

## "Beauty Types of Three Races"

Like most American fairs since the World's Columbian Exposition in 1893, the **AYP Exposition gave time and space to feminist causes**. Not only did the AYPE feature a special Women's Building, which still survives as the University of Washington's Cunningham Hall, but it **included a Woman Suffrage Day on July 7th and a National Council of Women Day on July 14th, both timed to coincide with the 41st Annual Convention of the National American Woman Suffrage Association which was held in Seattle that year.**

Other women-centered celebrations at the AYPE were more limited in scope, like Daughters of the American Revolution Day and Women's Christian Temperance Union Flower Mission Day. And still others were of a kind that feminists cannot have approved of, such as a contest for Pay Streak Queen and a Ballet of Beauties, although these, naturally enough and in spite of the puritanical attitudes of the AYPE's organizers, were enormously popular with less high-minded fairgoers.

Many local Asians (who were mostly Chinese and Japanese) must also have disapproved of beauty contests. After all, they came from cultures that prized feminine modesty, not to mention premarital chastity, and yet here they were in an environment where the white population would react negatively to more-modest-than-thou attitudes and where real social benefits could come from showing that one's younger womenfolk could be simultaneously as respectable and good-looking as the American debutantes whose portraits filled the newspapers of every major city.

Asians did of course distinguish between female entertainers and decent young ladies and would have had no objection to the former parading around in saucy Paris fashions while chatting with strange men of all nationalities. This must have been the attitude of resident Japanese toward the appearance in Seattle of the "ten tiny maidens" who "helped while away the hours" for American naval officers during the Great White Fleet's visit to Tokyo in 1908. In spite of the *Post-Intelligencer's* claim that these maidens, 16-22 years old, were "daughters of the most aristocratic families of ancient Nippon," it seems likely that they were professionals and, as such, uncontroversial in the eyes of local Japanese.

But what are we to make of the inclusion of a seemingly respectable Japanese girl, Miss Koyo, in the widely published photograph of a living AYP Exposition seal, as shown near the top of this web page? Or what of this photograph of "Beauty Types of Three Races," from a May 24 1909 issue of the *Post-Intelligencer*? It shows a white girl named Sophie De La Nux, a Honolulu bookkeeper whose father was connected to French nobility; a native Hawaiian girl, Elizabeth Victor, from Hilo on the Big Island; and a Chinese girl, Florence Ho, who was the first girl of her nationality to graduate from the prestigious Punahou School of Honolulu, now famous as the alma mater of Barack Obama. Was Florence Ho's family not horrified? How can they have reconciled traditional Asian family values with her appearing as a "beauty" in a Seattle newspaper?

It seems to us that American-based Chinese and Japanese, not to mention Filipinos, abandoned those values with surprising ease. Some must even have liked the idea of their daughters participating in such events. Soon after the close of the AYPE, Asian Americans were already organizing their own beauty contests – the first Miss Chinatown contest was held at San Francisco’s Panama-Pacific Exposition in 1915. The question is, why? How did it happen that immigrants from tradition-bound rural societies could have caved in so completely on an issue that one would think lay close to the core of their perceptions of cultural identity?

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