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Hairy Ainu and Lost Aryans: Differing Perceptions of the Ainu as shown by the Osaka and Louisiana Purchase Expositions

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HAIRY AINU AND LOST ARYANS: DIFFERING PERCEPTIONS OF THE AINU AS SHOWN BY THE OSAKA AND LOUISIANA PURCHASE EXPOSITIONS



Kutoroge of Piratori

Abstract: The Ainu of Northern Hokkaido, an indigenous group of unknown origins, drew the attention of both Meiji era reformers and Western anthropologists. Anthropological exhibits featuring living members of the Ainu would be featured at the Fifth Domestic Industrial Exposition of 1903 in Osaka and at the Louisiana Purchase Exposition of 1904 in St. Louis. Examining these two expositions, along with the events surrounding them, reveals the different ideologies through which Japan and the West viewed indigenous cultures.



Shutrateg, Wife of Kutoroge

The Louisiana Purchase Exposition, Race, and the West

- Westerners did not interact with the Ainu until the late 16th century.
- Over time, Europeans would refer to them as “noble savages,” a term which implied simplicity and peacefulness.
- By the 1700’s, the Ainu were compared to other indigenous peoples, claiming, “He[the Ainu] was far nobler than the Red Indian.”
- Racial theories become more pronounced in the late 1800’s, comparing their physical attribute to that of the Aryan European.
- This line of thought was prevalent in Frederick Starr’s *Ainu Group at the St. Louis Exposition*, stating, “... he resembles us, the whites of European Race.”
- Starr argues that the Ainu are the indigenous population of the Japanese islands, leading him to believe they are the ancestors of the Japanese.
- McGee, the leader of the anthropological exhibit at the St. Louis exposition, claims that the Ainu, “...magnified the racial characteristics of Japanese progress...” implying that the Japanese were able to modernize thanks to an Aryan heritage through the Ainu.
- This displays the West’s racial lens regarding indigenous populations, as well as explaining Japan’s success.



The Osaka Exposition, Culture, and the Japanese Empire

- The Japanese and the Ainu had interacted with each other for centuries.
- The conquest of Hokkaido did not officially begin until 1604, when Tokugawa Ieyasu granted the Matsumae clan exclusive trading rights.
- The Matsumae became highly involved in trade between the Ainu, making the Ainu dependent on their goods.
- Following the Meiji Restoration, several policies were instituted to crush Ainu culture, such as the banning of tattoos and the enforcement of agriculture.
- Despite these laws, there was no legal distinction between the Ainu as a people and the Japanese.
- In 1903, the Osaka exposition featured Kozo and his family, who came to raise funds for Hokkaido schools.
- Yozo sought to show the distinctions between the Ainu and the Japanese, while also showing that he could be a loyal subject of the Emperor.
- During this time, many Japanese were displeased by the showing of an Ainu at the exposition, claiming he was “new Japanese,” and thus deserved better treatment.
- During Starr’s journey one year later, the Japanese on many occasions disparaged the Ainu traveling with him.
- The Japanese believed the Ainu had potential to become Japanese, but their culture was inferior.

Conclusion: At the beginning of the 20th century, Japan viewed the Ainu through a cultural lens, regarding them as less civilized. However, the Ainu could become civilized, but only by being culturally assimilated and acknowledging Japanese supremacy. The West meanwhile saw the Ainu through a racial lens, referring to them as “lost Aryans.” Not only did this allow for the Ainu to be fit into a racial category, but it also helped European intellectuals rationalize Japanese success despite their “inferiority.” These two examples show the differences between Japanese and Western imperialism, and how the two cultures interacted with indigenous populations.