



## American Imperialism at the 1904 World's Fair: A Case Study of Philippine Dress

Jenna Tedrick Kuttruff, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, Louisiana, USA  
Carl Kuttruff, Kuttruff and Associates, Baton Rouge, Louisiana, USA

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This research examines the role of dress of the Igorots, mountain peoples from the northern Philippine Islands, at the beginning of the twentieth century both within their own land and in the United States as a part of the 1904 World's Fair. The Louisiana Purchase Exposition, held in St. Louis, Missouri, has been described as the "Coronation of Civilization" (Rydell, 1984) and served as the cultural touchstone for the nation at that time. This largest international exposition the world had ever seen was viewed by over twenty million people. By far the most extensive as well as the most popular of all exhibits at the St. Louis Exposition was that of the Philippine Islands (see Figures 1 and 2). It included nearly twelve hundred Filipinos living in traditional style villages on a forty-seven-acre display. The exhibit included not only the products, resources, manufactures, art, ethnology, education, and government of the Philippine Islands, but also a presentation of the habits and customs of the Filipino people.

The imperial message of the United States government's Philippine Exposition Board, organizers of the Philippine exposition, pervaded the display. This display served to affirm the value of the recently acquired Philippine Islands to America's commercial growth and the United States' role as a colonial power. It created, based on then current anthropological theories, a scientifically validated impression of Filipinos as racially inferior and incapable of national self-determination in the near future. Inside the Philippine exposition was a series of three cultural spheres depicting the civilizing influence of the Spanish past, the current ethnological state of the islands, and the beneficial results that both the Filipinos and Americans could expect from the United States possession of the islands.

The Igorots, a general term used to refer to any of several cultural groups from the mountain area of northern Luzon, comprised the largest contingent in the series of ethnological villages that portrayed the lifestyles of indigenous Filipino peoples. This paper presents not only the social significance and role of Igorot dress within their own society but also in the U.S. government supported presentation of the Philippine Islands at the 1904 Exposition. Using period descriptions and photographs, Igorot dress is compared and contrasted with the dress of other Filipinos from different ethnic groups and social levels and American dress at that time. Also included in the presentation are photographs and documentation of Igorot textiles and costumes exhibited at the St. Louis Exposition, which were among the early acquisitions now in the collections of the Philippine National Museum in Manila.

Rydell, R. W. (1984). *All the World's a Fair: Visions of Empire at American International Expositions, 1876-1916*. University of Chicago Press, Chicago.

No Author (1904). Philippine Exposition, World's Fair St. Louis 1904. Brochure from the Louisiana Purchase Exposition, in collection of the authors.

No Author (1904). Souvenir Igorot Village. Philippine Photograph Co. World's Fair, St. Louis, in collection of the authors.

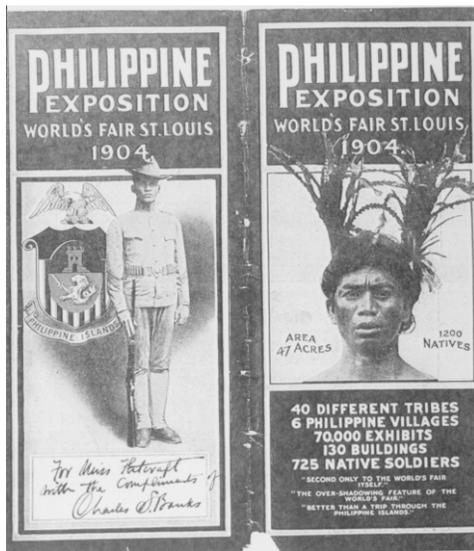


Figure 1. (left) Cover of brochure from the Philippine Exposition at the 1904 World's Fair in St. Louis, Missouri (authors' personal collection).

Figure 2. (right) Cover of souvenir booklet from the Igorot Village at the 1904 World's Fair in St. Louis, Missouri (authors' personal collection).