From Statecraft to Stagecraft:
The Politics of Peddling *Mexicanidad* in U.S. Culture,
1886-1906

by

M. Lorena Chambers

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Doctoral Committee:

Professor Earl Lewis, Co-Chair
Professor George J. Sánchez, Co-Chair, University of Southern California
Associate Professor Matthew J. Countryman
Associate Professor Anthony P. Mora

M. Lorena Chambers

marlo@umich.edu

ORCID iD: 0000-0002-1870-5573

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to past, present, and future historians of color.

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ABSTRACT

From Statecraft to Stagecraft tells the layered story of how representatives of the United States and Mexico peddled performances of *mexicanidad*, or forms of Mexican identity, to sell products, entertain audiences, and advance commercial and state interests. Amidst the vast technological and economic changes in American culture of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, ethnic Mexican performers showcased *mexicanidad* on U.S. commercial stages for the first time since 1848 when Mexico lost half its territory to the United States. Growing cities like Boston and Chicago featured Mexican performers in paid entertainment and amusements, creating public spaces where spectators observed and consumed Mexican culture for pleasure in exchange for a fee. For spectators, that social contract (amusement for a fee) opened up 'new ways of seeing' ethnic Mexicans, including learning about Mexico, witnessing Mexican culture performed live in safe and enclosed spaces, and walking away with a newly perceived understanding of Mexican culture. Their experiences took place within the context of U.S.-Mexico bilateral engagement. One country pursued opening up Latin American commercial markets on behalf of U.S. business interests while the other sought a steady stream of investments to buttress its international standing. Not far behind were American businessmen seeking to incorporate this transnational cultural movement into economic success. At a time when emerging globalization altered the economics and politics of both countries, statecraft produced, and diplomacy distributed, marketable representations of Mexico and Mexicans in the United States. Ethnic Mexicans performed in

cultural productions such as the *Aztec Fair and Mexican Village* in 1886 Boston, at the World's Columbian Exposition in 1893 Chicago, and in wild west shows across the country well into the early twentieth century. These performers shared their skills, talent, and knowledge with millions of entranced audience members, forging new and not-seen before versions of Mexican identity. Over time, however, popular narratives constructed Mexican culture as primitive and backwards, irretrievably defining Mexicans living in the United States -- even those who were U.S. citizens by conquest or birth -- as unworthy of joining or belonging to the American polity. Competing versions of *mexicanidad* in an American marketplace commodified racial differences and cultural identity for mass consumption. As cultural production moved from statecraft to stagecraft, the visuals of live Mexican performance diverged wildly from the Mexican state's desired vision of a modern bourgeois nation. Instead, *mexicanidad* on stage transformed from proud theatrical moments into a negative visual shorthand through which paid entertainment defined Mexican performers as non-white, unmanly, and foreign. Due to unequal relations of power based on racialized and gendered frameworks, the Mexican government and the performers' desire for positive images in the United States was insufficient to overcome the weight of white supremacy and the political power of the expansionist United States. Representations of *mexicanidad* reified into visual tropes, detrimentally giving credence to violence against Mexican communities in the U.S.-Mexico borderlands while also excluding them from the protections and benefits of the U.S. state.

CHAPTER I

Introduction: Performing *Mexicanidad*

In the fall of 1886, an entire stand-alone anthropological exhibit marketed as the *Aztec Fair and Mexican Village* was the spectacle to see and experience in downtown Boston just a short two blocks from the Boston Common. The *Aztec Fair* included 35 Mexican performers who made their home in Boston for six weeks at Horticultural Hall. This Mexican 'village' was the first reproduction in the United States of a foreign village with live performers imported for a commercial purpose, and the *Aztec Fair* became the archetype in the decades to come for future "human zoos" at Expositions and World's Fairs until 1958.[1]

Seven years later in the summer of 1893, the iconic Ferris Wheel stood at 264 feet tall and towered 25 stories high above the Midway Plaisance - the entertainment walkway of the Chicago World's Fair. Both loomed large in the American imagination. Attendees from across the United States gathered at the World's Columbian Exposition to celebrate modernity, technological progress, and whiteness. Against this backdrop, both the Mexican state and the United States government each harnessed aspects of Mexican culture to create and peddle versions of Mexicanness, or *mexicanidad,* that transformed new and exotic images at the Exposition into

[1] The last organized human zoo took place at the 1958 World's Fair in Belgium, where over 183 families consisting of close to 600 men, women, and children from the Congo inhabited straw huts in their 'village' in Brussels between April and July as part of a paid attraction called "Kongorama." See Pascal Blanchard and Gilles Boëtsch, eds., *Human Zoos: The Invention of the Savage* (Aries, France: Actes Sud, 2011).

mainstream visual expectations of Mexican identity and culture that took hold in the American imagination.

In the formal 'White City' of the fairgrounds, visitors learned about new topics like anthropology, technology, and a globalizing world. In the informal amusement area of the Midway (a term that would soon come to mean all carnival experiences), revelers experienced new entertainment, with the explosion of popular music and nighttime diversions made possible by electric lighting and the increasingly popular trend of observing people from exotic and foreign cultures in their supposed natural habitats. The World's Columbian Exposition was one of several entertainment sites in Boston and Chicago where impresarios, showmen, and even the U.S. and Mexican states displayed elements essential to Mexican culture for economic reward. This dissertation analyzes the self-interests that drove the differing, if at times contradictory, constructions of Mexican identity in paid entertainment in the twenty years between 1886 and 1906. This imagery of *mexicanidad* appeared at sites designed to amuse and sell visual enjoyment while creating a diversion from everyday life. The memorable images first appeared as staged performance, but as is often the case with popular entertainment, the popular versions migrated to open and unintended spaces where dissonant versions of *mexicanidad* competed with each other within the same cultural space and time.

In Chicago for instance, the Mexican government's exhibits and formal military band entertained thousands of fairgoers in the formal buildings of the White City of the Exposition while, at the same time just outside of the fairgrounds at *Buffalo Bill's Wild West*, elegant *charros* and raucous *vaqueros* showcased dramatic roping and riding skills for millions of spectators.[2] And

[2] *Vaqueros* are working Mexican cowboys who have historically conducted the heavy work on ranches. *Charros* are upper-class horsemen who originated in the nineteenth-century as the gentrified land-owner identified and by an ornate suit and superior roping skills, mostly for show and not necessarily for everyday work. With the founding of Mexico's Rural Police Force in 1861, the Mexican state chose the *charro* suit for the *Rurales* uniform for its meaning and metonymy: "Its wearer could outride, outrope,

if wide-eyed visitors were particularly fortunate that Chicago summer, they heard gifted Mexican composer Juventino Rosas play his masterpiece, *Sobre las olas*, a melody that to this day is the instantly recognizable symbol of the carnival midway and circus.[3]

The impetus to peddle *mexicanidad* through live performance at the *Aztec Fair and Mexican Village*, the Chicago World's Fair, and *Buffalo Bill's Wild West* show was not an anomaly. It was a process that began with the interests of the state and ended with the commodification of *mexicanidad* through live performance. These three cultural sites created lasting images of *mexicanidad* that U.S. mass culture reproduced on a national scale and over time became visual tropes about ethnic Mexican identity. Using *mexicanidad* as a category of analysis, I examine how entrepreneurs, multinational corporations, anthropologists, and the Mexican and U.S. governments alike interwove elements of Mexican culture into statecraft and stagecraft in pursuit of geopolitical power, economic advantage, and profitable amusements in the late nineteenth century. While the end goal of the performances themselves was to maximize profits, the stagecraft of *mexicanidad* also gave credence to the narrative that *all things Mexican* were fundamentally foreign, regardless of the concurrently growing communities of ethnic Mexicans in the U.S.-Mexico borderlands.

This research also analyzes how *mexicanidad* emerged in late nineteenth-century U.S. entertainment through powerful live performance and became the foundation to four iconic male images that took hold in the American imagination: the primitive *peón* or indigenous 'Aztec;' the Mexican musician; the elegant but flashy *charro*; and the rustic, non-heroic *vaquero*. In the cultural

outshoot, outdrink, and outwomanize any other cowboy, from whatever land." See Paul J. Vanderwood, *Disorder and Progress: Bandits, Police, and Mexican Development* (Wilmington, Del: SR Books, 1992), 54.

[3] To this day, Rosas' waltz is the most well-known musical theme for circuses around the globe. The audio segment begins at :41 and linked here: https://youtu.be/N2YvhEv7ykM.

borderlands of Boston and Chicago, race and gender shaped the presentations of these four icons, reinforcing *mexicanidad* to mean non-American, and forever designating members of Mexican communities in the American Southwest as foreigners, if not second-class citizens of the United States.

This work acknowledges the real bodies of ethnic Mexicans as they performed in a makeshift indoor 'village;' delivered research at academic conferences; played musical concerts; and roped while riding wild mustangs – all to mesmerize live audiences. And while I have linked together physical descriptions of how they looked, audience responses to their performances, and much commentary about sartorial choices, the voices belonging to these performers are mostly silent. What they said at the time or personal thoughts about their performances are limited if they are currently identified in the archive. Instead, I have traced the decisions and resulting behavior these performers took, as supported by their actions and shaped by their circumstances. Their performances involved personal choices within the confines and social structures of their entertainment arrangements, for it was business and government elites who created these performance spaces to begin with in order to reap the rewards of peddling *mexicanidad*. While we can only imagine each performer's pride (and perhaps disappointments) while sharing their skills, talent, and knowledge with expectant spectators, these entertainers enacted aspects of *mexicanidad* that were adaptable to their stage and venue. In capturing narrative fragments of their human agency, I have endeavored to reconstruct individual stories of persistence, perseverance, and resilience vis-à-vis the gendered norms and racialized expectations of the era.

Technology and Mass Culture

The iconic images of the indigenous 'Aztec,' the Mexican musician, the flashy *charro*, and the working *vaquero* became familiar to mass audiences across the United States between 1886

and 1908 due to rapidly expanding technologies as the transcontinental railroad, mass printing of photography, electricity, and moving image machines like the kinetoscope. These technologies enabled spectators in communities large and small to experience new forms of entertainment while seeing Mexicans perform live with their very eyes. As a decade of major urban and industrial changes, the 1880s began the transformation in U.S. society from an agriculture-based economy to one shaped by industry and technology.[4] Immigration and industrial productivity between 1880 and 1910 changed the independent life of rural artisans, craftspeople, and many small farmers as their locally-produced goods faced a commodified and much more competitive marketplace.[5] Hard currency became the main way to procure goods to shelter and feed families, forcing many former independent business owners and entrepreneurs out of business and into factory labor to earn wages.[6]

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[4] Advancements in transportation and technology buttressed the vast economic changes of the 1880s. Power based on steam instead of water allowed factory owners to free themselves from riverside locations, while electric lighting helped create an environment in which round the clock shift work was possible. The growth of railroads gave factory owners more logistical options, enabling them to receive raw materials and deliver products to growing consumer markets much more quickly and efficiently. Rail routes also encouraged a mass migration of laborers to large urban centers by providing an economical and more rapid way to travel. See David Noble, *America by Design: Science, Technology, and the Rise of Corporate Capitalism* (New York: Knopf, 1977).

[5] The rapid changes in the labor markets correlated with the explosive population growth in cities. An expansion of labor markets, sustained by both an exodus of rural residents and the large number of immigrants seeking work fed the accretion of urban residents. By the end of the 1880s, for example, Chicago and Philadelphia each boasted populations just over a million residents, while the number of people living in New York City reached over two and a half million. Many of these new residents were immigrants from southern and eastern Europe who sought wage work rather than settling and working on small, rural farms. Scholars estimate that over five million newly-arrived people settled in the U.S. during the 1880s alone, which equaled the total number of immigrants of the previous six decades. For immigration to the U.S. between 1880 and 1920, see: John Bodnar, *Immigration and Industrialization: Ethnicity in an American Mill Town, 1870-1940* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1977); Elizabeth Ewen, *Immigrant Women in the Land of Dollars: Life and Culture on the Lower East Side, 1890-1925* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1985); Donna Gabaccia, *From Sicily to Elizabeth Street: Housing and Social Change among Italian Immigrants 1880-1930* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1983); Mario Garcia, *Desert Immigrants: The Mexicans of El Paso, 1880-1920* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983); Susan Glenn, *Daughters of the Shtetl: Life and Labor in the Immigrant Generation* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990); John Higham, *Strangers in the Land: Patterns of American Nativism, 1860-1925* (New York: Atheneum Books, 1963, 1977); Mae M. Ngai, *Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens and the Making of Modern America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004); Janet Nolan, *Ourselves Alone: Women's Immigration from Ireland, 1885-1920* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1989); Virginia Yans-McLaughlin, *Family and Community: Italian Immigrants in Buffalo, 1880-1930* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977).

[6] Sarah Deutsch, *No Separate Refuge: Culture, Class, and Gender on an Anglo-Hispanic Frontier in the American Southwest, 1880-1940* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987); Herbert Gutman, *Work, Culture, and Society in Industrializing America: Essays in American Working-Class History* (New York: Vintage, 1977); Susan Levine, *Labor's True Woman: Carpet Weavers, Industrialization, and Labor Reform in the Gilded Age* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1984); Roy Rosenzweig, *Eight Hours for What We Will: Workers and Leisure in an Industrial City, 1870-1920* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

The transcontinental railroad not only increased the mobility of people from rural to urban centers and moved goods from production to markets, but also provided a platform for a national culture of entertainment in the United States.[7] Rail made major entertainment spectacles such as wild west shows highly mobile from town-to-town, and also encouraged recreational passenger travel to cities for mega-events like the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition. In a country of approximately 63 million people, for example, 27.5 million people attended the 1893 Exposition, with thousands of fair-goers traveling domestically and others from abroad to reach the venerated White City. As the most successful Exposition in the United States, 21 million paid admissions made it into the till equaling $11 million in revenue, far surpassing the original projections of $7.5 million in gate sales and 15 million visitors.[8]

Before the Exposition, print and publication technologies had made widespread the dissemination of travelogues, picture postcards, and the ever-growing circulation of photographic images that created a visual foundation about Mexico in the cultural imagination.[9] For years after the close of the Chicago Exposition, World's Fair memorabilia such as souvenir picture books and print paraphernalia continued to be sold. However, through press accounts and remembrances of the Fair by such notable visitors as Will Rogers, it was the visual astonishment of live performance and seeing talented ethnic Mexican performers bring images to life that created a long-lasting and impressionable effect on spectators.

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[7] Julian Lim, *Porous Borders: Multiracial Migrations and the Law in the U.S.-Mexico Borderlands* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2017); Richard White, *Railroaded: The Transcontinentals and the Making of Modern America* (New York: Norton, 2011).

[8] Norm Bolotin and Christine Laing, *The World's Columbian Exposition: The Chicago World's Fair of 1893* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1992), 4.

[9] Jason Ruiz, *Americans in the Treasure House: Travel to Porfirian Mexico and the Cultural Politics of Empire* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2014).

Performing Mexicanidad

This story tells of ethnic Mexicans from the U.S. Southwest and Mexican nationals who traveled across the United States to entertain American audiences, and the reactions to them and their performances. We do not know the names of many of them, but we know some of their work schedules, housing conditions, and how they were called upon to perform *mexicanidad*. We learn of their struggles to find and maintain employment, and read about their successes in rave reviews. Their individual experiences shone through the powerful interests surrounding them, including the state's.

A scaffold of vested interests in search of profit backed each entertainment. The Mexico City-based Orrin Brothers Theater Company and Mexican businessman Benito Nichols, with a promotional nod from Mexican President Porfirio Díaz, for example, organized the *Aztec Fair and Mexican Village* in 1886 Boston with support from the U.S.-owned Mexican Central Railway. As a subsidiary to the Atchison Topeka & Santa Fe (ATSF) railroad system, the Mexican Central Railway won the concession from Díaz's government to access Mexico's interior markets in order to build a north-south line between El Paso and Mexico City.[10] The Mexican Central Railway was critical to the Mexican statecraft strategy of modernization. By the same token, President Díaz supported the Orrin brothers and Nichols as the Aztec Fair's to organize the North American tour of a roving Mexican 'village' to promote the Mexican Central. This presentation of 'authentic' Mexicans in a simulacrum of their home village was the first of its kind in the United States, and quickly become a popular and expected feature of international exhibitions.[11]

[10] Richard White, *Railroaded*, 204.

[11] Promoted to audiences as places for anthropological learning, ethnic 'villages' were sites of exploitation and racism. For a history of human exhibitions in Europe, see Pascal Blanchard, editor, *Human Zoos: Science and Spectacle in the Age of Colonial Empires* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2008).

Appearing to be wholly independent business ventures (though reflecting government policy by advancing tropes of American superiority and expansionism), the renowned and popular *Buffalo Bill's Wild West* and *Pawnee Bill's Wild West* shows filled seats and stayed profitable by 'selling' vast narratives about the West and American expansionism in large arenas – an enterprise that would not have been possible without talented and skilled Mexican performers, workers, and managers. While Mexican *charro* Vicente Oropeza and *vaqueros* Tony Esquivel and Joe Barrera were only a few of the hundreds who made their living as wild west showmen over the years, the popularity and fame of their live acts brought to the fore a visual distinction of *mexicanidad*. Oropeza, Esquivel, and Barrera made the *charro* suit, *sombrero*, and intricate lasso skills familiar to hundreds of thousands of American spectators well before the turn of the twentieth century. Their *mexicanidad* would soon be a key component of early silent film. And decades later, Barrera's obituaries in the English-language press assumed that Americans would still remember his celebrity decades later.[12]

Mexican and U.S. Statecraft

As we shall see, cultural diplomacy between Mexico and the United States was a conduit for the fusion of statecraft, financial interests, and white supremacist constructions of race that decided on the aspects of *mexicanidad* performed in the United States. As varied as the entertainment was, each entity had financial backers seeking to make a profit by 'selling' to spectators some arresting aspect of Mexico, not only for the sake of simple entertainment, but also to sell and inculcate viewpoints about Mexicans and Mexico that would excite American audiences

[12] "Obituary, Jose Barrera," *New York Times*, November 17, 1949; "Obituary, Jose Barrera," *The Hartford Courant*, November 17, 1949; "Obituaries, Jose Barrera," *Pittsburgh Post Gazette*, November 17, 1949; "Obituary, Jose Barrera," *Detroit Free Press*, November 17, 1949.

and make their investments profitable. And while these performances finished as stagecraft, it was statecraft that originally peddled *mexicanidad* to U.S. audiences.

Useful here is a working definition of statecraft. As early as 1952, political scientist Morton Kaplan wrote that statecraft "includes the construction of strategies for securing the national interest in the international arena."[13] Similarly, Secretary of State Colin Powell in 2004 expounded that "statecraft encompasses both the internal and external management of the state, and the relations between the two; diplomacy has to do with external affairs."[14] How one country presents itself in the international arena under the rubric of external affairs includes not only military and geopolitical maneuvering, but also economic and cultural diplomacy. As history shows, Mexican statecraft ratcheted up cultural diplomacy during the thirty-one years of the *Porfiriato*, buying opportunity and time to build up commercial, manufacturing, and military power to ensure that Mexico would no longer be ripe for invasion and occupation by the United States or European powers.

Beginning with his second presidential election in 1884, Porfirio Díaz and his administration focused on modernizing Mexico by strengthening its economic ties with the United States. One of the tools of Mexican statecraft was cultural diplomacy with the United States. Within this frame, the Mexican state promoted *mexicanidad* in the United States to welcome increased foreign investment from the U.S. For Díaz, peddling elements of Mexican culture allowed him to adapt to the geopolitical needs based on the international climate, while also representing Mexican national pride and economic interests. As Mexico expanded its role in the

[13] Morton Kaplan, "An Introduction to the Strategy of Statecraft," *World Politics* 4, no. 4 (July 1952): 548.

[14] Colin Powell, "The Craft of Diplomacy," *The Wilson Quarterly* 28, no. 3 (Summer 2004): 60–67.

international financial arena of the late nineteenth century, the state chose to peddle *mexicanidad* as an instrument of its cultural diplomacy with the United States.

Similarly, U.S. statecraft supporting a web of financial interests marked the impetus for the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago. To facilitate U.S. business expansion into foreign countries south of the border, the United States State Department opened up the Latin America Bureau of the World's Columbian Exposition to actively recruit countries to exhibit in Chicago. Its first invitation was to Mexico. From its standpoint, the Mexican state premised its statecraft on appearing worthy of foreign investment and capital, carefully choosing its cultural diplomatic strategy to rest on *mexicanidad.*

Assumptive constructions of race premised the statecraft of each country. Eager for foreign investment to modernize its economy, the Mexican state first marketed its abundant labor force by exhibiting an entire 'village' of humble but hardworking indigenous people in Boston in 1886. By 1893, it altered its strategy and chose to symbolically erase the indigeneity of its people at the international level by putting forth European-trained musicians and educational exhibits at the Exposition in order to showcase a bourgeoisie persona.[15] For its part, the United States chose to intervene economically in Mexico because the southern neighbor lacked 'white civility,' supporting the premise that, in order to benefit American economic and geopolitical interests, U.S. capital deserved to have first claim on Mexico's natural and human resources. To be clear, it was economic interests from both states fueling the impetus to peddle *mexicanidad* to U.S. audiences. The Mexican government searched for foreign investment, while the United States pursued new commodity markets and hemispheric dominance.

[15] Manuel Peña, "From Ranchero to Jaitōn: Ethnicity and Class in Texas-Mexican Music (Two Styles in the Form of a Pair)," *Ethnomusicology* 29, no. 1 (1985): 29–55.

While the two countries shared a joint interest in a unified North American capitalism, they did not do so from a shared position of power – indeed, the cultural diplomacy of the late 1800s reinforced unequal relations of power between the two countries (and their peoples). No matter how modernist or bourgeois the Mexican government presented itself, it was unsuccessful in combatting dominant American visions of Mexico as poor, superstitious, and riddled with banditry. Mexican statecraft was no match for American stagecraft. Representations of Mexico filtered through power, race, and gender became the norm for American audiences in the live fairs, musical performances, and wild west shows studied in this dissertation.

These assumptions captured the unequal relations of imperial power between the United States and Mexico. For while each country had its own notions of race, the international and cultural diplomatic decisions resulting from white supremacy opened up the space to emasculate and primitivize *mexicanidad* reflected in popular accounts. Visual representations in entertainment coded the 'Aztec' to mean indigenous, barbaric, backwards, and primitive rather than the inheritors of an advanced civilization the Mexican state had aspired to convey in its initial cultural diplomatic efforts. Additionally, American observers' characterization of Mexicans through gendered discourse coded the highly-stylized Mexican musicians and equestrian performers in the U.S. as dandified and effeminate, no matter how masculine and powerful the iconic *charro* appeared in a Mexican national context. Additionally, vis-à-vis U.S. statecraft, capitalist interests, and white supremacy, *mexicanidad* simply represented 'foreign' -- no matter how cultured, historical, or Europeanized it may have been presented.

U.S. Racialized Systems of Power

How racialized systems of power rooted the production of imagery is a through-line in this dissertation. White supremacist frames permeated the new types of public entertainment in the

1890s, and racialized meanings ascribed to the Mexican performers themselves were continually embedded in descriptions about their attire, their attitudes, and their gender. From a spectator's perspective, Mexican performers were different in myriad ways from others.

For starters, Mexicans wore different ensembles from the other actors. Depending on the venue, performers strode out in highly-decorated charro costumes and sombreros, wore colorful sashes and ties, played new and exciting orchestral music, and used ropes instead of guns and rifles. In other instances, Mexicans lived and worked in primitive environments while creating unique crafts and artwork not seen before in the United States. And no matter how intricate the workmanship, the Mexicans on display were hard-working and humble if not outright 'primitive.' Yet, no act required dialogue. So, while a few words may have been exchanged in Boston between spectators and performers when offering freshly-made hot chocolate, and Arizona-born "Aztecs" on the Chicago Midway risked giving up the pretense by speaking English as well as Spanish to passersby, most American audiences only received – or wanted -- visual markers to understand racialized and gendered narratives.

In these performances, symbolic but powerful visual differences based on white supremacy discourse appeared front and center. While material items such as costumes and performances captured visual differences, the Mexican nature of those differences transformed them into elements deemed foreign. Wild west programs, for example, listed the national origins of each performer, such as 'Cossacks from Russia.' When a brown actor appeared in the show program, his description was simply as 'Mexican' or 'From Mexico.' Audiences knew performer Joe Barrera only as 'Mexican Joe the *vaquero*,' even though he was a native of San Antonio, Texas, and was not only a performer but also served as the behind-the-scenes manager for Pawnee Bill's *Wild West Show*. Mexican American performers played similar roles in other major touring shows as well, as

trusted road supervisors and as managers of the ranches to which the shows would return each year. And yet, white supremacist discourse of the nineteenth century defined Mexicans as either meek and powerless, racially different, dangerous, or curious to observe. Millions of spectators consumed this visual imagery packaged as entertainment, assuring that turn-of-the century culture could support and rationalize racism - and racial violence - against Mexican American communities in the U.S. borderlands.[16]

Indeed, discourses on stage linked ethnic Mexicans to a Mexican national identity that separated, differentiated, and altogether erased them from the weave of American identity. This new identity emerged from America's 'manifest destiny' to procure and secure a vision of progress in domestic and foreign affairs. As diplomatic historian Michael Hunt argues, ideals of Americanization permeated the drive to 'civilize' distinct cultures within the United States as well as in foreign countries that demonstrated strains of perceived barbarism: "the idea of a racial hierarchy proved particularly attractive because it offered a ready and useful conceptual handle on the world."[17] Additionally, political scientist Benedict Anderson has argued that in the rapidly changing society of the late 1800s, nationality, rather than property ownership, emerged as "a new way to link fraternity, power, and time" together in a meaningful manner as defining American identity.[18] What I demonstrate in this work is that constructions of nationality and race, no less, occurred in the seemingly innocuous sites of pleasure, leisure, and entertainment where viewers and producers did not expect imagery to have political significance, but in effect created cultural expectations in mass media.

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[16] Monica Muñoz Martinez, *The Injustice Never Leaves You: Anti-Mexican Violence in Texas* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2018).

[17] Michael H. Hunt, *Ideology and U.S. Foreign Policy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987), 52.

[18] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1991) 36.

In the initial ethnic 'village' exhibition in Boston in 1886, the show organizers (themselves from Mexico) depicted indigenous Mexicans as humble, helpful and improvable but primitive - a portrayal reflecting the needs of Boston railroad entrepreneurs and the Mexican state at that moment. Seven years later, however, in a complete reversal at the World's Columbian Exposition, the European-trained Eighth Cavalry military band arrived in Chicago to represent Mexico with symphonic literature like Wagner, Bach, and Handel. While the military band played at the formal cultural diplomatic exchanges between the U.S. and Mexico, a small musical orchestra also enthralled audiences throughout the fairgrounds while contesting the *mexicanidad* set forth by the Mexican state. Their resilience shone through as they performed in exotic costumes and at informal locales while expanding the musical panorama of the Exposition

In wild west shows touring the U.S. and beyond, Mexicans played supporting roles opposite the heroes of the show, adding color and variety to the visual action depicting a fiction of how white America had mastered the American West and its inhabitants. In Buffalo Bill's dramatizations of U.S. military and geopolitical statecraft over the course of thirty years, Mexicans replaced the conquered American Indian tribes and became the "convenient villain," a trope that hardened irrevocably in the new medium of silent film.[19] The large, conical-shaped sombrero; the fitted, short waistcoat with silver trim; and the swarthy, non-trustworthy look became visual shorthand to brand Mexican characters as the foreign, and at times primitive, element lurking in live shows.

Show producers marketed their Mexican characters with descriptions like "primitive," "semi-civilized," "dandified" and "mixed-breed" - identifiers that labeled Mexicans as non-white,

[19] Blaine Lamb, "The Convenient Villain: The Early Cinema Views the Mexican-American," *The Journal of the West*, October 1975.

racially inferior, and effeminate. By doing so, the tentacles of whiteness reached out and included specific descriptions that implied a secondary, inferior status. As cultural theorist Lawrence Grossberg explains, when the richness of any culture is reduced to a single aspect and all differences are erased within that culture, the singular notion of the Other comes into play.[20] In these visual images, regardless of the cultural differences among them based on class, indigeneity, region, and even national origins, all characters were non-white. Stagecraft had designated them 'exotic' and 'foreign,' indicating difference on top of Otherness - a real basis of modern power.

Certainly, the power to regulate the images and discourses in their shows gave producers 'disciplinary and regulatory power' because they defined and constructed the various facets of the show's narrative.[21] By the early part of the twentieth century, difference layered with the Other had rendered Mexicans not only foreign but also racially inferior. And through the process of Othering, national rhetoric about U.S. identity left no room for Mexicans to be identified nor accepted as American.

Despite the stable and historical Mexican communities within the borders of the U.S., depictions in art, literature, illustrations, travelogues, and dime novels myopically relegated Mexicans to a sideshow, notable only for an exotic culture, violence, and banditry.[22] As the Mexican state wrestled to eradicate this narrative (to assuage foreign investors), it advocated for anthropological shows, musical concerts, and bourgeois sartorial choice to excise narratives about

[20] Lawrence Grossberg, "Identity and Cultural Studies: Is That All There Is?," in *Questions of Cultural Identity*, ed. Stuart Hall and Paul Du Gay (London: Sage Publications, 1996).

[21] Michel Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended: Lectures at the College de France, 1975-76* (New York: Picador, 2003).

[22] For the economic reasons of Mexican banditry, see: Chris Frazer, *Bandit Nation: A History of Outlaws and Cultural Struggle in Mexico, 1810-1920* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2006). For a study on banditry in popular culture in the twentieth century, see Juan J. Alonzo, *Badmen, Bandits and Folk Heroes: The Ambivalence of Mexican American Identity in Literature and Film* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2009).

the impoverished indigenous. Mexico desired to peddle imagery of a reliable, cultured, and peaceful working class to foreign interests. But in spite of a modernizing impulse of flash, action, and pizzazz by the Díaz regime, Mexicans on U.S. stages were exotic visual foils. What was noble and masculine in a Mexican cultural context, such as the elegance of the *charro* or the talents of the musicians, American tastemakers and audiences instead interpreted these performers as dandified and unserious. Even U.S.-born Mexican performers had little choice but to take roles characterizing them as foreign and subservient to the modernity of white American masculinity.

Manhood and Whiteness

Discourses based on white manhood and civilization became inextricably intertwined with America's emerging global identity as it incorporated manliness and virility into its reason for expanding boundaries.[23] As Gail Bederman argues, many in the Gilded Age believed that civilization was a stage in human evolution that had been reached only by Anglo-Saxons, and the by 1890s, a new racialized hierarchy became interlocked with notions of civilization and gender that supported white racial superiority in terms of male power.[24] Because gender is a "relation of difference and domination constructed such that it appears 'natural' in day-to-day life," it cannot be detached or separated from other constructed notions of power.[25] Race interlocked with newly formed ideals of American manliness and manhood, resulting in a new definition of national identity.

[23] Kristin L. Hoganson, *Fighting for American Manhood: How Gender Politics Provoked the Spanish-American and Philippine-American Wars* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998).

[24] Gail Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880-1917* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1995).

[25] Susan Lee Johnson, "'A Memory Sweet to Soldiers': The Significance of Gender in the History of the 'American West,'" *Western Historical Quarterly* 24, no. 4 (1993): 495–517.

Amidst this milieu, whiteness reassured those who bemoaned the arrival of new immigrants from Southern and Eastern Europe, China, and Japan, as well as pre-existing minority populations in the United States.[26] Malleable standards for whiteness continually defined Mexicans in the U.S.-Mexico borderlands mostly because it could include or exclude light-skinned Mexicans or those who appeared middle-class.[27] As ethnic Mexican gradually lost their economic and political power in the Southwest, fewer were able to obtain the status and safety that whiteness represented.[28] Instead, they fell outside the rubric of white America and it became common to identify them as foreign. And in an era when America was acquiring territorial subjects in the Philippines, Puerto Rico, and Hawaii, in addition to the ethnic Mexicans colonized a generation before in the Territory of New Mexico, the "implicit ranking of human difference by degree" opened the door for some newly-arrived non-Anglo-Saxon Europeans to become American through whiteness. Interestingly, U.S. popular entertainment provided them the cultural cues with which to navigate their social inclusion.[29] These cross-currents would undergird the racialized portrayals of Mexican and Mexican Americans, and in turn, give validation to the white supremacists of a pattern of continual

[26] For an account of how whiteness establishes itself via appropriations of racial "Others," see Eric Lott, *Love and Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993); Noel Ignatiev, *How the Irish Became White* (New York: Routledge, 1995); David Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class* (New York: Verso, 1991); and Alexander Saxton, *The Rise and Fall of the White Republic* (London: Verso, 1990).

[27] Illustrative of the elasticity of whiteness is how U.S. industries classified working-class Mexicans as "white" after 1900 because of the need for low-paid wage laborers and the impetus to circumvent restrictions in U.S. immigration policy. See Natalia Molina, *How Race is Made in America: Immigration, Citizenship, and the Historical Power of Racial Scripts* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014).

[28] For how the Mexican community in California lost its political and economic power in the nineteenth century, see Albert Camarillo, *Chicanos in a Changing Society: From Mexican Pueblos to American Barrios in Santa Barbara and Southern California, 1848-1930* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979). For the changes in women's roles in Chicano communities in Southern Colorado, see Sarah Deutsch, *No Separate Refuge*; claims of whiteness neither shielded ethnic Mexicans from lynching or police violence, or hastened New Mexico's long-delayed admission as a State.

[29] Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color: European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), 42.

economic, cultural, and physical violence against ethnic Mexican communities in the U.S.-Mexico borderlands.[30]

Visual Cultural Theory

Cultural theorists have long argued that the dramatic effect of images is largely a result of the meanings they impart to viewers. An image and its underlying meaning did not emerge in an intellectual vacuum, but emerges with new meaning because of its context. As John Berger writes, "An image is a sight which has been recreated or reproduced. It is an appearance, or a set of appearances, which has been detached from the place and time in which it first made its appearance and preserved -- for a few moments or a few centuries. Every image embodies a way of seeing."[31] The transformation of a "sight" into an image denotes a change in the context of the original sight. A sight becomes an image when the "original context" changes; once an image has emerged "ways of seeing" and of understanding a given image, also change. Similarly, images of the indigenous 'Aztec', the musical Mexican, the hardworking *vaquero*, and the equestrian *charro* had been collected from various sources and successively dropped into new plots and stories explicitly constructed to entertain white U.S. audiences. In new contexts, however, each image transcended the physical boundaries of the stage, resulting in a growing understanding outside of entertainment that largely defined and viewed Mexicans in the United States.

[30] The process of Othering had historical roots in the separation of lands and culture. For over 300 years, Spain occupied what would become the U.S.-Mexico borderlands until Mexico won independence and became a republic in 1821. Under the terms of the 1848 Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, Mexicans living in the area annexed by the United States (a full third of Mexico's territory) had been promised full U.S. citizenship. Once the Mexican North became the American Southwest, however, the government of the United States ignored diplomatic promises. See chapters one and two of Neil Foley, *Mexicans in the Making of America* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2014). In the following decades, as gold fever and Indian wars filled the American imagination, popular culture routinely romanticized Native Americans as integral to America's historical legacy, but only after they had been 'erased' from the American West through genocidal wars. For Othering of Native Americans, see Philip J. Deloria, *Playing Indian* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998). For detailed histories of Native American imagery and narratives in wild west shows, see L. G. Moses, *Wild West Shows and the Images of American Indians, 1883-1933* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico, 1996).

[31] John Berger, *Ways of Seeing* (London: British Broadcasting Corporation, 1972), 9-10.

Because images are multi-faceted and completely dependent on their surroundings and contexts to evoke meaning, they can be used to represent different ideas. Images are not static. Malleable and in continual flux, images are part of an overall ideology - a set of beliefs - that influences the original setting of the image. Film scholar Robert Stam states that artistic impressions result from ideologies that constitute the artistic impression itself; he writes that "artistic impressions are at the same time thoroughly and irrevocably social, precisely because the discourses that art represents are themselves social and historical."[32] As easily and quickly as discourse changes, so too do the meanings behind imagery and narratives. It is essential to analyze the placement of visual images and what meanings emerged from the depiction of Mexicans, and for what reasons. Most people paid for amusement and almost unwittingly also purchased a series of visual ideologies. As the story and plot unfolded in front of spectators, Mexican characters propelled the drama forward, but without any indication of their presence in, or ability to join, the American polity.

The impact of these representations lay with multiple layers of meaning: the one placed on the image, another emerging from the image, and an additional one perceived from the entire tableau. Each time a Mexican character appeared on a different stage, the context in which the image appeared created an entirely new discourse, as a new set of symbols that conveyed different meanings resulted at each new cultural site. Every depiction conveyed assumptions about Mexicans that appeared in the final product, whether it was a show, performance, or exhibit as each became a visual cue that depended on its context for significance.

[32] Robert Stam, "Bakhtin, Polyphony, and Ethnic/Racial Representation," in *Unspeakable Images: Ethnicity and American Cinema*, ed. L.D. Friedman (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1991), 252.

What drove the success of each image was the presumably 'normal' and 'natural' cultural context in which it appeared. The process by which relations of power between Mexicans and white Americans seemed normal and natural were from "the power of normalization."[33] The ability to dictate social constructions as the ultimate form of disciplinary power and to set up specific dictates about what is socially acceptable naturally leads into creating what is the standard of normalcy. Individual differences become even more striking when measured against a norm, especially when that norm is a highly esteemed one in a given cultural context.

By the turn of the twentieth century, the images of the primitive *peón* or indigenous 'Aztec,' Mexican musician, *vaquero*, and *charro* hardened in the American psyche. Appearing in different contexts across paid entertainment and across time, these four images became tropes as they mutated in new contexts, and meanings attached to the original images transcended boundaries. The persistence of these iconic images primed spectators to accept unequal relations of power as normalized and expected for when they saw any one, or more, of these images. Soon, audiences held cultural expectations of indigenous Mexicans being primitive and backwards (but likely was masking poverty); saw the Mexican national icon wearing a dandified charro suit and sombrero as effeminate and non-American; and viewed the working vaquero as a dependent, if underpaid, laborer working at the behest of American cowboys. As Philip Deloria argues: "broad cultural expectations are both the products and the tools of domination and they are an inheritance that haunts each and every one of us."[34]

It did not take long for these images to appear in myriad forms of popular entertainment across the nation. Indeed, just a year after the Chicago World's Fair, the indigenous 'Aztec'

[33] Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of The Prison* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), 184.

[34] Philip J. Deloria, *Indians in Unexpected Places* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2004), 4.

appeared in a key role in the Los Angeles city parade. In the summer of 1894, the Los Angeles Committee for Las Fiestas attempted to recreate the drama of the Exposition and Midway Plaisance. As had occurred in Chicago, the city elders brought in U.S. born Pueblo Indians from Arizona to perform as genuine 'Aztecs' in their local parade to visually recreate the progress of humankind from primitive to civilized, with the Arizona 'Aztecs' representing the most primitive of human beings in the parade, while at the finale, white Angelenos exemplified the most modern example of human civilization.[35] With recreated and fictionalized stage settings of Old Mexico and Spanish California, well-rehearsed performers in colorful costumes emulated the imagery that had emerged less than a year before at the Chicago World's Fair. Whether it was to sell more tickets, propel a story forward, or to create an amusement glorifying the racialized and gendered norms of American white supremacy in a state taken from Mexico by conquest, the Los Angeles parade, like other business interests across the country, was well on its way to peddling its cultural expectation of *mexicanidad* for monetary gain. Soon, these images would harden and go global through the growth of the film industry, for whom an immediately recognizable villainous "Other" was not only an effective cinematic shorthand, but good business as well. How these images first took root on a grand scale in American culture is a discussion for the following four chapters.

Chapter Summaries

The inextricable relationship between the production of images and international business ventures is the subject of Chapter Two. I analyze the gendered imagery presented in the live performance of exhibited Mexicans at the 1886 *Aztec Fair and Mexican Village* in Boston, where stagecraft was key to creating the first commodified visuals of *mexicanidad* in U.S. entertainment.

[35] For a description of the festival, see chapter one in William Deverell *Whitewashed Adobe: The Rise of Los Angeles and the Remaking of its Mexican Past* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004).

Sponsored by the American-owned Mexican Central Railway, the *Aztec Fair* portrayed live indigenous Mexicans as submissive, simple, and "primitive" through exotic visual imagery and performance. Also, as the first exhibition of live human beings in the United States, this exhibition set the foundation for future ethnological exhibitions of live human beings in the United States.

The interconnected web of cultural, political, and economic forces that created different, and at times dissonant versions, of *mexicanidad* at the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago is the topic of Chapters Three and Four. Chapter Three describes the role of the newly-emerging discipline of ethnology in the nascent field of museum studies, as the exhibition of indigenous peoples became a boomlet for public expositions. The Exposition exemplified the full force of U.S. statecraft, of which the Smithsonian Institution's outsized role in shaping popular misconceptions of primitive Aztecs and indigenous Mexicans was a key component.

Chapter Four tracks how U.S. statecraft shaped Mexico's presentation at the Chicago World's Fair in addition to Mexico's own statecraft strategy through musical representation and formal exhibits. Central to both countries was forging a modern economic relationship with each other. Mexico premised its cultural diplomacy on the Eighth Cavalry Military Band and its Europeanized musical performance, which the Mexican elite supported as it desired to gain entree with American business industries. The Mexican state peddled one version of *mexicanidad* in Chicago.

A small group of Mexican musicians, however, interjected the carefully planned cultural diplomatic plans by the Mexican state and performed another version of *mexicanidad* at the World's Fair. I reconstruct the story of this Mexican string orchestra as the musicians exhibited a rasquache-like resilience when their financial plans in Chicago fell short, resulting in performances that changed the musical landscape in the United States. Their experiences diverged from the

international goals of the Mexican state and, as a result, the dissonance between the Mexican orchestra and the Mexican state's military band is best captured in each's live musical performances and expression of *mexicanidad*.

Wild west performances of Mexican *vaqueros* and *charros* in large arenas and how these actors shaped ideas another version of *mexicanidad* in American entertainment is examined in Chapter Five. Based on the era's notions of masculinity, human qualities based on gender ideals set the boundaries for who qualified as 'American.' The romanticization of the American West masked both the permanent and migratory Mexican presence in the United States, instead reflecting and popularizing prevailing notions of civility and whiteness. Over time, the stunning roping and riding of skilled Mexican horsemen - central to not only the audiences' experiences but even to the management of the shows themselves - was altogether erased in the narratives of the wild west shows, and the Mexican performers' legacy lived on in the guise of the bandits they played more frequently after the turn of the twentieth century.

CHAPTER II

The Spectacle of 'Aztecs' and Mexicans in 1886 Boston

For six weeks in the fall of 1886, at the Horticulture Hall in downtown Boston, thirty-five Mexicans re-enacted a scripted 'typical' day in rural Mexico as they worked as cooks, craftsmen, and artisans. This group toiled at *The Aztec Fair and Mexican Village,* an exhibition organized by Mexico City showmen and sponsored by executives of the Boston-owned Mexican Central Railway. Spectators at the exhibition watched Mexican women cook native foods and Mexican men weave, carve, and paint images from natural materials, which visitors could taste and purchase hand-made items during their visit. Bostonians strolling through the exhibits feasted their eyes on exotic daggers, striking bull-fighting suits, colorful pottery, expertly carved stone figures of female deities, dazzling jewelry, and macabre mummies.[1]

The items and materials on display drew curious gazes, yet the active lives being played out in the composite 'Mexican village' commanded the most attention. Visitors casually wandered into different halls and observed Mexicans performing a variety of tasks, including young women in the kitchen grinding corn into cornmeal on *metates,* flat slabs of roughly-hewn volcanic rock.

[1] "Opinions of the Press and Public on the Mexican Village, Horticultural Hall," Box 1, Mexico, Warshaw Collection, Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C; "Orrin Bros. and Nichol's Aztec Fair. Something about the People in the Mexican Village," Box 1, Mexico, Warshaw Collection.

The exhibited women subsequently patted the dough into flat, round and thin *tortillas*, cooking them over an open fire. To help visitors understand this unfamiliar food, one journalist described tortillas as "the national bread of the middle and poorer classes."[2] And so throughout the fall of 1886, visitors to the 'Mexican Village' ate tortillas and sipped cups of hot chocolate in an atmosphere of excitement, perhaps filled with awe, but most certainly with curiosity.

For the first time in United States public culture, material artifacts and live performances came together to demonstrate to Americans elements of Mexico's culture - Mexicanness or *mexicanidad* - under one roof.[3] Sponsored by the newly-formed Mexican Central Railway and set against the political and economic narratives of the Gilded Age, live Mexicans and extensive visual displays fueled the mischaracterization of Mexico as a backward country with primitive, if not quaint, customs. But that was not a concern for the investors of the Mexican Central Railway for they wished to expand the business by promoting and marketing Mexico as a safe and exciting place in order to entice fairgoers to visit Mexico. It was an innovative marketing event in support of international business and transnational economic relations between the United States and Mexico. The images presented at the fair, however, did more than promote travel to Mexico - it reinforced narratives that cast Mexico as a country beset by slow human and technological progress, engendering public perceptions about Mexicans that would forever be imbedded into the American imagination.

This chapter analyzes the first paid ethnological exhibit in the United States to display live humans in surroundings made to look like a Mexican village. The novelty was not only the display

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[2] "Orrin Bros. and Nichol's Aztec Fair: Something about the People in the Mexican Village."

[3] While mindful that the Americas stretch from the Arctic circle to Tierra del Fuego, this dissertation will use "American" to signify the people, culture, and society of the United States. "Mexican" will typically signify the people, culture, and society of Mexico in the 1880s, while "ethnic Mexican" also encompasses colonized and immigrant communities in the United States.

of live people, but that they were Mexican people. With the growing body of racial science of the time, assumptions about ethnic Mexicans in U.S. discourse for mass audiences first emerged here. Significantly, these assumptive racialized notions resulted from both Mexican businessmen's views of Mexican indigeneity as well U.S. constructions on race. The expectations shaped sociopolitical narratives for justifying the loss of economic and political power among Mexican communities in the American West in the late nineteenth century and also laid the foundation for denying future ethnic Mexicans and Mexican immigrants' entry into the American polity. That these perceptions began as paid entertainment made them ever more insidious as it marked the beginning of a long history in American amusement where white supremacist constructions of race and gender shaped and promoted the devaluation of brown human bodies in the United States for entertainment.

Imperative to this argument is the focus on the unequal economic relationship between Mexico and the United States. While the *Aztec Fair* itself was not a bilateral diplomatic event between two foreign states, the support of the Mexican state for the visual imagery and cultural narratives of *mexicanidad* presented at the fair reflected Mexico's statecraft strategy at the time. From the investors' perspective, the fair was to leave the impression that Mexico would benefit greatly from an infusion of superior technology from the United States and therefore was ripe for increased U.S. capital investment. The Mexican Central sought to capitalize on the theme of industrial expansion by showcasing Mexico's 'primitiveness' compared to Yankee entrepreneurship and technology, portraying that Mexican backwardness could be turned around through modernization. In addition to hearing and reading about Mexico, visitors experienced Mexico's exoticism by direct observation. Certain components of *mexicanidad* – some of it in human flesh, some of it in material objects - and the discourse about Mexico's primitivism and

semi-civilized state moored the captivating images peddled by both Mexican businessmen and the American railroad company. The consequence of displaying Mexicans in an indoor village, however, was the cultural invention of the indigenous and primitive 'Aztec,' which would continue in the American imagination long after the fall of 1886.

A Journey to Mexico in Downtown Boston

While a grand tour of Mexico on the expanding rail lines of the Boston-based Mexican Central Railway would require a great investment of time and money, for six weeks in 1886, Bostonians could step out of the autumnal New England chill and experience the exotic culture of Mexico for the price of admission to the *Aztec Fair and Mexican Village*. The event occupied two levels of the Horticulture Hall, prominently located just two blocks from City Hall in downtown Boston. Arriving on modern horse-drawn busses, by private coach, or on foot through the brick and stone buildings of the modern financial hub, visitors entered the impressive three-story marble structure on the first floor, where they immediately encountered a vision of Mexico in the form of the Aztec Fair. They were on an exotic journey with little subtlety: the 'Mexico' they first encountered was symbolized by a bamboo hut with a thatched roof that, according to Fair advertisements, "was a true copy of the kind of houses occupied by the natives in the Torrid Zones."[4]

Complimenting the hut and arranged in museum glass displays, an abundant number of traditional items purported to present Mexico's diverse indigenous and Spanish history. Depicting that the breadth of Mexican culture was not just indigenous, the catalog of the Fair detailed more than 350 items, including books and manuscripts that ranged from an 1854 copy of a Bible written

[4] "Orrin Bros. and Nichol's Aztec Fair. Something about the People in the Mexican Village."

in Latin to an “idol unearthed in the ancient pyramid of Mitla, representing a dead prince,” and even a "manuscript pamphlet containing a lawsuit over a water dam on the dividing line of two haciendas in 1804."[5] A series of paintings and photographs highlighted the country's culture and sought to provide a glimpse of Mexico’s natural resources and beauty. By the time visitors finished examining the artifacts in the entrance hall, the lesson had been made clear: strange rituals and customs originating in an exotic past filled with Aztecs and Spanish Catholics had formed Mexico and the Mexican character. On the upper level, the results flowing from those exotic and ancient artifacts came to life for audiences as they entered the second portion of the Fair, a composite village that strove to portray life in a small Mexican community in present-day 1886.

In this generically named exhibit, *Mexican Village* artisans worked diligently making small figurines from onyx, wood, straw, silver, and wax that Bostonians could purchase as souvenirs.[6] Through their work products, deemed primitive and quaint, the craftsmen, folk artists, cooks, and other performers were viewed through the virtue of their labor. These tableaux fueled the popularity of the *Mexican Village* but also cast Mexico and Mexicans in a specific light, and Bostonians could see for themselves how Mexicans *really* lived, which was indeed vastly different from life in New England, and more so from urban Boston. The Fair’s organizers and sponsors, intending to present the uniqueness of Mexican culture, ultimately succeeded in contrasting Mexican rural traditions with a growing urban class in Boston where the population grew 7.59

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[5] Benito Nichols, Edward Orrin, and George W. Orrin, *Guide to Orrin Bros. & Nichols’ Aztec Fair: Mexico Past and Present* (Orrin Bros. and Nichols, 1886), Dibner Library of Rare Books, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC, 9.

[6] "Orrin Bros. and Nichol's Aztec Fair. Something about the People in the Mexican Village”; "The Aztec Fair. The Opening Day--Attractions at Horticultural Hall," *Daily Advertiser*, September 21, 1886.

percent from 1880 to 1885 according to the state census.[7]

Figure 1: Aztec Fair and Mexican Village pamphlet. NMAH, Smithsonian Institution.

A large number of visitors eagerly took in the sights and smells of the fictionalized working Mexican community. The *Aztec Fair* did exceptionally well in its six-week run. The number of paid admissions totaled more than 6,000 by the end of the first week, and an additional 4,000 people visited the exhibit in the two weeks following.[8] In addition to word of mouth, effusive and enthusiastic newspaper reports encouraged readers to attend the exhibition. Opening-day reports

[7] In 1880, Boston's population was 362,839 and grew to 390,393 five years later; see "Annual Report of the City Auditor: Receipts and Expenditures of the City of Boston and the County of Suffolk, State of Massachusetts for the Financial Year 1886-87." (Rockwell and Churchill, City Printers, 1887), 265.

[8] *Boston Post,* 25 September 1886; *Boston Post,* 6 October 1886.

captured and ginned up the awe and excitement enveloping the Fair. Journalists wrote lengthy articles extolling the opportunity to learn about the Republic to the south. The Fair received accolades for its presentation of Mexican life and for the opportunity it offered Bostonians to educate themselves about Mexico and Mexicans.

Representing the interests of the Mexican Central Railway, Mexico City-based entertainment and circus impresarios Benito Nichols and his partners, the brothers George and Edward Orrin, designed and managed the exhibit to appeal to a wide cross-section of people. They kept the fair open for 12 hours a day, from 10 a.m. to 10 p.m., to give people who worked during the day the opportunity to attend in the evening.[9] Although the general admission of fifty cents matched the higher end of admission prices at the popular "dime museums" of the day, the organizers reduced the cost of admission to twenty-five cents on Tuesdays to encourage attendance, noted as "People's Day" in the Fair's literature.[10] "Special discounts to schools and societies" were made available, and on Mondays and Thursdays visitors received complimentary souvenirs made by one of the 35 Mexican villagers.[11]

The organizers of the Fair chose a strategic location within the city which also expanded attendance. The organizers found space at the popular and large Horticultural Hall, owned by the Massachusetts Horticultural Society and centrally located on Tremont Street, two blocks from City

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[9] Advertisement, *Boston Sunday Herald*, October 3 and 10, 1886. While the newspaper ads listed the hours of 10AM to 10PM, the fair leaflet read: "Open all Day and Evening." In leaflet, "Opinions of the Press and Public on the Mexican Village, Horticultural Hall."

[10] "Opinions of the Press and Public on the Mexican Village, Horticultural Hall." In Andrea Stulman Dennett, *Weird and Wonderful: The Dime Museum in America* (New York: New York University Press, 1997), xi, xiii, Andrea Stulman Dennett defines dime museums as public places for recreational activities that integrated many types of entertainment, including exhibits and live performances "under one roof and for a single price." Regarding admission prices to dime museums, see Dennett, *Weird and Wonderful*, 8.

[11] "Opinions of the Press and Public on the Mexican Village, Horticultural Hall."

Hall.[12] The Society, incorporated in 1829, was one of the oldest organizations in the United States devoted to horticulture, an important marker of upper-class respectability. According to *The King's Handbook of Boston*, the popular late nineteenth-century city guide, the Society regularly hosted non-horticultural events for its members and guests.

Each September, for example, the Society placed large annual exhibits -- or "the important exhibitions" as described in the guide -- in "the upper story by a large and elegant hall."[13] In a later edition, King's Handbook described the halls on both the second and third floors used for "concerts and the better class of entertainments."[14] The hall's location and availability provided an effective income source for the Society as the exotic Mexican exhibit and the Society's credibility in Boston combined to create a profitable venture. Society President Marshall P. Wilder reported that the Fair increased the group's income by $10,658, not only allowing the payment of half of the outstanding mortgage debt on the building, but also securing the Society's operating finances for the year.[15]

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[12] Albert Emerson Benson, *History of the Massachusetts Horticultural Society* (Norwood, Mass.: Plimpton Press for the Massachusetts Horticultural Society, 1929); Moses King, *King's Handbook of Boston*, 5th ed. (Cambridge: Moses King Publisher, 1883).

[13] King, 240.

[14] Moses King, *King's Handbook of Boston*, 9th ed. (Buffalo, NY: Matthews, Northrup & Co., 1889), 253.

[15] Benson, *History of the Massachusetts Horticultural Society*, 260.

Figure 2: Horticultural Hall is first building on the left, circa 1891.
Transit Department, City of Boston Archives.

But the Fair was more than a profit-making, educational bit of entertainment. It was at its heart an exercise in international business diplomacy at a time of increasing globalization. A letter written by Mexican President Porfirio Díaz, displayed prominently at the fair's entrance, provides a window into the complex relations of business and power that propelled Díaz's statecraft strategy in an attempt to modernize Mexico with the aid of foreign capital and technology. The exhibition's Boston sponsors shared Díaz's vision of Mexican modernity and geopolitical power, both of which depended on rapid industrial and technological transformation. The threads of what formed the strengths of a modern nation wove through the Mexican Central Railway's marketing campaign, which insinuated in its promotional materials and in the composition of the Fair itself that, without a cooperative relationship between the Mexican elite and investors in the United States, Mexico could not enter the global ranks of the modern states. The Presidential letter read in part:

> *My Esteemed Friends -- Your favor of yesterday leaves me filled with pleasure at the project you have resolved to put in practice in reference to the Mexican artisans and to make known, although probably on a small scale, the industrial possibilities of this country. I sincerely hope it will serve to stimulate the exportation of our*

> *national products, which although they may be poor in the industrial branch are valuable in the raw material.*[16]

In a short, printed welcome, Díaz spelled out Mexico's statecraft in simple form: The goal of displaying Mexican bodies and elements of Mexican culture was to demonstrate the unlimited economic opportunity resting on the exchange of human capital (personified by the exhibited artisans in Horticultural Hall) for the growth of Mexican exports that would fuel the country's global economic importance. The president had endorsed peddling *mexicanidad* for economic gain. He was not alone.

Railroad companies were not the only U.S. firms doing business in Mexico but they did enjoy a favored relationship with the Mexican government. The Mexican Central Railway, as the largest U.S.-owned railroad company in Mexico, represented the larger scope of the economic and political relationships between Mexico and commercial interests in the United States during the Porfiriato.[17] Ostensibly operating as public entertainment, the underlying circumstances that resulted in Mexicans being put on display in Boston -- with unintended and decisive consequences of identity and representation that had international ramifications for generations to come and continues to resonate in the present -- resulted directly from international business interests seeking to market their services, goods, and products in global markets. They did so with the full cooperation and participation of the governments of Mexico and the United States.

President Díaz's letter captured a pivotal moment that reflected the intertwining of the economic interests of the Mexican and U.S. political and business elite. Yet, in their enthusiasm

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[16] "Opinions of the Press and Public on the Mexican Village, Horticultural Hall," 1.

[17] Routes to Mexico City were the prized concessions from the Mexican government, and at the end, the Mexican Central Railway subsidy totaled $26,609,003, separate from the subsidies given to the ATSF. See Richard White, *Railroaded: The Transcontinentals and the Making of Modern America* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2011), 215–16.

for northern capital, the Mexican elite and the business class in the United States failed to grasp the repercussions that their enthusiastic endorsement and sponsorship of the 1886 Aztec Fair in Boston would have on ideological constructions of Mexico and Mexicans in United States popular culture.

The Mexican Central Railway

As the primary sponsor of the *Aztec Fair*, the Mexican Central sought to generate a much-needed economic boost for the company by bringing attention to the exotic world south of the border. The Mexican Central completed its first leg in 1884 between Mexico City and Ciudad Juarez, across the river from El Paso, Texas and connected to feeder rail lines of the Atchison, Topeka, and Santa Fe Railroad (ATSF). However, the MCR had not produced any profit since its organization and charter under the General Railroad Laws of Massachusetts in February 1880 although it began with conceivably strong leadership.[18] The MCR hired as its first president Thomas Nickerson, a former ATSF executive, practically declaring that American railroad-building success would continue south into Mexico.[19] In addition to Nickerson's experience in both companies, the ATSF and Mexican Central shared many of the same investors and board members. At least nine members elected to the Central Railway's board of directors also were major shareholders in the ATSF.[20] There was no reason to believe that the Mexican Central would

[18] Frederick A. Ober, *Travels in Mexico and Life Among the Mexicans* (San Francisco: J. Dewing and Company, 1884), 424; Arthur M. Johnson and Barry E. Supple, Boston *Capitalists and Western Railroads: A Study in Nineteenth-Century Railroad Investment Process* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967), 300. For yearly lack of profits, see "Annual Report of the Board of Directors of the Mexican Central Railway Co. Limited to the Stockholders, 1880-1894" (Boston: Cochran & Blodgett, n.d.), Yale University Library Holdings.

[19] Led by railroad magnates J. P. Morgan and Robert Symon of the New York financial house of J. & W. Seligman and Company and the bank Winslow and Lanier, the Mexican Central was a subsidiary of the ATSF with enormous political and financial backing. See Johnson and Supple, *Boston Capitalists and Western Railroads*, 292, 302-303.

[20] Sandra Kuntz Ficker, *Empresa Extranjera y Mercado Interno: El Ferrocarril Central Mexicano (1880-1897)* (Mexico City: El Colegio de Mexico, 1995); White, *Railroaded: The Transcontinentals and the Making of Modern America*.

not be as successful as the ATSF in the United States.

The close relationship allowed for a 'double mechanism' by which the Santa Fe could directly and indirectly profit from the success of the Mexican Central. Having the two companies switch cargo and passengers from one line to another at the border crossing and rail junction of El Paso, Texas made the financial records of the Mexican Central appear like it had organic revenue while it operated within Mexico.[21] That the two companies functioned almost as one was well-known, if not entirely expected. Frederick Ober, a popular travel writer of the day, concluded that the Mexican Central was "still under the guidance of the same wise and sagacious capitalists who projected the Atchison, Topeka, and Santa Fe system westward from the Missouri River, and southward to the Mexican frontier."[22]

The close ties between the two companies augured well for the Mexican Central in its formation, for the Mexican government favored it over its U.S. competitors. The political and economic relationship that had already been established between the ATSF and President Díaz had proved decisive in the newly-organized railroad company receiving the highly prized concession to build the first north-south rail line in Mexico. As early as 1877, the ATSF had received a concession from Díaz to build a line from the border at El Paso, Texas, to the Pacific Ocean across northern Mexico. But the northern line did not come to immediate fruition. Instead, the relationship between the ATSF and the Mexican government made way for an additional railroad concession from the Díaz administration, this time with a railroad route from El Paso down to Mexico City. The priority was to unite northern and southern Mexico, but also seamlessly connect the economies

[21] Kuntz Ficker, *Empresa Extranjera y Mercado Interno: El Ferrocarril Central Mexicano (1880-1897)*.

[22] Ober, *Travels in Mexico and Life Among the Mexicans*, 601.

of the two countries. The outcome would be a win-win: a profit opportunity for the new railway as the U.S. infrastructure market began to tighten, and an opportunity for a modern globalization that met the desires of the Porfirian elite.

The business strategy behind the construction of the Mexican Central Railway was for the ATSF to keep pace with the rapidly-expanding Southern Pacific Railroad, the ATSF's domestic competition which was emerging as a challenge in the U.S. Southwest. Anticipating the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) by over a century, Mexican Central executives argued that a line running north and south through the center of the country from Mexico City to the border crossing at El Paso would open Mexican markets to goods from the United States and allow for the transport of Mexican raw materials to the hungry economy in the north.[23]

Historically, many in Mexico had been uncomfortable with the growing role that foreign investors played in the country's economy and domestic affairs. In the 1880s, however, the Díaz administration, cognizant of its inability to repay its public debt to European lenders, recognized that investment capital from investors in the United States could keep funding Mexican infrastructure development projects.[24] The idea of a national grid-like transportation system also appealed to a great number of Mexicans, many of whom wanted to further connect the northern parts of the country to the southern region dominated by Mexico City. The U.S. consul documented the sentiment in a dispatch he wrote from Mexico City about "reports of awakening interest in the

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[23] Juan de la Torre, *Historia y Descripcion del Ferrocarril Central Mexicano* (Mexico City: Imprenta de I. Cumplido, 1888), 3; John H. McNeely, "The Railways of Mexico: A Study in Nationalism," *Southwestern Studies* II, no. 1 (Spring, 1964), 14; Sergio Ortiz Hernán, *Los Ferrocarriles de México: Una visión social y económica* (Mexico City: Ferrocarriles Nacionales de México, 1988 edition); Ramón Eduardo Ruiz, *Triumphs and Tragedy: A History of the Mexican People* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1992).

[24] Ruiz, *Triumphs and Tragedy*, 276.

subjects of rail road and mining" arriving "from all quarters of the Republic."[25]

Pressure to allow investment capital from the United States to help build Mexico's infrastructure grew from various sectors in the outlying Mexican regions, and on September 8, 1880, the Mexican Congress and President Díaz awarded the final concession to the Mexican Central Railway to build a line from deep in the interior of Mexico to the northern border at El Paso.[26] Construction was swift. Only four years later, on March 8, 1884, the railway laid its last piece in Fresnillo, Zacatecas.[27]

The early years of the line's operation showed why the Mexican Central engaged in creative marketing efforts such as the Boston *Aztec Fair and Mexican Village* in 1886. Early figures from the MCR indicate that freight charges generated 73 percent of the company's total revenue, making cargo the most profitable aspect of the rail line.[28] Mexican Central executives attempted to accommodate changing tariff policies in the United States and at the same time fulfill the formal stipulations that had been agreed upon in September 1880, with the Mexican government. In their formal agreement with the Railway, the Díaz administration included price regulations for cargo within Mexico, specifically concerning the shipment of food items from one region to another, in the hopes of evening out the price differentials that distorted the Mexican economy. Beef and wheat continued to be priced lower in northern Mexico, where they were

[25] Consular Despatches, Mexico City (M296), 1 September 1880, General Records of the Department of State, RG 59, National Archives, Washington, DC.

[26] Juan de la Torre, Historia y Descripcion del Ferrocarril Central Mexicano, 3; McNeely, "The Railways of Mexico: A Study in Nationalism," 14; Hernán, Los Ferrocarriles de México: Una visión social y económica, 185.

[27] de la Torre, Historia y Descripcion del Ferrocaril Central Mexicano, 8.

[28] Ficker, "El Ferrocarril Central Mexicano," 285.

grown, while corn, beans, and rice yielded lower prices in central Mexico.[29] As a result, products like corn, wheat, barley, and rice shipped at below-market rates and made up a hefty 26 percent of the rail line's cargo in 1884.[30] On the one hand, the completion of the north-south railroad line and the discounted rates for the shipment of Mexican products did not aid in lowering the prices of basic food items as the Díaz administration had hoped. On the other, due to its initial agreement for the Mexican concession, the company nevertheless continued to carry more than a quarter of its cargo at a deep discount. In the company's first two years of operation, revenue did not meet the railroad's initial forecasts.

While freight profits lulled, other menacing factors also threatened the railroad company's bottom line. Soon after the first passenger train from Mexico City to Chicago, Illinois, passed through El Paso at 7 a.m. on March 25, 1884, several serious accidents occurred.[31] Later, in a violent episode, an MCR train came under fire, with bullets being exchanged in an attempted robbery north of Mexico City. The U.S. consul from Paso del Norte (renamed Juarez, Mexico, four years later) wrote about the incident:

> The last and most serious accident up to date happened last week some seven kilometers this side of Queretaro; at this point a rail was lowered by drawing the spikes...The robbers at once opened fire upon the train. This was briskly returned by several passengers and some train-hands. Several volleys were exchanged resulting in killing one robber and wounding another who was captured when the gang fled.[32]

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[29] Lorena Parlee, "Porfirio Díaz, Railroads, and Development in Northern Mexico: A Study of Government Policy Toward the Central and Nacional Railroads, 1876-1910" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of California, San Diego, 1981), 165.

[30] Parlee, "Porfirio Díaz, Railroads, and Development in Northern Mexico," 164.

[31] Consular Despatches, Paso del Norte (M184), 25 March 1884, General Records of the Department of State, RG 59, National Archives.

[32] Consular Despatches, Paso del Norte (M184), 13 May 1884, General Records of the Department of State, RG 59, National Archives.

The consul concluded that the attack had been triggered by $60,000 in silver being transported on the train. One week later, the *Chicago Tribune* reported that "seven of the train-wrecking gang" had been caught, bringing relief to many travelers. Travel on the train was again "considered thoroughly safe."[33] The newspaper article, however, curiously did not mention that the seven robbers had been executed within days of their capture.[34] Such quick and forceful action indicates the extent to which train robberies had caught the attention of both government and company officials and the length to which the Mexican government was willing to go publicly to protect its new rail network.[35]

The dangers of the railroad in its early years continued to hold the Mexican public's attention an entire decade later. In the 1895 *The Railway Revolution in Mexico*, the Secretary of the Interior described the alarming nature of the attempted robberies:

> In the beginning, immediately after the establishment of our great railroads, attacks were made under a new form, more cruel and atrocious as ever. The robbers used every means to throw the train off the line, in order that when this was once done, they might possess themselves of the baggage, merchandise, etc.[36]

One robbery in particular, described as "a specific instance of train wrecking and robbery on the Mexican Central," raised the ire of the Mexican elite, having "roused the indignation of the better elements in the nation, and moved the government to take decisive action."[37] A decree issued on May 17, 1886, suspended all Mexican federal rights of "all road robbers," and attempted train

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[33] *Chicago Tribune*, May 21, 1884.

[34] Consular Despatches, Paso del Norte (M184), 27 May 1884, General Records of the Department of State, RG 59, National Archives.

[35] Consular Despatches, Paso del Norte (M184), 13 May 1884, General Records of the Department of State, RG 59, National Archives.

[36] Bernard Moses, *The Railway Revolution in Mexico* (San Francisco: The Berkeley Press, 1895), 14.

[37] Moses, 15–16.

robbery became legally punishable by death if the perpetrators were caught and convicted.[38] The extreme punishment of death set forth by the Mexican government met with overwhelming public approval.

Robbers on horseback were not the only people attacking the rail trains. Friction with local communities erupted into violence along the railroad's route both during its construction and soon after it began operating. "Ill feelings towards Americans," wrote U.S. Consul Kimball from Zacatecas, may have fueled the "act of private revenge" that caused a construction train to de-rail, killing two persons and injuring eleven others outside the city of Zacatecas; a "maliciously" placed rail across the tracks had caused the train to jump the rails.[39]

Sentiment against foreign companies appeared repeatedly in the form of violence during the construction of the railroads. Historians have offered various explanations for the surge in violence, most often claiming that the new railroads had led to the displacement of Mexicans, their lands, and homes which resulted in frustration and anger. In one violent act in 1881, a group of Mexican landowners near Puebla strapped an effigy of Judas rigged with explosives onto the headlights of a stopped train. The villagers lit the fuse and the Judas dummy burned slowly, eventually exploding. According to historian William Beezley, the Judas "represented the people who had been destroyed by the locomotive," or the very ones "who had tried to protect their fields by armed resistance against predatory speculators seizing their corn patches for railroad right-of-way."[40]

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[38] Moses, 15–16.

[39] Consular Despatches, Zacatecas (M307), 5 May 1884, General Records of the Department of State, RG 59, National Archives.

[40] William Beezley, *Judas at the Jockey Club and Other Episodes of Porfirian Mexico* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1987), 103-104.

These loss of lands during the major boom of railroad construction fed much of the anti-foreign sentiment in Mexico. The construction increased the value of surrounding lands, and a rush to buy private and public lands exacerbated existing inequities among large and small land owners.[41] While Mexican speculators benefitted from liberal legislation and court rulings in their favor, the distrust over the loss of Indian *ejidos* -- the communal lands guaranteed under centuries of Spanish rule -- triggered much of the anti-foreign sentiment -- and apparently, resistance.[42] Railcars returning to El Paso commonly arrived with windows broken, presumably by stones and bullets. U.S. Consul Fechit reported to the State Department that "a feeling of deep hostility" existed among "the Mexican people towards railroads built and operated by foreigners and especially Americans." Even priests in remote villages fueled the backlash by preaching against U.S. railroads.[43]

The sporadic violence made travelers uneasy. After learning about the incidents, many passengers *en route* to Mexico City often decided at El Paso to not continue their trips.[44] Angry displaced landowners, disgruntled employees, and violent robbers thus hampered the Mexican Central in its initial weeks of operation. The attacks and skirmishes, coming as they did as the country entered a major economic downturn, severely damaged the company's financial state. By

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[41] John Coatsworth argues that between 1877 to 1884 the largest number of conflicts occurred over communal lands. The northernmost Mexican states of Sonora, Coahuila, and Chihuahua became the major points of entry into the United States for the three largest U.S.-owned railways in Mexico including the Mexican Central. See John Coatsworth, *Growth Against Development: The Economic Impact of Railroads in Porfirian Mexico* (DeKalb, Ill.: Northern Illinois University Press, 1981).

[42] Rural communities' understanding of the transformation that would come with the railroad, and the resistance that resulted, was not limited to Northern Mexico. A few years later, Mexican Americans in northern New Mexico cut fences and burned thousands of ATSF railroad ties as they tried to prevent further incursion into Hispano and Native lands by colonizers from the Eastern United States. See Jeffrey M. Garcilazo and Vicki Ruiz, *Traqueros: Mexican Railroad Workers in the United States, 1870-1930* (Denton: University of North Texas Press, 2012), 87–89.

[43] Consular Despatches, Paso del Norte (M184), 13 May 1884, General Records of the Department of State, RG 59, National Archives.

[44] Consular Despatches, Paso del Norte (M184), 13 May 1884, General Records of the Department of State, RG 59, National Archives.

the spring of 1884, the newly operational railroad seemed to have a growing reputation for attracting violence.

The resulting Depression of 1882-1885 slowed U.S. investment and dramatically reduced the railway's freight shipments and passengers. In addition, the Panic of 1884 broke out and the failure of thousands of U.S. banks and businesses on May 14 resulted in a contraction in railroad investment.[45] Equally damaging, the next year, the Mexican government suspended subsidy payments that were part of the original concession agreement. The downturn was not limited to the United States; Mexico was also hit economically. Although officials changed the level of the subsidies and instituted them the following year, the Mexican government was able to make only partial payments on the new amounts. By 1886, just two years into the operation of the flagship north-south route that was to open new market opportunities for Boston investors and the Mexican state, a severe shortfall in revenue reduced liquid assets, compelling Mexican Central executives to search for new ways to increase revenue.[46]

The Promotion of a Mexico as Primitive Exotica

To increase the number of passenger tickets sold on its trains, the Mexican Central broadened its marketing promotions, not so much to brand the company but to increase revenue. The *Aztec Fair and Mexican Village* in Boston was the company's first major exhibit on Mexico.[47] Mexico's economic growth and growing stature among the nations of the world increased the interest of an American public hungry for entertainment, more attuned to foreign cultures, and

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[45] Alan L. Sorking, "Depression of 1882-1885," in *Business Cycles and Depressions: An Encyclopedia*, ed. David Glassner (Abington: Routledge, 1997), 149-151.

[46] Fred Wilbur Powell, *The Railroads of Mexico* (Boston: The Stratford Company, 1921), 119-120.

[47] The Mexican Central would participate in the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition by exhibiting scattered items in the ethnology section of the Anthropology Hall and in the Manufactures Hall. It is unclear if these items were remnants of the fire sale that took place after the end of the run for the Aztec Fair.

eager to consume new forms of diversion as a result of urbanization.

Late nineteenth-century Americans, like their counterparts in other 'modern' industrial countries, were fascinated with exotic locales and cultures. Increasing interest in travel and tourism as well as the growth of public museums like the Smithsonian Institution and the Peabody Museum of Archeology and Ethnology at Harvard spurred a greater awareness and fascination with indigenous, foreign, and different cultures. Leisure travel was an upper-class pursuit, and so the public enjoyed having the exotic brought to them in the form of illustrated newspapers, lectures and magic lantern presentations, traveling exhibits, world fairs, and soon thereafter, moving pictures.[48]

A deepening interest in comparing cultures stemmed from studying Indians from the Americas as ethnology grew from archeology and resulted in the Smithsonian's Bureau of American Ethnology, established by the U.S. government in 1879, as the "first agency of the federal government to make a substantial financial investment in American archaeology."[49] The state had officially linked archeology and ethnology, professionalizing the study of cultural differences. The Smithsonian's interest focused on North American Indians, and included Aztec history duet to its immense archeological finds and proximity to the United States. As folklorist Simon Bronner explains, studies in American folklore had been influenced mostly by English studies, and since the 1870s Americans took a deep interest in learning about America's natural history.[50] Ethnologists collected artifacts and learned about rites and customs, for these were

[48] Sumiko Higashi, *Cecil B. DeMille and American Culture: The Silent Era* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 90.

[49] David J. Meltzer, "North American Archaeology and Archaeologists, 1879-1934," *American Antiquity* 50, no. 2 (April 1985): 249–60.

[50] Bronner, *Folklife Studies from the Gilded Age*.

considered especially telling of primitive people. The more exotic a culture, the more primitive it was labeled by ethnologists, who believed that "the progression of items ... worked from superstition to science, from primitive rites to refined manners, from exotic customs to rational observances."[51] Scientific discourse, to use a Foucauldian term, played an authoritative role in labeling Mexicans as primitive and far behind the progression of civilization.

To separate out from the dime museums, museums were being organized throughout the United States as markers of a city's wealth and sophistication, and in the nascent field of folklore and ethnology, social scientists enthused about what they termed "barbaric" and "savage" cultures, including Native Americans and Native Mexican.[52] Ethnologists eagerly collected cultural artifacts, and, as an indication of their popularity, set up intricate displays at fairs under the rubric of ethnology and anthropology.[53]

One need only to recognize the absence of Mexican performance and lack of information about Mexico in popular culture to comprehend the impact of the *Aztec Fair and Mexican Village* on Boston audiences. Almost no information circulated about Mexico or the daily lives and cultural traditions of the vast majority of Mexicans whose lives were shaped by poverty and disenfranchisement, whether they lived in Mexico or in the regions of the United States that once belonged to Mexico. The steady and eventual loss of political and economic power of the Spanish and Mexican middle-classes of California, Texas, and New Mexico in the wake of the U.S. –

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[51] Bronner, *Folklife Studies from the Gilded Age*, 14.

[52] The Smithsonian's Otis Mason and Harvard's Frederick Putnam were two leading ethnologists who most likely toured the in Boston and in Washington, DC.

[53] See chapter three of this dissertation for a discussion of how ethnology played out at the 1893 Columbian Exposition in Chicago. Much scholarly attention to problematic ethnographic displays has concentrated on the major international exhibitions, such as the Columbian Exposition. The Aztec Fair in Boston, and its subsequent stands in other Northeastern cities, reminds us that ethnographic entertainment was not limited solely to World's Fairs, but could be presented in smaller, more local efforts.

Mexico war paralleled the increased incidences of violence and banditry in Mexico.[54]

The stream of immigration from Mexico into the United States that brought with it more, if imperfect, awareness of Mexicans did not begin until after the completion of the major rail lines, including the Mexican Central. In 1886, only two years after the completion of the railroad, little face-to-face interaction had occurred between working Mexicans and everyday Bostonians. With such sparse knowledge in the United States about Mexico, the Fair's success depended greatly on building up interest and excitement among Bostonians to motivate them to attend. The sponsors knew that their political and economic goal depended on Bostonians internalizing their message of Mexico as a place of tourism, productivity, and improvability. And the organizers – experienced showmen -- well knew their revenue depended directly on the number of people who attended the Fair. In this way, three different, but interrelated, sources of revenue emerged at the Aztec Fair.

Admissions and concession sales provided the most direct source of revenue, though the sale of rail tickets to leisure and business travelers served as the secondary goal. The exhibit doubled as a huge advertisement for the ways in which the locally-based Mexican Central Railway was at the forefront of doing business in Mexico, and in so doing served a third goal of not only reassuring investors of the company's viability but also potentially attracting new investors. The location of the company's headquarters in a financial center such as Boston was a natural catalyst for the Railway to mount the Mexican Village exhibit there. As one report stated: "Boston people, who have taken so much financial interest in Mexican interests, have manifested their interest in

[54] See Albert Camarillo for an analysis of the Californios' loss of political power in the Santa Barbara area; Deena Gonzalez for the changes in the New Mexican society; Sarah Deutsch examines Mexican villages in southern Colorado and northern New Mexico; David Montejano analyzes the changes in the Mexican American communities of South Texas as a result of changing agrarian practices.

the Exhibition by attending in goodly numbers."[55]

To maintain a large attendance, the organizers went to great lengths to advertise the Fair in local papers, including paid advertisements and first-person reports. One journalist wrote:

> For us powerless Mahomets who cannot go to the Mexican mountains for lack of time or money, or both, the Mexican mountains are brought into our midst by the Aztec Fair or, at any rate, very much of the life that fills the valleys and the tablelands over which tower the noble Sierras of romantic New Spain. And it is all genuinely Mexican, as the writer can testify. There is nothing "made up," nothing exaggerated. It is all just as one sees it on the spot, the actual daily life of the 12,000,000 of people south of the Rio Grande.[56]

Although it is unclear whether this writer had traveled to Mexico, he did believe in the accuracy of the representations of the Mexican Village, and accordingly vouched for them to his readers. These reports and similar testimonies convinced others to experience the Fair as entertainment and as a learning environment.

The meticulous and lengthy catalog of displayed material items strengthened the perception that everything at the fair was genuine. The exhibit's "authenticity" did not go unnoticed. Edward Morse, a professor at the Peabody Institute of Harvard University, marveled at the opportunity for students of ethnology to study another culture so close in proximity to Harvard.[57] Samuel Green, formerly the mayor of Boston, espoused the educational value of the Aztec Fair for all Bostonians. He claimed the exhibition was "a good example of object teaching, a lesson adapted to persons of all ages, from the child to the adult."[58] Such endorsements helped effect a plan to provide a special 10-cent admission rate for school children who wished to visit the exhibit. The rate became

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[55] *Boston Journal*, September 21, 1886, as cited in leaflet, "Opinions of the Press and Public on the Mexican Village, Horticultural Hall."

[56] *Boston Herald,* September 21, 1886.

[57] "Opinions of the Press and Public on the Mexican Village, Horticultural Hall."

[58] Ibid.

available a few days after the show's opening.[59]

The promotion of the *Aztec Fair's* semi-scholarly environment occurred at the same time the concept of primitivism was gaining acceptance as the latest paradigmatic development in the fledging field of ethnology. The juxtaposition of live, "primitive" Mexicans and the "exoticism" of Aztec culture framed Mexico as a nation that was settled, but comfortably far behind the tide of civilizing progress that many white members of society in the United States believed they had achieved already. As one *Aztec Fair* visitor wrote:

> Mexico with all its characteristics, as viewed in miniature at Horticultural Hall, has made a decided hit, and therefore the projectors of the affair are rejoicing....To wander from the old musty books of the Aztec idols, and then again to the heroic relics of the conquest, quite imbues the visitor with the spirit of Mexico's past, with which feeling he ascends to the upper hall, where the living Mexicans work, and the true life of the tropics presents itself at a glance.[60]

In a casual walk through the hall, this writer placed Mexico's Aztec past as a precursor to the lives of the Mexicans working at the fair. While enjoying the experience of a public amusement, spectators discovered a presumably accurate version of Mexico's history and culture while also learning about the development of humankind. Bostonians attending the Fair could scarcely be faulted for concluding that modern-day Mexico was lagging in modernity and simply primitive.

It is difficult to imagine anyone questioning the authoritative construction of the Fair when scholars, politicians, and other experts so enthusiastically endorsed its portrayals. The exhibitors included a 32-page guide with detailed descriptions of both artifacts and people.[61] The level of

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[59] *Boston Post*, September 26, 1886; Boston *Daily Globe*, October 6,1886.

[60] *Boston Sunday Herald*, September 26, 1886.

[61] Benito Nichols, Edward Orrin, and George W. Orrin, "Guide to Orrin Bros. & Nichols' Aztec Fair: Mexico Past and Present" (Orrin Bros. and Nichols, 1886), Dibner Library of Rare Books, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC.

authenticity that translated into entertainment and education about Mexico's lack of modernity emerged from the authoritarian discourse and the material artifacts of the Aztec Fair. The exhibit promoted, and the public believed, the historical record of Mexico as presented not only due to the real, live performances but also by reason of the immense collection of unusual material artifacts. Orrin Brothers and Nichols clearly had a strong relationship with President Díaz for they ably shipped Mexican relics purported to be original and authentic out of the country. The increased interest in Aztec antiquities (and resulting pillaging from mostly foreign explorers and anthropologists in the previous decades) led the Díaz administration a year before the *Aztec Fair* in 1885 to pass the Inspección de Monumentos Arqueoleógicos (Archeological Monuments Inspection), a formal inspection process by the state to oversee the unearthing and movement of archeological pieces.[62] This example of Mexican statecraft undergirds how the international display of Aztec antiquities was part of the national patrimony, and that peddling these aspects of Mexican history at international exhibitions was key to the construction of *mexicanidad* by the state. And this likely carried immense credibility in the minds of fairgoers.

[62] Karin Alejandra Rosemblatt, *The Science and Politics of Race in Mexico and the United States, 1910-1950* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2018), 31–32.

Figure 3: Cover of the 32-page guide to the *Aztec Fair and Mexican Village* exhibit. Dibner Library, Smithsonian Institution.

As visitors observed the visual and linguistic images on display in the Horticulture Building, Bostonians formed assumptions about Mexico's primitiveness, constructing it as a direct antithesis to the civil ways of the United States. This categorization functioned to separate and differentiate New Englanders from Mexicans and generated a distinct visual image of Mexico (and Mexicans) in an unequal relationship of power with the United States (and Americans). The reiterative question that naturally sprung from the obvious visual disparity that every visitor to the exhibit could see with their own eyes was: How could such primitive people afford not to learn and benefit from the ideals of civilization that greatly benefited the United States, and its mighty industrial prowess?

The discursive construction of primitivism also encompassed the meticulous array, and

arrangement, of the Fair. The choices and arrangement of displays condensed hundreds of years of Mexican history visually into one exotic collection of material artifacts through the construction of a "real" village. Having observed for themselves on the first floor of the exhibit the exotic items that constructed Mexicans as semi-barbaric indigenous peoples or superstitiously Catholic Spaniards, spectators in Boston could then on the second level see real, primitive Mexicans at work. Once on the upper level, visitors marveled at the skilled artistry and craftsmanship demonstrated by the Mexicans in the village. Yet, the continual visual narratives of primitivism and of a semi-civilized people conveyed the idea that Mexicans had progressed little since the 1521 Spanish Conquest. Their history and culture seemed rich and interesting, and certainly worth consuming as entertainment, yet Mexicans had failed to reach the same degree of human civilization that had been achieved by most Americans.

Evidence of the Mexicans' semi-barbarism lay in such examples as the bamboo hut and the ways in which they lacked modern technology. Implicit in the descriptions about the men and their work was that industrial and technological progress had occurred very slowly, if at all, in Mexico. "The bone worker's primitive lathe," wrote one reporter, was a "curiosity" because the worker did not have a "better clamp."[63] Another observer claimed that it was "doubtful whether the oldest relic of an American farm could equal in primitiveness of the modern Mexican plough."[64]

Another observable expression of Mexico's primitivism lay in the gendered performances of workers. Because the men wove the *serapes* - the only textile product of the *Aztec Fair* available for purchase - the image contrasted vividly with American's relegation of sewing and weaving to

[63] *Boston Daily Advertiser*, September 21, 1886.

[64] "Opinions of the Press and Public on the Mexican Village, Horticultural Hall."

the realm of less worthy women's work.[65] By weaving the vividly striped, woolen, blanket-like shawls in public and putting them into commerce, Mexican men reinforced the gendered differences between the two cultures. By performing what U.S. culture deemed as feminine, these Mexican men clearly demonstrated that they had not attained the same level of progress as the men of the United States. Furthermore, the bright colors of the serapes indicated, again, the primitiveness of the Mexicans, for it was understood among ethnological experts of the day that "savages and children have a natural love for good bright colors. Everybody knows that these colors tend to raise the spirits, and therefore improve the health...."[66] At that historical moment, Mexican men, engaged in womanly actions, were gendered as feminine and their performances reinforced existing frameworks that defined cultures like Mexico's as primitive.

No other image at the Fair, however, evoked such interest to Bostonian observers as that of a kneeling woman grinding cornmeal into *nixtamal* to make *tortillas*. The image would imprint onto the American imagination well into the twentieth century, and it figured prominently in promotional literature and travel books about Mexico.[67] The *metate*, or stone table, continually captured viewers' attention at the *Aztec Fair*. Using their "primitive" *metates* to grind the corn, the women kneaded the dough and cooked "the curious little pancakes over an open charcoal fire,"

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[65] "Orrin Bros. and Nichol's Aztec Fair. Something about the People in the Mexican Village."

[66] Henry Childs Merwin, "On Being Civilized Too Much," *Atlantic Monthly*, as quoted in Simon J. Bronner, ed., *Folklife Studies from the Gilded Age: Object, Rite, and Custom in Victorian America* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1987), 4.

[67] A few examples of the era's travel books which contain descriptions about tortilla-making include: Ober, *Travels in Mexico and Life Among the Mexicans*, 44, 138; Fanny Chambers Gooch, *Face to Face With Mexicans: The Domestic Life, Educational, Social, and Business Ways, Statesmanship and Literature, Legendary and General History of the Mexican People* (New York: Fords, Howard, & Hulbert, 1887), 428-430; Martin M. Ballow, *Aztec Lands* (Boston and New York: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1890), 70-71; Nevin O. Winter, *Mexico and Her People of To-Day: An Account of the Customs, Characteristics, Amusements, History and Advancement of the Mexicans, and the Development and Resources of Their Country*, New Revised ed. (Boston: The Page Company, 1918), 178, 215. For tortilla-making description, see the Mexican Central Railway's own publication, Thomas L. Rogers, *Mexico? Si Señor* (Boston: Collins Press/Mexican Central Railway Co., Limited, 1893), 89.

sharing the tortillas with fair-goers.[68] Visitors loved the scene, as many elaborate details made their way into written accounts:

> The housemaids kneel upon the kitchen floor, lay a handful or two of moistened kernels of corn upon a flat, coarse-grained sandstone, and with a rolling pin of like stone they pulverize the kernels into indisputably proper looking dough, pat the dough into form precisely as described in the familiar lines of Mother Goose, and over charcoal fires burning in little earthern [sic] furnaces, bake it into very palatable cakes which have somewhat a parched corn flavor.[69]

In the gendered space of the exhibit, Mexican women prepared the cornmeal throughout the day and evening while spectators tasted the corn tortillas and hot chocolate, which itself had to undergo a grinding process. The tortilla-and-chocolate spectacle conveyed that only primitive ways of living existed in Mexico while the very personal experience of tasting these fundamental elements of Mexican cooking, likely for the first time ever, left an indelible visual impression.

The responsibility of feeding families and village workers belonged to women in the contrived village, although in ironic fashion, none of the workers were evidently allowed to eat any of the tortillas nor sip the hot chocolate, for it cost too much in overhead expenses.[70] In essence, the very people who would have understood the food ways on display were denied the opportunity to consume it as food, as opposed to their audiences, whose enjoyment of tortillas and chocolate was not as sustenance, but as part of an interactive experience of exoticism that involved taste and smell as well as the other senses.

The Fair offered a visual, tangible image of Mexican women whose work differed from that of men's only because of their sex. These performances clearly conveyed Mexican women's

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[68] *Daily Advertiser*, September 25, 1886.

[69] *Daily Advertiser*, September 21, 1886.

[70] *Boston Sunday Globe*, October 3, 1886.

work to be about nourishing a family's daily need for food. Interestingly, these visual images supported a gendered distinction that paralleled the roles of working- and middle-class women in the United States. But as Mexican women, they were deemed primitive.

Similar to the exotic material objects on the lower level of the exhibition, the Mexican women on display in the Village were worthy of lengthy descriptions. Reporters noticed the women's beauty and shared their observations:

> One of the most attractive groups is that of the four pretty senoritas in charge of the Mexican kitchen, with its primitive looking implements. They have glossy, blue-black hair, worn in two heavy braids behind. The splendid development of their brown arms would make many of our belles almost willing to take up their work of grinding tortilla meal.[71]

From this description, readers learned that a by-product of using "primitive-looking" tools was a physical muscularity that may or may not have been deemed feminine, but was certainly sexualized. As they worked, these brown women showed their bodies in an era when "long skirts, high collars, and corsets" stringently hid respectable white American women's bodies, especially in public spaces.[72] In contrast to the norms required of middle and upper-class women in the United States in the late nineteenth century, the different style of clothing for Mexican women, along with their exoticized beauty, instigated longing gazes, such as the *Herald* reporter that September day.

Gazes in this arena were not one-sided as the women at work also observed visitors, but for different reasons. Consistently, they were described as eager to entertain and please visitors. One report stated that "they cause[d] no end of amusement by the manner in which they watch[ed] the partakers of the food." Another read: "The native women, who seem delighted at the attention

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[71] *The Boston Herald*, September 21, 1886.

[72] Valerie Steele, "Clothing and Sexuality," in *Men and Women: Dressing the Part*, ed. Claudia Brush Kidwell and Valerie Steele (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1989), 42-63.

bestowed on their work, enter into the spirit of entertainment."[73] While these gazes thus existed in both directions, those from spectators held the upper hand in a relationship of power, for the only role they held was to be entertained, while the working women held the responsibility to be the objects of both attention and amusement. Further, when the Fair closed for the evening, the Mexican women, unlike their American counterparts, most likely did not go home to their families, but went upstairs to where they slept under the roof of the exhibition hall during the time they were temporarily in America.

A Journey to Mexico, Courtesy of the Mexican Central Railroad

During the six weeks these images delighted, entertained, and amused spectators, the Mexican Central highlighted aspects of Mexican culture that it deemed would attract the most public attention from American audiences. The railway targeted upper and middle-class visitors to boost its number of international rail tickets. First-class passengers amounted to between five and seven percent of the total number of passengers, a relatively small percentage. However, first-class travelers tended to ride for much longer distances, and so the value of their ticket generated 20-40 percent of the Railway's passenger revenue.[74]

In 1885, following the inaugural year marked by accidents, train robberies, community resistance, and economic depression, the Mexican Central's overall ridership dipped to about half a million passengers.[75] To increase this number, a distinct strategy geared to generate enthusiasm for traveling abroad was placed into action by means of the Aztec Fair. The company sought to whet appetites for travel to Mexico. By marketing Mexican culture, society, and vistas as viable,

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[73] *Boston Daily Advertiser*, September 25, 1886.

[74] Parlee, "Porfirio Díaz, Railroads, and Development in Northern Mexico," 152.

[75] de la Torre, *Historia y Descripcion del Ferrocarril Central Mexicano*, 14.

safe, entertaining, and worthwhile experiences, the railroad targeted a small, but elite, portion of Aztec Fair visitors that would hopefully decide to embark on a train trip all the way to Mexico City (or at least invest in a railroad that could get one there). Wondrous views of Mexican landscapes and culture enveloped visitors as soon as they entered Horticulture Hall. Photographs, display cases, written narratives, and *bona fide* Mexicans created images of Mexico as beautiful and picturesque to help dispel the idea that the journey of 3,200 miles from Boston to Mexico City would be uninteresting and uncomfortable.

Marketing that openly encouraged travel to Mexico appeared in the printed advertisements throughout the Aztec Fair's literature. The entire back cover of a small hand brochure exclaimed: "A TRIP TO MEXICO: Novel, Entertaining, Instructive, Profitable."[76] This brochure served two purposes. First, it suggested that if needed, the Fair's accurate and realistic production could serve as a replacement for an actual trip, thus engendering goodwill for U.S. companies investing in Mexico at a time of financial upheaval. It simultaneously encouraged visitors with the leisure and wherewithal to take a trip to Mexico to see first-hand what they had experienced and enjoyed at the Fair. A more blatant attempt to encourage tourism to Mexico, with fuller descriptions about Mexican sights, appeared in the exhibit catalog. The last section of the guide meticulously described an itinerary from New England to Mexico City with information on length and time of travel and suggestions for sight-seeing at every stop. Helpful step-by-step procedures for passing through customs at El Paso would hopefully allay any trepidation about interacting with Mexican officials, who were described as wanting "to do their duty with courtesy, celerity, and propriety."[77]

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[76] "Orrin Bros. and Nichol's Aztec Fair. Something about the People in the Mexican Village."

[77] Nichols, Orrin, and Orrin, Guide to Orrin Bros. & Nichols' *Aztec Fair: Mexico Past and Present*, 31.

Rail officials also tried to suppress any concerns about comfort by explaining that travelers would find "all the comforts and luxuries of modern travel amply provided."[78]

During this period, the Mexican Central enlisted the writing skills of James W. Steele to produce a travelogue titled *To Mexico by Palace Car, Intended as a Guide* for "two classes of travelers" as described by the writer.[79] Steele aimed his guide at both leisure and business travelers, who in either case would possess the economic means to plan a lengthy trip to Mexico. Steele described the first group of travelers as those whose time was "not especially limited," while the business person only had time to "take in only the most prominent" sights, and therefore, needed a shorter itinerary highlighting the most important views.[80]

To convince people to travel into Mexico, Central Railway marketers offered captivating descriptions of Mexico's scenic beauty throughout their literature and the Aztec Fair alike. The travel guide told of tropical fruits "growing side by side with cotton, cane, limes, bananas, and a hundred different fruits" which constructed an image of abundance and warm weather without the fear of disease usually found in tropical climates.[81] Additionally, phrases such as "inaccessible majesty," "shining vertical sun," and "becoming accustomed to grandeur" helped create a narrative of pristine and unmarred landscapes, waiting solely for the American tourist to buy a ticket and travel to "the land of mountains."[82]

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[78] Ibid., p. 33.

[79] The full title is: *To Mexico by Palace Car, Intended as a Guide to Her Principal Cities and Capital, and Generally as a Tourist's Introduction to Her Life and People* (Chicago: Jansen, McClurg, and Company, 1884), Box titled Mexico, Warshaw Collection, Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution.

[80] Steele, To Mexico by Palace Car, 32.

[81] Steele, To Mexico by Palace Car, 14.

[82] Steele, To Mexico by Palace Car, 15.

To add a visual complement to the linguistic narratives describing the beauty of Mexico, photographs and paintings displayed at the *Aztec Fair* also sought to convince visitors that what they read and heard was real. The exhibit catalog devoted several pages detailing the *bona fides* and credentials of the Mexican artists whose works hung in Boston, as well as the subject of each work.[83] Vouching for credibility was essential.

If breathtaking narratives of Mexico did not suffice, there were also exemplary natives at the Fair, whose gentle exoticism could soothe the curious potential traveler concerned about the Mexican people. The railroad company used the working Mexicans to deter fear of the rigors or dangers of traveling in Mexico in an attempt to overcome the bad press surrounding the violent episodes of 1884. The company's success depended on its rail line between El Paso and Mexico City, and it had suffered losses in passenger revenue in its first two years due to the robberies and accidents. Accordingly, two years later the company's promotional literature and public exhibition alike became built around narratives that stressed safety in order to encourage foreign travel. According to the exhibit catalog, the objective of the Fair was to help narrow, literally and figuratively, the "space" between Mexico and the United States, "thanks to the railroads and peaceful international enterprise."[84] The reference to peace also supported the view set forth in Steele's travel narrative for the Mexican Central: "The facilities for a pleasant and economical journey thither are not overstated, and all ancient stories of danger, suspicion and semi-barbarism must soon be exploded by the experience of the hundreds."[85] Trying to overcome economic downturns and negative press coverage, the Mexican Central Railway utilized primitiveness as an

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[83] Nichols, Orrin, and Orrin, Guide to Orrin Bros. & Nichols' *Aztec Fair: Mexico Past and Present*, 20-22.

[84] Nichols, Orrin, and Orrin, Guide to Orrin Bros. & Nichols' *Aztec Fair: Mexico Past and Present*.

[85] Steele, *To Mexico by Palace Car*, 95.

aura of safety to prospective passengers. After all, how could anyone like the pleasantly servile Mexicans working at the Fair be a threat to passengers?

Progress and primitiveness, and ultimately Mexico itself, became gendered in purposeful narratives constructed to convince would-be travelers and investors that Mexico was ready for the infusion of U.S. dollars. Descriptions of beautiful landscapes and assurances of safety served the company well as it vigorously sold Mexico as an attractive nation that had the potential to please travelers and investors. Like the beautiful tortilla girls who dazzled the *Boston Herald* reporter with their sensuality, Mexico itself was feminine, ready to serve American interests and industry. "Mexico," wrote James Steele in his travel guide for the Railway, "is the coming country, if there be any. She is accessible, as she has never been before, hopeful, expectant, cordial..."[86]

Through the use of gendered constructions of Mexico in both paid entertainment and promotional literature, the Mexican Central Railway painted a nation ready for - and eagerly awaiting - the United States' technological prowess and industrial progress. Throughout James Steele's text, descriptions of building railroads contrasted sharply to the passivity of the virgin, primitive, land of Mexico. Tourists wanting a closer view of this pristine land, from the perspective of a spectator or even as a voyeur, had the power to get one at any time, simply in an exchange of money for a ticket.

The recurring theme of the *Aztec Fair* and travelogues was that Mexico could only achieve progress and modernity through the aid of masculine capital and technology from the United States. The exhibition effectively wove assumptions about gender with notions of race to create a specific image of difference Mexicans. As historian E. Anthony Rotundo explains, passions that

[86] Steele, *To Mexico by Palace Car*, 9.

became associated with successful men included "ambition, avarice, assertiveness, lust for power."[87] These descriptions, emerging in the 1880s as newly-defined parameters for American men, took on special meanings. The Mexican Central, itself a representative of American industry, exemplified manly traits of conquest in land not their won in its self-depictions: "among the latest and most surprising achievements of American energy...forming a continuous line through the heart of the country from El Paso del Norte to the Capital."[88] In no uncertain terms, the railroad represented manly America, bringing progress behind its virile locomotives and imposing tracks. Metaphors not just for sex but for war -- "endless series of beneficient and bloodless conquests" -- securely and acceptably linked the United States with aggression and power over the frailer Mexico.[89]

The popularity of the railroad system and its insistence that tourists -- especially from the East Coast -- visit exotic places in order to be among "natives" also reflected an unequal relationship between the United States and Mexico. By generating travel brochures that depicted friendly natives and eager-to-please Mexican peasants, the rail companies enticed prospective riders with promises of viewing "real, live" and "primitive" people and in such narratives, defined Mexican peasants as humble, submissive, naive, and pliant. The by-product of such narratives, however, was an ideology constructed along the lines of race and gender that implicitly feminized Mexico's national identity while establishing a gendered system of power through visual and linguistic narratives.

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[87] E. Anthony Rotundo, *American Manhood: Transformations in Masculinity from the Revolution to the Modern Era* (New York: Basic Books, 1993), 16.

[88] Steele, *To Mexico by Palace Car*, 7.

[89] Steele, *To Mexico by Palace Car*, 8.

Murdered Spaniards, an Exotic 'Aztec' Past, and "Dried Mexicans"

The *Aztec Fair and Mexican Village*'s success was not only a result of the confluence of interest between the Porfirian regime and Boston railroad men. It was a successful paid amusement because a group of circus showmen who were aware of visual shock value organized it. The new popularity of educational and ethnographic entertainment lent a sheen of respectability to this amusement, and the organizational structure of nineteenth century dime museums and circus tents was a key to what the Orrin company exhibited.[90] The goal was to show many interesting objects to a wide array of spectators.

Visitors with disposable income for leisure trips or possibly to be a future investor in the Mexican Central Railway epitomized the perfect visitor to the Aztec Fair and the showmen put their public relations to work. Soon after the opening day, a news account claimed the Fair was attracting "the very best classes and the most progressive minds" and that a trip to the Fair signaled "fashionable attendance."[91] Evenings were especially animated and bright due to: "both the fashionably attired visitors as to the picturesque looks of the natives. It has become quite the proper thing to be seen in full evening dress at the *Aztec Fair*, and the contrast between the best types of American society and the primitiveness of the native Mexican is as much food for thought as is the work and the workmen themselves."[92] This self-awareness is noteworthy. A century before post-modernism, Fair promoters themselves understood and sought to profit from the juxtaposition of these constructed realities and class markers, knowing that this mix of fashion and primitiveness

[90] The dime museum's novelty encompassed a new form of entertainment that bridged class differences among the middle and working class in the nineteenth century, and where visitors could view different and varied diversions in one setting. See Andrea Stulman Dennett, *Weird and Wonderful: The Dime Museum in America* (New York: New York University Press, 1997).

[91] *Boston Sunday Herald*, October 10, 1886; October 3, 1886.

[92] "Opinions of the Press and Public on the Mexican Village, Horticultural Hall."

made for a successful exhibition. Together, fashionable attire and the desire to be seen at the Fair marked it as a respectable place, assuring the organizers that they could count on the continued patronage from the upper and middle-class while still making the Fair available to working-class ticket buyers as well.

The Orrin brothers and Nichols marketed the *Aztec Fair* as an unusual museum visit with live entertainment, for there was lots to learn from seeing novel artifacts and foreign people. Experienced showmen, they understood that even for elite audiences, the elegance and respectability of learning about new cultures was best counterbalanced with the *frisson* of shock, sexuality, and scandal. Vistas, narratives, and the promise of great scenery were one thing, but to further pique the curiosity of Bostonians, the show organizers turned again to offering Mexican bodies for the American audience's examination and consumption. But these were not alive.

The Fair offered its guests two dried Mexican mummies as spectacle - a visually exciting diversion from the more serious on-going narratives of culture and history.[93] Described as bizarre, unusual, and shocking, the mummies guaranteed an exotic and 'real' view of Mexican culture while also raising the level of titillation at the Fair. Throughout the press coverage, descriptions of the mummies appeared alongside distinct warnings. One journalist advised: "Whoever wishes to experience a wild thrill of horror will take a look at the two mummies which are judiciously shown by themselves in a separate space, curtained off from the hall and draped funereally."[94] Due to the potentially shocking effect of seeing the corpses on display, other journalists also wrote warnings; one read: "Large numbers of the many visitors to Horticultural Hall on the opening day of this

[93] Contemporaneous accounts accept at face value the exhibition's claims that the bodies on display were mummified (through what process is unclear), ancient, and Mexican.

[94] *The Boston Herald*, September 21, 1886.

very interesting museum paid their tribute of mingled wonder and dread to these twin horrors, though ladies as a rule feared to venture behind the curtain."[95] Another writer not only cautioned women as well, but also advised "any one with weak nerves" to "perhaps best avoid" the curtained space of the two mummies.[96] As these warnings grew, of course, so too did the interest in the mummies.

Insight and background information on the pair continued to appear in the daily papers, instigating widespread curiosity. The *Boston Daily Globe* ran a full-length column on its front page with the lurid title "DRIED MEXICANS: Mummied Forms That Are Two Centuries Old." It told an intricate history, describing one mummy as "a blooming Spanish maiden by the name of Dolores de la Vega," and the second as Reverend Father Nicholas de Seguia, "a leading Jesuit of the inquisitorial court."[97] The pair of mummies proved to be so popular that a few weeks into the exhibit the Fair began to deliver nightly "regular discourses ... on the celebrated pair."[98]

Accordingly, the two mummies had lived and suffered from extraordinary circumstances during their lifetimes. Audiences eagerly listened to the elaborate stories that the organizers constructed around the desiccated bodies. For instance, visitors learned that the female mummy, "Dolores de la Vega," was a member of Spanish nobility and had been tortured by Aztec priests as a result of her amorous behavior toward a Spanish officer. Ms. de la Vega was said to have been placed in a stone coffin between 1710 and 1712 and hidden away until 1885 when "gentlemen from the United States visited Mexico, and at their request those ancient pagan vaults were

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[95] *Boston Daily Globe*, September 21, 1886.

[96] *Boston Post*, September 21, 1886.

[97] *Boston Daily Globe*, September 21, 1886.

[98] *Boston Daily Globe*, October 13, 1886.

explored."[99] It is unclear how, if at all, the lecturers sought to explain away for their audiences the discrepancy of almost 200 years between the Spanish Conquest in 1521 and subsequent purging of Aztec religion and social structures, and the supposed date of Ms. de la Vega's death, internment, and mummification.

Also, supposedly found in the same vaults by the American gentlemen was the other mummy, identified by the exhibitors as a strangled Spanish priest. Father de Seguia's described method of execution had been with a catgut string, also at the hands of angry Aztec priests as punishment for preaching "his obnoxious doctrine." After having been walled up in a cavern made of limestone, the priest's desiccated body, with lips still parted "as if struggling for the breath which pagan intolerance refused him," was removed by the same Americans who had verified the identity of "Dolores de la Vega."[100] Whether constructed by the exhibition's organizers or the supposed American explorers and anthropologists, the stories were presented as true to add a dramatic flair to the display. In the end, the mummies functioned as a visual spectacle, drawing visitors to see something "authentically Mexican" that was exciting and entertaining, but also macabre. The mummies had a backstory that conformed to wild prejudices, filled with murderous indigenous pagans, scandalous Spanish *señoritas*, and even the anti-Catholic Black Legend itself.

Stretching the truth to fit the spectacle, however, was commonplace in the business of dime museums. Proprietors of such establishments advertised "heavily in local newspapers, touting their exhibits with a mix of exaggeration and outright lies."[101] As dime museums peaked beginning in the 1880's, the Aztec Fair reflected the era's types of popular entertainment by simultaneously

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[99] *Boston Daily Globe*, September 21, 1886.

[100] *Boston Daily Globe*, September 21, 1886.

[101] Dennett, Weird and Wonderful, 9.

serving as a learning environment for visitors and tailoring displays to different tastes and expectations for entertainment.[102] In this case, patrons seeking horror needed to look no further than to the macabre mummies displayed with great fanfare at the Fair while those seeking ethnographic knowledge or an exotic foreign culture needed only to look at the expansive display of cultural artifacts.

Organizers chose only the most stunning images to display the unusual and the unfamiliar, intending to trigger the curiosity of potential visitors. The decision to personify Mexico by displaying certain images and not others highlights the ways in which the Aztec Fair offered a persuasive but highly narrow and distorted view of Mexican culture. By not representing the variety of Mexican cultural traditions, the cultural differences between Mexican men and women, or the reality of ethnic Mexicans in the colonized American West, the lives of the Mexicans on display omitted real context for southwestern communities. By presenting them as types, or only by the particular craft they practiced, the live Mexican bodies on display were unnamed, dehumanized, and reduced to understood tropes of servility and femininity. The dead Mexican bodies on display, in contrast, had names, were of high social status, and had met horrible fates at the hands of a lurking indigenous and violent Mexico. The visual representations generated at the Aztec Fair set forth Mexican culture as monolithic, static, and ahistorical, allowing little room for the richness of Mexican culture to be explored.[103] The effect of this narrow view, of course, was that it played well into exhibiting a tangible theme constructed as both instructive and entertaining

[102] Dennett argues that the dime museum began in 1841 with P.T. Barnum's purchase of the American Museum from John Scudder, and lasted a little over fifty years when it declined heavily by the first decade of the 1900s. See *Weird and Wonderful*, 8, 65, 126, 129.

[103] The Southwestern U.S. in 1886, for example, consisted of former Mexican territories including a large number of residents of Mexican descent. Moreover, aspects of Mexican culture permeated newly established western towns and cities during the fifty-year period following the Mexican War.

without challenging any preconceptions about Mexico.

The Construction of Mexico by Mexicans and the Americans who View Them

Very few, if any, villages in late nineteenth-century Mexico could subsist solely on the production of skilled craftsmen and artists. Nevertheless, the fictionalized Mexican world of 1886 Boston delighted visitors. It appears no one publicly questioned the premise. The *Aztec Fair* captured the pizzazz of dime museums while also drawing on rare cultural artifacts to engage a variety of visitors. In a contained space, the exhibition's popularity rested on a set of ideas about how Mexican culture could be successfully presented. The organizers linked the needs of the Mexican Central Railway with those of spectators willing to pay to be entertained. And in doing so, the organizers inevitably shaped the ideas, conclusions, and images taken away by all who visited the event.

The visual images and linguistic narratives presented at the Fair constituted a specific representation of Mexico and its people that benefited the Railway and was duly supported by President Díaz. Public exhibits "inevitably draw on the cultural assumptions and resources of the people who make it."[104] The 'Mexican Village' in 1886 was no different. Its organizational team maneuvered a careful balance of veracity, credibility, and the excitement of curiosity. The workers – Mexicans physically representing Mexico -- were presented as having the ability to perform impressive and even beautiful skilled labor, but in a pre-industrial setting. The repercussion was a hardened image that Mexicans were primitive beings who were nevertheless capable of being led to a more productive path by a more enlightened and industrialized United States.

The 'Mexican Village' created a micro-version of the skills and craft work that, according

[104] Ivan Karp, "Introduction," in *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display*, ed. Ivan Karp and Steven Lavine (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991).

to the organizers, exemplified the most intriguing Mexican products. Artisans used straw to make artistic landscapes and wax to mold into representations of Mexican animals, fruits, and people. Jewelers worked on silver while feather sketchers and thread workers worked in their own spaces, creating their own impressions of Mexican culture. Visitors created some of their own.

While spectators had little choice about the exhibited items, they did decide on whether or not to pay an admission fee, and in doing so, chose to purchase entertainment. As they wandered from one display to another, they also decided on ways to see a certain display. Regardless of what they saw, they committed to a dialogical relationship between themselves and the images they beheld. Whatever previous knowledge about Mexico each spectator brought with them, they negotiated that information with what was before them.

As the villagers performed upstairs, systems of knowledge played a role in what image each and every spectator took away with them. While the chance of conversation between a spectator and a performer was slim (there is no evidence that any of the performers knew English), there still existed a cultural exchange. Even without the interplay of a spoken language, ideas formed and, depending on each person's experiences before having arrived at the Horticultural Hall, visitors walked away with a personalized view of what Mexico was like.

That gender and race shaped images of Mexico is reflected by how narratives discursively constructed Mexican and American national identities. Mexican primitivism, in relation to American technological progress, ultimately resulted in a less than manly depiction that could be justified at the fair because the Mexicans were not racialized as white. In Boston, the Mexican performers -- whether male or female -- took on qualities normally reserved for women including humility, quietness, deft sewing skills, and a complete lack of technological industrial knowledge. Gendered representations shaped notions of race, ideals of manliness, and the construction of

national identities in ways that shaped the Fair.

The theme of American leadership in the economic development of Mexico helped spectators place Americans in a superior position vis-à-vis the working Mexicans. The notion of "imperial primitivism" applies to visuals at the Aztec Fair and to the power relations between the United States and Mexico. According to Jackson Lears: "Imperial primitivism implied a dialectical rather than a dualistic relationship between white Christendom and the "lower beings." The vaguely subversive part of this interchange was the idea that knowledge was not all on one side -- that "inferior" races, even animals possessed some fundamental sort of knowledge, especially of physical nature and its needs."[105] Although Lears uses this notion strictly in his discussion of advertising images, it can be re-tooled to include images generated for public consumption, as they were created to sell a specific product and message. As the Mexican Central Railway sought to sell Mexico in several ways, the underlying assumption to visitors and organizers alike was that Mexico, and by extension Mexicans, had the potential to advance out of semi-barbarism and progress in the social evolution of cultures.

Organized into two distinct kinds of exhibition space, the Aztec Fair comprised several competing meanings. While the care with which the catalogue was constructed and the high quality of the objects and displays indicates that the Mexican businessmen may have sought to bring a serious exhibition to Boston, the wildly enthusiastic responses of American observers suggest that a very different message was received by the audience. The working village on the upper floor demonstrated the productivity of Mexican artisans, yet highlighted their primitive practices, tools, and skills. The secondary representations in the displayed artifacts on the first floor demonstrated

[105] Jackson Lears, *Fables of Abundance: A Cultural History of Advertising in America* (New York: Basic Books, 1994), 147.

the unique, yet semi-barbaric, nature of Aztec culture. In the context of the fair, the live Mexicans "working" above appeared to be the direct descendants of the Aztecs, and as a result, suffered from slow human progress. The dead, mummified Mexicans, while mainly presented for shock value, had intricately constructed backstories that purported to show the inability of Spanish-speaking elites to dispel the residual evil of the pre-contact Aztec religion. These material reminders of Aztec heritage were a reminder that Mexico, unlike the more modern United States, had not fully consolidated power against indigenous communities.

These visual depictions gave visitors the message that Mexicans were simple, docile people, who needed guidance to progress upward on the evolutionary ladder of culture - guidance that the Spanish and the Catholic Church had not been able to provide. Their country offered many natural and human resources that could offer businesses in the United States a good return on their investments, while travelers had the opportunity to see a culture that held great potential to be "civilized" by American industries.

Conclusion

Although the 1886 *Aztec Fair and Mexican Village* originated with the economic interests of the Mexican Central Railway, the images of *mexicanidad* organized by Mexican businessmen in Boston were the first in American paid entertainment. The indigenous Mexican would emerge as the primitive 'Aztec' – a peddled trope that would encompass imagery of working Mexicans such as the *laboring peón* or a subservient housemaid working at her *metate* to name two. These Mexicans on display - be they men, women, or children - appeared docile and primitive, and perhaps were open to the idea of leaving behind their way of life in to be exhibited in Boston. How they felt about their daily work or thoughts about their experiences, we will likely never know. According to the Railway's narratives, Mexicans willingly offered untainted lands and

breathtaking landscapes in exchange for civilizing human progress. If that came with profits for the Mexican Central and its investors, so much the better.

With the public support of President Porfirio Díaz, the *Aztec Fair* linked directly to a vision of modernity and globalization benefitting Mexico on a national level. As part of Mexico's statecraft, a growing Mexican economy required an increase in the country's gross national product, a growing tourism industry in Mexico, and a newly re-financed rail system to export Mexican products to the United States. While the Mexican state supported 'selling' the image of an industrious and humble indigenous workforce to U.S. audiences in order strengthen its international business relations, the unforeseen consequence was a visual perception of Mexico that indeed was not modern nor could it prosper on its own.

Not immediately evident in the success of the *Aztec Fair* was how it shaped the growing national narrative about Mexico. The consumption of these live performances as primitive, docile, and submissive Mexicans men and women created a visual justification for disenfranchisement. As the first major exhibit to show in the United States that used Mexico as a subject matter, the *Aztec Fair* and its village, as a large-scale thematic spectacle, crystallized visual notions of a primitive and backward nation that inevitably affected how Mexicans and ethnic Mexicans living in the United States were viewed and treated, whether they were citizens, neighbors, immigrants, or workers.

The images on display had been the decision of those who funded and organized the Fair. To the degree that it was a learning experience, many visitors did indeed learn about certain Mexican traditions and ways of living. Yet, the selection process involved certain choices that reflected the ways in which Anglo, male, upper and middle-class Americans exoticized Mexican culture for the specific benefit of a modernizing enterprise, the Mexican Central Railway. In

Chicago, a short seven years later, a grand-scale effort to exhibit another 'authentic' rendition of *mexicanidad* appeared, this time on a global stage. And there, too, a group of elite Anglo men, with the unwavering support of the Mexican state, would decide again how Mexico should be presented to the public in the United States and beyond.

CHAPTER III

"Home-Made Aztecs":

Statecraft and Ethnology at the World's Columbian Exposition[1]

On the afternoon of August 29, 1893, at the annual meeting of the Congress of Anthropology held on the grounds of the Columbian World's Exposition in Chicago, a Mexican American woman named Zelia Nuttall from California took the podium and presented the findings of her breakthrough research: Nuttall had decoded the Aztec Calendar.[2] News about Nuttall's work rippled across the country on Associated Press newswires, from the *New York Times*, through Midwestern papers, and to the *Los Angeles Times* with such declarations as "Found by a Woman" and "Most Important Discovery Of Its Kind."[3] At the Exposition, the 35-year old Zelia Maria

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[1] "Home-Made Aztecs," *Los Angeles Times (1886-1922); Los Angeles, Calif.*, October 9, 1893. A note on terminology: The term "Aztecs" is multi-dimensional depending on how it is being used and by whom. Here it is quoted directly from a primary source, and in subsequent uses in this chapter, the term Aztec will not be used in quotes unless from a published quote.

[2] The "Aztec Calendar", known in Spanish as the *Piedra del sol* ("Sun Stone"), was discovered in 1790 in Mexico City at the center of Aztec religious and political power, the Templo Mayor. Throughout much of the 1800s, the carving – twelve feet in diameter and three feet thick -- was displayed on the exterior wall of the national cathedral that had been built on the ruins of the temple. Currently housed in the National Museum of Anthropology, the stone is a national symbol of Mexico and appears on Mexican coins and paper currency.

[3] "The Aztec Calendar: ... Interpretation By T. C. Johnston Striking Correspondences Found ... Adventure and Civilization Produced The Aztec," *San Francisco Chronicle*, Sep 05, 1893; "Found By A Woman: The Discovery Of Vast Importance It Will Lead To Valuable Results In Mexico and Central America, *San Francisco Chronicle*, Aug 30, 1893, Page ; Associated Press Wire, *Minneapolis Tribune*, Aug 30, 1893, Page 5; "A Discovery: The Ancient Aztec Calendar Deciphered, *Los Angeles Times*, Aug 30, 1893; "Aztec Calendars: Correct Interpretation Made Public At The Anthropological Congress. Most Important Discovery Of Its Kind This Century. Furnishes A Key To Much Of The Ancient Life And Arts Of Six Or More Different Nations Which Inhabited Mexico And Central America Centuries Ago--World's Fair." *St. Louis Post - Dispatch,* Aug 29, 1893; "Student of Archaeology Is Here.: Mrs. Nuttall, Who Discovered Principle Of Aztec Calendar, Arrives In Chicago," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, Aug 27, 1893.

Magdalena Nuttall mingled with other leading American researchers such as anthropologists Frank Cushing and Otis Mason of the Smithsonian's Bureau of American Ethnology, and Frederic Ward Putnam, the Harvard anthropologist heading up the department responsible for all Ethnology exhibits at the Fair – known as Department M.[4] Despite her gender and ethnicity, Zelia Nuttall was working with men who were revolutionizing the study of ethnography.

By the time of the 1893 Exposition, Nuttall had become a leading voice among archeologists and anthropologists through her work in the field of Aztec studies (what today is called Mixtec studies). Early in her San Francisco childhood, a gift from her mother of Lord Kingsborough's work on Mexican antiquities piqued Nuttall's interest in Mexican archeology. As one of the only ethnic Mexican women in this field, she researched Aztec archeology to correct what she believed were misconceptions about the ancient Aztecs, who had been continually labeled as barbaric and uncivilized.[5]

As early as 1886 (ironically the same year as the successful *Aztec Fair* in Boston) Nuttall had been credited as "knowing the Nahuatl language," the language of the ancient Aztecs and successfully deciphering the "picture writing of Old Mexico."[6] Not only did Nuttall publish her corrections of early translations of antiquarian codices from Nahuatl to Spanish, she was not hesitant to identify bias on the part of prior scholars – writing that the work of "early Spanish

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[4] Nuttall was born into an upper-class San Francisco family in 1857. Her parents were Mexican-born Magdalena Parrot and British physician Robert Kennedy Nuttall. Nuttall passed away in Coyoacán, Mexico in 1933 after living in Mexico for over three decades, having moved permanently to Mexico City in 1902. See Alfred M. Tozzer, "Zelia Nuttall," *American Anthropologist* 35, no. 3 (1933): 475–82.

[5] Tozzer, 475.

[6] *New York Times*, November 22, 1886.

writers" … "renders evident the false and distorted impressions they received and handed down."[7]

Indeed, the *New York Times* heralded her as a rising star:

> "The results she has obtained cast an entirely new light on ancient Mexican history and social life, and her conclusions, if established, will deal a severe blow at most of the prevailing theories regarding the government, religion, and mythology of the Aztec and allied tribes," said Dr. Brinton, the Professor of Linguistics and Archeology at the University of Pennsylvania. Such a pronouncement from Dr. Brinton "carries the greatest weight" and Mrs. Pinart [her married name in 1886] will rank among the great discovers like Champollion."[8]

For Brinton, the eminent archeologist of the late nineteenth century, to place Nuttall on the same level as Jean-Francois Champollion, the "Father of Egyptology," who first deciphered Egyptian hieroglyphics, showed that the young Latina anthropologist had a bright career ahead of her.

Nuttall was a trailblazer in both fieldwork and academic settings. The same year the feature appeared in the *New York Times*, Frederick Putnam, in his role as curator of the Peabody Museum of Archeology and Ethnology at Harvard University, appointed Nuttall as honorary assistant in Mexican archeology at the Peabody Museum, a position she held until her death in 1933.[9] By 1893, she had been collaborating for six years with Putnam when he appointed her to the Exposition's Department of Ethnology as an Honorary Assistant in Mexican archeology.

Nuttall took the opportunity at the Exposition to present her research in the Science Room of the Women's building, as part of the Mexican exhibit. There, she walked the audience through her research and the astronomical questions surrounding her ability to decode the Aztec Calendar.[10]

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[7] Zelia Nuttall, "Preliminary Note of an Analysis of the Mexican Codices and Graven Inscriptions," *Science* 8, no. 195 (October 29, 1886): 393–95.

[8] Nuttall.

[9] Curtis M. Hinsley and David R. Wilcox, eds., *Coming of Age in Chicago: The 1893 World's Fair and the Coalescence of American Anthropology* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2016); Ruiz, "Insiders and Outsiders in Mexican Archaeology."

[10] Carmen Ruiz, "Insiders and Outsiders in Mexican Archaeology (1890-1930)," (PhD Diss., University of Texas at Austin, 2003), 257.

In the separate Anthropological building, where she exhibited large charts analyzing the math surrounding the Aztec calendar system, Nuttall also displayed her personal collection of Mexican artifacts, including photographic reproductions of Mexican shields and feather-work "from the time of Cortes."[11] Her private collection mixed with material items from the Mexican state showcasing the "advanced civilization of the Aztecs" as well as private -- and likely plundered -- items loaned by explorer and ethnographer Carl Lumholtz such as "human skulls, pottery, and other objects from ancient burial places in northern Mexico."[12] This snippet of a formal exhibition on Mexican anthropology showed the seeming overlap of personal collections and state-sponsored items, as well as the real-time effect of academic discourse within the geography of the Exposition fairgrounds.

Amidst the macabre human skulls, Nuttall's work heightened interest of Mexico's Aztec past and brought it to the forefront of Exposition chatter. Her August lectures about the Aztec Calendar piqued national interest so much that it seems to have inspired the opening of a hastily-organized paid amusement on the Midway Plaisance titled the "Aztec Village." Even as Nuttall's expertise about Mexican archeology suited the intellectual and academic conference spaces of the formal Exposition, the late-summer arrival of "home-made Aztecs" settled seamlessly on the entertainment-focused Midway for businessmen seeking to turn a profit and curious audiences. Unlike in the lecture halls, where Nuttall fiercely defended historical and archeological accuracy in portraying ancient Mexico, on the Midway it mattered little that the Aztec empire and culture

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[11] Rossiter Johnson, *A History of the World's Columbian Exposition Held in Chicago in 1893*, vol. 1 Narrative (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1897), 324.

[12] Rossiter Johnson, *A History of the World's Columbian Exposition Held in Chicago in 1893, Volume 3: Exhibits* (D. Appleton and Co., 1898), 421.

had long passed into history and the villagers on display were actually Pueblo Indians, was of little consequence.

In addition to this late-arriving amusement on the Midway featuring live humans as "Aztec," formal exhibits pertaining to Mexico and Mexicans curated by the Mexican state, Harvard's Peabody Museum, and the U.S. Government through the Smithsonian Institution appeared throughout the fair, on huge display walls, in glass cases, and on tiny exhibits spread throughout the various exhibition buildings. But despite their creators' varying intentions, these disparate visuals emerged not with a positive story about past and present Mexican peoples in Mexico and the United States, but with a unifying view of white racial superiority.

During the six months the Exposition operated, over 26 million visitors consumed the ultimate example of U.S. cultural diplomacy in the history of the country: thousands of displays in the gigantic halls and buildings on the grounds internalizing a racialized view of what Exposition organizers deemed civilized and what they labeled primitive and barbaric, within a frame setting the United States above other countries. As a participant in the global exhibition, the Mexican government set forth its version of modern Mexico, in pursuit of its economic and diplomatic goals. But Mexico could not dictate what fairgoers would take away from their experience, and did not have the field to itself. Academic and official U.S. government museum versions of *mexicanidad* blended in with those sponsored by the Mexican state, and both presentations bumped up against other performances, such as the commercial imagery produced by Arizona businessmen who rushed to populate an adobe village on the Midway in the last two months of the Exposition. Each entity delivered an alternate view of Mexico and Mexicans using select aspects of *mexicanidad* that best suited their goals. Some were mercenary, others were geopolitical, but all appeared on the Exposition fairgrounds.

In sum, a pattern of racialized and gendered discourse emerged in the production of these various visuals, giving a foundation to a U.S. meta-narrative that coded people of Mexican descent as racially inferior. Exposition discourse depicted ethnic Mexicans as interchangeable with other non-white races and ethnicities. Because the images produced and consumed at the world's fair took place in a space of entertainment, racialized representations of *mexicanidad* took on meanings that innocuously became embedded in the American imaginary.

Waiting to envelop these disparate images and representations of *mexicanidad* was the long-standing practice of white supremacy in the United States. Within this hegemonic cultural space is where ethnic Mexicans were "dispensable" and "disposable," because they ostensibly did not add value to the culture and economy of the U.S. - and they were not white.[13] Because these images and narratives emerged as paid amusement at the World's Columbian Exposition, the magnitude and importance of the 1893 fair not only amplified the discordant discourses about Mexico and ethnic Mexicans but also justified the unequal relations of power between white men and people of color. The effect of such a hardening lens was to deny ethnic Mexicans entry into the polity of the late nineteenth century. The visual tropes that emerged in earnest at the Colombian Exhibition would continue to shape the cultural narratives of ethnic Mexicans and their communities in the United States.

Racialized By Design: The Geography of the Fairgrounds

As with most exhibitions of the late nineteenth century, the grounds of the Columbian Exposition were designed to be temporary. While the consumable entertainments coexisted for

[13] This notion of disposable and dispensable Mexican lives is borne from the analysis of public health crises in the U.S. borderlands in the work of John Mckiernan-Gonzalez, *Fevered Measures: Public Health and Race at the Texas-Mexico Border, 1848-1942* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012); and Natalia Molina, *Fit to Be Citizens?: Public Health and Race in Los Angeles, 1879-1939* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006).

only six months in the geography of the Exposition, the 1893 fair's dramatic effect on U.S. culture, and its showcasing of American whiteness, was reinforced to by the very design and layout of the actual fairgrounds. Integral to the design of the fairgrounds was a demonstration of civilization, with gradations of color and race to demonstrate that whiteness signaled civilization throughout the hastily-built environment.

Figure 4: Souvenir Map of the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition.
Geography and Map Division, Library of Congress.

From the main part of the fair dubbed the "White City" to the ethnic villages and amusements of the Midway Plaisance, the Exposition's design and space left no question to its 26 million plus visitors that race was integral to the spatial design of the Exposition's 620 acres. The official, main part of the fairgrounds -- known as the White City due to the gleaming color of the building materials of every structure, column, and sidewalk at the center of the Exposition -- represented insurmountable whiteness, classicism, and formality all around during the day. At night, thousands of electric lights ethereally lit up the main buildings and streets, declaring to all that American technological might had conquered the darkness.

Additionally, the White City dedicated its immense halls to educating fairgoers about science, art, music, technology, manufacturing, anthropology, horticulture, and transportation.[14] One fair organizer described the Exposition as a "house full of ideas" and that the entirety of the fair was to be "an illustrated encyclopedia of civilization."[15] The White City is where the enlightened thinking appeared on the walls and galleries of the huge halls of the fair. It also is where the official state building of the U.S. Government sat, surrounded by lush open green areas and designed to exude civility and authority.

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[14] The leading, and largest, structure was the Manufactures and Liberal Arts building. The main exhibition halls were: Agricultural, Anthropology, Electricity, Fisheries, Forestry, U.S. Government, Horticultural, Machinery Hall, Mines and Mining, Transportation, and the Woman's Building. For scale and size of the exhibition halls in the White City, see the interactive map: http://ecuip.lib.uchicago.edu/diglib/social/worldsfair_1893/interactives/worldsfair_map.html

[15] Robert W. Rydell, *All the World's a Fair: Visions of Empire at American International Expositions, 1876-1916* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 45.

Figures 5 and 6: U.S. Government Building and Manufactures Hall.
World's Columbian Exposition, 1893.[16]

Also crucial to the racialized visual narratives at the Exposition was the separation of the American portions of the White City from the rest of the exhibiting nations. The main U.S. buildings faced each other towards each other around the Grand Basin and its forested island designed by the preeminent landscape designer Frederick Law Olmsted. Organizers invited foreign countries to construct their buildings and pavilions in the northern part of the fairgrounds, away from the main crush of visitors, with much smaller buildings than those representing the United States.[17] Significantly, foreign pavilions were away from the grand white structures, the huge lagoon, and the central Court of Honor, leaving their locales symbolically and literally on the outskirts of the White City.

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[16] Halsey C. Ives, *"U.S. Government Building" in The Government Collection of Original Views of the World's Columbian Exposition Secured by the Official Government Photographer For Preservation in the Archives at Washington* (Chicago: Preston Publishing Company, 1895); C.D. Wade, *"The Manufactures Building" in The World's Columbian Exposition: A Portfolio of Views, Issued by the Department of Photography* (Chicago: National Chemigraph Company, 1893).

[17] See the Exposition map in Figure 2A for the spatial geographies of the White City, the exhibit halls surrounding the center of the fair with the wooded island in the middle of the lagoon, and the placement of the Midway Plaisance perpendicular to the White City to northwest.

Additionally, it was in the halls of the White City where the production of hegemonic discourses about race and civilizations formally emerged, only to be substantiated by the informal, paid visual entertainment of the Midway Plaisance. Most decidedly, U.S. academic anthropologists were responsible not only for the scientific anthropological exhibits in the White City, but also for the live human amusements of inhabited villages on the Midway Plaisance. The scientists and academics overseeing the live ethnology of the Midway provided authoritative reasoning for displaying ethnic people as amusements.

Arguably the most popular area of the fairgrounds was the Midway Plaisance, separated from the intellectual and civilized White City by distance and space. Exposition financiers located the independently-owned paid amusements on the Midway. The live human villages fell under the category of 'amusement,' as did cafes, restaurants, and exciting experiences like the Captive Balloon and the Ferris Wheel. The significance in American culture of this separate area for amusements is perpetuated yearly to this day across the country in the permanent and official structures of U.S. state fairgrounds, with annual exhibitions modeling themselves after the Exposition's blend of formal educational display and informal entertainment venues.[18] Historian Gail Bederman writes that the "the White City depicted the millennial advancement of white civilization, while the Midway Plaisance, in contrast, presented the undeveloped barbarism of uncivilized, dark races."[19]

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[18] This was the first such separate area for amusement at a world's fair, and the Midway Plaisance soon became an eponym: "Midway" is now the common noun used to refer to any area of rides, amusements, or games of chance at a fair, circus, or amusement park.

[19] Gail Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880-1917* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 31.

Indeed, the layout of the Midway took the strolling fairgoer on a progression away from civilization and into savagery. The Irish and German village, for example, conducted business near the entrance closest to the White City, just past the Woman's Building at the entrance of the Midway. Intentionally, the world's 'barbaric' and 'primitive' people appeared in the living villages on the far end of the mile-long Midway Plaisance where visual gradations of "civilization" could be identified visually with the darker skin color of exhibited humans. At the furthest point of the Plaisance were the 'Dahomeyans' as they were the darkest-skinned group of people displayed on the Midway and, according to organizers, the least civilized.[20]

The assumption of race as an integral underpinning of American paid entertainment solidified at the 1893 Exposition, magnified beyond its walls and seeping forever into American culture. This process is central to understanding how racialized depictions in amusements normalized the denial of ethnic Mexicans to the American polity. The production and consumption of *mexicanidad* became part of cultural narratives embedded at the Exposition deemed Mexicans and their *mexicanidad* as foreign and feminized because they were non-white.

For one, based on new Western academic thinking which aggregated most indigenous peoples into one general category, anthropological narratives began to depict indigenous Mexicans as similar, if not actually having the same origins, with American Indians. Indigenous Mexicans then became disposable, possibly erased, and even invisible in popular culture. This process, in turn, was one of myriad ways maintaining Mexicans, and Mexican culture, separated from U.S. white culture because they were indigenous and distinctly foreign. Second, as had happened in

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[20] Bridget R. Cooks, "Fixing Race: Visual Representations of African Americans at the World's Columbian Exposition, Chicago, 1893," *Patterns of Prejudice* 41, no. 5 (December 1, 2007): 453–55; Robert W. Rydell, "'Darkest Africa': African Shows at America's World's Fairs, 1893-1940," in *Africans on Stage: Studies in Ethnological Show Business*, 1999, 135–55. Dahomey roughly corresponds to present-day Benin.

Boston's *Mexican Village*, "Aztec" actors performed gendered labor coded as feminine while also being defined as primitive. By performing on the Midway, men and women actors were in the category labeled uncivilized, if not altogether barbaric and savage.

This relegation of ethnic Mexicans to a lower level of civilization was in stark contrast to the statecraft of the Mexican government, which in its programming for international expositions insisted on a civilized and bourgeois representation of *mexicanidad*. Music, women's poetry, and elegant needlework on display in the various pavilions of the White City exemplified the significant cultured aspects of the Mexican government's chosen examples in arts and natural resources. In this self-selected version, however, the state ably erased Mexican indigenous people from its worldview and presentations. Other than briefly exalting the history and legacy of the ancient Aztecs, Mexican cultural diplomacy, intent on portraying modernity, buried Mexico's indigeneity to the point of exclusion. Only such cultured or commercial subjects as music (as personified by the Eighth Cavalry military band discussed in Chapter 4), the First Lady's book of poetry and the embroidery prowess of Mexican women, and the country's natural resources were acceptable for exhibition purposes. The sixty percent of Mexicans who were indigenous were not.

So too, in the entertainment of the Exposition, ethnic Mexican characters were presented as foreigners, even if they were American by birth, viewed as primitive based on Mexico's indigenous legacy, and were consistently feminized and deemed unmanly due to their often mixed race background. The Exposition became an influential nucleus that peddled visual narratives of American racial superiority which defined ethnic Mexicans in the United States as unworthy of belonging to American society. Both the Mexican state and official U.S. ethnographers excluded the indigenous. But while Mexico attempted to claim geopolitical place by downplaying indigeneity and foregrounding the modern educational and technological advancement of the

urban Mexican bourgeoisie, for American officials, no amount of culture or mineral wealth could make Mexicans white.

Amusement and Commerce On The Midway Plaisance

On the Midway in Chicago, the concept of believability marked successful paid amusements, which required a modicum of realism. As art critic John Berger points out, spectators could presuppose that the live humans in their supposedly natural habitats were not only real but also credible, even if it was paid entertainment.[21] This was by design. The ethnic villages of the Midway Plaisance commodified the larger narratives of the Chicago Exposition: foreign cultures were primitive and backwards, and in relation to U.S. white racialized culture, were inferior and uncivilized. That was profitable for business.

The Midway Plaisance at the Columbian World Exposition was a space a mile long and 600 feet wide, standing perpendicular to the formal grounds of the White City.[22] On the Midway, dozens of independently-owned entertainment venues assembled in one enclosed locale. Chicago was the first time a world's fair had organized a separate section solely for amusement.[23] This exclusive area for entertainment proved to be profitable and the key to the entire Exposition's financial success. Gross revenue from the Midway concessions totaled $7,444,522 and the commission receipts passed through to the Exposition corporation averaged 22.5 percent, equal to $1,672,761.[24] Every concession contract included terms favorable to the Exposition's bottom line,

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[21] John Berger & Michael Dibb, *Ways of Seeing* (London: BBC Enterprises 1972)

[22] "Fun Facts About the World's Columbian Exposition," The Field Museum, July 15, 2013, https://www.fieldmuseum.org/fun-facts-about-worlds-columbian-exposition.

[23] Robert W. Rydell, All the World's a Fair: Visions of Empire at American International Expositions, 1876-1916 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 60.

[24] See "Total Concession Revenue for the Fair" in Norm Bolotin and Christine Laing, *Chicago's Grand Midway: A Walk Around the World at the Columbian Exposition* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2017), Appendix.

even if the commission rates varied significantly. The Blarney Castle amusement, for example, earned $138,869 in revenue, paying $67,658 to the World's Columbian Exposition Corporation (48.7 percent of total revenue), while the Turkish Village owners paid the Exposition only $21,274 of its total revenue of $474,602.[25] That the Turkish Village negotiated a commission rate of only 4.5 percent was likely due to the owners announcing their plans as early as September, 1891 when "many applications ha[d] been made for locations for buildings by private parties, companies and syndicates" on the Midway Plaisance.[26]

In addition to the Exposition's main entrance cost of fifty cents, amusements on the Midway required a separate admission fee. Originally conceptualized as a place for food concessions, rest areas, and sanitation stations, the Midway Plaisance became the place to experience the unknown, see the lurid, and simply have fun. Even the original planners did not imagine the cultural effect the Plaisance would have, and focused on educational aspects of the space, describing in the early planning stages that "as a general policy it has been deemed wise to place those exhibits showing the manners and customs of peoples in [the] Midway Plaisance" so as to display "similar representations of life and manners in foreign countries."[27]

Adding to the festive and magical aura of the Midway were attractions based on new technology like the Ferris Wheel, the camera obscura, and the Electric Scenic Theatre featuring

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[25] See Table 4 in Bolotin and Laing, Appendix.

[26] "Extracts From the Report of the Committee on Grounds and Buildings, Submitted by Chairman E. T. Jeffery, Chicago, Sept. 2, 1891," *World's Columbian Exposition Illustrated: Devoted to the Interests of the Columbian Exposition, Art, and Literature* Vol I, no. 8 (October 1891): 19. For a fuller process of how the Turkish Village arrived at the 1893 Exposition, see Ozge Heck, "Labelling the Ottoman Empire as 'Turkey' in the Chicago World's Fair of 1893," *International Journal For History, Culture and Modernity* 3, no. 1 (2015): 122.

[27] "Extracts From the Report of the Committee on Grounds and Buildings, Submitted by Chairman E. T. Jeffery, Chicago, Sept. 2, 1891," 19.

light displays from "electric illuminations."[28] Whereas the White City filled its palatial exhibition buildings with formal exhibits from around the world reflecting each country's own vision of modernity and progress, the Midway Plaisance sold the opposite: the less-than-acceptable and purely fun amusements designed to attract fairgoers and their pocketbooks. The demand created a new department called the "Section of Isolated Exhibits" in order to manage the fifty-two concessions that eventually made up the privately-owned, profit-driven businesses of the Midway Plaisance.[29]

By far, the popularity of the new and the novel on the Midway made an indelible mark in the American psyche – creating a decades-long demand for "human zoos" at future world's fairs and expositions.[30] Inhabited by live humans, these ethnic villages displayed a supposed facsimile of exotic daily lives in foreign countries. As discussed in Chapter Two, this type of amusement first appeared in the United States in 1886 Boston, where the *Aztec Fair and Mexican Village* was the first in the United States of a wholly built replica of an ethnic village inside another structure. Three years later, and to great fanfare, the 1889 Paris Exposition had introduced human villages to international audiences. Whether locally-focused as in Boston's *Mexican Village* or on a global scale as in the Paris fair, the practice of exhibiting live humans in reproduced villages as paid entertainment was economically successful with sophisticated urban audiences in industrialized countries. The trajectory of exhibiting live humans as paid entertainment was possible because such displays operated ostensibly as educational endeavors in the nascent field of ethnology. And

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[28] M. P. Handy, *Official Catalogue: United States Government Building Part XVI* (Chicago: W. B. Conkey Company, 1893), 779–80.

[29] Bolotin and Laing, *Chicago's Grand Midway: A Walk Around the World at the Columbian Exposition*, 10.

[30] Gilles Boetsch and Pascal Blanchard, "From Cabinets of Curiosity to the 'Hottentot Venus': A Long History of Human Zoos," in *The Invention of Race: Scientific and Popular Representations* (New York: Routledge, 2014).

so, by 1893, these human villages arrived *en masse* at the Chicago fairgrounds, where both Harvard's Frederic Putnam and the Smithsonian's Otis Mason shaped the national narrative about race based on academic debates in the growing field of anthropology.[31]

Department M at the Exposition

Frederick Putnam had two roles at the Chicago Exposition. As the Director of Department M, he was responsible for the teams organizing the Ethnology and Archeology departments in the formal White City. And, two, approval for the construction of the ethnological villages on the Midway Plaisance were technically under Putnam's purview given the initial thinking that the Midway would be an educational promenade in which to learn about the cultures of foreign countries. Of the 52 independent ventures on the Midway, nine were human villages, representing a range of cultures and countries and listed in the official Exposition guide as: Java, German, Turkish, Dahomey, Lapland, Algerian/Tunisian, Austrian, American Indian, and Pueblo Indian. Together, the villages covered most of the physical space on the Midway.[32]

Under the guise of 'seeing' and 'learning,' the Exposition officials sanctioned the human villages of the Plaisance under the still-nascent field of ethnology, while understanding their implications as non-academic profit centers. This expanded definition of learning while seeing made acceptable the sensational nature of gazing at a variety of foreign bodies and indigenous tribes for the first time in one place in America. The science of ethnology opened up the space for a new form of live visual environment that was presumably acceptable and attractive, for this

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[31] See "F.W. Putnam Professional Papers: World Columbian Exposition," 1893, Harvard University, Hollis Library, Peabody Museum Archives. "Otis Mason Letters," 1893, Division of Ethnology, Manuscript and Pamphlet File, Smithsonian Institution Archives.

[32] Handy, Official Catalogue: United States Government Building Part XVI, 779–80.

popular anthropology extended knowledge beyond the static exhibits and formal lectures of the White City. The Midway blurred class and educational lines by encouraging fairgoers to see, view, and enjoy (if not ogle) the human villages under the rubric of 'learning.' Exposition officials were on to something.

To fit into the paid entertainment function of the Midway, the human zoos mirrored and adapted the Exposition's larger narratives of civilization and primitivism into living examples that were racialized and gendered. As Robert Rydell argues, the 1893 Exposition was the apex of racist and white supremacist thinking of the late nineteenth century, where the United States symbolized a modern and civilized culture vis-à-vis the rest of the world. The World Exposition buoyed – if not outright advocated – U.S. imperialism and outlandish race theories justifying narratives of inequality, racism, and expansion.[33] Among these narratives, the visual imagery of the Midway Plaisance included live and supposedly primitive humans of foreign countries which validated the emerging field of ethnology exhibited in the White City.

This overlapping duality of the Midway Plaisance and the White City shaped what fairgoers saw about ethnic Mexicans. One tension in the visual narratives of the Exposition was between the images officially disseminated by the Mexican state in formal settings and those evoked by others of their own accord. The individuals described in this and subsequent chapters exercised their agency to perform at the Columbian Exposition in diverse ways, and the many of the created images emerged from informal, happenstance appearances. In contrast, the exhibits sponsored by the Mexican government took years of meticulous planning and negotiations between Mexico and the Exposition's Executive Committee. In the two years leading up to the

[33] Rydell, All the World's a Fair, 3-5.

fair's opening, Mexico's exhibition plans reflected its government's diplomatic goals: to attract foreign capital, its displays marketed Mexico's natural resources while staking a claim to membership in the ranks of the cultured and modern nations of the world. Mexico's statecraft, like the image it sought to portray, was formal, official, and bourgeois.

Mexico in the Chicago Cultural Borderlands

In its Chicago exhibits, Mexico broadcast itself to the world as a modern and progressive nation open for international investment. Internally, Mexican authorities understood they needed to primarily shake off three images: that of Mexicans as indolent, violent, and primitive. Mexico's original plans for a grand exhibition in Chicago came from President Porfirio Díaz himself. Descriptions of an 'enthusiastic' Díaz who was an "ardent supporter of every measure which has been put forward in aid of the World's Columbian Exposition" and making the "most generous promises of what Mexico will do at the exposition" seemed to have stemmed from the Mexican President "knowing that there is scarcely another line in which he can better advance the interests of his country."[34]

Demonstrating his personal commitment to the cultural diplomacy opportunity the Exposition represented, not only were Mexican ingenuity and craftsmanship to be displayed mainly in the halls of Manufactures and Arts, Mining, Transportation, Agriculture, and Ethnology, but the state's arts and culture display in the Women's Building would be led by President Díaz's wife herself, Carmen Romero Rubio.[35] These exhibits consisted of singular items and historic relics to provide a cultured narrative of Mexico that would curry favor with investors and the United

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[34] "What Mexico Will Show: Castles of the Dark Ages to Be Reproduced at the Exposition," *World's Columbian Exposition Illustrated: Devoted to the Interests of the Columbian Exposition, Art, and Literature* Vol I, no. 11 (January 1892): 20.

[35] Bertha Palmer, *Official Catalogue: Woman's Building*, ed. M. P. Handy, vol. Part XIV (W. B. Conkey Company, 1893).

States government. In addition, these displays mixed in with transnational corporate interests, such as the Mexican Central Railway and other U.S. companies looking to conduct business in Mexico.

The Díaz administration considered international exhibitions a strategy to "correct the errors of world opinion" on the world stage and to encourage economic development.[36] Similar to the needs of the Boston-based Mexican Central Railway discussed in Chapter Two, U.S. financiers seeking to invest in Mexico needed assurances that the country's economic outlook looked favorable. The Mexican state curried favor with potential investors by designing uniquely Mexican displays at international fairs and expositions to not only show its natural wealth but also its unique culture as an added value to their marketing. Through its depictions of *mexicanidad*, the state sought to project a sense of modernity and progress and convey its willingness to participate in the business of supporting and working with multi-national corporations.

On February 6, 1891, formal correspondence arrived from the U.S. Secretary of State James J. Blaine requesting Mexico's participation in the World's Columbian Exposition. United States and Mexican statecraft unfolded as each pursued its business interests through cultural diplomacy. The invitation stated that Mexico "should name Representatives … and send objects that most properly and completely show their resources, industries and advancements in its civilization." On March 21, Mexico cordially accepted the invitation to participate in the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago.[37]

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[36] Gene Yeager, "Porfirian Commercial Propaganda: Mexico in the World Industrial Expositions," *The Americas* 34, no. 2 (1977): 231–32.

[37] "Boletín de La Exposición Mexicana En La Internacional de Chicago" (Oficina de la Secretaria de Fomento, 1892), 17, Special Collections, Smithsonian Institution Libraries Exposition Collection.

A core group of Mexican elite, named the "wizards of progress" by historian Mauricio Tenorio-Trillo, became professionalized in organizing and implementing Mexico's exhibits at world's fairs.[38] This team understood the goal of Mexican statecraft was to champion economic progress and focused on ensuring that Mexico's mining, state infrastructure, manufacturing, and cultural arts displayed well so as to be accepted by European and U.S. business leaders, thus proving the country's civility and modernity. Within this core group, a cadre of elite Mexican officials became responsible solely for organizing world fairs and expositions. Accordingly, in 1891, without much hullabaloo, the small team began its plans for a large presence in Chicago.[39]

The Mexican government initially earmarked between *eight and nine percent* of its annual national budget to a Chicago presence. Pre-exposition reports state that $700,000 to $750,000 had been budgeted -- almost 300% more than the $200,000 spent in 1884 for the Mexican Alhambra at the New Orleans International Cotton Exposition.[40] In addition to this eye-opening figure, "commissioners have been appointed, a magnificent building will be erected in Chicago, and Mexico promises one of the most interesting displays which will be presented by any of the Latin-American countries."[41] Initial public statements read "…that with part of Mexico's $750,000 she will erect a fac-simile of an Aztec palace."[42] A repeat in Chicago of the sensational Aztec Palace

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[38] Mauricio Tenorio-Trillo, *Mexico at the World's Fairs: Crafting a Modern Nation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), xiii.

[39] "Boletín de La Exposición Mexicana En La Internacional de Chicago."

[40] See Tenorio-Trillo, Appendix 2, for the yearly government expenditures of both exhibitions in addition to the Ministries of Justice, Education, and Economic Development for 1884, 1889, and 1893. For reference to $700,000 figure, see Yeager, "Porfirian Commercial Propaganda: Mexico in the World Industrial Expositions," 235.

[41] "Porfirio Diaz, President of Mexico," *World's Columbian Exposition Illustrated: Devoted to the Interests of the Columbian Exposition, Art, and Literature* Vol I, no. 11 (January 1892): 22.

[42] Julian Ralph, *Harper's Chicago and the World's Fair: The Chapters on the Exposition Being Collated From Official Sources and Approved by the Department of Publicity and Promotion of the World's Columbian Exposition* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1893), 118. References to Mexico's investment of $750,000 had been publicized in trade publications as early as 1892. See "Porfirio

at the 1889 Paris Exposition seemed likely, because the Paris exhibition had showcased an ancient civilization equal to Egypt and worthy of Mexico's modernity. Due to its success, the Mexican world's fair team began to design an entire pavilion for Chicago, much of it devoted to showcasing Mexico's Aztec heritage.

The Exposition, in and of itself, was a full expression of United States statecraft. Essential to that statecraft was procuring access to Latin American markets and resources on behalf of U.S. corporations and businesses. In the early planning stages for the Columbian Exposition, pressure to increase investment opportunities south of the border mounted. As early as December 1890, the Committee on Foreign Affairs of the U.S. National Commission for the Exposition met to approve a recruitment plan, requesting from the President of the United States that Army and Naval officers became detailed to foreign governments so that each nation had a direct U.S. advocate and conduit to the Chicago World's Exposition. On December 1, 1890 the Commission organized the Latin-America Bureau and headquartered it at No. 2 Lafayette Square in Washington DC, across the street from the White House. A short month later, those government detailees became "attachés of the United States legations in the countries they were appointed to visit," and the President of the United States designated these attachés as special commissioners, giving them broad powers when interacting with foreign countries.[43] These were the agents of U.S. statecraft.

Similarly, Mexico planned to execute its statecraft in Chicago by seeking to market the benefits of investing in Mexico's infrastructure and natural resources. And as Mexico advanced

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Diaz, President of Mexico," 22. "Foreign Participation," *World's Columbian Exposition Illustrated: Devoted to the Interests of the Columbian Exposition, Art, and Literature* Vol I, no. 12 (February 1892): 4.

[43] Rossiter Johnson, *A History of the World's Columbian Exposition Held in Chicago in 1893, Volume 2*, vol. Departments (D. Appleton and Co., 1897), 363–65.

its strategy of commercial and cultural diplomacy, its exhibit ideas for the Exposition changed dramatically in the planning stages. The state's design moved away from its previously-popular depictions of a grand Aztec past (as it had in Paris 1889), to pursue a new narrative: one conveying a modern, industrious, and perhaps acquiescent, Mexico that no longer troubled with indigenous Aztecs. In such light, a news update stated that by "erect[ing] a model of a typical hacienda or farmhouse instead of an Aztec temple, President Díaz wishes to represent Mexico as it is rather than what it has been."[44] The perceived economic stability of the large Mexican haciendas emboldened the state to highlight a labor system that perhaps could appear attractive to investors at a temporary international exhibit, but in reality was a debt peonage system in the making and the beginning of a destabilized national economic system that would lead to revolution.[45] But in 1891, the hacienda appeared like the natural progression in a modernized image of a rural Mexico that could help meet the food and fiber needs of an emerging transnational business community.

As part of that present-focused view, and perhaps attempting to assuage investors about rural violence, labor shortages, and lack of urban modernity, new descriptions of the Mexican plans began to appear in Exposition literature. One in particular linked its Aztec heritage with a discourse of peace and civilization, describing the legacy of the Aztecs as "comparatively a peaceful race, establishing roads, tilling the soil, and founding cities, one of them being the City of Mexico, founded in 1325."[46] By moving away from depictions of an Aztec past linked to violence and blood sacrifice to discursive constructions of a civilized and stable way of life of

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[44] "Mexico Has Decided...," *World's Columbian Exposition Illustrated: Devoted to the Interests of the Columbian Exposition, Art, and Literature* Vol II, no. 2 (May 1892): 62.

[45] Paul J. Vanderwood, *Disorder and Progress: Bandits, Police, and Mexican Development* (Wilmington, Del: SR Books, 1992), 79–81.

[46] Color map, Newberry Collection, folioT500_C1M31893_193.

modern agrarian *haciendas*, the Mexican state modified its pavilion plans to highlight Mexico's abundant natural and human resources in hopes of attracting even more foreign capital.

Money issues changed Mexico's pavilion plans yet again. Due to the silver crisis that came into full force by February 1893, the formal state-sponsored pavilion with a fully-working *hacienda* in in the White City was not to be, as the crash gutted the Mexican government's finances and forced the cancellation of the glamourous Mexican exhibit planned for Chicago.[47]

However, trouble with the often-stated $750,000 investment from Mexico appears to have begun at least two years earlier. Mere months after the initial invitation and acceptance to the Exposition in early 1891, William Curtis, the man in charge of the Latin American Bureau of the World's Columbian Exposition in Lafayette Square, wrote to James Ellsworth, a board member of the Exposition, urging him to advocate for a personal visit with Mexican officials. Curtis wrote:

> "I have written Mr. Fearn and Mr. Baker, urging that one or two members of the Board of Directors go to Mexico at once, as the situation is critical down there. Mexico will exhibit, but there is a good deal of opposition to the appropriation of $750,000 which has been asked for. I hope you will do what you can to promote the thing."[48]

After all, Curtis' bureau was an important tool of American statecraft, responsible for implementing U.S. economic diplomacy by harnessing the power of the World's Fair to open up Latin American markets to American business interests. It's not known from Exposition records if a follow-up visit did or did not happen, but the situation was indeed critical, and the Mexican government did not spend three quarters of a million dollars to exhibit in Chicago. As a result,

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[47] Tenorio-Trillo, *Mexico at the World's Fairs*, Appendix, 262-263.

[48] "Incoming Correspondence, William E. Curtis," September 25, 1891, Box 3, Folder 44, James W. Ellsworth Collection, Chicago Public Library.

unlike other Latin American countries such as Guatemala, Nicaragua, El Salvador, and Costa Rica, Mexico did not build a stand-alone pavilion or building to represent itself in Chicago.[49]

Furthermore, the actual amount Mexico invested in the Exposition was far less than the $750,000 hoped for by the Exposition commissioners. By official accounts, Mexico spent almost the same amount of money for its exhibits in Chicago as it had for the much smaller New Orleans Exposition in 1884. Recorded expenditures show that the Mexican government spent between $184,000 and $200,000 for the 1893 Columbian Exposition, which roughly equaled the $200,000 used for the Mexican Alhambra pavilion in New Orleans.[50]

Inevitably, these funding cuts prevented Mexico from building any physical structure. No Aztec palace and no hacienda represented Mexico in Chicago. Without a specific location, the lack of a centralized space hampered the decision of the Mexican government to put forth a cohesive visual narrative of modern bourgeois culture while also rejecting its own indigeneity, in order to push back on the narrative of Mexican primitivism. The state's choice to not undertake an exhibit like the Aztec extravaganza in 1889 Paris, and to turn away from the cultural premise of cottage-industry industriousness presented at the *Aztec Fair and Mexican Village* in 1886 Boston, begs the question: What did it decide regarding its Aztec past, which was integral to representing *mexicanidad* in past expositions to the rest of the world?

By opening day, the Díaz government did choose to display some "relics and antiquities of ancient Mexico" to depict "the remains of the old Aztec dynasty".[51] For the Chicago extravaganza,

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[49] Tenorio-Trillo, *Mexico at the World's Fairs*.

[50] Tenorio-Trillo, *Mexico at the World's Fairs*, Appendix 2: The Economic Cost of World's Fairs, 262-5.

[51] James A. Campbell, *Campbell's Illustrated History of the World's Columbian Exposition*, vol. II (Chicago: N. Juul & Co., 1894), 464.

the full glory of the Aztec empire was no longer front and center of Mexican statecraft, and the few scattered officially-sanctioned antiquities and relics that made the exhibition were part of a small portion of the items displayed in the Anthropology hall and nowhere else. This time around, the glories of Mexico were not to be found in the Aztec past, but in the cultural and economic possibilities of modern Mexico. In Chicago and thereafter, *mexicanidad* was to be rooted in the Mexican present, not the Aztec past.[52]

Despite not having its own pavilion, Mexican statecraft concentrated on its goal "to attract the capitalists of the world to its advantages and induce them to invest."[53] The tactics surrounding its Chicago strategy may have changed, but the strategy was still to make a play for foreign capital by trumpeting Mexico's industrial and economic potential. Mexico demonstrated its breadth in "all the departments except for electricity and livestock," and forged ahead with enough material to fill 5,000 cases for Mexican exhibits throughout the White City.[54] Its mining exhibit alone took up nearly 10,000 square feet to show the variety and wealth of natural minerals to attract "the capitalists of the world to its advantages and induce them to invest."[55] By targeting its extractive possibilities to industrialists, Mexico appeared to be implementing its commercial diplomacy in a consistent and methodical manner.

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[52] Not only did the state not undertake in Chicago anything similar in scale to the full Aztec Palace extravaganza of 1889, Mexico never again marketed its Aztec history as the sole premise of its national identity, taking up instead *indigenismo* (indigeneity) in the post-revolutionary 1920s.

[53] "Mexico and Her Exhibits," *World's Columbian Exposition Illustrated: Devoted to the Interests of the Columbian Exposition, Art, and Literature* Vol III, no. 9 (November 1893): 226.

[54] "Immense Exhibit From Mexico," *World's Columbian Exposition Illustrated: Devoted to the Interests of the Columbian Exposition, Art, and Literature* Vol III, no. 2 (April 1893): 48.

[55] "Mexico and Her Exhibits," 224.

With its exhibits in the White City, Mexico shifted how it executed its statecraft from previous fairs. In Chicago, the Mexican state soundly refused to highlight its Aztec history beyond a minimal collection of material artifacts in Anthropology Hall, a far cry from the centrality of the Aztec past in the Boston village just six years before. One reason for this may have been to mitigate attention to its indigenous past, no matter how imperial it may have been. This would allow the Mexican state to obfuscate the miserable poverty of rural Mexicans, indigenous or not, while foregrounding the technological and extractive possibilities of modern Mexico with just a nod toward the advanced civilization of the long-ago dead Aztecs.

A second reason for shifting attention away its historical past may have been Mexico's concern about the growing international awareness of its current indigenous people. In a similarly pejorative frame for race, the U.S. placed whiteness at the pinnacle of its racial hierarchy, while the Mexican state celebrated its modernism by placing indigeneity at the bottom of the race scale. To maintain the primacy of its economic interests at the Exposition, the Mexican state operated only in the formal spatial geography of the White City, never stepping foot in the uncouth precincts of the Midway Plaisance. As we shall see in the next chapter, Mexico would also use cultural diplomacy to further promote bourgeois Europeanism, in order to distance its elitism from the vast majority of its citizenry. Among this racialized mindset then, imagine the potential disruption to the Mexican state's narrative of modernity and progress when a paid entertainment titled the "Aztec Village" – and inhabited by live humans – appeared in late summer, as paid entertainment on the Midway Plaisance.

"Home-Made Aztecs"

In the final two months of the Columbian Exposition, a group of performers described as "Aztecs, almost the last now living of that ancient race of people" arrived in Chicago, and they

landed in a live show on the Midway Plaisance.[56] Sometime in early September 1893, a bare-bones structure built to look like an adobe house and painted with what would seem today like cartoonish petroglyphs materialized in the northern part of the main avenue of the Midway. Its location was practically underneath the Illinois Central Railroad, next to the Electric Scenic Theatre, and adjacent to the public toilets. In the official maps of the Plaisance – with the first printing of the guides to the Midway dating to the World's Fair opening in May – the eventual site of the purported *Aztec's Village* was simply an open lot.[57]

The new amusement was anything but subtle about who would be on stage. A sign over the entrance to the simple plaster building had one word painted in all-capitals: AZTECS. To the right, another set of signs described what could be found inside after paying the admission fee. "The Aztec's Village: Alive and on Exhibition Here" claimed to passersby that authentic and genuine examples of a day in the life of an Aztec was available for viewing. Along with entertainment, the entrance would cost only ten cents, relatively affordable compared to the fifty cents required to ride the Ferris wheel on the Midway.

The sign in full read:

Original Home Life and Industries
Weavers/Metal Workers
Sports Pastimes/Ceremonies
Singing & Dancing
Admission 10 cents[58]

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[56] "Features of the Midway Plaisance," *World's Columbian Exposition Illustrated: Devoted to the Interests of the Columbian Exposition, Art, and Literature* Vol III, no. 11 (January 1894): 292.

[57] M. P. Handy, ed., *Official Catalogue: Exhibits on the Midway Plaisance Part XVII* (Chicago: W. B. Conkey Company, 1893), inside cover.

[58] "The Aztecs." William Cameron, *The World's Fair, Being a Pictorial History of The Columbian Exposition* (Chicago, Ill: Chicago Publication & Lithograph Co., 1893). Smithsonian Collection of World's Fairs. Reel 106, no 13.

Figure 7: The "Aztec's Village" on the Midway Plaisance. World's Columbian Exposition, 1893.[59]

What to make of this? Foremost, the anachronism of advertising "real, live Aztecs" in 1893 should have been jarring enough because the Aztec civilization, government, and religion had been decimated by 1525 upon contact with the Spanish. Additionally, the Mexican state was exhibiting Aztec relics in the formal Anthropology building to show an advanced but disappeared indigenous past. And just days before, at the Anthropological Congress, Zelia Nuttall's academic presentation

[59] Cameron.

had explained the reasons why decoding the Aztec calendar carving was a big breakthrough, considering the lack of cultural, linguistic, or historical information surrounding the carved stone as well as centuries-old Aztec manuscripts and codices preserved since the Conquest.[60] Both narratives – that of the modern anthropologist and that of the Mexican state – were predicated on the Aztec empire and culture having perished long before. And yet, here were live 'Aztecs' as a Midway amusement.

Another dissonant aspect of the village was the ethnicity of the performers -- especially since the so-called Southwestern adobe was reportedly populated by Spanish-speaking people who were not presented as ethnically Mexican or U.S. Native American, but as remnants of an extinguished central Mexican civilization. Tantalizing clues as to the 'Aztec's' identify appear in contemporaneous accounts. In a September 1893 column, freelance writer Teresa Dean wrote about her visit to the "new Aztec Village" and described it as "an exhibit from Mexico."[61] Yet, she named the inhabitants as Pueblo Indians, whose "war dance was not very ferocious" and who displayed their looms for "blankets similar to Navajo blankets."[62] Dean herself had noted the similarities between the performers to other Native American Southwestern tribes, but accepted the notion that these Pueblo Indians were modern-day 'Aztecs.' Perhaps the performers' use of Spanish mollified her doubts.

A note in Dean's write-up tells of the interaction she and her friend Patsy had with the performers. When she asked the performers if they spoke English, the actors said nothing.

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[60] Ruiz, "Insiders and Outsiders in Mexican Archaeology," 257.

[61] Teresa Dean, *White City Chips* (Chicago: Warren publishing company, 1895), preface, 319-320. Two years after the fair ended, Dean published a compendium of 110 published columns she had written over six months of continual visits to the fair; she called them 'everyday jottings' based on observations which had caught her interest.

[62] Dean, 319.

However, when Patsy asked the performers in Spanish if they spoke English, Dean describes their response: "They were so astonished and pleased to hear sweet Spanish from a visitor that one of them said in perfect English, with a Yankee accent: 'I should say so.'" Quickly back in character, the "Aztec" continued their conversation in Spanish with Dean's friend Patsy.[63] The performers appear to have been a group of bilingual, if not actually trilingual, Pueblo Indians from the Southwest who, for the sake of the show, stood in as descendants of the ancient Aztecs, performing a supposed typical day in the life of an imagined indigenous Mexican past.

From Dean's perspective, the performers had apparently been instructed by their managers to not speak much with spectators in order to appear like they did not "know too much about civilization."[64] Such a performance fit the purpose of the pay-for-entertainment venues of the Midway. But it also pushed a narrative that ethnic Mexicans were 'primitive' and participated only in home life, weaving, and gendered women's work for survival.

The challenge here is the ease with which the amusement owners chose Pueblo Indians from New Mexico to represent ancient Aztecs, whose city and live civilization in central Mexico had been destroyed over 350 years before. We must ask: What was the cultural space that made possible, and seemingly acceptable, for U.S. Pueblo Indians to be misrepresented as 'Aztecs' for a paid amusement on the Midway Plaisance in the final two months of the World's Fair?

As it appears, while official state narratives from the Mexico and leading archeologist Zelia Nuttall wrapped their discussions of Aztecs in a historical past, the anthropologists' whose opinions mattered most in Chicago did not align with this crucial historical point. Again, the

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[63] Dean, 319.

[64] Dean, 319.

inacurrate and racialized displays on the Midway were justified and normalized by the authority vested in the institutions of the White City; in this case, the Smithsonian Institution. And what advantage did the Smithsonian hold over Putnam's Anthropology Hall where one could see Zelia Nuttall's Aztec calendar exhibit and the Mexican state's relics? The Smithsonian served as the official voice of the United States Government, operating from its hegemonic location in the spatial geography of the White City. As the official museum of the American state, the Smithsonian's ethnographic work was integral to the American statecraft of race and empire.

The Smithsonian As Narrative-Maker

One reason as to why Pueblo Indians appeared as "home-made Aztecs" on the Midway Plaisance can be found in the White City itself - specifically in the U.S. Government's ethnography exhibit from the Smithsonian Institution. As the nation's museum, the Smithsonian's own visual exhibition declared Pueblo Indians of the Southwestern U.S. to be descendants of the Aztecs, even if it contrasted wholly with both the Peabody Museum's theory of indigenous groups in the Americas, as well as the Mexican state's exhibits. While the 1893 Exposition marked the fifteenth time in thirteen years that the Smithsonian had ventured outside of the District of Columbia to display ethnology exhibits to national and international audiences, no exhibit had been as expansive as the one in Chicago. The Smithsonian made a large splash because it was not only the official ethnology exhibit sponsored by the United States Government, but it was apart and separate from Putnam's Department of Ethnology at the Hall of Anthropology.[65] The geographic space between Otis Mason's Smithsonian and Frederick Putnam's Harvard view was real and

[65] Rydell, All the World's a Fair; Hinsley and Wilcox, eds., Coming of Age in Chicago.

cogent, and this physical space reflected the difference in their intellectual and academic theories about Mexican Aztecs.

The U.S. Government building was next to the behemoth Manufacturing and Liberal Arts Building. For all who entered their vast entryways, the buildings epitomized the Exposition's themes of American economic, cultural, and racial superiority. In the interior, the Government building was also expansive in its themes and presentations. The museum-like displays comprised thousands of material items and artifacts presenting themes like military might, agriculture, farming implements, different modes of transportation, the Post Office, and U.S. mint procedures. But the most arresting display was the Smithsonian's ethnology exhibit. From the main entrance and running the length of its corridors to the center of the Government building, Smithsonian staff had arranged two long rows of large glass cases. Each transparent case enclosed life-sized, wax figures of human beings. These glass cases held "upward of seventy figures" of Native Americans, all depicted in "natural and characteristic positions" such as "cleaning hides," "writing an incantation," and "engaged in a religious ceremony." Notably, there was even an "Aztec with [a] fire drill."[66]

The wax figures represented a major departure from the usual methods of museum exhibition up to the late nineteenth century. Usually, ethnology exhibits arranged many similar material items, such as daily implements and tools of 'primitive' people stacked from top to bottom filling entire shelves and walls. These displays held endless collections of artifacts taken (if not stolen) from indigenous communities from around the world and, as noted above, often included

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[66] "Types of Americans. The Ethnological Display at the Fair," *Inter-Ocean*, June 7, 1893, Exposition Collection, Reel 112, No. 13, Smithsonian Institution Libraries.

personal collections such as those of Carl Lumholtz and Zelia Nuttall. As part of its mission, the Smithsonian changed the practice of museum collection from a private endeavor supported by personal wealth and non-public institutions, to one where the state collected and maintained material artifacts to display to the public.

In another dramatic change, after displaying individual wax statues at previous world's fairs, the Smithsonian created for the Chicago Exposition groups of two and three figures interacting or working together on one task, making "life groups as the central exhibit form of museum anthropology."[67] These life-sized working scenes encompassed only manual labor and handiwork because Smithsonian ethnologists equated indigenous groups as a different and primitive race. Wax statues mentioned above like "writing an incantation" and "Aztec working a drill" exemplified the Smithsonian's vision of primitive, indigenous life that at times also represented barbarism and savagery. For the sake of pedagogy, these human forms conveyed specific themes of race and gendered work to the most number of individuals, as the viewing public could visually learn without requiring an ability to read. Chicago set the standard: for world's fairs and expositions after 1893, U.S. museum anthropologists developed their official displays around the themes of primitive work and everyday life while creating a realistic, natural habitat that viewers could find believable.[68]

These visual narratives from the U.S. government were in the hands of Otis Mason, who firmly believed that indigenous peoples were alike, not only in being racially inferior to other races, but also due to a similar cultural primitivism. And since they were from the Americas, he

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[67] Curtis M. Hinsley, *Savages and Scientists: The Smithsonian Institution and the Development of American Anthropology, 1846-1910* (Washington, D.C: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1981), 100.

[68] Hinsley, 108–10.

assumed the similarities made them practically interchangeable. In his annual report, Mason had identified a loom used by the Pueblos that was "nearly identical to that of the Aztecs."[69] In his mind, the Aztecs of the past were the forbearers of the Pueblos because he believed little cultural progress had been made from one native group to another.

Given that millions of fairgoers paid an admission fee at the gates of the World Exposition seeking to see and learn new things, exhibitors like the United States Government set high expectations for their pavilions. Surrounded by water and with a large and impressive plaza at its entrance, the Government building gave an air of formality and authority. After all, it represented America at its height of imperialism, progress, and modernity on the international stage.[70] And as if to codify and support this vision, its location was strategic -- next to the Manufactures and Liberal Arts location.[71] Set side by side, the buildings reinforced the credibility of what was on display inside their huge halls, and also promulgated the overarching sweep of the White City vis-à-vis the Midway Plaisance in a wholesale promotion of America's white racial superiority.

Upon walking into the Government's building, visitors faced the mesmerizing displays of wax human beings, which in and of itself, pushed aside the requirement to know how to read the attached scientific descriptions, widening the expanse of individuals who could understand the visual narrative put forward by the Smithsonian scientists. As the United States' anthropologists, they framed the accepted authenticity of the wax figures that fairgoers viewed with their own eyes; after all, 'official' information, coupled with material artifacts procured by "army men" and

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[69] Otis Mason, "Ethnological Exhibit of the Smithsonian Institution at the World's Columbian Exhibition," in *Memoirs of the International Congress of Anthropology - 1893* (Chicago: The Schulte Publishing Company, 1894), 214.

[70] Rydell, All the World's a Fair.

[71] Rand McNally and Company, *Bird's-Eye View of the World's Columbian Exposition, Chicago*, Map, 1893, Geography and Map Division, Library of Congress.

"special agents" only added to the credibility of these visual narratives.[72] These glass cases held ethnological truth because of the life-like detail and the credibility of the U.S. national museum. For spectators, many already taken by the Exposition's grandiosity, most did not question the expertise of the country's national museum.

Under Mason's supervision, the Smithsonian Institution took the responsibility of designing and staging the large undertaking for the Exposition with meticulous detail.[73] Mason described how his Bureau had "assiduously devoted itself" to investigating everyday practices like the "languages, the sociology, the science and the religions of the American aborigines."[74] Each of the wax figures was "decked out in the genuine garments and ornaments worn by the types they represent, many of these having been gathered by army men and special agents of the Smithsonian during a long series of years."[75] These details made the wax figures so "lifelike," writes cultural anthropologist Melissa Rinehart, "that some tourists thought the life-sized groups were once-living Indians stuffed for the exhibit."[76] This exhibit was popular enough that throngs of spectators surrounded the long row of encased wax figures each day.[77]

One visual link between the home-grown Midway Aztecs and the Smithsonian's authority was the wax figure of the "Aztec using a drill to bore a hole and make fire." A reporter found this

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[72] "World's Fair Doings. Another Unique Ethnological Display Prepared. Seventy "Good" Indians," Inter-Ocean, Chicago. Smithsonian Archives, Newspaper Clippings, Reel 112, No. 13.

[73] Mason, "Ethnological Exhibit of the Smithsonian Institution at the World's Columbian Exhibition."

[74] Mason, 214.

[75] "Types of Americans. The Ethnological Display at the Fair," Inter-Ocean, June 7, 1893 and "World's Fair Doings. Another Unique Ethnological Display Prepared. Seventy "Good" Indians," *Inter-Ocean*, Chicago. Smithsonian Archives, Newspaper Clippings, Reel 112, No. 13.

[76] Melissa Rinehart, "To Hell with the Wigs! Native American Representation and Resistance at the World's Columbian Exposition," *American Indian Quarterly* 36, no. 4 (2012), 419.

[77] "Types of Americans. The Ethnological Display at the Fair," *Inter-Ocean*, June 7, 1893. Smithsonian Archives, Newspaper Clippings, Reel 112, No. 13.

wax figure one of the strangest of the lot and it clearly made a strong impression. He wrote that the Pueblos were "a family akin to the Aztecs, [and] still live in New Mexico very much the same as they did before Columbus discovered America."[78] In writing about the Smithsonian Aztec and the similarities between the wax figure and Pueblo Indians, he provided to newspaper readers a visual depiction and essential information linking the two, and therefore gave credibility to the amusement that would open on the Midway in the following months.

For the thousands who viewed the Smithsonian Institution's exhibit, there were additional connections between Pueblo Indians and Aztecs based on Mason's direction at the Bureau of Ethnology (BAE). Starting in 1880, the BAE focused much of its work on the Pueblos south of Colorado's Mesa Verde region, in the upper northwest corner of New Mexico, which had been linked inaccurately to Aztecs at least 100 years before.[79] The government exhibit's portrayal of interchangeable Pueblos and Aztecs reflected an intellectual and bureaucratic debate between Mason, speaking for the government, and Harvard's Putnam, who led the Department of Ethnology for the Exposition at large. Mason claimed that natives were "of one blood or race throughout the entire continent" whereas Putnam held to a "double race, two races in fact, one developed in the north…and one in the South. The modern aborigines are a mixture of the two."[80] In fact, this disagreement and Mason's entrenched thinking, seemed to compel him to write a year later:

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[78] "Types of Americans. The Ethnological Display at the Fair," *Inter-Ocean*, June 7, 1893. Smithsonian Archives, Newspaper Clippings, Reel 112, No. 13.

[79] Curtis M. Hinsley, *Savages and Scientists: The Smithsonian Institution and the Development of American Anthropology, 1846-1910* (Washington, D.C: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1981), 192. The town of Aztec, New Mexico is in this region and although it was incorporated in 1887, its inaccurate link to Aztecs of central Mexico had been made by Spanish priests in the mid-1770s when it was a travel post, perhaps due to the ruins of Ancestral Puebloan towns and temples in the area.

[80] Otis Mason's account in Curtis M. Hinsley and David R. Wilcox, eds., *Coming of Age in Chicago: The 1893 World's Fair and the Coalescence of American Anthropology* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2016), 214.

> "…as Curator of the Department of Ethnology in the United States National Museum, charged with the Ethnological Exhibit at the World's Columbian Exposition, I have endeavored to bring together results of the labors of men connected with the Smithsonian Institution and with the Government for the period of fifty years. I have been led to do this in order to avoid interfering with the work of the Department of Ethnology at the World's Columbian Exposition at large."[81]

With the heft of its expertise and weight of its authority, the Smithsonian staff linked the wax Aztec figure to Pueblo Indians in both its museum displays and narratives. Once the government ethnologists made this assertion, couching its life-like displays in government research, it left little space or reason to question. While Zelia Nuttall delivered her conference paper arguing the opposite of Mason's premise and Frederic Putnam's passion lay with developing the Exposition's American Indian exhibits and villages, for all who took in the Smithsonian exhibit, Pueblo Indians were officially the modern-day version of Aztecs.

Peddling *Mexicanidad* on the Midway

Due to the spatial geography of the fairgrounds and the daily information reports, this misinformed link between Pueblo Indians and Mexican Aztecs likely migrated from the U.S. Government building to the hastily-constructed business venture on the Midway Plaisance. Foremost was a belief that peddling some kind of 'Aztecs' could turn a profit and using U.S. Pueblo Indians to represent Mexican Aztec culture, under the notion that Smithsonian research and narratives were accurate - even if they weren't - made the venture appear believable enough to be profitable. Adding to the interest required of any for-profit venture, national headlines in late

[81] Hinsley and Wilcox, 210.

August of Nuttall decoding the Aztec calendar only heightened awareness of this aspect of *mexicanidad*.

And unlike the exhibits of the White City, the Midway was a place of business. The cost of owning a Midway concession was between $50,000 to $250,000. Each "building, village, and palace" was a "[seat] of private enterprises" and required an application for a permit from the Executive Committee of the Exposition.[82] The guide to the concessions listed the Aztec Village business owner as S.B. Mills, and was the last concessionaire of the 52 total "isolated ventures" on the Midway at the fair's opening. Interestingly, the concession's original description does not purport to bring Aztecs to the Midway, but reads "Pueblo Indian Village" and its given purpose was "showing the manner of life of the natives" and "Indian curios for sale."[83]

What originally had been petitioned for inclusion as a village of Pueblo Indians became the "Aztec's Village," with a grammatical error to boot. Their sudden appearance was noteworthy to observers of the day, as the brash idea to recruit "a half-dozen or more Pueblo Indians" to the Chicago World's Fair came from a "few gentlemen…as there was no Aztec village at the fair up to the latter part of August." The responsibilities of the Pueblo Indians on the Midway were "weaving, baking and housekeeping in their primitive style" and "showing their primitive ways of working and selling their manufactured wares."[84] On top of the Exposition's entrance fee of fifty cents, fairgoers paid an additional ten cents to enter the village to observe a reenactment of the

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[82] Ralph Julian, *Harper's Chicago and the World's Fair; the Chapters on the Exposition Being Collated from Official Sources and Approved by the Department of Publicity and Promotion of the World's Columbian Exposition* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1893), 207.

[83] F. W. Putnam, *Official Catalogue: Anthropological Building, Midway Plaisance and Isolated Exhibits; Department M. Ethnology*, ed. Edited by Handy, M.P., vol. Part XII (Chicago: W. B. Conkey Company, 1893), 36.

[84] "Home-Made Aztecs." Campbell, *Campbell's Illustrated History of the World's Columbian Exposition*, II:620.

supposed domestic activities of the living Aztecs. In effect, the Arizona concession owners peddled *their* version of *mexicanidad* for potential profit, exhibiting humans purported to be Mexican in the last available entertainment space on the Midway. It appears that the Smithsonian-driven U.S. Government narrative that Pueblo Indians descended from Mexican Aztecs had jumped from the White City to the Midway Plaisance for a profit-making venture. Having nothing to do with U.S. or Mexican geopolitics, but created on the Exposition fairgrounds, this version of *mexicanidad* on the Midway Plaisance demonstrated how U.S. statecraft had become American stagecraft. Mexican primitivism was now part of the U.S. cultural zeitgeist.

While the amusement's main purpose was "coining money for the schemers of the enterprise," as per the article title in the *Los Angeles Times*, Pueblo Indians appeared in Chicago as "home-made Aztecs" at the behest of investors seeking to turn a profit, regardless of ethnographic accuracy.[85] So long as believability (supported by Smithsonian narratives blending the history of ancient Aztecs with current American Pueblos) was at the fore, a group of 'gentlemen' existed to invest in the venture. A review of the village's revenue, however, shows a modicum of business in its two-month run. The end of year proceeds place the Aztec Village's income in the lower third of 96 businesses on the Midway. Its gross revenue was $10,233, while at least ten other businesses had revenue of less than $10,000.[86] Aside from its late start, there may have been additional reasons for its lower income.

As with many of the Midway diversions found to be distasteful or socially unpalatable in news accounts of the day, this amusement's popularity came into question by some writers

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[85] "Home-Made Aztecs."

[86] Bolotin and Laing, *Chicago's Grand Midway: A Walk Around the World at the Columbian Exposition*, Appendix.

covering it. While the *Los Angeles Times* reported "the village is now one of the greatest attractions on the Midway Plaisance," another description stated it "was never a successful enterprise" especially in comparison to "other far Southwestern exhibitors."[87] Perhaps, due to its late start in August and appearing in the final eight weeks of the six-month Exposition, there may have been little time for word of mouth to go far, and the village did not garner enough coverage to become a must-see attraction. Or it may have been difficult to see and find due to the small lot and poor location on which the construction of the adobe-style building occurred. Unlike the other ethnological villages located down the mile-long Plaisance, the "Aztec's Village" was closest to the toilets, at the entrance to the Midway.[88]

In addition to being in a seemingly undesirable location, the village faced other issues that signaled poor production values for a live show. "Their serapes were said to have been made in Germany," said one observer, and even though "their booths were filled with trinkets" there may not have been enough information about the "Mexican aborigines" to pique a higher level of interest from the many fairgoers on the Midway. If only "the general knowledge" among fairgoers had been more extensive, stated one observer, better sales may have occurred and "a good trade might have gone on."[89] In fact, when an official photographer from the Exposition took the only known photo of the village, that image shows a closed and locked gate to the entrance of the exhibit.[90]

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[87] Halsey C. Ives, *"The Aztecs" in The Dream City: A Portfolio of Photographic Views of the World's Columbian Exposition*, 1894, 1894, Exposition Collection, Reel 106, No. 13, Smithsonian Institution Libraries.; *Los Angeles Times*.

Oct. 9, 1893.

[88] Handy, *Official Catalogue: Exhibits on the Midway Plaisance Part XVII*, inside cover.

[89] Halsey C. Ives, *"The Aztecs" in The Dream City: A Portfolio of Photographic Views of the World's Columbian Exposition*, 1894, Reel 106, No. 13, Smithsonian Institution Libraries Exposition Collection.

[90] Ives.

While we may not learn the full story of the Native people who staffed the exhibit for the entertainment of fairgoers, what appears clear is that they arrived in Chicago from the American West to work in a temporary re-creation of Aztec life. In this faux village, U.S. Native Americans fluent in Spanish and English, probably from the Pueblo villages of New Mexico or related tribes in Arizona, re-enacted for the visual consumption of paying spectators a gendered pastiche of "an original homelife" based on such everyday domestic work as housekeeping, weaving, and baking. How they were compensated, or whether or not they returned to the West is unknown, but it appears that their instructions were to not interact much with fairgoers.[91] For the spectator, being entertained at this venue meant seeing mostly women's work, as defined by Victorian ideals of gendered work. These visuals in turn reified the divide between the civilized depictions of industriousness and innovation of the White City, vis-a-vis the primitive and rudimentary ways of the uncivilized on the Midway Plaisance.

The Aztec village was a gendered and racialized microcosm of the larger narrative of the Exposition. The village was intentionally placed on the Midway, away from the White City because it was an amusement, paid for by private investors, and intended to be profitable entertainment. Scientific accuracy was only important to the extent that it could create believability and justify the villagers' display and the audience's gaze as being in service of educational entertainment. Additionally, the primitivism of the village synchronized with the larger themes of the Columbian Exposition: the uncivilized, savage, and primitive cultures of the world did not belong in the official area of the White City but on the Midway Plaisance. Organizers intentionally designed the World's Fair to showcase qualities of white manliness and progressive civilization in

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[91] Teresa Dean, *White City Chips*.

the White City, and for exhibiting the uncivilized races, showcasing their primitive customs, in the Midway.[92]

By 1893, the widespread appearance of ethnic villages, which had first appeared in the United States seven years before as the *Aztec Fair and Mexican Village*, had expanded into its own cottage industry. All were independent private ventures designed to turn a profit. All were exotic purveyors of savagery as instructed by the anthropological experts like F.W. Putnam and Otis T. Mason. All were paid amusements. Most damaging, all fueled racist iconography that would become so believable it would weave itself permanently into the American imagination.

When it came to Mexico, critical to the discussion of image creation was the magnetic pull of the word "Aztecs," which showmen banked would bring in plenty of visitors and, consequently, revenue. The presumed goal was to cover the costs of construction and be profitable regardless if it risked credibility among fairgoers. We can surmise that imagery of Mexicans in the minds of these entrepreneurs was malleable and flexible, and that historical and cultural accuracy was not a priority. Instead, ancient Mexican 'Aztecs' and Pueblo Indians were interchangeable. In that historical moment, at this contested site, two advanced indigenous cultures melded into one sub-par race, for the sake of profitability.

Conclusion

Seven years after the successful run of the *Aztec Fair and Mexican Village* in Boston, faux villages inhabited by live humans flourished on a much larger scale at the World's Columbian Exposition, putting forth racialized narratives about foreign cultures and claiming authenticity.

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[92] Rydell, *All the World's a Fair*; Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880-1917*.

Partly due to the growing fields of anthropology and ethnology, learning about foreign cultures became a popular amusement, and the steady stream of newspaper accounts covering the Midway Plaisance's ethnic villages and exoticism only fueled even more curiosity. It was in 1893 Chicago, under the aegis of the Columbian World's Exposition, that viewing live human beings became an accepted spectator activity. Between spring and fall of 1893, a defining moment in American culture was the emergence of large-scale visual consumption of distinct and foreign cultures for *entertainment*. A spectator paid an admission fee in exchange for viewing live humans in real surroundings under the rubric of amusement.

While Mexican and U.S. statecraft stayed stable in complementary goals of expanding business opportunities for both nations, millions of spectators roamed the fairgrounds and took in various images, absorbing distinct narratives about *mexicanidad* as entertainment. The diverse contexts of these images at the Exposition fed into larger cultural frameworks that devalued the *mexicanidad* of Aztec history. In this case, the Mexican state decided against highlighting an Aztec history lest it lessen investor opportunities. And while Mexican statecraft sought to convey a bourgeois, modern vision devoid of indigeneity, U.S. government narratives functioned to erase the complexity of pre-Columbian civilization by substituting Aztecs with modern-day Pueblo Indians and reducing ancient and modern Mexico to the sidelines reserved for non-white, non-civilized groups.

In the cultural borderlands of the World's Columbian Exposition, narratives emerged racializing ethnic Mexicans as primitive and backwards, and emasculating indigenous communities by displaying them as conducting mostly women's work in the eyes of spectators. The meta-narrative was consistent with that applied to other people of color -- all non-whites were unequal and subservient. Consistency with this frame, and the believability that attached

therefrom, came to be more important than the accuracy of the narratives or the desires of the Mexican state.

Believability was key to popular paid amusement. In selling tickets, the paid entertainment on the Midway created consumable -- and profitable -- images that parlayed into a growing atmosphere that readily accepted racialized and gendered images of ethnic Mexicans. At the "Aztec" village and elsewhere, images of the real and imagined Mexicans in Chicago would be the very first consumed on a mass scale through live performance, by the millions of American and international fairgoers.

In the next chapter, I analyze how live musical performance continued to lend credence to racialized and gendered constructions of Mexicans in paid entertainment. The Mexican state's attempts to construct its desired modern bourgeois *mexicanidad* through musical troupes would not succeed, but would continue the feminization of ethnic Mexicans in U.S. entertainment. As we shall see, it was not just the intention of the Mexican government, but prevailing notions of race and gender in the U.S., that shaped how Mexican musicians appeared to others in the white racialized environment of the Columbian Exposition. And through the prism of paid entertainment, the production and peddling of *mexicanidad* resulting from Mexican and U.S. statecraft would become accepted as real and accurate in American culture, inevitably leading the process in denying ethnic Mexican communities entry to the American polity.

CHAPTER IV

Mexican Musicians and a Musical "Dandy" at the World's Columbian Exposition

On October 22, 1892, a full seven months before the World's Columbian Exposition opened to the general public in May 1893, a grand celebration memorializing its dedication took place on the unfinished fairgrounds.[1] Organizers planned to seat 90,000 attendees plus an additional 35,000 special guests at the Manufactures and Liberal Arts Building, the largest of the Exposition's structures. Three days of festivities culminated in an all-day Saturday event that began with "a big chorus…accompanied by the Mexican band to the great edification of the crowd." The Mexican state's "most distinguished band" - the army's Eighth Regiment Cavalry Band "consisting of some of the best musicians in Mexico" - had visited "various European capitals preparatory to going to the Chicago Exposition." Performing at the dedication ceremony was "a mark of national courtesy and consideration" from the Mexican government. Six weeks later, high-ranking managers of the Exposition traveled to Mexico City to present each musician with a commemorative medal for traveling to Chicago and participating in the opening ceremonies.[2] Sent by the Mexican government and led by their esteemed conductor Captain

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[1] The Chicago World's Fair originally planned to commemorate the 400th anniversary of Columbus' arrival to the Americas, but the United States postponed it by a year to accommodate Spain's own 1892 World's Fair in Madrid.

[2] Rossiter Johnson, *A History of the World's Columbian Exposition Held in Chicago in 1893, Volume 1*, vol. Narrative (D. Appleton and Co., 1897), 472. "The World's Fair: Complete Program for the Dedication," *The Hartford Courant*, October 17,

Encarnación Payén, the Eighth Regiment Cavalry Mexican Band would not return to the Chicago World's Fair until nearly a year later, in the fall of 1893.

For millions of visitors to the largest international Exposition and World's Fair to date, however, that Mexican musical vacuum would be filled by a second, smaller group of Mexican musicians, known as an *orquesta típica mexicana* (traditional Mexican orchestra). Identified in English as a 'string orchestra' or a 'typical Mexican orchestra,' the small group's performances in Chicago would imprint American culture with an unique style of Mexican music and sartorial imagery.[3] Instead of brass and woodwinds used by the Eighth Regiment Cavalry Mexican band, the *orquesta típica mexicana* played mostly strings to create their unique sound: a *salterio* (similar to a small dulcimer); instruments similar to guitars such as a *bandolón*, *bajo quinto*, and *bajo sexto*; and a xylophone and marimba for percussion.[4] The unique sound and performance style of the Mexican string orchestra disrupted the visual narrative intended by Mexican government's planned cultural diplomacy. It is at the Columbian World's Exposition where an itinerant musical ensemble contested the state-manufactured *mexicanidad* with their own version of Mexican music and culture, leaving an indelible impression about ethnic Mexicans in U.S. paid entertainment.

1892; "News Notes from Mexico," New York Times, September 5, 1892; "How the Program Was Carried Out: First Came the Audience, Then the Dignitaries, and Finally the Exercises," Chicago Daily Tribune, October 22, 1892. "Badges for the Mexican Band," *World's Columbian Exposition Illustrated: Devoted to the Interests of the Columbian Exposition, Art, and Literature* Vol II, no. 10 (December 1892): 240.

[3] English-language primary sources translate "orquesta típica mexicana" literally to mean "typical Mexican orchestra." While the word "typical" in the Spanish name refers to the musical instruments used by the orchestra, English-language sources continually label the ensemble itself "typical" – which they were not. I have adapted the translation to "traditional Mexican orchestra" to better represent the intent of the original name in Spanish.

[4] Héctor Manuel Medina Miranda, "Los Charros En España y México. Estereotipos Ganaderos y Violencia Lúdica" (Ph.D. dissertation, Salamanca, Universidad de Salamanca, 2009), 231. For the differentiation of instruments between the Mexican military band and the *orquesta típica mexicana*, see footnote 205 in John Baron, *Concert Life in Nineteenth-Century New Orleans* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2013), 557.

Figure 8: *Orquesta Típica Mexicana*, Bakers Art Gallery, Columbus, Ohio, June 14, 1885. Personal collection of Jean Dickson, Buffalo, New York.

While scholars of Latina/o studies, Chicana/o, and North American borderlands historians have analyzed the negative depictions of ethnic Mexicans in nineteenth century U.S. popular culture (describing a host of sinister characters such as bandits, depraved Catholics, and indolent savages, to name a few of the most egregious stereotypes), there is a gap in recovering the contradictory imagery of Mexican performers that emerged in U.S. amusement culture in the late nineteenth century.[5] This dissertation chapter reconstructs how the unique circumstances of

[5] Raymund A. Paredes, "The Mexican Image in American Travel Literature, 1831-1869," *New Mexico Historical Review*; Albuquerque, Etc. 52, no. 1 (January 1, 1977): 5–29; Paredes; Doris L. Meyer, "Early Mexican-American Responses to Negative Stereotyping," *New Mexico Historical Review* 53, no. 1 (January 1, 1978): 75–91; Arthur G. Pettit, *Images of the Mexican-American in Fiction and Film* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1980); David Weber, *Foreigners in Their Native Land : Historical Roots of the Mexican Americans* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2003); Cecil Robinson, *Mexico and the Hispanic Southwest in American Literature* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1977); Arnoldo De León, *They Called Them Greasers: Anglo Attitudes toward Mexicans in Texas, 1821-1900* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1983).

the World's Columbian Exposition shaped the commodification and consumption of Mexican performance that took place on this international stage. It also analyzes the discourse surrounding the two groups of Mexican musicians, and the seemingly innocuous narratives about their *mexicanidad* that emerged within the fair's universe.

As a proven instrument of Mexican statecraft under the regime of President Porfirio Díaz, the military band known as the Eighth Regiment Cavalry arrived in Chicago in 1892 to perform on an international platform of a magnitude never seen before. Their job was to represent Mexico in its best cultural and artistic light in the face of foreign geopolitical and capitalist interests. An examination of the military band's scheduled appearances and reviews at the Columbian Exposition demonstrates the Mexican state's use of live musical performance to mitigate whatever negative images may potentially have been held by the U.S. investor and diplomatic class. Because the state's economic stability depended on foreign investments, Mexico's primary interest at the Exposition, and rationale for participation, was to assuage American capitalists about real and imagined fears about banditry, the purported lack of reliable workers, and Mexico's inability to offer the political stability that would allow international business interests to consistently extract profit from Mexico. One solution? Cultural diplomacy.

In the late nineteenth century, the elite group of Mexican government representatives known as the "wizards of progress" had an exhibition team trained to respond, manage, and organize Mexico's participation in world's fairs and exhibitions.[6] This group was active and eager to highlight Mexico on the international stage. For example, it only took two days to engage with the Americans after receiving the formal invitation on February 4, 1891 from the

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[6] *Mauricio Tenorio-Trillo, Mexico at the World's Fairs: Crafting a Modern Nation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 62.

U.S. Department of State requesting Mexico's participation in the Chicago Exposition. Immediately upon receipt of the invitation, Mexico began a diplomatic dance with the United States as to how to represent Mexico to American audiences.[7]

Two years after the initial invitation, and separate from the Mexican state's deployment of the Eighth Regiment Cavalry Band for its cultural narrative for foreign investors and political actors, a different group of twelve Mexican musicians who made up the *orquesta típica mexicana* traveled to Chicago to seek employment. Independent from the Mexican state or the Mexican military band, the group planned to perform in Chicago, as off-site entertainment venues looked to take advantage of the massive audiences expected for the Columbian Exposition. However, when they lost their formal stage engagement at a Chicago concert hall in late spring 1893, this group of performers took advantage of the opportunities surrounding the millions of spectators visiting the World's Fair, and adapted their actions to find employment and be compensated. They took gigs wherever they could on the grounds of the Columbian Exposition and even petitioned Fair officials for work. During this summer-long process, and compelled by a survivalist attitude of resilience, the *orquesta típica* adapted their performance behavior in response to the spatial environment of the Exposition.

Independent from formal business on behalf of the Mexican state, the small string orchestra maneuvered in and around the cultural borderlands of the fairgrounds – especially on the entertainment-focused Midway Plaisance -- where their story intersected with the Exposition's hegemonic narratives of white progress and civilization. They played popular music for large and small audiences, and through musical performance, their version of *mexicanidad*

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[7] "Boletín de La Exposición Mexicana En La Internacional de Chicago" (Oficina de la Secretaria de Fomento, 1892), 5, Special Collections, Smithsonian Institution Libraries Exposition Collection.

comingled with the Exposition's discourses on race. As previously noted, a basic premise of the Columbian Exhibition coded people of color including those of Mexican descent as racially inferior simply because they were non-white. Supporting the Fair's racialized premise of whiteness was late nineteenth century ideological discourse that categorized individuals by race, with African Americans and indigenous communities labeled as unequivocally inferior, and immigrants as racially deficient.

The Exposition's visual imagery and narratives framed Mexicans as interchangeable with other non-white races and ethnicities because they were deemed *both* foreign and non-white. For one, being non-American and therefore loyal to another country assumed unpatriotic tendencies toward the United States; patriotism was essential to whiteness and non-whites' national loyalty was suspect. Second, for American audiences, constructions of race had been etched into nineteenth-century American entertainment through minstrel and traveling shows in the wake of Reconstruction. But it was at the 1893 Exposition where race science spilled from academic circles (as displayed in the Smithsonian and Anthropology halls in the White City) into the mass visual entertainment of the Midway Plaisance where race (and skin color) visually marked the "lowest specimens of humanity…reaching continually upward to the highest stage" of the White City.[8] Because this visual construction of race was integral to the entertainment at the Exposition, spectators innocuously absorbed white supremacist narratives while engaging in fun activities. The camouflage of white supremacy as amusement was one reason that Mexicans, as other people of color and immigrant performers at the Fair, appeared as dispensable and disposable in the context of U.S. culture.

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[8] Robert W. Rydell, *All the World's a Fair: Visions of Empire at American International Expositions, 1876-1916* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 65.

Within the racialized social structures of the Fair, the Mexican string orchestra demonstrated resiliency and survival tactics through their actions and by exerting agency. In this space -- designed and sponsored by academic ethnographers, the U.S. state, and even the Mexican government -- the independent Mexican string orchestra stood as a counternarrative to the construction of Mexicanness as primitive, subservient, and economically available. Chicago became a contested space through their actions, even as the exigencies of performance required them to anticipate what type of Mexican experience American audiences would find comfortable enough to pay for. In this chapter, I argue how this group of Mexican musicians in fitted, highly-adorned suits with embellished millinery entertained thousands with their performances at the Chicago World's Fair and originated an enduring version of *mexicanidad* in U.S. entertainment.

In the cultural borderlands of the Columbian Exposition, their actions contrasted with the versions of *mexicanidad* put forth by the Smithsonian Institution, business interests, and archeologists analyzed in the previous chapter. In addition, the collision of the musicians' self-image with those constructed by U.S. and Mexican diplomatic forces at the Exposition reflects a fundamental and long-standing aspect of Mexican American experiences in the United States: U.S. ethnic Mexican communities exist in a liminal space between the needs and the wants of both the U.S. and Mexican states. The borderlands are not simply lines on a map, but are cultural spaces that existed wherever Mexicans and ethnic Mexicans lived and worked. In 1893, that was certainly at the Chicago World's Fair.

Scattered among press clippings, official reports, and summaries about the Exposition, a fragmented story emerges about the two Mexican musical ensembles, which most likely crossed paths – and certainly shared members at times -- but for the most part performed in different cultural spaces at the Columbian Exposition. The *orquesta típica mexicana* "integrate[d]

'typical' or regional [Mexican] instruments with standard European orchestral instruments in performances of folk and popular music" and began the season operating in the informal Midway Plaisance without having their employment run through diplomatic processes.[9] Once filtered through the Exposition's gendered and racialized narratives, the orchestra in their *charro* suits came to represent a feminized version of Mexican manhood, while the state-sponsored big-brass military band played with a familiar, masculine look and the insistent, percussive sound typical of modern nineteenth-century armies.

The confluence of working in a liminal space shaped by gendered and racialized language intersected in 1893 Chicago as musical performance *rasquache* -- the resilient human drive to make do in spite of current circumstances. Rooted in Chicano art history, Tomás Ybarra-Frausto's "*Rasquachismo*" is an appropriate framework through which to analyze the orchestra's actions at the Exposition. Coming from "an underdog perspective," the orchestra of twelve used their networks and sought assistance to obtain performance gigs while maintaining dignity in their work, revealing "an attitude rooted in resourcefulness and adaptability yet mindful of stance and style."[10]

Unlike the success of the military band in its official capacity as part of Mexican diplomacy, the economic survival of the *orquesta típica mexicana* in Chicago rested on its own ability to adapt in real time to the financial strains and cultural perceptions affecting them that summer. The orchestra's eventual paid performances came about due to their entrepreneurial

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[9] Jean Dickson, "Orquesta Típica," in *Oxford Online / Grove Music Online*, n.d., https://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/.

[10] Tomás Ybarra-Frausto, *Rasquachismo: A Chicano Sensibility* (Phoenix, Arizona: Movimiento Artistico del Rio Salado (MARS), 1989).

spirit and survival instincts, in addition to a resiliency that responded to and contested forced circumstances seemingly out of their control.[11]

With resilience and resourcefulness, the string orchestra adapted to the Exposition's cultural borderlands space. Separate from the temple-like pavilions and artificial lakes of the formal fairground, the amusement-driven Midway Plaisance created a fluid space for musical entertainment where the orchestra's *rasquache* performances germinated, allowing these musicians to commodify their version of *mexicanidad* to the American public. The orchestra developed essential performance markers like the dignified style of many modern-day U.S. mariachis, who roam on foot with their instruments in tow from one open-air performance to another, often in restaurants and bars but maintaining an upright and formal affect, and in return receive accolades and compensation. In the process of everyday work, the orchestra wound up anticipating elements of the mariachi musician decades before the art form's introduction in the 1920s.[12]

The musicians of the military band and of the *orquesta típica* introduced the musicality of Mexican cultural identity, or *mexicanidad*, to countless thousands through performance. Some were in full *charro* regalia and others wore military uniforms - but both groups capitalized on their distinctly Mexican sound and look. As a result, their very existence, and the distinct purpose of their performances at the Exposition, captured the inherent discord in Mexico's own definition of manhood and class at a time when the technocratic regime of Porfirio Díaz insisted

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[11] Ybarra-Frausto.

[12] As known today, mariachis added the trumpet as a key instrument to their ensemble in the late 1920s. The focus of this research pre-dates the origins and common usage of the word "mariachi" and so I use the 1890s language of "band" and "orchestra" from the primary sources to describe the Mexican musicians at the Exposition, whose elements of performance and sartorial style lay down a foundation for how modern mariachis operate in Mexico and United States.

on demonstrating a Francophile modernity to the world.[13] And with the United States as the World's Fair host, this tension played out vis-a-vis a U.S. white supremacist vision of progress and manliness that embodied the Exposition's very existence.

With discourses of U.S.-centric modernity and manliness at the Fair's core, the gendered language and racialized ideology emerging in its narratives portrayed the Mexican musicians as racially different, foreign, and feminized, which did not synchronize with Mexico's own view of national manhood steeped in European sophistication. For a United States that, through a series of "Indian Wars" had recently consolidated its territorial hold on the West and was turning its gaze to colonial ambitions, the power and status of its neighbors and its non-white citizens was critical. The nations of the world eagerly put their best foot forward in Chicago, and so did Mexico. But by far, when it came to the news around Mexicans at the Exposition, the evocative coverage was about the curious, interesting, and exotic musicians.

Mexico at the World's Fair: Competing Narratives of *Mexicanidad*

To prepare for the Columbian World's Exposition, the Mexican state attempted a marketable self-portrait of its culture, modernity, and progress in order to maintain a stable relationship with U.S. and European financiers who either already had invested heavily in building Mexico's infrastructure, or desired to extract its natural resources to show profit on U.S. balance sheets. Indeed, over a year before the Exposition's opening, the *World Columbian Exposition Illustrated*, the Exposition's business weekly summarizing all things about the Fair, wrote that under the leadership of Porfirio Diaz, the progressive government of Mexico had "given a mighty impetus" to "industry and capital" to develop its resources:

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[13] Tenorio-Trillo, *Mexico at the World's Fairs*, 47.

> "Therein lies the secret why Mexico is so much interested in the World's Columbian Exposition. If it can but call the attention of the world to its opportunities, there should be an influx of foreign capital that would speedily develop the treasures of soil and mine deposited there by nature."[14]

Marketing to venture capitalists and investors, the Mexican elite believed in projecting notions of modernity and progress to bring in such foreign capital, and in this light realized the precarity of showcasing its indigenous Aztec past like it had done at the 1889 Paris Exhibition.[15]

Instead, rather than showcasing exoticism or simple peasantry, the Mexican state chose not to fund a request for "an Indian or Aztec town in Chicago," nor a "Mexican village" akin to the Irish, Turkish, and other foreign villages constructed on the Midway Plaisance as had been discussed in pre-exposition talks and negotiations.[16] Such indigenous rusticity - even the romantic Aztec past in live action as had come alive in 1886 Boston - was no longer the image that Porfirian Mexico sought to portray to the economies and world powers it hungered to join.

In Chicago, Mexico pivoted away from its Aztec past and indigenous present and attempted to redefine its future by minimizing, if not outright obscuring, its indigeneity.[17] But even with a plausible case for modernity, with miles of new railroads, growing industrial capacity, and unquestioned agricultural and mineral wealth, the Mexican government still had a potential public relations problem and a hurdle to implementing its statecraft: news and accounts of banditry in Mexico were widespread, and with a majority of mixed-race citizens, Mexico had to confront and combat Victorian-era racialized ideologies that linked miscegenation with

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[14] "Mexico Has Decided...," *World's Columbian Exposition Illustrated: Devoted to the Interests of the Columbian Exposition, Art, and Literature* Vol II, no. 2 (May 1892): Vol 1 No 11.

[15] For an analysis of Mexico's significant participation at the 1889 Exposition Universelle in Paris, see chapters five, six, and seven of Tenorio-Trillo, *Mexico at the World's Fairs*.

[16] See footnote 17 of chapter 11 in Tenorio-Trillo, 314.

[17] Olga Vilella, "An 'Exotic' Abroad: Manuel Serafin Pichardo and the Chicago Columbian Exhibition of 1893," *Latin American Literary Review* 32, no. 63 (2004): 85.

depravity.[18] To push back on these inconvenient cultural and historical facts, the Porfirian government aspired to project a bourgeois capability at the Exposition. It landed on *mexicanidad* as a cultural commodity.

The responsibility of cultural statecraft placed on the Mexican military band and their performances was immense, for their unspoken role was to neutralize the competing images of ethnic Mexicans lurking in U.S. discourse about the contested borderlands of the United States and Mexico. The U.S.-Mexico border had been hotbed of cultural, economic, and territorial clashes since the War of 1848. Borderlands historian David Weber writes that "the stereotype of Mexicans as sinister characters" had been attached with epithets such as "greasers" and "murderous Mexicans" and prevailed in popular narratives of the late nineteenth century.[19] Early Chicano scholar Raymund Paredes analyzed American travel literature between the 1830s and 1860s and concluded that "Texas writers regularly contrasted Mexican depravity with Anglo virtue," based mostly on misleading ethnological assumptions about miscegenation steeped in white supremacy.[20]

In addition to these negative, if not outright racist, virulent depictions of Mexicans in South Texas, visuals and narratives of banditry in Mexico regularly appeared in press accounts in newspapers across the United States.[21] Such danger was heightened by the non-binary nature of race in the borderlands; Mexican historian Paul Vanderwood writes about the continual conflict

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[18] Raymund A. Paredes, "The Origins of Anti-Mexican Sentiment in the United States," *New Scholar* 6 (1977): 139–65.

[19] Weber, illustration number three following page 82.

[20] Raymund A. Paredes, "The Mexican Image in American Travel Literature, 1831-1869," *New Mexico Historical Review*; Albuquerque, Etc. 52, no. 1 (January 1, 1977): 5–29.

[21] For an account of the social and economic role banditry played in late nineteenth-century Mexico, see Chris Frazer, *Bandit Nation : A History of Outlaws and Cultural Struggle in Mexico, 1810-1920* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2006). For an analysis of how Texans and other Anglo Americans viewed and stereotyped Mexicans and Mexican Americans in the contested borderland of South Texas, see *David Montejano, Anglos and Mexicans in the Making of Texas, 1836-1986* (University of Texas Press, 1987).

among indigenous tribes in both the southwestern United States and northern Mexico, where "more than anything else the Apaches, their image even more fearsome than their reality, smothered capitalistic ambition."[22] In this light, the narratives about the Mexican musicians and their live performances for Chicago makes them even more compelling, as live audiences received them with accolades and cheers despite preconceived notions the listeners may or may not have had about Mexicans. The Mexican state depended on this calculated good will and, given the good will with which the band had been received before as official cultural ambassadors, knew it was achievable.

1884 International Cotton Exposition at New Orleans

Nine years before, at the 1884 Cotton Exposition in New Orleans, both the Eighth Regiment Cavalry Mexican Band and the *orquesta típica mexicana* made their debut to American audiences, where their "first concert made such a 'hit' that the people talked of nothing else."[23] The Mexican musicians' smashing success led to the subsequent success of future touring Mexican bands and fueled the nascent New Orleans music industry, which then published and sold these musicians' compositions, and would emerge as the national popular music distribution network known as Tin Pan Alley.[24] Audiences in the American Midwest and South enthusiastically welcomed the Mexican musicians many times after their 1884-85 tour. But their influence was particularly strong in multi-ethnic New Orleans, where the formerly

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[22] Paul J. Vanderwood, *The Power of God Against the Guns of Government: Religious Upheaval in Mexico at the Turn of the Nineteenth Century* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998), 112.

[23] "The Mexican Band - Leaves Fourteen Hundred and Ten Dollars of Minneapolis Money in Minneapolis," *Minneapolis Tribune*, September 29, 1891.

[24] Gaye Theresa Johnson, "'Sobre Las Olas': A Mexican Genesis in Borderlands Jazz and the Legacy for Ethnic Studies: Comparative American Studies An International Journal: Vol 6, No 3," *Comparative American Studies: An International Journal* 6, no. 3 (2008).

Spanish and French city in the 1800s was the United States' cultural and economic gateway to Mexico and Latin America.

The musical legacy was strong enough that even over a century later, it would be commonly referenced by jazz musicians and academics alike as having been integral to the development of New Orleans' pride of place as the birthplace of jazz. The Mexican band's popularity, distinct musical blend of strings and percussion, reliance on brass instruments, and the pedagogical legacy of its members was the legacy of the Mexican musicians who chose to stay in the city after their performance tour had ended.[25] Music historians have documented the sea change in both New Orleans and United States music culture through the "Mexican" or "Spanish" musicians who took up residence in New Orleans after the 1884-85 Cotton Exposition and choosing not to return to Mexico.[26]

While the two musical ensembles played separately most times, they performed together at various events and this tradition appears to have been in practice for future world's fairs and expositions. After New Orleans, the bands toured intermittently across the United States over the course of nine years, in a series of high-profile stands that included St. Louis, Cincinnati,

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[25] Known simply as the "Mexican band" in the lore of present-day musicians in New Orleans, the histories of the Eighth Cavalry Mexican band and the *orquesta típica mexicana* are, at times, used interchangeably in the archive as the orchestra and the military often performed together. The historical outline is of Mexican musicians staying in New Orleans after the Cotton Exposition ended in 1885, some becoming teachers while others worked with different musicians and musical groups; one started the local musicians union when performers went without pay upon the end of the Fair. Others sold or left behind their brass instruments and arguably it was the first time saxophones had been seen, played, or heard in New Orleans. That, with the skills of plucking strings on bass, was the basis for New Orleans' unique jazz sound. For the origins of borderlands jazz beginning with the Mexican band in New Orleans, see Jack Stewart, "The Mexican Band Legend: Myth, Reality, and Musical Impact; A Preliminary Investigation," *The Jazz Archivist* (Tulane University, December 1991), William Ransom Hogan Jazz Archive; Jack Stewart, "The Mexican Band Legend - Part II," *The Jazz Archivist* (Tulane University, May 1994), William Ransom Hogan Jazz Archive; Johnson, "'Sobre Las Olas': A Mexican Genesis in Borderlands Jazz and the Legacy for Ethnic Studies: *Comparative American Studies An International Journal*: Vol 6, No 3."

[26] Baron, *Concert Life in Nineteenth-Century New Orleans*, 61–64; Stewart, "The Mexican Band Legend: Myth, Reality, and Musical Impact; A Preliminary Investigation." "Hogan Jazz Archive" (1884), Howard-Tilton Memorial Library, Tulane University; "Permanent Collection" (1884), William Research Center, The Historic New Orleans Collection; "Vertical Files: Mexican Bands" (1884), The Louisiana Division, New Orleans Public Library.

Kentucky, Nashville, and Atlanta, and Minneapolis.[27] The 1891 stop in Minnesota is noteworthy because it included an excursion to the Palace Clothing Company where the band spent $1,410.00 on men's suits. This shopping spree was noteworthy for being at the time "the largest clothing sale ever made in Minneapolis," keeping eight salesmen "busy from 2 o'clock till 9 o'clock" while they "fitted out the entire band in good American clothing."[28] Presumably, Director Encarnación Payén understood how, as part of a large group of nattily dressed Mexicans with musical instruments, well-fitted American-cut suits could help men of color in social situations while traveling to mostly white communities in the United States in the late nineteenth century.

The dazzling performances of the Eighth Cavalry Band in New Orleans resulted in positive public reviews on behalf of the Mexican state and likely counteracted at least some negative views about Mexico that were being printed, read, and understood in the United States. For the Columbian Exposition, the Mexican state attempted to shift away from the portrayals of a glorious non-Spanish Aztec past which marked their participation in the 1889 Paris Exposition. In Chicago, then, the Eighth Cavalry was to enchant audiences with European musical genres and energetic performances as they had in New Orleans. What more powerful way to defy narratives of conflict, unrest, and bandits than to send non-threatening, classically-trained military composers and musicians?

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[27] "AMUSEMENTS: MUSICAL. Concerts and Events of the Present Week," *The Enquirer*, June 28, 1885; "The Mexican Band - Leaves Fourteen Hundred and Ten Dollars of Minneapolis Money in Minneapolis;" Baron, *Concert Life in Nineteenth-Century New Orleans*, 473.

[28] "The Mexican Band - Leaves Fourteen Hundred and Ten Dollars of Minneapolis Money in Minneapolis."

Performing *Mexicanidad*: The Formality of the Eighth Regiment Cavalry Band and the *Rasquachismo* of the Traditional Mexican Orchestra

For "Mexico Day" on October 4th, 1893, the 52-member Mexican military band took the stage in spectacular fashion at the Exposition's Manufactures Hall.[29] While the original plan had been to celebrate Mexican Independence Day on its actual date of September 16th, officials postponed the celebration until October 4th to ensure the successful arrival of the highly-regarded "brass band of the Eighth Battalion of the Mexican Army," which was needed in Mexico City for the government's official Independence Day celebration.[30] Another newspaper excitedly announced that "the famous Mexican National Orchestra, which played at the New Orleans Exposition, and the Eighth Cavalry band are coming from Mexico with a party of high officers of State and Mexicans distinguished in private life."[31] Expectations were high, and much planning and diplomacy took place for the planned pageantry to officially celebrate Mexico at the Fair. Such a special commemoration was especially crucial since the Mexican government had opted not to spend the resources required to build a standalone national pavilion, a decision resulting at least in part from the silver crisis that came into full force by February 1893. The financial crash had gutted the Mexican government's finances and forced the cancellation of the glamourous Mexican exhibit originally planned for Chicago.[32] Unlike other Latin American

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[29] "THIS IS MEXICO DAY.: EIGHTH CAVALRY BAND TO PLAY AND A RECEPTION TO BE GIVEN.," *Chicago Daily Tribune* (1872-1922); Chicago, Ill., October 4, 1893. "The Famous Band a Feature at the Fair Yesterday," Pittsburgh Commercial Gazette, October 5, 1893.

[30] "World's Fair Brevities.," Chicago Daily Tribune (1872-1922); Chicago, Ill., September 16, 1893. The Eighth Mexican Cavalry Band became well-known in New Orleans at the 1884-1885 World's Industrial and Cotton Centennial Exposition as part of Mexico's participation.

[31] "Thronging to the Fair: Even on Sunday the Attendance Is Large Preparations to Draw Half a Million Sight. Seers Within the Gates on Chicago Day--Rhode Island's and Mexico's Days a Congress for Christian Young Men," *New - York Tribune* (1866-1899); New York, N.Y., October 2, 1893.

[32] Tenorio-Trillo, *Mexico at the World's Fairs*, Appendix, 262-263.

countries like Guatemala, Nicaragua, El Salvador, and Costa Rica, Mexico had no independent space of its own.[33]

The festivities for Mexico Day began with the orchestra's performance from 10 a.m. to noon at the clock-tower of the Manufactures Building, where officials from both the Exposition and Mexico engaged in a formal bilateral diplomatic exchange. The protocol, speeches, and formal agenda reflected an international meeting between governments. Representing Mexico was "Senor (sic) Don Miguel Serrano, Delegate General, and several members of the Mexican Commission" while National Commissioner Mark McDonald from Santa Rosa, California represented Exposition leadership.[34] Promptly at noon, the military band marched behind as the U.S. and Mexican commissioners walked to the Administration building where "Commissioner Serrano rang the Liberty Bell while the [Mexican] band played 'Star Spangled Banner.'"[35] National Commissioner McDonald gave "a welcome to the people of Mexico and assured them the interest they had taken in the Fair was highly appreciated." Commissioner Serrano responded with prepared remarks in Spanish, although it is unclear how many Spanish-speakers were present other than the band and fellow Mexican dignitaries. The final speaker was Thomas

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[33] See Rossiter Johnson, *A History of the World's Columbian Exposition Held in Chicago in 1893*, vol. 2 Departments (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1897), 363-5. According to Robert Rydell, beginning with the 1884 Cotton Exposition in New Orleans, there was a full-state effort to recruit Latin American countries to participate in U.S. world fairs as one way to open up Latin America's natural resources as new markets for U.S. investors. By the planning stages of the 1893 Columbian Exposition, the pressure to increase investments south of the border had only increased. As early as December 1, 1890 the Committee on Foreign Affairs of the National Commission met to approve a recruitment plan and requested from the President of the United States that Army and Naval officers be detailed to foreign governments so that they each be a direct conduit to the Chicago Exposition. On December 1, 1890 the Commission organized the Latin-America Bureau and headquartered it at No.2 Lafayette Square in Washington, DC across the street from the White House. A short month later, those government detailees became "attachés of the United States legations in the countries they were appointed to visit," and the President of the United States designated these attachés as special commissioners, giving them broad powers when interacting with foreign countries.

[34] Johnson, *A History of the World's Columbian Exposition Held in Chicago in 1893, Volume 1*, Narrative:472. Miguel Serrano had been the "head of public instruction in Mexico" according to "The Work of the Latin-American Department in Mexico," WCEI, Vol 2 No 5, p 68.

[35] "THIS IS MEXICO DAY." "MEXICANS CELEBRATE AT THE FAIR.: Eighth Cavalry Band Plays and Splendid Receptions Are Given.," *Chicago Daily Tribune* (1872-1922); Chicago, Ill., October 5, 1893.

Palmer, president of the Exposition committee, who finished the reception with a speech from the balcony, addressing the band below in the rotunda.[36]

These formal performances exemplified Porfirio Díaz' government's statecraft at work. Through cultural diplomacy, the Mexican state ably marketed its national products, resources, and modern image on Mexico Day. Beginning at 3pm, having presented their required "cards of invitation…for admission," attendees listened to Mexican musicians play in the Music Hall, enjoyed refreshments, and sipped on a planned 5,000 cups of Mexican coffee. Over a 1,000 invitations had been "issued to persons, including the State and foreign Commissioners and Exposition officials" for this festival at the Music Hall.[37] The event included an additional 500 individuals chosen to receive gift bags of coffee in Mexico's national colors of red, green, and white that included "a free distribution of Mexican coffee, not only in cups but in the berry, in small ornamental bags," while listening to the Mexican band's concert of classical European music.[38] Fireworks and more music capped the full-day festivities, with yet one more performance by the Mexican band and a "serenade of the Exposition officials in front of the Administration Building" after the fireworks display ended in the evening.[39]

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[36] "THIS IS MEXICO DAY." "MEXICANS CELEBRATE AT THE FAIR.: Eighth Cavalry Band Plays and Splendid Receptions Are Given.," *Chicago Daily Tribune* (1872-1922); Chicago, Ill., October 5, 1893.

[37] "TO GIVE AWAY 5,000 CUPS OF COFFEE.: That Is One of the Plans for Tomorrow, Mexico Day at the Fair.," *Chicago Daily Tribune* (1872-1922); Chicago, Ill., October 3, 1893.

[38] "THIS IS MEXICO DAY." Johnson, A History of the World's Columbian Exposition Held in Chicago in 1893, Volume 1, 452. "Official Report, Bureau of Music, World's Columbian Exposition" (1893), Unprocessed scrapbook, Special Collections, Newberry Library.

[39] "TO GIVE AWAY 5,000 CUPS OF COFFEE."“THIS IS MEXICO DAY."

Figure 9: Eighth Cavalry Mexican Band Performance, "Mexico Day," Music Hall, World's Columbian Exposition, October 4, 1893.

One can only imagine the sensory stimulation of seeing 52 serenading musicians and hearing the blended sounds of the big brass from the military marching band and those of an orchestra's wind instruments with the "unusual plucking method of playing the string bass."[40] The melded music came from two traditions: the first was from military marching bands used in the Mexican state's public pageantry, and the second from the *orquesta típica mexicana*, which had been formed to showcase the European musical taste of Mexico City's bourgeoisie with

[40] Stewart, "The Mexican Band Legend - Part II."

elements of regional Mexican music, and created a combined sound that was striking and memorable.[41]

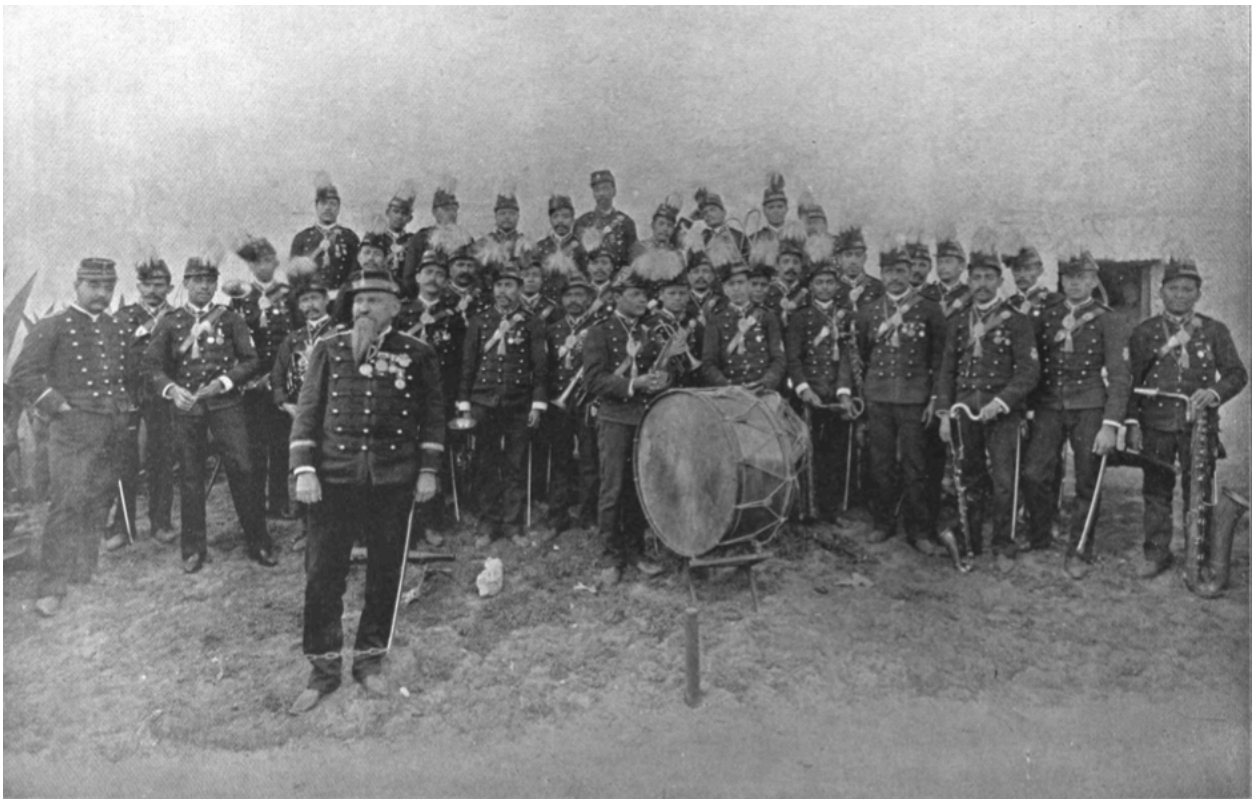

Figure 10: Captain Encarnación Payén and the Eighth Cavalry Mexican Band, World's Columbian Exposition, 1893.

Perhaps the sustained success of the Mexican military band can be credited to Captain Payén's direction of the ensemble. Payén's consistency in musical leadership, his knowledge of international touring that included Spain and the United States, and having been named Minister of the National Conservatory in Mexico upon his triumphant first return from New Orleans may have offered his students stable pedagogy in both musical training and performance skills. There is no complete roster of the touring military band, but the number of musicians generally

[41] While the literal translation is "typical Mexican orchestra" and is often described as such, there was nothing typical in the early 1880s about mastering Italian, French, and German operas while also learning to play several instruments and being invited to tour internationally as a member of the *orquesta típica mexicana*. Only the very talented were selected by the National Conservatory and joined the touring orchestras.

remained at 40, expanding on occasion to as many as 75.[42] For the October performance in Chicago 1893, the number of Mexican musicians totaled 52, which likely resulted from combining the Eighth Cavalry military band with the twelve members of the *orquesta típica mexicana*. But who were these twelve orchestral musicians, and why had they arrived in Chicago separate from a Mexican diplomatic delegation?

This small string orchestra's journey to Chicago included performances on and off the fairgrounds. The *orquesta típica mexicana* showcased a different style of music from the military band, operating largely as a string ensemble playing popular dances and light overtures rather than parade marches.[43] The orchestra had initially begun a set of stage performances at Chicago's Marlowe Theatre on Sunday, May 22, about a 40-minute walk to the nearest Midway Plaisance entrance. They encountered problems, however, from opening night due to a lack of attendance and newspaper coverage, likely due to its distance from the city center as well as from the Exposition.[44] The orchestra's on-stage performances at the Marlowe closed early, much to the chagrin of Mexico City reporter Julio Paulat, who observed that "the orchestra had abandoned the theater for lack of resources."[45]

Following the failure at the Marlowe Theatre, the orchestra obtained a contract with the Concert Garden and Restaurant in the Captive Balloon Park on the Midway Plaisance, where an observer reported that "popular airs are rendered throughout the day and evening by a Mexican

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[42] Stewart, "The Mexican Band Legend - Part II." "Signor Payen: His Band of Inimitable Mexican Musicians," *The Atlanta Constitution* (1881-1945); Atlanta, Ga., October 7, 1891.

[43] J.S. Roberts, *The Latin Tinge: The Impact of Latin American Music in the United States*, 2nd ed. (Oxford University Press, 1999), 19.

[44] Juan Alvarez-Coral, Juventino Rosas (México, D. F.: B. Costa-Amic, 1972), 46–47. According to Cinematreasures.org, the Timmerman Grand Opera House reopened as the Marlowe Theatre in 1892 and met with controversy surrounding its Sunday shows.

[45] Helmut Brenner, *Juventino Rosas: His Life, His Work, His Time* (Warren, Mich: Harmonie Park Press, 2000); Alvarez-Coral, Juventino Rosas, 48.

orchestra."[46] As the now stage-less Mexican orchestra moved to perform at the Midway Plaisance June 9th, Mexican journalist Paulat explained to readers back home that appearing at the "Midway Plaisance Café" was not unusual since even the military bands of Germany and the Hungarian orchestras give concerts in breweries/beer gardens!"[47] Paulet implied that while the *orquesta típica mexicana* deserved an attentive audience and a formal stage on which to perform, Mexico City readers should not be alarmed by reports of the orchestra's decision to move its performances to a Midway Plaisance eatery, since even European orchestras performed for thirsty patrons in beer gardens. This news report documents the first description of a Mexican music ensemble hired to perform at an eating establishment in the United States, which set the precedent for the tradition of early twentieth century mariachi band performance in Mexico City commercial establishments.[48]

On the Midway, the string orchestra's performances was organic and outside the official cultural diplomatic relations between the U.S. and Mexico taking place in the White City. Another news report described the Mexican orchestra on the Midway by announcing the opening of "the Hungarian restaurant, roof garden, and theater at the east end of the plaisance" on June 5th, emphasizing that the Mexican orchestra was "among the attractions" along with "Irma Ligeti, a Hungarian vocalist."[49] Whether it was with the Hungarians or at the Captive Balloon Café

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[46] M. P. Handy, ed., *Official Catalogue: Exhibits on the Midway Plaisance Part XVII* (Chicago: W. B. Conkey Company, 1893), 32. Rossiter Johnson, *A History of the World's Columbian Exposition Held in Chicago in 1893, Volume 3: Exhibits* (D. Appleton and Co., 1898), 444.

[47] Alvarez-Coral, Juventino Rosas, 48. [Translation mine.]

[48] The first musical ensemble hired in a dining establishment in Mexico City is an *orquesta típica mexicana* in 1904 at the San Carlos restaurant. Its popularity began a flurry of Mexico City restaurants hiring musical groups the following year. See Medina Miranda, "Los Charros En España y México. Estereotipos Ganaderos y Violencia Lúdica," 232.

[49] "Plaisance Is Filled: Street of Nations Deserted Only During Showers," *Chicago Daily Tribune* (1872-1922); Chicago, Ill., June 5, 1893.

Garden, the Mexican orchestra performed without political or financial allegiance to any one location in the Midway, and instead pursued a pragmatic and survivalist course of action.[50]

Under the direction of bandleader Julio Camacho, the Mexican orchestra had achieved international prestige and prominence. However, it was not Camacho who stole the headlines in Chicago but rather a talented violinist named Juventino Rosas. Significantly, Rosas represented the opposite of what military band leader Captain Encarnación Payén espoused. As the director of the Eighth Regiment Cavalry Mexican Band and Minister of Music for the Mexican government, Payén was the embodiment of official Mexican statecraft, whose rank and status and modern military musical style was key to the Porfirian state's experiment in cultured bourgeoisie and international diplomacy. By contrast, Rosas was 25 years old and a native indigenous Mexican – said to be a "pure Otomi Indian."[51] He flittered from one ensemble to the next, sometimes every month, and was perennially broke. Whether his peripatetic ways resulted from alcoholism, heartbreak, or both, the Mexican public whispered rumors about his personal life. In 1888, an admirer had gifted Rosas a German grand piano but Rosas found himself forced to sell it to cover basic living expenses.[52]

Like many tragic music stars, Juventino Rosas burned bright and fast. Within a year of his triumph in Chicago, Rosas passed away at the age of 26 while on tour in Cuba. Rosas' legacy rests with his composition at age 22 of one of the most famous waltzes in the world "*Sobre las*

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[50] Shared musical traditions may also have contributed to the fellowship as Czech and Hungarian musical traditions such as polkas, waltzes, and mazurkas had been incorporated into the Mexican repertoire with the founding of the *orquesta típica* at the Mexican Conservatory as a result of the Hapsburg occupation of Mexico, bringing to Mexico not just French and Austrian soldiers and cultural influence, but those of Austria's colonies as well.

[51] Brenner, *Juventino Rosas*; Helmut Brenner, "La Obra de Juventino Rosas: Un Acercamiento Musicológico," *Latin American Music Review / Revista de Música Latinoamericana* 16, no. 1 (1995): 58–77.

[52] Teresa Magdanz, "'Sobre Las Olas': Cultural Synecdoche of the Past," *Journal of the Society for American Music*; Cambridge, England 1, no. 3 (August 2007): 305.

olas."[53] His masterwork is known to orchestras, dancers, and circusgoers around the world, where it is the signature music of the trapeze artists. *"Sobre las olas"* is recognizable today upon hearing the first few bars because the Wurlitzer calliope organ company included the piece in its programmed music for circuses and fairgrounds in the wake of the Exposition.[54] Indeed, a news article from Chicago describes Rosas not as a member of the orchestra, but as "a famous Mexican composer."[55] It was the waltz "*Sobre las olas*" that elated audiences wherever it was played and won Rosas one of the four medals he received at the Columbian Exposition for his compositions. In the last photograph taken before his untimely death, Rosas proudly wears all four medals from the Exposition on his *charro* suit.[56]

The comparison between the two men is worthwhile because Rosas trained with Payén in Morelia, Mexico, at the National Conservatory and likely traveled to New Orleans in 1884 as an original member of Payén's military band for the International Cotton Exposition. Yet, far from becoming a government Minister, or even a non-commissioned officer in the army, the talented Rosas left the Conservatory twice without finishing his final exams, and stories about his dire economic circumstances imply a perpetual problem with finances which may have gained popular currency given Mexican upper-class assumptions about race and indigenous communities. Unlike upper-class Mexican audiences who would have been keenly aware of Rosas' indigeneity even as they celebrated his talent as a prodigy of the Conservatory, American

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[53] The audio segment of Rosas' waltz that is the most well-known musical theme for circuses around the globe begins at :41; it is linked here: https://youtu.be/N2YvhEv7ykM.

[54] Leon (Organist) Berry, Circus Calliope Music (New York: Audio Fidelity, 1960), Historical sound recordings, Irving S. Gilmore Music Library, Yale University.

[55] "Plaisance Is Filled: Street of Nations Deserted Only During Showers."

[56] Brenner, "La Obra de Juventino Rosas"; Brenner, *Juventino Rosas*; Alvarez-Coral, *Juventino Rosas*.

observers did not appear to have made such distinctions about him or his fellow musicians, who seem to have simply seen as Mexican and foreign.

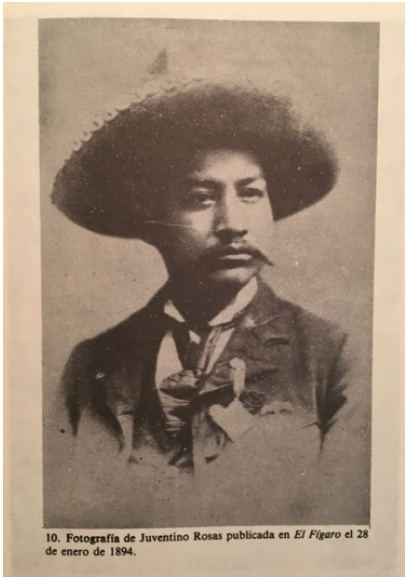

Figure 11: Published photograph of Juventino Rosas, dressed in a *charro* suit and pinned with Columbian Exposition medals, January, 1894.

Noteworthy in accounts of Rosas' life are his work ethic and musical genius. Although trained as a violinist, he had the ability to play different instruments as needed with various ensembles, on different tours and engagements. At the Conservatory, Rosas was trained in vocal and piano instruction as well as musical theory, giving him the foundation to work with different musical styles. An indigenous talent from a rural town, taught at the most elite school in the country, Rosas learned to blend traditional Mexican music and the most sophisticated European compositions.[57] One can imagine the code switching and resiliency that the young Juventino learned when taken from his family and placed into the formal academy. Indigenous and mestizo alike, Rosas and the other working class musical prodigies at the Conservatory existed in their own borderlands, caught between respectable modern urban Mexico and the folk tradition of the

[57] Alvarez-Coral, *Juventino Rosas*; Brenner, "La Obra de Juventino Rosas"; Brenner, *Juventino Rosas*.

countryside they had left behind. The coping skills of this liminality would be critical for his concerts at the Exposition – performances that required stepping down from a formal stage to improvisation in public spaces filled with audiences from radically different backgrounds and cultures. Whether it was outdoor performances on the Midway Plaisance, or concerts in the large halls and structures like the Women's Building, the Manufactures Building, or Music Hall, Rosas and the *orquesta típica* adapted to their physical surroundings, inevitably shaping their shows while considering account acoustics, performance space, and audience size. Adaptability was key.

Mobilizing *Mexicanidad*: Musicians On the Go

A cultural marker of Mexican mariachis is their ability to perform *ad hoc* while moving from one space to another with their instruments in exchange for compensation and tips. The tradition of hired Mexican ensembles with their portable instruments in large delineated public spaces such as restaurants or fairgrounds, and performing for continually changing paid audiences, and as described above developed for the first time in the United States on the Midway Plaisance at the Chicago Exposition.

The story of the *orquesta típica* is a story of mobility, adaptation, and *rasquachismo*. Having faced a failed run at the Marlowe theater, the unmoored orchestra, no matter how renowned, classically trained, or recognized in Mexico City, adapted to the reality that there was no pavilion, no building, nor stage representing the country of Mexico at the Exposition that may have produced employment opportunities. While they procured a contract in Spring 1893 for performance on the Midway Plaisance, the orchestra sought more work opportunities.[58]

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[58] M. P. Handy, Official Catalogue: United States Government Building Part XVI, 32 (Chicago: W. B. Conkey Company, 1893).

Intervening on behalf of the orchestra, James W. Ellsworth, a wealthy Chicago businessman who sat on the Exposition's Board of Directors and was the Chairman of the Liberal Arts and Music Committee, wrote to Musical Director Theodore Thomas at the Bureau of Music requesting an audition for the Mexican musicians. Thomas granted the favor. After hearing three selections from the orchestra, however, Thomas resolutely decided he "did not see his way to recommending making any engagement with them" in his response to Ellsworth's request.[59] Was the selection of music an issue with Thomas? Did he have pre-conceived notions about popular music? Ironically, Rosas and his colleagues had trained in European musical genres at the National Conservatory of Music, from whence they founded the first *orquesta típica mexicana* in 1884.[60] As we shall see, it is likely that Thomas' narrow definition of acceptable orchestral music may have been the reason to deny them the opportunity for inclusion in the official music program of the Columbian Exposition.

While this was a setback, their popularity led them to perform in less formal settings, special events, or as guests of Exposition committees. The Board of Lady Managers, for example retained the Mexican orchestra to play receptions and special events at the Women's Building at various occasions.[61] At another performance in the large Manufactures Hall, a Cuban news chronicler witnessed "40,000 to 50,000 people deliriously applauding and shouting 'hurrahs' to Mexico and Rosas."[62] On October 25th, and three weeks after "Mexico Day," the string orchestra

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[59] "Incoming Correspondence, George H. Wilson," June 1, 1893, Box 11, folder 33, James W. Ellsworth Collection, Chicago Public Library.

[60] Manuel Peña, "From Ranchero to Jaitōn: Ethnicity and Class in Texas-Mexican Music (Two Styles in the Form of a Pair)," *Ethnomusicology* 29, no. 1 (1985): 37.

[61] "Approved Official Minutes, Sixth Session of the Board of Lady Managers of the World Columbian Commission," November 31, 1893, 180, General collection, Newberry Library.

[62] Hugo Barreiro Lastra, *Los días cubanos de Juventino Rosas, Nuestra Cultura* (Guanajuato, Mexico: Gobierno del Estado de Guanajuato, 1994), 29. [Translation mine].

performed again in celebration of the "Marine Transportation Day." In the morning, a parade of national boats manned by their countryman sailed past spectators and in the afternoon, the "floats were anchored in the Grand Basin and a class of forty little girls dressed as sailor lads went through a programme of dances to the music of a Mexican orchestra."[63] In all these performances, the *orquesta típica* performed at non-Mexican events outside of Mexican diplomatic circles, and yet, through their performance, they added to the visual narratives of *mexicanidad* at the fair.

As with these performances, some of the musicians' performances were carefully scheduled, but others were spontaneous. The orchestra's talent and training allowed them to mobilize their skills in multiple settings, including ad-hoc music jams with other international musicians on the Midway Plaisance. An observer described a scene which took place well after Exposition had closed down for the night: one evening well past midnight at the German village, "a wild sort of dance" broke out after the café tables had been pushed aside. As the "Mexican band was wailing its last sad strains and the big hats of the performers nodded with night-old weariness," one by one, revelers "caught the spirit" and as many as fifty of them jumped to dance "about the tables and trees in the garden." The festive atmosphere continued as "here and there a woman," the observer continues, "a partner of one of the men, would join in the dance, balancing as if in a quadrille, walking around as if in a plantation hurly or swinging in a weird attempt at a waltz" – a reference to both the music playing as well as to a dance not recognized

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[63] Johnson, *A History of the World's Columbian Exposition Held in Chicago in 1893, Volume 1*, Narrative:461.

or seen before – the *jarabe tapatío*, the national dance of Mexico which came to be known to American audiences as the 'the Mexican hat dance.'[64]

The described "wild dance" continued with "cries of 'Hi-Yi' and 'Faster' by the men who stood to one side and patted their hands for a wilder diversion." The festivities continued despite the "spasm of impatience on the part of management" and only "stopped when the big Mexicans, tipping their broad, high hats over the eyes, bundled up their instruments and descended from the platform."[65] Such reverie mirrors the excitement and response from audiences earlier in the summer to the *jarabe tapatío* at both the Marlowe Theater and at the Midway's Hungarian restaurant, when 10-year-old dancer Manuelita received accolades for her superb dancing.[66]

This scene on the Midway Plaisance is perhaps one of many that occurred at the less-curated section of the Exposition, a cultural borderland where workers from different nations employed on the Plaisance inevitably saw each other every day and the Fair took on a life of its own outside of the formal national pavilions of the "White City." While the Hungarian restaurant with roof gardens and a theater contracted with the Mexican orchestra, it may very well have been a shared love of waltzes and polkas that brought the Mexicans and their instruments to perform at the German village on that August evening.

These Mexican musicians adjusted to the circumstances of the Exposition and in the process created a new kind of performance: musical *rasquachismo.* The creation of a dynamic and popular musical product resulted from a need to find performance space in the absence of

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[64] "Midway at Midnight: Pleasures of the Plaisance," *Courier-Journal* (1869-1922); Louisville, Ky., August 20, 1893. Before arriving in Chicago, Juventino Rosas toured with a musical group and performed in Corpus Christi and Nashville. The show included a young performer named Manuelita who danced the show stopping *Jarabe Tapatío*, anticipating the now-standard use of that dance as the culminating performance of *Ballet Foklórico* shows.

[65] "Midway at Midnight: Pleasures of the Plaisance."

[66] "Plaisance Is Filled: Street of Nations Deserted Only During Showers." "La Orquesta de Juventino Rosas," *El Universal En Chicago*, May 31, 1893.

official engagements; engage receptive audiences; a festive mood to fit their musical style; and a generally safe and semi-private space where spectators rewarded and exalted their performance. In this case, similar to much of jazz improvisation, the after-hours performance that was noteworthy enough to be covered by the press was not even for fairgoers, but for other musicians and entertainers employed at the Midway Plaisance. This *rasquache* attitude of survival and inventiveness of these Mexicans in America not only stood as a joyous counterpoint to the official desires of the Mexican state to exhibit a formal modernity, but also stands in anticipation of both modern-day mariachi performance and Chicano art based on the outsider's need to make do. As Ybarra-Frausto observes, *rasquachismo* is found where "the success and rewards of this behavior … continues to sharpen the chicano sensibility" and it is this behavioral factor which compelled Juventino Rosas and his companion musicians to adjust to the Exposition's environment. With a sensibility of survival and inventiveness, this group of musicians created a new genre of Mexican musical performance based on a mix of impromptu and paid public performances, away from a formal stage with unscheduled performances, and as we shall see, by sporting the newly-emerging national Mexican attire of the *charro* suit that the Porfirian state sought to establish as a worthy alternative to the formal dress uniforms of European cavalries.[67]

In addition, Juventino Rosas's own experience with poverty while growing up in Mexico City exemplifies a "lived reality" embracing a working class sensibility. As a child, the prodigy Rosas played violin with his family's musical group to attract customers' attention and entice them to purchase treats from street vendors, a far cry from the serious confines of the National

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[67] While Ybarra-Frausto theory emerges in the historicity of the modern-day Chicano movement, I argue the notion of survivalism and "ganas" comes to a head in Anglo-American and Mexican intersections/points of contrast/conflict whether it be cultural, political, or performative contexts, which predates the politicized use of the word "Chicano" of the 1960s. Indeed, Ybarra-Frausto gives the example of the performances of "peladitos" of the 1930s to demonstrate how rasquachismo is about a 'chicano sensibility,' Ybarra-Frausto, Rasquachismo: A Chicano Sensibility.

Conservatory and the bourgeois aspirations of the Porfirian elite.[68] Certainly what Rosas and the other musicians experienced in Chicago was a vastly different theatrical environment, but unique circumstances forced them to be "resourceful and adaptive yet mindful of stance and style."[69] The duality of Rosas' musical lives, straddling middle-class respectability and individual resiliency, enabled him and the orchestra to turn the failure of the Marlowe stand into a success with an unexpected legacy. One social current that suited – and demanded -- the musicians' adaptability was a fundamental change in popular tastes that upended the Exposition's musical programming in August of 1893 and transformed the production and consumption of music in American mass culture – the sudden explosion of "popular" music.

In navigating the dual worlds of the Midway and White City, the Mexican orchestra was on the leading edge of an unprecedented change in U.S. entertainment culture, which increasingly demanded alternatives to military marches and classical concerts. After the 1893 Fair, *popular* live music became a veritable standard, and audiences demanded music that was public, accessible, and fun. The Exposition hastened that generational shift in musical tastes and how it was consumed.[70]

Music played a democratizing role on the Midway Plaisance, for it added a festive quality to the atmosphere in a gated space where spectators had paid a daily fee to enjoy the sights and sounds unique to the Exposition. The Midway offered atmospheric music for all. In the structured section of the "White City," the entrance fee of fifty cents included "popular presentations" available in the morning which drew upwards to 3,500 spectators. In addition,

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[68] For a summary of Rosas' early life, see Brenner, *Juventino Rosas*.

[69] Ybarra-Frausto, *Rasquachismo: A Chicano Sensibility*.

[70] Sandy R Mazzola, "When Music Is Labor: Chicago Bands and Orchestras and the Origins of the Chicago Federation of Musicians, 1880-1902" (Ph.D., Northern Illinois University, 1984).

formal orchestral concerts, "often including a full symphony," played in the afternoon, often lasted longer than an hour, and required an additional fee of one dollar to attend, twice as much as the entrance fee itself. Due to lack of attendance, the symphonic concert series failed miserably.[71]

By the end of August, Exposition officials had cancelled Theodore Thomas' symphonic series because quite simply, fairgoers had chosen free band concerts all over the fairgrounds over paid musical symphonies – "popular culture" had taken over "high culture." The music department that had passed on hiring the *orquesta típica mexicana* in late May, suddenly faced a collapse of its entire musical program by late mid-summer. Reluctantly, Director Thomas decided to replace its symphonic series with popular and well-known, brass-heavy troupes such as "the Iowa State Band, the Stonewall Brigade Band of Virginia, the Eighth Regiment of Mexican Cavalry, and the Elgin Band" to add performances and fill in the gaps in musical entertainment.[72] Quite simply, fairgoers had chosen to attend free band concerts over paid musical symphonies. This change in the musical line-ups at the Exposition transformed two things in American entertainment: the permanent role of popular music as an included aspect of paid amusements, and the increased interaction between spectators and music in public entertainment.

In this milieu of everyday fun, spectators chose what kind of music to enjoy and which live music to pay (or not pay), shaping the musical environment of the Exposition. Facing the need for employment after no longer having a Chicago stage, the Mexican orchestra adapted to the unique circumstances of the Exposition, both on the Midway and in the White City. They did

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[71] Sandy R. Mazzola, "Bands and Orchestras at the World's Columbian Exposition," *American Music* 4, no. 4 (1986): 412.

[72] Mazzola, 416.

not have access to a national pavilion anywhere on the fairgrounds like the German and Hungarian musical troupes. Nor did they hold any formal support of the Mexican state upon which their Eighth Regiment Cavalry colleagues could count. As a result, the Mexican musicians took every opportunity to perform. Functioning in a liminal space constrained of stage and sponsorship, they ably aligned with their audiences' desire for an enjoyable experience rather than musical education. In the vein of *rasquachismo*, the Mexican orchestra performed together in impromptu scenes, obtained new contracts for musical performances, and adapted their Midway concerts at the Hungarian and German villages with the polkas, mazurkas, and waltzes learned at the Mexican National Musical Conservatory, all the while presenting their *mexicanidad* in the form of Mexican music and performance to eager consumers. Resiliency and resourcefulness shaped their success. But as with most popular music, their success did not come only from luck, hard work, or even the quality and popularity of their songs. Audiences were also drawn to their unique blend of fashion and attitude. As we shall see, coverage of the musicians' attire continually made headlines.

Sartorial Choice and the "Mexican Dandy"

Throughout the orchestra's stay in Chicago, amidst their paid musical performances and spontaneous Midway concerts, two recurring themes struck observers about the ensemble: One, the unique sound of the musical compositions and; Two, the design, cut, and look of the musicians' attire from head to toe. Gendered comments ranged from labeling the musicians as a "Mexican dandy" due to their attire, to critiques of the Mexican sombrero as being overly decorative and effeminate. As one official description stated, with sombreros costing "as high as $100 and upward...no article of his apparel receives so much critical attention from the Mexican

as his sombrero."[73] The string orchestra wore identical *charro* suits, with shiny silver tabs down the side of each pantleg, and detailed embroidery edging the seams of their bolero jackets. They had a consistently well-groomed look. The cost, the embellishment, and the tailoring were distinctive sartorial details that continually distinguished these cultural envoys on the Exposition fairgrounds. But, if the *orquesta típica mexicana* was not officially part of Mexico's diplomatic effort at the Exposition, why did the string orchestra perform in the now-iconic Mexican national emblem of the *charro* suit? What was the meaning of the *charro* suit in Mexico, and how did that differ from the discursive meaning at the Exposition?

Here again statecraft led to stagecraft. Wearing the *charro* suit for musical performances first began at the 1884 Cotton Exposition in New Orleans when the first *orquesta típica mexicana* traveled to debut an innovative style of Mexican music that blended different Mexican regional music into one synthesized sound. The goal has been to convey a single unified sound to foreign countries that was distinctly Mexican. Under Díaz, the Mexican government financed the recruitment and training of the original *orquesta típica mexicana* at the Mexican National Conservatory of Music specifically to prepare for its New Orleans debut.[74] The Mexican government attired the string orchestra with charro suits to ensure *mexicanidad* was consistent at home and abroad. This was statecraft at work.[75]

Porfirio Díaz and his circle used the *charro* suit to symbolize a unified country under the rule of law and free of extreme violence, and through the string orchestra, did so with cultural

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[73] William Cameron, *The World's Fair, Being a Pictorial History of The Columbian Exposition* (Chicago, Ill: Chicago Publication & Lithograph Co., 1893), 624.

[74] Medina Miranda, "Los Charros En España y México. Estereotipos Ganaderos y Violencia Lúdica," 231.

[75] The state had utilized the charro suit already to clothe the *Rurales* – the rural national police force of Mexico by the 1880s. In the next chapter we shall see how the charro suit represented *mexicanidad* in wild west shows due to its link with horsemanship skills.

panache to boot. Anthropologist Olga Najera-Ramirez writes that President Díaz took "special interest in cultivating the *charro*" during his dictatorship, and between 1876 and 1910, the "*charro* image became thoroughly integrated with the ideas of manhood, nationhood, and power."[76] The official *charro* suit soon represented the Porfiriato's notions of upper-class horsemanship (such as roping and riding skills), and the state began to implement the costume into its burgeoning Euro-centric cultural performance spaces, such as the *orquesta típica* in which Juventino Rosas began his career in 1884. This distinctly Mexican image of the *charro* came to represent the brave, skilled, and talented Mexican man (both in music and in horsemanship) to international audiences. Like European fashion's appropriation of cavalry garb into menswear, presenting the formal *charro* suit as a symbol of *mexicanidad* was a not-so subtle reference as to where the Porfiriato's power rested – in the thousands of armed vaqueros who made up the corps of light cavalry at the disposal of the large landowners who supported the regime.

The culture clash between this state-mandated *charro* image and the *rasquachismo* of musical superstar Juventino Rosas and his stranded string orchestra in the contested borderlands of the Chicago Columbian Exposition is truly where statecraft mutated into stagecraft. A strolling Mexican band of twelve emerged in American popular amusement to the largest international audience in world history, playing one of the most popular songs of all time, appearing to millions of fairgoers in form-fitting suits glittering with silver trim. While '*Sobre las olas'* was a waltz rather than a military march, and the small orchestra included not just

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[76] Olga Nájera-Ramírez, "Engendering Nationalism: Identity, Discourse, and the Mexican Charro," *Anthropological Quarterly* 67, no. 1 (1994): 4.

strings but also musicians with smaller horns such as the cornet, this traditional Mexican orchestra anticipated the musical Mexican style of twentieth century mariachis.

Another unexpected consequence of the stylized musical *charro* at the Exposition were the gendered descriptions in popular discourse. In a standard collection of photographs from the Fair, a visual reference to "a Mexican dandy" appeared under the title of "Other Types of the Midway." A series of photographs identify six subjects from the Midway Plaisance with the descriptions reading from top left to right bottom: "A girl from the Himalayan country; a Corean (sic) young man and girl; and Egyptian donkey boy; and Indian scout; two young Javanese girls and a Mexican dandy."[77] The "dandy" in the image wore fitted pants with a slight flair at the bottom with silver decorations down the seams of each pantleg, a shorter jacket with a snug fit, a cravat and a gold chain, all topped with a wide-brimmed sombrero with its edge decorated all around with accent stitching. In the caption, unlike in at least one other photograph in which he appears, the musician was not described as a Mexican musician, but only as a "dandy" – likely due to the photographer's opinions as to his sartorial choice. Indeed, unlike the rustic images of the other individuals printed on the same page without any editorial comment, it was the "Mexican dandy," who stood straight in a self-assured pose and in a striking suit.

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[77] James William Buel, *The Magic City: A Portfolio of Original Photographic Views of the Great World's Fair and Its Treasures of Art, Including a Vivid Representation of the Famous Midway Plaisance*, vol. 1 (Historical Publishing Company, 1894).

Figure 12: "Other Types of the Midway," *The Magic City: A Portfolio of Original Photographic Views of the Great World's Fair and Its Treasures of Art,* Beinecke Library, Yale University.

The official photographer for the Exposition was C.D. Arnold, and the entire collection of photographs of 'Midway types' appears to have been taken in a studio with set design and a painted background. For the image of the Mexican in a *charro* suit, perhaps the photographer saw too much confidence, too much embellishment, or both, for he chose to title the Mexican performer a "dandy" as opposed to a "musician." While we may not know the reason why this image titled "Mexican dandy" was chosen for publication, we do know that C.D. Arnold held back a different image of another individual, also in a *charro* suit, and with a brass instrument

like a cornet, posing next to a music stand. In albums totaling over 1,200 images, he hand-wrote the reference title in ink: "Mexican Musician, Midway Plaisance."[78]

Figure 13: "Mexican Musician, Midway Plaisance 1893," Special Collections, Chicago Public Library.

Even without knowing the reasons for them, these decisions played a role in how visual discourses may have shaped long-lasting narratives. For the thousands of readers of an Exposition magazine serial, the 'Mexican dandy' title delivered a feminized description of a

[78] "Mexican Musician, Midway Plaisance, 1893," C.D. Arnold Photographic Collection, Vol 10, Plate 82, Special Collections, Chicago Public Library.

poised Mexican band member in fancy and decorative attire. The meaning of an individual wearing the national suit of Mexico went unchecked to hundreds of thousands souvenir collectors. In the context of nothing more than Exposition memorabilia, the visual of the Mexican dandy conveyed the meaning that men and women of color were racially inferior because of their strange clothing and non-white skin. By adding the gendered title of 'dandy,' the context further feminized the young Mexican musician due to his iconic *charro* suit. While this is only one example, the continual feminization of men of color reified the larger narratives of masculinity and white supremacy embedded at the Fair.[79] Publishers printed over 600 souvenir and photographic collections during and after the Fair, distributing biased and racialized imagery to millions of souvenir buyers around the world.[80]

In one issue of the weekly mailer *Vistas of the Fair in Color: A Portfolio of Familiar Views at the World's Columbian Exposition* there is a water color of a Mexican in a *charro* suit, swathed in a shade of royal blue, casually speaking with a woman attired in what seems to be a Hungarian national costume.[81] The two stand chatting on the steps next to the "Statue of Industry" surrounding the Court of Honor in the White City; the *charro* has the silver adornment running down the side of his pants and wears the conical, highly-decorated sombrero. As the only non-black and white image of a Mexican musician identified from thousands of images, the

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[79] Another example of 'dandifying' men of color to deny them the privilege of white masculinity appears in nineteenth century minstrel shows where the racist character and dandy Zip Coon looms large as an over-confident black man who attempts to dress nattily but can only achieve mismatched sartorial choices. The dandy trope reappears in the Zoot-Suit Riots of 1940s Los Angeles where, driven by white supremacy and racism against young men of color, outright attacks and bodily harm to Latino and black youth centered on their sartorial choices. This reoccurring trope points to a pattern of denying men of color power and access to the American body politic by coding them as racially different while gendering them as feminine in relation to white American masculinity.

[80] Robert Christopher Reed, *"All the World Is Here!": The Black Presence at White City* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002), xxix.

[81] Moses P. Handy, "'Statue of Industry' in Vistas of the Fair In Color: A Portfolio of Familiar Views of the World's Columbian Exposition" (Chicago, 1894), 1893 World's Columbian Exposition Collection, Field Museum.

unusual royal blue color worn by this performer historicizes one of the several bright colors worn by performers representing Mexico at formal affairs beginning in the late nineteenth century.[82]

Figure 14: Mexican *charro* in "Statue of Industry,"
World's Columbian Exposition Collection, Field Museum.

The many bright colors of the *charro* suit, however, became upsetting to the Mexican state in the industrialized modern era. Olga Najera-Ramirez writes that when the National Charro Association organized in the 1921 in the aftermath of the Revolution, the *charro* code "forbade the use of bright colors, specifically royal blue, yellow, purple, and pinks. Presumably such colors were deemed too ranchero, or unsophisticated, and insufficiently masculine for the

[82] Nájera-Ramírez, "Engendering Nationalism: Identity, Discourse, and the Mexican Charro."

image."[83] The bright royal blue color, a marker of the bright colors of Mexican indigeneity and introduced by Rosas and his colleagues to U.S. and international audiences in 1893 in Chicago, was no longer acceptable thirty years later to official Mexico, erasing bright colors from performance spaces. And while the *charro* code would continually evolve throughout the twentieth century, the code insisted on somber colors not just for horsemen who performed in the ring, but also required mariachi attire to appear "more elegant and manly." By the 1930s, the Charro Association concluded that fabric colors that were not confined to a narrowly acceptable dark palette did not fit the masculine optics of the Mexican national icon.[84] For the Mexican state, the colorful stagecraft of musicians and exuberant horsemen had to be tamed into a formal, muted color palate.

Today, the *charro* suit represents the Mexican male national icon, symbolizing a unified nationhood rather than any one administration, social class, or even time period. It is worn by mariachi musicians and singers as well as the skilled horsemen who perform in Mexican rodeo events called *charreadas* in both the United States and Mexico.[85] All are performances about *mexicanidad*, highlighting distinct cultural aspects about Mexican culture. Today, while still bedecked with silver trim and wire braid, mariachis and *charros* mostly wear muted tones such as beige, white, brown, grey, and black – not the electric blue of the watercolor image staged at the Court of Honor in 1893.

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[83] Olga Najera-Ramirez, 6.

[84] The symbolism of the *charro* as the image of Mexico, so desired by Porfirio Diaz, was realized by the revolutionaries who overthrew him and his technocratic government. After the Revolution, *charro* performances were often choreographed with references to Francisco Villa's Army of the North, with *charros* seen as the cavalry of the revolution, rather than the quasi-official government troops that Diaz intended. It was the post-revolution governments who empowered the *charro* associations to require only somber, less expressive, and thus more masculine fabrics.

[85] Laura Barraclough, *Charros: How Mexican Cowboys Are Remapping Race and American Identity*, American Crossroads (Oakland: University of California Press, 2019).

Conclusion

At the 1893 Columbian Exhibition, unmoored from their formal engagement, the small troupe of Mexican musicians who made up the *orquesta típica mexicana* demonstrated a resilience that embodied the qualities of opportunity and the "will to continue" embedded in the Chicano concept of *rasquachismo*, performing out of necessity and in the liminal spaces of popular entertainment, not in furtherance of the Mexican state's agenda.[86] The success of an entertainer depends on playing to what the paying audience wants, and unlike in multicultural New Orleans nine years before, few U.S. observers in Chicago appeared to value the *orquesta típica* for their musicianship as much as for their rollicking spirit and flashy dress – attributes that made them popular but also relegated them to the non-serious spaces reserved for dandies and foreign, non-threatening entertainers. Even as the musicians of the *orquesta típica* successfully navigated the Midway Plaisance and wowed the crowds, the musical genius of Juventino Rosas was largely overlooked by revelers, who simply wanted to enjoy the Fair. No matter their popularity with fairgoers, the *orquesta típica* had been feminized in the gendered descriptions of Exposition memorabilia and official records, while racialized sartorial descriptions about the string orchestra wearing *charro* suits confirmed an understanding that ethnic Mexicans in the United States likely had no place in the American polity.

In the cultural borderlands of the Chicago World's Fair, both official and informal narratives of *mexicanidad* intersected with those of white supremacy and frames of race and gender in ways that denied non-white individuals entry into the American national narrative. Whether in the entertainment fora of the Midway Plaisance or in any one of the great halls of the

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[86] Similarly, current Chicano cultural and political commentator John Paul Brammer writes of adaptive tactics in the modern era, "I'm from a Mexican family. Stop expecting me to eat "authentic" food," *Washington Post*, May 20, 2019.

White City's national and industrial pavilions, this could be accomplished by terms of engagement delineated beforehand: the U.S. welcomed foreigners to the Exposition with an understanding that this gesture was valid only from May to October 1893.

Additionally, in this temporary and make-believe universe, Mexican musicians of the *orquesta típica* fought to survive as they continually searched for work. As a result, they developed and mastered a musical *rasquache*. The usual forced boundaries to their performances such as a stage and seated spectators in a concert hall were swept away in the hurly-burly world of the Chicago World's Fair. They gained their applause from fairgoers eager to consume exoticism and new popular musical styles, but earned their respect after hours from other foreign workers and performers at the Exposition, united in a transitory borderland on the Midway. In effect, their survivalist actions would anticipate the style and behavior of mariachi ensembles of the future.

In contrast, within the formal boundaries of international relations, the Porfirian government continued to entice U.S. capitalists about investing in Mexico by presenting an official narrative that privileged modernity over the experiences of indigenous and transient Mexicans and Mexican Americans. For this, they turned to the Eighth Regiment Cavalry military band and the Mexican state's own vision for cultural diplomacy. But the gendered and racialized assumptions of the U.S. did not allow that desired modern image to take hold, no matter how formally or officially presented. Popular narratives relegated Mexico, and Mexicans, to the exotic, and even reinterpreted the elegant national costume of the *charro* suit to be not a signifier of masculine power but as an exotic and feminine weakness. The tight-fitting, silver-adorned *charro* suit, topped with a dramatic sombrero, appeared to industrial-age U.S. observers as flashy, effeminate, or dandy-fied. The discourse around the sartorial choice of the string

orchestra musicians gendered the men in ways that tracked the entire premise of the Exposition – non-white, feminized, foreign actors could not compete with American masculinity, progress, and civilization.

The following chapter further explores the meaning of the *charro* suit in the context of horsemanship and wild west shows – a form of paid entertainment which marked American culture in its own indelible way. Profitable entertainment ventures required imagery and action that sold tickets with believable storylines to engage audiences, and to do so wild west shows packaged myths and assumptions about the American West as entertainment through roles that were instantly recognizable through costume and race. Successful showmen knew instinctively what bits of core knowledge would enthrall spectators. As we shall see, images of the Mexican *vaquero* and *charro* in the American imaginary were harnessed for the benefit and success of paid amusement across the country.

In the context of paid entertainment, these images, too, would come to add credence to the punishing cultural framework that ethnic Mexicans, no matter their origin, were not worthy of being part of America. And, like the home-made "Aztec" villagers in Chapter Three and the Mexican musicians and band members of Chapter Four, these *charros* and *vaqueros* would also find themselves commodified and their images consumed in 1893 Chicago. These performers would reach the Columbian World's Fair and U.S. audiences not under the auspices of the Mexican or U.S. states, but would instead arrive just across the street from the fairgrounds, with hundreds of other performers and a mass of livestock, on the train cars of Buffalo Bill's Wild West.

CHAPTER V

A West Wild Enough For a Show

In the summer of 1893, across the street from the Midway Plaisance and the Chicago World's Fair, charro Vicente Oropeza stepped on stage for a segment in *Buffalo Bill's Wild West* and cemented his reputation as the premier attraction in "Mexicans from Old Mexico."[1] He was the era's top trick and fancy roper, and became a national celebrity during his remaining tours. Not to be outdone, *Pawnee Bill's Historic Wild West* highlighted the great roping and riding skills of Texas native José Barrera, known to audiences as Mexican Joe, who became "one of the show's top attractions" during the tours of the East Coast, the Midwest, and the South.[2] While not going so far as elevating one of them to celebrity status, a third traveling troupe known as Miller Brothers and Arlington's *101 Ranch Real Wild West* proclaimed that they had "brought from the ranches of the sunny Southern Republic several dozen vacqueros (sic), who [were] the pride of the Mexican country."[3]

By the 1890s, the 'Wild West' and its integral notions of expansionism, white supremacy,

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[1] 1893 Program, photographed in Joseph G. Rosa and Robin May, *Buffalo Bill and His Wild West: A Pictorial Biography* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1989). Mary Lou LeCompte, "The Hispanic Influence on the History of Rodeo, 1823-1922," *Journal of Sport History* 12, no. 1 (1985): 21–38.

[2] Glenn Shirley, *Pawnee Bill: A Biography of Major Gordon W. Lillie* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1958), 144.

[3] Miller Bros. & Arlington, "101 Ranch: Real Wild West," 1910 Program, Wild West files, Warshaw Collection, National Museum of American History, Washington, D.C. Indeed, the 101 Ranch had many vaqueros in their shows, as demonstrated in the Emil W. Lenders Photographs, Western History Collections at the University of Oklahoma at Norman. Labeling these men as "Mexico's pride" was likely an advertising strategy to increase ticket sales.

and conquest had become the hottest ticket in a rapidly expanding entertainment industry with an explosive growth fueled by the demand of mass amusement. Conveying a narrative of American identity, paid entertainment became nationalized through the new technologies of railroads, electricity, communications, methods of printing that made photographs, posters, and color prints available on a mass scale. But it was showmen such as William Cody ("Buffalo Bill"), Gordon Lillie ("Pawnee Bill"), and the Miller Brothers who competed to bring enormous productions with hundreds of performers and livestock across the United States and Europe via steamship and rail cars, offering their audiences a vision of a rough-and-tumble America filled with manly virtues and moral messages. In 1893 Chicago, it was Cody who made the impression (and the profits), with his arena situated just outside of the formal confines of the Exposition grounds. While Buffalo Bill lives on in popular memory as presiding over a pageant of "cowboys and Indians," ethnic Mexicans were key members of the leading troupes.

During the heyday of wild west shows, Mexican performers rode, lassoed, whooped, and hollered their way into mythic renditions of the "Old West" across the United States and Europe, wowing audiences with their performance, inspiring striking imagery, and even starring in some of the first motion pictures ever filmed. The gendered images created in the wild west shows shaped a complex and compelling narrative that buttressed unequal relations of power along lines of race and gender, while simultaneously portraying these relations as natural to U.S. and foreign audiences alike.[4] In constructing a seamless narrative, the show's producers injected the story lines with notions of U.S. masculinity and whiteness, two ideals at the forefront of everyday culture in

[4] Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archeology of the Human Sciences* (New York: Vintage, 1970).

the 1890s.[5] The traveling shows increasingly equated masculinity with American technological progress, "civilization," and whiteness, rather than with the "older definitions of white, middle-class manhood that emphasized restraint and respectability."[6] In turn, these ideals set the boundaries for who qualified to be 'American.' The show's narratives reflected and contributed to changing representations of manliness and masculinity.

One can only imagine the pervasiveness of these visual tropes over time and space. As late as 1905 *Buffalo Bill's Wild West* tour in France began on April 2 and ran until November 12, having toured 114 different communities, with multiple performances at each stop.[7] Since many who attended this tour were unfamiliar with U.S. history, Buffalo Bill helped fill in the gaps of popular western memory by having the show "not only accepted as entertainment, but received with some seriousness as exercises in public education."[8] The competing shows uniformly presented a glamorous, dangerous America populated by Indians and Mexicans who could nevertheless be civilized by white heroes in the course of the afternoon's performance. This narrative, and the images that supported it, soon emerged as the normalizing force by which others framed their views of the American West and even America itself. In Foucault's words, the show became a "regulatory force" where business owners shaped story lines and visual images of whiteness and

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[5] Gail Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880-1917* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995).

[6] Susan Lee Johnson, "'A Memory Sweet to Soldiers': The Significance of Gender in the History of the 'American West,'" *Western Historical Quarterly* 24, no. 4 (1993): 495–517.

[7] *Buffalo Bill's Wild West in France*, Souvenir guide and map, 1905, Library and Archives, Autry Museum of the American West. Additionally, "the exhibition required fifty railroad cars for transportation of its personnel and stock. Each railroad car was fifty-four feet long and eight feet wide. The show moved in three sections including twenty-two flat cars, eighteen orange stock cars, nine red sleepers, and an advance car." See William E. Deahl, "A History of Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show, 1883-1913" (Ph.D. dissertation, Southern Illinois University, 1974), 144.

[8] For Cody's role in purporting that his show offered "genuine and instructive object lessons" see Richard Slotkin, "Buffalo Bill's 'Wild West' and the Mythologization of the American Empire," in *Cultures of United States Imperialism*, ed. Amy Kaplan and Donald E. Pease (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993),164.

masculinity to sell the troupe more effectively. In the process, producers supported the perception -- or "regulated" -- that the "real West" could be seen all over the U.S. and even in Europe.

The wild west show popularized the roping and riding of *vaqueros* and *charros* outside of their original contexts, leaving a fragmented view of Mexican performers in the popular imagination. By extension, the seductive use of visual imagery served to encode -- and normalize -- unequal relations of power that masked the very real lives of Mexicans in the borderlands. Malleable meanings for the word "Mexican" slipped quietly into expressions of foreignness and second-class citizenry, and in the process, new tropes were created that rendered Chicanos almost invisible from the history of the United States. Set against this backdrop, the symbolic erasure of ethnic Mexicans from the American cultural borderlands demonstrates how gender effectively disqualified them from being "American."

Even though they achieved a modicum of fame by entertaining international audiences with their fancy costumes, trick-riding, and fake shoot-outs, Barrera's and Oropeza's stardom and performances have faded from popular and scholarly historical memories of the West. At the same time, this historical effacement elides the extent to which Barrera and Oropeza were crucial participants in the visual constructions of Mexicans in U.S. culture. Through the skits, scenes, and sequence of events in the western show, these performers came to represent one image of Mexicans that not only circulated widely in American culture, but also served as a boundary against which American national identity was constructed.

WILD WEST SHOWS

Buffalo Bill

In 1893, Buffalo Bill Cody faced a crisis – the world's largest audience was coming to Chicago for the World's Columbian Exposition, but Exposition officials had denied his request to

participate within the perimeter of the exhibition. Not to be denied access to this enormous market and the prospect of a months-long stand, Buffalo Bill and his marketing manager Nate Salsbury strategically set up their wild west show across the street from the furthest exit of the Exposition, at the far end of the Midway Plaisance, past the ethnic villages and military barracks. Ingenious in their marketing techniques and strategies, Cody and Salsbury rented a fourteen-acre lot between Chicago's Sixty-second and Sixty-third Streets, the closest available land to the Midway Plaisance.[9] To advertise their show, they hung a huge banner spanning the entire entrance to the grounds, clearly in view of would-be Exposition patrons and perhaps not drawing attention to the non-authorized nature of their presence. The logic of the marketing strategy was clear; as people entered and exited the World's Fair, Buffalo Bill's intended his extravaganza to visually overwhelm fairgoers, piquing their curiosity, and luring them to pay money to watch the show.

It worked. The 1893 season proved to be the most successful season in thirty years of Buffalo Bill's performances. The summer season alone produced profits of between $700,000 and one million dollars, prompting one of the local newspapers to declare the show "unquestionably the most popular entertainment in Chicago."[10] The number of spectators averaged between eight and ten thousand per performance, and the show ran twice a day, without the need to strike tents, load railroad cars, or send promoters ahead to market the show's imminent arrival.

While there is some disagreement among historians as to the unique number of paid admissions to the Exposition, most agree that the event alone accounted for over twenty-six million admissions, and many of those same visitors also paid to see Buffalo Bill's carefully constructed

[9] Sarah J. Blackstone, *Buckskins, Bullets, and Business: A History of Buffalo Bill's Wild West* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1986), 26. Walter Havighurst, *Annie Oakley of the Wild West* (New York: Macmillan, 1954), 166.

[10] Blackstone, *Buckskins, Bullets, and Business*, 27; Deahl, "A History of Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show, 1883-1913," 99.

American West. This montage of the West, amidst the carnivalesque milieu of the Exposition, became etched in the imagination of millions of Americans and foreign nationals who traveled to Chicago that summer.

The millions of spectators at western shows loved the believability of the American West as a wild place but also enjoyed participating in its dangers from the safety of their seats. Over the years, Cody gladly delivered by producing a fictitious place that continually pleased his often-urban customers. Everything from painted backdrops to the kinds of "games" that cowboys played when they were not too busy busting broncos, fighting Indians, and shooting buffalo added to the mythic reconstruction of a subject dear to Cody. He gladly assumed the responsibility to teach eastern and European spectators by reifying wildness through depictions of what he presented as daily life west of the Mississippi, leaving out the less glamorous facts such as the widespread adoption of citywide electricity, telephones, and the low murder rates achieved by strict local gun ordinances.

Cody's formula for entertainment was simple yet effective. He first displayed riding and shooting skills in various scenarios and circumstances followed by a re-enactment of battles between Indians and U.S. cavalries (where the Indians indubitably and dutifully lost). As a grand finale, he depicted a vivid attack by Indians against such American icons as the Deadwood mail-coach, a settler family's cabin, or a "prairie emigrant train crossing the plains."[11] Under the rubric of entertainment, these scenes poignantly brought to life visual narratives and popular myth. Cody's deft understanding of public desire allowed him to change actors and events in his shows, without ever needing to alter his winning formula.

[11] All show programs between 1884 and 1908 list these three events, although not necessarily in the same order.

One key to the show's indelible style was Cody's ability to breathe life into the characters and images of dime novels and stage plays that had portrayed the West in popular culture during the latter part of the nineteenth century. As Richard White argues, "the genius of Buffalo Bill was to recognize the power of the mimetic, of the imitation, in the modern world;" Cody's true talent came in the form of creating fictional characters from loosely-based historical events.[12] Because mimesis refers to descriptions of art that are known to represent *reality*, the reconstruction of a *mythic* West, staffed with white cowboys and Native Americans, effectively became Cody's West, creating an influential--albeit fictionalized--prototype of life west of the Mississippi in American popular culture.

The simulated adversities of a journey West created a sense of the "real," whereby spectators became active participants in a dramatic narrative that visually developed before them. Details that were attributed to life in the West were utilized to create a "reality effect" where "the representational accuracy of the details was less important than their role in creating the optical illusion of the truth."[13] "Real" signs such as fired buckshot, riding passengers, and Buffalo Bill coming in for the rescue were key in creating a credible "truth" that "authenticated" the wildness of the west.[14]

The success of Cody and Salsbury inspired imitators, as one popular writer explained:

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[12] Richard White, "Frederick Jackson Turner and Buffalo Bill," in *The Frontier in American Culture: An Exhibition at the Newberry Library, August 26, 1994-January 7, 1995*, by Patricia Nelson Limerick and Richard White, ed. James R. Grossman (Chicago/Berkeley: The Newberry Library/University of California Press, 1994), 35.

[13] For a definition of the "reality effect" first purported by Roland Barthes, see Robert Stam, Robert Burgoyne, and Sandy Flitterman-Lewis, *New Vocabularies in Film Semiotics: Structuralism, Post-Structuralism, and Beyond* (London: Routledge, 1992), 188.

[14] Although Cody himself, the sharpshooting Annie Oakley, and her husband Frank Butler were the only performers to use real shot in their target-shooting demonstrations were, the blank shots used by other performers gave off loud noises and dramatic bursts of gun smoke when fired from their guns.

"Wild West shows [appeared] like wild mushrooms popping up through buffalo chips after the spring rains on the prairie." As many as one hundred shows spotted the entertainment landscape between 1883 and the 1930s, although some simply took on different names and partners for financial reasons.[15] The majority of the imitators did not last more than one season, often experiencing financial shortages and routing problems with railroad companies. Like their circus counterparts, even the smallest wild west shows tended to follow a reassuringly predictable script, blending danger with the exotic West, and tamed by buckskin-clad white heroes for eager audiences.

Pawnee Bill

Although Buffalo Bill's show became the most famous and recognized in the western show circuit, other producers such as Gordon Lillie and the Miller Brothers Ranch put together their own successful troupes that helped shaped popular western narratives through the turn of the century. Gordon Lillie, for example, first started his wild west career as an employee of William Cody in 1884 and by 1908 would circle and become Cody's partner in the business entity's final stage. Lillie first met Cody through the Pawnees.[16] From 1864 to 1877, Pawnee men served as U.S. Army scouts and Lillie served as their translator. Following their decommissioning at the conclusion of the Sioux Wars, many Pawnee men abandoned their lives as yeoman farmers on reservation land and obtained employment performing with Buffalo Bill's Wild West. Pawnee veterans trusted the young Lillie to interpret and negotiate on their behalf with Cody because Lillie

[15] Allen L. Farnum, *Pawnee Bill's Historic Wild West: A Photo Documentary of the 1900-1905 Show Tours*, (West Chester, PA: Schiffer Publishing, 1992), 11.

[16] Louis S. Warren, *Buffalo Bill's America: William Cody and the Wild West Show* (New York: Vintage Books, 2005), 532–33.

had worked with the tribe as secretary to Indian Agent Major Edward Hale Bowman and as a teacher at the Pawnee Indian School.[17] Recalling his first meeting with Cody, Lillie wrote:

> I had been carrying around in my mind for a dozen years or more the picture of Buffalo Bill as I had first seen him, well groomed, with a beautiful buffalo robe coat. I never was so disappointed in my life. He had been sleeping on the floor of a tent in some hay, his fur coat was missing, his hair was all matted and he was drunk...I found him courteous enough. He was pleased with the Indians and it became my job to assume responsibility for them, to do all the interpreting for them and even to make up as an Indian myself and go on with them.[18]

For two years, Lillie took a position with Cody managing the Indian performers, earning him the reputation of Pawnee representative and the moniker "Pawnee Bill."

Eventually, Lillie departed from Cody's company and created his own traveling show under the name of "Pawnee Bill's Historical Wild West Exhibition and Indian Encampment." The production underwent periodic titular and content changes, but experienced great financial success, highlighting not only the Native performers but also Mexican and other "foreign" riders. Twenty years later in 1913, the shows unified and became the "Two Bills Show. However, the business relationship with Cody ended Pawnee Bill's show career abruptly in Denver, Colorado, when creditors seized horses, tents, railroad cars and all other material items. Cody had defaulted on a loan that he had financially backed with the production company as collateral, a commitment about which he had failed to inform Lillie.[19]

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[17] Shirley, *Pawnee Bill*, 96.

[18] Shirley, 99.

[19] Blackstone, *Buckskins, Bullets, and Business*; Glenn Shirley, *Pawnee Bill: A Biography of Major Gordon Lillie*; Don Russell, *The Lives and Legends of Buffalo Bill*, Fourth ed. (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1973); Don Russell, *The Wild West: Or, A History of the Wild West Shows, Being an Account of the Prestigious, Peregrinatory Pageants Pretentiously Presented Before the Citizens of the Republic, the Crowned Heads of Europe, and Multitudes of Awe-Struck Men, Women, and Children Around the Globe, Which Created a Wonderfully Imaginative and Unrealistic Image of the American West* (Fort Worth, TX: Amon Carter Museum of Western Art, 1970).

A better celebrity than manager, Cody had never recovered financially after the death of his previous business partner Nate Salsbury. In 1907, Buffalo Bill faced bankruptcy after creditors called in his loans in the midst of a worldwide financial panic, prompting Gordon Lillie to buy out Cody's share and jointly produce the two shows, saving Cody from complete financial ruin. The "Two Bills Show," as it became known, reorganized as "Buffalo Bill's Wild West Combined with Pawnee Bill's Great Far East"; it lasted only five years.[20]

The relationship between Lillie and Cody appears to have been strained from the beginning. Lillie's wife, May, never approved of merging the shows, having known about Cody's bad decision-making for many years, and in fact refused to travel with the combined show.[21] May Lillie's staunchness may have subsided over the next few years, for in a letter dated September 29, 1912, Cody wrote to his close friend Emil Lenders: "Major Lilly (sic) and wife are very happy and are traveling with the show. We are getting along fairly well."[22] Later, after Cody's death in 1917, Lillie's friction with the elder showman seems to have dissipated: "Time smooths everything," he wrote, "Buffalo Bill died my friend. He was just an irresponsible boy."[23]

The legacy of these two showmen, however, rests not so much on their personal relationship and rivalry, but on the tremendous impact their shows had on American public culture.[24] Because of their popular appeal, Jonathan Martin argues, the shows can be "examined to

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[20] Shirley, *Pawnee Bill: A Biography of Major Gordon Lillie*.

[21] Shirley, *Pawnee Bill: A Biography of Major Gordon Lillie*, see chapter thirteen.

[22] Correspondence file, Emil Lenders Collection, National Museum of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.

[23] Shirley, *Pawnee Bill: A Biography of Major Gordon W. Lillie*, 211.

[24] Indeed, the trappings of the wild west shows and the rivalry and partnership of the two Bills live on in the musical "Annie Get Your Gun," which debuted in 1946. Tellingly, despite the prominence of ethnic Mexicans in both performance and managerial roles in the wild west shows, the Broadway musical's only diversity comes in the form of Native Americans, whose initial racist portrayal in the original play has been dramatically redrawn in modern productions.

highlight the ways in which popular culture reinforced hegemonic relationships in the late nineteenth century."[25] At a time when whiteness emerged as a crucial factor in defining "American" identity, the shows happily marketed a fused image of Mexicans.

Although the traveling show allowed performers to construct their own personas through costumes, roles, and routines, they still were forced to maintain a stage persona that was bound by race and gender. These actors occupied a privileged space by the leverage they had within their personal routines, yet their performances fit into larger narratives that normalized inequality between white Americans and people of color. The erasure of indigenous Americans and black cowboys, for example, fit well into an overarching schematic to define the United States as a white nation. Similarly, in contrast to earlier renditions of ethnic Mexicans members of U.S. society, the meaning of "Mexican" in wild west performances changed to solely represent them as foreigners.

Tejano and Mexican Performers

The popularity of wild west shows remained high for over forty years, and while many Mexicans loyally returned to their production companies year after year, their roles changed during that time to produce vastly different meanings.[26] Show *vaqueros* performed according to production needs, ranging from skits to town parades, as well as the grand entrances and finales at each performance where they demonstrated their skills to eager spectators. *Vaqueros* and *charros* were expected to entertain audiences with dazzling roping and riding that needed to be visually distinctive from the performances of white cowboys -- be it through skits, skills, or costumes -- in

[25] Jonathan D. Martin, "'The Grandest and Most Cosmopolitan Object Teacher': *Buffalo Bill's Wild West* and the Politics of American Identity, 1883–1899," *Radical History Review* 1996, no. 66 (Fall 1996): 93–123.

[26] Buffalo Bill's Wild West, Pawnee Bill's Wild West and Far East, and the Miller Brothers 101 Ranch were stable productions with strong financial reputations. Many small upstart companies traveled the U.S., but oftentimes made agreements with performers that were later not honored.

order to maintain the variety of the show. They took great pride in their precision and uniqueness, often adding theatrical touches to their acts to make them unusual, if not visually stunning. As unknown and motley performers, these actors functioned in the public--yet safely defined--space of the show tent.

Working with a traveling troupe, show *vaqueros* did not endure the grueling life of ethnic Mexican, Black, white, and Native American working cowboys who raised livestock on cattle ranches throughout the plains, the Southwest, and in northern Mexico.[27] As Richard Slatta writes: "Depending on terrain and season, cowboys faced choking dust, swollen rivers, driving rainstorms, and howling blizzards. But through it all, cattle had to be tended. Few men labored under such harsh, variable conditions for so little pay."[28] In contrast, stable seasonal work, good living wages, the opportunity to travel throughout Europe and the United States, and a sense of stardom provided a unique lifestyle that often came with plenty of press coverage. No surprise, then, that many Mexican nationals and ethnic Mexicans gave up the dangerous life of the working cowboy to join the life of the traveling western show.

As early as 1889, Gordon Lillie brought a group of Mexican *vaqueros* from the state of Chihuahua to perform in his show. Because "the Mexican states of Zacatecas, Durango, Chihuahua and Coahuila constituted the oldest and best raising region of New Spain," rich traditions inevitably evolved among the vaqueros of that region.[29] Hence, it is no surprise that Lillie billed Don De

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[27] Here I alter L. G. Moses' term of "show Indian" to "show *vaquero*" to distinguish between working *vaqueros* and those who performed in the public space of the wild west show. Please see L. G. Moses, *Wild West Shows and the Images of American Indians, 1883-1933* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1996).

[28] Richard W. Slatta, *Cowboys of the Americas*, Yale Western Americana Series (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), 82.

[29] Donald Chipman, *Spanish Texas, 1519-1821* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1992), 54. Michael Meyer and William Sherman write that because "the availability of land was almost useless for cultivation [in northern Mexico], many great livestock spreads

Anza, Senor Francisco, and their group as "the most daring and graceful riders of all mankind ... their tricks with the lasso seem the work of a conjurer, yet they do actually catch a horse by any foot called for by the audience; lasso and throw wild buffalo and then mount and ride them, an act never before attempted."[30] Because a basic tenet of vaquero culture is the trust within the working group, it is conceivable that show troupes grew from these pre-existing working relationships, just as the Pawnee veterans in the show had served in the same platoons. The lack of sources about Don De Anza's group suggests that they did not perform for many seasons and that other groups of *vaqueros* could fill the role of the most "daring and graceful riders of all mankind" if needed.

The Esquivel Brothers

Although Lillie may have brought the first Mexican *vaqueros* to perform in wild west shows, Cody already had two Texan cowboys in his troupe as early as 1883. Joe and Tony Esquivel, two brothers from San Antonio, Texas, exhibited the stunning horsemanship they had learned as working cowboys on Texas ranches.[31] Why the brothers left southern Texas is unknown, but historian David Montejano offers a plausible reason. "By the 1880s" he writes, "the work of the cowboy in Texas was increasingly irrelevant ... In general, cowboys had to devote less time to working with cattle and more time to mending fences and greasing windmills."[32] In addition to the unique lifestyle of traveling performers, the inevitable changes in ranching may have been a factor in the brothers' decision to leave Texas for show business. With their talent came longevity: Joe

developed," in Michael C. Meyer and William L. Sherman, *The Course of Mexican History*, 4th ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 176.

[30] As quoted in Shirley, *Pawnee Bill: A Biography of Major Gordon Lillie*, 134.

[31] Nate Salsbury Collection, Western History Department, Denver Public Library, Denver, Colorado.

[32] David Montejano, *Anglos and Mexicans in the Making of Texas, 1836-1986* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1987), 90.

was not just a performer but held a managerial position with Cody as "chief of the cowboys" for over twenty years, while Tony was billed as a "champion vaquero rider" throughout his career.[33]

The brothers rode across Europe and the United States in specific costumes--those similar to the work clothes of Texas cowboys, with some modifications. The Esquivels' working clothes signaled not only their Texan roots, but also created a visual link between their identity and the skills emblematic of ranch work and cattle drives. And in a photograph printed in the 1905 program, the Esquivels and other performers created an impressive presence by wearing woolly chaps. Most "action" photos of the shows did not depict heavy chaps, as one might imagine the combined weight and heat of such attire during the rigor of stunt riding.[34] Woolly chaps did serve to keep the body warm during extreme weather on the rough cattle drives, and live on today in Montana and Wyoming's cold climate. Woolly chaps are rare, however, in Texas, New Mexico, and Oklahoma, where the thorns and burrs of the thickets in which cowboys must work would tear a rider from his horse if not deflected by smooth leather "batwing" chaps. For the purpose of the wild west show, if not for the Southwestern vaquero traditions, the woolly chaps of the northern plains added a dramatic visual touch for audiences unfamiliar with the different regional tools of the working cowboy.

Programs for *Buffalo Bill's Wild West* did not identify the brothers as Mexican nor as being from Mexico, but instead, as Texas cowboys. Having learned many of their skills from *vaquero* traditions, the Esquivels ably performed in a space that allowed them far more subjectivities than other performers, and many more than most other ethnic Mexicans in U.S. society. They shifted

[33] Russell, *The Lives and Legends of Buffalo Bill*, 47, 72.

[34] "1905 Program, Buffalo Bill's Wild West," n.d., Warshaw Collection, Wild West files, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution.

theater personas between cowboys and *vaqueros* according to the script at hand. So long as they identified as Texan, the Esquivels belonged to the deeply-rooted tradition of American cowboys.

Figures 15 and 16: Tony Esquivel, Member of Buffalo Bill's Wild West,
Salsbury Collection, Denver Public Library

José Barrera

Many show vaqueros came from Texas and the northern Mexican states of Sonora and Chihuahua, where cattle and horses had been integral to the rich ranching traditions for centuries. Because Chihuahua meets the U.S.-Mexico border at the southeastern corner of New Mexico and southwestern Texas, commerce, including cattle, shuttled through El Paso and Juarez. During the Porfiriato, a new class of rural elite emerged from the ranchos of northern Mexico, and cattle

became one of the state's main exports.[35] As a result, *vaqueros* traditionally used *la reata* – the braided rawhide rope -- skillfully as a foundation for the daily work of ranch life. In 1885, wrangler Joe Barrera's use of what had come to be anglicized as the "lariat" caught Lillie's attention while the latter was in San Antonio purchasing livestock.[36]

José Barrera, known in show circuits as Mexican Joe, was born in Texas on May 10, 1876. Barrera learned to use the lariat by roping wild cattle on the family ranch in Northern Mexico and, after being orphaned at a very young age, worked on the cow camps that lined the Rio Grande in south Texas. One afternoon, while delivering livestock for general sale, Barrera's use of the lariat in handling the livestock so impressed Lillie that he invited the young vaquero to join his show.[37] At twenty-one, Barrera joined the Pawnee Bill show troupe and for the next fifty-two years, he worked with Lillie either on the home ranch in Pawnee, Oklahoma, or on the road with the traveling shows.

Oral histories passed on by Barrera's daughter and grandson claim that he was a descendant of the old "Spanish aristocracy" who colonized the Canary Islands, and identify Barrera as Spanish. Regardless of Barerra's specific family origins, Lillie already had a troupe of *vaqueros* performing in his show, and so he dubbed Barrera "Mexican Joe" and added him to the group. For the duration of his life, Barrera continually performed as a trick roper and star bronc rider, receiving top billing during the years of the combined Bill shows, later joining the Ringling Brothers Circus and finally

[35] Mark Wasserman, "Chihuahua: Family Power, Foreign Enterprise, and National Control," in *Other Mexicos: Essays on Regional Mexican History, 1876-1911*, ed. Thomas Benjamin and William McNellie (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1984).

[36] Cowboy culture, and then American Western English, were replete with Anglicized borrowed words, such as *vaquero*/buckaroo, *la reata*/lariat, *mesteno*/mustang, *chaparajos*/chape, etc.

[37] Archives, Pawnee Bill Ranch Site Collection, Oklahoma Historical Society, Pawnee, Oklahoma.

finishing his travel career with the Miller Brothers 101 Ranch show. Barerra rode until several months before his death: at the age of seventy-three, Barrera performed for the last time in the Pawnee Bill Memorial Rodeo for the 1949 Fourth of July celebration in Pawnee, Oklahoma, where he is now buried.[38]

As "leader of the Mexicans" in Pawnee Bill's show, Barrera was recognized throughout the country as an outstanding roper. Several local newspapers reported that Mexican Joe had caught animals that had escaped from different circuses and had returned them safely; he caught an elephant in Washington, D.C., a lion in New York City, and on another occasion, he stopped a group of runaway horses that had broken away from a street parade. Whether these recurring rescues were part of the show's marketing strategy or the hazards of working with animals – or both, Barrera's skill and bravery are noteworthy. Show life was almost as dangerous as that of a working cowboy, as Barrera suffered many broken bones over the years as a result of both his official and unofficial performances. Excerpts from the troupe's internal route book from 1901 show that Barrera fell from a "bucker" in Milwaukee, "got two falls in the Pony Express" in Minneapolis, and two weeks later "went through the tepees on one of the buckers."[39]

Mexican Joe Barrera was most proud of his distinguished roping. He did most of his roping with a "kick of the foot, instead of throwing the rope," and roped animals, usually horses and cattle, running several heads abreast of each other.[40] Among the many different stunts he performed, Barrera was most proud of his twelve-horse catch, limiting it to six horses as he grew older. A

[38] Joe Barrera Files, Pawnee Bill Ranch Site Collection, Oklahoma Historical Society, Pawnee, Oklahoma.

[39] "Historic Highlights #10;" and Oral history, Pawnee Bill Ranch Site Collection.

[40] Newspaper clipping, Joe Barrera Files, Pawnee Bill Ranch Site Collection.

photo published in 1928 shows the older roper throwing his lasso around five cowboys and their horses with one large loop.[41]

Like the Esquivels, Barrera's successful career rested on *vaquero* skills and traditions that were indigenous to the borderlands. *Unlike* the Esquivels, Barrera differentiated himself with the unambiguously identifiable stage name of "Mexican Joe." This persona allowed him the space to perform varying roles -- depending on what was required of a Mexican character -- all of which added panache to the visual productions. And although the meanings attached to the word "Mexican" certainly changed in American culture during his lifetime, it appears that the champion roper enjoyed his unusual life immensely and was proud of his well-known nickname; "I don't believe I need any introduction to the public," he wrote later in life, "for I am known to everyone as Mexican Joe and my work and roping will never be forgotten, especially my twelve horse catch."[42]

He was right about his unforgettable roping and riding--but the inclusion of Mexicans as a positive aspect of the American West did not carry over into popular culture. The formation of a safe, tame, and orderly West could only come about in popular narratives by making a clear delineation between Americans and foreigners, real or imagined. Increasingly, notions of authenticity became interwoven with national identity as showmen added more foreign groups to their traveling troupes, and images of Mexicans, as opposed to U.S. citizen *vaqueros* from the borderlands, emerged in the shows' programs. In this milieu emerged the very popular segment "Mexicans from Old Mexico" in *Buffalo Bill's Wild West*.

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[41] Photograph published in *The Literary Digest*, August 4, 1928, page 40.

[42] Personal letter, Joe Barrera Files, Pawnee Bill Ranch Site Collection.

Vicente Oropeza

Vicente Oropeza, billed as the "champion fancy roper of Mexico" in Cody's production, loyally performed with the show for over sixteen seasons. As the first -- and up to now one of two -- Mexicanos to be inducted into the National Cowboy Hall of Fame in Oklahoma City, Oropeza is heralded for his accuracy and fancy style with the lasso, and many rodeo ropers, past and present, consider Oropeza "the father of trick roping in this country as well as being one of the greatest ropers of all time."[43] Indeed, it was the great finesse and precision in using the lariat with which he created images that seemed to be alive in their movements, capturing the audience's attention time and time again. One admirer wrote about Oropeza's roping as follows: "The loop goes above his head and turns there for a while, then it falls, and with an agile jump, he is on the outside, and the rope swings on and on, now near, now far, but never on the ground."[44]

Born in Puebla, Mexico, in 1858, Vicente Oropeza, with his older brother Agustín, learned the skills and traditions of Mexican *charrería*. They also became well-known *picadores de toros*, or horsemen "in a bull fight that prod the bull with a lance to weaken its neck and shoulder muscles."[45] While Agustín excelled as a *picador*, Vicente strengthened his skills as a *charro*. Many years later, Vicente's son would recall that his father continued riding and roping until his death in 1922 at the age of sixty-five, and that "el mayor plaser de mi padre era montar a caballo y siempre lo hizo muy bien." (What gave my father the most pleasure was riding horses, and he always did

[43] Press release, February 9, 1976, National Cowboy Hall of Fame, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma; personal conversations with roper John Cloud of Santa Barbara, California.

[44] Clipping of April 21, 1896, *Public Ledger and Daily Transcript*, Buffalo Bill Scrapbooks, Buffalo Bill Historical Center, Cody, Wyoming.

[45] Jose Alvarez del Villar, page 32.

it very well.)[46]

Young Vicente's talent was the foundation of his success as he performed abroad. In 1891, he performed in the United States for the first time, billing himself as the "Premier 'Charro Mexicano' of the World," having already toured Spain with his brother and Ponciano Díaz, the most revered Mexican bull-fighter of the era.[47] By age 29, Oropeza began his professional association with Buffalo Bill's Wild West, making it the main vehicle by which much of the world would first learn about the artistry of Mexican *charrería*.[48]

The Cody and Salsbury team premiered "Mexicans from Old Mexico" in the 1893 Chicago season. As chief of his *vaquero* troupe, Oropeza starred in the feature, and became instantly recognizable. The famous charro's skill with the lasso not only became well-known within show circles, he also became a favorite of audiences--although at first, some skepticism arose regarding his talent. When the show stopped in Brooklyn, a journalist with *The New York Times* wrote:

> It should not cause admiration that he has gained so much prominence and popularity in New York where the art of roping is but little practiced; but even in Mexico where there are skillful ropers he stands without peer. Would the people of New York give Oropeza the merit he deserves for his skill with the "lasso," he would yet be more prominent; but there being so much trickery and fakery in that metropolis, there are some people who actually believe that by some invisible contrivance the loop is kept open while he is going through his performance and that it is not his agility and quickness in handling it.

The trickery and fakery of New York notwithstanding, Oropeza ably silenced the disbelievers by

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[46] Correspondence, Vicente Oropeza Files, National Cowboy Hall of Fame.

[47] José Zamora Valdés, "Recuerdos del Tiempo Viejo: Los Hermanos Oropeza," in *Mexico Charro*, 15 Enero, 1945, in Vicente Oropeza Files, National Cowboy Hall of Fame. LeCompte, "The Hispanic Influence on the History of Rodeo, 1823-1922." Mexican writer Jose Alvarez del Villar describes Ponciano Díaz as "the idol of Mexican bullfighting during the second half of the nineteenth century, who was renowned for his aptness as a consummate *charro*: he fought the bull, placed the banderillas, roped it, and was able to do anything and everything having to do with Mexican-style riding." See José Alvarez del Villar, *Hombres y Caballos de México: Historia y Práctica de "Charrería"* (Mexico, DF: Panorama Editorial, 1981), 96.

[48] "The Champion Rope Thrower," *San Francisco Chronicle*, September 28, 1902.

performing with any lariat that was offered to him.[49] Eventually, only accolades followed the roper, as when he competed in and won the first World's Championship of Trick and Fancy Roping held in New York in 1900.

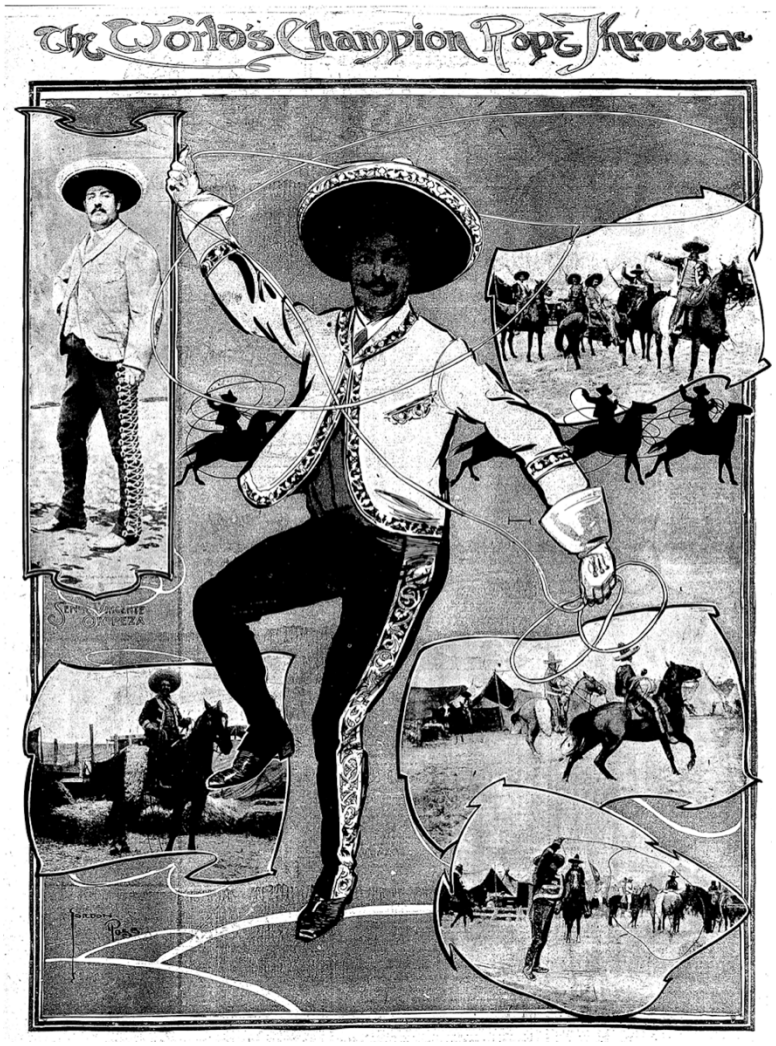

Figure 17: Vicente Oropeza, *San Francisco Chronicle*, September 28, 1902

[49] 1894 Buffalo Bill Scrapbook, Harold McCracken Research Library, Buffalo Bill Historical Center.

It was at that event that humorist and actor Will Rogers credited Oropeza for introducing the sport of fancy roping to the United States.[50] Rogers had first attended a show at age fourteen during the 1893 Chicago season, having brought a load of cattle north from Oklahoma with his father. At the Buffalo Bill show, the young Cherokee cowboy incredulously watched Oropeza perform, and found his own calling as a performer. As a final stunt there, Oropeza had written "his name with his lasso, one letter at a time, in the air," meticulously dotting the "I" in "Vicente" with the rope. One biographer stated that "this [stunt] brought tears to Willie's eyes, and as accurately as Oropeza spelled out his name he spelled out the future course of the boy's life." Another simply wrote, "Will, in the phrase of the day, had seen the elephant."[51] Rogers' subsequent vaudeville act, in which he delivered political commentary onstage while nonchalantly twirling his lasso in the styles pioneered by Oropeza, would propel him to stardom, making him the highest paid actor in Hollywood and a nationally syndicated opinion columnist and radio commentator before his untimely death. Throughout his life, Rogers credited Oropeza not only for inspiring him to become a roping performer, but also described the charro as the greatest roper of all time.[52]

Apparently, the young Will Rogers was not alone in being stunned by Oropeza's talent. In many of the towns and cities to which the show toured, reporters gushed about the roper in their reviews, prepped for his performance through press releases sent out before the show's arrival. A writer at *The Philadelphia Ledger* wrote:

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[50] LeCompte, "The Hispanic Influence on the History of Rodeo, 1823-1922," 36.

[51] Day, Donald, *Will Rogers: A Biography*, (New York: David McKay Company, Inc., 1962), 20. Ben Yagoda's *Will Rogers: A Biography*, (New York: Knopf, 1993) also tells of the mesmerizing effect that Oropeza's performance continually had on Rogers, see pages 24, 59, 135. See also Richard M. Ketchum, *Will Rogers: His Life and Times* (New York: American Heritage Publishing Company; distributed by McGraw-Hill, 1973), 43.

[52] A.F. Wertheim and B. Bair, eds., *The Papers of Will Rogers: The Early Years. November 1879–April 1904*, vol. 1 (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1996), 522.

> The lasso-throwing exhibition has perhaps never been excelled. The captain of the troupe swings a single loop of rope, running loosely as lassos are fixed, and 20 feet in diameter, for a quarter of an hour. He simply holds one end of the rope above his head, and now and then gives it a careless turn and twist. The rope seems scarcely to move his swinging or by his will. It swings toward him, and he steps into the middle of the writhing circle that has never yet touched the ground.[53]

Journalists interviewed Oropeza backstage, usually printing rave reviews, which not only created a cost-effective form of advertising for the remaining performances, but also added to the sense of excitement surrounding the relatively unknown Mexican troupe.

Described as "happy, witty, very congenial and a showman of utmost elegance," Oropeza radiated in his interviews, telling anecdotes about himself--often a combination of the real, the imagined, and the embellished.[54] Press kits claimed that he was part of the Grand Fiscal, a military organization "something like the famous Texas Rangers of [the] border."[55] Another reporter stated that "Senor Vincente Orrepezzo (sic), the Lord of the Lariat is the son of an hidalgo and as sturdy as a chap as you would care to meet. His stunt is a feature, and he likes the life."[56] In addition to enjoying his craft, wrote a Mexican author of the 1940s, the roper "tenía, natural y espontaneo, el don de hacer amigos--fuerte personalidad, como hoy se dice para ensalzar a los hombres." (He had a natural and spontaneous way to make friends--a strong personality, which is used today to describe praiseworthy men.)[57] The respected and admired roper reveled in the spotlight.

His regal attire, styled after the *charro* figure of Mexico, seems to have struck people, for

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[53] *Public Ledger*, April 21, 1896, 1896 Buffalo Bill Scrapbook, Harold McCracken Research Library, Buffalo Bill Historical Center.

[54] *Buffalo Bill's Wild West* routinely sent out an advance team to circulate press releases and advertisements before scheduled engagements, creating a mythic reality regarding many of its top performers.

[55] *New York Herald*, May 10, 1894.

[56] 1901 Buffalo Bill Scrapbook, Harold McCracken Research Library, Buffalo Bill Historical Center.

[57] Valdes, "Recuerdos del Tiempo Viejo: Los Hermanos Oropeza," 8.

many details about his costumes appeared in newspaper clippings and oral histories. In one instance, Will Rogers stated that Oropeza's aura consisted of "an embroidered jacket, buckskin trousers ornamented with brass buttons, a red sash and a hat trimmed with gold braid."[58] On another occasion, a reporter visiting the Brooklyn showgrounds remarked with awe: "Some of the hats that are worn so easily by these expert ropers weigh as many pounds as the up-to-date derby does ounces. Weighted with gold and silver braids they are very expensive costing from $40 to $150. Every part of a Mexican's costume is gotten up with absolute disregard to the cost and the trappings upon an ordinary broncho (sic) may cost $1,000 when ridden by one of these sons of Mexico."[59] A buckskin jacket worn by Oropeza in another show so impressed a local reporter that he remarked, "I had an opportunity to examine the buckskin jacket and marvel at the floral decorations in leather. The back was a bed of white and pink rosebuds, fashioned out of leather. The suit could not have cost less than $500 in Mexican money. The hat is a miracle of mysteries. We may see it in Fifth Avenue at Easter."[60] Whether the Fifth Avenue reference was a compliment or not, the statement describes the hat special enough for New York society ladies to wear for a religious holiday due to its elaborate embroidery and stitched decoration.

The use of color was another tactic that added uniqueness to Oropeza's stage presence. Along with fitted pants and jacket, his attire always carried a flash of color in the form of a neck

[58] Amy Ware, *The Cherokee Kid: Will Rogers, Tribal Identity, and the Making of An American Icon* (Lawrence, Kansas: University of Kansas Press, 2015).

[59] 1897 Buffalo Bill Scrapbook, Harold McCracken Research Library, Buffalo Bill Historical Center.

[60] 1901 Buffalo Bill Scrapbook, Harold McCracken Research Library, Buffalo Bill Historical Center.

or waist sash in addition to silver ornaments on his outfits.[61] The leatherwork on the jacket may have represented the labor of Mexican artisans. Their hand-made leatherwork usually included intricate carved and stamped patterns, standing out in bas-relief and painted in bold colors to contrast with the natural tone of unfinished leather. This distinctive artwork continues today in Mexico as well as in cowboy and Chicano communities of the United States.[62]

Performing within the defined space of Mexican *charrería*, Oropeza and his act took on different meanings in the context of a show about the American West. As the first to be described as 'Mexican' in the show circuit, Oropeza was a Mexican national as opposed to the Esquivels and Barrera, who were from Texas. Even as an integral aspect of the show, however, the Mexican troupe performed as "guest actors" in a space bound by notions of Mexican national identity--captured visually by elaborate costuming and fancy roping--that clearly delineated them as foreign.

One might think that with so few circulating images of Mexicans during the 1890s, it would have been sensible to place Oropeza in a category altogether different than the Esquivels and Barrera. They, after all, had grown up in the U.S.-Mexico borderlands, immersed in ranch life while Oropeza's adeptness resulted from rigorous training with a goal of elevating one's equestrian skills to an art form. The two equestrian practices were as distinctive along lines of culture and class as are Olympic jumping competitions and rodeo barrel racing today. The roughness of the working vaqueros, their mounts, and their gear, especially when performing in plotlines that had them chasing stagecoaches or menacing white travelers, stands in dramatic counterpoint to the formal, upper-class elegance of the exquisitely presented *charro*. It was Oropeza's sartorial style

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[61] Cisneros explains in José Cisneros, *Riders across the Centuries: Horsemen of the Spanish Borderlands* (El Paso: Texas Western Press, University of Texas at El Paso, 1984) that by the turn of the century, the "charro suit had evolved into a distinctive and streamlined design. Done in costly fabrics and discreetly adorned with gold and silver, it was extensively used by rich hacendados."

[62] Gerd Dörner, *Folk Art of Mexico* (New York: A. S. Barnes and Co, 1962); Kōjin Toneyama, *The Popular Arts of Mexico* (New York: Weatherhill/Heibonsha, 1974).

and skills that paralleled the image of elegance and bourgeoisie element the Mexican state desired to project to international audiences since 1893 as opposed the working-class cowboys of the North American borderlands. But in the context of Buffalo Bill's paid entertainment, the performers simply represented the single category of foreign Mexicans to increasingly urban American audiences. Class and national signifiers did not readily communicate such nuances on stage, and were unnecessary in this space. In spite of the vibrancy of *vaquero*s and *charros* in their importance to *mexicanidad* as representing Mexican national identity, the two iconic images ultimately collapsed into one within U.S. popular culture.

Charrería

Oropeza's successful wild west debut in Chicago inspired Cody to hire a troupe of Mexican *charros* who had been touring the United States the following year. They performed in Buffalo Bill's New York show where Oropeza joined them in their exhibition.[63] Their unique costumes and skills were an asset, for Cody truly enjoyed the spectacle of featuring something new and different in his production. Represented for the first time in U.S. popular culture, *vaqueros* and *charros* shared the stage front and center. What the riveting performances did not convey, however, were the nuanced differences--and the meanings attached to these distinctions--that were embedded in the iconic value of the distinct types of horsemen in *Mexican* culture.

[63] Sands, *Charrería Mexicana,* 64. LeCompte, "The Hispanic Influence on the History of Rodeo, 1823-1922," 35.

Figure 18: Vicente Oropeza (left) with Mexican *charros*, Buffalo Bill's Wild West, Salsbury Collection, Denver Public Library

Mexican *charrería* is "a uniquely developed form of horsemanship that, while related to the equitation systems of the conquistadores' homeland, is a genuinely American riding style shaped and molded by the physical and social environments of New Spain."[64] Indeed, the horse and cattle economy of Spain's colonial empire in the New World was key to developing unique riding skills and styles in Mexico. As one Mexican scholar explains further, vast numbers of horses roamed the colony of New Spain because "the abundance of good pasture land, the digestibility of the maize with which the pencos in stalls were fed, and the vast extensions of the fields caused the herds to greatly increase."[65] Large herds, coupled with vast land holdings, were the cornerstones of Mexico's ranching economy and long equestrian history.

As New Spain *criollos* benefited from the parceling of royal land grants, an elite riding

[64] Kathleen M. Sands, *Charrería Mexicana: An Equestrian Folk Tradition* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1993), 25.

[65] Alvarez del Villar, *Men and Horses of Mexico*, 21.

culture emerged among the new gentry, whose ownership of land and livestock buttressed their social and economic status. The Mexican elite made legislative attempts to maintain strict distinctions between the elite and the poor, and to undermine any insurrections; native peoples were prohibited from owning arms and riding horses. Due to the remoteness of many ranches and haciendas, however, the law was unenforceable, and many criollos hired mestizos and Indians, and taught them how to ride horses and to use the lariat to herd cattle in the large unfenced pastureland. Haciendas grew in size and scope, eventually leading to the ubiquitous need for skilled, working horsemen to help support the daily requirements of mid to large-size cattle operations; a segmented work force soon developed among working *vaqueros* and *hacendados* who were separated not only by land ownership, but also by the kind of work they performed.[66]

There were other visual characteristics that distinguished *charros* from *vaqueros*. Smaller, highly-decorated saddles and shortened stirrups for *charros*, for example, paralleled the changes on the ranches. While many working *vaqueros* depended on the handmade products of the hacienda for their accouterments--resulting in functionally-driven products that matched the ingenuity of the maker to the often life-or-death needs of the *vaqueros*--hacienda owners could afford to buy their equipment from luxury saddlemakers using the finest leather and expensive silver trim and have it shipped, especially after the construction of railroads in the 1880s. The decorations and trim on such saddles and bridles were not intended for ranch work such as herding cattle and roping farm animals, but here, were clear signifiers of class, race, and status. Additionally, the *charro* outfit took on new meanings of elegance, for the elite favored tailored

[66] Sands, *Charrería Mexicana*, 31-32; Alvarez del Villar, *Men and Horses of Mexico*; Slatta, *Cowboys of the Americas*; Chipman, *Spanish Texas*. Laura Barraclough, *Charros: How Mexican Cowboys Are Remapping Race and American Identity*, American Crossroads (Oakland: University of California Press, 2019), introduction.

clothing with fine detail and decoration, exemplified by Emperor Maximilian. In the 1860s, the Hapsburg monarch "ordered [a *charro* suit] to be made of the finest fabric. Until then, black had never before been used for riding costumes."[67] The short-reigned Emperor, having grown up in the Viennese palace that also houses the famous Spanish Riding School, would have been accustomed to the equitation exercises of the Hapsburg Court, where formally-dressed cavalrymen trained their white Lipizzaner stallions in intricate performances similar to *charreria*'s Cala de Caballo, in which rider and horse are valued for the grace with which they can turn, reverse, and move between gaits. Not just the dazzling clothing, but the practice of formal horsemanship for its own sake, was developing as a marker of an emerging aristocracy.

The evolution of the *charro* in Mexican culture was tightly bound with notions of class, race, and power. Nowhere else was the chasm between the *charro* and the *vaquero* more salient than in the items that could be seen, recognized, and identified with the naked eye. Horses, equipment, apparel all pointed to a very specific identity that carried racial and class meanings. In a revealing description, artist Joe Cisneros writes:

> In the decade preceding the outbreak of the Mexican revolution of 1910, the charro suit had evolved into a distinctive and streamlined design. Done in costly fabrics and discreetly adorned with gold and silver, it was extensively used by hacendados. And so it was when the social conflict began...The cultivated fields were turned into battlegrounds; the vaquero became a soldier, as did the farmhand; horses and saddles were battle equipment and the entire nation became a vast military drilling ground that involved all Mexicans.[68]

This is not to suggest that the increasingly ornate *charro* suits of the upper classes triggered the

[67] Jose Cisneros, *Riders Across the Centuries*, 154. Maximilian's use of black as unique would come as a shock to many observers today. See Chapter Four for a discussion of how and why the Mexican state and the Charro Association narrowed the acceptable colors for charro suits to buff or black.

[68] Jose Cisneros, *Riders Across the Centuries*, 187.

Mexican Revolution; but the symbolic meaning that Cisneros identifies in the outfit succinctly captures the divergence in identities and social realities in pre-Revolutionary Mexico that in hindsight made a peasants' revolt seem inevitable.[69]

The chasm between the poor and the landed gentry in Mexico was immense, and the growth of the middle class in urban areas also expanded dramatically during the Porfiriato.[70] Mostly indigenous, the very poor suffered from malnutrition, unsanitary conditions, and lacked well-compensated work. The other end of the social spectrum included wealthy land-owners who could support an upper-class lifestyle that included owning vast homes in rural and urban areas as well as not just livestock, but riding stock with a purely recreational purpose.[71] The elite had the means to purchase the accoutrements of *charrería* in addition to having the leisure time to learn, practice, and master the intricate skills required of *charros* as they guided their horses through intricate footwork and equitation exercises similar to European dressage.[72] In this manner, according to artist Joe Cisneros, the discontent about social inequities simmering in the decades before the Mexican Revolution could be encapsulated in the meanings attached to the *charro* suit, for its elaborate decorations signaled wealth, breeding, and training that could only be had by Mexico's elite. The sartorial making of the charro suit was also an effete rendering of what the poor had to

[69] Paul J. Vanderwood, *The Power of God Against the Guns of Government: Religious Upheaval in Mexico at the Turn of the Nineteenth Century* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998).

[70] Meyer and Sherman, *The Course of Mexican History*, 472.

[71] See Meyer and Sherman's chapter titled "Society and Culture during the Porfiriato" in *The Course of Mexican History* and William Beezley, *Judas at the Jockey Club and Other Episodes of Porfirian Mexico* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1987).

[72] Much as dressage formalized and tamed the skills that a horse would need to survive in battle at a time when modern warfare was rendering those skills superfluous, charrería lifted the skills needed by vaqueros and their mounts out of their dangerous quotidian context and rendered them instead as a voluntary luxury of the ruling class.

do in their work.[73]

These same people, however, were the very ones responsible for constructing an image that represented Mexico proudly on the international stage. When a *charro* performed in public, he took on the responsibility of representing Mexican culture in its entirety, even though *charrería* had emerged from elite traditions. To the Mexican upper-class, the *charro* was synonymous with elegance, uniqueness, and civility -- a perfect symbol to differentiate Mexico from other countries, especially the United States.

But in wild west shows, and by extension in American popular culture, the *charro* was conflated with that of the *vaquero*, the working Mexican cowboy. While Vicente Oropeza and his troupe of twelve exhibited the very skills that the Mexican elite esteemed highly, in the context of the shows, he and his fellow performers became synonymous with other Mexican performers, regardless of their class or the kind of horsemanship they performed. The American urban audience couldn't differentiate between the subtle skills of a charro performing a formalized art form and the vaquero's high-energy riding: both were simply 'Mexican.' Such a classification also labeled all ethnic Mexican performers as foreign even though they prided themselves on the intricate skills of the U.S. borderlands vaquero.

Mirroring U.S. statecraft that increasingly categorized ethnic Mexicans in the U.S. borderlands as immigrants and foreigners, showmen effectively erased nuanced differences in *mexicanidad* by grouping together performers of Mexican descent, whether they were citizens of

[73] *Charrería* has become less of an elite preserve since the Mexican Revolution. While the men's sartorial choice mirrors the dress of nineteenth-century elites, modern events incorporate the work of the vaqueros and the women of the Revolution. In the United States, ethnic Mexican communities' practice charrería not as an homage to a lost aristocracy, but as a touchstone of national pride. For its widespread practice in the United States, see Barraclough, *Charros: How Mexican Cowboys Are Remapping Race and American Identity*.

the United States or Mexico.[74] Against the white American heroes of the show, who themselves performed in only slightly modified versions of equipment and clothing that originated in Hispanic and Native communities of the West, Mexican *charros* and *vaqueros* increasingly fell out from under the rubric of being American.[75] While businessmen like Buffalo Bill, Gordon Lillie, and the Miller Brothers did not play a direct role in statecraft policy, they did foster an environment that reflected and peddled popular narratives of race and national identity. Racial difference had been an element since the first shows began in 1883, but the peddling of *mexicanidad* as a cultural marker of foreignness became part of paid entertainment. These narratives intensified social expectation that ethnic Mexicans did not belong in the body politic.

Narratives of Race and White National Identity

As early as the first traveling program, narratives of racial difference were crucial to the overall success of *Buffalo Bill's Wild West*. The show's first segment portrayed a "Quarter Mile Race between Mexican, Cowboy, and Indian Riders."[76] The cowboy, who wore chaps, a work-shirt, bandana, and a pistol, epitomized Southwestern cowboys. And although in reality there were always Mexican and Native American ranch hands and cowboys who wore similar clothing, such attire gradually became synonymous in public culture with American, white cowboys. In one illustration for a show advertisement, a Mexican vaquero wears a charro-styled suit similar to those worn for *charreadas* and public festivals by the upper classes of Mexico, which made the outfit

[74] The U.S. Naturalization Act of 1906 shifted the responsibility of naturalization policy from the individual 50 states to the federal government while increasing the policing of the U.S.-Mexico border at El Paso, Texas. The 1906 Act also instituted requirements that all newly naturalized individuals take an oath of allegiance and speak English.

[75] See Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, (New York: Vintage Books, trans. 1977), part III.

[76] Nate Salsbury Collection, Department of Western History, Denver Public Library, Colorado.

appear out of context. Even more dramatic, a Native American rider wears nothing but a loincloth and a feather headdress over his long, flowing hair, visually marking him as "uncivilized," if not outright barbaric, by the lack of clothing and riding equipment.[77]

Additionally, the written program described the *vaquero* and the cowboy as having the "skills" necessary to maneuver a horse effectively. But the implication was that Native Americans did not know, nor needed to know, how to be skilled horsemen. The inclusion of racially different characters in this visual and linguistic narrative culturally marked them as exotic and undeserving of inhabiting a "civilized" West.[78] Both the lithograph and the program effectively inscribed relations of difference into a sort of endurance test between cowboys, vaqueros, and Indians.

Subtle differences became not so subtle as the program used national identities to inscribe racial differences that made the unequal relationships of power appear normal. As the first segment in Buffalo Bill's 1884 program, the "Quarter Mile Race between Mexican, Cowboy, and Indian Riders," would change a decade later to the "Horse Race between a Cowboy, a Cossack, a Mexican, an Arab, and an Indian, on Spanish-Mexican, Broncho, Russian, Indian and Arabian Horses."[79] By the 1890s, a time of racial categorization, Jim Crow, and virulent nationalism, even the various performers' horses were racialized for the audience. In 1899, the event would be marketed as the "Race of Races", demonstrating how the show's trajectory had incorporated

[77] "1884 Program, Buffalo Bill's Wild West," n.d., Warshaw Collection, Wild West files, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution.

[78] Deahl, "A History of Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show, 1883-1913," 71.

[79] Deahl, 20; "1894 Program, Buffalo Bill's Wild West," n.d., Warshaw Collection, Wild West files, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution.

current political events to fit a meta-narrative of white American supremacy.[80] Notably, despite high profile Black cowboys such as Bill Pickett and the heroism of the United States Tenth Cavalry "Buffalo Soldiers," African-American horsemen had no place at the starting line in this entertainment show.[81]

At its most basic level, the "Horse Race" pointed to the ideological current in late nineteenth-century America that placed racial and ethnic "others" in a scientifically-based racial hierarchy. The horse race reinforced notions of biological differences as the foundation for racial inequality. Additionally, Cody placed foreign and ethnic groups with distinct cultural identities that, to American audiences, seemed odd and unusual in secondary roles, never in central places in the larger story of the show. A group of Cossacks, for example, performed feats of horsemanship and native dances while Syrian and Arabian horsemen demonstrated native sports and pastimes.[82] By the virtue of their secondary status as "side shows," they filled the gaps in the "real story" being told of the U.S. West, and by the virtue of being foreign, helped define what certain groups did and did not belong to the traditions of the American West.

The emphasis on horsemanship extended to include the talent of each rider as well as each

[80] "1899 Program, Buffalo Bill's Wild West," n.d., Warshaw Collection, Wild West files, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution.

[81] Bill Pickett joined the Miller Brothers 101 Show in 1905 where he showcased the bull-dogging skills of bringing down a charging steer by jumping from his horse onto the steer's horns, digging his boot heels into the ground, and wrestling the animal into submission by biting the steer's lip. See Bailey C. Hanes, *Bill Pickett, Bulldogger: The Biography of a Black Cowboy* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1977); Courtney Elliott, "The Legacy of Bill Pickett, The Dusky Demon," in *Cowboys, Cops, Killers, and Ghosts: Legends and Lore in Texas*, ed. Kenneth L. Untiedt (Denton: University of North Texas Press, 2013). For 1921 footage of Pickett wrestling steers, see https://youtu.be/AH5j9s4wm8E. For African American 'Buffalo Soldiers,' see William H. Leckie and Shirley A. Leckie, *The Buffalo Soldiers: A Narrative of the Black Cavalry in the West, Revised Edition* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2012).

[82] "1893 Program, Buffalo Bill's Wild West," n.d., Warshaw Collection, Wild West files, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution.

participant's horse. By creating a pairing of rider and horse, foreign entities were also created.[83] Should the race be won by the Arab riding the Arabian horse, for example, then it would speak to the superiority of not only the horse, but also to the skills the rider had learned in his own culture. Interestingly, only one outcome is mentioned: on July 7, 1891 in Liverpool, England, "an exciting race took place between a cowboy, Mexican, and Indian, in which the Mexican won."[84] One scholar argues that the races were a sport in which white frontiersmen and Indians freely competed; horse races tested men's skills while allowing the riders an opportunity to exhibit them before their peers.[85]

Exemplary of the increasing racialization of Buffalo Bill's program is "The *Capture* of the Deadwood Mail Coach by the Indians," which changed a year later to "The *Attack* on the Deadwood Mail Coach by Indians."[86] The program's short description of this event read: "This is the identical old Deadwood Coach, called the mail Coach, which is famous on account of having carried the great number of people who lost their lives on the road between Deadwood and Cheyenne 18 years ago."[87] For a complete version of the event, readers needed to turn to page twenty-four, where the detailed description ran over two pages long:

> The people of the Eastern States of the Union are accustomed to regard the West as the region of romance and adventure. And, in truth, its history abounds with thrilling incidents and surprising changes. Every inch of that beautiful country has been won from a cruel and savage foe by danger and conflict. In the terrible wars of the border, which marked the early years of the Western settlements, the men signalized (sic) themselves by performing prodigies of valor, while the women, in

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[83] Joy Kasson, "Animals in Buffalo Bill's Wild West," paper delivered at the American Studies Association, Washington, D.C., November 1, 1997.

[84] "Buffalo Bill Scrapbook," 1891, William F. Cody Collection, Buffalo Bill Center of the West, Harold McCracken Research Library.

[85] Deahl, "A History of Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show, 1883-1913," 70.

[86] The *italics* are mine to highlight the change in word choice, which effectively changed the meaning of the segment.

[87] "1893 Program, Buffalo Bill's Wild West."

> their heroic courage and endurance, afforded a splendid example of devotion and self-sacrifice. The history of the wagon trains and stage coaches that precede the railway is written all over with blood, and the story of suffering and disaster...is only known in all of its horrid details to the bold frontiersmen who, as scouts and rangers, penetrated the strongholds of the Indians, and backed by the gallant men of the army, became the avant couriers of Western civilization and the terror of the red man.

While based on a specific historical event, this passage reified expansionist narratives, creating a vivid intersection of tropes in the Deadwood stagecoach act. Most graphically, the "blood," "suffering," and "disaster" that occurred in the West apparently resulted from the "savagery" and "cruelty" of Native Americans. Moreover, by inverting the silences of the passage, Native Americans certainly were not "heroic," "gallant," courageous," "valourous," or "bold"--instead, those terms identified white Americans as the "couriers of civilization"--making relations of difference and domination appear natural. The repeated performance also manipulated time and space, and made “Indian attacks” much more frequent in the public mind. While the initial event (the attack on the mail coach) took place once, 18 years in the past, it was then repeated two hundred or more times a year over several decades in front of audiences across the United States and Europe. Indian attacks on stagecoaches therefore *were* common in America, but in performance and imagination rather than in documented history.

One tactic used to convey these images effectively was having audience volunteers join in the re-enactment, serving as passengers of the stagecoach as it emerged from behind the backdrop into the main arena. What followed was reported in *The Washington Post*:

> Suddenly, a piercing yell was heard, and a party of mounted Indians galloped from behind a canvas sheet, where they had been lying in ambush, and pursued the coach. [The driver] lashed his mules into a furious gallop and rushed madly over the cinder track, the coach jumping and swaying from side to side. Nearer and nearer came the Indians, yelling like mad and exchanging rapid shots with the passengers. As the coach turned the curve by the stands again the foremost Indians came up with it, pouring shot after shot into the driver, whose capacity for holding lead seemed

unlimited. The spectators sat spellbound.[88]

The *Post* reporter continued: "Suddenly another body of horsemen appeared, headed by "Buffalo Bill', and charged on the yelling savages. A desperate encounter ensued which resulted in the flight of the Indians and the rescue of the coach."[89] In stark visual images, Native Americans were cast as ominous and dangerous yet again. And even though spectators and volunteers knew that the entire skit was a re-enactment, the stunning visuality of the performance made Buffalo Bill into the white hero of the American West. In show after show, city after city, he alone was the only one to save the stagecoach.

In another so-called authentic act, the visually titillating attack on a settler's cabin was also a crowd pleaser. A white woman, usually doing something domestic like hanging the laundry to dry, sweeping the front of her home, or boiling hot water outside, would be attacked by a band of "marauding Indians." At this point, the actress would be dragged away from the safety of her stage home by the Indians, (one presumes to be scalped, raped, or both--the show never let it go that far).[90]

In the public space of the show's arena, however, a cavalry of American cowboys led by Buffalo Bill did manage to rescue the woman in the nick of time--usually by outwitting the Indians with a surprise attack of their own, effectively accomplishing the manly duty of saving a woman from imminent peril. These scintillating images highlighted the violence--and its unmentionable effects when left unchecked--that, according to the show's producers, existed in the wildness of

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[88] Deahl, "A History of Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show, 1883-1913," 41.

[89] Deahl, 41.

[90] "1893 Program, Buffalo Bill's Wild West"; "1894 Program, Buffalo Bill's Wild West"; "1899 Program, Buffalo Bill's Wild West"; "1903 Program, Buffalo Bill's Wild West," n.d., Warshaw Collection, Wild West files, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution.

the west. Strategically, these images left much of what *might* have happened to the imagination of the spectators.

The Spanish-American War as Wild West Plotline

Images of whiteness and U.S. national identity mixed with a fascination for the Spanish-American War, and proved to be such an intoxicating mixture that by 1899 a new segment, "The Battle for San Juan Hill," replaced "Custer's Last Fight" as the climactic showpiece.[91] Cody used images from the Spanish-American War as another facet of his show, equating international foreign relations with a mythic war in the American West. Although Cody was not an agent of the state and not involved in U.S. statecraft, he was adept at taking historical events and incorporating them into paid entertainment to create a visual punch. For example, Cody used the 1898 Spanish-American war to showcase America's military prowess but also its racial superiority. The toughness of his cowboys and that of the staged U.S. military troops were linked only by whiteness and masculinity.

Cody's direction in the re-enactment of *The Battle of San Juan* was an additional step in converting late nineteenth-century ideologies of racial hierarchy into another set of entertaining visual images. Whiteness *and* masculinity represented American national identity as Cody re-

[91] The history of American foreign relations is extensive, especially regarding the 1898 Spanish-American War. Historians agree that the war was a watershed in the emergence of the United States as a world power. See Philip S. Foner, *The Spanish-Cuban-American War and the Birth of American Imperialism* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1972); Joseph A. Fry, "William McKinley and the Coming of the Spanish-American War: A Study of the Besmirching and Redemption of an Historical Image," *Diplomatic History* 3, no. 1 (1979): 77–97; Lewis L. Gould, *The Spanish-American War and William McKinley* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1982); Gabriel Kolko, *The Roots of American Foreign Policy* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969); Walter LaFeber, *The Cambridge History of American Foreign Relations Volume 2: The American Search for Opportunity, 1865–1913* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993); Gerald F. Linderman, *The Mirror of War: American Society and the Spanish-American War* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1974); Louis A. Pérez, Jr., *Cuba Between Empires, 1878-1902* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1983); Louis A. Pérez, Jr., "The Meaning of the *Maine*: Causation and the Historiography of the Spanish-American War," *Pacific Historical Review* 58, no. 3 (1989): 293–322; Willliam Appleman Willliams, *The Tragedy of American Diplomacy*, Third ed. (New York: Norton, 1988).

coded the U.S. military to symbolize the triumph of whiteness and civilization over the swarthy, semi-barbaric Spanish. Yet, as literary historian Amy Kaplan explains, the battle for San Juan Hill "was not heroic, but a military fiasco; not a massive orderly charge, but a struggling line of desperate soldiers, pitilessly exposed to enemy fire--not even on the romantic San Juan Hill, but the more mundane Kettle Hill."[92] So while American military failure marked the actual battle in Cuba, the re-worked version in Cody's show glorified his troops along the lines of race and gender, creating another version of U.S. national identity that was rooted deeply in notions of racial superiority. Cody, however, was not solely responsible for the taking images of Latin America out of context.

At the turn of the century, contemptuous images of people from Cuba and Puerto Rico in U.S. popular culture were readily lifted almost directly from the Black Legend. Coined by Spanish scholar Julián Juderías in 1914, the phrase 'La Leyenda Negra' [The Black Legend] described the vehemently anti-Spanish sentiment existing since the seventeenth century between Spain and England.[93] Over time, the phrase supported the stereotype of the barbaric, uncouth, superstitious, and inherently evil Catholic Spaniard, eventually expanding to include all people of Latin American descent. According to historian Michael Hunt, the black legend was "perpetuated by school texts, kept fresh in cartoons, retold in political rhetoric, and even incorporated into the views of policymakers."[94] Wrapped into basic tenets of American imperialism was the alleged racial

[92] Amy Kaplan, "Black and Blue on San Juan Hill," in *Cultures of United States Imperialism*, ed. Amy Kaplan and Donald E. Pease (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993).

[93] Joseph P. Sanchez, *The Spanish Black Legend: Origins of Anti-Hispanic Stereotypes* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico, 1990).

[94] Michael H. Hunt, *Ideology and U.S. Foreign Policy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987), 58.

inferiority of the Spanish that had resulted from their miscegenation with Indians and blacks. With fervor, the image of "the Latin half-breed brute" and "the infantile and often negroid Latin" circulated at the turn of the century and was consumed readily in the U.S.[95]

In the context of the Spanish-American War, U.S. imagery painted a helpless Cuban nation that sorely needed to be "rescued" in its battle for independence from the "ruthlessness" of Spain. Hunt's analysis of the relationship between the U.S. and Latin America suggests that the "feminized Latin allowed the United States to assume the role of ardent suitor or gallant savior."[96] By setting up a dichotomy of men and women through the representation of female helplessness on one hand and masculine courage and military prowess on another, Hunt shortchanges the complexity of gendered international relations. Although Hunt is accurate in that certain representations "provided justification for a policy of keeping [Latin Americans] in an appropriately dependent relationship to the United States," the use of visual imagery was far more complex than only providing "justification" for impending military action.[97] Even though the representations of Latin America were compelling, there were other ways in which power relations, shaped by gender and race, played out in the images of Latin America.

Costuming Gender In Manly Spaces

In addition to their roping legacies, the Esquivels, Barrera, and Oropeza were responsible for crystallizing the images of *charros* and *vaqueros* as the symbols of Mexico and Mexicans in U.S. public culture. In their choice of costumes, the actors not only mapped specific cultural traits onto their bodies, but also took part in constructing a Mexican national identity. While Oropeza

[95] Hunt, 59.

[96] Hunt, 62.

[97] Hunt, 62.

and Barrera always wore the well-known Mexican props such as wide-brimmed sombreros and ornately-decorated jackets and pants, the Esquivel brothers navigated between American working-cowboy attire and that of *vaqueros* since both cowboys and *vaqueros* worked with cattle. Each performer knew the specific functions of different clothing items as well as the effect of working with different props. Just as the costumes of these performers varied greatly, so too, did their own identities when they performed.

But to Cody and spectators, these performers were identified as Mexican and, therefore, foreign. By the late 1890s, the different costumes, props, and identities among the *charros* and *vaqueros* mattered little, as they increasingly became relegated simply to being seen as Mexican. Having these performers dress "Mexican" in the space of the arena created a diverse group of performers, but also equated Mexicans with "non-American." The ultimate function of eye-catching wardrobes was to inscribe cultural differences that could be recognized easily from the grandstands. In order to be effective over the long run of the traveling shows, these costumes needed to be consistent and they needed to be different from those of the heroes and heroines. It is through these mechanisms that the meanings attached to *vaqueros* and *charros* became the visual signifiers of Mexican national identity in American performances.

For the spectator who truly had no prior knowledge of Mexicans or what they looked like, he or she could always refer to the souvenir program for a written analysis of "The Vaquero of the Southwest" (where the implication was that there was indeed only one kind.) Programs from 1894 and 1900 both printed the same written description of *vaqueros*. The first line reads: “Between the "cow-boy" and the "vaquero" there is only a slight line of demarcation. The one is usually an American, inured from boyhood to the excitements and hardships of his life, and the other

represents in his blood the stock of the Mexican, or it may be of the half-breed.”[98] The program's writers assigned characteristics to the American cowboy, but only racial bloodlines for the Mexican or “half-breed” *vaquero*, constructing a definition of not just who qualified to be "American.” This specifically did not include U.S. Mexicans or other mixed-race people, even though the number of ethnic Mexicans in the country had been increasing steadily since the 1880s.[99]

In addition to racial and ethnic markers, costumes served to identify and define a character as "non-American." Although the work of cowboys and *vaqueros* was similar, their costumes marked important differences between the two; “your genuine vaquero," the program continued: “...is generally more of a dandy in the style and get-up of his attire...He is fond of gaudy clothes, and when you see him riding well mounted into a frontier town, the first thought of an Eastern man is that a circus has broken loose in the neighborhood, and this is one of the performers.”[100]

The gendered implication of the word ‘dandy’--especially in the realm of wild west shows -- was clear. The Oxford English Dictionary defines the word dandy as "one who studies above everything to dress elegantly and fashionably: a beau, fop, 'exquisite.'"[101] Additionally, in the specific historical context of the late-nineteenth century, the label dandy signaled that a man took extra care of his appearance. In *City of Eros*, for example, Timothy Gilfoyle observes that "the

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[98] “1894 Program, Buffalo Bill’s Wild West”; “1900 Program, Buffalo Bill’s Wild West,” n.d., Warshaw Collection, Wild West files, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution.

[99] Gutiérrez writes that by 1890, approximately 78,000 Mexican-born residents lived in the U.S., followed by an additional 50,000 immigrants in that decade alone. See David Gutiérrez, *Walls and Mirrors: Mexican Americans, Mexican Immigrants and the Politics of Ethnicity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 45.

[100] “1894 Program, Buffalo Bill’s Wild West”; “1900 Program, Buffalo Bill’s Wild West.”

[101] Oxford English Dictionary, 1933, vol. III, p. 25

quintessential dandies were fastidious in dress and detached in manner. They were known for their flashy outfits, finger rings, watch chains, leather boots, and "fashionable" behavior."[102] Gilfoyle's placement of this phenomena in urban New York is expanded by Ann Hollander; she writes that "in the new urban dandy mode ... his garments had to be perfect only in their own sartorial integrity, that is, in form alone, unburdened by any surface indices of the worth attached to rank."[103] In all of these contexts, dandyism brought to light the extra time, care, and expense required to be recognized through stylish clothing. Yet, it was the program's writers who interpreted the difference in costumes as dandyism in the West.

These meanings marked vaqueros as different in relation to cowboys, whose virility was not shaped by fashionable attire, but by the masculine virtues of courage, honor, and civilization. Similarly, *charrería* -- begun by the Mexican elite -- also enveloped notions of courage, honor, and civilization at its foundation. Beginning with the Porfiriato, national pride was indeed intertwined with the *charro* suit as per Mexican statecraft, but in the context of the American West -- as defined by East Coast narratives -- these characteristics pointed to a non-virile dandy life. Such labels differentiated between those who allegedly deserved to claim the West as their own, and those who did not -- all according to the show's images. The tension here was not so much each nation's statecraft, but what stagecraft would sell tickets to keep this show business afloat. Unlike the peddling of *mexicanidad* by the Mexican state, the calculus for the wild west showmen had little to do with international diplomacy and everything to do with financial success. What images worked to keep paying audiences filling their open arenas required one national identity to

[102] Timothy J. Gilfoyle, *City of Eros: New York City, Prostitution, and the Commercialization of Sex 1790-1920* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1992), 105.

[103] Anne Hollander, *Sex and Suits: The Evolution of Modern Dress* (New York: Knopf, 1994), 92.

win by the end of the show. The winner was always America.

By extension, the show's program gendered Mexican culture to imply that Mexicans were incapable of dominating the wildness of the American West because Mexicans were neither white nor virile. Steeped in racial and national constructions, the printed programs reified what was being displayed and seen in the arena. Whether spectators read the description of vaqueros before or after other horsemen raced around the showgrounds, written text in the programs and visual images – together - sustained a gendered image of *vaqueros* and *charros*. Through their alleged dandyism, *charros* like Oropeza were emasculated because they took too much interest in their exotic costumes while vaqueros, who wore less elaborate costuming, only performed in non-heroic, secondary roles.[104] Constructing U.S. national identity from racial and gender constructions, the show producers ultimately fused a range of subjectivities and identities of Mexican performers into a monolithic construction of foreign identity.

While the entertainment aspect of the shows always included vaqueros and *charros*, after the turn of the century, Mexicans, as an easily identifiable category of people, emerged in new and complicated roles. Mexicans as bandits in wild west shows became the norm, especially as this image appeared ubiquitously in early silent film – what may have been a circular feedback loop as the two genres influenced each other, and often shared performers. Because the incorporation of current events into the show had always been key in selling tickets, snippets of the Mexican Revolution made its way into the Miller Brothers' production, just as the Spanish-American War found its way into Buffalo Bill's show a decade earlier. With the Mexican Revolution in full force,

[104] "1893 Program, Buffalo Bill's Wild West"; "1894 Program, Buffalo Bill's Wild West"; "1900 Program, Buffalo Bill's Wild West"; "1903 Program, Buffalo Bill's Wild West."

the company's publicity machine responded by producing programs that re-enacted hold-ups with Mexican bandits.[105] Against this political backdrop, the imagery presented by the touring shows helps explain the prevailing mythos surrounding the "rugged individualism" and whiteness of the culturally-constructed American cowboy as opposed to the community and diversity of the real thing. Even though the Miller Brothers had integrated Mexicans into their definition of a "Wild West," the romanticization of a supposedly foreign population helped mask the presence in the United States of both immigrant and colonized ethnic Mexican communities.[106]

Even as the number of Mexicans living in the U.S. bolted upward after the start of the Mexican Revolution, by the mid-1910s, Mexicans appeared in no performance roles other than that of bandit. The image of the elegant *charro* and the *vaquero* as respected equestrians had mostly disappeared from U.S. popular culture. The wild west show's narrative that once lauded vaqueros and *charros* for their skills in roping and riding--had been transformed to include full-fledged Mexican bandits on the very pages of the show's program.

The evolution of the honorable *vaquero* of the 1880s and the elegant *charro* of the 1890s into fictional bandits by the 1910s correlates with the shift in U.S. attitudes towards Mexico and Mexicans in the U.S. Unidimensional portrayals of Mexicans as foreigners excluded them from public narratives, yet many U.S. Mexicans maintained their borderlands culture, depended on their riding and roping skills for their livelihood, and continued working on ranches as *vaqueros* well into the twentieth century, defining themselves on their own terms.

New Mexican author Fabiola Cabeza de Baca Gilbert, for example, wrote about growing

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[105] 1916 Souvenir program, Miller Brothers Real 101 Ranch Wild West, Library and Archives, Gene Autry Museum of Western Heritage, Los Angeles, California.

[106] The greatest number of Mexicans migrating to the Southwest began during this time period. The census of 1910 shows the number of Mexican-born persons in the United States more than doubled to approximately a quarter of a million since 1900.

up in a ranching family on the plains of New Mexico. Her work tells of a vibrant *vaquero* culture in turn-of-the-century New Mexico and the changes that arrived with the incorporation of Anglo newcomers and modern ranching techniques. In Texas, folklorists J. Frank Dobie and Jovita Gonzalez wrote extensively about the *vaqueros* of south Texas in the 1920s and 1930s.[107] Indeed, Mexican *vaqueros* and Chicano cowboys today work throughout the American West, maintaining a strong presence in U.S. ranching communities.[108]

The legacy of Mexican vaqueros in the U.S. is not limited to their physical presence and historical persistence, as the integration of their skills and equipment into American ranching techniques and range culture is unquestioned; for centuries, vaqueros "provided the cowboy of the Western plains with most of the accouterments, techniques, and terminology of the range-cattle industry." [109] The history of vaqueros in different historical contexts illustrates the integral relationship between Mexican horsemanship and the history and development of the U.S.-Mexico borderlands.

Amidst the ballyhooed attempts to sell a specific view of the West, the wild west shows systematically disseminated representations that struck at the core of late nineteenth-century American ideology. Images in popular culture like the "Attack on the Deadwood Stage Coach," American soldiers winning battles against Spanish-speaking foreigners, and Mexican bandits at

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[107] Fabiola Cabeza de Baca Gilbert, *We Fed Them Cactus*, Pasó Por Aquí Series on the Nuevomexicano Literary Heritage (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1954). For an informational, but intellectually problematic, view of vaqueros, please see J. Frank Dobie's "The Mexican Vaquero of the Texas Border," *Political and Social Science Quarterly*, V3, N1 (June 1927), 15-26 and "Ranch Mexicans," *The Survey,* V66 (May 1, 1931) 167-170. Jovita Gonzalez analyzed vaquero corridos (ballads) in "Lore of the Texas Mexican Vaquero," *Publications of the Texas Folk-Lore Society*, 1927.

[108] *Los Angeles Times*, May 16, 1992. Laura Barraclough, *Charros: How Mexican Cowboys Are Remapping Race and American Identity*.

[109] Matt S. Meier and Feliciano Rivera, *Dictionary of Mexican American History* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1981). See also Joe S. Graham, *El Rancho in South Texas: Continuity and Change from 1750* (Kingsville/Denton, TX: John E. Conner Museum/University of North Texas Press, 1994); and Slatta, *Cowboys of the Americas*.

the helm of armed robberies comfortably accommodated notions of whiteness, civilization, and racialized hierarchies. Above all, American national identity included only white and virile subjects as race and manhood emerged as the crucial factors in defining Americans at the turn of the century. By a process of elimination, ethnic Mexicans - whether foreign or U.S.-born - did not fit into that ideal.

The gendering by the showmen of *vaqueros* and *charros* in non-virile ways in plotlines and presentation highlighted the differences between Mexicans and white Americans in stark visual imagery that placed them in comfortable subservience and opposition to the white cowboys who would end the shows as heroes. Systems of power that created social hierarchies based on race and gender were made to appear natural in day to day life in how the show's program took shape. At its most fundamental, and blatant form, white manhood symbolized human advancement through American individualism and imperialism, for it was always the show's owner -- Buffalo Bill or his counterparts -- and the cadre of American cowboys that saved the day for white western expansion.

In the carefully manicured public space of the wild west show, clothing, attire, and costumes became the key to highlighting racial differences between white cowboys and other performers. Molded by notions of gender and race, images of the wild west shows sharply defined Mexicans as foreigners in U.S. culture by the turn of the twentieth century and as wild west shows reached their apex in 1916. White cowboys had taken on meanings other than simple heroes -- they represented White America. When the first feature-length films began exhibiting in 1908, the American film industry had already taken many of its Mexican images from wild west shows. These visuals, far less fluid than even those of the live shows, labeled Mexican characters as foreign or second-class citizens - if not outright bandits.

Paid entertainment and new technologies at the turn of the twentieth century spurred the spread of white supremacist iconography and narratives against ethnic Mexicans across the United States. And the production and consumption of these images in paid entertainment made acts of segregation, income disparities, and racism towards Mexican communities in the U.S. socially acceptable because these visual narratives supported and endorsed the political and economic forces which shaped the lives of ethnic Mexicans. Mass culture symbolically erased ethnic Mexicans from definitions of 'Americanness,' relegating them to the sidelines as racially inferior or simply not worthy of acknowledgement. In the cultural borderlands of the United States, where paid amusements entertained Americans near and far from the actual border, this became fertile ground for racialized U.S. policies and assumptions that continually denied ethnic Mexicans entry to the American polity, much as they continue to do so today.

CHAPTER VI

Conclusion

Mexicanidad as a Commodity

In 1906, William Cody's managing partner James A. Bailey of Barnum & Bailey circus fame passed away, marking the end of *Buffalo Bill's Wild West* heyday. Bailey had reorganized the traveling show into a corporate entertainment behemoth by putting the production on the road in 1895 for shorter stints, allowing Cody to reach millions more people across the United States and in Europe. Bailey was also the logistics mastermind, handling every train schedule to transport the dozens of rail cars into each town where he managed the show locally.[1] After Bailey's death, *Buffalo Bill's Wild West* never recovered financially.

Also in 1906, the Mexican government took control of the U.S.-owned Mexican Central Railway by claiming "an option on the controlling shares held by H. Clay Pierce," an American businessman who had taken over majority stock ownership from the original Boston investors.[2] Twenty years earlier, Boston investors had hoped for quick rail construction between El Paso and Mexico City, foreseeing a favorable return on their investment with the traffic to and from the

[1] Louis S. Warren, *Buffalo Bill's America: William Cody and the Wild West Show* (New York: Vintage Books, 2005), 421, 494.

[2] Fred Wilbur Powell, *The Railroads of Mexico* (Boston: The Stratford Company, 1921), 131.

interior of Mexico. The advantages of being a feeder line into the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe Railway, which crossed the span of the United States, and the favor of the Mexican government as early as 1880, did not hold up.

The rail line failed to generate traffic, the company was heavily capitalized, and the expected traffic of passengers never materialized at the levels required for profitability. The Mexican Central Railway not once showed profit in its annual reports between 1880 and 1894, and in the final years of the Porfiriato, U.S. rail owners retreated from doing business with Mexico.[3] The railway's financial future was bleak, and rather than have U.S. capitalists or courts decide the fate of Mexico's largest transportation system as it headed into bankruptcy, the Mexican state stepped in and began the process of nationalizing the railway.[4]

The demise of these entities after the turn of the twentieth century amidst changes in the U.S. business and political climate in addition to the growing tense diplomatic relations with Mexico is a different story, and one for another project.[5] The consequence here was that between 1886 and 1906, entities as disparate as wild west shows, railroads, and national governments left behind persistent tropes about Mexicans as long-term byproducts of their short-term marketing, and economic self-interest. The emerging entertainment marketplace transformed constructions of *mexicanidad* from an expression of Mexican pride into imagery shaped by race and gender and delivered as a commodity for public consumption. As wild west shows, American investors, and

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[3] "Annual Report of the Board of Directors of the Mexican Central Railway Co. Limited to the Stockholders, 1880-1894" (Boston: Cochran & Blodgett, n.d.), Yale University Library Holdings; Powell, *The Railroads of Mexico*, 130.

[4] Sandra Kuntz Ficker, "Economic Backwardness and Firm Strategy: An American Railroad Corporation in Nineteenth-Century Mexico," *Hispanic American Historical Review* 80, no. 2 (May 2000): 298.

[5] The passage in 1906 of the U.S. Naturalization Act began the transformation of the U.S.-Mexico border, which became "a place of increased regulation and surveillance," with increased medical inspections at the El Paso crossing. See Anna Pegler-Gordon, *In Sight of America: Photography and the Development of U.S. Immigration Policy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), 174.

the U.S. and Mexican states pursued profits and advantage, all peddled *mexicanidad* through live performance.

Together, these chapters tell the story of unequal relations of power based on race and gender that shaped *mexicanidad* in late nineteenth century U.S. paid entertainment. The unintended consequence of the economic and political self-interest of these performances was two-fold: first, the commodification of these live performances as they migrated from statecraft to stagecraft; and second, the transformation of *mexicanidad* from an expression of Mexican cultural pride into negative visual tropes in future U.S. entertainment. The recovered imagery and the narratives analyzed in this dissertation led to four icons representing a reductionist version of *mexicanidad* that emerged during this twenty-year period: the Aztec or indigenous *peón*, the singing Mexican musician, the horse-riding *charro* dandy and the laboring *vaquero*. Over time, these four tropes became the dominant representations of Mexicans in increasingly national and urban markets for paid entertainment, reaching the largest number and cross-section of spectators to date.

The construction of race and gender for ethnic Mexican performance in late nineteenth century amusement occurred in the seemingly innocuous sites of pleasure, leisure, and entertainment, all under the rubric of having fun. The peddling of *mexicanidad* came about through live acts that created accessible and enjoyable images for public consumption. The purveyors of commoditized culture were the Mexican Central Railway, entrepreneurs like the Orrin Brothers and Nichols, the Arizona businessman on the Midway Plaisance, and Buffalo Bill's and Pawnee Bill's Wild West shows.

These content producers did not seek political significance for their images of their live performers, but created cultural expectations that continued to recycle in mass media; the politics of economic interests moved forward. The Mexican and U.S. governments, meanwhile, proffered

images of Mexico and Mexicans for different reasons, seeking to gain geopolitical advantage through statecraft such as the cultural and economic diplomacy of the World's Columbian Exposition, the official racial ethnography of the Smithsonian Institution, and the Mexican government's directing the Eighth Cavalry Military band to the Chicago World's Fair.

Poignantly, the visuality of these live performances were memorable because the performers were magnetic. Ethnic Mexicans from both Mexico and the United States proudly exhibited craftsmanship, musical talent, and an astonishing level of horsemanship to their enthusiastic audiences. Seeking to portray Mexico in a good light, Mexican officials and their business allies tried to calibrate the perfect mix of exoticism, industriousness, and modernity. Individual Mexicans and the Mexican state proudly offered *mexicanidad* for their American counterparts' entertainment. The American imagination eagerly took in the Mexican presence in U.S. entertainment. The novelty and visual force of these performances made them memorable.

What made these performances easy to consume – and to misinterpret -- were the racialized and gendered frameworks reinforcing the unequal relationships of power in which these performers emerged. To audiences, these power dynamics were familiar and comfortable. On stage, ethnic Mexican performers threatened little of American life, for their purpose was to entertain others. And to boot, they were non-white, appeared unmanly to the American gaze, and arrived from a supposedly less civilized country. They were non-threatening because they ostensibly did not belong in the United States.

The unequal relations of power between the United States and Mexico also normalized these tropes for spectators, by delivering a consistent set of expectations for viewers when they consumed any one, or more, of these images. The pride and cultural legacy of *mexicanidad* did not register with American audiences, who only saw Mexicans before them. Millions of fair,

exposition, and show attendees maintained popular knowledge and expectations of indigenous or impoverished Mexicans as primitive and backward; observed the icon of Mexican pride wearing an effeminate and non-American dandified charro suit and sombrero; and deemed the working vaquero as a dependent, if underpaid, laborer working at the behest of American cowboys.

But even the political and economic power of the Mexican state was not sufficient to overcome the emerging negative images of Mexicans that hardened in U.S. entertainment. The result was that to U.S. audiences, Mexicans were not white, were unmanly, and were unworthy of American-ness. Within the space of paid entertainment, the production of this imagery transformed Mexican identity from a celebration of *mexicanidad* into the slow but steady idea of Mexican identity as negative, and therefore unacceptable for the American polity. These performances became the cornerstones for narratives that resonated with future U.S. audiences about what it meant to be Mexican, as these representations subsequently transformed into proxies of lawlessness, laziness, poverty, and dandyism in early silent film.

After the turn of the twentieth century, tropes of the primitive *peón* or indigenous 'Aztec,' the carefree Mexican musician, dandified *charro*, and subservient *vaquero* hardened in the American psyche. Appearing in different contexts across paid entertainment and across time, these four tropes gained more credibility as they folded into new technologies like the kinetoscope and the nickelodeon, where familiar notions and ideas about Mexicans offered readily accessible images from which to draw. Familiarity came with a set of expectations.

As early silent film exploded across the United States, the medium hardened ideas about Mexicans already shared in previous entertainment venues. Accompanying each trope was a built-in recognition and a perceived understanding about them, making more seamless the audience's ability to understand visual shortcuts on-screen. Because of live entertainment in the previous

decades, iconic sombreros, waist jackets with shiny trim, or plain cotton outfits with straw hats were an established visual shorthand with which film writers and directors denoted bandits, naïve Spanish dons, or slow-thinking primitive Mexicans.

What about the performers themselves? Working within the social structures shaped by the era's statecraft and the spatial geographies of stagecraft, individual ethnic Mexicans employed human agency to make their way. The resilience of archeologist Zelia Nuttall, musical artist Juventino Rosas and the *orquesta típica mexicana*, Captain Encarnación Payén and his elite military band, as well as wild west performers Vicente Oropeza, the Esquivel brothers, and Joe Barrera is borne out in each's legacy. The resilience of these performers demonstrated elements of Mexican culture that are the cornerstones of *rasquachismo*. The rasquache outlook of hope, *ganas*, inventiveness, and a make-do attitude made way for new cultural forms in U.S. entertainment while the performers left important legacies.[6]

Vestiges of their performances continue today. The string orchestra's musical behavior foreshadowed the invention of mariachi musical performance of the early twentieth century. The roping skills of Vicente Oropeza inspired Will Rogers, who became one of the most well-known (and liked) people of the early twentieth century, and the Esquivel brothers and Joe Barrera strengthened the popularity of rodeo and charrería in ethnic communities in the Southwest. Zelia Nuttall's recommendation of her student Manuel Gamio to study anthropology with Frank Boas at Columbia University led to Gamio becoming known as the father of Mexican anthropology, as

[6] *Ganas* means desire, urge in Spanish; from the Spanish verb *ganar,* to win or gain. According to Urban Dictionary, the actor Edward James Olmos, who plays Los Angeles mathematics teacher Jaime Escalante in the movie *Stand and Deliver,* states in the film: "You're going to work harder here than you've ever worked anywhere else. And the only thing I ask from you is *ganas*. Desire... If you don't have the *ganas*, I will give it to you, because I'm an expert."

he challenged notions about the racial inferiority of indigenous Mexicans and wrote the seminal work in the 1930s about Mexican migration to the United States.[7]

The archive reveals the content of their performances and the effect they had on audiences, but reconstructing more fully these people's individual experiences and behavior, if not their actual voice, requires additional archival work. Of the purported "villagers" in the *Aztec Fair*, we know little; did their adventures in Washington, DC entail walking past the White House, seeing the Washington Monument, and visiting the recently opened Arts and Industries Building of the Smithsonian Institution? How did Juventino Rosas' musical compositions fuel the creation of the U.S. music publishing industry Tin Pan Alley? After being known for decades as "Mexican Joe," why did Barrera's nation-wide obituaries use the Spanish-language version "José Barrera" for his name? What historical nuggets are to be discovered in the material artifacts from Vicente Oropeza's family recently acquired by the Buffalo Bill Historical Center in Cody, Wyoming? What are the additional links and fuller history between the *orquesta típica mexicana* and modern-day mariachi that burst onto radio in the late 1920s? These are but some of the questions generated by this research.

We must dig deeper and wider to strengthen the stories of Mexican performers who, against barriers of race and gender, constructed their own identity in the cultural borderlands of nineteenth-century U.S. entertainment. For future research in Chicana/Chicano and Borderlands History, the analysis of this dissertation is critical: by offering an understanding of where, how, and why the production of negative tropes about ethnic Mexicans emerged from performances of *mexicanidad* in U.S. entertainment and diplomacy alike, it opens up a new way of thinking about the political and legislative changes that debilitated/shaped ethnic Mexican communities in the United States

[7] Mireya Loza, *Defiant Braceros: How Migrant Workers Fought for Racial, Sexual, and Political Freedom* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2016), 30.

after 1906. Political decisions with real policy effects did not happen in a vacuum. U.S. statecraft continually reshaped domestic and international policy in service of a sole driving question: What was best for the United States? As the U.S.'s cultural ecosystem filled with outright negative imagery of ethnic Mexicans after the turn of the twentieth century, the easier and more logical it was to relegate whole ethnic Mexican communities to second-class citizenry, whether by limiting their economic and political status, failing to confront racial violence, or altering established patterns of migration that had been in place since 1848.

Additionally, that this story of *mexicanidad* opens in Boston and ends in Chicago exemplifies how open-ended narratives about Mexican culture with multiple meanings emerged in unexpected places. This study shifts the fields of Borderlands and Chicana/Chicano history, siting its analysis not in the physical national boundaries of the southwestern United States, but recognizing the Horticultural Hall, the White City, the Midway, and the Wild West arena as Borderlands -- the "spaces where the flows of peoples, things, and ideas creatively remade America."[8] This cultural history of performing Mexicans whose legacies remade America adds a much-needed perspective in the field of Chicana/Chicano history, and also expands the idea of the U.S.-Mexico borderlands far beyond the physical southern border between the two nations, to the places where the United States created and exhibited economic and political power. A final contour in the borders of Chicana/Chicano history takes us to New Haven, Connecticut.

Today, a prized sculpture at Yale University Art Gallery is an original carved stone that had been exhibited at Orrin Brothers and Nichol's *Aztec Fair and Mexican Village*. In a featured setting on the first floor of the Gallery in one of the first rooms nearest the entrance, the sculpture

[8] Pekka Hamalainen and Samuel Truett, "On Borderlands," *Journal of American History* 98, no. 2 (September 2011): 361.

is titled "Relief of the Five Ages." It is on perpetual loan to the Yale Art Gallery from Yale's Peabody Museum. The stone measures 21.5 inches tall, 18 inches across, and 10 inches deep. It is small but sturdy, and is a foundational piece of Yale's pre-Columbian art collection.[9]

After its Boston exhibit, the *Aztec Fair and Mexican Village* made stops in New York, Washington, DC, and ended in New Haven, where the show's contents were put into a sheriff's sale in 1887 to auction off the remaining items due to bankruptcy.[10] The Yale sun stone, labeled in the original *Aztec Fair* guide as item "No. 101. The temalactl" (or the gladiator's stone), was one of only three sun stones known at the time, one of which was the iconic Aztec Calendar stone that Zelia Nuttall deciphered.[11] The inclusion of an important part of Mexico's archeological patrimony in the *Aztec Fair* captured the extent to which the Porfiriato chose public entertainment to foster cultural and economic diplomacy in the United States.

The stone first arrived in 1898 at the Yale Peabody Museum, the university's archeological and anthropological counterpart to Frederick Ward Putnam's Peabody Museum at Harvard and Otis Mason's Bureau of American Ethnography at the Smithsonian Institution. Yale professor O. C. Marsh, the founding director of the museum, privately purchased the stone in 1887 and a decade later donated it to the Peabody. Since 2012, the stone has been on public exhibit at the Yale University Art Gallery as one of its featured possessions for visitors to enjoy. The last line of the

[9] "'A Welcome to Yale College' by Dean Mary Miller" (Speech, Yale College, August 28, 2013).

[10] George Grant MacCurdy, "An Aztec 'Calendar Stone' in Yale University Museum," *American Anthropologist* 12, no. 4 (October 1910): 481.

[11] Benito Nichols, Edward Orrin, and George W. Orrin, "Guide to Orrin Bros. & Nichols' Aztec Fair: Mexico Past and Present" (Orrin Bros. and Nichols, 1886), 17, Dibner Library of Rare Books, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC.

description in the 1886 *Aztec Fair* catalogue of the only authentic sun stone on exhibit then, as it is now, reads: "Consequently this relic is without price."[12]

Clearly, the catalogue's author was mistaken. There was a price. There always seems to be a negotiable price when statecraft and stagecraft co-exist. And while the narratives, the entertainment milieu, and cultural contexts are new, the peddling of *mexicanidad* in the United States continues today. As such, it is incumbent on each of us to identify what we can and should research, for recovering instances of resilience amidst the politics is our responsibility as historians.

[12] Nichols, Orrin, and Orrin, 17.

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