The University of Pennsylvania houses a collection of world’s fairs and expositions materials, given to the Kislak Center for Special Collections, Rare Books and Manuscripts by Michael Zinman in 2008. Comprising contemporary guide and souvenir books, photographs, sheet music, advertisements, and other ephemera from both large and small national and international fairs of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, these primary source materials provide insight into the changing nature of these gatherings over the years.

This collection is complemented by materials already held in the Penn Libraries, including runs of illustrated periodicals such as Harper’s, the Illustrated London News, L’Illustration, and Punch, where the various fairs and expositions were on display for the reading public and, in the case of Punch, served as the inspiration for humorous vignettes. Those who attended world’s fairs were curious about non-Western peoples; souvenir books were a way to bring home what visitors saw and learned at the fairs.

Guides to the Fairs
In some cases, guides were published and sold even before a fair opened. Martin’s World’s Fair Album-Atlas and Family Souvenir (1892), anticipating the opening of the 1893 World’s Columbian Exposition in Chicago, provided a preview of coming attractions, including foreign nations exhibiting at the fair and a brief sketch of former world’s fairs, as well as discourses on the life of Columbus and on the “manners, customs, and religion of the American Indian,” illustrated with photographs. Julian

Many souvenir booklets, including this one from 1893, focused on non-Western peoples.
Ralph’s 1893 *Harper’s Chicago and the World’s Fair* was intended by its author “to be read at home and before the Exposition opens.” In describing what the visitor would experience in one area of the Midway, he writes that “[t]ents and dwellings are scattered about, and a host of the savage, swarthy, but picturesque people of Tunis and Algiers will fill the place with activity.”

Other guides were published for sale at the fairs and provided descriptions of all the exotic sights to be seen. Perhaps even more popular among fairgoers were books of views, purchased as souvenirs, which included not only specific buildings and panoramas of the fairgrounds but also street scenes. Many of these—like C. P. Arnold’s *Glimpses of the Pan-American Exposition*, printed in the shape of a buffalo head—were comprised of photographs, many taken of various peoples on exhibition on the midway.

**Official Exposition Reports and Catalogs**

Official and government reports and catalogs were issued during and after the fairs and expositions. One example, relevant for its anthropological content, is Edward H.
Knight’s *A Study of the Savage Weapons at the Centennial Exhibition, Philadelphia, 1876* (1880). Another interesting work, disseminated in conjunction with a fair, is a reprint of a Smithsonian publication, issued as a “Special Edition for the Panama-California Exposition at San Diego,” of the physical anthropologist Aleš Hrdlička’s *The Most Ancient Skeletal Remains of Man* (1915).

Among the religious works specifically printed for distribution at the fair, one finds *The Mandukyopanishat: Being the Exposition of Om, the Great Sacred Name of the Supreme Being in the Vedas*. Written in English and Sanskrit, this work was prepared for the 1893 World’s Columbian Exposition in Chicago. It was published in that year in Punjab, under the auspices of the Arya Pratinidhi Sabha, and in Lahore by Virajanand Press.

**Souvenir Booklets About Non-Western Peoples**

A number of souvenir booklets in the collection are useful in exploring the anthropological focus of the early fairs and expositions. With titles such as *Portfolio of Midway Types, A Street in Cairo, and The Moorish Palace and Its Startling Wonder: The Chief Attraction of Midway Plaisance*, these works from the 1893 World’s Columbian Exposition reveal how curiosity about non-Western peoples was turned into a source of entertainment for visitors to the fair, and how they brought their experiences home with them through these kinds of souvenir booklets.

Other entertainments, such as the pageant known as *Imre Kiralfy’s Grand Historical Spectacle, America: in Four Acts, and Seventeen Scenes*, ends with all the nations of the earth congregating and peoples from each continent (Asia, Africa, and Europe), dressed in their native costume, singing in praise of America and paying “Homage to American Genius.”

**Advertising at the Fairs**

Various businesses used the platform of the world’s fair to advertise their wares. This material was produced with the intention of either being given away or purchased by visitors as souvenirs. McLaughlin’s XXXX Coffee produced a large chromolithographic trade card “An Egyptian
Shoemaker Seen at the World’s Fair,” which depicts the shoemaker busy making a shoe while a customer tries a pair on for size.

The Singer Manufacturing Co. 1893 souvenir cards—Costumes of All Nations—claim to be “lithographed reproductions of photographs taken on the spot in various countries and provinces, and later colored.” They were described as native costume studies, “reliable and perfect in every detail.” Of course, on each card, the individuals are photographed with a Singer sewing machine. Singer was prominent at the 1901 Pan-American Exposition in Buffalo with “All Over the World,” Singer the Universal Sewing Machine, featuring women at Singer sewing machines and cabinet tables. Singer was again present at the 1904 St. Louis World’s Fair, with Singer Souvenir of the Louisiana Purchase Exposition A.D. 1904, focusing on the exploration of the West and St. Louis.

**FICTIONAL WORKS, SOME REFLECTING THE PREJUDICES OF THE TIME**

The Penn Library collection holds a handful of fictional works about visiting the fairs, and these works include numerous encounters with foreigners. Charles McClellan Stevens wrote a series of extremely popular, humorous books about the philosopher/farmer Uncle Jeremiah visiting various fairs; our collection holds those for the St. Louis and the Panama-Pacific Expositions. The humorist Marietta Holley satirized American society and politics in her many Samantha books, including *Samantha at the St. Louis Exposition* (1904), in which Samantha visits the Chinese Village, where she “wuz real interested lookin’ at them queer yeller pig-tailed little creeters with dresses on, and their funny little houses.” It is difficult today to imagine that such derogatory language was accepted, and even thought to be humorous.

Works for children were, in many ways, even more blatantly racist in their presentation of these encounters. *A Peep at the World’s Fair* (1889)—perhaps related to the 1889 Exposition Universelle in Paris—is a story about two children experiencing a world’s fair. The following
text accompanied the illustration for South American countries: “Madeleine offered a cake to a little black boy of about two or three years old, and he came trotting up to take it from her, in quite a friendly manner; but James would not touch the little fellow—he put his hands behind his back, and frowned at him.” Interestingly, much of this little book is about other countries (Egypt, Russia, Algeria, Chinese India, and Japan) and the people who inhabit them, revealing what the publisher considered would be most appealing about these expositions to a young audience.

Another example of literature for children is The Century World’s Fair Book for Boys and Girls: Being the Adventures of Harry and Philip with their Tutor, Mr. Douglass, at the World’s Columbian Exposition (1893). It is illustrated with numerous photographs taken of the villages of foreigners whose lives were on display at the fair. Despite being a fictional account, it is full of direct observations.

We are fortunate to have an extensive collection of materials from world’s fairs in Penn’s Kislak Center for Special Collections, Rare Books and Manuscripts. Many of the illustrations are as vivid as the day they were printed. These books and other objects demonstrate not only the allure of the fairs but also prevalent attitudes toward people of other countries and cultures at the time.

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