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# "The most deadly spot on the face of the earth": The United States and antimodern images of "Darkest Africa" 1880-1910

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“THE MOST DEADLY SPOT ON THE FACE OF THE EARTH”: THE UNITED STATES AND ANTIMODERN IMAGES OF “DARKEST AFRICA,” 1880-1910

An Abstract of a Thesis

Submitted

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of the Arts

Melinda Stump

University of Northern Iowa

August 2013

## ABSTRACT

During the late nineteenth and early twentieth-centuries in the United States, images of Africa and Africans were prevalent throughout society. Africans were described as primitive or child-like and were contrasted with the so-called high civilization of middle-class Anglo-Saxons. This thesis will look at these images and attempt to complicate the current historiography on United States images of Africa. Furthering Jackson Lears's theories of antimodernism in Progressive Era United States, I argue that the images produced of Africa and Africans were attempts at regeneration and intense experiences.

Due to the huge progress made due to the Industrial Revolution and the urbanization of American society, modern, white, middle-class Anglo Saxons at the end of the nineteenth century began to feel that they were the victims of civilization. Victorian values and over consumption led to a culture of self-repression and weightlessness. According to Lears, the consequence of this overcivilized society was a desire to escape their urban prisons through intense experiences. This manifested itself in four ways. First, in the craft aesthetic, or the idea that hand-made folk art was better than something mass produced. Second, in an attraction to the occult and to magic; an attraction to the unexplained mysteries of human existence and the world. Third, in the martial idea, or the idea that war, combat, or physical self-testing would make men stronger and more vibrant. Finally, in the nature cure, which believed that by getting in touch with nature, one could unleash authentic forces within themselves and get over

their neurasthenia. I apply these manifestations of antimodernism to images of Africa in the period between 1880 and 1910.

Looking at *National Geographic Magazine*, the World's Columbian Exposition of 1893, and Teddy Roosevelt's 1909 safari trip to Africa, I contend that the images of Africa were used as an escape from the "colorless" life of modern society and to regenerate the self-repressed Anglo-Saxon race. I argue that in an antimodern attempt to escape the overcivilized, consumer-driven city, middle-class Americans packaged, produced, and bought images of Africa.

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has been approved as meeting the thesis requirements for the

Degree of Master of Arts

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I dedicate this thesis to my parents  
Melissa Mitchell and Mitchell Stump,  
who let me embarrass them in the mall

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My sincerest gratitude goes to my fellow graduate students who have gone through this struggle with me, with special reference to Ray Werner and Christopher Shackleford for their early readings and support of this project. A big thank you is deserved to Barbara Cutter and Donna Maier, whose high expectations of me have made me a better historian. Without a doubt, this project would not have been completed without the dedication and encouragement of my advisor, Brian Roberts, who continued to have faith in me even when I didn't. Finally, I am indebted to Charles Hays, who helped save my sanity by offering me pizza and episodes of *The Wire*.



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## INTRODUCTION

During the late nineteenth and early twentieth-century, an increased interest in Africa and Africans became evident in middle-class American culture. European and American missionaries had been a staple in Africa for several decades, and the partition of Africa by European powers brought the continent into American popular culture. Exploration narratives such as the ones produced by Henry Morton Stanley showed Americans for the first time the geography and native people of Africa. Although Americans had for centuries been aware of Africans through the slave trade, these exploration narratives brought them first-hand accounts of Africa. Thus began a fascination with images of Africa that would prevail throughout the Progressive Era and into the present day. This thesis will focus on how American culture and life impacted the images produced of African and Africans during the period between 1880 and 1910 and what these images said about Americans. I will focus on how Antimodernism, attitudes about nature, and attitudes about gender and masculinity impacted these images.

To fully understand how these images of Africa impacted Americans, it is important first to look at the historiography of imperialism. Amongst historians, the motive for Imperialism during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries is a subject widely debated amongst historians. Among historians, there are four leading groups: those who argue for the materialist approach, the nationalist approach, the power approach, and the exceptionalism approach. The most obvious explanation for colonialism is materialism, or the idea that capitalism and profits were the primary

purpose for colonialism. To an extent, all historians fall into this category, as it is undeniable that material goods and profits were one goal of colonialism. Historian David Landes, however, was one of the forerunners to argue that it was only at best, a fraction of the motivation. He attempts to see objectivity within imperialism and argues that economic motives applied to the colonized as well as the colonizers. Other historians have tried to flesh out these motives. There is no one unanimous decision on the motivations for imperialism, however. Yet, it is also generally agreed that was not the *only* reason for nineteenth century imperialism.<sup>1</sup>

A popular trend among historians has been to emphasize the role nationalism placed in nineteenth-century imperialism. William D. Langer's 1935 publication, *The Diplomacy of Imperialism* is the forerunner in this category, arguing that imperialism all over the globe was due to a surge of nationalism in Europe that began to extend beyond the confines of Europe. Although published almost eighty years ago, Langer's interpretation has never quite gone away. George Lichtheim argues that imperialism was a by-product of nationalism which was controlled by economic interest groups, while Daniel Fieldhouse places less emphasis on capitalists and more on politicians.

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<sup>1</sup> David Landes, "Some Thoughts on the Nature of Economic Imperialism," *The Journal of Economic History* 21, no. 4 (December 1961), 496-512. For further readings of imperialism, see: David B. Abernethy, *The Dynamics of Global Dominance: European Overseas Empires, 1415 – 1980* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000); Ralph A. Austin, *Modern Imperialism, Western overseas Expansion, and Its Aftermath, 1776-1965* (D.C. Heath, 1969); Peter J. Cain and Mark Harrison, eds, *Imperialism: Critical Concepts in Historical Studies* (London: Routledge, 2001); Ruth Ben-Giat and Mia Fuller, eds, *Italian Colonialism* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2009); Adu Boahen, ed., *Africa Under Colonial Domination, 1880-1935* (Heinemann, 1985); Kevin Grant, Philippa Levine and Frank Trentmann, eds., *Beyond Sovereignty: Empire and Transnationalism* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007); Bernard Waites, *Europe and the Third World: From Colonisation to Decolonisation, c. 1500-1998* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999); Patrick Wolfe, "History and Imperialism: A Century of Theory, from Marx to Postcolonialism," *American Historical Review* 102, no. 2 (1997): 388-420.

Capitalists, he argues, saw the challenges related to imperialism and were consequently leery of colonization. Politicians, however, bent to the will of the general voting public, which tended to favor expansion for nationalistic reasons.<sup>2</sup>

Some historians contend that the power struggle in Europe prior to World War I was a catalyst to European imperialism. R. Robinson and J. Gallagher argue that political rivalries expedited the imperial process, citing the political feud between England and France as a key proponent in engendering imperialism. Historian Winfried Baumgart similarly argues that many proponents of imperialism in the west saw it as a method to gain power and, in turn, enact social change within their own country. Historian Mommsen, however, argues that power politics were, at best, one factor among many that enticed Western powers towards imperialism at the end of the nineteenth century.<sup>3</sup>

There are also historians that look at how culture affected imperialism. Historians such as Paul Kramer argue that ideas of Anglo-Saxon exceptionalism were crucial to ideas of imperialism. Kramer argues that racial concepts of superiority, sometimes guised as advanced civilization, were instrumental in the justification of imperialism. Likewise, Patrick Brantlinger argues that the idea of civilizing Africans was present in cultural ideas of imperialism. Brantlinger argues that images of Africans as primitives or savages were used in an effort to justify the partition of Africa. He argues that the British

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<sup>2</sup> William L. Langer, *The Diplomacy of Imperialism* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1968), 795-8; Daniel Fieldhouse, "The Economic Exploitation of Africa: Some British and French Comparisons," in *France and Britain in Africa: Imperial Rivalry and Colonial Rule* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1971), 642-662.

<sup>3</sup> John Gallagher and Ronald Robinson, "The Imperialism of Free Trade," *The Economic History Review* 6, no. 1 (1953), 3-7; Winfried Baumgart, *Imperialism: The Idea and Reality of British and French Colonial Expansion, 1880-1914* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982).

felt a need to colonize Africa to end the slave trade and keep up with international competition. Popular opinion in Britain, however, was against the colonization of Africa. Consequently, to make colonization more appealing, cultural images of Africans as the “other,” were presented to further the idea of “uplift.”<sup>4</sup>

Historian Gail Bederman argues for a gender and racially charged approach to imperialism. She cites anxieties about the state of Victorian masculinity during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Victorian values stipulated that men be self-restrained, nonviolent, and rational. Yet, during the late nineteenth century, middle-class men began to fear that they were losing authority within their own households, turning to new ideas of masculinity to alleviate these anxieties. Bederman argues that white, middle-class American men allayed their fears about losing authority through the promise of racial and colonial dominance. She agrees that Anglo-Saxon males used the different levels of civilization as a motivation for authority through imperialism. Seeing America as racially superior to the rest of the world, she argues, gave them the specific right to wield colonial authority.<sup>5</sup>

Historian Sarah Watts, in her study on Theodore Roosevelt addresses cultural issues of gender and masculinity. Watts contends that anxieties began to arise in the late nineteenth-century about the fading manhood of middle-class American men.

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<sup>4</sup> Paul Kramer, “Empire, Exceptions, and Anglo-Saxons: Race and Rule between the British and the United States Empire, 1880-1910,” *The Journal of American History*, Vol. 88, No. 4 (Mar., 2002), 1335-1340; Patrick Brantlinger, *Rule of Darkness: British Literature and Imperialism, 1830-1914* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988), 6-8.

<sup>5</sup> Gail Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880 – 1917* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995, Kindle ed.), Chapter 1, section 1.

Consequently, Roosevelt became a powerful symbol for the revitalization of masculinity through war and imperialism. This study will complicate the historiography of imperialism by adding to the context Jackson Lears's ideas of antimodernism in an attempt to understand the way Americans looked at Africa. I will contend that ideas of antimodernism as described by Lears can be seen in the images of Africa and Africans from the period between 1880 and 1910, including the nature cure, an attraction to magic and mystery, the martial idea, and the craft aesthetic.<sup>6</sup>

Images of the frontier in the American West have been a popular theme amongst historians. The idea of the frontier as had a deep and complex impact on Americans. Frederick Jackson Turner wrote in 1893 about the deep impact the frontier and progress had on the American people. He argued that the gradually progressing frontier in American history had strengthened and unified the American character. Roosevelt, in agreement with Turner, saw the revitalizing power of the frontier. Americans who suffered from neurasthenia as a result of the sallow, urban environment of cities could escape the wilderness to become rejuvenated.<sup>7</sup>

In the early 1890s, however, Americans like Frederick Jackson Turner believed that the frontier had finally come to an end. The rejuvenating and unifying power of the frontier had closed. I will argue that Americans who had seen the frontier as a

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<sup>6</sup> Sarah Watts, *Rough Rider in the White House: Theodore Roosevelt and the Politics of Desire* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 12; T. J. Jackson Lears, *No Place of Grace: Antimodernism and the Transformation of American Culture, 1880-1920* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1981), 4-7.

<sup>7</sup> Frederick Jackson Turner, *The Frontier in American History* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1921), 1-4.

therapeutic place of masculine adventure now projected these images onto Africa.

Through *The National Geographic Magazine*, African exhibits at the World's Columbian Exposition, and the writings of Theodore Roosevelt, I will show that American images of Africa were complex and represented desires for an escape from the hum-drum existence of modern society. Finally, I will show that these fantasies became part of an emerging consumer culture in the form of a packaged Africa experience.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Turner, *The Frontier in American History*, 34.

## CHAPTER 1

*NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC MAGAZINE AND IMAGES OF AFRICA*

When George K. French first entered Kumasi he had already heard of the Sacred Grove. He had read about the grand cottonwood trees, the spacious plot of land, and the thousands of dead, decaying bodies laying out for the vultures. The infamous site for dumping the bodies of ritual sacrifices had been described in many exploration narratives of Thomas Bowditch, Sir Francis Scott, and of course, Henry Morton Stanley. When French entered Kumasi for the first time in the beginning of 1896, he was prepared for a smell which overtook a large portion of the city. He was ready for a sight which “appalled,” he declared, “the stoutest heart and the most stoical mind.”<sup>9</sup> He described a man who held the position of executioner, who had purportedly taken the lives of as many as twenty to fifty thousand people during his lifetime. And what he found, he intended to display to the American people through the pages of *The National Geographic Magazine*. His article would be one of the scariest portrayals of Darkest Africa that would enter the pages of this magazine.<sup>10</sup>

Western portrayals of Africa had not always displayed the inhabitants of the continent as the child-like savages that they would during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In the time of ancient Greece or Rome, several African societies

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<sup>9</sup> Henry Morton Stanley, *Coomassie and Magdala* (New York: Harper & Brothers, Publishers, 1874), 231;

<sup>10</sup> George K. French, “The Gold Coast, Ashanti, Kumassi,” *The National Geographic Magazine* 8, no. 1 (January 1897), 14.



traded within the Mediterranean and it would not have been unlikely to see an Ethiopian male within a European city. Dark-skinned Africans who travelled into the Mediterranean during the Roman empire would not have been subject to racism nor would they have been perceived as half-human or child-like. While Europeans did not begin to have regular contact with Africans until the fifteenth century, however, research suggests that Europeans were aware of Africans as early as the fourteenth century through the trade of West African gold. Why, then, did Europeans and Americans in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries promote the image of Africans as the ultimate “other,” the complete opposite and inferior of the Anglo-Saxon man?<sup>11</sup>

The ground-breaking book *Orientalism* by Edward Said can help us understand how these images were created. Although geared towards the Middle East, Said’s work presents an intriguing argument about European society. Said argues that European perceptions of “the East,” in the nineteenth century were not historically or even factually based, but rather romantic images of a unified “other” which were pushed onto a group of people. These romantic notions of the East, Said argues, positioned the people of this region as completely and utterly different from those in the West, providing a reason and justification for colonization.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Frank M. Snowden Jr., *Blacks in Antiquity: Ethiopians in the Greco-Roman Experience* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap, 1970), 176; Curtis Keim, *Mistaking Africa: Curiosities and Inventions of the American Mind* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2009), 40.

<sup>12</sup> Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), 13-25.

Although *Orientalism* has received a fair amount of criticism, its publication in 1978 has been extremely influential to African historians. V. Y. Mudimbe, in *The Invention of Africa* argues that the idea of Africa was not created by Africans, but by westerners in an attempt to situate the continent as a host of dark-skinned, primitive “others.” Historians like Patrick Brantlinger, Jan Nederveen Pieterse, and Curtis Keim run with this idea, arguing that the racist images of Africans being pushed by European and American writers were used as justifications for the European colonization of Africa. With the image of a unified group of “primitive” Africans in need of the helping, guiding hand of civilization, what better rationale for colonization could be found?<sup>13</sup>

Patrick Brantlinger argues that Western imperial powers used these images of Africans as primitives to justify colonization. As the “Dark Continent,” Africa had limitless opportunities for missionary and civilizing work. Susan Schulten argues that during the Spanish American War *National Geographic Magazine*, in order to justify colonialism in the Philippines, pushed the notion of progressive uplift of so-called less civilized cultures to their readers. By emphasizing the difference between the “civilized” West and the non-civilized “East,” *The Geographic* attempted to allay anxieties about colonization and insist on the necessity of it. Schulten argues that the magazine introduced photographs to its articles starting with the Spanish American War to show the American people the clean, cultured atmosphere of the Philippines while at the same

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<sup>13</sup> For books on the idea of Africa and Africans in Western thought, see: V. Y. Mudimbe, *The Invention of Africa: Gnosis, Philosophy, and the Order of Knowledge* and *The Idea of Africa*; Kwame Anthony Appiah, *In My Father's House: Africa in the Philosophy of Culture*; Curtis Keim, *Mistaking Africa: Curiosities and Inventions of the African Mind*; Jan Nederveen Pieterse, *White on Black: Images of Africa and Blacks in Western Popular Culture*; Daniel M. Mengara, *Images of Africa: Stereotypes and Realities*; Carol Magee, *Africa in the American Imagination: Popular Culture, Radicalized Identities, and African Visual Culture*.

time presenting them as different enough from Western society to not be perceived as dangerous.<sup>14</sup>

From the inception of the magazine, ten years before the Spanish American War, however, articles had already started appearing which emphasized the extreme difference between the peoples of Africa and the so-called civilized West. Yet, the United States had seemingly no colonial ambition in Africa like it did in the Philippines, and articles about European colonialism in Africa seemed at times to condemn the practice. So why, then, did *The Geographic* place so much emphasis on the “primitive” nature of Africans? This chapter will argue that magazine articles about Africa and Africans found within the pages of *The National Geographic Magazine* titillated middle to upper class American readers by providing an escape from their sallow, urban lifestyle. According to Jackson Lears, new conveniences created by the Industrial Revolution caused a weightless culture who craved intense experiences. It was within the pages of *The Geographic* that late nineteenth century readers would find these experiences.<sup>15</sup>

In 1800, the population of New York City was slightly over 60,000 people. There were no skyscrapers or grand factories and in fact, the length of the city barely reached more than a mile and a half. The rise of the Industrial Revolution in England, however, had permanent effects on the United States as the rise of factory work forever changed the way that Americans would earn their income. The country began to change from an

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<sup>14</sup> Schulten, *The Geographical Imagination in America*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 57; Patrick Brantlinger, *Rule of Darkness: British Literature and Imperialism, 1830-1914* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988), 6-8.

<sup>15</sup> Schulten, *Geographical Imagination*, 58.

artisan-driven economy to more urban-focused factories. By 1850, New York City had exploded to almost 500,000 people and by 1900, the once-modest city now contained over three million residents. In just 100 years, New York City had grown to become one of the largest metropolises in the world. All over the country, cities were growing bigger and more crowded.<sup>16</sup>

What emerged was a sense of hopelessness, a sense that modern life had grown dry and passionless. From this sense of hopelessness and “weightlessness” came a longing for intense experiences; something to put the “color” back into American society. Lears calls this phenomenon “antimodernism.” Historian Roderick Nash also refers to this antimodernism through what he calls “The American Cult of the Primitive,” in which people (mostly middle-class American men) began to glorify the American wilderness and romanticize the primitive as a source of renewal. Through the pages of books and magazines like *The National Geographic Magazine* Americans shifted this romantic view of wilderness and primitivism to the realm of Africa. For example, taken the overcrowding, dirty streets, and industrial environment of places like New York City, an article by E. C. Hore entitled “The Heart of Africa” would have evoked an appealing image when he talked about the “clearer, more healthy air, the rich land, [and] the open forests” of Africa.<sup>17</sup> Through *National Geographic Magazines*, middle-class Americans were introduced to antimodern images of Africa through the writings of people like Ernest De Sasseville, Gardiner Hubbard, and George K. French. Portrayals of the

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<sup>16</sup> Stuart M. Blumin, “Introduction: George G. Foster and the Emerging Metropolis,” in *New York by Gas-Light* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 2-11; Lears, *No Place of Grace*, 5-7.

<sup>17</sup> E. C. Hore, “The Heart of Africa,” *The National Geographic Magazine* 3 (February 1892), 246.

primitive yet admirable African, as portrayed in the magazine, all suggest elements of antimodernism. At the same time that the explorers and journalists of *The Geographic* were touting the importance of civilization and extolling the “illumination” of the globe, they were at the same time fantasizing about the intense experiences of the peoples who lived throughout “the darkest part of the dark continent.”<sup>18</sup>

To fully understand the era into which *National Geographic Magazine* was born, one must first look at the context of exploration which had been occurring in Africa for several decades by this time. Possibly the most famous explorer and purveyor of the idea of “Darkest Africa,” was the very person that coined the phrase: Henry Morton Stanley. Stanley, originally named John Rowlands, was born in 1841 to less-than-perfect conditions in Denbigh, Wales. A child of unmarried parents, he was passed around among family members until ending up in a workhouse for the poor by the age of eight. When he was eighteen, he boarded a ship to New Orleans and began his new life as an American; Stanley soon shed his British accent and eventually claimed American origins. After a brief stint as a shop boy, in 1862 Stanley joined the Confederate Army. During the war he spent some time as one of the only men to fight on both the Confederate and Union side. After the war, he decided to become a journalist and spent time writing for papers in the American West. In 1869 he landed a job with the *New York Herald*.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> “Geographic Landscape,” *National Geographic Magazine* 8, No. 1 (1897), 25; Lears, *No Place of Grace*, 142; Roderick Nash, “The American Cult of the Primitive,” *American Quarterly* 18 (Fall 1966), 520-37.

<sup>19</sup> Tim Jeal, *Stanley: The Impossible Life of Africa’s Greatest Explorer* (Yale University Press, 2008), 17-23; 31-37; 46; 91-98.

Stanley's writings for the *New York Herald* made him famous. After spending a year as an overseas correspondent, *The Herald* sent Stanley to Africa to find the beloved missionary and explorer David Livingstone, who was missing and presumed dead. Although he was hardly an experienced explorer, Stanley fared relatively well in Africa. Landing in Zanzibar in March of 1871, he traveled West towards Livingstone's rumored location in Ujiji. By November he had located him. Sending periodic telegraphic reports back to the *Herald* of his journey, all of America and England held their breaths hoping to hear good news on their favorite missionary. No doubt thousands of readers gave a sigh of relief when they read the words, "Dr. Livingstone, I presume?" His laconic utterance on meeting Livingstone was a perfect model of courtesy in a trying situation, a largely Victorian ideal. Henry Morton Stanley would not be the first explorer to enter Africa, nor would he be the last, but he was without a doubt the explorer who influenced American opinions of Africans the most. His two decade career in Africa prompted five books, countless articles, and introduced to millions of Americans and Europeans to the image of "Darkest Africa."<sup>20</sup>

Sixteen years after Stanley's legendary rescue of Livingstone and right in the midst of his latest adventure, the Emin Pasha Relief Expedition, the *National Geographic Magazine* was born. Indeed, the magazine came directly out of the context of African exploration. Created by the academic organization The National Geographic Society in 1888, the publication would become the longest-lasting geographic magazine of its era.

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<sup>20</sup> Jeal, *Stanley*, 112-115; Henry Morton Stanley, *How I Found Livingstone: Travels, Adventures, and Discoveries in Central Africa* (London: Sampson Low, Marston, Low, and Searle, 1872), 412.

At its inception, the Society was based in Washington D.C. and held a membership of around 200 middle-class males.<sup>21</sup> The first president of the Society was Gardiner Greene Hubbard, a gentleman scholar with no training in geology or any other science, but who held a firm belief in the “expansion of knowledge.”<sup>22</sup> *The Geographic* was a unique publication. It had strong governmental ties, giving it legitimacy. It also gave non-experts a chance to become members in this elite society. Hubbard made it known in his Introductory Address that the magazine would not be strictly a professional journal.<sup>23</sup> The Society would be different because, according to Hubbard, a membership did not require a diploma but only a “desire to promote special researches by others, and to diffuse the knowledge so gained, among men, so that we may all know more of the world upon which we live.”<sup>24</sup> The Society and its publication exemplified a growing interest on the part of Americans in the landscapes, culture and people of the world.<sup>25</sup>

During Hubbard’s tenure as President, membership in the National Geographic Society increased from 200 to almost fourteen hundred. At his death in 1897, his son-in-law, Alexander Graham Bell of telephonic fame took over as President of the Society. Bell decided to take the Society in a different direction, believing that the magazine would not flourish unless the material within was pleasing and entertaining. Catharine

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<sup>21</sup> “Announcement,” *the National Geographic Magazine* 1, no. 1 (1888), i-ii.

<sup>22</sup> “Officers,” *The National Geographic Magazine* 1, no. 1 (1888), iv.

<sup>23</sup> Catharine A. Lutz and Jane L. Collins, *Reading National Geographic* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 7.

<sup>24</sup> Gardiner G. Hubbard, “Introductory Address,” *The National Geographic Magazine* 1, no. 1 (1888), 3.

<sup>25</sup> Lutz, *Reading National Geographic*, 14.

Lutz and Jane Collins argue that it was this change in leadership that sparked the success of *The Geographic*, and that when Bell hired Gilbert Grosvenor in 1899, the magazine changed from the dry, scholarly magazine of Hubbard's time to a more entertaining publication that audiences absorbed. Lutz and Collins argue that it was the change in leadership that facilitated the shift in *The National Geographic Magazine*.<sup>26</sup> Historian Susan Schulten agrees that the magazine changed around the turn of the century, but argues that the Spanish American War was more responsible. It was through the increased global awareness brought on by the war that *The Geographic* was able to include less dry articles about physical geography and more articles about cultures, people, and politics. Schulten even goes as far as to say that prior to the Spanish American War, it was extremely rare for the Geographic to publish any information not directly related to the physical environment.<sup>27</sup>

National Geographic official lore seems to agree with Lutz and Collins. An article posted on the *National Geographic* website entitled "Evolution of *National Geographic Magazine*," states of the magazine prior to Grosvenor, "Between its conservative, dull-brown covers, there were no photographs – only studious articles that discussed such topics as 'Geographic Methods in Geologic Investigation,' 'The Classification of Geographic Forms by Genesis' and 'The Great Storm of March 11 – 14, 1888.'" The article goes on to state that the transformation of the magazine came at the hand of

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<sup>26</sup> Catherine A. Lutz and Jane L. Collins, *Reading National Geographic* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 16, 20-21, 34.

<sup>27</sup> Schulten, *Geographical Imagination*, 50-68.



Gilbert Grosvenor. Lutz, Collins, and Schulten all argue for a focus solely on physical geography prior to 1898.<sup>28</sup>

However, the Society showed an early knowledge of the various types of geography available, and established five different committees to study the different types of geography: geography of the land; geography of the sea; geography of the air; geography of life; and geographic art.<sup>29</sup> The Society realized that there was more to geography than the physical descriptions of an area, and their articles reflected it. The magazine contained many articles which dealt with the cultures and people of Africa. In a yearly address to the Society, Gardiner Hubbard discussed the past and future history of relations in Africa, stating that “one of the departments of this society is the geography of life. At the head of all life stands man; it is therefore within our province to investigate those questions which more intimately concern and influence his welfare.”<sup>30</sup> Hubbard realized early on the potential in geography to study the cultures and peoples of the world and chose to show this approach through the continent of Africa.

When *The National Geographic Magazine* published its first issue in 1888, Africa had been in the public’s eye for many decades. Although it was Stanley who coined the phrase “Darkest Africa,” the concept of Africa as a mysterious continent had existed far longer than that. Mungo Park, who traveled up the Niger River in 1796, is considered to

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<sup>28</sup> Beth Foster, “Evolution of National Geographic Magazine,” accessed April 8 2013, <http://press.nationalgeographic.com/files/2012/07/NGM-History-6-12.pdf>.

<sup>29</sup> “By-Laws,” *The National Geographic Magazine* 1, no. 1 (1888), 90-91.

<sup>30</sup> Gardiner G. Hubbard, “Africa, Its Past and Future,” *The National Geographic Magazine* 1, no. 2 (1889), 112.

be one of the first modern Europeans to explore Africa. He was followed by Richard Francis Burton, who explored the African Great Lakes; Dixon Denham, who explored West Central Africa; and John Hanning Speke, who discovered the source of the Nile. The plethora of gentlemen explorers who would travel to Africa over the next hundred years indicates a high level of interest in the mapping and charting of the African continent.<sup>31</sup>

Gardiner G. Hubbard conveyed some of this interest in his Introductory Address to the National Geographic Society. In this speech, he declared that society had entered an “age of organized research”; a new understanding of the globe. He emphasized the expanding of horizons and a more complete knowledge of the world. Previously, knowledge of the Earth had been limited to what one could experience personally. In this new age, however, Hubbard suggested that the world was systematically being explored and opened up. He conveyed the process in terms of light and darkness:

To the members of this society the word “earth” suggests a very different idea. The term arouses in our minds the conception of an enormous globe suspended in empty space, one side in shadow and the other bathed in the rays of the sun.<sup>32</sup>

Besides the obvious night/day analogy here, Hubbard was referencing the struggle between the Western, or “civilized” world, and the rest of the planet. There seems to have been the unexplored or undeveloped part of the world, which remained, in Western eyes, uncivilized and in shadow. Within the first six paragraphs of his Introductory

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<sup>31</sup> Keim, *Mistaking Africa*, 45-46.

<sup>32</sup> Gardiner G. Hubbard, “Introductory Address,” *The National Geographic Magazine* 1, no. 1 (1888), 4, 5.

Speech, Gardiner Hubbard placed the *National Geographic Magazine* within the context of this opening up of the globe. So while the Society was interested in local, physical geography to a degree, it was also concerned with people and culture. To the readers of *The Geographic*, “Darkest Africa” was available for five dollars a year, the price of a membership.<sup>33</sup>

Over the next decade and a half, readers of *The National Geographic Magazine* were opened up to all kinds of new information about the regions and peoples of Africa. The frequent articles that appeared on the subject of Africa systematically stripped the continent of the mystery that had so long shrouded it for Western readers. The rivers, the climate of each region, the landscape, as well as the economic possibilities all were described in great detail. According to exploration accounts in the magazine, Africa also provided a fertile resource to study the “Geography of Life.” In his Presidential Address to the National Geographic Society, Hubbard attempted to systematically divide the peoples of Africa into areas of differing race, language, and religion. He separated the population of Africa into four basic types: “Negroes proper”, “Bantu”, “Shemites and Hamites”, and “Hottentots”.<sup>34</sup> He then divided these four groups into subsections of

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<sup>33</sup> “By-Laws,” *The National Geographic Magazine* 1, no. 1 (1888), 90-91.

<sup>34</sup> The term Bantu refers to over 300 ethnic African groups who speak a derivative of the Bantu language, which spread throughout Central, Eastern and Southern Africa between 1000 B.C.E. to 500 A.D. “Hottentot” is considered derogatory today, but refers to the pastoral Khoikhoi people of southwestern Africa. The word is derived from an European imitation of the sound of the Khoikhoi language.

religion and region.<sup>35</sup> By the turn of the twentieth century, *The Geographic* had done much to outline geographically the continent of Africa, so much so that in 1897, Ernest De Sasseville wrote within the pages of the magazine, “Africa is fast losing its title of the Dark Continent, and if explorations continue at their recent rate for a few years longer it will be as well-known as other parts of the globe.”<sup>36</sup>

This remark would have undoubtedly had a powerful impact on National Geographic Readers. According to Jackson Lears, upper class Americans felt a “soul-sickness”; a feeling that the passion and color had left modern life. Consequently, they began searching for this color and passion outside of American society. While Lears focuses specifically on how this manifested in a desire for medieval attitudes towards magic and chivalry, I argue that it also led to an increased interest in the continent of Africa. A life of convenience and Victorian repression had left them hoping that there was something more to life than their upper-class society. Lears claims that a hope spread among them, that perhaps nineteenth-century scientists hadn’t figured it all out, that perhaps there were places of mystery still left on the Earth. When put into that context, “Darkest Africa” represents a whole new ideal. It represents a place where mystery and fantasies were still allowed to exist. Simply by picking up *The National*

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<sup>35</sup> Gardiner G. Hubbard, “Africa, Its Past and Future,” *The National Geographic Magazine* 1, no. 2 (1889), 110.

<sup>36</sup> Ernest De Sasseville, “Recent Explorations in Equatorial Africa,” *The National Geographic Magazine* 8, no. 3 (March, 1897), 88.

*Geographic Magazine* American readers were allowed, if briefly, a chance to experience a place which “refused to reveal its secrets to civilized man.”<sup>37</sup>

Of all the nineteenth century writers of *The National Geographic Magazine*, perhaps none emphasized the “darkness,” or mystery of Africa more than George K. French. His article, “The Gold Coast, Ashanti, Kumassi,” may have read like a work of sensational fiction. He started out by introducing them to a region then known as the “Guinea coast,” on the Gulf of Guinea, including present-day Sierra Leone, Cote d’Ivoire, Ghana, Togo, Benin, and Nigeria. This region, he declared in his opening,

is a part of Africa that abounds in dark tradition and tragedy, and romance has never dared to trespass on its forbidding shore or penetrate its deadly swamps and jungle. It is a place where the fiercest and most selfish passions of man, white and black, have vented themselves for four centuries.<sup>38</sup>

Passages such as these were designed to evoke a sense of terror and excitement for Americans who were looking for to bring color back to their lives.

As Lears points out, however, it was possible (even probable) to have antimodern tendencies while promoting a modern or progressive ideology. *The National Geographic Magazine* and its readers walked this fine line. To fully understand the context of *National Geographic*, one must first be aware of the idea of the changing “stages of civilization” which was a common theory in the late nineteenth-century. This idea

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<sup>37</sup> Gardiner G. Hubbard, “Africa, Its Past and Future,” *The National Geographic Magazine* 1, no. 2 (1889), 9,101; Lears, *No Place of Grace*, 142-4.

<sup>38</sup> George K. French, “The Gold Coast, Ashanti, Kumassi,” *The National Geographic Magazine* 8, no. 1 (January, 1897), 1.

implied that evolution was like a ladder. Some races of people might be on a higher stage than others (Anglo-Saxons were on the highest), but all had the capability of moving up the ladder. According to scientific ideology, even races on the lowest stage of the evolutionary ladder had the potential of moving up, presumably with the benevolent help of more civilized societies. This idea of the different levels of civilization and the interaction between the “civilized” societies of the West and the “primitive” societies of Africa is a constant theme throughout the first decade and a half of *The Geographic*.<sup>39</sup>

When speaking of the “levels” of civilization, one should also be familiar with the terms associated with each stage. The words “primitive,” “savage,” and “barbarian” all evoked images of backwards societies, and all were used to describe the peoples of Africa. “Primitive,” as a word was often used to represent something or someone that was the earliest or original of its kind. Accordingly, Jan Nederveen Pieterse places the word “primitive” at the beginning of the evolutionary ladder, before savages and barbarians, looking something like this: primitive – savage – barbarian – civilization.<sup>40</sup> Adam Kuper argues that there were seven tenants agreed upon by nineteenth century scientists about the nature of the primitive. These perspectives included a belief that all primitive societies were founded on blood relationships, that each tribe or clan practiced “totemism,” or the belief that each group was descended from an animal god, which was

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<sup>39</sup> Jan Nederveen Pieterse, *White on Black: Images of Africa and Blacks in Western Popular Culture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 34-40.

<sup>40</sup> Nederveen Pieterse, *White on Black*, 37.

worshipped. It was also generally agreed that “primitive” societies were usually matriarchal.<sup>41</sup>

Africa was perceived as unusual because all on one large continent it was said to have contained all 5 levels of the civilization ladder. Gardiner G. Hubbard explained the five different levels very early on in the magazine’s history. The first level, the “primitive” level, consisted of nomadic peoples who lived without clothing, housing, or with any of the comforts of civilization. In this state, Hubbard implied that man is little better than an animal. “It is the land of the gorilla, and there seems to be little difference between the man and the ape, and both are hunted and shot by the Boers.”<sup>42</sup>

One step up on the levels of civilization was the “savage,” from the French word *sauvage*. This word dates back to the late fifteenth century and was used to define something or someone as wild, unpolished, or undomesticated, although Kuper argues that it would later reference violence and danger. In the nineteenth century, it would imply the direct opposite of civilization, the original state of humankind.<sup>43</sup> According to Hubbard, the savage level of civilization was a step up from the primitive level. “Savages,” according to Hubbard, were not forced to scrounge for their food or live in temporary houses made of tree bark. Instead, the members of this level of civilization were able to produce a bit of agriculture, have minimal clothing, and produce crude, but

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<sup>41</sup> Adam Kuper, *The Reinvention of Primitive Society: Transformations of a Myth* (London: Routledge, 2005), 21-31.

<sup>42</sup> Hubbard, “Africa, Its Past and Future,” 111; Nederveen Pieterse, *White on Black*, 35-37.

<sup>43</sup> Adam Kuper, *The Reinvention of Primitive Society*, 26.

more permanent settlements. Some familial relations could be found in savage societies, but many of the vices that were seen as immoral in American society could also be found: monastic government, polygamy, slavery, paganism, human sacrifice, and the most heinous crime of all, cannibalism.<sup>44</sup> On the third level of civilization was the “barbarian.” Hubbard described this third level of civilization as a beneficial movement towards progress: government was no longer a dictatorship, some metalwork was produced, and there was the beginning of trade with outside societies. On this level, the seemingly “primitive” bow and arrow was replaced by the more civilized gun.<sup>45</sup>

Through *National Geographic Magazine*, readers were introduced to new ideas of the environment and progress through these images of Africa. Africa is a geographically and climatically varied continent, each region presenting unique challenges to its inhabitants. The members of the National Geographic Society believed that the environment that most African societies lived in affected their abilities to move higher on the scale of civilization. Modern scholars call this *environmental determinism*, or the belief that the environment was one of the key factors in the history of the African peoples. For example, nineteenth century scientists might look at the tropical climate of Central Africa and *determine* that the temperatures were the reason that Central African societies did not wear much clothing. Modern day scholars try to avoid this way of thinking for several reasons. First, it generalizes the peoples of Africa into one or two homogenous groups when in actuality the societies of within Africa are culturally and

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<sup>44</sup> Hubbard, “Africa, Its Past and Future,” 112.

<sup>45</sup> Kuper, 29-34.



economically very diverse. Second, it takes away agency from the people of Africa and implies that they have no other choice but to remain victims of their situation.<sup>46</sup>

Environmental Determinism was a popular way to look at the continent of Africa during the nineteenth century and many examples of this can be found within the pages of *The National Geographic Magazine*. Hubbard himself was an advocate of the notion that the environment people lived in determined their location on the scale of civilization, and the worst climate of all was thought to be Equatorial Africa. It was within the depths of the Central African rainforest that the worst of the primitives were thought to have been produced.<sup>47</sup> Heading south from the equator, Hubbard contended, the “tribes become more degraded.” Here one could see naked Africans living a nomadic lifestyle: “his only house pieces of bark hung from the trees to protect him from the prevailing wind.”<sup>48</sup> Hubbard believed in this theory so much that he contended in an 1897 Presidential Address to The Society, that given the environment, a geographer could determine the characteristics, religion, and habits of the people before setting foot on the continent. This theory would shape the image of the African as portrayed in the pages of *The National Geographic Magazine* in very predictable ways, deepening the connection between the “primitive” or “savage” African and the wilderness.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> John Parker and Richard Rathbone, *African History: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 12.

<sup>47</sup> Parker, *African History*, 13,14.

<sup>48</sup> Gardiner G. Hubbard, “Africa, Its Past and Future,” *The National Geographic Magazine* 1, no. 2 (1889), 111.

<sup>49</sup> Hubbard, “The Effects of Geographic Environment,” 162; Nederveen Pieterse, *White on Black*, 37.

Hubbard contended that essentially the only difference between Anglo-Saxons and so-called uncivilized Africans was the environment; that all human beings had a fair shot at civilization. Great Britain's temperate climate, adequate rainfall, and navigable rivers had provided the right climate for Anglo-Saxons to thrive and become civilized. Likewise, he argued that the climate in Africa did not engender civilization like it did for Europeans. Hubbard gave an example of the "Hottentots" of Africa, also known as the Khoikhoi people of Southwestern Africa, modern-day Botswana. According to Hubbard, The Khoikhoi lived in a warm climate that did not necessitate them to wear clothes and their environment was peaceful so they did not need proper housing, and therefore developed none. They lived a peaceful, contented life and as they wanted for nothing, they advanced no further on the steps of civilization. However, Hubbard contended, when a stronger "negro" race from the North entered their region with more powerful weapons, new competition forced the Khoikhoi to develop bows and arrows, new ways of fighting, and a system of alarms. The competition drove the Khoikhoi to take a step forward, stepping up to level two in the stages of civilization. However, Hubbard argued, when they had defeated their enemies, as their environment encouraged no further progress, they remained on that level. With the introduction of competition to their environment, Hubbard argued that the Khoikhoi began to progress towards civilization and implied that if their environment had provided them with more challenges to overcome, they could thrive and become civilized.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Hubbard, "The Effect of Geographic Environment," 164.

According to the ideology, the geography of Africa posed quite a challenge for American and European explorers, but to Africans it posed none, explaining the classification of Africans as primitives or savages. This contradiction suggests a racial logic to environmental determinism. The racial ideology of the late nineteenth century argued that the African environment was one of the main reasons for the “backwardness” of Africa. One particular example of this was the Boers, a group of immigrants to South Africa from the Netherlands who first emigrated during the seventeenth century to escape British rule. To Gardiner Hubbard, there were many similarities between the Dutch Boers and the English colonists who had moved to the American colonies in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries to escape hardships in Britain. The only difference between the two groups, it seemed to Hubbard, was their environment:

They left Holland about the same time that Pilgrims and Dutch sailed for America – the one to an inhospitable climate and a life of hardship, privation, and intense activity, the other to a genial climate, where toil was unnecessary and where all the surroundings were favorable to life and a rapid increase of population. The one has steadily advanced, the other retrograded, a difference largely due to environment.<sup>51</sup>

According to Hubbard, the Boers were still several steps above the Africans that surrounded them in Southern Africa, but far below that of Americans. Again one sees contradictions pointing towards racial logic. When the geography of America was favorable and relatively without challenges, Americans stepped further up the ladder. However, without challenges in *their* environment, Africans remained at the primitive level. Although Boers were known for their

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<sup>51</sup> Gardiner G. Hubbard, “Africa Since 1888, With Special Reference to South Africa and Abyssinia,” *The National Geographic Magazine* 7, no. 5 (May, 1896), 162-163.

skill in hunting wildlife, even that could be explained from the environment.

Hunting was an absolute necessity and the Boers depended upon it for clothing and food. The racial ideology of the late nineteenth and early twentieth-century easily explained away any progress made by Africans and dismissed any challenges posed to American exceptionalism.<sup>52</sup>

To Americans and Europeans, the continent of Africa was a site of struggle between civilization and primitivism. As Gardiner Hubbard put it, “In Africa a contest is going on between civilization and barbarism, Christianity and Mohammedanism, freedom and slavery, such as the world has never seen.” It was generally agreed upon that it was the duty of Anglo-Saxon middle classes to “uplift” these under-civilized peoples of Africa in what is sometimes referred to as “The White Man’s Burden.”<sup>53</sup> As previously mentioned, historians tend to agree that the notion of civilizing the African peoples was a slim pretense to justify the colonization of Africa. The United States, however, would never have any colonial holdings in Africa, raising the question of motivation for the perceived struggle between primitivism and civilization as portrayed in *The National Geographic Magazine*. Africa, as a place of struggle provided Americans the opportunity for intense experiences through struggle. The stakes in this struggle were high. “If European colonization is successful,” Hubbard contended, “European civilization will come into contact with African barbarism. Where such a context is

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<sup>52</sup> John Iliffe, *Africans: The History of a Continent* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 137-40.

<sup>53</sup> The phrase “The White Man’s Burden” comes from a poem which first appeared an 1899 edition of McClure’s magazine. Written by English poet Rudyard Kipling, it referenced the United States’ obligation to colonize the Philippine Islands in order to civilize them, portraying such actions as noble.

carried on in a country where the climate is equally favorable to the two races, it can only result in the subjugation or destruction of the inferior race.”<sup>54</sup>

This focus on the struggle between civilization and primitivism, between the West and Africa by *The Geographic* is rooted in one of the tenets of antimodernism.

According to Lears, the Victorian values of self-control coupled with the increasing desire for convenience and decadence had reduced existence for many Americans to dull routine. The proper, modern Victorian gentleman was rational, self-controlled, and anxious to avoid violence. Consequently, something Lears dubs “the Martial idea” began to appear in upper-class society. The Martial Idea, as explained by Lears was an idealization of the warrior. In a colorless, banal society, the warrior’s lifestyle of danger and violence promised Americans an intense experience which was lacking in modern society. Images of the struggle in Africa, while promoting a progressive agenda, would have titillated readers’ antimodern sentiments. Africa was seen as a dangerous place for Americans, and those explorers and missionaries who dared go into Africa to fight for their beliefs in civilization and Christianity would have appealed to antimodernists who desired intense experience as an antidote to overcivilization.

George K. French’s article on the fierce Asante kingdom would have appealed to American readers’ sense of antimodernism and desire for intense experiences. Through this article, readers could experience the “most dangerous spot on the face of the Earth”

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<sup>54</sup> Hubbard, “Africa, Its Past and Future,” 123; Lears, *No Place of Grace*, 106, 137.

right from their own home.<sup>55</sup> French portrayed the Asante region as an uncivilized and treacherous place. He also expressed pleasure at the thought of European colonization, showing a simultaneous desire for antimodern ideas of violence and progress. His article, “The Gold Coast, Ashanti, Kumassi,” emphasized the beneficial result of English interference on the Fanti tribe, also of present-day Ghana:

The Fantis are an inoffensive, peace-loving, happy-hearted race, who readily succumbed to European aggression, but have been exceedingly loth to accept its civilization and Christianity. In common with the other natives of West Africa, with the exception of the Haussas and the Krumen, the Fanti is shiftless and will work only when is absolutely necessary. Centuries of life without a want that nature did not lavishly supply have quite spoiled him for the advantages of civilization and its accompanying responsibilities, and it is no easy task to convert him to the ways of European life.<sup>56</sup>

While spreading the idea of the favorable impact of the English imperialism, French pointed to the barbarity of the Asante. According to French, when the British attacked Asante, it was of course noble in spirit and even the Asante themselves must give in and admire the British “valor.” However, when the Asante attack a nearby group, the Fanti, they were considered merciless savages who took advantage of the genial spirit of the Fanti. According to French, when the noble Brits invaded Kumasi, they did it in the name of civilization and carried with them the power of Christianity and moral uplift.<sup>57</sup>

Gardiner Hubbard, who most often wrote about Africa within the pages of *The National Geographic Magazine* often emphasized the danger present in any African

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<sup>55</sup> French, “The Gold Coast,” 5.

<sup>56</sup> French, “The Gold Coast,” 5.

<sup>57</sup> French, “The Gold Coast,” 7-8, 11.

exploration. Henry Morton Stanley, when he began his famous mission to find Livingstone, started his journey in Zanzibar with two white companions. These companions died in Africa. According to the account, the terrain was treacherous for inexperienced travelers; the climate was vastly different from what many westerners had ever experienced, and diseases like malaria were quite common.<sup>58</sup> In addition to the myriad “natural” dangers in Africa, Hubbard stressed the threat of attack from the peoples within Africa. These natives were often described as having violent and malicious tendencies. These assumed characteristics restricted exploration in that area.<sup>59</sup>

Hubbard described one particular experience of explorer Henry Drummond at Livingstonia, a missionary station located at the time on Lake Nyanza in present-day Malawi. According to the story, Drummond came upon the station and found it completely empty. Looking for an explanation, he entered the home of a missionary that appeared spotlessly clean in every way, but which was missing any inhabitants. After looking in several other buildings, Drummond concluded that the small town had been deserted. “A little way off,” however, “among the mimosa groves, under a huge granite mountain, were graves: there were the missionaries.”<sup>60</sup> Hubbard never spelled out for the magazine’s readers what happened to the missionaries. But in the next small paragraph he emphasized the warlike nature of the people of this region. He thus let the reader’s imagination take care of the rest. This story and others like it portrayed to American

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<sup>58</sup> Nederveen Pieterse, *Black on White*, 64, 76, 117.

<sup>59</sup> Keim, *Mistaking Africa*, 45-47.

<sup>60</sup> Gardiner G. Hubbard, “Africa, Its Past and Future,” *The National Geographic Magazine* 1, no. 2 (1889), 101.

readers a group of people who were passionate enough to die for what they believed in. This was something missing in their modern, overcivilized lives and would have appealed exceptionally well to upper-class Americans.

For all that *The National Geographic Magazine* touted the beneficent influence of civilization in Africa, their doubts sometimes showed through. Gardiner Hubbard didn't turn a blind eye to the evils of civilization, and often felt pity for the African who fell victim to civilization. The best example of this was slavery. Hubbard blamed much of the transatlantic slave trade on Europe and portrayed Africans as the innocent victims of this devastating system. He observed with regret the fading "tribal" characteristics of Africans and the collapse of many social and economic organizations and ensured the public that the slave trade, if anything, had increased, not decreased in the late nineteenth-century.<sup>61</sup>

To emphasize his point, Hubbard told the readers of *National Geographic Magazine* a story about Hermann Wissmann, a German explorer and administrator in East Africa. According to Hubbard, Wissmann described a region along the Sankuru and Lomami Rivers in present-day Democratic Republic of Congo which he traversed in January of 1882. The story spoke with admiration of an industrious people with sophisticated houses, diverse gardens, and superior weapons. Four years later, however, when Wissman once again traveled through this location, he told a much different story:

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<sup>61</sup> Hubbard, "Africa, Its Past and Future," 112.



The paths were no longer clean, no laughter was heard, no sign of welcome greeted us. The silence of death breathes from the palm-trees, tall grass covers every thing, and a few charred poles are the only evidence that man once dwelt there. Bleached skulls by the roadside, and the skeletons of human hands attached to the poles, tell the story. Many women had been carried off. All who resisted were killed.<sup>62</sup>

In this story, both Hubbard and Wissman portrayed the peoples of Africa as the innocent victims of the heinous crime of slavery, which had destroyed this idyllic village. For readers of the magazine, Wissman's story would have evoked a sense of admiration for the simplicity and innocence of the primitive side of Africa. It might have also evoked disappointment at its disappearance, usually through the introduction of civilization. This evocation of Africa's lost innocence would be a reoccurring theme in the pages of *The National Geographic Magazine*.

The distressing report of the disappearance of African culture as told by Gardiner evokes a strong antimodernist tone. The article, and many others like it seem to further an image of the primitive African society as somehow worth preserving. Jackson Lears calls this "primitivism," and argues that it is a fascination of a world beyond modern society as a reaction to the overcivilized atmosphere of upper-class America. Looking at Africa was a way of seeing an earlier and healthier stage of civilization before it had been weakened by convenience and the sloth of modernity. Primitivism was seen throughout *National Geographic Magazine* in a number of ways, but most obviously in the sense of

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<sup>62</sup> Hubbard, "Africa, Its Past and Future," 115.

wonderment shown in the geography of Africa. A fascination with nature is one of Lears's tenets of antimodernism, and the *Geographic* had it in spades.<sup>63</sup>

Edward Coode Hore, an English explorer and "Master Mariner," who submitted two papers to *The Geographic* in 1891 was a prime example of these antimodern tendencies. Hore was particularly pleased with the environment of Africa, which was completely different from the crowded streets of his hometown, London. His article, "The Heart of Africa," was filled with descriptions of Africa's "verdant slopes," "beautiful forests," and "healthy air" of the interior of Africa. This theme continued in a story published in 1892 by E. C. Hore. Here, Hore described traveling through the Urambo region in present-day Tanzania. As he and his crew passed through the "rich and verdant" countryside, heavy rains began to pour. The company had to hurry to make it across the Malagarasi river before it became too wild to cross. Upon reaching the river, Hore and his crew were introduced to several native Africans who, for a fee, would help them cross the river. Almost immediately, Hore's attention fell on an older man who wore "a curious skull cap apparently made of bladder."<sup>64</sup> He and his crew nicknamed this curious old man "The Old Admiral." As his story continued, the river began to rise and the crew members were forced to wade in water up to their armpits until they reached the main river. When it came time to load their carts onto the river, Hore explained, the ferryman were astonished at the size and weight of the carts, and did not believe that it

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<sup>63</sup> Lears, *No Place of Grace*, 143.

<sup>64</sup> Hore, "The Heart of Africa," 246.

could be done. Only “the Old Admiral” was unafraid.<sup>65</sup> What is curious about this is that while “the Old Admiral” was portrayed as a curious, primitive human being, he was also portrayed as fearless and quite admirable. Within two paragraphs of each other, Hore championed the notion of “civilization and Christianity,” while also showing a deep admiration for the “savage.”

Ernest De Sasseville, whose short article appeared in *The Geographic* in early 1897 also wrote of the “nobility” of native Africans. He wrote in depth about the Masai (sometimes spelled Maasai) of present-day Kenya. De Sasseville described the Masai as a naked, nomadic people with particularly fearsome and warlike tendencies. Thinking back to Hubbard’s writings on the “scale of civilization,” this placed them in the category of “primitives.” De Sasseville spoke positively of them. He recounted tales of nobility among the Masai and presented them as a “brave and fearless tribe [which was] known and feared from the Kenya to German East Africa.”<sup>66</sup> The way De Sasseville presented it, it appears that he admired the Masai in large part *because* of the traits that classified them as “primitive.”

Antimodernism was also seen in an appreciation for African craftsmanship. Lears explains that this occurs as a reaction to the rationalization of the nineteenth-century. Mass consumption and the factory system had eliminated the need for small-scale

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<sup>65</sup> Hore, “The Heart of Africa,” 247.

<sup>66</sup> Ernest De Sasseville, “Recent Explorations in Equatorial Africa,” *The National Geographic Magazine* 8, no. 3 (March, 1897), 89.

artisans, breaking labor down to repetitive tasks that required little skill. This presented a problem both for working class and middle to upper class Americans. The working class now had very little control over their own lives and their menial, repetitive jobs seemed insubstantial and pointless. The middle to upper classes lost their sense of selfhood, Lears contends. Consequently, they sought out authentic experiences in the hopes of reviving their colorless worlds. According to Lears, this discontentment manifested itself in interest in the pre-modern artisan figure. The artisan's work demanded talent and skill unlike tedious factory jobs. It was this urge for pre-modern revival that would have driven readers to the pages of *The National Geographic Magazine*.

E. C. Hore spoke of the industrious native trade of Africa, challenging the stereotype of the “lazy” African. The trade, he wrote, consisted of “[. . .]a constant stream, increasing perhaps just now, but which has always been flowing – of wool, cotton, oil, rich spices, dyes and medicinal and ornamental woods [. . .]. Are these the products of a desert land inhabited only by lazy and savage people?”<sup>67</sup> He contradicted the then-popular idea that Africans were wholly inferior to the more-civilized West. Hore spoke of the evil influences of civilization, including the slave trade and the more recent trade in alcohol. What was particularly interesting, however, was that Hore believed that the spread of civilization had “deprived [the natives] to a great extent of the old uncivilized condition and its innocencies [sic]”; the Africans which have been exposed to western civilization are somehow being dispossessed of their purity. This

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<sup>67</sup> E. C. Hore, “The Heart of Africa,” *The National Geographic Magazine* 3 (February 1892), 239.

showed the standard idea of the antimodernist; the belief that modernity corrupted the purity of the primitive.

The end of the nineteenth century brought a curious dilemma for Americans. New views of geography and civilization changed peoples' understanding of the world. Suddenly, the world that had been partly shrouded in shadow was exposed to light and the "mysteries" of these shadowed places began to disappear. The writers of the *National Geographic Magazine* walked a thin line between wanting to distribute knowledge of the globe to their readers, and wanting the world to still have secrets. The rise of urban cities and changing ideas of identity and personality left Americans craving something more than their colorless, industrial life. For this, they craved the revitalizing power of nature and the primitive. With the "closing" of the American Frontier pretty much secured by 1890, "Darkest Africa" appeared to be the only place left. Consequently, articles about the "primitivism" of Africans became popular among American audiences, and drove the descriptions of Africans found in magazines such as *The Geographic*.

## CHAPTER 2

### AFRICANS AND THE WORLD'S COLUMBIAN EXPOSITION

The World's Columbian Exposition, also known as the Chicago World's Fair was the event of the century. Set to celebrate the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Columbus's discovery of the New World in 1492, it was attended by over 27 million people in its six month run-time. Chief architects Daniel Burnham, John Wellborn Root, and Frederick Law Olmsted operated tirelessly for over three years. Working to make this Exposition a testament to the progress of America over the previous 400 years, they filled the over 600 acres with grand, neoclassical buildings, statues, lagoons, canals, and of course, one of the greatest testaments to American ingenuity, the Ferris Wheel. At a point when electricity was not yet common, the Exhibition included electric street lamps to light the pathways at night; meanwhile many of its exhibits were dedicated to the wonders of electricity. All these exhibits, buildings, and amusements displayed the magnificence of American engineering. The American people came out to see it in droves.<sup>1</sup>

The World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago was held just four years after the Exposition Universelle, a similar type of fair set in Paris, France in 1889. Set for the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the storming of the Bastille, the Paris Universelle was said to have had over 32 million visitors in its 5 month run-time. Attractions included a reconstruction of the Bastille, a *Galerie des Machines*, which testified to France's strengths in engineering, and the wildly popular Eiffel Tower, which was completed just

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<sup>1</sup> David F. Burg, *Chicago's White City of 1893* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1976), xi-1.

in time for the opening. France also had varied international participation in its exposition, with almost half of the attractions being from other countries. These attractions included over 400 people of African descent, displayed in a so-called primitive state. Nations from all over the world showed up in multitudes and presented themselves with dignity and ingenuity. The *Exposition Universelle* was the largest and most elegant World's Fair up to that point but the United States would not let that stand.<sup>2</sup>

The United States did not even wait for the end of the Paris Exposition to begin planning a way to top the *Universelle*. Organizers immediately started looking at locations for the next world's fair. The most obvious choices were Washington D.C. or New York City, D.C. because it was the center of government and New York City because it had the largest population and was the cultural and societal hub of the country. Soon, however, Chicago and St. Louis wanted a piece of the pie, and by June of 1889, Mayor DeWitt C. Cregier of Chicago had constructed a committee of 250 people to guarantee that Chicago would become the host of this grand event. With the theme of the fair revolving around progress, no other city in the United States fit better than Chicago. In 1871, the city had been devastated by the "Great Fire." Yet it continued to thrive and expand and seemed to many observers to be a testament to American ingenuity and resilience. Additionally, the city's population had been rapidly growing and by the 1890 census. Records showed that Chicago had finally reached the one million mark. Congress made the final decision, and with the pledge of various benefactors, Chicago

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<sup>2</sup> David F. Burg, *Chicago's White City of 1893* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1976), xii, 80, 92.

clinched the final cut in a neck-and-neck race that came down to just it and New York City.<sup>3</sup>

Once Chicago secured the fair, Chief of Construction Daniel Burnham set about finding the perfect team to fulfill the high expectations of the nation in a very short period of time. Burnham was assisted by his business partner John Wellborn Root, who operated as Supervising Architect and enlisted the help of Frederick Law Olmstead as Supervising Landscape Architect to add a feeling of nature and harmony to the fairgrounds. Most of the other architects he pulled from New York City. After a long, drawn-out process of many months, Jackson Park was chosen as the location for the fair. Many believed the location was perfect, as it was on the shores of Lake Michigan which would act as a beautiful backdrop to the fair. It was not until late 1890, however, that they decided on Jackson Park, leaving them a little over two years to construct the magnificent buildings that the people of America were expecting. In fact, although Burnham would work tirelessly for more than two years, most of the buildings remained unfinished when the fair opened.<sup>4</sup>

The Neoclassical design of the buildings and the white stucco adorning the walls coupled with the use of street lamps to illuminate the streets at night gave buildings of the fair, also known as the Court of Honor, the nickname “The White City.” The legend of the beauty of the Chicago World’s Fair would resonate in almost every description found

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<sup>3</sup> “The World at the Fair,” accessed April 9, 2013, <http://uclawce.ats.ucla.edu/fair-overview>.

<sup>4</sup> Stanley Appelbaum, *The Chicago World’s Fair of 1893: A Photographic Record* (New York: Dover Publications, Inc: 1980), 2-6.



about the fair. James and Daniel Shepp, who published a book filled with photographs of the fairgrounds called it the “Venice of the Western World” and commented that:

myriads of electric lights pierce night’s sable mantle and shed their opalescent rays upon the sapphire waters of the lagoons, it presents a fairy scene of inexpressible splendor, reminding one of the gorgeous descriptions in the Arabian Nights [. . .]. The Court of Honor with its flashing fountains, the wooded island once a barren strip of sand protesting against the surrounding marches are sights to dream of, not to tell.<sup>5</sup>

Articles describing the fairgrounds, while telling of the magnificent white buildings invariably mentioned how spotless the fairgrounds were. One reporter commented on the cleanliness of the fairgrounds. With thousands of people entering the “White City” each day, he added, “it would be hard to find even a spent match on the roads.”<sup>6</sup> The clean state of the fairgrounds would be augmented by the clean public restrooms, a sewage processing system, and purified water.<sup>7</sup>

The cleanliness of the fairgrounds was particularly notable because of the state of the city outside its doors. Chicago, a city known as the “hog butcher for the world,” was an infamously dangerous and filthy city at the end of the nineteenth century. Having poor waste treatment systems, the streets were filled with garbage and often, the corpses of dead animals, both of which brought billions of flies to fill the city streets. Roads that were not paved were filled with horse manure, mud, and garbage. Not only was the city dirty, it was hazardous to one’s life. The railroad crossings were so hazardous that an

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<sup>5</sup> James W. Shepp and Daniel B. Shepp, *Shepp’s World’s Fair Photographed* (Chicago: Globe Bible Publishing Co., 1893), 8-9.

<sup>6</sup> “White City of Chicago,” *Spectator* 17 (September 16, 1893).

<sup>7</sup> Burg, *White City of 1893*, 67-9.

average of 2 people died every day. Diseases like diphtheria, typhus, cholera, and influenza threatened the lives of Chicagoans daily while fire took an average of 5 lives per day. In 1892 alone, there were 800 violent deaths.<sup>8</sup> The contrast between the “White City” within the Chicago World’s Fair and the filthy city outside in the “Black City,” as one writer called it, was noted by almost every fairgoer.<sup>9</sup>

Chicago was typical in this sense, and Americans had been feeling anxieties toward such urban localities for generations. The city had a degrading influence on practically everyone according to social reformers, especially women. As reformer Charles Loring Brace put it, “[the woman] soon learns to offer for sale that which is in its nature beyond all price, and to feign the most sacred affections, and barter with the most delicate instincts. She no longer merely follows blindly and excessively an instinct; she perverts a passion and sells herself.”<sup>10</sup> As women were seen as innately pure, when women succumbed to the darker tendencies of the city, Americans began to wonder if there was something truly wrong with modern society.<sup>11</sup> Historian Jackson Lears argues that for decades, many Americans had been equating material/industrial progress with moral progress. With the state of the cities as they were, however, people could not help questioning the accuracy of this belief. It was into this context of anxieties about urban

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<sup>8</sup> Larson, *The Devil in the White City*, 28; Burg, *Chicago’s White City*, 45-6, 51-3.

<sup>9</sup> White City of Chicago, *Spectator*, 366.

<sup>10</sup> Charles Loring Brace, “Street Girls,” in *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets*, edited by Kevin J. Hayes (Boston: St. Martin’s Press, 1999), 273.

<sup>11</sup> Stuart M. Blumin, “Introduction: George G. Foster and the Emerging Metropolis,” in *New York by Gas-Light* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 2-11.

and moral degradation that the Columbian Exposition was introduced and was one of the reasons the term “The White City” would have resonated so well with Americans.<sup>12</sup>

As explained earlier, one tenet of antimodernism was a fixation with green space and wilderness. Much like with Central Park in New York City, chief architect Frederick Law Olmstead designed green space into the exposition to relieve some of the burdens of modern industrial society. The Wooded Island is a good example of this. Olmstead originally wanted the entire island to be covered in flora and fauna without a single building, although eventually a few buildings would be added. It was Olmstead’s design to give visitors to the fairgrounds a place to unwind from all the sights at the fairgrounds. He also incorporated nature into other parts of the fairgrounds. Streets were lined with trees, buildings had “well-watered” green lawns, and there were several great lagoons and ponds. The World’s Columbian Exposition in Chicago worked hard to provide a space for Americans outside of their humdrum urban lives, giving them intense experiences. They accomplished this not only through the use of green space, but also through the use of magic and mystery.<sup>13</sup>

The world within the gates of the World’s Columbian Exposition would represent a world of fantasy, completely disparate from the anxieties of late nineteenth century society. Michael Steiner, in the article “Parables of Stone and Steel,” argues that the Chicago World’s Fair represented an escape from the anxieties of society and urbanization. The fair promoted a fantastical future vision while simultaneously

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<sup>12</sup> Lears, *No Place of Grace*, 15.

<sup>13</sup> Applebaum, *Chicago World’s Fair of 1893*, 60-63.

revisiting the wonders of the past. Despite the Exposition's celebration of the superiority of Western society, the millions of Americans who came to visit the fair in 1893 hoped to reassure themselves of the brightness of the future despite the banal urban surroundings outside the fairgrounds. What Steiner fails to note is that Americans were searching within the fairgrounds for something to revitalize their mundane lives.<sup>14</sup>

Some found this revitalization through the "White City" or Court of Honor, which helped turn Americans' eyes towards the future. Buildings like the Manufactures and Liberal Arts Building astonished fairgoers with their utter size and brilliance and inside they would be overwhelmed by the sheer volume of displays. Within the Machinery Hall, visitors could see contraptions of all types: all promised to make life more convenient. Sewing machines, weighing machines, engines, boilers, and so much more promised Americans that through consumption, anything was possible. The Horticulture Building brought fairgoers face to face with rare breeds of plants and flowers from all over the world. According to Burg, the fair was impossible to take in in just one day; visitors could spend weeks there and still not see everything. The Manufactures and Liberal Arts Building, in particular would consist of artifacts and exhibits boasting the progress of all mankind. The White City represented a world of the future and showed Americans the possibilities of tomorrow.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Michael Steiner, "Parables of Stone and Steel: Architectural Images of Progress and Nostalgia at the Columbian Exposition and Disneyland," *American Studies* 42, no. 1 (Spring 2001), 48-49.

<sup>15</sup> Burg, *Chicago's White City*, 94-6; "The World at the Fair," <http://uclawce.ats.ucla.edu/fair-overview>:

Michael Steiner argues that in addition to the focus on the future present at the fairgrounds, there was a nostalgic gaze upon the romantic past, contending that this could be seen within the . It is true that a fair amount of nostalgia could be seen at the fair. A frontier-era log cabin appear on the fairgrounds as a formal salute to America's past:

How many a fierce fight against savage Indians these cabins have withstood! Like little castles they dotted the almost primeval wilderness, and sheltered all that were dear to the sturdy pioneer. What privations our fathers and mothers underwent in their heroic efforts to lay the foundations of this great Republic strong and firm! This is a very humble building, but every log in it has a special eloquence. Within, all is plain, as befits the home of a hardy pioneer. These cabins have been the houses of the best blood of the West, we might even say of the whole earth. Andrew Jackson, Polk, Zachary Taylor, Millard Fillmore, Andrew Johnson, and many eminent men were born in log huts. The free life in the open air, the simple food and simple habits thus engendered made them strong in their country's need.<sup>16</sup>

Looking into the past provided Americans an outlet for their anxieties over modern society.<sup>17</sup>

Michael Steiner argues that places like the Midway Plaisance, filled with so-called backward cultures from all over the world provided fairgoers with a sense of nostalgia, a connection to the past that eased their anxieties. In reality, however, it was more complicated than that. While nostalgia did play a role, it was more than a connection to the past that fairgoers were feeling. It was a desire for renewal, for a reinvigoration of life which they found in spades at the exposition. Antimodernism appeared at the fairgrounds most obviously in the Midway Plaisance, the two miles strip

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<sup>16</sup> James W. Shepp and Daniel B. Shepp, *Shepp's World's Fair Photographed*. (Chicago: Globe Bible Publishing Co., 1893), 240.

<sup>17</sup> Slotkin, "Buffalo Bill's 'Wild West,'" 168-174.

filled with foreign villages from all over the world. Within the Plaisance, fairgoers could break free from the repressive Victorian culture of the late nineteenth century and have intense experiences not present in their own lives. Looking specifically at the Dahomeyan Village and the Street in Cairo, this essay looks at how American fairgoers viewed scenes of Africa as an opportunity to release their repressions and experience real life.<sup>18</sup>

According to John F. Kasson, life in the urban United States created an atmosphere of selfishness and isolation. Every day, Americans walked past hordes of other people, making no connection with any of them, but simply continuing on their own colorless lives. Besides the isolation Americans felt within the city, they also felt repressed by an extremely harsh set of Victorian values. In the wake of the chaos taking over the city, Victorian genteel reformers took it upon themselves to set restrictions on American culture. Victorian culture expected modern man to be rational, self-controlled, and avoidant of violence at all times. As Jackson Lears explains, this created a weightless culture, where nothing seemed real or intense.<sup>19</sup>

Victorian society believed that everything in one's life should be productive. Leisure, too, was supposed to be industrious. Museums, art galleries, and symphonies were all approved productive forms of leisure. The purpose was to "uplift" society from the chaotic and dirty atmosphere found within the city. Even within the World's Columbian Exposition, this culture of industriousness prevailed. The "White City"

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<sup>18</sup> John F. Kasson, *Amusing the Million: Coney Island at the Turn of the Century* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1978), 4-8.

<sup>19</sup> Kasson, *Amusing the Million*, 4, 12; Lears, *No Place of Grace*, 100.

showed fair patrons the possibilities of the future, at the same time providing them with leisure entertainment that was approved by Victorian values. The White City sought to uplift visitors through the elegance and vastness of the fairgrounds. As a testament to Victorian repression and uplift, Grecian-style buildings and statues lined the streets while classical art filled the buildings.<sup>20</sup>

As noted by John F. Kasson, although the White City brought people face to face with the wondrous possibilities of the future, it did not relieve their urban anxieties. The White City was just too overwhelming – there were too many things to see. The Victorian “uplifting” notions of the fairgrounds were prevalent throughout the fairgrounds and visitors felt it weighing them down. That’s where the Midway Plaisance came in. The recreation area of the fair, this is where Victorian Americans could enjoy themselves without having to worry about uplifting themselves. The Plaisance consisted of sideshows, eateries, shops, and exhibits that didn’t have to hide behind productivity. Kasson argue that the Plaisance became more popular on the fairgrounds than the White City because it allowed American fairgoers to experience for the first time, a relief from the sallow industrial atmosphere of Victorian America.<sup>21</sup>

Beyond the beautiful buildings, pavilions and the natural landscape, one of the main attractions of the fair was the Midway Plaisance. The *Plaisance* was the center of amusements for the fairground, featuring attractions such as the Ferris Wheel (which was not ready for passengers until late June), an Ice Railway, and a model Eiffel Tower. It

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<sup>20</sup> Burg, *White City of 1893*, 70, 115.

<sup>21</sup> Kasson, *Amusing the Million*, 22-24.

also featured Hagenbeck's Zoological Arena, a key spectacle that included bears on tightropes, chariot-riding lions, and a dwarf elephant. More than just a place of amusement, the Midway Plaisance operated as a cultural center of the fairgrounds. It hosted an "Avenue of Nations" which occupied a 13-block area of the Midway. This area featured displays from over 15 countries: including the Irish Village, the Javanese Village, and the Turkish Village.<sup>22</sup>

The extremely popular Street in Cairo was arguably the most popular exhibit in the Plaisance. It consisted of over 180 men, including Egyptians, Arabs, Nubians, and Soudanese. Visitors to the Street in Cairo could buy Arabian jewels, clothes, perfume, watch sword swallowers, or see any of the street scenes which were performed twice daily. One of the most popular parts of this exhibit, however, was the dancer Little Egypt, who performed in one of the many Egyptian theaters located in the Plaisance. Little Egypt was made famous for her *danse du ventre*, more commonly known as the hootchy-kootchy dance. Although Victorian genteel reformers called Little Egypt's show revolting, it was wildly popular. Kasson argues that it was *because* of the lewd nature of Little Egypt's show and that drew American audiences to the Plaisance. A chance to rebuke Victorian culture and throw off their metaphorical chains presented itself within the Midway Plaisance, and Americans took it.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> "The World at the Fair," <http://uclawce.ats.ucla.edu/fair-overview>; Applebaum, *Chicago's World Fair of 1893*, 102-9.

<sup>23</sup> Kasson, *Amusing the Million*, 26; Burg, *Chicago's White City of 1893*, 221.



Another example of antimodernism can be found in the Dahomeyan Village on the Midway Plaisance. The Dahomey, or Fon people of present-day Benin were at one time a fearsome, violent nation noted for their large army. For a population with only about a quarter of a million people in its prime at the turn of the nineteenth century, their ability to produce a standing army of around 12,000 regular soldiers (and 24,000 militia members) was quite phenomenal. In Western culture, Sir Richard Burton had made them famous for the ferocity of their female warriors, sometimes referred to as Amazons. As many as five thousand women fought for the Dahomey nation in 1845. Dahomey was one of the biggest slaving nations in Africa during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, and historians Linda Heywood and John K. Thornton suggest that as much as 20% of the slaves of the Transatlantic Slave Trade came through the Dahomey trade port of Ouidah.<sup>24</sup> The Dahomey, including their infamous Amazon warriors, would attack to the north and west looking for slaves to sell in exchange for guns, making Dahomey a wealthy, prosperous and powerful nation.<sup>25</sup>

When, in the early nineteenth century, the British decided to put an end to the slave trade, the Dahomeyan lifestyle changed forever. With the slave trade making up the majority of their economy, the Dahomey nation was forced to switch to the selling of palm oil. Historians J. B. Webster and A. A. Boahen argue that by the 1870s, Dahomey

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<sup>24</sup> Heywood, Linda M.; John K. Thornton. "Kongo and Dahomey, 1660-1815". In Bailyn, Bernard & Patricia L. Denault. *Soundings in Atlantic history: latent structures and intellectual currents, 1500–1830*. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press 2009).

<sup>25</sup> Dov Ronen, *Dahomey: Between Tradition and Modernity* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1975), 11-15; J. B. Webster and A. A. Boahen, *History of West Africa: the Revolutionary Years – 1815 to Independence* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1967), 102-8; Robert Rydell, "'Darkest Africa:' African Shows at America's World Fairs," in *Africans on Stage: Studies in Ethnological Show Business*, edited by Bernth Lindfors (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), 138.

had successfully made the transition to an economy based on the sale of palm oil. However, the glory days of the Dahomeyan nation were not to return, and as the kingdom began to break up, the sales going through the port of Ouidah quickly began to diminish. Pressures from the French to occupy the land became overwhelmingly powerful for the failing nation, and the king, or *ahosu* in the Fon language, Glele committed suicide rather than see his kingdom destroyed by invaders. His son, Behanzin, who succeeded him, chose to resist the French invaders, and in 1892 was captured and exiled to the French West Indies. In 1893, after the destruction of the Dahomeyan way of life and only one year before the complete colonization of the Fon people, they would make a wildly anticipated yet highly controversial appearance at the Chicago World's Fair.<sup>26</sup>

As previously mentioned, The Martial Idea, as proposed by Jackson Lears was an idealization of the warrior in Victorian America. The desire for intense experiences prevailed among upper-class Americans, and thus the warrior lifestyle appeared romantic and desirable. Although the Dahomeyans violent lifestyle had been severely curbed by the time the exposition began, American visitors hailed the Dahomeyans as the most fearsome warriors at the fairgrounds. It was because the Dahomeyans were at a low point in their power that they were able to be brought to the fairground and then exploited by the image makers and made into an example of African savagery. Right from the beginning, as one writer with the *Rocky Mountain News* showed, Americans believed in the Dahomeyans as extremely dangerous:

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<sup>26</sup> Webster, *History of Africa*, 110-15.

For more of the barbaric you may look up the women warriors of Dahomey. Sixty-eight of the dusky feminine fighters and their masculine escorts have shivered here in a Chicago May and are slowly getting down to a fighting condition. They Dahomeyans have a village by themselves, which is to be mostly warlike. The spears are polished and the women are going to stand guard all summer, pursuant to their determination to convince everybody that they are the genuine article.<sup>27</sup>

The antimodern images of Dahomeyans as fierce warriors despite their waning power shows a desire within American culture to find intense experiences at the fairgrounds.<sup>28</sup>

The Dahomeyan Village was located on the main thoroughfare of the Midway Plaisance, between the Austrian Village and the Lapland Village, and right across the street from the Ostrich farm. The Dahomey village was a medium-sized exhibit, surrounded by wood boards to prevent people from viewing inside without paying the 25 cent admission fee. Two men, who were proposed to be warriors in full regalia, stood guard on high perches right above the gates. It was a fearsome sight to behold and visitors would have been terrified as well as intrigued. Indeed, the Dahomeyans were portrayed as by far the most primitive and most savage group at the fairgrounds. According to a reporter with the *Daily Inter Ocean*, the village was “the most barbaric sight to be seen at The Fair. In an open building was a collection of the blackest and most savage-looking people ever brought from Africa.”<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> “Chicago Side Shows,” *Rocky Mountain News* (Denver, CO) Sunday, May 21, 1893; pg. 11; col E.

<sup>28</sup> Lears, *No Place of Grace*, 98-100.

<sup>29</sup> “Dahomey Village Opened,” *The Daily Inter Ocean* (Tuesday, May 30, 1893), 7; Burg, *Chicago’s White City of 1893*, 219.

Once inside, fairgoers were put face to face with what many believed were actual cannibal warriors from Africa. Americans were so intrigued by the thought of the Dahomeyans as cannibals, a sign had to be placed outside the village requesting that fairgoers not ask the Dahomeyans about any cannibalistic practices. Whether or not the Dahomeyans actually practiced cannibalism is outside the scope of this essay. However, it seems that Americans were fascinated by the prospect of the Dahomeyans as cannibals. Because cannibalism was seen as a tenet of primitivism, as shown in chapter one, I argue that images of the Dahomeyans were strongly antimodern. The interest in primitivism, as cited by Jackson Lears, shows a captivation with the dangers present in the world beyond modern safety. Primitives were uncivilized, uninhibited, and aggressive. Everything the modern, Victorian man was not.<sup>30</sup>

Americans views of wilderness and “primitive” Africa had much to do with their relationship to the American frontier. Americans had been interacting with the frontier for hundreds of years. As America took shape and the country expanded, a frontier separating the wilderness and civilization began to develop that would shape the people as much as it did the landscape. Frederick Jackson Turner, in his “Frontier Thesis,” which he gave during the World’s Columbian Exposition, argued that the frontier, which he called the “meeting point between savagery and civilization,” was the most important feature of American history; that the struggle with the wilderness, more than anything else, turned Americans into the top-notch specimens they would become. Turner’s

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<sup>30</sup> Louis Chude-Skoei, *The Last “Darky”*: Bert Williams, *Black-on-Black Minstrelsy, and the African Diaspora*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 161-66; Lears, *No Place of Grace*, 137; Burg, *White City of 1893*, 219-220.

influential speech showed within America a sense of connection between Americans and the struggle of the frontier; a connection that many seemed to be fading in the uber-industrial atmosphere of urbanized America. Turner's address announced the closure of the frontier according to a census of 1890. This closing of the frontier left Americans anxious about the current state of Victorian America.<sup>31</sup>

The image of the frontier and the connection to nature is most obviously shown in the example of Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show which made an appearance at the fair. Although not technically part of the Exposition, as Buffalo Bill Cody had been denied a spot in the Midway (a grievous financial error on the part of the fair planners), crowds of thousands packed the Wild West Show every day, which Cody had set up just outside the fairgrounds. Buffalo Bill's show was wildly popular at the fairground and shows an antimodern connection to nature. Jackson Lears calls this the "nature cure"; the idea that people closer to nature and the West, such as Buffalo Bill, were a source of regeneration and therapy. By getting in touch with the wilderness and primitive people, white, middle-class men could unleash authenticity within themselves and get over their neurasthenia.<sup>32</sup>

Historian Richard Slotkin argues that Buffalo Bill's shows represented an important balance between fact and fiction formulated by the myth of the American frontier. The show centered upon the different epochs of American history, specifically

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<sup>31</sup> Frederick Jackson Turner, "Significance of the Frontier in American History," (1893).

<sup>32</sup> Richard Slotkin, "Buffalo Bill's 'Wild West' and the Mythologization of the American Empire," in *Cultures of United States Imperialism*, ed. By Amy Kaplan and Donald E. Pease (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993), 172-3.

showing the relationship between Native Americans and non-Native Americans throughout different periods of civilization. Cody depicted himself through a series of Indian battles as the epitome of the frontier hero, displaying characteristics such as hard work, democratic tendencies, and moral superiority. Slotkin goes on to argue that these interpretations of the country's Indian past were representative of the nation's imperialist future. The image of the cowboy and Buffalo Bill was a fantasy of masculinity and regeneration through connection to wilderness and violence and Buffalo Bill became a symbol of progress. By portraying the past struggles with Indians as a fight for civilization and progress, Buffalo Bill's show stood as an argument in favor of the American imperialist destiny.<sup>33</sup>

However, with the frontier declared closed by Frederick Jackson Turner, Americans were forced to look elsewhere for their fantasies of regeneration. According to Jackson Lears, Americans needed to believe that there were still unexplained mysteries and darkness left in the world. This was applied to the Dahomeyans. In images of the Dahomeyans at the fairgrounds, they appeared as the most dangerous and "savage" creatures to ever walk the Earth. Article after article published about the Dahomeyans (and there were many) emphasized the source of ferocity located within the Midway

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<sup>33</sup> Thomas J. Schlereth, "Columbia, Columbus, and Columbianism," *The Journal of American History* 79 (Dec., 1992), 938-9.

Plaisance right next to the Lapland Village.<sup>34</sup> One writer for a Kansas newspaper assured fairgoers that the female Dahomey warriors were:

Several shades darker than the shades of Erebus, their appearance is repellant in the extreme. Their coarse features are rendered doubly hideous by scars and lines, some self-inflicted, some received in battles and others being “brands” to distinguish families. Tall and heavily built, they are easily the superiors of the men in their party.<sup>35</sup>

Many of the cultures and exhibits displayed on the Plaisance were considered by Americans to be primitive or backward. These exhibits included the Javanese village, a Sioux Native American tribe, an Algerian theater, but the most terrifying of all were the Dahomeyans. Many historians have argued that pitting the superior successes of the “White City” next to the supposedly inferior villages of less civilized nations in the Midway Plaisance it was an attempt to draw attention to the awe-inspiring achievements of Western civilization. Scholar Matthew Wilson, in his article “The Advent of ‘The Nigger,’” argues that the civilizations located within the *Plaisance*, specifically the Dahomeyans, were presented as being on the lowest level of civilization. This again emphasized the United States as being on the highest level. Wilson argues that by depicting the Dahomeyans as uncivilized, the Plaisance celebrated the power of “white manhood.” While this undoubtedly has a basis in reality, seeing the peoples of the Midway as “primitive” served more than just this purpose; it also offered Americans an image of the primitives as simple and uncorrupted – a version of the healthy childhood of civilization.

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<sup>34</sup> Lears, *No Place of Grace*, 98-9.

<sup>35</sup> “Dahomey Amazons,” *The Atchison Daily Globe* (Thursday, May 11, 1893), Issue 4, 818, col. B.

Historian Matthew Wilson argues that the Dahomeyans were only at the fair to demean African Americans and give legitimacy to segregation. The famous dismissal of the Dahomeyans by Frederick Douglass, who was personally embarrassed by the Dahomeyans backs up this stance. Douglass claimed they were invited to the fair to “shame the African.” Yet, that is not the whole story. Historian Christopher Robert Reed contends that the Dahomeyans appeared in the media far too often for them to be simply despised. Through newspaper articles, Americans began to learn the names of the members of the group; no longer just a nameless, faceless group of Dahomeyans, they were Butagalon, Amessang, Ipoke, etc.<sup>36</sup>

Americans, the majority of whom lived in urban atmospheres by the end of the nineteenth century, were not only anxious about the moral degeneration of their society, but were seeing their vitality of life fading due to the new conveniences of industrialism. Jackson Lears argues that in several ways, white, middle-class Americans tried to find cultural regeneration through an interest in the primitive. Through an interest in the artisan and the craft aesthetic, the unknown world of the occult, war and violence, and through nature, The World’s Columbian Exposition showed an antimodern attempt at social regeneration. For thousands of people every day in 1893, the energy and primitivism that they were looking for could be found within the Midway Plaisance. The book *Shepp’s World’s Fair Photographed* says it best when it says:

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<sup>36</sup> Wilson, “The Advent of “The Nigger,” 6-8; Robert W. Rydell, “Darkest Africa”: African Shows at America’s World’s Fairs, 1893-1940” in *Africans on Stage: Studies in Ethnological Show Business* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), 140-43; Christopher Robert Reed, “*All the World is Here!*”: *The Black Presence at White City*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000), 148-49.



The tongues of uncounted nations ripple forth the genial speech of welcome; all is gaiety, life and beauty. Removed from the humdrum of the outer world we are whirled along in a maelstrom of inexpressible delight, until we feel as though we had eaten of the fabled lotus and drifted into paradise while we slept. No one seeing the marvels congregated in Jackson Park could fail to cry, "Great is America and the glory thereof."<sup>37</sup>

James and Daniel Shepp imply that by entering the Midway and seeing the various cultures within it, visitors could begin to feel reenergized about America itself.

The end of the nineteenth century was a period of great anxiety for the United States. An increasingly urban nation led to new anxieties about the moral state of society. More products available on the market gave way to new levels of comfort and leisure. The combination of these factors as well as many others left Americans feeling that they were becoming too comfortable and overcivilized, that they were losing touch with the real life. For millions of Americans in 1893, the World's Columbian Exposition helped to alleviate these feelings by tapping into a fantasy version of a therapeutic other, a colorful, exotic, and energetic native of someplace far away. Visitors to the fairgrounds could be enthralled with electric light shows one minute and be titillated at the "savagery" of the Dahomey village the next. The fear and exhilaration prompted by the Amazon warriors within the Dahomey Village symbolize a yearning for a simpler, more exciting and challenging past.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Shepp, *Shepp's World's Fair Photographed*, 10.

<sup>38</sup> Shepp, *Shepp's World's Fair Photographed*, 15, 16.

## CHAPTER 3

### TEDDY ROOSEVELT AND IMAGES OF AFRICA, 1909

In March of 1909, mere months after his tenure as President of the United States ended, Theodore Roosevelt and his son, Kermit took an eleven-month safari in East and Central Africa. The purpose of the trip was to shoot and preserve animal species for the Smithsonian Institute, a task Roosevelt carried out zealously and in the name of science. He carried four tons of salt for preserving his animal hides until they could be shipped to the United States and mounted. He carried a lucky rabbit's foot, which had been given to him by John L. Sullivan, a famous boxer, and of course his famous Pigskin Library, Roosevelt's personal collection of classic books bound in pig leather and transported in a reinforced trunk. He was joined by three naturalists from the Smithsonian. Yet only Roosevelt and Kermit would be hunting game.

Landing in the town of Mombasa in present-day Kenya on the East Coast of Africa, Roosevelt traveled through the Belgian Congo, or what is now known as the Democratic Republic of Congo in Central Africa. From there, he travelled up the Nile River to Khartoum, in present-day Soudan. Along the way he and Kermit killed over eleven thousand animals, 512 of which would be big game including 17 lions, 11 elephants, and 20 rhinos (including nine rare white rhinos). It is said that Roosevelt shipped so many preserved animals back to America that it took years to finally mount them all. Roosevelt arranged a deal with *Scribner's Magazine* prior to his departure in which he wrote twelve articles for the publication during his eleven-month expedition

which he sent off every month from his location in Africa. These articles, which were wildly popular and which came to make up his book *African Game Trails*, detailed the wildlife of Africa, the people he encountered, and the overall “spirit” of Africa.<sup>1</sup>

Theodore Roosevelt is closely linked with themes of masculinity and gender relations during the Progressive Era. It is generally agreed upon by historians that this period was a time of shifting gender roles. Anthony Rotundo argues that as women fought to redefine their place in society, ideas of masculinity were also redefined by men afraid of losing power and domination. Historian Gail Bederman cites a shift in attitudes of masculinity; from a manliness of self-restraint which emphasized civilization, to one that encouraged aggressiveness and what she refers to as working-class strength. Kristin Hoganson, in turn, argues that the emphasis and redefinition of masculinity during the progressive Era was crucial to the emphasis on imperialism during the Spanish-American War at the end of the nineteenth century. Hoganson cites a desire to shore up male dominance as one of the leading factors in United States imperialism.<sup>2</sup>

Historian Sarah Watts, in her book *Rough Rider in the White House* cites the emphases on masculinity during the Progressive Era as one of Theodore Roosevelt’s driving forces. Determined to expel any feminizing qualities from not only his own life

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<sup>1</sup> H. W. Brands, *T. R.: The Last Romantic* (New York: Basic Books, 1997), 642 – 47; Curtis Keim, *Mistaking Africa: Curiosities and Inventions of the American Mind* (Boulder: Westview Press, 2009), 47-8.

<sup>2</sup> Gail Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880-1917* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1996); Anthony Rotundo, *American Manhood: Transformations in Masculinity from the Revolution to the Modern Era*; Kristin Hoganson, *Fighting for American Manhood: How Gender Politics Provoked the Spanish-American and Philippine-American Wars* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000).

but the lives of the American people, Roosevelt fought to encourage tough masculinity. In this chapter, I would like to extend Watts's argument, contending that the context for manhood remained the United States, but the site of his fantasies shifted to Africa. I will show that Roosevelt, anxious about the current state of society, sought to redefine masculinity through the rejuvenating powers of the African wilderness. Drawing a connection between the uber-masculine "Wild West" and perceptions of the continent of Africa, I argue that Theodore Roosevelt viewed Africa as a place for the assertion of a violent, vibrant form of white masculinity.<sup>3</sup>

Teddy Roosevelt was a tough, action-oriented President famous for his masculinity. He did not start out that way. The young Roosevelt, or Teedy, as he was called, was born a sickly child into a sickly family. His oldest sister Anna (or Bamie, as she was lovingly called), was born with a hereditary bone disease that left her partly disabled for her entire life. His sister Corinne had a severe case of asthma. His younger brother Elliott is suspected to have had epilepsy. His mother died of typhoid fever at the age of 48; and his father passed away to cancer at 46. Teedy took the cake. If not the sickest in the family, his illness was definitely the most mysterious. Suffering from headaches, fevers, and stomach aches, Teedy was a very frail boy who also suffered from asthma attacks which could last for days. H. W. Brands, author of *T. R.: The Last Romantic* suggests that Teddy's ailments were at least partially mental, as he received undivided attention from his father when he had his attacks. Whatever the cause of

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<sup>3</sup> Sarah Watts, *Rough Rider in the White House: Theodore Roosevelt and the Politics of Desire* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 12.

Teddy's illness, no medications were available at the time for his ailments, so the young boy was given various, sometimes painful medications. His parents tried it all: strong coffee, opium, and nicotine. Nothing worked.<sup>4</sup>

In 1869, when Teedy was around 11 years old, his parents decided to take a trip to Europe to see his Mother's siblings in England. This was the side of the family that had fled the United States after fighting for the Confederacy in the Civil War. The Roosevelts had another motive for visiting Europe, however; they wanted to visit a lung specialist in London to hopefully find a cure for young Teedy's asthma. To his parents' exasperation, the doctor found nothing wrong with his lungs and his illness once again went untreated. Yet this trip to Europe would produce something to alleviate his illness. Eventually the Roosevelts ended up in Switzerland. There Teedy and his father took long walks in the Alps. In Italy, they tramped up Mount Vesuvius. To his family's surprise, it seemed that fresh air and exercise helped alleviate Teedy's asthma.<sup>5</sup>

The Roosevelt's trip to Europe was a catalyst for a new life for young Teedy; his asthma became something he could at least partially control. The now-teenaged Teddy immediately began to throw himself into physical activity. He rode horseback, hiked, climbed, lifted weights, and wrestled. To his family's delight, his health began to improve and the symptoms of his asthma, while not entirely gone, were greatly diminished. The experience would help Roosevelt formulate an image of "rugged

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<sup>4</sup> Brands, *The Last Romantic*, 9-11.

<sup>5</sup> Joshua David Hawley, *Theodore Roosevelt: Preacher of Righteousness* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 6-8.

masculinity,” an image which prevails to this day as one of his defining characteristics. Driven by a fascination with zoology, Teddy would in time add hunting to his repertoire of “masculine” activities and it would not be uncommon to see the teenaged boy with a collection of taxidermied animals that he had shot himself.<sup>6</sup>

Many historians, when looking at Theodore Roosevelt and his ideals of rugged masculinity, have closely examined his role in the Spanish-American War along with his ideas of American imperialism. When fighting broke out in 1898 between Spanish forces and American forces on the island of Cuba after the explosion of the battleship *Maine*, Roosevelt was ready for battle. He promptly resigned his position as Assistant Secretary of the Navy, gathered volunteers for a cavalry troop, and with the help of Colonel Leonard Wood, put together the “Rough Riders.” This regiment consisted of mainly Ivy League athletes. The Rough Riders became famous with their charge up San Juan Hill on July 1, 1898, a decisive and bloody battle in the war for which Roosevelt was nominated for a Medal of Honor.<sup>7</sup>

Historian Amy Kaplan, author of “Black and Blue on San Juan Hill,” and Kristin Hoganson both argue that masculinity and gender ideologies played a large role in Roosevelt’s experience of the Spanish-American war. Both agree that the white, American soldiers were portrayed as racially superior to the Cuban, Filipino, and African American soldiers who fought alongside the United States. However, Kaplan seems to

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<sup>6</sup> Brands, *The Last Romantic*, 26-9.

<sup>7</sup> Hoganson, *Fighting for American Manhood*, 198.

argue that by promoting the vision of Cubans and Filipinos as similar to African Americans, they were enhancing the idea that these groups were not fit for self-government and bolstered the argument for American imperialism while at the same time heightening American racist tendencies.<sup>8</sup>

Hoganson argues, in contrast, that depicting Cubans and Filipinos as effeminate, Americans were actually reassuring their own masculinity. She argues that anxieties about threats to American manhood provoked an extreme patriotism among many male, middle-class Americans and led many pro-imperialist political leaders (such as Roosevelt) to support the War in an attempt to depict Cubans as “maidens in distress” and Americans as the chivalric leaders coming to defend them. While their arguments are not mutually exclusive, this essay will extend Hoganson’s argument, showing that Roosevelt’s masculine–influenced imperialistic leanings did not stop with the Spanish-American war, but stayed with him his entire life, influencing his ideas and writings in East Africa.<sup>9</sup>

To understand Theodore Roosevelt’s emphasis on masculinity, however, one must first take a step back to look at society as a whole during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. According to historian Gail Bederman, the Victorian standards of masculinity which had dominated popular culture throughout post-Civil War society began to wane around 1890. There were several reasons for this change. Middle to

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<sup>8</sup> Amy Kaplan, “Black and Blue on San Juan Hill,” in *Cultures of United States Imperialism*, edited by Amy Kaplan and Donald E. Pease (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993), 219-25.

<sup>9</sup> Hoganson, *Fighting for American Manhood*, 138-139, 143-44.

upper-class men's sense of self-worth was tied up in their ability to take care of their family, an ideal which was undermined by a severe economic depression which caused thousands of bankruptcies. These economic changes, coupled with an increasingly urbanized society filled with unstable social positions, began to break down concepts of traditional masculinity. As Bederman puts it, "behaviors which had once appeared self-possessed and manly now seemed over civilized and effeminate."<sup>10</sup> In an attempt to recover the sense of manhood, Bederman argues that upper and middle class men appropriated traits that had previously been thought of as working class. Roderick Nash argues that they were looking for something more "authentic" than the artificiality of the city. Either way, middle-class men began to admire activities which had once been deemed working class. Bederman calls these new ideas of a more uncivilized, or primitive masculinity a "savage masculinity." She argues that they began to mold new ideas of masculinity and femininity for both the upper and lower classes.<sup>11</sup>

To many psychologists of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, the result of this overcivilization and feminization of culture was a disease known as *neurasthenia*. This term became popularized in 1869 by George Miller Beard, an American neurologist who defined neurasthenia as a condition which involved fatigue, anxiety, and depression. Beard postulated that neurasthenia was the result of the exhaustion of energy reserves within the central nervous system. Simply put, it was believed to be a condition caused by the hyper-stressful urban environment of the United

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<sup>10</sup> Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization*, 17.

<sup>11</sup> Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization*, 17-8; Roderick Nash, "The American Cult of the Primitive," *American Quarterly* 18, no. 3 (August, 1966), 518-19.



States. Eventually the “disease” became so common among Americans it received the nickname “Americanitis.” For men who suffered from this disease, the most recommended treatment was to get away from the industrial atmosphere of the city to retreat either to the wilderness or to a serene location.<sup>12</sup>

To restore the masculinity of the population and save society from overcivilization, Americans like Roosevelt turned to the writings of G. Stanley Hall, a well-known psychologist of the era. Hall hypothesized a theory of *recapitulation*, a concept which took the idea of the evolution of species and applied it to human development. Childhood, Hall argued, was the “primitive” stage in a boy’s life, from which he would then advance to a more civilized stage as he aged. He therefore argued that “savagery” should be encouraged and facilitated within young males. Boys who were not allowed to act without restraint grew up to become over civilized, effeminate men, according to Hall. If, however, young boys’ savagery was fostered from an early stage and afterwards introduced to the effects of civilization, overcivilization could be avoided. As Hall stated in 1908, “a teenage boy who is a perfect gentleman has something the matter with him.” Through Hall, and as a reaction to the urbanization of the city, new ideas of masculinity emerged within the urban society. As Jackson Lears puts it: “If over-civilization was the sickness, careful primitivism was the cure.”<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Tom Lutz, *American Nervousness, 1903: An Anecdotal History* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), 4,20,21.

<sup>13</sup> Jackson Lears, *No Place of Grace: Antimodernism and the Transformation of American Culture, 1880-1920* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1994), 37; Rotundo, *American Manhood*, 269.

Tim Prchal, in his article “The Bad Boys and the New Man,” picks up on this trend of the idealization of primitive masculinity seen in the works of Beard and Roosevelt. Prchal cites a period between 1869 and 1914 in which male characters in children’s books tended to be rambunctious, immoral little boys. These characters, despite their faults, win the hearts of the readers. These “bad boy books,” he writes, were representative of:

“an earlier, unpolished stage of male life – before civilization had softened the rough edges – the genre provided its original readers a view of masculinity that, if adopted by grown men, might begin to counterbalance a culture feared to be too ladylike in its level of refinement.”

Not only did these “bad boys” help to set an example of how young boys should act, Prchal argues, they helped middle-class men in their own way to live lives of violence and danger vicariously through these stories. This shows a connection between middle-class men and a desire for violence and real experiences that weren’t available to them through modern culture.<sup>14</sup>

Jackson Lears, in his book *The Rebirth of a Nation* aptly points out two differing types of racism in the late nineteenth century. The first, and most widely discussed, was paternalist uplift, which we can see in American ideas of imperialism in Cuba and the Philippines, as well as in American interactions in Africa. Often called exceptionalism by historians, this was the belief that Cubans, Filipinos, and Africans were all racially inferior to Americans, and thus it was up to the United States to “uplift” these people to their level of civilization. These ideas of uplift can be seen in *The National Geographic*

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<sup>14</sup> Tim Prchal, “The Bad Boys and the New Man: The Role of Tom Sawyer and Similar Characters in the Reconstruction of Masculinity,” *American Literary Realism* 36, no. 3 (2004), 188-190.

*Magazine* and, to an extent, in the World's Columbian Exposition. It was a major argument for imperialism as well as a condescending way to allow Americans to feel better about themselves in an urban environment which was quickly losing its appeal.<sup>15</sup>

The second type of racism, as proposed by Lears is what he calls "vitalist racism," which realized, to an extent, the mysteriously beneficial powers of "primitive" cultures and wished to combine those with American exceptionalism. Roosevelt, Lears argues, was one of the nation's most well-known proponent of vitalist racism and contributed to the increased attention on supposedly less civilized cultures. Violence, Lears argues, was a necessary tool for white, middle-class Americans to take back their masculinity. Only by appreciating and absorbing some of the positive energies of these so-called "primitive" peoples, could Americans achieve the highest level of civilization.<sup>16</sup>

Although he was born in New York to upper-class parents, Roosevelt fancied himself a true sportsman. In 1885 he took an \$80,000 investment and built a cattle ranch in North Dakota territory and lived the life of his dreams. According to one story, when three outlaws stole from him, he personally hunted them down and brought them to justice. He even met Seth Bullock, the famous sheriff of Deadwood, South Dakota and the two remained friends until Roosevelt's death in January of 1919. Roosevelt's time in the Dakotas affected him deeply. He wrote three books about living on the frontier:

*Hunting Trips of a Ranchman; Ranch Life and the Hunting-Trail; and The Wilderness*

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<sup>15</sup> Jackson Lears, *Rebirth of a Nation: The Making of Modern America, 1877-1920* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2009), 34.

<sup>16</sup> Lears, *Rebirth of a Nation*, 35.

*Hunter.* Roosevelt was living life in the “Wild West” and he loved it. An unusually harsh winter in 1886-87 wiped out Roosevelt’s cattle, however, and the zealous outdoorsman was forced to return home to the East. His days in the Dakotas never left him. Later, he ran for mayor of New York City under the nickname “The Cowboy of the Dakotas.” He did not win, but idealization of the “Wild West” had been secured.<sup>17</sup>

As we saw in Chapter 2, the end of the Nineteenth Century marked the closing of the frontier, which Frederick Jackson Turner argued had shaped the very character of America today. For Teddy Roosevelt, that could not have been truer. The closing of the frontier brought about within Roosevelt a sense of nostalgia for the romantic west and a growing anxiety about the current state of the world. During a speech in 1910, after returning from Africa, Roosevelt spoke of the unity and brotherhood developed through the shared experiences of the frontier:

Any man who had the good fortune to live among the old frontier conditions must, in looking back, realize how vital was this feeling of general comradeship and social fellowship. There were good men and bad men in the new communities, just as in the old communities, [. . .] but among the men who tried to lead hard-working, decent lives, there was a feeling of genuine democracy, which represented an approach to the American ideal which we certainly should do everything in our power to preserve. We did not try to say that men were equal when they were not equal, but we did our best to secure something like an equality of opportunity and an equality of reward for good service; and, moreover, each man expected to be received, and, on the whole, was received, wherever he went, on the footing that his merits warranted.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Watts, *Rough Rider in the White House*, 142-6, 156-7.

<sup>18</sup> “Mr. Roosevelt’s Speech: Says the Whole Nation Must be Progressive, as the West Is,” *New York Times* (August 28, 1910), 2.

According to Roosevelt, the “Wild West” was both a romantic past, and the answer to the present’s problems. Men of the “Wild West,” according to Franklin Roosevelt were of a stronger type, of a more brotherly and heroic type.<sup>19</sup>

Roosevelt particularly liked the American painter and writer, Frederick Remington and the two were close friends. Remington, born in 1861, was famous for his romantic images of the American West. His traditional paintings showed Cowboys and Indians depicted over a deep, red, desert background. Roosevelt held up Remington as a very important American, as someone who recorded the heroic past for the future generations. “In Remington’s pictures, he declared in 1910, “all the most vivid and characteristic features of the Western pioneer life, which is just closing, were set forth, and he has commemorated forever the men of the plains and the mountains as they actually were.”<sup>20</sup> For Roosevelt, these paintings demonstrated the strength and virility of the West.<sup>21</sup>

In the late nineteenth century, the increased urbanization coupled with the closing of the frontier reacted to form a powerful sense of national identity related to wilderness. The nineteenth century was the era of the National Park; The U.S. Government, began in 1832 setting aside land for preservation purposes in Hot Springs, Arkansas. Others followed: in 1864 Yosemite Valley was dedicated for conservation. Yellowstone

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<sup>19</sup> Watts, *Rough Rider in the White House*, 146-8.

<sup>20</sup> “Mr. Roosevelt’s Speech: Says the Whole Nation Must be Progressive, as the West Is,” *New York Times* (August 28, 1910), 2.

<sup>21</sup> Watts, *Rough Rider in the White House*, 152-153.

followed in 1872. With the country quickly modernizing thanks to the Industrial Revolution, it appeared as though if not for conservation efforts, there would be no wilderness left. Unsurprisingly, Roosevelt was an avid advocate for conservation. He helped create five national parks and over 150 national forests. Mark David Spence, in the book *Dispossessing the Wilderness* describes a change in the view of wilderness among Americans from the idea of Native Americans being a *part* of the wilderness, to an *intruder* in the “uninhabited” wilderness. Spence argues that although Native Americans had lived on and shaped the wilderness for thousands of years, Americans wanted to view the wilderness as completely untouched.<sup>22</sup>

Roosevelt carried these ideas of conservation and the strength of “Wild West” men with him to Africa in 1909. His novel, *African Game Trails* is often references the struggle present in the days of the American West, implying that to him, Africa was another “West,” ready for exploration and progress. He put it clearly:

The hunter who wanders through these lands sees sights which ever afterward remain fixed in his mind... Apart from this, yet mingled with it, is the strong attraction of the silent places, of the large tropic moons, and the splendor of the new stars; where the wanderer sees the awful glory of sunrise and sunset in the wide waste spaces of the earth, unworn of man, and changed only by the slow change of the ages through time everlasting.<sup>23</sup>

Frederick Jackson Turner had argued that the frontier was marked by a struggle between civilization and primitivism, and declared the struggle had shaped the national character.

As Americans forged farther into the west, he maintained, progress had occurred:

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<sup>22</sup> Mark David Spence, *Dispossessing the Wilderness: Indian Removal and the Making of the National Parks* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 56-75.

<sup>23</sup> Theodore Roosevelt, *African Game Trails: An Account of the African Wanderings of an American Hunter-Naturalist* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1910), viii.

transportation and industry became more important to bring together the expanding empire. According to these fantasies, Americans had been shaped by the wilderness and had shaped the wilderness through the expansion of civilization. Roosevelt took those principles and applied them to Africa: through foraging into Africa, Americans could be shaped and, in turn, shape the African wilderness and come out the other side as better and stronger Americans. In Africa, Roosevelt could embrace the violence of the frontier and the vibrancy of the primitive other.<sup>24</sup>

A good example of the winning combination of white, Anglo-Saxon genetics and the strengthening power of primitivism can be found in the 1912 Edgar Rice Burroughs book, *Tarzan of the Apes*. In the novel, Lord and Lady Greystroke of England travel to Africa but are marooned in Western Equatorial Africa by corrupt sailors looking for plunder. The two are forced to make due in the jungle and wait for a rescue ship that will never come. Pregnant when she left England, Lady Greystroke has a baby a few months into their isolation and gives him the name John Clayton. In the novel, the jungles of Africa are dangerous and unpredictable. Both Lord and Lady Greystroke are killed. The baby is left totally alone in the wild jungle until Kala, a mother ape who has just lost her own baby adopts the young babe and names him Tarzan. The boy grows into a young man in the protection of the group of apes. He does not see another human like himself until his mother, Kala is attacked and killed by a tribe of black cannibals.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Turner, *The Frontier in American History*, 33-8.

<sup>25</sup> Edgar Rice Burroughs, *Tarzan of the Apes* (New York: A. L. Burt Company, 1914).

First published in 1912 by *All-Story Magazine*, Tarzan may be the single most famous symbol of American attitudes toward Africa and Africans. Roderick Nash contends that Tarzan is seen as a “superman” within the novel *because* of his connection to the wilderness. Gail Bederman agrees with this argument, adding that it is only through the combination of both elite, Anglo-Saxon blood and his savage upbringing that Tarzan is able to become the highest specimen of civilization. Later in the book, when the acting Lord Clayton arrives in the African jungle, he is portrayed as essentially useless. Weak and over-civilized, Clayton frequently needs rescue by the strong ape-man. As cousins, Tarzan and Clayton have essentially the same DNA, however, Clayton is seen as puny and effeminate, while Tarzan is strong and virile, teeming with muscles. The Anglo-Saxon male has been made strong by his contact with Africa.<sup>26</sup>

Also important is Burrough’s image of black African natives. When Tarzan is first brought into contact with people of his same species, he is innately sure of his superiority to these black Africans. Burroughs portrayed the black natives as the epitome of the “savage.” They had, he wrote, “tattooing on the forehead and breast, [. . .] sharp filed teeth, [and] feathered headdress.”<sup>27</sup> The natives in the novel represent the fanciful image of the native African: savage; dangerous; and, of course, cannibalistic. In a fit of revenge, Tarzan stalks Kulonga, killer of his mother, and hangs him. According to Tarzan’s upbringing, it was then appropriate for him to eat his African prey. However, something deep inside his Anglo-Saxon genes tells him this is wrong. “All he knew was

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<sup>26</sup> Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization*, 221-7; Nash, “American Cult of the Primitive,” 527.

<sup>27</sup> Burroughs, *Tarzan*, 119.



that he could not eat the flesh of this black man,” Burroughs writes, “and thus hereditary instinct, ages old, usurped the functions of his untaught mind and saved him from transgressing a worldwide law of whose very existence he was ignorant.”<sup>28</sup> Right away, Burroughs positions Tarzan above the black, cannibalistic Africans purely through superior Anglo-Saxon genetics.

As the narrative continues, Tarzan discovers the village of the black cannibals and begins to watch their movements and learn about their society. He does not like what he sees. Women tend the field while the men do little work; the villagers stalk their prey and bring it still alive into the village (the cowards way of hunting, Tarzan thinks), and they practice many “foolish” superstitions. Burroughs summed up Tarzan’s reactions:

He had been sorely disappointed with the poor little village of the blacks, hidden away in his own jungle, and not with a single house as large as his own cabin upon the distant beach. He saw that these people were more wicked than his own apes, and as savage and cruel as Sabor [the leopard], herself. Tarzan began to hold his own kind in low esteem.<sup>29</sup>

Not only is Tarzan genetically superior to the African cannibals in the novel, but he is also faster, stronger and smarter. *Tarzan of the Apes* represented an important symbol of masculinity in a society that was increasingly interested in nature and “savagery.” The novel exemplified the idea that only through the careful combination of western superior civilization and wilderness could Americans escape their environment of urban convenience and feel in touch with nature.

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<sup>28</sup> Burroughs, *Tarzan*, 120.

<sup>29</sup> Burroughs, *Tarzan*, 133.

*Tarzan of the Apes* was a wildly popular book. It spurred a 1918 movie adaptation of the book and several movie spin-offs. Edgar Rice Burroughs went on to write an additional 23 novels focused on the character, a testament to the immense popularity of Tarzan. Likewise, Theodore Roosevelt's African safari became extraordinarily popular with American audiences. Almost every other day *The New York Times* posted more news on the former president. One article, from July 1909 featured a song entitled "Lion Song for Roosevelt." The song celebrated Roosevelt's journey:

[. . .]  
 Teddy armed to the teeth with a knife in sheath  
 And a rifle beneath this arm.  
 The Colonel plugged him with a laugh,  
 While Kermit took his photograph,  
 Said he, "Those Wall Street Boys would cry  
 "If they knew how near I'd been to die.  
 "oh, this country's bull, bull, bully,  
 "I've enjoyed it full, full, fully,  
 "For it euchres the best they can show in the West.  
 "That's so wild and wool, wool, woolly."<sup>30</sup>

Roosevelt's wilderness acumen and masculine persona was honored in 1906 with the donation to the Bronx Zoo of two bear cubs, Teddy-B and Teddy-G, nicknamed the "Roosevelt Bears," which quickly became a favorite of young children.

Teddy Roosevelt's legacy of virile masculinity lives on to the present day. From his days in the "Wild West" with Sheriff Seth Bullock, to his safari in Africa, Americans saw Roosevelt as the epitome of manly strength during an era of uncertainty and

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<sup>30</sup> "Lion Song for Roosevelt. Hears Miss Shooter of "Nairobi Follies" Celebrate his Prowess," *The New York Times* (July 5, 1909), 7.

“feminization.” He allayed fears of the degeneration of the Anglo-Saxon race by emphasizing the possibilities for strength in the African wilderness.

## CONCLUSION

In 2003, *National Geographic* published a travel catalog filled with almost 50 exotic vacations available through their agency for the daring explorer. These expeditions included private jets around the world, cruises to the Caribbean, and tours of Japan, to name a few. Also included in the possible expeditions provided by *National Geographic* was a fourteen-day safari in Southern Africa. The \$7,000 vacation package included trips to the Londolozi Private Game Reserve and Chobe National Park, where guests could hope to see exotic species of leopard, lions, rhinos, and elephant. Guided tours on the Chobe and Zambezi rivers were included. The catalog boasted that purchasers of the expedition could “experience southern Africa, from historic Cape Town to the verdant vineyard-covered valleys of the Winelands; from premier wilderness reserves to thundering Victoria Falls.” *National Geographic*, the magazine which in 1888 had brought Africa right to Americans’ living rooms, was now packaging the wilderness experience and selling it for \$7,000 per person.

Certainly, the *National Geographic* was neither the first nor the last to offer vacation packages of Africa. It was, however, simply the latest in a more than century-long attempt by Americans to consume the exoticism of Africa. Offering an escape from their modern lives, *The National Geographic Magazine* from the very beginning offered images and stories of primitive Africa which were pumped into the households of white, middle-class Americans. They were drawn to it because it was mysterious and promised revitalization through intense experiences. Those white, middle-class Americans, trying

to escape the decadence caused by consumerism in modern life inadvertently packaged and consumed these images of Africa. By purchasing a copy of National Geographic or buying a ticket to the World's Columbian Exposition, one could conveniently purchase an escape from their own overcivilized lives.

It is important to note that this thesis focuses solely on how white, middle-class American life affected the perceived images of Africa and Africans during the period between 1880 and 1910. Any effect that these antimodern images had on colonization or on Africa are outside of the scope of this study, and outside my area of expertise. As historians can attest, often what is occurring and what one perceives is occurring are often completely different. This thesis focuses solely on the latter, and any references to what actually occurred in Africa during this period, unless specifically noted, are beyond this study.

To this day, when Americans think of Africa, they imagine many things. They construct myriad images of what they consider Africa to be. According to Erik Gilbert and Jonathan Reynolds, these include Exotic Africa, Wild and Dangerous Africa, Primitive Africa, or Unspoiled Africa. There is a popular image of Africa which has persisted for centuries that Africa has been left behind on the march toward progress, that the continent is nothing but unyielding forests and wild animals, or that Africa is somehow “pure,” set apart from the corruption of the modern world.<sup>1</sup> All of these images

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<sup>1</sup> John Reader, *Africa: A Biography of the Continent* (New York: Vintage Books, 1997), 525, 530-43, 548; Erik Gilbert and Jonathan T. Reynolds, *Africa in World History: From Prehistory to the Present* (Boston: Pearson, 2012).

are derivatives of an antimodern yearning throughout American history. Images of “Wild Africa,” or even “Primitive Africa” are reminiscent of the nineteenth century desire for nature and the believe that by getting in touch with the wilderness and with primitive people, white, middle-class men could unleash something authentic within themselves to cure their neurasthenia.

In recent years, documentaries and movies about “Wild Africa” have flooded the market. A recent BBC/Discovery Channel collaboration entitled *Africa: Eye to Eye with the Unknown* is a good example of this and can be purchased on the shelves of any Walmart or Target. The documentary mini-series includes 6 one-hour episodes on 5 different regions of the continent. The back cover of the DVD promises to take audiences of this documentary to places that have never before been seen by humans. “Each episode promises intimate, eye-to-eye encounters with extraordinary wild life, venturing into genuinely unexplored places and capturing never-seen-before behavior.” Audiences are assured that “Unknown Africa,” or “Unexplored Africa,” a place completely separate from the mundane modern world, can be purchased for only \$26.89 on Amazon.com.

As previously stated, the trend of “consuming” Africa is not a recent phenomenon. Americans searched for ways to bring the “darkness” of Africa right into their living room as early as the nineteenth-century with *National Geographic Magazine*. Early editions of the magazine focus heavily on Africa, showing a variety of antimodern images within its pages. Through the *National Geographic Magazine*, American

audiences were infused with ideas of the rejuvenating powers of nature and primitive people. An attraction to magic and the unexplained mysteries of the world was clearly seen within the pages of the magazine. Within George K. French's article on the war-like Asante, middle-class men reflected the martial idea, or the attraction to war and combat as a way to become stronger and more vibrant. Ironically, for a five dollar membership to the *National Geographic Society*, middle-class men could escape the confines of the consumer-driven world.

A little over four years after the first edition of *The National Geographic Magazine*, the World's Columbian Exposition brought actual Africans to America's doorstep. With the wildly popular Dahomeyan Village, Americans could, for a 25 cent fee, experience "Darkest Africa" for themselves. The village was occupied by more than 60 Dahomeyans, over half of whom were the so-called women amazons. I further John F. Kasson's argument about the fair by stating that not only was the Midway Plaisance a medium for shedding the restrictive atmosphere of Victorian Culture, but it was also a method of revitalization. The warrior atmosphere of the Dahomeyans played into men's desires for real experiences through war, while the crafts and tools on display was a resuscitation of the authentic experience of manual labor.<sup>2</sup>

In 1909, with Theodore Roosevelt's famous safari trip to Africa, America's biggest advocate of rugged masculinity projected the image of rejuvenation through Africa. Roosevelt's sickly childhood and eventual transformation into a fit, healthy individual through the outdoors promoted the idea that neurasthenia and the

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<sup>2</sup> Lears, *No Place of Grace*, 60; Kasson, *Amusing the Million*, 4-12.

“weightlessness” that Lears describes could be eased by being closer to nature. As Roosevelt says, “there are no words that can tell the hidden spirit of the wilderness, that can reveal its mystery, its melancholy, and its charm. There is delight in the hardy life of the open, in long rides rifle in hand, in the thrill of the fight with dangerous game.” As shown by Roosevelt in 1909, the “color” that was missing from industrial American life could be brought revitalized through Africa.



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