Completing Lewis and Clark’s Westward March

Exhibiting a History of Empire at the 1905 Portland World’s Fair

Statuary of ferocious bobcats and enormous plaster-of-paris bulls menaced visitors from across manicured lawns. Stone images of dancing American Indians broke through the shrubbery and flowers of the carefully styled gardens. Visitors who encountered these statues and gardens entered a fantasy of colonial majesty in the Columbian Court of the 1905 Lewis and Clark Centennial and American Pacific Exposition and Oriental Fair in Portland, Oregon. Surrounded by grand exhibit buildings that conjured images of the imperial power of Byzantium, Spain, and Great Britain, visitors were expected to imagine the American West as conquered and tamed. The American flag was ever-present at speeches and other events, and it flew above all of these imperial structures and throughout the exhibits of exotic people and places. The symbolism of the fair layered representations of imperial might and ingenuity with expressions of American heritage and promised a bright future for the United States, finally realized in the far western town of Portland.

Nowhere were these themes more played out at the fair than in the statuary of Native Americans. Fairgoers were faced with incongruous depictions of Indians as either doomed by their adherence to traditional lifeways or as a hopeless race in need of assimilation into white ways of life. Alice Cooper’s statue of Sacagawea, as well as the speeches that ac-
accompanied its unveiling, connected the conquest of Indians and western lands in the nineteenth century with future U.S. commercial expansion. The exposition’s events, exhibits, and design suggested that the nation could draw upon traditions of western empire to justify moving ever westward and into Pacific and Asian markets. In the speeches, statues, and grand structures, the fair told the story of the Lewis and Clark Expedition, which not only paved the nation’s way through the West but also laid the groundwork for expansion into Asia. The Portland fair’s planners hoped to bring the West into an international spotlight and sought to create images that offered both justification and self-congratulation for those who lived at the far edge of an old expansionist push and at the beginning of a new one. The Lewis and Clark Exposition was intended to help the United States define itself in the world marketplace.

*OHS neg., OrHi 36789*

*U.S. flags were ubiquitous at the Lewis and Clark Exposition. In this image, they fly above and within a section of The Trail exhibiting Japanese cultural symbols, foods, and people.*
In the 1870s, U.S. industrial production increased at such a rate that exports exceeded imports for the first time in the nation’s history. Industrial capitalists insisted that new markets be secured to support the pace of production and economic growth and to ensure that American overproduction would not bring economic ruin. They looked west, across the Pacific, to markets in the Philippines, Japan, and China. The situation only seemed more pressing as the industrial economy continued to grow. “Many of our manufacturers have outgrown or are outgrowing their home markets,” Theodore C. Search, president of the National Association of Manufacturers, proclaimed in 1897. “The expansion of our foreign trade is the only promise of relief.”

The search for overseas markets in the early twentieth century fit into a larger pattern of territorial expansion that Frederick Jackson Turner had argued was a major factor in the shaping of the American character. In 1893, Turner predicted that, with the settlement of the frontier, internal social turmoil would boil over in a population previously shaped and quieted by patterns of conquering, settling, and expanding farther west. In this interpretation, expansion was necessary, not only for the health of the economy but also for the stability of society. Anxieties about the changes that accompanied industrialization could be calmed by looking to past patterns of expansion. Some Americans were quick to translate fears of economic collapse and social turmoil into a desire for new, foreign commercial frontiers. Before the close of the nineteenth century, those new frontiers began to materialize. The Spanish-American War concluded in 1898 with U.S. acquisition of numerous overseas holdings, including the Philippine Islands, which promised to be a stepping-stone to the lucrative markets of Asia.

Because Portland was an important Pacific shipping port, planners and supporters of the Lewis and Clark Exposition were sure to emphasize that Oregon had much to gain by reaching out to the new markets. Representative Binger Hermann (R-Ore.) expressed the expansionist mentality behind Portland’s world’s fair in a statement to the House Committee on Industrial Arts and Expositions in 1905. Through the foresight of President Thomas Jefferson and the explorations of Meriwether Lewis and William Clark, he asserted, the American nation now stood “3000 miles nearer the coast of the Orient whose trade we much desire.” Such thinking effectively displaced the push for new markets from the context of industrial production and refashioned it as a continuation of tactical American expansionist mentality. While market expansion was prag-
matically attractive to some, the romantic tale of expansion held wide appeal.

Historian Matthew Frye Jacobson has noted that “pride in the legacy of conquest is integral to American nationalism and national belonging; and it is a pride constantly regenerated not only in the perpetually expansive spirit of actual state policy, but in the less formal and more pervasive telling of the tale” of expansionist successes. That is, the power behind expansionist rhetoric lies not only in the prospect of material gain but also in links to intangible notions of patriotism and pride in the nation’s past. Through the imagining and retelling of the story of U.S. expansion — with statuary and exhibits at the Lewis and Clark Exposition, for example — the nation’s identity could be reconstructed and passed on to future generations.

Racial characterizations also were expressed in these tales of expansion. In an age of social Darwinism, territorial domination was attributed to racial supremacy. When Theodore Roosevelt, the 1904 presidential candidate and a former soldier in the Spanish-American War, advocated the “race-importance of the work” of conquering a nation for the sake of “civilized mankind,” he articulated a romantic western vision of the past while calling forth a sense of civic responsibility for the success of the white race through expansion. “The rude, fierce settler who drives the savage from the land,” Roosevelt wrote in the 1890s in *The Winning of the West*, “lays all civilized mankind under a debt to him.” Reflecting such sentiments, the Lewis and Clark Exposition made American might and right its guiding principles.
World’s fairs have always been tied to commerce, and the Lewis and Clark Exposition was no exception. The idea of hosting a world’s fair in Portland originated with Dan McAllen, a dry-goods merchant who had seen the success of San Francisco’s 1894 Midwinter Fair. Held in Golden Gate Park and largely modeled after the 1893 World’s Columbian Exposition in Chicago, the Midwinter Fair sought to draw international attention to the city as a cultural and economic center. As the economic troubles of the late 1890s kept Portland’s economy in a slump, McAllen’s proposal gained popularity with the city’s business elite. A national exposition meant “money — lots of money,” wrote Col. Henry E. Dosch, an early fair supporter, in April 1899. Most Portland businessmen agreed, recognizing how the fair would help the local economy and maintain Portland’s prominence in the Northwest.

Local business leaders and powerful politicians rallied behind the idea, and supporters created an Exposition Corporation to define the fair’s objectives and financially secure its construction.

As blueprints were drawn, the corporation began soliciting funding. The businessmen of the Exposition Corporation tied the national expansion story — with the subplot of conquering and assimilating Native peoples — to the local advantages of finding new markets for Oregon goods. This tactic appealed to thousands of investors at both the local and regional levels and helped attract Congressional funding.

While generating wealth was the ultimate goal of both the exposition and U.S. expansion, corporation members could appeal to a wide audience by intertwining themes of a civilizing mission, national expansion, and local prosperity in planning and designing the fair. At the center of the exposition grounds were a number of serious state buildings, grand stairwells, sprawling gardens, and massive convention halls. The popular entertainment section, called The Trail — which featured about a hundred slot machines, performing horses, a fortuneteller, and several souvenir shops — was confined to a smaller yet prominent area between the main exhibition grounds and the Bridge of Nations that led to the U.S. Government Exhibit on a peninsula in Guild’s Lake.

The fair’s planners wanted to school visitors in the admirable qualities of the national character as they demonstrated how economic expansion would create new jobs and bring an array of goods to U.S. consumers. At a time when Progressive reformers sought to improve society through educational programs and government action, expansion could be presented as a social service. Part of the education program presented at the fair, for
example, showed how Native people had been “improved” through U.S. government programs. Rather than showing how Indian people challenged and tactically incorporated the assimilation policies that had been imposed on them, historical narratives at the fair justified colonial rule by showing how Indians had “advanced” under the paternalistic tutelage of the U.S. government. “Our colonial system did not begin with the Spanish War,” Frederick Jackson Turner reminded Americans in December 1901. “The United States had had a colonial history and policy from the beginning of the Republic.” The real goals behind colonial rule — control over and eventual extermination of Native lifeways — remained obscured by white imaginings of Indian subjects dependent upon American benevolence. The generalized white understanding of Native cultures and history, expressed
through the lens of compassionate rule, determined the essentialized images of Indians on display. Representations of Indians at the fair shed light on how white westerners justified the past and applied it toward their present-day imperialism.

Solon H. Borglum’s *First Steps to Civilization*, along with *Buffalo Dance*, *The Pioneer*, and other statues situated in the main body of the fairgrounds, provided part of a complex message about the place of Indians America. On one side of *First Steps to Civilization*, in a downward posture symbolizing exhaustion and extinction, an Indian dressed in buffalo skins holds a large stick, representing a connection to unimproved land and pre-reservation lifestyles. On the other side, an Indian carries a book and is draped in fabric manufactured by whites. In a posture of mobility and growing strength, he points toward civilization and, therefore, renewed life and progress. The impression of actual movement is even more apparent in a young boy who crouches next to him, ready to spring in the direction of assimilation. The message is clear: to survive, Indians must throw off the chains of traditional life or perish in a misery of their own making.

Solon’s statue fit beliefs, common at the time, that Indians would assimilate or die and traditional lifeways would soon dwindle away. “There are no fewer than 800 tribes now remaining,” noted one writer, “and these are hastening with fatal rapidity toward total extinction.” Those who saw *First Steps to Civilization* were led to conclude that the Indians’ “savagery” was to blame. Reflecting social Darwinist ideas that treated domination of land as a measure of racial superiority, the statue depicted some of the deficiencies in the Indian way of life, such as the connection to “unimproved” land and dependence on hunting and non-manufactured goods. This message was all the more obvious when juxtaposed with buildings that displayed the Anglo-American exploitation of natural resources, such as the Forestry Building. Notions of savagery and civilization defined opposing poles of human social development, and one could argue that exhibits of American progress, representing the apex of civilization, had their most potent meaning when they were located next to examples of savagery.

If traditional Indians were inherently doomed, then warfare, disease, economic exploitation, and dislocation at the hands of western settlers could be denied as factors in Native Americans’ troubles. Instead, blame could be placed on the Indians’ inability to cope with a superior civiliza-
tion. At the time of the Lewis and Clark Exposition, Oregon was fewer than thirty years from the last violent string of Indian wars in the Northwest. The Modoc (1872–1873), Nez Perce (1877), and Bannock-Paiute (1878) wars were surely still fresh in the minds of northwesterners. We know that white veterans of those wars were in the crowds at the fair, because the exposition directors discussed them and their concerns when scheduling events. Borglum’s *First Steps* sentimentalized the traditional Indian as a part of the old American West and assumed he would inevitably pass along with the last vestiges of the frontier. The statue also validated the American policy of acculturation through allotment and government schooling, portraying those practices as righteous actions with humanitarian ends. It was a positive colonial model that could be applied elsewhere on American territory.
Borglum’s artistic message was not entirely consistent, however. *Buffalo Dance*, a statue located on the main terrace overlooking Guild’s Lake, shows several strong, stylized Indian men dancing in buffalo robes.\(^6\) *The Pioneer* depicts an exhausted, downtrodden Indian man slumped over his rain-soaked horse. Together, these statues depict the importance that Euro-Americans placed on the civilizing mission but also a romanticized, traditional Indian. Such contradictory beliefs about American Indians sometimes led to opposition to official U.S. policies, but often they worked in tandem to deny Indian culture. Categorized as either modern and civilized or traditional and dying off, American Indians were sentimentalized in the same way as the Wild West was. The romantic wilderness was seen as giving way to the higher forces of a grand empire constructed in the American West.

Fairgoers had ample opportunity to see these dual messages about Native culture, and they were not limited to viewing statues of Indians at the Lewis and Clark Exposition. They could also see living Native Americans performing traditional dances and songs and demonstrating crafts. At the Indian Village, located at the entrance to The Trail, several regional Indian artists sold beautifully crafted Native artwork, Umatilla Indians mingled with the crowds, and some Nez Perces danced. Although some visitors found the village demeaning for all involved, this display of Native culture on The Trail made the evidence of Euro-American civilization in the main section of the fair all the more pointed.\(^7\)

American Indians were also on display at the U.S. Government Building, along with Filipinos. Both groups were depicted as colonial subjects who were wards of the government and could not represent themselves. Under the direction of the Department of the Interior, Superintendent Edwin L. Chalcraft of the Chemawa Indian School, a federal boarding school near Salem, was responsible for the preparation and installation of the Indian Exhibit. Chalcraft reported that “the greater part of the exhibit is devoted to industrial and literary training given pupils in the Indian schools and showing in their ability to take up the pursuits of our own race.”\(^8\) He organized the space into two separate parts filled with display cases. In one part were four cases with industrial works from Indian school students, including tin works, blacksmith tools, buggy equipment, and samples from the tailoring and domestic departments of the school. The second part displayed pre-contact arts and crafts, including a canoe, carrying bags, dresses, moccasins, and other ethnographic items.\(^9\)

While the school crafts display reflected the assimilation efforts carried out across the country for all American children — including Na-
tive Americans and immigrants — the pre-contact display held a special significance. The careful separation of traditional items from the modern products of Indian labor denied the possibility that Indian cultures could be both traditional and modern. Euro-American society imposed the dichotomy between traditional and modern and, in doing so, rejected the idea of a relevant modern Indian culture. Government schools were presented as brilliant successes, while the economic, social, and psychological effects on Indian children and their families were overlooked. Those who saw such an exhibit might be satisfied that the policy of acculturation uplifted Indians from a hopeless fate and could feel reassured that American civilization was supreme.

A statue of Sacagawea unveiled at the exposition on July 6 embodied the link between the “noble conquest” of Indians in the West and the promise of western expansion into Asia. Emerging interpretations at the time treated Sacagawea as a brave young Shoshone woman and an important guide in the Lewis and Clark Expedition. Sacagawea joined the expedition when the captains hired her French husband, Toussaint Charbonneau, as an interpreter. There is little question that she played a valuable role in translating and recognizing landmarks in her home Shoshone country as the expedition passed through what is now western Montana and Idaho. She and her son, Jean Baptiste Charbonneau, even may have served as a symbol of peace when the group encountered Indians they knew nothing about. Once the expedition traveled beyond the Bitterroot Mountains, however, Sacagawea was familiar with neither the territory nor the languages. She might have done her share of work on the expedition to the Pacific, but she was in no position to lead once they were west of Lolo Pass. Nowhere in the journals do the men give Sacagawea credit for their survival; and although the captains acknowledged her contributions, only William Clark mentions her as a guide.

Sacagawea was referred to as a “savage” in published accounts from 1804 through 1902. Oregon author Eva Emery Dye was the primary architect of the renewed interest in Sacagawea at the turn of the twentieth century. Her novel The Conquest: The True Story of Lewis and Clark, published in 1902, combined fact and fiction to argue that Sacagawea had played a larger role in the expedition than historians had acknowledged. The Conquest helped change the public perception of Sacagawea, by portraying her as a princess, an American heroine, and a key figure in the success of the expedition.
One of the few original works on display at the fair, *Sacajawea* was unveiled with speeches by three notable figures. Susan B. Anthony, well known as the former president of the National American Woman Suffrage Association, was attending a summit on women’s rights in Portland, and her celebrity drew a crowd to the unveiling. T.J. Bell was a leading member of the Washington Improved Order of Red Men, the oldest fraternal organization in the country. The members of the Order of Red Men, which had been founded before the Revolutionary War, were exclusively white men, but they dressed and organized themselves in imitation of the League of the Iroquois. They espoused noble characteristics that they ascribed to Indians and adopted “ancient customs and teachings” to create rituals aimed at reaffirming masculinity in the lives of middle-class white men.26 Eva Emery Dye, the founder and president of the Sacagawea Statue Association, delivered the final speech.

Each speaker interpreted the life of Sacagawea in an effort to promote his or her own agenda. Susan B. Anthony argued that “this is the first time in history that a statue has been erected in the memory of a woman who accomplished patriotic deeds.” Moreover, she continued, “if it were not for that brave little Indian mother, there would be no Oregon or Portland.” She concluded by urging voters to remember the patriotic role women had played in American history and to support woman suffrage in the upcoming election.27 Anthony’s appropriation of Sacagawea as an American patriot was both inaccurate and ironic. The laws at the time of the expedition did not extend U.S. citizenship to Sacagawea, even though she lived in land that had been purchased by the United States. Married to a Frenchman and living in an area where few Americans ventured, she had virtually no ties to the U.S. government. She was never formally hired by the captains nor given government recognition as a member of the expedition after it was over. Anthony reinterpreted the past to portray Sacagawea as a patriot and as vital to western progress in order to promote her own fight for women’s rights.

T.J. Bell assigned Sacagawea a role in the development of the United States as a successful, capitalist nation, declaring that “the formation of a wilderness into a . . . commonwealth of wonderful and great commercial enterprises is directly credited to the little Indian.”28 The United States secured strategic Pacific coast trading ports thanks in part to the Lewis and Clark Expedition, and Bell attributed the success of the mission to the Indian woman. By tying commercial and national expansion to Sacagawea, Bell created the illusion that the Indian woman consciously
Alice Cooper’s Sacajawea, pointing the way to the Pacific, suggests that the Indian woman was a brave guide for the Lewis and Clark Expedition. It also celebrates her Indian heritage and role as mother.
endorsed expansion. If Sacagawea lent her approval to the purpose of the expedition, then she could be seen to have secured the permission of all western Indians for the American territorial expansion that followed. Bell imbued Sacagawea with a conscious understanding that her actions worked in tandem with U.S. national interests and interpreted Sacagawea as a “civilized” Indian because she recognized the value of American economic and territorial domination. Bell also alluded to the popular understanding that commercial success lies ever westward, in the wilderness, as the expedition had demonstrated.

The idea that future wealth would depend on further expansion westward — across the Pacific Ocean — was developed by Eva Emery Dye, who delivered the final address before the statue was officially unveiled.
Dye described Sacagawea as completing a march that had begun when Pocahontas saved white men and directed them into the American interior. By guiding the expedition, Dye claimed, Sacagawea was “point[ing] the way to Asia, unlocking the gates of the mountains, and giving up the key to her country, . . . giving over its trade and resources to the whites, opening the way to a higher civilization.” She may have had an even higher purpose, Dye speculated, as “the dark-eyed princess of the native race, the child of Asia, beckoned the white man on toward her ancient home in the Orient.”

Dye touched on several identities frequently ascribed to Sacagawea at the time: princess, gatekeeper of civilization, and child of Asia. The title of princess launched Sacagawea into an ambiguous place between Anglo-Americans’ interpretations of savagery and civilization. She was clearly an Indian by birth, yet if she could be seen to have realized the worth of civilization and to have accepted the importance of it being spread, whites would be able to classify her as something other than savage. If she could be seen as an Indian princess, Sacagawea could be evaluated in a positive light because she reflected the ambitions of the society that claimed the right to define her. As a gatekeeper, she represented Indian acceptance of white supremacy and was given status far above others of her race. Describing Sacagawea as a child of Asia made her an effective connection to a bright future of expansion into that continent.

As she completed her speech, Dye gave a signal, the band played America, and the crowd broke into cheers as an enormous American flag fell from the bronze figure. Sacajawea, designed by Alice Cooper, was based on likenesses of modern Shoshone girls and depicts Sacagawea dressed in fringed buckskin with her papoose strapped to her back. Pointing stoically westward, her body shows movement and strength. The Dallas News raved about the model in anticipation of its unveiling:

The sculpture has shown fidelity to the traditions of the intrepid woman who led the white men on their perilous journey. The spirit of the immortal Sacajawea is portrayed, and the “Bird Woman” is lifted by the hands of art from the degrading characteristics which mark the features of her descendants among the Shoshone or Snake Indians of her tribe today.

Sacagawea was covered in a flag that was not hers, shrouded in religious sensationalism that was not her own, and praised for patriotism that she did not express. She was the perfect emblem of the movement into the West, created for the fair’s contemporaries, not her own time.
The implications of American expansion as a humanitarian as well as a commercial endeavor were readily apparent at the fair. Present on nearly every pamphlet and piece of memorabilia was the official emblem: Lady Columbia, personifying Liberty or Progress, leading Lewis and Clark toward the setting sun beyond the western ocean. A contemporary trade journal described the allegorical design: “Two buckskin-clad explorers, each with a powder-horn and gun, have raised their hands in salutation. Between them . . . moves Progress, a woman draped in the stars and stripes. The whole symbolizes confidence, energy, trust, and solemn wonder.” It is significant that Lewis and Clark are both well armed as they make their advance on the Pacific. They may have “raised their hands in salutation,” but it is clear that where they are headed they will need a rifle. As Theodore Roosevelt expressed the national mission in his 1905 inaugural address, just and generous dealings with other nations have greater significance coming from a strong nation that can ethically defend its actions. Thus, the U.S. “civilizing mission” on newly acquired American territory could be figured as a friendly act rather than an aggressive one. Echoing Roosevelt’s adage — “speak softly and carry a big stick” — the exposition seal reflects the assumption that advancement and expansion have always been accompanied by, and perhaps made possible through, the use of military might.

Progress, shrouded in the patriotic colors of America, is depicted as light and flowing, reminiscent of the scene in American Progress, John Gast’s painting of America’s westward movement. In Gast’s work, the allegorical figure of Manifest Destiny leads pioneers into the Promised Land as Natives flee farther west, receding into the darkness. Similarly, the exposition seal articulates a unified Anglo-American understanding of the western past and the inherent right of Americans in westward expansion.

The sentiment embodied in the seal was repeated at the entrance to the fairgrounds. After paying admission, every visitor walked under a grand colonnade on which was inscribed “Westward the Course of Empire Takes Its Way.” The phrase was popularized through Manuel Leutz’s painting by the same name, which shows the western migration of settlers as they cross over the Rocky Mountains and point toward the setting sun and the idealized land in the west. The quotation and the colonnade — styled in the Romanesque architecture of a classical empire — announce that the United States not only claimed empire for itself but it also was basing its claim on a tradition of grand empires of the past. According to historian
Anders Stephanson, the notion of *translatio imperii* (transfer of empire), popularized in the eighteenth century in both the United States and Britain, held that “civilization has always been carried forward by one single dominant power or people and that historical succession was a matter of westward movement.” Anglo-Americans saw themselves as the one great race God had chosen to civilize the world.  

*Blee, Completing Lewis and Clark’s Westward March*
Behind the colonnade entrance to the exposition, the fairgrounds opened up into the immense Columbia Court, complete with statues, fountains, and gardens and bordered by towering buildings. The Sunken Gardens in the center of the courtyard consisted of manicured grass with what one journal described as “such a profusion of tropical plants . . . as will make [a visitor] imagine that he is in the West Indies instead of the northwest.” The atmosphere of the courtyard celebrated imperial grandeur and demonstrated that the West was not a great desert but a civilized garden. The introduction of exotic species showed the extent to which people could shape their environment to suit their needs.

The buildings lining Columbia Court made a strong statement about the United States as an empire. On the left was the European Exhibits
Palace, containing displays sponsored by European powers, while on the right was the Palace of Agriculture, exhibiting the ways in which the western landscape had been conquered with Anglo-American ingenuity. Both buildings were partly styled after Spanish colonial architectural themes, with ornamented portals, tiled roofs, and bell towers. The European Palace embodied features from Romanesque and Spanish Renaissance architecture, with the entrance styled after Spanish missions. The Palace of Agriculture was crowned by a huge golden dome, reminiscent of Byzantine splendor. Together with the Roman colonnade, the classical architectural forms suggested power, solidity, and permanence. Even though the buildings were façades rather than permanent structures, as symbols of empire they gave viewers a sense that their imperial design was a link in the chain that bound western civilization together.

Along with the visual splendor at the fair, visitors witnessed ceremonies and speeches that effectively tied the American West to classical empires such as Rome and Athens. On June 1, the opening day of the fair, Vice President Charles Fairbanks gave a highly anticipated address on the grassy terrace before a hushed crowd.

A beneficent Providence has scattered his bounties about you with a prodigal hand. The mighty Pacific is at your very doors. It invites you to illimitable commerce beyond. . . . The future has much in store for you. Yonder is Hawaii, acquired for strategic purposes and demanded in the interest of expanding commerce. Lying in the waters of the Orient are the Philippines, which fell to us by the inexorable logic of an humane and righteous war. . . . We must have a vigilant care for our increasing interests in the Orient. . . . Our foothold is steadily increasing, and if we are but true to our opportunities, it will be immeasurably enlarged to the advantage of the entire country.

Fairbanks effortlessly moved from divine selection to western expansion and the righteous acquisition of Hawaii and the Philippines. The United States should continue its encroachment on Asia, Fairbanks explained, because the much-sought Asian trade was nearly within grasp and controlling trade in the Pacific was the secret to economic growth. Future prosperity, Fairbanks asserted, would come from perpetual expansion to the west. Oregonians, he argued, had been supplied with the providential location at the doors of the Pacific and the means to achieve commercial domination in Asia. Fairbanks also made it clear that citizens had a responsibility to be “vigilant” about their economic security and that Oregonians played a special role. Civic passivity would mean not only economic failure but failure of the American empire as well.
As a far western state, Oregon had historic ties to Asia. Regional connections to the Chinese trade can be dated to 1787, when Capt. Robert Gray and the Columbia stopped at what is now the Oregon coast en route to Canton. By the turn of the twentieth century, intellectuals and capitalists fantasized about the Chinese market as the epitome of wealth and world control. In 1900, expansionist Brooks Adams described the kind of imperialism for which the United States strove, an economic hegemony aimed at dominating the Chinese trade: “From the earliest times, China and India seem to have served as the bases of human commerce; the seat of empire having always been the point where their products have been exchanged against the products of the West.”

Because of the constant national rhetoric and local pressure from burgeoning businesses, port cities such as Portland tied their future prosperity to trading rights and their proximity to China. China was viewed as a commercial wonderland, with 400 million customers waiting for an avalanche of American goods. Although China accounted for only 3 percent of U.S. trade in 1900, Oregon had a significant export market in that nation, with lumber and flour leaving the Portland shipyard in record-breaking loads. Oregon products sent to Asia and Oceana made up one third of the local export revenues in a $10 million market in 1903.

Given nearly universal interest in the Far East, it is not surprising that images of that part of the world could be found throughout the Lewis and Clark Exposition. The U.S. government mounted a photographic display depicting potential customers from areas that had fallen under American control, and the Government Building had a huge display of wood products that demonstrated the commercial potential of the Philippines under American control. The abundant logs and wood chips harvested from the Philippine Islands could be shipped to the United States for manufacturing and the products sold to Americans and Filipinos alike. The American plan for command of Pacific trade, the displays suggested, was well underway.

The Portland exposition housed the Asian exhibits in one building, balanced against the single European Palace. The Oriental Building was located on the far western part of the grounds, next to the Forestry Building and facing the Oregon State Building across a courtyard. All three buildings were constructed with funds from the state of Oregon. Located amid displays of Oregon’s rich timber and abundant agricultural capabilities, the Oriental Building was implicitly associated with northwestern commerce. Its design was classical Corinthian, with an American eagle placed
The interior housed mainly Japanese trade goods, yet the decor was red, white, and blue and featured American flags. The Oregon Daily Journal reported: “the idea one received immediately [of the Oriental Building] . . . is ‘America looking toward the orient.’ Below are the nations of the orient with their old ideas and customs, while above, looking over the whole, is America, extending to these countries her civilization through the medium of education.” The lesson was not that the United States and the Asian nations were simply trading partners but that America would invigorate and re-invent the East. While Japan and other Asian nations were encouraged to send exhibits to the fair, at the Oriental Building Oregon exhibited the East for its own purposes.

On October 15, 1905, the Lewis and Clark Exposition closed. It had been one of the most economically successful American world’s fairs of the era, and the summer of 1905 made a handful of Portland businessmen very rich. Close to $8 million flowed into the local economy, with the fair attracting some 1,588,000 visitors. The organizers of the exposition considered the summer an economic and cultural turning point for Portland and the Northwest.

In 1905, Oregon boosters believed that Portland was ideally located in geography and history to validate American imperial actions overseas, and the world’s fair was an effective tool to advance that ambition. The U.S. policy of “benevolent assimilation” of American Indians, evident in the

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The fair’s statuary, saved and “civilized” Native people. Warfare and attempted genocide had been refashioned as conquest and advancement in the far West. At the fair, Sacagawea represented a visionary Indian who endorsed and encouraged the extension of American boundaries and imperial ideals for the betterment of all. U.S. expansion offered a patriotic tale of righteous actions and economic development through mastery of territory. The fair’s planners had designed an imperial wonderland in a far western town that became intrinsically connected to distant empires of the Western world. Every Anglo-American visitor at the fair could find reason to support a thrust into the Pacific with the promise to spread civilization and bring economic prosperity to the cultural center of the Pacific Northwest.

Notes

7. See Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color*.
15. Photographs of *Buffalo Dance and The Pioneer* may be found in the Oregon Historical Society photograph collection. *Buffalo Dance* is also pictured in *Glimpses of the Lewis and Clark Exposition and the Golden West* (Chicago: Laird and Lee, 1905), MSS 1609, Box 100 Folder 20.
17. Kate C. McBeth, a Christian missionary among the Nez Perces, found the village abhorrent and demeaning for all involved. In a letter to Eva Emery Dye, she wrote about the fair’s scouting mission among the Indians: “Some parties have been engaging our wild, long haired ones to [perform at
the fair]. Of course they will be paid to go through their dances and heathenism. I regret this part of the Fair, it will be demoralizing to all the Western tribes.” Kate C. McBeth to Eva Emery Dye, February 2, 1905, MSS 1609, Box 9, Folder 11.


19. Ibid, 57.


27. Oregonian, July 7, 1905.

28. Ibid.

29. Ibid.


33. Kessler, Making of Sacagawea, 94. Sacagawea was also represented in the Souvenir Song of Welcome for the fair, in which she received most of the attention. Alson Landon Woodard, Souvenir Sacagawea Song, 1905, MSS 1609, Box 115, Folder 8.

34. Lewis and Clark Journal 1:1 (January 1904): 6, MSS 1609, Box 98, Folder 8.


37. Bishop George Berkeley coined the phrase in 1726: “Westward the Course of Empire takes its way; The four first Acts already past, a fifth shall close the Drama with the Day; Time’s noblest Offspring is the last.” From “Verses … on the prospect of Planting Arts and Learning in America,” 1725, quoted in Vivien Green Fryd, Art and Empire: The Politics of Ethnicity in the United States Capitol, 1815–1860 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 209. Leutz’s painting is still mounted in the U.S. Capitol in Washington, D.C.

38. Stephanson, Manifest Destiny, 18.


43. Ibid.

44. Oregonian, June 2, 1905.


46. Jacobson, Barbarian Virtues, 27.


49. Noel Jacob Kent, America in 1900 (Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe, 2000), 135.

50. Abbott, Great Extravaganzas, 33.

51. Lee, Lewis and Clark Centennial Exposition, 6; Rydell, All the World’s a Fair, 203.

52. Rydell, All the World’s a Fair, 203.


54. Abbott, Great Extravaganzas, 72.