

"Savages" in the White House and the 1904 World's Fair

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A few weeks back we had someone reach out to us who was doing research for an Asian-American Documentary Series for PBS. She asked what material we had related to Igorot chiefs making a visit to the White House. To be honest, this was the first I had heard of the visit, let alone the Igorot (Igorotte) people. The group's name refers to a number of different Austronesian ethnic groups dwelling in the mountains of the Philippines. And indeed, they did make a trip to the White House in 1904.

The public's fascination with the native Other had only increased after the Philippine American War and the ongoing Moro Rebellion, and the exhibits, as well as the press, played up their difference as if to justify the need for U.S. colonial intervention. During the Louisiana Purchase Exposition in St. Louis in 1904, one of the most visited exhibitions by fairgoers featured native Filipinos, including the Igorots, Bagobos, Moros, and others, living in villages. Thousands of small exhibits also featured Filipino industry, military, arts, and missionary efforts among other topics.

Capturing the curiosity of fairgoers was a young teen boy named Antero Cabrera, who was taken in at 12 years old by anthropologist Albert Ernest Jenks as an interpreter for research he was doing. At the time the field was still new, and a lot of the research conducted by early practitioners is now considered junk science and aligned with problematic eugenics theories used to establish racial hierarchies by using tactics like measuring skulls or using skin tone to explain behavior.

Jenks was appointed director of Philippine ethnology for the 1904 fair, and chose Antero as a member of the Igorot delegation and Igorot Village on display. Exhibition promoters advertised the group as backwards, naked dog-eaters. In reality, the mountain dwelling group had long cultural ties to their land and retained their independence for over 300 years. They were successful in fending off the Spanish from taking their land (and gold), and later against Japanese occupation during World War II. Yet, to the average American, these people who dressed, ate, and spoke differently seemed like freak show attractions. As Nancy J. Parezo and Don D. Fowler write in *Anthropology Goes to the Fair: The 1904 Louisiana Purchase Exposition*, the people on display served as the "primitive before" to contrast the "civilized after" of the fair and its attendees (p. 13). In treating its participants this way, the exhibit distorted people's image of the Philippines and erased the savagery being displayed by white military members in the name of civilizing these people who had not asked to be saved. After a public outcry over the indecency of Igorot's G-string coverings, Roosevelt

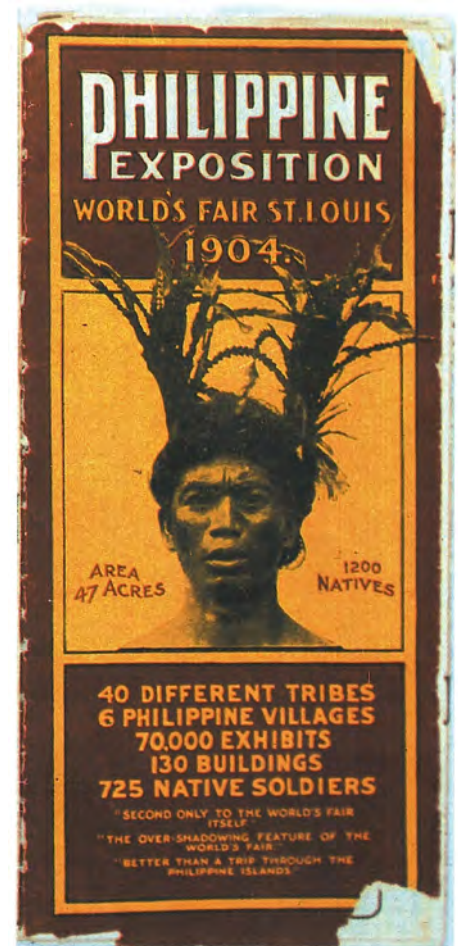


Image: St. Louis Public Library

wondered if they were "exploiting savagery to the detriment of civilization," as if seeing the mens' bodies could corrupt fairgoers. He ordered a brief halt to their traditional wear and required them to wear shorts until the uproar had passed.

In August of that same summer, Antero and a group of Igorot chiefs were invited to the White House to meet with Roosevelt. Antero served as interpreter for the group and performed a rendition of "My Country 'Tis of Thee." News of the visit ran in newspapers across the country, luring readers with headlines like "Savages in the White House," although this time dressed in silk coverings.

After the visit, Antero wrote a letter to Rev. Walter Clayton Clapp back home in the Philippines using a typewriter, a feat which again made headlines. Clapp and Antero would later create the first Bon-
toc-English dictionary.

Antero returned to the United States a number of times, both as part of performing troupes managed by unscrupulous showmen, as well as on exhibit at the 1905 Lewis and Clark Exhibition, and the Alaska-Yukon-Pacific Exposition in Seattle in 1909.



Image: Library of Congress

THE PITTSBURG POST.

Savages Visit the White House.

WASHINGTON, Aug. 2.—Picturesquely, but adequately garbed, a party of eight Moro and Igorrote chiefs, constituting a part of the Philippine exhibit at the St. Louis exposition, to-day paid their respects to President Roosevelt at the White House. Through Antero, a bright, 15-year-old Igorrote boy, who acted as interpreter, the Moro dattos and the Igorrote chiefs expressed their pleasure at being received by the President, and told him he might depend upon their loyalty to the American Government. President Roosevelt, after shaking hands with each one of his little brown visitors, replied that he was glad of the opportunity to welcome them to the National capital, and to assure them that the American Government desired to promote their welfare, prosperity and contentment. As the President's kindly expressions were interpreted to them by Antero, the dattos and chiefs nodded their heads in approval, and smiled their thanks. The reception took place in the President's private office and the adjoining cabinet room. While it was in progress, the members of the cabinet arrived to attend the regular semi-weekly meeting. Each in turn was presented to the Filipinos, who paid them the highest respect known to their people.

Before the conclusion of the reception, the chiefs, through Antero, presented to the President some handsome native gifts, including curious carved metallic pipes, a beautifully embellished spear and two shields, one of closely woven native grass, and the other of wood covered with hide. After they left the executive offices, the Filipinos were shown through the lower apartments of the White House.

The party arrived here via the Pennsylvania railroad at 8:30 to-day from St. Louis. Eight natives were in the party—Antonio, chief; Antero, interpreter; Liouoels, a priest, and Chonou, a judge, members of the Bontec tribe of Igorrottes; Bacassin, a chief of the Snyoc Igorrottes; Datto Facundo, a chief of the Moros, accompanied by Gallo and Lapuchi, two guards armed with native short swords with elaborately carved handles of ivory and gold. Frederick Lewis, one of the attaches of the Philippine exhibit, had charge of the Moros, while T. K. Hunt, governor of one of the Philippine provinces, conducted the Igorrottes.

The party began its sight-seeing at Pittsburg, where the members stopped for a few hours yesterday. The Filipinos were intensely interested in the big rolling mills. As soon as the party had breakfasted to-day, the natives, after donning the attire they always wear when they are to appear at an important function, were conveyed in carriages to the war department. The Moros were garbed in native costume of brilliantly colored Japanese silk blouse, and tightly fitting trousers, all elaborately figured, and wore turbans of the same materials, twisted loosely about their heads. The Igorrottes wore complete suits of spotted white duck, relieved by oriental scarfs of brilliant colors.

On arrival at the war department, the natives called first on Colonel Clarence Edwards, chief of the bureau of insular affairs, and held an informal reception while awaiting the arrival of Secretary Taft. Several of the party were acquainted with the secretary and manifested their pleasure when he appeared.

On their way to the White House, the natives were photographed on the east steps of the war department building. Here their native vanity cropped out. Antonio, when he realized what was going on, whipped his fine scarlet scarf from his waist, and twisted it about his head in a picturesque turban. The others adjusted their attire to conform to their notions of elegance and then smiled broadly while the cameras were snapping. Facundo, one of the big dattos of the Moros, was evidently nervous as he faced the camera brigade, and had to be admonished to stand still. He is a half brother of Rajah Mudda Mandi, the overland lord of the Samar Moros. He is regarded as one of the bravest men of his race and a great warrior, but he capitulated before the cameras.

The Igorrottes presented Colonel Edwards a set of miniatures of all the types of weapons used by their people. They were hand made by natives and were artistically arranged on a shield.

Image: Pittsburgh Post, August 7, 1904

IGORROTO USES TYPEWRITER.
Naked Savage Writes Fairly Good English on the Machine.

St. Louis, Sept. 2.—The rapidity with which Antaero, a member of the Igorrote village in the Philippine section, at the World's Fair, is mastering the English language and such up-to-date inventions as the typewriter, of which he knew nothing before he arrived at St. Louis, is shown by the following letter which he has written to one of his boy friends in the Philippines. The young Igorrote has been practicing on the new typewriter recently installed in the office of Governor Hunt. Antaero received very few lessons in the manipulation of the machine, and no assistance whatever in writing the letter. He said, "I write it about two hour." The letter follows .

"My Dear Clapp:
 "On thiraday I was went to Washington to see President Roosevelt, he is a nice man an he said I am very glad to see you now an five Igorrotes and three moros. an I saw where they make monny an gnu and I saw lots monny. I saw George Washington picture. an the boys go to school here in every morning. Ten Igorrotes boys and two moros girls and three nigrotose and five girls. Three

some months ago after being pronounced insane by the Probate Court. Lewis is in St. Louis, and is prepared to come to Nogales at any time, if wanted, while Swain, according to P. E. Murray, an intimate friend, is in San Francisco. It has been frequently asserted of late that Swain would not return to Nogales for trial, but Mr. Murphy states that it is not true; that he will be here whenever his presence is required.

REDUCED RATES.

From September 15th to 19th, inclusive, this company will sell tickets to San Francisco and return for \$35, return limit September 30th, 1904, on account of meeting of Sovereign Grand Lodge Independent Order of Odd Fellows, September 19th to 25th. Continuous trip will be required in going, but on return trip stop overs may be had in California.

CARL BOCK,
 Benton Agent.

tribe altogether, and the philippine scouts they are playing wery nice music every morning and every evening. we have two died here. One soyne and one tatepan. but the botoc they are leveing. Please write me a letter soon if you can.

Respectfully, yours,
ANTERO CABRERA.

Bisbee Daily Review, September 3, 1904



Igorot tribe members on display in Coney Island after the fair. Image: Library of Congress

For more on the history of the exposition and the Igorot Village, and the complexity of exhibiting humans different from us, read **Anthropology Goes to the Fair: The 1904 Louisiana Purchase Exposition** by Nancy J. Parezo and Don D. Fowler.

For more on the traveling shows of which Antero was a part, see **The Lost Tribe of Coney Island: Headhunters, Luna Park, and the Man Who Pulled Off the Spectacle of the Century** by Claire Prentice.

Click here to read the **Report of the Philippine Exposition Board to the Louisiana Purchase Exposition**. (If you do not see a scan of the book pages click on "See other formats.")