

Through A Clouded Mirror: Africa at the Pan-American Exposition

For five months, in 1901, as many as 98 men, women, and children from Benin, Togo, Gabon, and the Republic of Congo lived and worked in *DARKEST AFRICA*, the exposition's African village commissioned by the Buffalo Society of Natural Sciences, the Buffalo Museum of Science's parent organization.

Ethnological exhibits were very popular on the Pan-Am midway and millions of visitors paid to observe Africans, Filipinos, Mexicans, Eskimos, Hawaiians, Japanese, Germans, Italians, and Native Americans in settings that replicated their native environment. "While some walked away with a new understanding that similarities among people were more important than differences," explains Kevin P. Smith, associate curator of anthropology, "others saw only differences, reinforcing their prejudices and stereotypes."

When the Pan-Am closed in November, the Museum acquired its collection of more than 500 African artifacts. "This is the largest collection remaining from any of the African Villages that appeared in world's fairs during the late 19th and early 20th centuries," says Smith.

The Museum is planning a major exhibition in 2004–2005 to explore how these African Villages shaped the ways Americans understood Africa, its people, and African-Americans in the 20th century.

To mark the Pan-Am centennial, the Museum presents a glimpse of Smith's ongoing research and planning in a preview exhibit sponsored by the Margaret L. Wendt Foundation entitled, **THROUGH A CLOUDED MIRROR: AFRICA AT THE PAN-AMERICAN EXPOSITION.**

The exhibit is Among the questions this exhibit will ask are:

- What was the Buffalo Museum of Science's role in organizing the African Village?
- Why was it involved?
- Who were the African Villagers?
- Why were they here, what did they expect, how did they understand the African Village?
- How did they perceive Americans and the Pan-Am?
- What was Africa like in 1901?
- How did visitors to the Pan-Am perceive the African Village?
- How did the African Village transform lives?

Objects from the collection including manuscripts, masks, instruments, jewelry and ceremonial clothing will explore these questions. **The exhibit opens Friday, June 22**, the centennial anniversary of the day the African Village opened at the Pan-Am. The exhibit runs through Sunday, October 21. Museum hours are Tuesday through Saturday: 10:00am to 5:00pm. Sunday: Noon to 5:00pm.



Power figure (n'kisi), Bakongo culture. Democratic Republic of Congo or Republic of Congo. Wood, mirrored glass, pigments, resin, unidentified substances. Late 19th century. Exhibited at Pan-American Exposition, African Village, Buffalo, 1901. Buffalo Museum of Science, Anthropology Division.

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