

The 1876 Centennial Exposed:
How Souvenir Publications Reveal Contrasting Attitudes of Race and Gender in the Post-bellum
United States

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“I declare the International Exhibition now open”
 President Ulysses S. Grant announces on the morning of
 May 10, 1876.¹ Crowds roar as the American flag rises to
 the top of the Main Building.² The chorus, orchestra, and
 organ join together in Handel’s “Hallelujah Chorus,”
 while a parade of dignitaries and 4,000 specially invited
 guests pave the way to Machinery Hall where the Corliss
 engine stands.³ The engine, providing enough energy to
 power all of the machines on the fairgrounds, with
 2,500 horsepower, is a forty-five foot tall steel giant
 and masterpiece of American engineering.⁴ President Grant and Brazilian Emperor Dom Pedro
 II ascend the engine’s platform, and at the signal of inventor George H. Corliss, they turn the
 wheels to arouse the engine from its slumber.⁵ As the engine awakes, the rest of the machines in
 the hall take their first breath and the Exhibition comes to life. Cheers erupt as the doors to all
 exhibits open, and spectators begin exploring the fairgrounds.



Image of the Corliss Engine from *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Historical Register of the Centennial Exposition, 1876*

The grounds display everything from food and fine art to extraordinary industrial machines. Alexander Graham Bell’s telephone, which many visitors overlook, Heinz Ketchup,

¹ McCabe, *The Illustrated History of the Centennial Exhibition*, 105.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Goldfield, *America Aflame: How the Civil War Created a Nation*, 514.

⁵ McCabe, *The Illustrated History of the Centennial Exhibition*, 106.

and Hires Root beer make their premiere at the Exhibition.⁶⁷ Wares and exhibits from around the world display the wealth that each country has to offer. Among all of this innovation, the United States stakes its claim as an industrial giant at what was formally known as the International Exhibition of Arts, Manufacturers and Products of the Soil and Mine and would become generally accepted as the Centennial Exhibition of 1876 held in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

Many scholars, such as Gary Nash, Mitch Kachun, Philip Foner, and David Blight (to name a few) have questioned the involvement of minority groups, specifically women and African Americans, in the Exhibition. The 1800s brought the beginning of the women's suffrage movement, and Exhibition offered women a chance to voice their opinion in a way that was accepted by many members of 19th-century United States' society. Likewise 1876 marked thirteen years since "The Great Emancipator" President Abraham Lincoln read the Emancipation Proclamation ending slavery in the United States and foreshadowing the Civil Rights Movement that would emerge in another one hundred years bringing the end of segregation.

The representation of women and African Americans in *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Historical Register of the Centennial Exposition, 1876* and James McCabe Jr.'s *The Illustrated History of the Centennial Exhibition* demonstrates in many ways the attitudes of American society at the time. Through the examination of these two books, which are different in structure and content, yet similar in publication technique and overall style, readers can examine two distinctly important views of American society – not only the differing perceptions of women's

⁶ Goldfield, *America Aflame: How the Civil War Created a Nation*, 516.

⁷ Ibid.

suffrage but the conflicting views of the North and South – in order to further understand the role of women and African Americans at the close of the Reconstruction era in the late 19th-century. In a much larger picture, the illustrations and descriptions reveal America's need to establish an identity in the global world. The emergence of the women's suffrage movement at the Exhibition did not mean that women would soon be granted equality with men. Instead, it was only the beginning of the demand for female equality. Similarly, the end of the Civil War did not signify an ease of racial tensions between the North and South: it merely represented that the national laws would agree to serve the same goals. Leslie and McCabe's publications were a means of expressing all of these differing views. Before delving into the analysis of American society through this lens, it is first important to have a basic understanding of the historical context of the Exhibition, the authors' backgrounds, and an analysis of some of the important images and pieces of text within both of these publications.

Historical Context

1876 was a celebratory year in the United States of America for many reasons. Not only had it been 100 years since the signing of the Declaration of Independence, but the United States had survived the turmoil of the Civil War and was growing in industrial prowess. Throughout 1876, America would find itself hiding behind its growth in economic power and using its industrial aptitude to cover the reality of a failed Reconstruction and the rise of racial tension with the emergence of Jim Crow laws.⁸ Reconstruction took place over 12 years beginning in

⁸ Roberts, "PBS Exposes Jim Crow," *Philadelphia Tribune*.

1865 and ending in 1877.⁹ Throughout Reconstruction, political parties went back and forth to determine how society in the North and South should run. Blight has written extensively on Reconstruction and its effect on historical memory specifically regarding race. Although many discussions of Reconstruction do not necessarily focus on the Exhibition, an understanding of the fair, the people there, and the exhibits on display assists in providing a new lens for analysis of the United States during the Post-bellum period. As the Gilded Age began, the time finally arrived for the United States to announce its place in the world. It was with these sentiments that John L. Campbell put together a committee to develop and plan the Centennial Exhibition. Once the group was assembled, members decided that the celebration should be held in no other place than the city of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

Philadelphia was flourishing in the 19th-century. The population grew from 30,000 people when the American Revolution began to a “muscular commercial and industrializing city” with almost 110,000 inhabitants by 1820.¹⁰ By 1875, the city housed about 725,000 people from varying religious and ethnic backgrounds.¹¹ The growth of the city brought a myriad of opinions regarding issues like women’s suffrage and equality for African Americans, with Philadelphia becoming the first city in the nation to house an abolitionist society.¹² Because of the ever growing vibrancy of the city and its luscious landscape, it came as no surprise that Philadelphia’s Fairmount Park would house the Exhibition.

⁹ History.com Staff. "Reconstruction." History.com. 2009. Accessed April 28, 2014. <http://www.history.com/topics/american-civil-war/reconstruction>.

¹⁰ Nash, *First City: Philadelphia and the Forging of Historical Memory*, 108.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 261.

¹² *Ibid.*, 187.

Commissioners set aside 450 acres of land at Fairmount Park located on the banks of the Schuylkill River to be used for the Exhibition.¹³ As construction began, Fairmount's grounds transformed from an expanse of trees and foliage to hundreds of acres bustling with buildings and pavilions dedicated to the Exhibition. Hosting 31,000 exhibitors, the Centennial Exhibition would be a world's fair unlike any other before it.¹⁴ By its closing in November, one in every five Americans had attended the Exhibition with 10,000,000 people from every corner of the world attending in total.¹⁵ One hundred and sixty-seven buildings scattered the exhibition grounds, with the largest being the Main Building, Memorial Hall (the only permanent construction at the Exhibition), Agriculture Hall, Machinery Hall, and Horticulture Hall.¹⁶ With the combination of these structures and gardens, Fairmount Park became the stomping grounds for the celebration of the century.

Opening Day

When opening day finally arrived, 4,000 dignitaries assembled on the grandstand from nations around the world.¹⁷ The most prominent and celebrated of those present was Brazilian Emperor Dom Pedro II.¹⁸ Others included Senators Conkling and Blaine as well as Secretaries Fish and Bristow, who were all looking for the Republican nomination for the upcoming

¹³ White, *Fairmount, Philadelphia's Park: a History*, 62.

¹⁴ Post, *1876: A Centennial Exhibition*, 22.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Goldfield, *America Aflame: How the Civil War Created a Nation*, 573.

¹⁷ Post, *1876: A Centennial Exhibition*, 13.

¹⁸ Brown, *Year of the Century 1876*, 119.

Presidential Campaign.¹⁹ Guests joyfully accepted the arrival of Generals Sherman, Hancock, and McDowell, and especially cheered for Major General Phil Sheridan, who was a famous leader of the Union Army in the Civil War.²⁰ Other notables included J. Pierpont Morgan – a famous banker who would later finance General Electric and International Harvester – along with Cyrus W. Field – another financier known for being a founder of the New York, Newfoundland, and London Telegraph Company – and, of course, President Grant.²²²³

Not all dignitaries were as well received, however. Frederick Douglass, a famous African American leader, was also among those chosen to sit on the grandstand. Not being accustomed to an African American being allotted this kind of status, a police officer refused to admit Douglass to the stand. Luckily, New York Senator Roscoe Conkling intervened, which allowed Douglass to pass.²⁴ As Douglass finally reached the grandstand, he was also met with loud cheering.²⁵ Representatives from Australia to Japan, Austria to Egypt, and everywhere in between joined these prominent figures, as well as representatives from each state in America. The representative of New York State was none other than the famous publisher Frank Leslie.²⁶

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ *Credo Reference*, s.v. “Sheridan, Philip Henry.”

²² *Credo Reference*, s.v. “Morgan, John Pierpont.”

²³ “Cyrus W. Field (American Financier) -- Britannica Online Encyclopedia.”

²⁴ Brown, *Year of the Century 1876*, 119.

²⁵ Foner, Philip S. 1978, “Black Participation in the Centennial of 1876,” 283-284.

²⁶ *The Reader's Companion to American History*, s.v. “Leslie, Frank.”

Authors' Background

Frank Leslie (1821 – 1880)

Leslie was a very prolific engraver and publisher in America during the 19th-century. After moving to the United States from London in 1848, Leslie opened up his publishing company in New York.²⁷ He produced a variety of publications ranging from *Frank Leslie's Ladies' Gazette of Fashion* to *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*.²⁸ Leslie's work was admired not only because his publications were decorated with detailed engravings of what was going on in the world but particularly because of the speed at which his publications delivered information with along with images. By dividing a copper block of the illustration into multiple sections, Leslie was able to print and deliver news articles with pictures much quicker than his competitors.²⁹ Leslie's publications achieved wide fame throughout the United States for this speed. With Leslie's involvement in the Centennial Exhibition, it is no surprise that he began a new project dedicated to the Exhibition.

James Dabney McCabe, Jr. (1842-1883)

Approximately one year prior to the publication of Frank Leslie's *Illustrated Register*, James Dabney McCabe Jr., a well-known author during the 19th-century, published *The Illustrated History of the Centennial Exhibition*. Although he did work as the editor for *The Magnolia Weekly* of Richmond, VA for a time from 1863 to 1864, he did not spend as much time working with periodicals as Leslie.³⁰ However, McCabe was widely known as a "prolific hack

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ *The National Cyclopaedia of American Biography*, s.v. "Leslie, Frank."

²⁹ *The Reader's Companion to American History*, s.v. "Leslie, Frank."

³⁰ Davidson, *The Living Writers of the South*, 345.

writer” and for publishing a variety of works on Confederate Generals Lee, Jackson, and Johnston as well as war poems and dramas, which is likely a result of his fighting for the Confederacy in the Civil War.³¹ As Carla Waal discusses in her essay *The First Original Confederate Drama*, McCabe wrote a pamphlet called “Fanaticism, and its Results,” in which he warned of “the demon of abolition.”³² This statement is merely one example of McCabe’s dissent for the ideas of the North. McCabe demonstrated even more disrespect for the North by writing extensively on what he considered the atrociousness of New York City.³³ The illustrations McCabe uses in *The Illustrated History of the Centennial Exhibition* further portray all of his disdain for the North and abolition.

Publication Basics

Frank Leslie’s Historical Register of the Centennial Exposition, 1876

Capturing everything from the beginning of construction to Closing Day, Frank Leslie’s *Register* is “embellished with nearly 800 illustrations” that offer a glimpse into life at the Exhibition.³⁴ Leslie’s illustrations depict people and their reactions to exhibits as well as images of single items on display. These images capture many aspects of American society including minority groups and give America the appearance of being inclusive and welcoming. The first example of Leslie embracing minority groups in the United States is demonstrated in the full

³¹ Gohdes, “Wicked Old New York,” 176.

³² Waal, “The First Original Confederate Drama: The Guerrillas,” 462.

³³ Gohdes, “Wicked Old New York,” 177.

³⁴ Norton, *Frank Leslie’s Historical Register of the United States Centennial Exposition, 1876*, Title Page.

page, eye-catching color illustration featured at the very beginning of the *Register*. The illustration depicts three white women, a Native American man, and an African American woman on a hill looking over the United States. The inclusion of minorities is further exemplified in the pictures of different nations represented, the Women's Pavilion, and African Americans at the Exhibition.

Today, approximately 240 copies of Leslie's book are available from libraries across the world. However, when the *Register* was first produced in 1877, it was distributed in various ways making it widely accessible to consumers. Due its size, people were able to purchase the book in ten different volumes.³⁵ This made the *Register* accessible regardless of buyers' economic class because they were able to purchase the book as they had the money and have it bound together after obtaining all of the volumes. Looking through the *Register* today, readers will find many variations of the publication due to the different purchasing methods. Depending on the version purchased, the book may include different covers, binding style, and illustration size, as well as the inclusion or exclusion of an index, title page, and prologue. Clearly the accessibility of the *Register* was important to Leslie. In contrast to publications about previous exhibitions such as those in London and Paris, Leslie intended for his book to be "within reach of every one."³⁶

The Illustrated History of the Centennial Exhibition

³⁵ This information found by searching for the title on WorldCat

³⁶ Norton, *Frank Leslie's Historical Register of the United States Centennial Exposition*, 1876. Preface.

Prior to the close of the Exhibition in 1876, McCabe published his history of the Exhibition. About 400 original copies of this publication are still in circulation, although this publication was later reprinted in 1975 in celebration of America's bicentennial. McCabe's goal with his publication was to provide a detailed and accurate account of the Exhibition. As the title suggests, the *History* includes many illustrations of the Exhibition – about 300 in total.³⁷ However, the *History* focuses more on buildings and specific exhibits than the people involved in the planning of the Exhibition and its visitors. Nevertheless, Having fewer images and focusing on exhibits as opposed to people does not account for McCabe's exclusion of women and African Americans. McCabe still incorporates many illustrations with visitors that are dominated by white men. With the *History* being published prior to the close of the Exhibition, the book functions not only as a memoir but as a guide for those who were planning their visit to Philadelphia. The original printing was “comprised in one large Octavo volume” and “issued by subscription only, and not for sale in the book stores.”³⁸ Buyers could purchase it for three dollars and fifty cents bound in “extra fine satin cloth” or “in library style” for four dollars.³⁹ Thus, McCabe's book was also made widely available to the public. By mentioning in the preface that his book is intended for the “intelligent visitor,” McCabe makes a significant distinction in his audience.⁴⁰ This is the first of many examples in which McCabe is not as inclusive as Leslie.

Similarities & Differences in Organization & Content

³⁷ This information found by searching for the title on WorldCat

³⁸ McCabe, *The Illustrated History of the Centennial Exhibition*, 877 & Title Page.

³⁹ *Ibid.* 877.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, Preface.

Beyond the similarities and differences in publication basics, many points of comparison and contrast also lie in the organization and content of each book. These points must be understood first in order to analyze the similarities and differences between the portrayal of women and African Americans in each publication. The biggest difference in organization is that Leslie did not divide his writing into chapters as McCabe did. This makes Leslie's book slightly more difficult to navigate, although the *Register* does include a small index. However, both books follow a similar timeline beginning prior to the Exhibition (discussing the previous world's fairs) with the planning of the Centennial Exhibition, its Opening Ceremony, what was on display, and the Closing Ceremony.

Offering specific details about how the fairgrounds were built, the work of the laborers, and descriptive accounts of each exhibit, Leslie's *Register* offers more information in general about the Exhibition than McCabe, who provides many of these details in a broader, watered-down fashion. With this being the case, McCabe's book is perhaps more enjoyable to read assuming the reader is looking for an overview of the Exhibition rather than some of the nitty-gritty details.

Finally, and possibly the most important point of similarity, is the use of illustration. The mid-19th-century saw the rise of photography; however, printers had not yet developed the technology to print photographs into newspaper publications. Instead publishers, like Leslie and McCabe, sent workers to draw pictures of what was happening at various events. Illustrators then engraved their drawings onto wood and copper blocks and printed them onto the periodicals. Illustrations could be printed using many techniques including lithograph, etching, and engraving. Leslie and McCabe primarily used the techniques of etching and engraving. Although Leslie and McCabe both incorporated copious amounts of illustrations in their

publications – even advertising this trait within the titles of each book – the way that the images portray American society is quite different. One aspect of American society that the books portray differently is the role of women.

Women's Role in the Centennial Exhibition

Women played a very important role in the Exhibition. Under the leadership of Eleanor Gillespie, the great granddaughter of Benjamin Franklin, a group of women formed the Women's Centennial Executive Committee. The Committee raised \$126,000 for the treasury of the Board of Finance and assisted with marketing



Image of the Women's Committee from *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Historical Register of the Centennial Exposition*,

the Exhibition to the public.⁴¹ The Women's Committee felt that it was important for the Main Building to display exhibits from across the world. The Committee raised enough global awareness that they lost their own spot in the Main Building because so many countries wanted to represent themselves at the Exhibition. This, however, did not deter the women. Instead, in four months' time, they raised \$30,000 to build the Women's Pavilion, which stood in Fairmount Park west of the Horticulture building.⁴² The Committee used this pavilion to raise awareness of women's influence on American culture by displaying a variety of exhibits by women ranging from their contribution to literature to their impact on technology.

⁴¹ Norton, *Frank Leslie's Historical Register of the United States Centennial Exposition*, 1876, 36.

⁴² McCabe, *The Illustrated History of the Centennial Exhibition*, 218.

Each publication fails to mention the true motive behind women's participation in the Exhibition. Although the United States had come a long way since its independence, many Americans still considered women inferior to men. By having their own pavilion, women were able to share pamphlets about the women's suffrage movement and use the Exhibition as a platform to reach out to thousands of people about the importance of female equality. However, some scholars, such as Gary Nash in his book *First City: Philadelphia and the Forging of Historical Memory*, argue that the Women's Committee did not use the Exhibition to its full potential. For example, the National Woman Suffrage Association sent an exhibit to be displayed in the Women's Pavilion. According to Nash, the Women's Committee "tucked" the exhibit away "where the public could hardly find it."⁴³ Although, this does validate Nash's argument, recognizing that the exhibits within the Pavilion all symbolized the growing importance of women in American society is more significant than whether or not women's suffrage was overtly represented.

Besides submitting an exhibit to the Women's Pavilion, the Suffrage Association also asked for a role in the Fourth of July program. However, male organizers denied the Suffrage Association any form of participation. In protest, Suffrage Association member Susan B. Anthony forced herself onto the stage and gave the Vice President a copy of a *Woman's Declaration of Rights* and the *Articles of Impeachment Against the United States*.⁴⁴ This back and forth between the Suffrage Association and the men of the Centennial Committee as well as the building of the Women's Pavilion are only two examples of how women were fighting for an

⁴³ Nash, *First City: Philadelphia and the Forging of Historical Memory*, 274.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 274-275.

equal role in society. the differing views of women's equality, active participation, and innovation at the Exhibition are represented throughout the images and texts of Leslie and McCabe's books.

Leslie and McCabe's publications do share a couple of similarities regarding their discussion of women: these include having a specific section of each book dedicated to women as

well as recording the prayer given by Bishop Matthew Simpson, a bishop in the Methodist Episcopal Church

and the sole religion leader on the grandstand, at the Opening Ceremony; in it he said:⁴⁵

We pray Thy benediction especially on the women of America, who for the first time in the history of our race take so conspicuous a place in a national celebration. May the light of their intelligence, purity and enterprise shed its beams afar, until, in distant lands, their sisters may realize the beauty and glory of Christian freedom and elevation.

Simpson is very forward with his acknowledgment of women's work and place in society and sheds a positive light on women in America by encouraging them in their growth. Although both books do include this prayer and devote a portion of their text to female efforts, the way Leslie and McCabe portray women is profoundly different. In Leslie's *Register*, images depict women as active participants in the Exhibition, and the text describes more details of how women were involved. McCabe's *History*, on the other hand, rarely focuses on women in its illustrations and provides little detail on female participation.

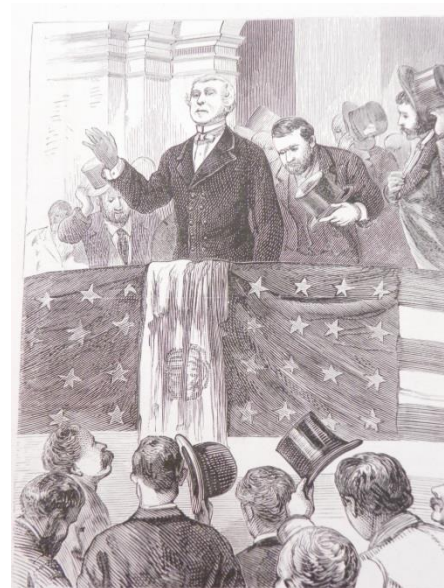


Image of the Bishop Simpson from *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Historical Register of the Centennial Exposition, 1876*

⁴⁵ Rowe, Kenneth E. "Discovery."

Analysis of Images & Text from Frank Leslie's Illustrated Register of the Centennial Exposition, 1876

Many images – too many to mention all examples – throughout Leslie's *Register* attest to the involvement of women at the Exhibition. A few illustrations of different exhibits, such as the fur and confectionary displays, depict women as the sole viewers of the exhibit. Although the main focus of these images is the individual exhibit – as it takes up a greater portion of the illustration and the women are not directly facing the viewer – having women as the only people present shows that women were important visitors of the Exhibition. Other images in the *Register* illustrate women as the focal point. Two images that particularly stand out among the rest include one of a woman in a wheelchair who is viewing some of the Chinese wares and another of a woman playing with her daughter at one of the weapons exhibits. Although both images take up the majority of the page, and the women are clearly the focal point of the illustration, these images do not appear to be significant. Within the context of American society at the time, however, the

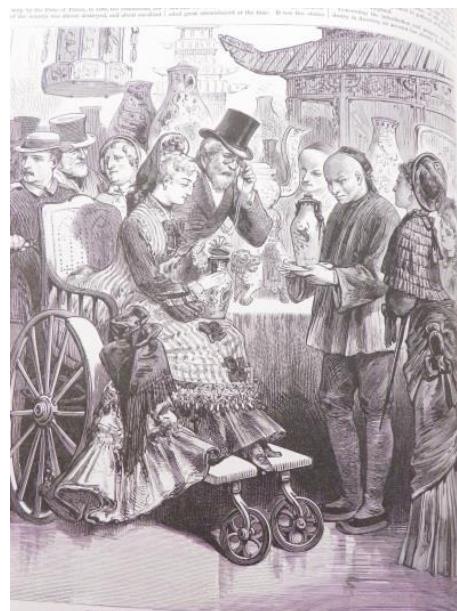


Image of women from *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Historical Register of the Centennial Exposition, 1876*

incorporation of so many pictures of women is fascinating. The inclusion of women in the images exemplifies the important role they were taking on in society: a role that embraced the innovative spirit of America and was willing to make a stand for female equality.

One way that women's innovation is highlighted in Leslie's *Register* is through the illustration and description of the Kindergarten Exhibit in the Women's Pavilion. In this image, two women are intently teaching a lesson to a table full of children. A group of spectators is observing the classroom in the background.



Image of the Kindergarten Exhibit from *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Historical Register of the Centennial Exposition*,

Incorporating kindergarten into the school system

was an emerging idea in the 19th-century. The United States' school system had not yet adopted the new teaching philosophy created by Friederich Froebel, who first introduced the idea in Germany in 1837.⁴⁶ By demonstrating this idea at the Exhibition, Leslie states that the Women's Committee may have caused schools to "introduce the system where it [was presently] unknown."⁴⁷ Of course, Leslie does not show only women's prominence in this one instance: he also features their participation in his discussion of the Women's Day celebration.

Not only were members of the Women's Centennial Committee and the Woman Suffrage Association involved in the Centennial Exhibition, but women across the United States played an important role as well. Leslie discusses how it was "naturally noticeable" that more women were at the Exhibition on November seventh not only because of the Women's Day reception, but also because it was Election Day: thus, the majority of men were away at the polls.⁴⁸ Leslie's

⁴⁶ Norton, *Frank Leslie's Historical Register of the United States Centennial Exposition*, 1876, 158.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 267.

mention of the Women's Day celebration demonstrates that women were not willing to accept a second rate place in society behind men. Even though women were unable to vote, partaking in Women's Day shows that they were still active members of society. The idea of celebrating Women's Day on Election Day was a genius idea by Gillespie and the members of the Women's Committee. Election Day, being a day that emphasized women's inferiority and lack of political power in society, made a perfect platform to spread the word of women's suffrage.

Through his use of a multitude of images and portions of text highlighting women's involvement at the Exhibition, Leslie's *Register* presents the ways in which women of the 19th-century were innovative and actively involved in American society. Leslie does this by not only featuring women in many of his illustrations but by discussing specific ways in which women were pioneering ideas like kindergarten and participating in special events dedicated to themselves such as the Women's Day celebration. These are only a few of the examples within Leslie's *Register* that demonstrate this view of women in society. However, this positive and outgoing portrayal of women was not the only mindset present in the United States in 1876.

Analysis of Images & Text from The Illustrated History of the Centennial Exhibition

McCabe shines a very different light on women at the Exhibition. The illustrations in McCabe's *History* do not put women in the spotlight. The *History* does not even include an illustration featuring a woman in his section dedicated to the Women's Pavilion. Rather, McCabe's illustrations depict women as either small and obscured or with their backs facing the viewer. This representation of women supports the common idea that women were not worthy of an equal role in American society.

The discussion of women in McCabe's text also supports the idea of women's inferiority. In the Women's Pavilion, Emma Allison operated a six horsepower engine that powered the

machinery in the Pavilion.⁴⁹ Rather than discussing this as an example of women's innovation, McCabe comments that "if [Miss Allison] did nothing else, [she] offered an example worth following to the engineers of the male sex in the neatness of her dress and the perfection of cleanliness exhibited in both engine and engine-room."⁵⁰ McCabe's further explanation of the Women's Pavilion does not recognize women for their achievements but more so records the items on display with little regard to their significance.

Considering the contributions women had made to society, McCabe's representation of women is poor and lacking in content specifically when compared to Leslie's *Register*. Unlike Leslie, McCabe makes no mention of the Kindergarten Exhibit or the Women's Day celebration. The combination of these two different portrayals of women is not unique to the Exhibition. Rather, Leslie's *Register* and McCabe's *History* demonstrate the ways that women were viewed in society as a whole. Some Americans embraced women's suffrage, whereas others maintained the tradition belief that women were unequal to men. Instead of allowing this issue to fade into the background of people's minds, women forced the issue of equality to the foreground through their involvement at the Exhibition. Unfortunately, women were not the only people facing injustice and inequality in 19th-century America. African Americans also faced oppression, which is seen in two different lights through Leslie and McCabe's publications.

African American's Role in the Centennial Exhibition

In a time focusing on freedom in the United States, African Americans were not explicitly excluded from the festivities of the Exhibition, but they certainly were not welcomed openly into the community. Because of this unfair treatment, African Americans participated

⁴⁹ McCabe, *The Illustrated History of the Centennial Exhibition*, 218.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

minimally in the Exhibition. Thus, neither Leslie nor McCabe dedicated a section in their books to African Americans. However, each publication reprinted the words of John Greenleaf Whittier's "Centennial Hymn" in their accounts of the Opening Ceremony. Whittier was a well-known poet and abolitionist in the United States.⁵¹ The "Centennial Hymn" combined these two passions to create what McCabe called "a fine, vigorous production, worthy of the genius of the poet."⁵² Various lyrics of the hymn allude to the importance of the emancipation of slavery by describing the "glad refrain" of "rendered bolt and broken chain," and "manhood never bought nor sold." The final line of the hymn states "let the new cycle shame the old" speaking of America's commitment to growth as a country and how the new era after Reconstruction would be increasingly better than the one before it. This bold move by Whittier to include slavery in his hymn brought forward the importance of African American equality to the forefront of the minds of spectators at the Exhibition from its beginning. Americans grappled with the "hot" topics of emancipation and abolition in different ways that were exemplified through the Civil War and differing views of the North and South. By addressing these issues through song, Whittier was able to share the message of how far the United States had come in the last decade with reaching the Founding Fathers' goals of a free nation where all men are created equal while also stressing the improvements that American society still needed to make.

Although Whittier discreetly included African Americans at the Opening Ceremony, many situations throughout the planning and executing of the Exhibition excluded African Americans. Philip Foner discusses African American involvement in his essay *Black Participation in the Centennial of 1876*, as does Mitch Kachun in *Before the Eyes of All Nations:*

⁵¹ O'Donnel, Patricia, "John Greenleaf Whittier."

⁵² McCabe, *The Illustrated History of the Centennial Exhibition*, 102.

African-American Identity and Historical Memory at the Centennial Exposition of 1876.

African American men were involved on some local and state committees to help plan exhibits.

Unfortunately, due to the lack of newspaper coverage, most of this information has been lost.⁵³

However, more information is available regarding the involvement of African American women.

When the Women's Centennial Committee formed, it broke off into several subcommittees divided by state. When this division occurred, some committee members invited black women to join; however, it was not long until the black women met hostility. White members of the committee told the black women they had "no right to work among white people" and segregated the committee.⁵⁴ The black members stepped down from their positions and publicized the mishap. Surprised by how the media latched on to this event, the white women apologized and invited the black women to rejoin the committee. Although some reconciliation occurred, black women never reached the true equality promised by the white women.⁵⁵

Though some African American men and women did find ways to participate on small committees, overall involvement was minimal. No records of African American participation on work crews or in attendance of the Exhibition exist. However, most scholars, such as Foner and Kachun, agree that African Americans were not involved on work crews. In a lecture given to his students at Yale University, David Blight also asserts that African Americans "were even

⁵³ Foner, Philip S, "Black Participation in the Centennial of 1876," 286.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 287.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

excluded from the construction crews.”⁵⁶ Because race was not recorded in attendance records, the number of African Americans who actually attended is also unknown. African Americans were not underrepresented only on crews and committees but also in actual exhibits. Minimal displays showcased works by or about African Americans.

The exhibits that displayed works of art most prominently portrayed African Americans. Of the thousands of art pieces at the Exhibition, very few African American artists had works on display. Two of the pieces were the “Death of Cleopatra,” a sculpture by Edmonia Lewis, an active artist her entire life and was the “first African American sculptor to receive international recognition.”⁵⁷ The other was the painting “Under the Oaks” by Edward Bannister. Considering that he did not go to Europe to study art because he wanted to “paint like an American,” Bannister was a very unique and famous black artist in the 19th-century.⁵⁸ “Under the Oaks” received a gold medal at the Exhibition; however, when the judges realized that Bannister was black, they considered taking away his award.⁵⁹ Conversely, white participants insisted that Bannister maintain the prize, which made Bannister the first African American to win an American national art award.⁶⁰ These two exhibits are examples of the few pieces that

⁵⁶ Blight, David W, “Exhibitions and Elections of 1876” (Hist-119: The Civil War and Reconstruction Era, 1845-1877, New Haven, Connecticut, April 24, 2008).

⁵⁷ *Women in World History: A Biographical Encyclopedia*, s.v. “Lewis, Edmonia.”

⁵⁸ Anonymous, “Edward Bannister (1826-1901) Painter.”

⁵⁹ Kachun, “Before the Eyes of All Nations: African-American Identity and Historical Memory at the Centennial Exposition of 1876,” 308.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

represented one role African Americans were playing in America. The exhibit that most directly represented emancipation and African American freedom was a sculpture by Francesco Pezzicar, an Austrian artist, called the “Freed Slave.”⁶¹ Leslie and McCabe each dealt with these exhibits in different ways: specifically the exhibits displaying the works of Bannister and Pezzicar.

Analysis of Images & Text from Frank Leslie’s Illustrated Register of the Centennial Exposition, 1876

Leslie addresses both Pezzicar and Bannister in the *Register*. Leslie includes an etching of Pezzicar’s statue “The Freed Slave,” which portrays an African American slave wearing tattered rags, breaking free of shackles, and holding a copy of the Emancipation Proclamation in his left hand. The illustration shows the statue surrounded by African Americans who are intently gazing at the figure. In the foreground of the picture is a mother who appears to

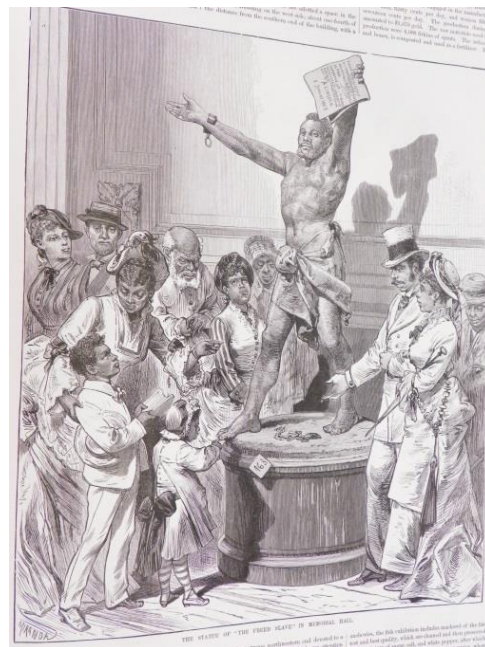


Image of the “The Freed Slave” from *Frank Leslie’s Illustrated Historical Register of the Centennial Exposition*,

be telling her young children about the statue. The reverence and solemnity surrounding the spectators resonates in this etching. Each person depicted seems to be drawn toward the statue and what it is saying about newfound freedom for slaves in America. Depicting African Americans in this role at the Exhibition demonstrates the popular Northern belief that African Americans deserved equality with white Americans. The illustration also recognizes the importance of remembering the history of slavery as seen in the way the mother shows her children the statue as well as the

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 307.

significance of how far African Americans had come in being able to participate in every day aspects of American life.

Leslie's *Register* also gives a fairly detailed account of the artists with work at the Exhibition. Leslie's discussion of Bannister's painting is another example of his support of African American equality. In his discussion of "Under the Oaks," Leslie treats Bannister as every other artist whose work was on display, giving him equal respect, analysis, and discussion. Leslie describes the detail and "wonderful closeness" of Bannister's work, and never mentions that he is black or makes any comment that would hint at his inferiority.⁶² Making no distinction of Bannister's skin color may be the most profound way that Leslie demonstrates the importance of equality for African Americans.

Leslie's *Register* also offers a different answer to the question of African American involvement on work crews. In an illustration depicting the construction of the Exhibition, an African American man is working side-by-side with a white man to remove stumps from the fairgrounds in order to make room for pathways. This illustration stands in direct opposition to the opinion that African Americans did not participate on work crews. Although this image contradicts popular belief, considering that the purpose of Leslie's *Register* is to

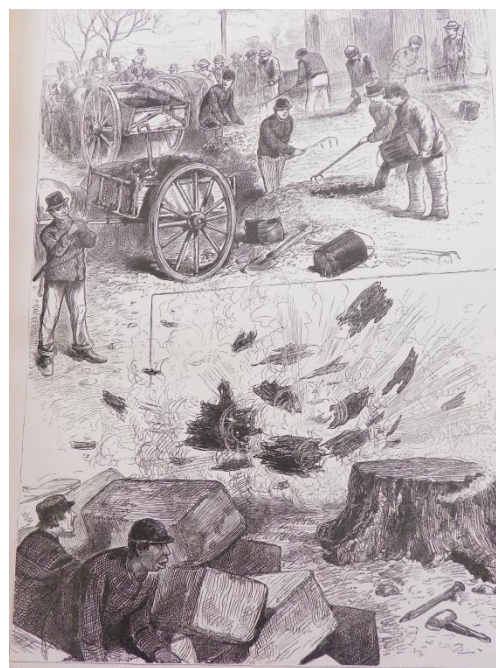


Image of African American man on work crew from *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Historical Register of the Centennial*

⁶² Norton, *Frank Leslie's Historical Register of the United States Centennial Exposition*, 1876, 204.

provide a “truthful” depiction of the Exhibition, it only makes sense that this is an accurate portrayal of African Americans on work crews.⁶³ Furthermore, Leslie does not include only this one illustration of an African American on a work crew, but he also incorporates another illustration of an African American man waiting in line with white men to get paid for his work on the construction of the Exhibition. Through these illustrations of work crews, and the etchings and discussion of art exhibits, the *Register* not only demonstrates African American’s involvement at the Exhibition but also reveals that popular belief about African American involvement at the Exhibition is incorrect.

Analysis of Images & Text from The Illustrated History of the Centennial Exhibition

Unlike the *Register*, McCabe’s *History* includes only two pictures of African Americans. One image is an etching of an African American young man pushing a cart with luggage for a white man. The white man in the picture is directing the young man where to take the cart with a look of disdain. This picture displays the

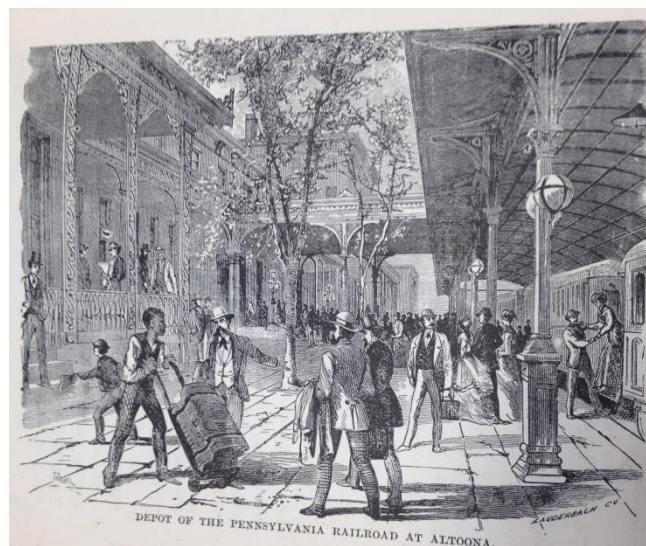


Image of the African American pushing cart from *The Illustrated History of the Centennial Exhibition*

side of American society that still saw African Americans as unequal to white citizens. The other is an illustration of “A Kentucky Home,” which is a painting by Eastman Johnson that depicts a similar sentiment.

⁶³ Ibid., Introduction

“A Kentucky Home” paints a very stereotypical view of African American life in the South, and is an entirely different discussion of art than what Leslie writes. McCabe’s Southern views are clearly portrayed in the way he talks about

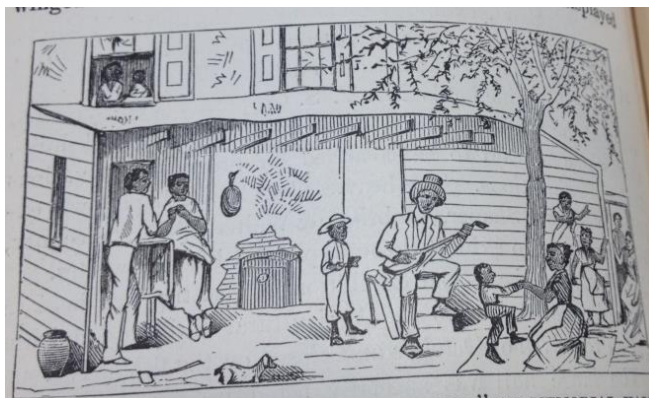


Image of “A Kentucky Home” from *The Illustrated History of the Centennial Exhibition*

this piece of art. Not only does McCabe highlight Johnson’s painting, but he describes it as being done in the “happiest style,” which shows that McCabe supports Johnson’s stereotype.⁶⁴ “A Kentucky Home” also illuminates an interesting perspective of 19th-century American society. The painting is of a poor African American family who is playing music and enjoying time together outside of their ramshackle house. In the background of the painting, a white woman is timidly entering the scene. This symbolizes the trepidation and fear members of the white society had upon entering an unfamiliar culture. The woman is curious but clearly hesitant about fully engaging in the family’s activities. By including this image, McCabe demonstrates the hesitancy of white Americans to allow African Americans an equal place in society.

The exclusion of images of African Americans is not the only important feature of McCabe’s book: McCabe’s omission of discussing Bannister is also noteworthy. Having won a medal, “Under the Oaks” was obviously an important display at the Exhibition. McCabe does admit that “the list of necessity omits many [American pictures] that were deserving of notice;” however, omitting a medal-winning painting seems odd and only further demonstrates the lack of

⁶⁴ McCabe, *The Illustrated History of the Centennial Exhibition*, 525.

inclusion in McCabe's publication. This lack of conclusion, however, is not merely a reflection of only McCabe's opinion of African Americans but mirrors the Southern belief that African Americans should not have the same freedoms as whites.

Conclusion

Writers of all levels recorded their experiences at the Centennial Exhibition with Leslie and McCabe being only two of these authors. Each author used his respective work to publicize his views of the role of women and African Americans in 19th-century America. Whether readers at the time recognized the incorporation of these views is unknown. The importance lies not in who read the books, but how each publication portrayed American society at the Exhibition. Where Leslie is critical and inclusive in his discussion of women and African Americans, McCabe is subjective and exclusive. These books are not simply souvenirs or memoirs of the Exhibition: they demonstrate important conflicting interpretations on how society was functioning at the time. An analysis of these publications reveals more than detailed accounts of exhibits and ceremonies at the Exhibition. Each book provides a window to analyze the end of the Reconstruction era and the United States during the Post-bellum period.

With clouds and rain blotting the sky on November 10, 1876, President Grant once again takes the stage. "I have now the honor to declare the Exhibition closed," he proclaims.⁶⁵ At four o'clock the sound of a gong rings in Machinery Hall signaling two engineers to turn off the Corliss engine.⁶⁶ As the great engine ceases and the hiss of machinery dies to a quiet monotony, visitors disperse from Fairmount Park, forever leaving behind the fair that served as a platform for so many. In the coming days buildings are torn down and exhibits find new homes. The

⁶⁵ McCabe, *The Illustrated History of the Centennial Exhibition*, 841.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

growing silence encompassing Fairmount Park is contradicted with the rising cries for equality coming from women and African Americans as the women's suffrage and Civil Rights movements continue to root themselves firmly in American society. A new era arises in the United States – an era encompassing the closing thoughts of Whittier's hymn: "Oh! make thou us, through centuries long, / In peace secure, in justice strong; / Around our gift of freedom draw; The safeguards of thy righteous law, / And, cast in some diviner mould, / Let the new cycle shame the old!"

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