

Exhibiting at a World's Fair

By David J. Cope

Overview

In this lesson, students will study primary and secondary sources to discover the problems that African Americans faced during the Jim Crow era when participating in the 1893 Columbian Exposition and the 1939 New York World's Fair. They will then research and create a pavilion and exhibit for an African nation today at the class' world's fair. This lesson, easily adapted for upper elementary through high school students, serves as a link to the beginnings of the Jim Crow era.

Time Required

Four to six days for background readings, discussion, Internet research, and project preparation.

Materials Needed

1. Internet access to these sites:
 - **[Jimcrowhistory.org History Section](http://jimcrowhistory.org)**
 - **<http://columbus.gl.iit.edu>** (The Paul V. Galvin Library provides access to books on the World's Columbian Exposition printed after the fair)
 - **<http://cti.itc.virginia.edu/~hius202/lectures/lecture04.html>**
 - **<http://www.ahs.uwaterloo.ca/~museum/Archive/Culin/Mancala1894>**
 - **<http://imagiware.com/mancala>**
 - **<http://minneapolisfed.org/research/data/us/calc>**
(If school Internet access is unavailable, teachers can print the necessary information and distribute)
2. Transparency, slide, or copy of the *Puck* cartoons, below
3. Copies of the following (available below):
 - "Southern Rhodesia, entries from the *Official Guide Book, New York World's Fair, 1939, Third Edition*"
 - Map of the Amusement Zone, 1939 New York World's Fair
 - World's Fair Project Sheet
 - World's Fair Grade Sheet

The Lesson

Anticipatory Set

Have the students write their mental images of the following nations on scrap paper as you read them aloud: Haiti, Zimbabwe, Benin. List their responses on the board and have a volunteer locate each place on a world map. Ask students to answer the following:

- How difficult was it to get a mental picture for each of these nations?
- How difficult was it to locate each of these nations?
- Which nation do you know the most about?
- Which nation do you know the least about?
- What factors play into your knowledge about and perceptions of these three nations?

Note that you can do this lesson with Program One alone or in conjunction with Program Three.

Procedures

1. Divide the class into two (or three) groups. Assign each group to read either of these essays: **"From Terror to Triumph: An Historic Overview"** or **"African Americans and 'The White City'"** If you also are using Program Three, also include the essay **"African Americans in 'The World of Tomorrow': 1939"**
2. Have each group research the following topics and report their finding to the entire class:
 - a. "From Terror" group: developments in the United States during the time between the Supreme Court's decision striking down the Civil Rights Act of 1875 and their ruling in *Plessy v. Ferguson*.
 - b. "White City" group: the three problems facing African Americans at the World's Columbian Exposition.
 - c. "World of Tomorrow" group (only if your lesson includes Program Three): the problems African Americans faced at the 1939-1940 New York World's Fair.
3. List the problems of the time period and the fairs' problems and "solutions" on the board and compare the problems of the two fairs first if you are using both programs One and Three. Then, discuss why African Americans had limited choices in solving the problems. Also, note that the United States was in an economic depression in 1893.

4. Explain to the class that, while African-American participation in the exhibits was limited at the fair (fairs), there was, nonetheless a sense of presence in abstentia through the exhibits of Haiti and Dahomey (Benin) in 1893 and Southern Rhodesia (Zimbabwe) in 1939. Have the students "visit" each of these pavilions.

5. Give students the following background information on Dahomey:

Around 1645, the Abomey kingdom conquered the neighboring kingdom of Dan and became known as Dahomey, which means "in the belly of Dan." Dahomey became a protectorate of France in the mid-1800s, but King Gbehanzin in 1889 irritated the French by raising taxes on their exchange goods and limiting their occupation. Fighting broke out in 1890 and lasted only that year in what was known as the First War of Resistance. Two years later, the Second War of Resistance began with an eventual French victory.

6. Have students enter the Paul V. Gavin Library Internet site, click on "The Dream City" in the left column, and then on "I. The Dream City Layout." They should continue by clicking on "6" and then scrolling down and clicking on "From Far Away Dahomey." Once they read the text, students should:
 - a. Pick out terms, phrases, or images from the written text that play into the concept of racial superiority or stereotyping, such as: "it was difficult, in warmer weather, to keep any clothing whatever on them," "the women carried the heaviest loads, with babies strapped to their waists," "the dusky court of King Gbehanzin," and answer: How do the words and images you found in the reading seem a part of the time period as portrayed in the essay "From Terror to Triumph?"

- b. Look at the accompanying picture and answer: How does the picture compare to the written text?
7. Tell students to go to the <http://cti.itc.virginia.edu/~hius202/lectures/lecture04.html> web site. Ask them to write a brief description of the photograph, noting both the participants from Dahomey and the onlookers. Then, ask students to compare their descriptions with the written text from "The Dream City" and share what images a visitor to the Dahomey concession may have taken home with him/her.
8. Tell students about *Puck*, a weekly humor magazine of the era. Many of its printed jokes and cartoons contained horrendous racial stereotypes, typical of the day. Because of its popularity, *Puck* constructed its own building at the Exposition and printed a special fair edition.

Using either a transparency, slide, or individual copy for each student of the "Different Points of View" cartoons, ask students:

- What was the cartoonist's point of view towards the people of Dahomey?
 - What was the cartoonist's point of view towards women's current fashions? (Note: The Midway was the location perpendicular to the official fairgrounds where many "entertaining" concessions were built, such as the Dahomey Village and the world's first Ferris Wheel.)
 - Would a cartoonist portray similar attitudes today?
9. Have students access the essay, "Mancala, The National Game of Africa," on the <http://imagicware.com/mancala> web site, to find simple rules for the game, "Mancala." On the web site, Stewart Culin notes that the inhabitants of the Dahomey Village played this game at the Columbian Exposition.
 10. Give the students this brief background on Haiti at the time of the Columbian Exposition:

In 1791, a successful slave revolt was initiated against the French by Toussaint L'Ouverture, and, by 1804, the island became the first black independent nation. General Dessalines declared himself its emperor; however, abuses by Dessalines led to his assassination. The island then divided with Henri Christophe, an illiterate ex-slave, ruling in the North and Alexandre Petion, a mulatto, ruling in the South. Upon Christophe's death, the island united briefly but eventually split into two countries, Haiti and the Dominican Republic, in 1844. In 1893, the island was once again under dictatorships.

11. Divide the students into share-pairs. For each pair, instruct one student to enter the Paul V. Gavin Library Internet site and click on "The Dream City" in the left column and then on "I. The Dream City Layout." The student should continue by clicking on "8" and then scrolling down and clicking on "The Haytien Building."

Have the second student enter the Paul V. Gavin Library Internet site and click on "The Book of the Fair" in the left column and then on "Textual Illustrations." Then, he/she should scroll down and click on "Haytian Building."

12. Inform the class that the Board of Design for the Columbian Exposition decided to construct all of the main exhibition buildings surrounding the Court of Honor in the Beaux Arts style. However, the board allowed great variation within the state and international areas. From the individual sites, have each student cull a list of architectural features

associated with the Haitian building and answer the following:

- Why would the Haitian government build its pavilion in this style?
 - What geographic influences play into this style of architecture?
13. Tell students, that, in previewing the fair, *The New York Times* commented in its April 30 issue on Haiti's building that "in addition to sheltering Mr. Douglass, it will contain the entire Haitian exhibit." Have each student list items that Haiti selected for its pavilion and then compile a single list. Ask them:
- Which objects impressed both authors by being included in their texts?
 - Why would Haiti choose these items for display?
14. Note to students that, at the end of two texts on Haitian buildings, an eating facility is mentioned. Have them answer the following questions:
- How do the authors differ in their views of this facility?
 - In "The Dream City" text, what socially significant statements are made?

Then, have the students write a brief paragraph applying these facts to those presented in "From Terror to Triumph."

15. If you are using Program Three at this time in your lesson plan, give students this brief background on Southern Rhodesia (Zimbabwe) at the time of the 1939 New York World's Fair:

In the 1830s and 1840s, European gold seekers and ivory hunters moved into the Shona and Ndebele territory of southern Africa. British entrepreneur Cecil John Rhodes envisioned a corridor of "civilization" stretching from the Cape to Cairo, and Britain's Queen Victoria allowed for colonization. A local all-white legislature established the new country of Rhodesia in 1895. The Ndebele and Shona natives resisted in the Chimurenga, the War for Liberation, but the British ended the conflict by capturing and hanging the leaders. By 1911, 24,000 Brits settled there and, throughout the 1920s and 1930s, they excluded black African ownership of farmland and kept them from entering trades and professions through legislative action.

16. Instruct students to read "**Southern Rhodesia, entries from the *Official Guide Book, New York World's Fair, 1939, Third Edition.***"
17. Ask them to pick out terms or phrases that play into the concept of colonialism and imperialism, such as: "...how Cecil Rhodes developed the country..." "...natives in Africa named...but David Livingstone, the first white man to see them, named..." "to impress you with the atmosphere of the 'Dark Continent.'" Have them answer this question: How do the words and phrases that you found in the reading reflect the white view of Africa from the late 1800s through the era of the fair?
18. Distribute copies of "Map of the Amusement Zone, 1939 New York World's Fair" and have students locate the Victoria Falls concession and the concessions closest to it.

(You should note the following: A68 -- Victoria Falls; A20 -- The Crystal Palace: a reproduction of London's original 1853 fair building containing tributes to fairs of the past; A15 -- Cavalcade of Centaurs: a show of horsemanship and a Wild West exhibit; A22 -- Doughnut Corporation of America: a Maxwell House Coffee and Mayflower Doughnut restaurant; A11 -- Bel Geddes' [Mirror] Show: a single dancing girl reflected in multiple mirrors; A49 -- Parachute Jump: an amusement ride based on an army training tool.)

19. Explain to the students the controversy concerning the Victoria Falls exhibit. On July 4, *The New York Times* reported that the government of Southern Rhodesia removed its flag, name, and coat of arms (bearing the motto "Live in the dignity of the name") from the exterior of the Victoria Falls exhibit. Southern Rhodesia's Commissioner General, Normal Yule, discredited reports that the exhibit would be discontinued. However, on August 30, *The Times* printed a report from an official spokesman, who requested to be unnamed, stating that the government sold the concession to a "syndicate" in which the government held no interests. Ask to students: Why would the Southern Rhodesia government be so concerned over the location of the Victoria Falls exhibit?

The three acknowledged functions of a world's fair, to promote existing and new products, provide a utopian vision of the future, and educate through entertainment, have largely been appropriated by theme parks today, such as Disney World's Epcot. However, the World Showcase at the Florida attraction contains no African nation. Divide the class into groups of three or four. Have each group select an African nation. Distribute the "World's Fair Project" worksheet and establish a timeframe for the project to be completed.

20. To help students who are interested convert the prices of 1893 and 1939 to today's prices, you can direct them to an excellent Internet source to help in the conversions at: <http://minneapolisfed.org/research/data/us/calc>.

Assessment

The teacher should assess the students through observations made during the class discussions and through the written assignments and projects provided in the Procedures section.

Related Works

Appelbaum, Stanley. *The Chicago World's Fair of 1893 -- A Photographic Record*. New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1980.

_____. *The New York World's Fair 1939/1940 in 155 Photographs by Richard Wurts and Others*. New York: Dover Publications, Inc. 1977.

Interdisciplinary Links

The world's fair project allows for great interdisciplinary links with music and visual arts curricula.

This lesson was submitted by David J. Cope, Honors teacher at Titusville Senior High School, Titusville PA.

WORLD'S FAIR PROJECT SHEET

The purpose of this project is for the class to utilize the three concepts of world's fairs/Epcot. You and your group will be able to explore a country in Africa and decide how to promote it within the context of a world's fair.

Select one of these African nations, Haiti, Zimbabwe, Benin; then research information about the country's history, geography, culture, economy, and current advances.

Your group must complete the following assignments:

1. Build a model of the exterior of your fair building using an appropriate style.
2. Use your research to create a portion of the interior display highlighting the country.
3. Write a description of your building and display for the fair's guidebook.
4. Make a souvenir for your building.

Your grade will be determined based on the following sheet:

WORLD'S FAIR GRADE SHEET

BUILDING: _____

DESIGNERS:

STRUCTURE AND GROUNDS:

DISPLAY AREA:

SOUVENIR:

WRITTEN:

EXTRA COMMENTS:

To help you design your building and exhibit, read the following:

EXHIBITION TECHNIQUES

In 1940, the New York Museum of Science and Industry surveyed the 1939 New York World's Fair and analyzed the exhibition techniques. Their discoveries and commentaries have influenced exhibit design ever since.

The following are quotes from their work, *Exhibition Techniques*, describing "The World of Tomorrow."

"Designing a popular exhibition is somewhat like bathing a dog. One feels that a bath would be good for the dog. The dog, an individualist, has other ideas...: the dog remains unimpressed."

"A world's fair affords an occasion for the participating exhibitors to show what their enterprises have contributed to the fabric of civilized life. The exhibitor comes to the fair to inform and persuade. But, the public comes mainly to have a good time.... To reconcile the cross-purposes of exhibitor and the public and make them serve each other is the problem of the exhibition designer. It calls for experience and imagination...."

"If the Fair had been advertised as an educational project and if people had the feeling that they were going through an educational process, the exposition would have had far less popularity. It was this procedure of educating while entertaining which made the Fair the great attraction that it was."

"An exhibition is a short cut to knowledge. It is a form of expression used to project ideas by the display of objects and deriving its value from the fact that people learn more easily from concrete illustration than by trying to visualize words."

"The functions of an exhibition and the more important means for carrying them out are:

1. To draw attention: color, light, motion, sound.
2. To create and sustain interest: entertainment, beauty, sentiment, mystery, humor, etc.
3. To "tell the story": order, simplicity, unity, progression."

1. TO DRAW ATTENTION:

"Any exhibition is only as good as the items of which it is composed."

"...we have found that the three-part formula of sound, architectural design, proper use of illumination and good color effects is the first essential of good exhibition practice."

"It was our feeling that since music adds so much to the general effect of exhibit presentation when used in a practical manner, more could have been done in this respect. This would have improved the effectiveness of the exhibitions and relieved the tenseness of the visitors, putting them in a better frame of mind to receive the message...."

"Since people are becoming more and more color conscious it is not surprising that the exhibitors at the Fair made their displays as colorful and striking as possible while still keeping within the limits of harmony."

2. TO CREATE AND SUSTAIN INTEREST:

"Throughout the Fair, the exhibitions provided incentives for the visitors to "Stop and Look," thereby giving the exhibitors the opportunity to tell their stories."

"It was found that 62% of the exhibitions had a personal appeal, with 15% inclining toward the suspense angle and 5% even holding out a romantic lure."

"80% of the exhibitions inspired people with a curiosity to look further into the subject, 35% impressed them with their beauty while 19% mystified the audience."

"[Many left] with the feeling that what they had just seen and heard was a possible development of the future."

"This ability of the exhibitions to convert curiosity into interest was a direct result of more or less sugar-coating the educational pill by entertaining and amusing the visitors while educating them."

"The theory that operating exhibits are the most effective was put into practice at the Fair."

3. TO "TELL THE STORY:"

"It was found in 76% of the exhibitions that attention was obtained directly by the exhibit itself, while 40% of the exhibitions used attention-getting devices, such as sound effects, moving signs, etc."

"It was evident throughout the Fair that the most successful exhibitions were the ones presenting their material in the form of a story done in simple and popular fashion."

"[The exhibits proved] rather conclusively that the visitor's first interest in exhibits are things which affect him personally and that this leads to his interest in external activities which have a bearing on his daily life and well-being."

"About the best an exhibitor could do was to put over one main idea in his exhibition with such other stories as he had to tell subordinate to this main idea and tending to advance each part of it a step further. A skillful presentation of the various items would stimulate the visitor to thinking 'Aren't these interesting' but would leave him with one main thought of the entire exhibition firmly impressed on his mind."

"The manner in which the explanatory material was organized and presented was particularly important."

"...the explanatory material was such as to make it possible for the visitor to help himself in securing an understanding of the facts, phenomena, developments, etc., being presented."

"[The attendants] were rated very highly in personality, knowledge, and aggressiveness. In 45% of the exhibitions, the attendants wore uniforms and 21% [of them] had badges."

"It was our feeling that the attendants, in their attitude and graciousness, were in keeping with the Fair."

"The attendant, as the resident host of the exhibition, reflected the sponsor's hospitality and, while not in so many words, clearly indicated the attitude of welcome which resulted in a general spirit of congeniality and friendliness throughout the Fair."

WORLD'S FAIR GRADE SHEET

BUILDING: _____

DESIGNERS:

STRUCTURE AND GROUNDS:

DISPLAY AREA:

SOUVENIR:

WRITTEN:

EXTRA COMMENTS:



Miss Beach (at the Dahomey Village).
"--Oh, Mother! Come. Let's get out of this! Their lack of costume is too shockingly immodest for anything."
DIFFERENT POINTS OF VIEW.-11.



Miss Beach (*at Newport, later in the season*).
"--Yes; we were at the Fair, and liked it all but some
parts of the Midway. The Dahomey Village was
something outrageous." -- *World's Fair Puck*

SOUTHERN RHODESIA: ENTRIES FROM *THE OFFICIAL GUIDE BOOK, NEW YORK WORLD'S FAIR, 1939, THIRD EDITION*

PAGE 114: SOUTHERN RHODESIA: The Exhibit demonstrates the scenic beauties of the Colony and describes its leading industries: tobacco-growing, gold-mining, and agriculture. Material on Rhodesia's early history shows how Cecil Rhodes developed the country through the British South Africa Company. A diorama depicts the impressive hill of granite--the Matoppos--in which lie the Empire-builder's remains. You see large photographs of the enigmatic Zimbabwe ruins, where, according to legend, gold was smelted centuries ago for King Solomon and the Queen of Sheba. An impression of an enormous cascade of water covers an entire wall; its purpose is to draw attention to Southern Rhodesia's exhibit in the Amusement area where a huge replica of one of the world's greatest wonders, the famous Victoria Falls, is in operation (see page 54).

Thousands of tourists have seen the Victoria Falls in Southern Rhodesia, which measure one and a quarter miles wide by 387 feet high--twice the size of Niagara Falls.

The mammoth replica of Victoria Falls measures 186 feet long by 22 feet high, and, over its man-made precipice, a torrent of 60,000 gallons of water per minute roars with a voice of thunder. Natives in Africa named these mighty falls, "Mosiotunya" ("Smoke that Thunders"), but David Livingstone, the first white man to see them, named them "Victoria," after his Queen.

The replica is an authentic reproduction within the limits of human artistry, and is noted for the beauty of its setting in the lush, jungle atmosphere of the Rain Forest, where, amid the tropic vegetation and trees, small animals and birds live freely. The amazingly lovely colors, changing in the sky from dawn to midnight, must be seen to be appreciated.

Here, in a form never attempted before, there is wrought a replica of the world's greatest wonder--a highlight of the New York World's Fair--and we confidently recommend all those who would see perhaps the most interesting exhibit at the Fair not to miss a spectacle which will remain long in the memory of every visitor. (Location: opposite the Parachute Jump.)

PAGE 54: VICTORIA FALLS: Featured BY MURALS of African native scenes on its facades, the Building (Norman Yule, designer) consists of (sic) large rotunda joining a long, rectangular structure, in which is housed a replica of Victoria Falls. Immediately upon entering the rotunda, you hear an insistent beat of native drums and the increasing roar of thundering waters. Here is a modern travel bureau where information concerning South Africa and Rhodesia may be obtained. To impress you with the atmosphere of the "Dark Continent," the decorative area in the rotunda is utilized for exhibitions of native arts and crafts, Bushman paintings, animal heads, and war weapons. In the interior of the native Rhodesian grass hut, intricately beautiful beadwork, musical instruments from which modern jazz instruments have been developed, bangles and jewelry, and other types of native craftsmanship are displayed.

As you walk up a curved ramp toward the door of the main section of the building, the dull roar drums louder in your ears until it becomes vast thunder. You are in the heart of Africa. There before you: an inspiring sight of mighty water leaping a precipice, bursting into creamy foam, boiling into the ravine below -- Victor Falls! Discovered by the Scotsman, David Livingstone, on November 16th, 1855, it has been called by Robert "Believe It or Not" Ripley the greatest spectacle in the world!

By way of a path that winds through dense tropical growth, you skirt the chasm. On either hand, strange trees flourish in profusion--mimosa, boabab or cream-of-tartar trees, "sausage-dog"

trees, giant elephant-ear leaves, ferns and bracken, and brilliantly colored flowers, all native to Southern Rhodesia.

As you walk through "The Rain Forest," as it is called, faint spray from the Falls dampens your face. Iguanas and lizards slither over spray-drenched rocks, shrieking parakeets and other birds of gorgeous plumage flutter amid the canopy of foliage.

A train winds its way on tracks high on the cliff face, then vanishes behind a jungle barrier. The torrent thunders downward, midday brightness fades into tropic dusk.

Night blankets the scene, the Southern Cross gleams from an inky sky. Slowly, the darkness gives way to gray shadows, then the reddish hues of the rising sun tinge the cataract. Clouds sweep across the heavens. The rolling drumbeat of thunder, flashes of lightning, herald a tropic storm sweeping out of immensity.

The natives named this mighty wonder "Mosiotunya" ("The Smoke That Thunders") believing that a great and powerful god dwelt in the torrents. The mile and a quarter width of the Victoria Falls and its precipitous drop of 387 feet make it more than twice as high and twice as wide as Niagara. This replica spread 186 feet in length; it is 22 feet high; and, over its rocky face, 60,000 gallons of water per minute hurtle into the ravine below. Admission 25 cents.

