

WORLD'S FAIRS AND THE DAWNING OF "THE AMERICAN CENTURY"

A UNIT OF STUDY FOR GRADES 9-12

**Kevin Randolph
and
Robert Rydell**



ORGANIZATION OF AMERICAN HISTORIANS
AND THE
NATIONAL CENTER FOR HISTORY IN THE SCHOOLS
UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, LOS ANGELES

**WORLD'S FAIRS
AND THE DAWNING OF
"THE AMERICAN CENTURY"**

A UNIT OF STUDY FOR GRADES 9-12

**Robert Rydell
and
Kevin Randolph**

**ORGANIZATION OF AMERICAN HISTORIANS
AND THE
NATIONAL CENTER FOR HISTORY IN THE SCHOOLS
UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, LOS ANGELES**

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction

Approach and Rationale	1
Content and Organization	2

Teacher Background Materials

Unit Overview	3
Unit Context	4
Correlation to the Standards for United States History	4
Unit Objectives	5
Lesson Plans	5
Historical Background on World's Fairs	6

Dramatic Moment 12

Lessons

Lesson One: To Make a Nation Whole	13
Lesson Two: The March of Progress	24
Lesson Three: Cultural Frankensteins?	46
Lesson Four: Case Study—Filipinos at the 1904 St. Louis Fair	64

Bibliography 72

TEACHER BACKGROUND MATERIALS

I. UNIT OVERVIEW

This unit is designed to introduce students to one of the most fascinating eras in American history, the period bounded, on the one side, by the end of Reconstruction, and, on the other, by the search for an overseas empire at the end of the nineteenth century. This unit is also intended to introduce students to the medium of the world's fair, an institution that millions of Americans relied on to understand the world and their place in it.

The appropriate starting point for this unit is with a deceptively simple question: how do you reconstruct a nation after a civil war? Students need to be reminded that the American Civil War (1861-1865) left 600,000 Americans dead and horribly bitter memories in both the South and North. Students also need to be reminded that, while the political restoration of the union may have been completed by 1877, it was by no means clear that the future of the United States was secure, especially in the aftermath of the 1873 industrial depression and the growing storm of class conflict that hit the United States in the Gilded Age. The central point to get across to students is that the reconstruction of the United States after the Civil War was anything but automatic or complete by 1877 (the year of the Compromise of 1877 and the date usually used to denote the end of Reconstruction). The Reconstruction era unleashed powerful forces of industrialization and ushered in an era of pronounced anxiety about where the United States was heading and what kind of society America would become in the next century.

This set of concerns about the stability and future of the recently restored nation-state led influential (and worried) business, political, and civic leaders to think of a way to shore up popular faith in America's future. Drawing on European precedent, they turned to the medium of the world's fair. The world's fairs that ringed the country between 1876 and the First World War presented the American people with a roadmap to a future that was often depicted in utopian terms. Rapid industrialization, technological innovation, scientific knowledge, and inherited "racial capacity"—these, according to world's fair authorities, were the keys to America's national progress.

But not all Americans were pleased by what they saw at the fairs or by how they were presented at (and sometimes excluded from) the expositions. What exactly did "progress" mean? For whom was "progress" intended? Were there any costs associated with the vision of "progress" projected at the fairs? These are among the questions that this unit encourages students to think about while coming to the realization that the reconstruction of the United

States after the Civil War was a long and often painful process—one that would continue into the next century.

II. UNIT CONTEXT

These lessons concern the “Gilded Age,” from the end of Reconstruction to the early twentieth century. This unit fits comfortably in an overall study of the period that emphasizes themes such as westward expansion, immigration and urbanization, the growth of business, and the origins of the American labor movement. Far too often the domestic and foreign policy issues of this period are not effectively tied together; nor are social and cultural themes effectively integrated with political events. After completing this unit, students will be able to identify clear connections between domestic concerns about progress and consolidation and the expansionist mentality of American society at large. As a result, they will be in a position to evaluate the reconstruction of the American “national culture” as an intentional creation and ongoing process that, by the end of the nineteenth century, positioned the United States to extend its vision of progress overseas.

III. CORRELATION TO NATIONAL STANDARDS FOR UNITED STATES HISTORY

World’s Fairs and the Dawning of “The American Century” provides teaching materials that complement the *National Standards for United States History, Basic Edition* (Los Angeles, National Center for History in the Schools, 1996). The lessons in this unit help students attain Standards 2C of Era 6 by investigating various aspects of popular culture in the study of American history.

The unit integrates a number of specific Historical Thinking Standards by having students analyze cause-and-effect relationships, interrogate historical data by uncovering the social and political context within which it was created, and compare and contrast different sets of ideas and values. Students will better appreciate historical perspectives by describing the past on its own terms through the eyes and experiences of those who were there, as revealed through speeches, newspaper articles, and contemporary narratives. The unit also includes a number of photographs and cartoons providing students with the opportunity to examine visual data to clarify, illustrate, and elaborate upon information presented in historical narratives.

IV. UNIT OBJECTIVES

1. To encourage students to think about social progress as having both positive and negative aspects.
2. To introduce students to how cultural representations shape the way people think about the world.
3. To examine the role of the world's fair movement in giving legitimacy to popular culture.
4. To consider the ways a manufactured environment can pervade a culture and influence people's attitudes.
5. To help students create an historical context for understanding American culture and an instrument for comparing nineteenth- and twentieth-century American society and values.
6. To cultivate critical analysis of visual primary sources such as photographs, cartoons, and architectural drawings.

V. LESSON PLANS

1. To Make A Nation Whole
2. The March of Progress
3. Cultural Frankensteins?
4. A Case Study: Filipinos at the 1904 St. Louis Fair

LESSON I: "TO MAKE A NATION WHOLE"

A. OBJECTIVES

1. To help students understand how world's fairs played a crucial role in culturally reconstructing the United States.
2. To consider the intersection of politics and culture in the period directly after Reconstruction.
3. To examine the Pledge of Allegiance and its origins, as indicative of the phenomenon of nationalism.
4. To understand historical revisionism.

B. LESSON ACTIVITIES

1. As a pre-lesson homework assignment, have students make a chart indicating the positive and negative consequences associated with the period of the Civil War/Reconstruction.

Example chart format:

POLITICAL	ECONOMIC	SOCIAL	CULTURAL

LESSON I

2. Read Joaquin Miller's "*Song of the Centennial*" (**Document 1.1**) from the 1876 Exposition and the excerpt from the *Guidebook for Southerners* for the 1876 exposition (**Document 1.2**). As a class discuss in what ways celebrating the 100th birthday of the United States could have served as a form of "cultural reconstruction" after the agony of the preceding fifteen years.
3. Discuss why an exposition was an appropriate choice for culturally reconstructing the U.S. in 1876.
4. In early 1892, Charles C. Bonney, a world's fair official, proposed nationwide involvement in the Columbian Exposition's dedication ceremonies. "The day of the Finding of America should be celebrated everywhere in America. Let it also be suggested that a desirable note of unity would be given if at least one feature of the exercises be identical, both in Exposition dedication, and in all local celebrations."⁵

Read the National School Celebration of Columbus "Salute to the Flag" (**Document 1.3**). What is the central theme of the salute? Was it only an effective publicity stunt to raise awareness about the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago? What other purpose(s) did it serve?

5. Read **Document 1.4** and make a list of possible reasons why Iowans were encouraged to participate in the fair. How could state participation foster a sense of nationalism?
6. In small groups identify as many of the specific images present in the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition lithograph as possible (**Document 1.5**) by dividing the cover vertically into halves and making a list of the images in each section. Pay close attention to the iconography of the cover focusing on who the figures might represent and how the drawing links elements of the American past. Why do you think Christopher Columbus was chosen as the principal figure to be celebrated at the 1893 Fair? Is this drawing biased?

After each group has reached a consensus, have the groups share their conclusions with the entire class by reporting their findings. Conclude the lesson with a discussion of people and groups who are not present in the cover illustration.

⁵ John T. Rodgers, "Authorship of the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag: A Report," Library of Congress, Legislative Reference Service, July 18, 1957, 6.

Follow-up assignment: Divide the class into small groups of equal size. Then have each group design a drawing which they believe is a more accurate reflection of American history as of 1893. Decisions should be made on the basis of consensus. Conclude by transferring each group's design into an overhead transparency and then engage the class in a discussion about the differences/similarities between the historical lithograph and their revisionist drawings. Be prepared to help students with the concept of historical revisionism, and its value, by giving them a specific example of how an historical event has been reinterpreted. One obvious choice would be Christopher Columbus, the figure whom the 1893 fair honored. Then he was a hero. Is he still viewed as one today?

7. In small groups have students identify as many of the nations represented as visitors to the 1893 fair in the "Uncle Sam's Grand Finale" cartoon as they can (**Document 1.6**). Pay particular attention to the figures on either end of the can-can line and how they are represented. Is this just a cartoon poking fun at different nationalities or is this a concerted effort to stereotype different people and convey a message about national superiority? Does the cartoon represent values associated with imperialism? If so, how?

Post-Lesson Homework

Using **Documents 1.1-1.6**, write a short essay discussing the apparent similarities and differences in purpose between the 1876 Centennial Exposition in Philadelphia and the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago.

C. EVALUATING THE LESSON

Check for understanding during the discussions. Some students will identify the differences more effectively using text, while others will find that visual representations convey the similarities and differences more clearly. Use both the vertical analysis exercise and expository writing to assess their understanding. Be open to both approaches.

**“Song of the Centennial”
by Joaquin Miller**

Orator to the People

Oh, wondrous the wealth, prodigious the powers!
Unbound the dominion, and matchless the love!
And this the inheritance! This then is ours:
Reached down, as you stars are reached down, from above.
Then rise in your places. Rise up! Let us take a great
oath together as we gather us here,
At the end and beginning of an hundred year,
For the love of Freedom, for Liberty's sake-
To hand the Republic on down, undefiled.
As we have received it, from father to child.

The past is before us. Its lessons are ours;
The cycles roll by, and beckon, and cry--
Lo! There fell Babylon; fell eaten away
With lust and luxury. Her thousand towers.
Her temples, her gardens, are dust today,
And the wild-fox burrows where her portala be.
Lo! Greece died here, devoured by strife
Of kings she had cradled and nurtured to life.
Lo! There proud Rome, in imperial flight,
Fell down from sun to the darkness of night.

Oh, let us live pure in the flush tide of life;
Be patient in valor as the solemn years roll.
Oh, let us not strive too much in the strife,
But bridle ambition and invoke control.
Come, turn us from luxury, dash down the wine.
And walk by the waters. So live, that men
Who stand where stand, in the footprints of Penn,
By the same broad city, in the same sunshine,
Shall say of us all, just a century hence,
“They are worthy, indeed, the inheritance.”

The People Sing a Song of Peace

The grass is green on Bunker Hill,
The waters sweet in Brandywine;
The sword sleeps in scabbard still.
The farmer keeps his flock and vine;
Then, who would mar the scene today
With vaunt of battlefield or fray?

The brave corn lifts in regiments
Ten thousand sabres in the sun,
The ricks replace the battle-tents,
The bannered tassels toss and run.
The neighing steed, the bugle's blast
These be but stories of the past.
The earth has healed her wounded breast.
The cannons plow the field no more;
The heroes rest! Oh let them rest
In peace along the peaceful shore!
They fought for peace, for peace they fell!
They sleep in peace, and all is well.

The fields forget the battles fought,
The trenches wave in golden grain
Shall we neglect the lessons taught
And tear the wounds again?
Sweet Mother Nature, nurse the land,
And heal her wounds with gentle hand.

Lo! Peace on earth. Lo! flock and fold,
Lo! rich abundance, fat increase,
And valleys clad in sheen of gold.
Oh, rise and sing a song of peace!
For Theseus roams the land no more,
And Janus rests with rusted door.

Source: Joaquin Miller, "Song of the Centennial," *Frank Leslie's Historical Register of the Centennial Exposition*, 1876 (New York: Frank Leslie's Publishing House, 1877).

Guidebook for Southerners
1876 Centennial Fair
AN IMPORTANT QUESTION

At the very threshold an important question occurs that requires patient considering — a question that is asked probably in the South thousands of times a day— “Shall we go to the Centennial?” By this is meant really, “Shall the South *patronize* the International Exhibition?” With proper deference we would with emphasis respond — “By all means, whether or not your State has contributed money and material, let all go who can afford to do so, for it is *our* Centennial as well as the Centennial of the Northern people.” We are a part of the Union. This country is *our* country. Here we were born and reared, here we live, and here we must die. In the past we had our fierce antagonisms, our sorrows and disappointments; but it is now more than eleven years since the last Confederate gun was fired and the battle flag of the defeated hosts was furled. Let the dead past bury the dead. Let all bitter memories be forgotten. Let the peace offerings of the Republic be accepted or the war-drum and the shotted cannon. Let us do those things that make for peace, striving as best we can to act well our parts in this “living present.” Let us feel that we are indeed American citizens. Let our hearts say to our countrymen and friends wherever found in this broad land, as gentle Ruth said to Naomi — “Thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God.”

We ask then, is not the Philadelphia Exhibition an American Exhibition? Ought it not to awaken the patriotic ardor and hearty sympathy of the people in every section? Surely, we are all members of the same great family, and we should all feel a profound interest in the prosperity and glory of our country. The United States have made marvelous progress in the first hundred years of their history, and in this Centennial Year is it not altogether fitting that we should show to the world what has been accomplished by the young and mighty nation who dominates the most of this vast continent, and has converted a wilderness into a land of corn and wine, of fruits and flowers? Ours is indeed a goodly heritage, and we should be proud of the great material and intellectual advancement that marks our career. The peoples of the earth have been invited to come to our land to participate in the Hundredth Anniversary of our national birth, and to bring with them their selectest treasures of art, their multitudinous productions of field and forest and mine, of workshop and factory and loom — all that will set forth their inventive genius and express their achievements in every department of human activity. About forty nations have accepted the invitation in a spirit of courtesy and generous rivalry, making it in fact a grand INTERNATIONAL exhibition. The Old World comes to do homage to the New.

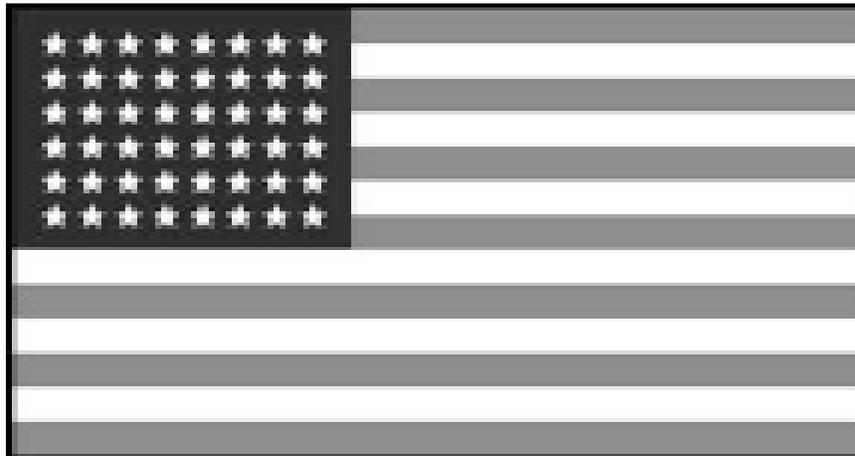
Source: *International Exhibition Guide for the Southern States* (Philadelphia and Raleigh: R. T. Fulghum, 1876).

National School Celebration of Columbus

SALUTE TO THE FLAG

The wording of the Pledge of Allegiance has changed over time. Francis Bellamy, assistant editor of the periodical The Youth's Companion, made the first change inserting "to" right before "the Republic." Then, in the context of the passage of the National Origins Act in 1924, the phrase "my flag" was changed to read "the flag of the United States of America." During World War II, the adaptation of the old Roman gladiators' salute was replaced with the gesture of placing one's right hand over one's heart. Then, in the 1950s, the phrase "under God" was added.

At a signal from the principal the pupils in ordered ranks, hands to the side, face the Flag. Another signal is given: every pupil gives the Flag the military salute—right hand lifted, palm downward, to a line with the forehead and close to it. Standing thus, all repeat together, slowly: "I pledge allegiance to my Flag and the Republic for which it stands: one nation indivisible with liberty and Justice for all." At the words, "to my Flag," the right hand is extended gracefully, palm upward, towards the Flag, and remains in this gesture till the end of the affirmation; whereupon all hands immediately drop to the side. Then, still standing, as instruments strike a chord, all will sing AMERICA—"My Country 'tis of Thee."



Source: "National School Celebration of Columbus," *Youth's Companion*, Vol. 65 (September 8, 1892), 446–47.

Call for Iowa State Participation in the Chicago 1893 Fair

It is expected that Europe, Asia, Africa, Australia, Central, South and British America, the Islands of the Sea, and every State and Territory in our Union, will be represented with their finest productions of arts, manufactures, and of the soil, mine and sea. The whole world competing in generous rivalry for the palm of superior excellence. In the things that make Nations great and prosperous and happy, Iowa stands in the front rank of States, and is situated so near the location of the Exposition, that she should avail herself of this opportunity to make such an exhibit as will fully show her real condition and thus augment our national exhibit, and add to the grandeur of the whole as a comprehensive display of the industrial, intellectual and moral development of the world. International Expositions have grown to such immense proportions, and are prepared at such great cost, it is not probable that the present generation will be called upon to assist in the preparation of another within the United States. The Commission will take pleasure in communicating all needed information and in furnishing all facilities within its power; yet with the people must rest the responsibility of the success or failure of our State to be properly represented; and we invoke the aid of every true citizen to do all within his power, in her exhibit to place Iowa before the assembled Nations, in the position to which she is justly entitled; that we may thus be enabled to compare with other States our condition and capabilities, and our Nation with other Nations of the World. Ample buildings will be constructed to supply all the needs of the Exposition, and sufficient space will be secured for all exhibits from our State; and we earnestly urge all Agricultural and Horticultural Societies and Farmers' Alliances and clubs, all Stock Breeders' Associations and Stock Breeders; Manufacturers of every description; all Miners, Mechanics, Farmers, Nurserymen, Quarrymen; all persons in control of State Institutions; all Institutions of learning, Teachers and School Boards; Artists; Musicians, Photographers, Printers, Publishers, Bankers, State Officers; Managers of Rail Ways, Insurance Companies, and Producers of every kind, to begin now to plan for the best contribution you can make to the World's Columbian Exposition. This Exposition will be a school of observation to the farmer, of technical education to every artisan, a school of design to every manufacturer; it will stimulate progress in the sciences, arts and industries that benefit mankind; it will advance knowledge, dispel conceit and prejudice; cultivate friendship between individuals, States and Nations. There is no other means of diffusing knowledge in so short a time, so wide and varied in its scope, to an extent so great and far

reaching in its refining and elevating in character. It is desirable that the greatest possible number of our people should attend the Exposition, and devote as much time as they can give to the study of its mammoth collection of object lessons, for it will be an opportunity the value of which is beyond computation.

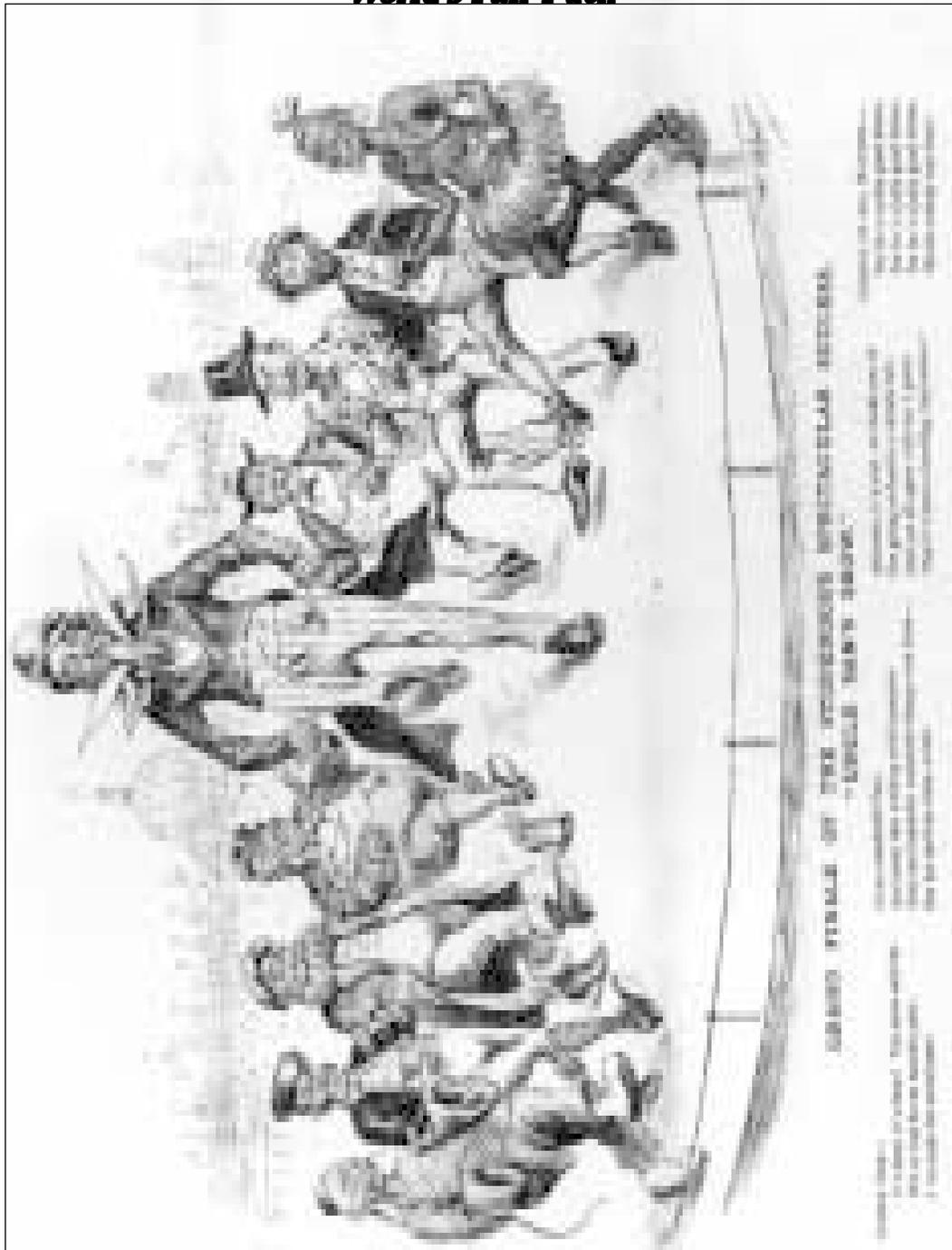
Source: [Pre-exposition Circular, 1891?] in Report of the Iowa Columbian Commission. (Cedar Rapids, IA: Republican Printing Company, 1895), 9-10.

**Allegorical Portrayal of the 1893 World'sColumbian
Exposition**



Lithograph by Rodolfo Morgari.
Chicago Historical Society

**“Grand Finale of the Stupendous Spectacular Success”
*World's Fair Puck***



Library of Congress
Prints and Photographs Division