

**ECONOMIC IMPERIALISM ON THE GLOBAL FRONTIER:
WILLIAM HENRY JACKSON'S PHOTOGRAPHS FOR THE
WORLD'S TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION, 1894-1897**

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation investigates William Henry Jackson's photographs for an international scouting and fact-finding mission, the World's Transportation Commission, and the multivalent meaning the images possessed for period patrons and audiences in four contexts. I argue that Jackson visually constructed a homogenous global frontier of economic imperialism that channeled and advanced burgeoning expansionist ideologies in American cultural and political realms during the 1890s.

Organized under the auspices of the Field Columbian Museum, the World's Transportation Commission consisted of five members, including Jackson, who traveled the world between October 1894 and March 1896 seeking information and artifacts regarding railroad history for display at the museum. The Commission also received funding from five major American railroad tycoons, as well as from *Harper's Weekly*, which published forty-five articles between February 1895 and August 1897 that featured 372 Jackson photographs. After returning, Jackson presented these pictures as colored lantern slides in a stereopticon lecture series in Colorado throughout spring 1897. Each chapter of this dissertation focuses on one of the four patrons and contexts for which Jackson intended his images and in which they were seen.

Chapter One investigates the intended function of these images as didactic objects within a public context for the Field Columbian Museum. The second chapter positions Jackson's work for five industrialist patrons as an imperial scouting report that studied existing colonial railway systems as models for possible future deployment of corporate interventions throughout Latin America. Chapter Three analyzes the popular cultural dissemination of Jackson's photographs in *Harpers Weekly* and the complicated intersections between photographer and editors working to captivate armchair tourists while forwarding notions of ostensible American moral superiority and global hegemony. Chapter Four examines Jackson's stereopticon lecture tour and his presentation of a hand-colored spectacle within the context of personal entrepreneurial gain. In this final, unmediated venue, Jackson shifted his photographic focus towards a seemingly candid, snapshot approach.

My analysis of these four contexts and applications demonstrate how Jackson pictorially destroyed existing worlds of indigenous customs and perspectives, and replaced them with a new, unified vision of an international commercial frontier ripe for exploitation.