

PERFORMANCE AND PROTEST: INUIT OF LABRADOR AND THE WORLD'S COLUMBIAN EXPOSITION, 1893. By NIGEL MARKHAM. St. John's: Memorial University Press, 2025. ISBN 9781990445293. xvi + 224 p., maps, b&w illus., appendices, index, bib., notes. Softbound. Cdn\$27.95. Also available in pdf and ebook format.

On 14 October 1892, sixty Inuit from Labrador sailed into Boston Harbor aboard the Schooner *Evelena*, along with their dog teams, tents, komatiks, kayaks, hunting weapons, and household implements. The Inuit had been recruited from communities along the Labrador coast by agents from the Seattle-based J.W. Skiles & Co. to populate an ethnological display called "Esquimaux Village" scheduled to open in 1893 at the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago, Illinois.

Nigel Markham has written an engaging account of the Inuit's experiences at the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition. The reader comes to understand some of the Inuit's motivations for undertaking the journey to Chicago, the racism and exploitation they faced at the exposition, their resourcefulness when dealing with adversities, and the joys and heartaches they experienced during and after their stay in Chicago.

In clear, accessible prose, Markham explains late nineteenth-century assumptions about race and culture and how they were operationalized at the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition. This two-year fair was conceived of as a celebration of the 400th anniversary of Christopher Columbus' arrival in the Americas. The idea of the Esquimaux Village and other living ethnological displays grew out of Harvard anthropologist Frederic Putnam's desire to show the world the cultural diversity of the Americas and what he and other scholars believed were the various stages of societal development and progress represented by the Indigenous people of the continent. The Esquimaux Village was intended to feature daily activities of what fair organizers believed to be one of the continent's most "primitive" people, all for the education and entertainment of the paying American public.

In addition to explaining the thinking behind the living exhibits at the exposition, Markham describes the context in which the Inuit would find themselves upon reaching their destination. Chicago was a young city embracing industrialization and all the economic and cultural trappings of a "civilization." It was promoted as emblematic of the United States' achievements as a sophisticated, advanced society that was superior to less complex cultures.

The book is organized chronologically, moving from the recruitment of Inuit to their reception and experiences in Chicago, and concluding by tracing their lives after the exposition closed. Markham takes the reader on the *Evelena*'s voyage up the Labrador coast with two J.W. Skiles & Co. agents on board who had been tasked with finding Inuit who fit the stereotype of unsophisticated, simple people for the Esquimaux Village. He explains the

context in which recruitment took place, describing the economic difficulties experienced in 1892 by Inuit living on the coast because of a poor hunting year. Also, he details family histories of Inuit the agents met and outlines the activities of western traders and missionaries who were resident in the communities the *Evelena* visited.

In addition, Markham briefly reviews the Labrador Inuit's long history of contact with westerners, important to this story because by 1892, the Inuit of Labrador had been in contact with westerners for over 300 years. The Inuit the J.W. Skiles & Co. agents encountered were astute at dealing with westerners, including Hudson's Bay Company factors and Moravian missionaries who, when the *Evelena* arrived, had been expanding their trading posts and mission stations along the northern Labrador coast and were competing for Inuit loyalty and trade.

The agents used financial incentives as their recruitment tools, and several Inuit families experiencing economic hardships in 1892 agreed to spend two years in Chicago in exchange for money, food and housing, and hunting outfits. The agents realized that the Inuit they met were more worldly than they had expected. Despite this, upon reaching the United States the agents and exposition personnel chose to exoticize the Inuit and characterize them as simple, primitive people from a distant land.

The Inuit's daily life in the Esquimaux Village and the demonstrations they performed for the public are described and illustrated with photographs of the time. Markham also explains how the exposition organizers and the media sensationalized and exploited events involving the Inuit, including births and funerals. Using various archival sources, Markham documents the physical deterioration of living conditions in Esquimaux Village, the Inuit's realization that they were being poorly compensated, and their belief that exposition demands on them were unreasonable.

The Inuit's growing dissatisfaction led to a revolt, journeys to court where their plight was taken up by sympathetic judges, and the media and public's growing awareness of the problems manifest in Esquimaux Village. Markham describes these developments in detail, as well as the fissioning of the Inuit group; some families left the fairgrounds and performed in a rival show, a few individuals found outside employment, while those who remained at Esquimaux Village extracted additional compensation for their performances. Markham does not simply document these developments; he explores how the image of savvy Inuit advocating for themselves conflicted with the stereotype promoted by exposition organizers.

The final chapter discusses what happened to those who returned to Labrador. Labrador communities were being ravaged by epidemics and several exposition Inuit returned home only to succumb to communicable diseases. The Moravians expressed their dismay at some of the attitudes members of the group had picked up while away and tried to dissuade people from leaving the coast. Also, exposition Inuit were erroneously blamed

for infecting people in Labrador with typhoid fever. This faulty assumption, as well as the desire to limit outsider access to the Inuit, persisted and in 1911 a law was passed in Newfoundland making it illegal to recruit Inuit from Labrador to perform services outside the region without official governmental permission.

Woven throughout the book are accounts of experiences of specific individuals and families, and these miniportraits reveal some very different ways the Chicago experience impacted people's lives. For instance, Zacharias Naemiup is first mentioned in the context of the *Evelena* recruitment voyage when the Moravians running the Hebron mission characterized him as a troublemaker because he challenged the terms of trade at their mission store. He is mentioned again in Chicago when he repeatedly defied exposition handlers and helped instigate the Esquimaux Village uprising. Markham also discusses Zacharias' family life upon his return to Labrador and his negative assessment of his experiences in the south. Readers can also follow the life of Esther, a pregnant 15-year-old in 1892 who gave birth in Chicago to Nancy Columbia, who became the fair's most famous baby. Esther's family performed throughout the United States, worked for Franz Boas at the American Museum of Natural History in New York City, and she and her daughter toured Europe before settling in the United States where Nancy Columbia became a film star.

The story of the Labrador Inuit who performed at the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition has been told in other publications. What distinguishes Markham's excellent book from earlier works is the extent to which he contextualizes the Inuit's experiences and the depth of archival research that went into detailed reconstructions of various parts of their story. In his telling, the Inuit's resourcefulness and adaptability become clear, as does the resentment many felt and the emotional hardships they experienced. This insightfully written, nicely illustrated, and exhaustively researched work should be read by anyone interested in the impacts of colonialism on Inuit and other Indigenous groups, or anyone working in a cross-cultural context, for it is more than an account of a group of Inuit who performed at the 1893 Chicago Exposition, it is also an important study of how ideological assumptions about race and ethnicity impact the way we relate to one another.

Susan A. Kaplan
 Director, The Peary-MacMillan Arctic Museum
 Professor of Anthropology
 Bowdoin College
 9500 College Station, Brunswick, Maine 04011, USA
skaplan@bowdoin.edu