

Fashioning Modernity at the 1904 Louisiana Purchase Exhibition in St. Louis

Myths of the 'New Woman' and the 'Vanishing Indian'

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Abstract

This essay examines how fashion was complexly constructed and experienced at the Louisiana Purchase Exposition of 1904, better known as the St. Louis World's Fair. It takes as its point of departure a striking poster illustrated by the Czech artist Alphonse Mucha to advertise the event for a European audience. The image depicts an elegantly clad woman and traditionally dressed Native American joined by the hand – allegorical symbols of the old and new. Ideas about the progressive 'new woman' and the mythical

'vanishing Indian' were evident throughout the fairgrounds in exhibits that showcased art, industry, cultural heritage, entertainment, and American political power. An analysis of photographs taken there by Jessie Tarbox Beals, Frances Benjamin Johnston, and Emme and Mayme Gerhard reveals that sartorial encounters between fairgoers and participants played a key role in articulating the exhibition's narrative of progress, while also problematizing contemporaneous attitudes towards race and gender.

The world's fair as fashion

[1] In 1904 the United States celebrated the centennial of the Louisiana Purchase, its acquisition from France of the vast region spanning the Mississippi River basin. The Louisiana Purchase Exposition in St. Louis, Missouri, was the first major world's fair since the 1900 Paris *Exposition universelle*, and the first on that scale in North America since the Chicago World's Columbian Exposition in 1893. Czech artist Alphonse Mucha (1860–1939) designed a provocative poster advertising the event to a French-speaking audience (Fig. 1).



1 Alphonse Mucha, *Exposition universelle & internationale de St. Louis (États-Unis) du 30 Avril au 30 Novembre 1904*, color lithograph printed poster, Paris: Imp. F. Champenois, 1903 ([Wikimedia Commons](#), accessed February 16, 2021)

At its center is an alluring young woman in a flowing gown with lace trim, which clings to her bare white shoulders. She clasps the hand of a Native American man crouching behind her who wears beaded moccasins and a feathered headdress that mirrors her own ornamental coiffure. What is the relationship between this fashionable young woman and her companion? The poster suggests that the fair will be stylish and exotic, with decorative symbols for art, industry, agriculture, and the iconic Indigenous people of North America.¹

¹ I have used the terms Native American, American Indian, and Indigenous when describing people from a present-day point of view. The phrase "Vanishing Indian", used in the title of this essay, describes the erroneous concept that Indigenous people were on the brink of extinction, a myth used by the U.S. government to promote territorial expansion by white settlers in the nineteenth century. The term "Indian" has been used historically in the United States both as an official general ethnological term for Indigenous people of North America, and as a label for Native Americans as depicted in art, literature, or popular culture, often with caricatured or stereotypical traits.

[2] Taking Mucha's poster as its point of departure, this essay explores how fashion was constructed at the St. Louis fair. More broadly it looks at how ideas about style and modernity were complexly embodied in dress, which was exhibited both as a product of modern, industrial manufacture, and as an historical artifact of the pre-industrial past. It asks, where was dress on display at the Louisiana Purchase Exposition in St. Louis and how did people experience it? Did the appearance of fashion serve to uphold the fair's official narrative of the triumph of American imperialism and industrial progress? Or does the visual evidence reveal a counter-narrative, which may have complicated and problematized theories of modernity? World's fairs offer the opportunity to better understand fashion in the broader context of dress – the varied and diverse clothing worn by people who participated in the temporary, spectacular events that Paul Greenhalgh so aptly described as "ephemeral vistas".² Concepts of fashion were intimately bound up with ideas of femininity at the turn of the 20th century. Ulrich Lehmann has shown that the masculine noun *le mode* (form, mode, method) was not feminized as *la mode* (fashion, denoting sartorial aesthetics) until around 1845. Likewise *le moderne* is distinct from *la modernité*, a term used by Charles Baudelaire and Théophile Gautier to describe the ephemeral, fugitive, contingent aspect of art.³ Baudelaire believed that fashion had the ability to bridge the ancient and the modern, to "distil the eternal from the transitory".⁴

[3] The striking sartorial contrast between fairgoers and those who were on display in the living exhibits is particularly apparent in photographs that document the fair. Professional women portrait photographers and photojournalists, including Frances Benjamin Johnston (1864–1952), Jessie Tarbox Beals (1870–1942), Emme Gerhard (1872–1946), and Mayme Gerhard (1876–1955), took many of those pictures that preserve a record of what people wore. At first glance the photographs seem to underscore America's domination of its new colony, the Philippines, as well as its subjugation of Indigenous people at home, whose costumes of feathers, fur, hide, hand-stitched and hand-woven materials contrasted dramatically with the rich dress of foreign dignitaries; the manufactured suits and gowns worn by fair organizers, celebrities, and visitors; and the work clothing of the women photographers themselves. A more critical examination of such arresting images, however, reveals a complicated network of ideas about authenticity, style, and shifting attitudes towards professional identity, creative expression, race, and gender at the turn of the 20th century. In their depictions of dress at the fair, in all its varied manifestations, Beals, Johnston, and the Gerhard Sisters move beyond the masculine gaze of Baudelaire's *flâneur* and offer a differently gendered perspective on modernity.

[4] The 1900 Paris *Exposition universelle*, which was still fresh in the minds of those who organized and attended the St. Louis fair, had represented the culmination of the Art Nouveau style in its architecture, exhibits, and above all in the form of *La Parisienne*, a monumental statue of an elegant woman atop its entrance gate. Dressed by the contemporary French couturier Jeanne

² Paul Greenhalgh, *Ephemeral Vistas: The Expositions Universelles, Great Exhibitions, and World's Fairs, 1851–1939*, Manchester 1988.

³ Ulrich Lehmann, *Tigersprung: Fashion in Modernity*, Cambridge, MA 2000.

⁴ Charles Baudelaire, "The Painter of Modern Life" [1863], in: idem, *The Painter of Modern Life and Other Essays*, transl. and ed. by Jonathan Mayne, 2nd ed., London 1995, 12.

Paquin, *La Parisienne* represented Paris as the fashion capital of the world.⁵ The design of the St. Louis fair in 1904 was, by contrast, stately and grand. Its elegant classical pavilions were painted an "old ivory white" to give the landscaped grounds a unified aristocratic appearance. Planners rejected showy, trendy, outrageous, colorful decoration in favor of flowers and green spaces.⁶ In place of *La Parisienne* the St. Louis fair's main entrance featured a towering monument surmounted by an allegorical representation of *Peace*, a female figure in ancient Roman dress who extended an olive branch, gesturing, we might imagine, towards the nearby equestrian statues of conquered Sioux and Cherokee chiefs.⁷ A photograph taken on opening day of stylishly dressed crowds passing in front of the Palace of Varied Industries provides a glimpse of the popular fashions of the day in context (Fig. 2).



2 Crowds passing in front of the Palace of Varied Industries on the opening day of the 1904 World's Fair, 1904, photograph. Missouri Historical Society, St. Louis (<http://collections.mohistory.org/resource/144010>; courtesy of the Missouri Historical Society, St. Louis)

[5] Of the many examples of modern manufacturing at the St. Louis fair, it was evidently women's clothing that most clearly signified the spirit of the age and the event:

Among all the wealth and luxury displayed at the great Exposition, the gowns for women, in a way, represented the climax. The harmonious combination of laces, furs and jewels, and the exquisite handwork shown in embroidery and painting, made each dress as much a masterly creation of decorative art as some beautiful vase might be. Like this,

⁵ Anne Dymond, "Embodying the Nation: Art, Fashion, and Allegorical Women at the 1900 Exposition Universelle", in: *RACAR: Revue d'art Canadienne / Canadian Art Review* 36 (2011), no. 2, 1-14; Debora L. Silverman, *Art Nouveau in Fin-de-Siècle France: Politics, Psychology, and Style*, Berkeley 1989, 5.

⁶ *Louisiana and the Fair: An Exposition of the World, its People and Their Achievements*, ed. James W. Buel, 11 vols., St. Louis 1904, vol. 6, 2018-2026.

⁷ David R. Francis, *The Universal Exposition of 1904*, 2 vols., St. Louis 1913, vol. 1, 198-199.

*too, each dress carried out some motive, which was elaborated by every line and tint of the gown, by every fold of lace, and by every piece of hand embroidery.*⁸

It was not only the novelty of new products or the skill and technology of their manufacture that was exciting to visitors, but also their aesthetic presentation, which was seductive and enticing, like the figures in Mucha's poster. The display of aesthetically pleasing objects of art, craft, and industrial manufacture, as well as the people making them, fueled a desire to consume.

[6] The international exhibitions and great world's fairs of the late 19th and early 20th centuries are perhaps the best examples of fashion, as theorists of modern life defined it, from Charles Baudelaire to Walter Benjamin. More than a form of clothing, fashion was for them an experience and an expression of modern life. The visual juxtaposition of contemporary clothing and traditional dress had long been a source of curiosity and fascination at those events, and it threw the experience of modernity into sharper relief.⁹ In St. Louis domestic and foreign delegations celebrated their history, identity, and cultural heritage in ceremonial attire and staged exhibits with living actors in picturesque national costumes. Prominent officials and organizers of fairs, including women who served as jurors and board members, dressed in contemporary Western clothing. The extensive open-air living museum of Indigenous dwellings, organized by the fair's Anthropology department, presented an evolutionary history of humankind through the guise of science and education, while the most theatrical exhibits along the Pike promoted and celebrated cultural variety as entertainment.

[7] German sociologist Georg Simmel (1858–1918) identified fashion as a symptom of modernity, which reflects social adaptation – the desire to belong to a group – as well as individual differentiation – the impulse to distinguish oneself and stand out from the crowd.¹⁰ These counter-tendencies, he believed, were at the heart of the modern human condition. Simmel's ideas about the modern urban metropolis and the role of fashion within it were reinforced by his visit to the 1896 Berlin Trade Fair, where more than six hundred exhibitors had represented the burgeoning German textile and fashion industries with displays in an enormous hall.¹¹ He noticed in particular the "shop window quality" of "diverse products of the entire world, arranged in a confined space as if in a single picture", observations that could just as easily have been made in St. Louis, where the bewildering force of fashion was ubiquitous.¹²

⁸ *History of the Louisiana Purchase Exposition*, eds. Mark Bennitt and Frank Parker Stockbridge, St. Louis 1905, 633-635.

⁹ Lou Taylor, *Establishing Dress History*, Manchester 2004.

¹⁰ Georg Simmel, "Zur Psychologie der Mode", in: *Die Zeit: Wiener Wochenschrift für Politik, Volkswirtschaft, Wissenschaft und Kunst* 54 (October 12, 1895), 22-24; Georg Simmel, "Fashion", in: *On Individuality and Social Forms*, ed. Donald N. Levine, Chicago 1971, 294-323.

¹¹ *Offizieller Spezial-Katalog der Berliner Gewerbe-Ausstellung 1896*, 10 vols., Berlin 1896, vol. 1: Gruppe I u. II: Textil- u. Bekleidungs-Industrie.

¹² Dorothy Rowe, "Georg Simmel and the Berlin Trade Exhibition of 1896", in: *Urban History* 22, no. 2 (August 1995), 216-228.

[8] Simmel's theory of fashion as an expression of the social and psychological condition of modernity is an especially useful lens through which to examine international exhibitions. Monumental pavilions with classical façades presented an illusion of grandeur and permanence, which obscured the fact of their artifice as hastily built structures that would be disassembled at the conclusion of the festivities. The "evanescent" and "dazzling" spectacle, as Tom Gunning has described it, collapsed both space and time.¹³ Past and present were conflated in an immersive cinematic experience, which was enhanced by the visual appearance of people at the fair wearing different types of dress.

Fashion on display

[9] Contemporary fashions were exhibited at the St. Louis World's Fair within the Department of Manufactures (Department D). Group 59, "Industries Producing Wearing Apparel for Men, Women, and Children" represented American tailors and dressmakers from New York, Chicago, Philadelphia, and St. Louis in the Palaces of Manufactures and Varied Industries. Echoing Simmel, the Manufactures department chief Milan H. Hulbert wrote that the exhibits were especially "pleasing to the eye", and based on the best contemporary retail practices and theories of show window design.¹⁴ The Butterick Publishing Co., which sold sewing patterns through its magazine, *The Delineator*, was represented there, as was Chicago couturier, Madame Caroline, who won a grand prize for her elegant gowns. After the United States, France and Japan were most visible in the apparel group. France sent many examples of women's clothing produced by its world-renowned Paris fashion houses, including Callot Soeurs, Drecoll, Paquin, and Redfern, while clothing designers and manufacturers of silk and cotton fabrics from Kyoto, Yokohama, Osaka, and Tokyo represented Japan.¹⁵

[10] Indeed the Japanese exhibitions throughout the fair were highly praised by critics who viewed modern Japanese design as a source of inspiration for Western decorative art. Japan's official national exhibition was a recreation of an imperial garden with several examples of traditional architecture.¹⁶ A photograph taken by Jessie Tarbox Beals of two women dressed in kimonos walking in the garden with parasols depicts the elegant setting and fine clothing that captured the attention of visitors (Fig. 3). In the upper right hand corner of the picture, behind the women, is a group of visitors in Western clothing. The contrast is provocative and suggests an encounter that was likely both intriguing and confusing. The fashionable ladies in the interesting garden represent both the cultural heritage and contemporaneity of Japanese design. During the Meiji period (1869–1912) it was common in Japan to wear both Japanese and Western clothing,

¹³ Tom Gunning, "The World as Object Lesson: Cinema Audiences, Visual Culture and the St. Louis World's Fair, 1904", in: *Film History* 6 (1994), 422-444.

¹⁴ Milan H. Hulbert, "Introduction", in: *Official Catalogue of Exhibitors. Universal Exposition, St. Louis, U.S.A., 1904. Division of Exhibits. Department D. Manufactures*, ed. Frederick J. V. Skiff, St. Louis 1904.

¹⁵ Skiff (1904), 82-83, 126.

¹⁶ Hajime Hoshi, *Handbook of Japan and Japanese Exhibits at World's Fair, St. Louis, 1904*, St. Louis 1904.

and members of the delegation to St. Louis frequently appeared in both, blurring the boundaries between past and present, and between East and West.¹⁷



3 Jessie Tarbox Beals, *Two Japanese women wearing kimonos and holding umbrellas in the Japanese Garden at the 1904 World's Fair*, 1904, photograph. Missouri Historical Society, St. Louis (<http://collections.mohistory.org/resource/141521>); courtesy of the Missouri Historical Society, St. Louis)

[11] A more theatrical version of Japanese culture, Fair Japan, was represented on the Pike, an avenue just to the north of the main exhibition palaces where, for an additional cost of admission, visitors could tour reproductions of the Tyrolean Alps and an Irish Village. They could also see exotic animals in Carl Hagenbeck's famous traveling zoo, a moving picture cinema, a recreation of Ancient Rome, and an Eskimo Village from Alaska. After looking at premature babies in the Infant Incubator exhibit, visitors could stop for popcorn on their way to see ancient Cliff Dwellers, the Streets of Cairo, and an Old Plantation. Adjacent to the Pike was the popular cowboy and Indian show, Buffalo Bill's Congress of Nations or Rough Riders of the World. Fair Japan on the Pike featured fashionable women described as geisha girls, who were trained in the arts of beauty, theater, and performance.¹⁸ Emme and Mayme Gerhard photographed some of the women at their St. Louis portrait studio (Fig. 4). In one example a young woman wears an embroidered silk kimono and classical hairstyle reminiscent of those depicted in *ukiyo-e*, woodblock prints of the

¹⁷ Terry Satsuki Milhaupt, *Kimono: A Modern History*, London 2014. Many thanks to Helen Nagata for suggesting this reference.

¹⁸ *Louisiana Purchase Exposition, St. Louis, 1904* (brochure to promote the Union Pacific Railroad's Overland Route), St. Louis 1904; see also Miya Elise Mizuta, "'Fair Japan': On Art and War at the Saint Louis World's Fair, 1904", in: *Discourse: Journal for Theoretical Studies in Media and Culture* 28 (2006), no. 1, 28-52.

"floating world", characterized by scenes of female beauties and theater performers, a precursor to the images of women and scenes of modern life later captured by Alphonse Mucha.



4 Gerhard Sisters, *Geisha girl*, 1904, platinum print, 52.2 × 33.7 cm. Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, Washington, D.C. (<https://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2011648550/>; copyrighted 1904 by Gerhard Sisters, St. Louis, Mo.)

[12] At the *Palais du Costume* visitors could watch fashion shows performed by live models. Brothers Auguste and Émile Poussineau, owners of the French fashion house Maison Félix, had curated an exhibition of thirty tableaux for the 1900 Paris *Exposition universelle*. The show, "Women's Costume Through the Ages", with wax figures dressed in historical costume, had been very popular, but when Maison Félix closed the following year, the entire installation was sold to the London exhibition center, Earls Court, which subsequently leased it to the Louisiana Purchase Exposition Company.¹⁹ Exhibitions of historical dress had been a regular feature of world's fairs in Europe for many years, including at the 1896 Berlin Trade Fair that Simmel visited.²⁰ The sumptuous historical costume on display at the *Palais du Costume* in St. Louis, however, despite its beautiful exhibits, elegant building, and cafe, must have paled in comparison to the sight of living people in exotic dress, which visitors encountered on the Pike.

¹⁹ Carol S. Porter, *Meeting Louis at the Fair: The Projects and Photographs of Louis Clemens Spiering, World's Fair Architect*, St. Louis 2004, 101; *Le Costume de la femme à travers les âges: Projet Félix*, Paris 1900.

²⁰ August von Heyden, *Ein Jahrhundert der Mode 1796–1896: Trachtenpavillon der Berliner Gewerbe-Ausstellung 1896*, Berlin 1896.

Photography and the New Woman

[13] The Gerhard Sisters were part of a team led by Charles Carpenter, staff photographer for the Chicago Field Museum of Natural History, who recognized the unique opportunity to document the wide variety of ethnographic groups at the fair without having to travel around the world to do so. Carpenter also employed Frances Benjamin Johnston, who had established a professional reputation with her photographs from the previous international expositions in Chicago and Buffalo, and who served as a juror for the Department of Liberal Arts at the St. Louis fair. Jessie Tarbox Beals had likewise photographed the earlier fairs, and had started a successful career reporting for the *Buffalo Courier*. She was not a member of Carpenter's team, but was able to wrangle a pass that enabled her to take personal photographs of the fairgrounds. Her pictures of aeronautical exhibits, Olympic athletes, and mothers with children are some of the most remarkable and unusual records of the event, and were so well-received that many were published by the fair's Official Photographic Company, led by William H. Rau, who supervised the documentary project that credited more than 750 professional photographers.²¹

[14] The Gerhard Sisters photographed many of the foreign visitors to the fair, including participants in the anthropological exhibits. Their artfully composed, visually stunning portraits tend to objectify their subjects, who are often posed in profile to highlight their exotic features, as in the case of *Geisha girl*, and their pictures have been criticized as upholding the racist ideology of the fair organizers. Linda Wexler has pointed out that although the emergence of professional women photographers in the early 20th century represented a step forward for white middle class women, their pictures also reveal the violence of the white woman's privileged colonial gaze.²² However, while it is certainly evident that such photographs of the fair upheld racist narratives of imperialism, power, and white supremacy, it may be possible also to view some of the pictures taken by women photographers as sympathetic or even subversive commentary on oppressive social structures at that time, especially when interpreted from the point of view of fashion.

[15] Professional photography provided women with a means of income that enabled them a certain independence, while also offering an avenue for creativity, commentary, and personal expression. Emme and Mayme Gerhard studied with St. Louis portrait photographer Fitz W. Guerin. When he retired in 1903 they acquired his studio and negatives, which gave them the opportunity to produce portraits of some of the fair's most famous participants.²³ Nancy

²¹ Eric Breitbart, *A World on Display: Photographs from the St. Louis World's Fair 1904*, Albuquerque 1997, 11.

²² Laura Wexler, *Tender Violence: Domestic Visions in an Age of U.S. Imperialism*, Chapel Hill 2000; see also Robert W. Rydell, *All the World's a Fair: Visions of Empire at American International Expositions, 1876–1916*, Chicago 1984, 154–183. Wexler's argument complicates earlier feminist readings of these photographs as interventions in a male-dominated profession. See Anne Tucker, *The Women's Eye*, New York 1973. Many thanks to Sarah Evans for her lectures and conversations about photography.

²³ Beverly W. Brannan, "Gerhard Sisters", Biographical Essay, Prints and Photographs Reading Room, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. (May 2011), <https://loc.gov/rr/print/coll/womphotoj/gerhardessay.html> (accessed May 12, 2020).

Columbia, the eleven-year old Inuit (Inuk) girl who had been born at the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition, posed with her sled dog for the Gerhard Sisters, as did the world's most infamous and most frequently photographed Native American warrior, Apache leader Geronimo (Mescalero-Chiricahua), who was at that time a US prisoner of war from Fort Sill, Oklahoma (Fig. 5).



5 Gerhard Sisters, *Geronimo*, ca. 1904, gelatin silver print. Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, Washington, D.C. (<https://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2011647021/>; photo copyright by the Gerhard Sisters, St. Louis, Mo.)

Geronimo became a celebrity after having been exhibited by the U.S. government at the 1898 Trans-Mississippi and International Exposition in Omaha, Nebraska and 1901 Pan-American Exposition in Buffalo, New York. Those fairs were significant international events, though on a smaller scale than the ones in Chicago and St. Louis. Early in her career Frances Benjamin Johnston took photographs of African American and American Indian students at the Tuskegee Institute in Alabama, the Carlisle Indian Industrial School in Pennsylvania, and the Hampton Institute in Virginia for which she won a Grand Prize in Paris. Later she specialized in architecture and landscape photography.²⁴ After photographing the St. Louis world's fair Jessie Tarbox Beals settled in New York, where she opened a fashion portrait studio, while continuing to work as a freelance photojournalist, taking many pictures of prominent artists and contemporary life in Greenwich Village.²⁵

²⁴ Helena Zinkham, "Frances Benjamin Johnston – Biographical Overview and Chronology", Biographical Essay, Prints and Photographs Reading Room, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. (2011, last revised: June 2019), <https://www.loc.gov/rr/print/coll/fbjchron.html> (accessed May 12, 2020).

²⁵ Beverly W. Brannan, "Jessie Tarbox Beals (1870–1942)", Biographical Essay, Prints and Photographs Reading Room, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. (January 2011), <https://loc.gov/rr/print/coll/womphotoj/bealsessay.html> (accessed May 12, 2020).

[16] Beals took many pictures of women in positions of authority and importance at the fair, such as Florence Hayward, the only woman who served on the Board of Commissioners for the Louisiana Purchase Exposition, and Alice Roosevelt, oldest daughter of President Theodore Roosevelt. In Beals's photograph of the fair commissioners on the steps of the Anthropology Building, Florence Hayward stands next to St. Louis mayor Rolla Wells and fair president David R. Francis, at the opening of the Vatican exhibition (Fig. 6).



6 Jessie Tarbox Beals, Rolla Wells, Frank D. Hershberg, Florence Hayward, David R. Francis, Archbishop John J. Glennon and Vatican Commissioner Signor Coquitti [Francesco Cagiati] (from left to right) at the opening of the Vatican exhibit at the 1904 World's Fair, 1904, photograph. Missouri Historical Society, St. Louis (<http://collections.mohistory.org/resource/141927>; courtesy of the Missouri Historical Society, St. Louis)

Hayward had travelled to Europe at Francis's request to arrange for the critically acclaimed exhibit of Vatican treasures to be sent to the fair. She wears a feminine version of the sober formal attire in which the men are dressed: a sharp, three-quarter length jacket with broad shoulders, white tie, and broad-brimmed hat, and looks towards the camera with a withering gaze. Hayward was a worldly, unmarried professional writer, who apparently had little to do with the prominent society women who served on the St. Louis fair's Board of Lady Managers.²⁶ In fact Beals mocked the Lady Managers in a photograph of five Filipino men in the Philippine Reservation, awkwardly dressed in Western clothing, which she labeled, "As the Lady Managers Wanted to Have Them – Prime Christians".²⁷ The ladies had been offended by the nakedness of natives on display in the ethnographic exhibits and requested that they be covered up.

[17] Alice Roosevelt, a notorious socialite and glamorous fashion icon, was frequently photographed at the fair. Frances Benjamin Johnston had recently publicized the First Daughter's

²⁶ Katharine T. Corbett, *In Her Place: A Guide to St. Louis Women's History*, St. Louis 1999, 179.

²⁷ Breitbart (1997), 55-56; Wexler (2000), 281-282.

debut with a series of photographs from the White House, including one in which she stands defiantly, with arms crossed, wearing a fashionable print dress with high lace collar and hair piled in a stylish bouffant (Fig. 7).²⁸ Likely Beals and Johnston were intrigued by Roosevelt, who was infamous for her bold and provocative public life, which included such antics as smoking on the roof of the White House, driving a sports car, and later, cutting her wedding cake with a sword. Alice Roosevelt was a trendsetter who popularized for dresses and gowns a particular shade of "Alice blue", the color of her blue-gray eyes.²⁹



7 Frances Benjamin Johnston, *Alice (Roosevelt) Longworth, 1884–1980*, 1902, photographic print. Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, Washington, D.C., Frances Benjamin Johnston Collection (<https://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2001704082/>; Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.)

[18] Despite their differences in age, position, outlook, and style, Florence Hayward and Alice Roosevelt might both be described as New Women. The concept, which emerged in feminist writing of the late 19th century, encompassed a variety of progressive ideals, including women's rights to education, professional opportunities, sexual autonomy, and economic independence, and it involved changes in physical activity and dress. Several years earlier Frances Benjamin Johnston photographed herself as a New Woman, sitting in her eclectic artist's studio with a decidedly masculine stance, a cigarette in one hand, and a beer stein in the other. Beals had a similar flair for self-promotion as an intrepid photographer capable of unusual feats of strength and agility, such as climbing tall ladders with her heavy camera equipment, and leaping into hot air balloons to capture aerial views of the fair (Fig. 8).

²⁸ Bennitt and Stockbridge (1905), 144.

²⁹ Stacy A. Cordery, *Alice: Alice Roosevelt Longworth, from White House Princess to Washington Power Broker*, New York 2007, 52, 159.



8 *Untitled (Jessie Tarbox Beals preparing to take photograph atop high ladder, main entrance of the Austrian Pavilion, 1904 St. Louis World's Fair)*, 1904, gelatin silver print, 17.2 × 12.2 cm. Harvard Art Museums/Fogg Museum, Cambridge, MA, Transfer from the Carpenter Center for the Visual Arts, object number 2.2002.3162 (<https://hvard.art/o/156223>; © President and Fellows of Harvard College, Cambridge, MA)

Pictures of dress

[19.] The most controversial aspect of the St. Louis world's fair was its presentation of race.³⁰ William J. McGee of the Bureau of American Ethnology was head of the fair's Anthropology department (Department N). McGee chose the theme of "Man and His Works" to demonstrate the evolution of human development, representing both "race-types and culture-types", in a series of outdoor exhibits that showcased Indigenous people and their traditional dwellings from Central Africa, South America, and Northern Japan, as well as families of American Indian tribes. All of the outdoor exhibits were occupied by natives of those tribes and regions who had traveled to the fair at the behest of its organizers to perform in person their "arts, industries, languages,

³⁰ Nancy J. Parezo and Don D. Fowler, *Anthropology Goes to the Fair: The 1904 Louisiana Purchase Exposition*, Lincoln 2007.

social customs, and beliefs".³¹ By contrast, educational exhibits and representative students in the Model Indian School organized by the US Bureau of Indian Affairs presented, "the most approved methods of raising aboriginal tribes to the plane of citizenship".³² McGee wanted tourists to compare the primitive customs and traditional dress of those in the Indian Village to the activities of students wearing European-style clothing in the Model Indian School to garner support for the US government's treatment of native peoples.

[20.] A separate Philippine Reservation organized by the US government represented the annexation of the Philippines as an unincorporated territory of the United States in 1899 at the end of the Spanish-American war. The outdoor exhibition held 1,250 individuals of different ethnic groups from the islands, who were encouraged to demonstrate their unfamiliar rituals and lifestyles as justification for America's colonization of the territory and its assimilation of the native peoples there. While the Philippine Reservation represented the United States' foreign colonial interests, the Indian Village promoted the same message domestically. The exhibits reinforced one another and illustrated, as McGee put it, "the means whereby America bears her share of the White Man's Burden".³³

[21.] The contrasting narratives of traditional and modern Indians is especially striking in a comparison of two photographs of the Fort Shaw Indian Boarding School women's basketball team, one of which was taken at the fair by Jessie Tarbox Beals, and the other most likely after the team returned to Montana. The young women were selected to represent the Model Indian School by playing games and by giving artistic performances in traditional and theatrical costumes. In one photograph, the young women students were romanticized and idealized as archetypal Indian maidens, based on the fictional Minnehaha of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's epic poem, *The Song of Hiawatha*, which had been popularly performed in recitations since its publication in 1855.³⁴ In the other photograph, they look like modern girls, dressed for physical activity in outfits that enable them to move their bodies dynamically.

³¹ W. J. McGee, "Introduction", in: *Official Catalogue of Exhibitors. Universal Exposition St. Louis, U.S.A. 1904. Division of Exhibits. Department N. Anthropology*, ed. Frederick J. V. Skiff, St. Louis 1904, 6-7.

³² McGee (1904), 6.

³³ McGee (1904), 6. The phrase is a reference to Rudyard Kipling's poem *The White Man's Burden* originally published in 1897 to celebrate Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee and revised in 1899 to support U.S. rule of the Philippines.

³⁴ Katy Young Evans, "The People's Pageant: The Stage as Native Space in Anishinaabe Dramatic Interpretations of 'Hiawatha'", in: *MELUS: Society for the Study of the Multi-Ethnic Literature of the United States* 41, no. 2 (Summer 2016), 124-126; Michael D. McNally, "The Indian Passion Play: Contesting the Real Indian in 'Song of Hiawatha' Pageants, 1901-1965", in: *American Quarterly* 58, no. 1 (March 2006), 105-136; Alan Trachtenberg, *Shades of Hiawatha: Staging Indians, Making Americans: 1800-1930*, New York 2004.



9 Jessie Tarbox Beals, *Indian girls dressed for a ball game, U.S. government Indian Exhibit (Fort Shaw Indian School basketball team), 1904 World's Fair, 1904*, photograph. Missouri Historical Society, St. Louis (<http://collections.mohistory.org/resource/146157>; courtesy of the Missouri Historical Society, St. Louis)

[19] Beals's photograph captures a range of expressions on the faces of the ten teenage girls in their uniforms of blouses and bloomers (Fig. 9). Flora Lucerro (Chippewa/Cree), standing second from the left exudes self-confidence, smiling with arms crossed, while the team's star player, Minnie Burton (Lemhi Shoshone), the tallest of the group, looks with steely resolve toward the camera. Their attitudes and expressions, which range from authoritative to skeptical, are not unlike those of Florence Hayward and Alice Roosevelt, but perhaps their faces also reflect their contradictory experience as celebrity athletes, who were nevertheless treated with discrimination, as Native American women, on their journey from Montana to St. Louis.³⁵ Team captain Belle Johnson (Piegan Blackfeet), seated on the grass in the front row, holds both a leather basketball and a bouquet of flowers, incongruent symbols of femininity and athletic talent.

³⁵ Linda S. Peavy and Ursula Smith, "World Champions: The 1904 Girls Basketball Team from Fort Shaw Indian Boarding School", in: *Montana: The Magazine of Western History* 51, no. 4 (Winter 2001), 2-25; Linda S. Peavy and Ursula Smith, *Full-Court Quest: The Girls From Fort Shaw Indian School, Basketball Champions of the World*, Norman 2008.



10 Andrew P. Williams, *Indian girls basketball team, Fort Shaw*, c. 1906–1907, photographic print, black and white, board mount, 21 × 25.4 cm print on 28 × 35.56 cm mount. Montana Historical Society, Research Center, Helena, MT, Photograph Collections, PAc 80-79.M3 (courtesy of the Montana Historical Society, Helena, MT)

[20] In the second photograph, with similarly bemused expressions, the team members wear embellished buckskin dresses, beaded necklaces, breastplates, and moccasins, with their hair in two long braids (Fig. 10). Costumes like these were a standard feature of *Hiawatha* pageants, which the young women performed on their way to St. Louis and during the fair.³⁶ Students at Indian Boarding Schools, however, were typically forbidden from wearing traditional native dress in keeping with the oppressive assimilation policies established by the U.S. government through the late 19th century. Women students made their own school uniforms: blouses with ties, or calico dresses with puffed sleeves, high lace collars, and Victorian jewelry, which were characteristic of European-American women's fashions in the 1890s. Visitors to the Model Indian School could see students wearing such clothing while demonstrating the curriculum, which prepared Native American girls for domestic labor.

[21] Beals's photograph of the Fort Shaw basketball team captures a moment in which ideas about physical activity and women's dress were changing. In conjunction with the fair that summer St. Louis hosted the third Olympic Games, with running, swimming, gymnastics, wrestling, and weightlifting events. The Physical Culture department (Department P) at the fair included exhibits related to physical education, as well as manufacturers of sports clothing and

³⁶ Peavy and Smith (2001), 20.

equipment.³⁷ At the Fort Shaw Indian Boarding School, which drew students from many western tribal communities and reservations, basketball was introduced as a part of the physical culture curriculum, a standard component of American education by the 1890s, which emphasized gymnastics, calisthenics, and outdoor activity as a means to strengthen the physical body, as well as team sports and games to foster comradeship and a national democratic spirit. For women physical education intersected with theories of reform dress, which had emerged in the 1850s, when social reformer Amelia Bloomer began wearing trousers as an alternative to skirts.³⁸ By the end of the nineteenth century many different women's organizations in Europe and North America advocated for less restrictive clothing for sports, swimming, dancing, or bicycling.

[22] While Beals's photograph of the Fort Shaw women's basketball team may represent women's progress, her portraits of women with young children at the fair seem to reflect more conservative attitudes towards traditional ideals of motherhood. The pictures belong to a genre of work by modern women artists, for whom images of motherhood and intimate interior scenes were deemed appropriate subjects, but which also provided an opportunity for creative expression in places that were less accessible to their male peers.³⁹ Gertrude Käsebier (1852–1934) was perhaps the best-known woman photographer of the period, and her pictorial images of mothers with young children were particularly admired. They are similar in some respect to the artful studio portraits produced by the Gerhard Sisters, who may have modeled their portraits of Indigenous peoples at the St. Louis fair on Käsebier's carefully staged, pictorial photographs of Native Americans.⁴⁰ Beals's photographs, by contrast, seem to record and document mothers and children as ethnographic subjects, with attention to their costume, gestures, and facial expressions. They often capture spontaneous, unexpected moments, such as when Es-kee, the young son of Becinta Begay (Mrs. Vincente Begay) tugs at his mother's silver squash blossom necklace (Fig. 11).

³⁷ *Official Catalogue of Exhibitors. Universal Exposition St. Louis, U.S.A. 1904. Division of Exhibits. Department P. Physical Culture*, ed. Frederick J. V. Skiff, St. Louis 1904, 9-12.

³⁸ Patricia A. Cunningham, *Reforming Women's Fashion, 1850–1920: Politics, Health, and Art*, Kent 2003, 38-48.

³⁹ Griselda Pollock, "Modernity and the Spaces of Femininity", in: *Vision and Difference: Femininity, Feminism and the Histories of Art*, London 1988, 50-90.

⁴⁰ Wexler (2000), 177-208.



11 Jessie Tarbox Beals, *Navaho squaw (with child)*. *Department of Anthropology, 1904 World's Fair, 1904*, photograph. Missouri Historical Society, St. Louis (<http://collections.mohistory.org/resource/148910>; courtesy of the Missouri Historical Society, St. Louis)

[23] Beals's portrait of Becinta Begay contextualizes the elements of her costume, including a woven blanket with geometric pattern, which she wears over her shoulders, and the silver rings on her third and fourth fingers of each hand. It combines the rhetoric of ethnographic study, documentary journalism, family portrait, and fashion photography. Mrs. Begay was one of twenty Navajo (Diné) artisans from Fort Defiance, Arizona, who traveled to the fair to demonstrate traditional weaving and jewelry making in silver and turquoise. The photograph is taken outside of one of the traditional hogans, circular log and earth dwellings, which the families constructed in the Indian Village, though their craft demonstrations were held at the Model Indian School. It is likely that Mrs. Begay was one of the women who demonstrated weaving there alongside her baby.⁴¹

[24] Beals may not have known about the matrilineal structure of some of the native communities she photographed at the fair, but the strength of the female figures in her photographs is apparent. Is it possible that the women photographers at the fair were attracted to their subjects not only for commercial purposes, as a means of income, but also because they admired their strength as professionals, artists, or even as mothers? It is tempting to speculate that Beals, Johnston, or the Gerhard Sisters might have seen themselves reflected in their active, creative, and authoritative women subjects, despite their differences in race, age, social class, or dress.

⁴¹ Parezo and Fowler (2007), 120-124.

Fashion and modern mythmaking

[25] Mucha apparently admired American women for their bold attitude, strength, and modernity.⁴² He depicted women in general as formidable forces of nature, which exude a powerful sexuality as they smoke cigarettes or ride bicycles – emblems of the New Woman. In his poster for the St. Louis world's fair, however, the erotic appeal of the young woman – perhaps an allegorical representation of America itself – is heightened by her proximity to the Native American (Fig. 1). The blue green feathers of his war bonnet, which he wears over two dark braids, complement the jeweled wreath in her own sensuously wavy hair. She is dominant, masculinized through her newfound liberty, whereas he is feminized, reduced to a decorative presence in the background. Both figures, like exotic birds, are framed and intertwined in an organic, linear arabesque. Mucha drew attention to that which was most interesting about America and what made it most different from Europe – its Indigenous people. The event is made fashionable by the dual presence of the figure in native dress and the desirable woman who clasps his hand.

[26] More complexly, Mucha's image of the Native American could be seen as an extension of his own ethnographic mythmaking project. At home in his native Prague Mucha often wore an embroidered Bohemian smock while working in his studio, where he photographed and painted models in traditional folk costume. The images were studies for an epic mural of the history of the Slavic people in Europe, which he produced for the interior of the Bosnia-Herzegovina pavilion at the 1900 Paris *Exposition universelle*.⁴³ Four years later, Mucha's poster advertising the St. Louis fair to a French-speaking audience similarly located a fashionable new American cultural identity in its own folkloric roots.

[27] The iconic image of the American Indian as a wise and tragic "vanishing race" is perhaps best known through the photographs of Edward Curtis, who, at the time of the St. Louis World's Fair, had just embarked on his epic project to document the Indigenous peoples of North America.⁴⁴ Curtis's photo of the famous Nez Perce tribal leader, Chief Joseph (Hinmatóowyalah't'qit), in feathered headdress was taken in 1903 (Fig. 12). The striking representation of Chief Joseph as noble savage might well have been the image in the back of Mucha's mind, as he designed his stylish poster for the fair (Fig. 1).

⁴² According to his son, Jiří Mucha, the American women that Alphonse Mucha admired included Chicago philanthropist Bertha Potter Palmer (1849–1918), Chicago artist Narcissa Niblack Thorne (1882–1966), and Illinois First Lady Bina Maloney Deneen (1868–1950). Jiří Mucha, *Alphonse Mucha: His Life and Work*, London 1966, 292. See also Anna Daley, "Alphonse Mucha in Gilded Age America, 1904–1921", [MA Thesis](#), Cooper-Hewitt National Design Museum, Smithsonian Institution and Parsons the New School for Design, New York 2007.

⁴³ Milan Hlavačka, Jana Orliková and Petr Štembera, *Alfons Mucha – Paříž 1900: Pavilon Bosny a Hercegoviny Na Světové Výstavě / Alphonse Mucha – Paris 1900: The Pavilion of Bosnia and Herzegovina at the World Exhibition*, Prague 2002.

⁴⁴ Edward S. Curtis, *The North American Indian: Being a Series of Volumes Picturing and Describing the Indians of the United States and Alaska*, 20 vols., Seattle 1907.



12 Edward Sheriff Curtis, *Chief Joseph*, 1903, orotone photograph, 58.7 × 48 cm. National Portrait Gallery, Washington, D.C., NPG.80.325 (https://npg.si.edu/object/npg_NPG.80.325; National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution, Gift of Jean-Antony du Lac)

The fair organizers worked hard to make sure that famous warriors were present, in part to draw crowds, and in part to demonstrate that the U.S. military had successfully vanquished them. Chief Joseph did attend the fair, but perhaps just for an afternoon before returning to Eastern Washington, where he passed away that September on the Colville Indian Reservation.⁴⁵

[28] In the end, it was not Chief Joseph, dressed in feathered war bonnet, who was the best remembered face of the American Indian at the fair, but Geronimo, who preferred to wear Western clothing, and who sold signed souvenir copies of his portrait photographs for tourists, as well as buttons, which he regularly cut from his jacket (later replacing them with others).⁴⁶ Beverly Brannan writes that during the restoration of the Gerhard Sisters's portrait of Geronimo (Fig. 5), a curator at the Library of Congress noticed that in the reflection of his eye she could see an image of the photographer, Emme or Mayme Gerhard, wearing a white blouse and dark skirt, the uniform of the New Woman (Fig. 13).⁴⁷ This striking discovery, although it was made many years after the photograph was taken, provides a glimpse into the real encounter between the

⁴⁵ James R. Swensen, "Bound for the Fair: Chief Joseph, Quanah Parker, and Geronimo and the 1904 St. Louis World's Fair", in: *The American Indian Quarterly* 43, no. 4 (Fall 2019), 439-470.

⁴⁶ Swensen (2019), 456.

⁴⁷ Brannan (2011), "Gerhard Sisters".

sitter and photographer in a particular place and time when attitudes toward race, gender, power, modernity, and national identity were rapidly changing.



13 Gerhard Sisters, *Geronimo*, c. 1904, detail of eye, gelatin silver print. Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, Washington, D.C. (<https://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2011647021/>; photo copyright by the Gerhard Sisters, St. Louis, Mo.)

In Mucha's imaginative allegorical representation, the fashionable 'New Woman' and mythical 'Vanishing Indian' are joined, hand in hand, suggesting that the modernity of the St. Louis world's fair was bound up in their entangled images—complementary symbols of the future and the past. But in the Gerhard Sisters's photograph of Geronimo the real subject and his photographer are reflected much more intimately in one another's gaze.

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This article was inspired by conversations with students and colleagues at Northern Illinois University. The photographs reproduced here have been previously published and are made available to the public by the institutions that hold copies of them. They have been selected for this article because they tell an important story about how the individuals depicted in them and their photographers contributed complexly to narratives of fashion, modernity, and national identity. As the author of this essay, I acknowledge the racism and coercion surrounding the creation of the photographs, which record the experiences of those who visited and participated in the fair, including Geronimo, Chief Joseph, Becinta Begay and her son, and the members of the Fort Shaw Indian Boarding School women's basketball team.

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