

## Activity 1: Decoding the World's Columbian Exposition

### Sources

**Source 1:** Rodolfo Morgari, [Depiction of Chicago World's Fair in lower left, allegorical figures on the right, historical figures in the upper center of the print], 1893, chromolithograph, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C., <https://www.loc.gov/resource/ppmsca.44793/>.



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[https://edsitement.neh.gov/sites/default/files/resource/Morgari\\_Lithograph\\_1893\\_Annotated.jpg](https://edsitement.neh.gov/sites/default/files/resource/Morgari_Lithograph_1893_Annotated.jpg)

**Source 2:** Excerpt from H.R. 8393, 51st Cong., 1st sess., 1890, 1-2,  
<https://archive.org/details/hr8393acttoprovi00unit>.

AN ACT To provide for celebrating the four hundredth anniversary of the discovery of America by Christopher Columbus by holding an International Exhibition of arts, industries, manufactures and the product of the soil, mine and sea, in the City of Chicago, in the State of Illinois :

Whereas, It is fit and appropriate that the four hundredth anniversary of the discovery of America be commemorated by an exhibition of the resources of the United States of America, their development, and of the progress of civilization in the New World; and

Whereas, Such an exhibition should be of a national and international character, so that not only the people of our Union and this continent, but those of all nations as well, can participate, and should therefore have the sanction of the Congress of the United States; therefore,

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America, in Congress assembled, that an Exhibition of arts, industries, manufactures and products of the soil, mine and sea, shall be inaugurated in the year eighteen hundred and ninety-two,<sup>1</sup> in the City of Chicago, in the State of Illinois, as hereinafter provided...

**Source 3:** Excerpt from Daniel Hudson Burnham [Chief of Construction and Director of Works] and Francis Davis Millet [Director of Decoration], *World's Columbian Exposition: The Book of the Builders* (Chicago: Columbian Memorial Publication Society, 1895), 3-11,  
[https://www.google.com/books/edition/World s Columbian Exposition/k7A4rFg05KsC?hl=en&gbpv=1&pg=PA3&printsec=frontcover](https://www.google.com/books/edition/World_s_Columbian_Exposition/k7A4rFg05KsC?hl=en&gbpv=1&pg=PA3&printsec=frontcover).

The World's Columbian Exposition has marked a period in the civilization of this country, has initiated a new phase of art, and has created a keen and contagious enthusiasm for the study of the beautiful. Whatever may be the verdict of history on the artistic achievement signaled by the Exposition, it can never be denied that its influence has been most profound and far-reaching.

While the voices of the designers and builders who dreamed and wrought together still sound in our ears, and before the memories of their deeds shall have faded, it is our duty to record the story of their work, so that some chronicle of the vivid impressions of the present shall remain when the glories of the grand conception shall have vanished forever.

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<sup>1</sup> In 1890, Congress voted to postpone the opening until May 1, 1893, in order to ensure adequate time for preparation.

**Source 4:** Excerpt from Hubert Howe Bancroft, *The Book of the Fair: An Historical and Descriptive Presentation of the World's Science, Art, and Industry, as Viewed through the Columbian Exposition at Chicago in 1893* (Chicago: The Bancroft Co., 1893), 835-836, <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=uc1.b000702718&seq=41>.

If to any class of visitors the Columbian Exposition was somewhat of a disappointment, it was to those who went there merely in search of amusement. Instruction rather than amusement, but instruction conveyed in its most attractive form, was the main purpose of the Fair, and surely there were never such opportunities for a comparative study of what has and is being accomplished in every branch of industry and art...

[A]s places of recreation there were none that would compare with the Midway plaisance, an epitome and also a supplement of the Fair, with its bazaars of all nations, its manifold attractions, and yet with educational as well as pleasurable features. All day long and far into the night this spacious thoroughfare, a mile in length and 600 feet in width, was crowded with sight-seers who, whatever else they missed, would make the tour of this novel and heterogeneous exhibition. Entering the avenue a little to the west of the Woman's building, they would pass between the walls of mediaeval villages, between mosques and pagodas, Turkish and Chinese theatres, past the dwellings of colonial days, past the cabins of South Sea islanders, of Javanese, Egyptians, Bedouins, Indians, among them huts of bark and straw that tell of yet ruder environment. They would be met on their way by German and Hungarian bands, by the discord of Chinese cymbals and Dahomean<sup>2</sup> tom-toms; they would encounter jugglers and magicians, camel-drivers and donkey-boys, dancing-girls from Cairo and Algiers, from Samoa and Brazil, with men and women of all nationalities, some lounging in oriental indifference, some shrieking in unison or striving to outshriek each other, in the hope of transferring his superfluous change from the pocket of the unwary pilgrim. Then, as taste and length of purse determined; for fees were demanded from those who would penetrate the hidden mysteries of the plaisance, they might enter the Congress of beauty with its plump and piquant damsels, might pass an hour in one of the theatres or villages, or partake of harmless beverages served by native waiters. Finally they would betake themselves to the Ferris wheel, on which they were conveyed with smooth, gliding motion to a height of 260 feet, affording a transient and kaleidoscopic view of the park and all that it contains.

In this miniature fair with its stir and tumult, its faces of every type and hue, its picturesque buildings, figures, and costumes is the most graphic and varied ethnological display that was ever presented to the world. All the continents are here represented, and many nations of each continent, civilized, semi-civilized, and barbarous, from the Caucasian to the African black, with head in the shape of a cocoa-nut and with barely enough of clothing to serve for the wadding of a gun. Here, in truth, one may learn more of foreign lands, their customs, habits, and environment, their food and drink and dress, their diversions and their industries, than years of travel would teach him. If here and there is a certain admixture of indecency, so broad at times

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<sup>2</sup> Present-day Benin, Africa

as to call for the interference of the authorities, this does not detract from the value of an exhibition richer and more comprehensive than any before attempted.

**Source 5:** "Souvenir Map of the World's Columbian Exposition," Chicago, 1893,  
<https://www.loc.gov/resource/g4104c.ct002834/>.



**Source 6:** Frances Benjamin Johnston, [Grand Basin, World's Columbian Exposition], Chicago, 1893, photograph, <https://www.loc.gov/resource/ds.14202/>.



**Source 7:** Frances Benjamin Johnston, [Hagenbeck's Trained Animals, Midway Plaisance, World's Columbian Exposition], Chicago, 1893, photograph, <https://www.loc.gov/resource/ds.14184/>.



**Source 8:** Source 6: Frances Benjamin Johnston, [Art Gallery, World's Columbian Exposition], Chicago, 1893, photograph, <https://www.loc.gov/item/2021636192/>.

