

Gender and World's Fairs at the Turn of the Twentieth Century:

A Case Study in Panama and San Francisco

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Abstract

This paper explores the intersections between gender, display, and empire at turn-of-the-century world's fairs in the United States. The 1915 Panama-Pacific International Exposition serves as a case study. Designed to celebrate the completion of the Panama Canal, the 1915 fair was hinged on contemporary notions of manliness and used gender ideology to articulate prevailing ideas and assumptions about the American nation, its new empire, and its influence on the entire

world. Indeed, gendered rhetoric found its way into numerous contemporary published tracts, articles, paintings, and popular culture that take on the enormity of the Panama Canal and its implications. Manliness and its mechanical prosthetic, technology, became the arenas through which the United States refashioned its national body and confidently assumed its new role as imperialist on the world stage.

[1] On the morning of October 14, 1911, crowds of San Franciscans lined the streets near Van Ness and Golden Gate Avenues to witness the parade escorting United States President William Howard Taft to the groundbreaking ceremonies for the Panama-Pacific International Exposition in Golden Gate Park. Following opening remarks by Exposition President Charles C. Moore and other dignitaries, Taft addressed the crowds, extolling the significance of the events that were to be celebrated in 1915 and acknowledging San Francisco as the rightful host for the international exposition. Taft then turned the first spadeful of earth with the official sterling silver spade engraved with a dedication and the sun rising between the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans.¹ The groundbreaking officially inaugurated the building phase of the Exposition and served as a metaphorical reference to the digging of the Panama Canal itself, which the exposition was designed to celebrate, thus marking the indelible link between the two. In fact, it would not be an overstatement that the earth itself – the dirt and soil and bedrock – was the template upon which both the Panama Canal and the San Francisco Exposition embodied progress and imperial masculinity and transformed the sites on a local and global scale.

[2] Taft's feted first spadeful evoked a related eventful moment, nearly eight years earlier to the day, in which another president of the United States got his hands in the dirt. In this case, however, it is not with a silver spade etched with allegorical emblems of progress but a colossal, 90-ton Bucyrus shovel in the famed Culebra Cut in Panama in which then-President Theodore Roosevelt rallied the nation behind his dream of America's completion of the Panama Canal. Of the many photographs taken during Roosevelt's visit to the canal zone in late 1906, the most memorable image, and the one with which Roosevelt and the building of the Panama Canal would forever be associated, was that of the president seated at the controls of the mechanical giant in the most challenging section of the entire isthmian project (Fig. 1).

¹ See also my monographic analysis: Sarah J. Moore, *Empire on Display. San Francisco's Panama-Pacific International Exposition of 1915*, Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2013.



1 President Theodore Roosevelt in the cab of a Bucyrus shovel at the Culebra Cut, Panama Canal, November 16, 1906. Library of Congress, Washington, D.C., Prints and Photographs Division (photo: <https://www.loc.gov/item/2010649455/>)

Periodicals were quick to describe how the president ignored warning of landslides and other dangers and bravely left the observation platforms to traverse rocks and dirt to climb into the steam shovel. Notably not on horseback, as was the pictorial tradition in imperial iconography with which Roosevelt was surely aware, but at the controls of a colossal machine in the construction zone, this image of the president conflates body, machine technology, imperialism, and national manhood in what historian Mark Seltzer has called "the double discourse of the natural and the technological".²

[3] In effect, Roosevelt becomes "the real builder of the Panama Canal", as chief engineer Goethals would later remark. He continued, "the execution of the work was directed by other hands [...] but if he had personally lifted every shovelful of earth in its construction he could not be more fully entitled to chief credit than he is for the accomplishment of this task".³ Roosevelt is rendered gigantic – natural man becomes superman as continental nation becomes extracontinental imperial power – although not by sheer muscularity or national will but through the prosthetic of the dispassionate machine.⁴ Moreover, it evokes the history of the national body as pioneer and farmer who wrestled a nation out of the wilderness. As a contemporary chronicler

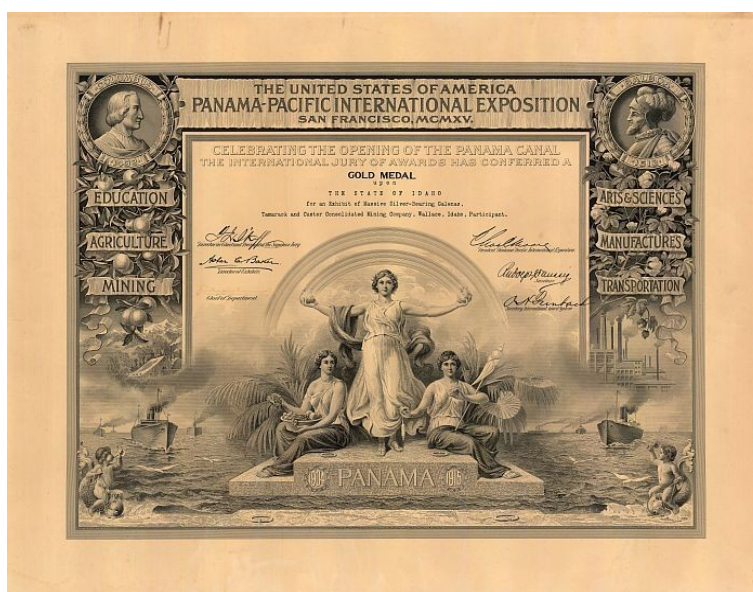
² Mark Seltzer, *Bodies and Machines*, London 1992, 152.

³ Cited in Miles P. DuVal, *And the Mountains Will Move: The Story of the Building of the Panama Canal*, Stanford 1947, 314.

⁴ See Seltzer (1992).

of the Panama Canal noted, "[N]ow that the government of a great nation has put their hands to the plow, the furrow will be driven through."⁵

[4] The story of the United States' engagement with Panama and the ultimate building of the canal is defined by as many facts, figures, and dates as it is by desires, longings, and national imaginings. Arching back to the early sixteenth century when Spanish explorer Vasco Nuñez de Balboa (1475–1519) paused atop a mountain peak in Darien, eastern Panama, gazed upon the Pacific Ocean, and promptly claimed the water and all its shores for the King of Castile, Panama's isthmus has been both a real and imagined territory, whose slender and elegant proportions belie its centrality in imperial history and the global aspirations of many nations. The official Certificate of Award of the Panama-Pacific International Exposition (Fig. 2) visualizes many of these ideas.



2 Certificate of Award of the Panama-Pacific International Exposition, San Francisco, 1915. University of Idaho Library Special Collections and Archives, Henry Lawrence Vincent Day papers, MG 318, oversized folder 1200 (photo: <https://harvester.lib.uidaho.edu/collection/items/lumber1137.html>)

[5] Bracketing the banner at the top of the certificate, which included the official title of the exposition and details of the award, were portraits of the patron saints of westward expansion and chief architects of Europe's claiming of the so-called New World: Columbus on the left and Balboa on the right. The dates of their respective encounters, 1492 and 1513, appear below their names. A foliage border alluding to California's rich natural abundance frames the top half of the certificate and lists the principal departments of the exposition. The transformation of nature into natural resource is suggested by, to the left, snow-capped mountains and, to the right, an industrial complex with stacks billowing smoke. Three allegorical female figures, each crowned with a laurel wreath of victory, float on a platform titled Panama – the central figure's open arms arched by a double rainbow visualize the willingness of the land to give way to the erotic embrace of the seas. The dates 1904 and 1915 are etched into the base of the platform, referring to the

⁵ Vaughan Cornish, *The Panama Canal and Its Makers*, London 1909, 18-19.

date when the United States began construction of the canal and the year in which its completion was celebrated in San Francisco. Behind them, pressing into the foreground, are lines of ships – the technological offspring, as it were, of Columbus and Balboa – waiting for passage through the slender isthmus. 1904 also marked the date of the Louisiana Purchase Exposition in St. Louis that commemorated the centennial of the United States' westward expansion with Thomas Jefferson's Louisiana Purchase from the French in 1803. The vastness of the acquired territory, which more than doubled the size of the continental United States, was matched by the scale of the 1904 exposition itself with its total acreage nearly double that of the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago.⁶

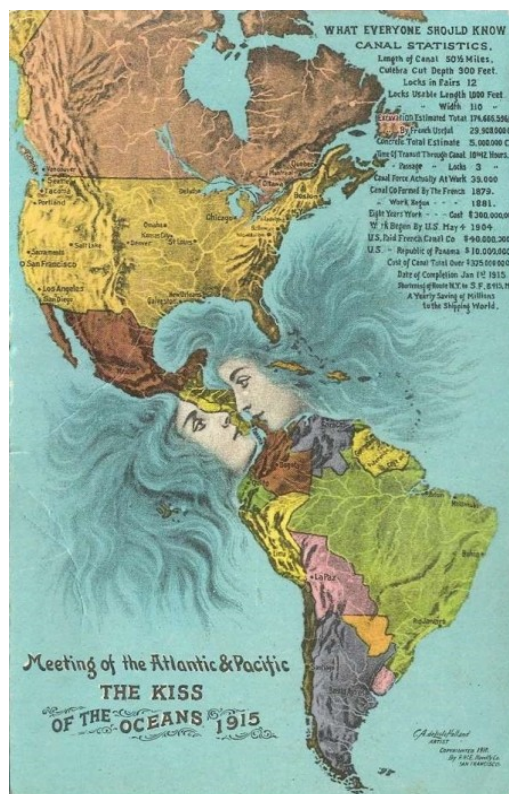
[6] The recent outbreak of the Spanish-American War in 1898 and the infamous voyage of the USS Oregon, which took sixty-odd days to travel the fourteen thousand-mile journey from San Francisco, by way of Cape Horn, to join the Atlantic fleet in Cuban waters, roused U.S. interest in the building of the canal. In April 1899, two months after the Senate ratified the treaty with Spain that concluded the war, then-New York governor Theodore Roosevelt delivered a speech, *The Strenuous Life*, in which he outlined the contours of America's new imperial physique. Defining the nation as one of "stern men with empires in their brains", he extolled imperialism as the United States' national destiny and as the force to expand the American economy, ensure military superiority and international trade, bolster nationalism, and invigorate the American man. "We cannot sit huddled within our own borders", he admonished the audience gathered for his speech. "We must build the isthmian canal ... and [thus] enable us to have our say in deciding the destiny of the oceans of East and West."⁷ Having become president following McKinley's assassination in 1901 at the Pan-American Exposition in Buffalo, Roosevelt was instrumental in taking on the immense task on behalf of the nation with characteristic bluster and the lofty rhetoric of civilization, staging a herculean battle between America's virile imperialism and the forces of chaos. Roosevelt's rhetoric, like that of the 1915 Exposition, was hinged on contemporary notions of manliness and used gender ideology to articulate contemporary ideas and assumptions about the American nation, its new empire, and its influence on the entire world.

[7] Indeed, gendered rhetoric finds its way into numerous contemporary published tracts, articles, paintings, and popular culture that take on the enormity of the Panama Canal and its implications. For example, a postcard advertising the 1915 Exposition, "Meeting of the Atlantic & Pacific: The Kiss of the Oceans" (Fig. 3) features a map of North and South America intersected by the profile view of two women about to kiss at the isthmian canal. Their hair, medusa-like, floats on the surface of the oceans whose historic embrace the 1915 fair in San Francisco was designed to celebrate. In contrast to the crisp contours of the two continents and their prescribed boundaries between land and sea, the Panama Canal Zone is fluid and malleable – erotically available – providing geographical evidence of its adaptability to the colonial enterprise. Indeed, the viewer is invited to read the canal statistics on the top right – the canal's length; the depth of Culebra Cut;

⁶ For a discussion of the 1904 fair, see James Burkhart Gilbert, *Whose Fair? Experience, Memory, and the History of the Great St. Louis Exposition*, Chicago 2009.

⁷ Theodore Roosevelt, *The Strenuous Life*, New York 1902, 7, 9.

the number, length and width of the locks, the total cost to the United States, and more – as inscribing meaning and value on a previously incoherent landscape whose natural geographic anomaly gave way to the rational forces of a manly American empire.



3 "Meeting of the Atlantic & Pacific: The Kiss of the Oceans 1915", postcard. San Francisco History Center at San Francisco Public Library, (photo: SFPL, San Francisco, CA)

[8] The majority of popular images of the Panama Canal and its building, perhaps not surprisingly, were of men performing mighty tasks and were likewise imprinted with the gendered and eroticized discourse of manliness, technology, and progress in battle with recalcitrant but ultimately accommodating nature. "The News Reaches Bogota" (Fig. 4) by cartoonist W. A. Rogers, for example, teases out the amount of dirt, quite literally, needed to be moved to complete the monumental project, the fraught political machinations between Columbia and the United States in acquiring the rights to build the canal, and Roosevelt's personal investment in its realization. Published in the *New York Herald* in December 1903, Roosevelt is depicted as a veritable giant in working clothes – knee-high boots and rolled-up shirt sleeves – digging a canal in Panama with an enormous shovel. At his feet are several ships queuing up for passage between the seas while the president-cum-laborer hurls a spadeful of dirt onto Bogotá, the capital of Columbia.



4 W. A. Rogers, "The News Reaches Bogota", cartoon, showing President Theodore Roosevelt rudely presenting Colombia with the fait accompli of his Panama Canal Zone treaty, in: *New York Herald*, December 1903 (photo: <https://www.granger.com/results.asp?image=0007185>)

[9] Similar popular images include a 1911 postcard that shows two figures atop the globe; Uncle Sam stands with Central America between his legs and leans to his left to help the portly President Taft step over the curvature of the earth, below which is the imagined construction of the 1915 fairgrounds with the Golden Gate in the distance (Fig. 5). From his left hand, Uncle Sam lets drop a hatchet at Panama that makes the actual and metaphorical cut to allow the embrace of the seas. Such manly national performances of imperialism visually align with the gendered metanarrative of expansion and progress, which found its ultimate expression in the Canal Zone. Taft and Uncle Sam are, effectively, modern-day pioneers who with the hatchet, rather than the plow, push back the chaos of the wilderness – here on a global scale – for the onrush of civilization.



5 "Ground Broken Oct. 14, 1911. Panama-Pacific International Exposition, San Francisco, 1915", postcard. San Francisco History Center at San Francisco Public Library (photo: SFPL, San Francisco, CA)

[10] In 1913, artist Jonas Lie (1880–1940) traveled to Central America to create images of the late construction phase of the Panama Canal that visually canonized the epic nature of the engineering feat with conventional colonialist and gendered tropes of mastery. His aptly named *The Conquerors*, 1913, for example, utilizes a view from above – a widely used compositional strategy in nineteenth-century landscape paintings in the U.S. – to disclose the viewer’s privilege and dominance over a broad swath of land in order to convey the sublime enormity and complexity of the project.⁸ Lie invites the privileged viewer to survey the herculean task of transforming the vexing problem of a hostile environment in progress; men, machines (including more than one hundred multi-ton steam shovels like the one on which Roosevelt posed for the 1906 photograph), and smoke move across and into the deep space of Culebra Cut. Lie’s selection of this particular site was not without significance. Indeed, Culebra Cut, more than any other section of the isthmus, came to stand for the project as a whole, and the sheer marvel of the engineering know-how that transformed the Continental Divide, nearly 300 feet above sea level, into an artificial canyon that allowed the meeting of the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans. The painting’s title expresses the hubris shared by many observers in regard to the nation’s manly ability to subdue even the most recalcitrant of natural obstacles in the name of progress.⁹

[11] Charles Willson Peale’s *Exhumation of the Mastodon*, 1806, is an important early precedent for such images and evokes the power of the engineer/artist to harness technology against the irrational and destructive forces of nature (Fig. 6).

⁸ Jonas Lie, *The Conquerors (Culebra Cut, Panama Canal)*, 1913, oil on canvas, 152.4 × 127 cm, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, George A. Hearn Fund, 1914, acc. no. 14.18; see: <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/480594searchField=All&sortBy=Relevance&ft=Jonas+Lie&offset=0&rpp=20&pos=1>.

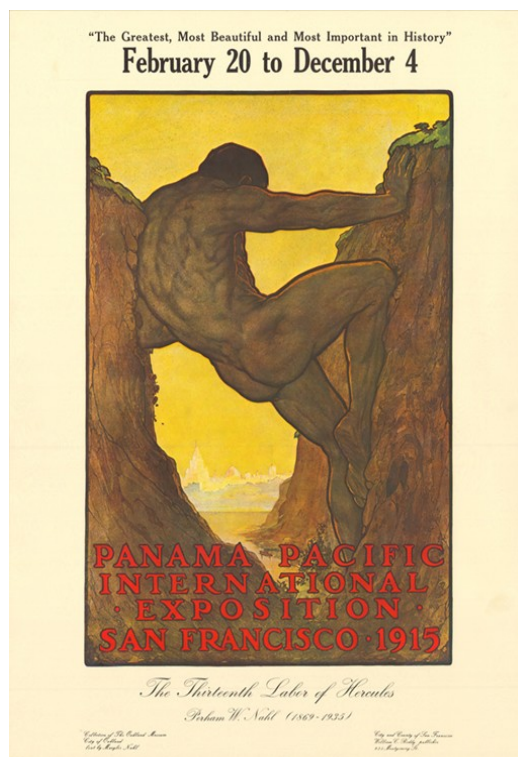
⁹ For a fuller discussion of this image within an ecocritical context, see Sarah J. Moore, "The Panama Canal Zone as a Hybrid Landscape: A Case Study", in: *Ecocriticism and the Anthropocene in Nineteenth-Century Art and Visual Culture*, eds. Maura Coughlin and Emily Gephart, New York 2020, 61-76.



6 Charles Willson Peale, *The Exhumation of the Mastodon*, ca. 1807, oil on canvas, 49 × 61.5 in. Maryland Center for History and Culture, Baltimore, MD, Baltimore City Life Museum Collection, BCLM-MA5911 (courtesy of the Maryland Center for History and Culture, image ID RS2237)

Standing at the edge of the watery pit in which Peale would ultimately excavate the skeletal remains of two nearly complete mastodons, the artist holds a scroll with a diagram of a mastodon's leg bone – a map, effectively, of the order and cleanliness that can be rendered out of the chaotic and dirty forces of nature – and gestures to the pit below. Peale's partially unraveled scroll renders visible and intelligible the obstinate earth in the pit and reconstitutes the invisible component parts into a coherent design, much as the museum he later founded in Philadelphia would reorganize and rationalize the flora and fauna of the United States into a grid system of miniature panoramas. Although the technology to dig Peale's pit was crude and simplistic in comparison with the massive steam shovels and railroads in the Panama Canal Zone, it shares with its century-later counterpart the assumption of power to subdue nature's recalcitrance and effectively transfers the sublime from nature to technology.

[12] As was standard practice with world's fairs, an official image was selected by the Panama-Pacific International Exposition Company for publicity and used in all official documents. The winner of the national competition was Perham Nahl (1869–1935), a California artist. His *Thirteenth Labor of Hercules* depicts a nude, hypermuscular male thrusting apart the continental barrier at Panama – the famed Culebra Cut – to allow the seas to meet (Fig. 7).



7 Perham Nahl, *The Thirteenth Labor of Hercules*, official poster for the Panama-Pacific International Exposition in San Francisco, 1915. Donald G. Larson Collection on International Fairs and Exhibitions, Special Collections Research Center, California State University, Fresno (photo: California State University, Fresno)

That the completion of the Panama Canal realized the fantasy of explorers more than four centuries earlier to find a navigable passage from east to west was not lost on contemporary observers. California State Commissioner Chester Rowell said the canal "celebrated the finish of the journey of Columbus".¹⁰ Below Hercules's feet, in the misty distance, rise the domes and pinnacles of the fairgrounds themselves. Although previous world's fairs in the United States employed a similar visual device for their publicity images – a representative figure of America gestures above to a bird's eye view of the fairgrounds below – Nahl's heroic nude departs from the typical allegorical representation of the nation in the guise of a female figure of Columbia or Liberty.

[13] This gargantuan male is both technological engineer and preindustrial laboring giant: a national superman carrying out the thirteenth, and by all contemporary accounts, most important modern labor of Hercules, whose physical strength and vigorous masculinity embody the bravura, extreme confidence, and technological accomplishment of the United States within an international, imperial, gendered, and historical context. The reference to the Greek hero in Nahl's image might refer not simply to the herculean task of building the Panama Canal but to an actual labor of Hercules, his fifth, in which he was ordered to clean the Augean stables in a single day. The task was presumed impossible as the livestock numbered more than a thousand and

¹⁰ Cited in Frank Morton Todd, *The Story of the Exposition. Being the Official History of the International Celebration Held at San Francisco in 1915 to Commemorate the Discovery of the Pacific Ocean and the Construction of the Panama Canal*, 5 vols., New York 1921, vol. 3, p. 131.

produced a prodigious amount of dung. Hercules, however, accomplished the labor by rerouting the nearby Alpheus and Peneus Rivers to wash away the filth. His diversion of the rivers required both brains and brawn – the mind of the engineer and the body of the laborer – and resulted in the seemingly miraculous cleansing of the famed stables. Equally miraculous is the thirteenth labor of Nahl's Hercules, this modern-day hero/engineer whose prowess is evidenced by his re-creation of the natural world; the ability to make machinery serve human needs; to redeem and surmount the forces of nature; in short, to win wilderness over to civilization. As historian Cecelia Tichi has written, "In controlling and utilizing the forces of nature, the engineer makes the continent itself his studio as well as the medium in which he works."¹¹

[14] Nahl's Hercules may also reference San Francisco, the host city of the 1915 fair, which faced the devastation and destruction of the 1906 earthquake and resulting fires with herculean determination and, among other rebuilding and renovation projects, filled over 600 acres of bay front tidal marsh – approximately three miles from Fort Mason through the Presidio waterfront to just east of the Golden Gate – as the site for the fair. Indeed, one could read Nahl's figure as an engineer refashioning the globe itself through the transfer of thousands of cubic yards of dirt from the canal zone to the shores of San Francisco to provide the foundation on which the fair would be built. Moreover, as with other expositions from the turn of the twentieth century, the cartographic design of the fairgrounds, that shimmer in the mist below Hercules's feet, functioned as a visual agent of regulation and social meaning, fixing nations and displays along spatial coordinates that assumed the authority and objectivity of the topographical map. Finally, many displays were hinged on contemporary notions of revitalized manliness and utilized gender ideology to articulate contemporary assumptions about the nation and its newly minted imperial physique, just as Nahl does in his publicity poster.

[15] The main entrance to the fairgrounds was on the city side at Scott Street (Fig. 8). The south gardens, with some three thousand square feet of California's exotic flora, gave way to the signature sculptural and architectural ensembles in the fairgrounds, the Fountain of Energy and the Tower of Jewels. The former represented the expansion of the American frontier in the Panama Canal zone, while the latter symbolized the progress and abundant wealth of the host nation. Beyond the Tower of Jewels were the three principal courts of the fairgrounds. They were organized on an east-to-west orientation, paralleling the Panama Canal itself and metonymically standing for San Francisco's location, physically and ideologically, as the point of contact between the two.

¹¹ Cecelia Tichi, *Shifting Gears: Technology, Literature, Culture in Modernist America*, Chapel Hill 1987, 179.



8 Visualization of the exhibition grounds of the Panama-Pacific International Exposition, San Francisco, 1915, inserted into an aerial view of San Francisco. The Wolfsonian – Florida International University, Miami Beach, FL, Rare Books and Special Collections Library (photo: <https://wolfsonianfiulibrary.files.wordpress.com/2009/11/xb2009-11-1-000.jpg>)

The Court of the Universe stood in the center of the fairgrounds and was the largest of the principal courts. Punctuated on the east and west by colossal triumphal Arches of the Rising and Setting Sun, respectively, the scale of the Court of the Universe was massive – 712 feet long and 520 feet wide – and traced the trajectory of imperialism from the past to the triumphant present. The official chronicler of the fair, Frank Morton Todd, could scarcely contain his enthusiasm about the sheer grandeur of the Court of the Universe when he noted, "The Roman Colosseum could have been set down inside it ... [and] the peristyle of St. Peter's could not approach it in interest." He went on to describe the figures in the sculptural ensemble that topped the Arch of the Setting Sun, *Nations of the West*, in gendered terms – "rough and real [...] waste-conquering, desert-spanning men" and located what he called the "thrusting heave of western ambition and progress" on the shores of the Pacific Ocean in San Francisco.¹²

[16] The eastern-oriented Aisle of the Rising Sun was punctuated at its easternmost edge by the Palace of Machinery – the largest wood and steel structure in the world of the time – and it was the site of numerous automated displays and the first indoor flight when pioneer aerialist and stunt man Lincoln J. Beachley flew through the building before it was completed. The Palace of Fine Arts flanked the westernmost edge of the western-oriented Aisle of the Setting Sun. It was designed by San Francisco architect Bernard Maybeck (1862–1957) and was the only building to be preserved at the close of the fair in December. The Column of Progress, topped by Hermon A. MacNeil's (1866–1947) *Adventurous Bowman*, punctuated the northernmost edge of the fairgrounds as they gave way to the Bay of San Francisco, which was traversed throughout the course of the exposition by the so-called scintillator, a battery of search lights on a barge which beamed 48 lights in seven colors across the Bay to illuminate the fairgrounds at night.

¹² Todd (1921), vol. 2, pp. 299, 302.

[17] The *Fountain of Energy* had a place of honor in the main entrance to the fairgrounds; Alexander Stirling Calder (1870–1945), who served as the acting chief of sculpture of the exposition, took full advantage of the location to pay tribute to the completion of the Panama Canal which the fair celebrated (Fig. 9).



9 Alexander Stirling Calder, *Fountain of Energy*, also known as *Lord of the Isthmian Way* and *Victor of the Canal*, at the main entrance to the Panama-Pacific International Exposition fairgrounds, San Francisco, 1915. California State Library, Sacramento, CA, California History Room, Picture Collection (photo: https://csl.primo.exlibrisgroup.com/permalink/01CSL_INST/hbrh2d/alma990013904950205115)

The globe on which the equestrian statuary group stands suggests the sun's course – east to west – and the evolution of mankind to the pinnacle of civilization embodied by the fair itself. *Energy*, a lean, nude male figure, also known as the *Lord of the Isthmian Way* and the *Victor of the Canal*, rides triumphantly on the earth; his outstretched hands represent the severing of the lands that allowed the waters of the Atlantic and Pacific to pass. The figure embodied manliness, national determination, and as chronicler Todd noted, "[...] the qualities of force and dominance that had ripped a way across the continental divide [the location of the Culebra Cut that Nahl renders in his poster] for the commerce of the world".¹³ Calder's sculptural ensemble visualized Theodore Roosevelt's national admonition in *The Strenuous Life* to "boldly face the life of strife, resolute to our duty well and manfully".¹⁴ This triumphant superman, who rides atop a miniaturized globe, the topography of which has been refashioned by American technology and imperial desires, did not shy from his manly duty to his nation and to the world. Indeed, *Energy*, as one contemporary observer notes, "made the Isthmus of Panama look like a geographical nuisance no virile people

¹³ Todd (1921), 2:310.

¹⁴ Roosevelt (1902), 21.

could tolerate".¹⁵ Calder's *Lord of the Isthmian Way* effectively takes the role of chivalric rescuer, used so pervasively in imperial discourse, and visualized Roosevelt's assumption that the unquestioned superiority of Euro-American civilization, in its full flush of manliness, justified any and all United States' imperial endeavors. On top of the figure's shoulders stand fame and glory, "heralding the coming of the conqueror", in the words of the sculptor himself and referencing imperial iconography.¹⁶ In the basin of the fountain, at the cardinal points of the compass, are representations of the Atlantic, facing east, and the Pacific, facing west.

[18] Such allusions to the archetype of the American pioneer were prevalent at the exposition, as were images of the theme, providing further evidence of the masculinist and imperialist preoccupations of the fair. Moreover, they were interpreted as providing historical evidence for the inevitable evolution of the new manly American empire from the internal colony to extraterritorial excursions.¹⁷ Among the most prominent sculptural evocations of this subject was Solon Borglum's (1868–1922) *American Pioneer* at the entrance to the Court of Flowers.¹⁸ Borrowing a visual staple of imperial iconography, the equestrian statue was more than two-and-a-half times life size and depicts a pioneer, seated at ease atop a magnificent horse whose elaborate tack seems more at home in Renaissance pageantry than in the American frontier. The man holds a gun aloft in one hand and gazes into the distance, as if to contemplate his defining role in national destiny. Borglum's statue rehearsed the narrative of the "advance of civilization in the new American Eden"¹⁹ depicted in countless visual images in the nineteenth century with a gun, a plow, and an axe as the tools with which the pioneer fashioned the wilderness into the American nation. In contrast with many landscape artists in the nineteenth century who expressed concern over the rapid destruction of the wilderness—what painter Thomas Cole (1801–1848) called "the ravages of the axe" in 1836—Borglum's pioneer gazes into the future with confidence in the conquest of nature.²⁰

[19] Tracing the arc of American progress from its historical roots in the pioneer to its modern manifestation of manly imperialism in Panama, one contemporary observer noted: "The greatest adventure is before us, the gigantic adventures of an advancing democracy – strong, virile, and

¹⁵ Todd (1921), vol. 1, 14.

¹⁶ Alexander Stirling Calder and Stella G. S. Perry, *The Sculpture and Mural Decorations of the Exposition: A Pictorial Survey of the Art of the Panama-Pacific International Exposition*, San Francisco 1915, 16.

¹⁷ For a fuller discussion of gender at the 1915 fair, see Sarah J. Moore, "Manliness and the New American Empire at the 1915 Panama-Pacific Exposition", in: *Gendering the Fair: Histories of Women and Gender at World's Fairs*, eds. T. J. Boisseau and Abigail Markwyn, Urbana 2010, 75-94.

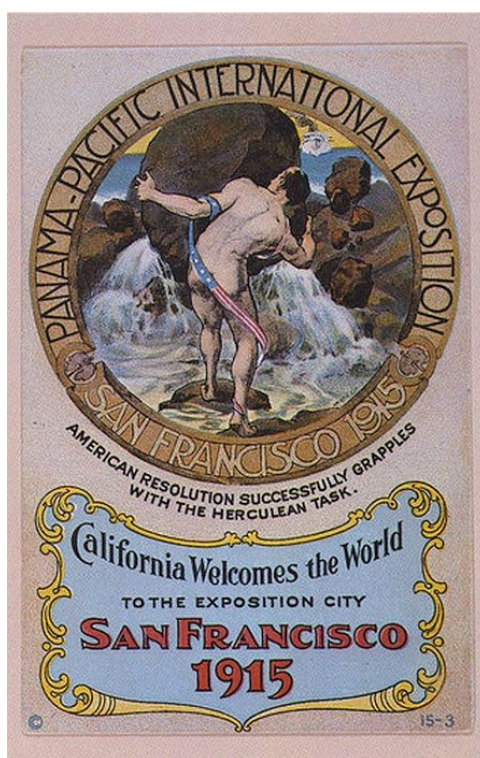
¹⁸ See Solon Borglum, *The American Pioneer, A Reverie*, ca. 1915, in: Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C., from the Solon H. Borglum and Borglum family papers, 1864-2002, digital ID: 11671.

¹⁹ Elizabeth N. Armstrong, "Hercules and the Muses: Public Art at the Fair", in: *The Anthropology of World's Fairs: San Francisco's Panama-Pacific International Exposition, 1915*, ed. Burton Benedict, Berkeley 1983, 114-133: 121.

²⁰ Nicolai Jr. Cikovsky, "The Ravages of the Axe: The Meaning of the Tree Stump in Nineteenth-Century American Art", in: *The Art Bulletin* 61 (1979), no. 4, 611-626.

kindly – and in that advance we shall be true to the indestructible spirit of the American pioneer."²¹ Roosevelt himself was quick to draw an historical trajectory from the intrepid pioneer of the nineteenth century to the Spanish-American War and to the building of the Panama Canal. Casting westward expansion in gendered terms and as a prelude to imperialist activities, Roosevelt defined America's triumph in the Panama Canal as a providential expression of the United States' national will and manly desire to "struggle for a place among the men that shape the destiny of mankind".²²

[20] "American Resolution Grapples with the Herculean Task" (Fig. 10) from a series of postcards produced to advertise and celebrate the fair – the series was called "California Welcomes the World to the Exposition City" – summarizes many of the gendered assumptions embedded in the 1915 fair.



10 "American Resolution Successfully Grapples with the Herculean Task", postcard from the series "California Welcomes the World to the Exposition City San Francisco 1915". San Francisco History Center at San Francisco Public Library (photo: SFPL, San Francisco, CA)

Seen from the rear, a male figure perches precariously on two rocks and twists his muscular body with tremendous strain to lift an enormous boulder that releases a rush of water. Draped across his body is a slender banner with the stars and stripes of the American flag. The visual links between Hercules's fifth labor of cleaning the Augean stables by rerouting nearby rivers and that of the American engineers and laborers in Panama was made clear by the title. Surely making a

²¹ Todd (1921), vol. 2, 270.

²² Roosevelt (1902), 16.

nod to Nahl's publicity poster, *The Thirteenth Labor of Hercules* (Fig. 7), both images offer a "vision of an imperialist American body" which will remasculinize and, as such, recuperate the nation.²³ Hercules's confrontation of the wilderness at Culebra regenerates, in Roosevelt's words, "vigorous national manliness"²⁴ and marks the place in which supernatural man and the Panamanian geography converge into a national body whose corporeal fitness and coherence naturalize United States' imperial excursions and technological triumph. Indeed, this Hercules who labors in Central America, embodies United States' development from adolescence to manhood in imperial prowess, looking back to the Spanish-American War of 1898, which itself functioned as a political rationale for the completion of the Panama Canal, and to the 1904 Louisiana Purchase Exposition, in which the imperial trophies of America's transcontinental excursions were exhibited to the world.

[21] Gender's imprint on the physical, social, cultural, political, and material terrain of the Panama-Pacific International Exposition is unmistakable. Manliness and its mechanical prosthetic, technology, became the arenas through which the United States refashioned its national body and confidently assumed its new role as imperialist on the world stage. Much as the globe had ostensibly shrunk with the completion of the Panama Canal, the Panama-Pacific International Exposition in San Francisco compressed the world into a compelling and legible miniature in which to celebrate this new national body: invigorated, imperial, manly, and indelibly technological. Inextricably entangled with the gendered and imperialist discourses at work in the completion of the Panama Canal and the 1915 fair to celebrate it was the issue of race. Although this paper is drawn from a keynote presentation for an international conference on gender and world's fairs (*Revisioning World's Fairs*, Darmstadt/Karlsruhe, Germany, April 2018) and, as such, concentrates on that theme, I will conclude with an examination of one of the most glaring embodiments of racial discourse at the PPIE.

[22] Immediately south of the Court of Flowers, with Borglum's *American Pioneer*, was the Court of Palms which also featured a massive equestrian statue, *The End of the Trail*, by James Earle Fraser (1876–1953; Fig. 11).

²³ Bill Brown, "Science Fiction, the World's Fair, and the Prosthetics of Empire, 1910–1915", in: *Cultures of United States Imperialism*, ed. Amy Kaplan and Donald E. Peace, Durham 1993, 135-137.

²⁴ Cited in Seltzer (1992), 149.



11 James Earle Fraser, *The End of the Trail*, located in the Court of Palms, Panama-Pacific International Exposition fairgrounds, San Francisco, 1915. Location of the photograph unknown (photo: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/57440551@N03/50002631447>)

First essayed in 1894 while a student at the Art Institute of Chicago and drawn from his experiences growing up in Dakota Territory, Fraser displayed a monumental plaster version of the subject at the Panama-Pacific Exposition to great acclaim. The historical, ideological, gendered, and racial counterpoints between the two statues would not have been lost on contemporary viewers who could easily read the two figures as binary opposites – civilization and wilderness/savagery – that was standard fare in colonial discourse. In a 1915 book on the works of art at the fair, for example, Eugen Neuhaus (1879–1963) wrote, "The symbolism of the 'Pioneer' and 'The End of the Trail' is, first of all, a very fine expression of the destinies of two great races so important in our historical development."²⁵ A bare-chested Native American man sits bareback on a horse; the horse and rider slump forward in apparent exhaustion, poised precariously at the edge of a cliff. The elongated spear that the rider holds points at a sharp downward angle, suggesting the imminent extinction of this man, and by extension, his race, and as such relegating Native Americans and the wilderness frontier to America's past. The prevailing racial assumptions of Social Darwinism encouraged contemporary viewers to read Borglum's *American Pioneer* as evidence of the march of progress of European Americans and Fraser's *The End of the Trail* as proof of American Indians enervation and ultimate extinction. The words of the artist himself are explicit: "[I] sought to express the utter despair of this conquered people, a weaker race [...] steadily pushed to the wall by a stronger one."²⁶ What prevailing racial

²⁵ Eugen Neuhaus, *The Art of the Exposition*, San Francisco 1915, 32.

²⁶ Cited in Armstrong (1983), 121.

assumptions prevented viewers from seeing, was the decimation of Native Americans as genocide in the name of manifest destiny and progress.

[23] In Panama, white American men mobilized technology, along with the semi-coerced labor of countless Central American men, to transform the incoherent and unproductive landscape of the Canal Zone into a legible site of coherence, productivity, and discipline. So, too, was the gendered, imperialist, and racial discourse of progress and civilization mobilized at the 1915 Panama-Pacific International Exposition to enunciate the national body of the new American empire as white, male, immensely powerful, and extracontinental in its reach – equal in power and might to that of Hercules performing his thirteenth labor. Such triumphant discourse seemed to suggest the unquestioned and unquestionable superiority and capability of white Euro-American men and disallowed for the tragic consequences of its legacy. However, at the moment of the writing of this essay, a 1939 equestrian sculpture by James Earle Fraser of Theodore Roosevelt, that has stood at the entryway to New York City's *American Museum of Natural History* since 1940, is being removed, having long stood as a controversial symbol of colonialism and racism.²⁷ Although sculpted decades after *The End of the Trail* and referring only obliquely, if at all, to the photograph of Roosevelt at the controls of a Bucyrus shovel in the Panama Canal Zone in 1906 (Fig. 1), the dismantling of this monument, and countless others across the United States and around the world, demonstrates the power and urgency of the present moment to reclaim history and write different stories.²⁸

²⁷ Robin Pogrebin, "Roosevelt Statue to Be Removed from Museum of Natural History", in: *The New York Times*, June 21, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/06/21/arts/design/roosevelt-statue-to-be-removed-from-museum-of-natural-history.html>.

²⁸ See, for example, Kristin Ann Hass, *Blunt Instruments: Recognizing Racist Cultural Infrastructure in Memorials, Museums, and Patriotic Practices*, Boston 2022.

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