World's Fairs: A Global History of Exhibitions

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Since London's Great Exhibition of 1851, world's fairs and international expositions have been an important global cultural phenomenon that has defined progress and modernity for hundreds of millions of visitors. They have displayed the achievements of industrial civilization and the latest technologies, while at the same time reinforcing national and ethno-cultural hierarchies, with exhibits ranging from scientific discoveries to human zoos. The world's fairs have also generated an impressive amount of documentation and material artifacts. The sheer variety of materials produced in tandem with the fairs is well represented in this online resource, which makes accessible an abundance of digitized materials relating to the world's fairs from archives and libraries in Canada, France, the United Kingdom, and the United States, including the vast Donald G. Larson world's fair collection at California State University, Fresno. *World's Fairs: A Global History of Expositions* comprises not only official documents, correspondence, catalogues, and other publications from the fairs, but also diaries, souvenirs, posters, postcards, songs, music scores, and sound recordings of interviews and music. The interviews are fascinating and offer insights into how visitors experienced the world's fairs, or at least how they remembered their experiences.

Users gain access to materials regarding more than 200 international expositions held from 1851 to 2015 in locations ranging from London, New York, and Paris to Hanoi and Santiago de Chile. The collection's main focus, however, is nine case-study exhibitions, selected because of their importance but also, perhaps, because seven were held in North America and all but one offer lots of English-language materials for students in Britain and the United States: the Great Exhibition of 1851 (London); the 1876 Centennial International Exhibition (Philadelphia); the 1889 Exposition universelle (Paris); the World's Columbian Exposition of 1893 (Chicago); the 1904 Louisiana Purchase Exposition (St Louis); the 1915 Panama-Pacific International Exposition (San Francisco); the Century of Progress Exposition of 1933–4 (Chicago); the 1939–40 New York World's Fair; and Expo 67 (Montreal). There are interactive site plans for five of these exhibitions.

The collection is organized into six sections or tabs: 'Introduction', 'Fairs', 'Documents', 'Explore', 'Image gallery', and 'Help'. In the introduction, visitors can learn about the nature and scope of the collection, the editorial board, and the contributing institutions. They can also view the 'Editors' choice' of four documents that are deemed representative of the collection and offer interesting ideas for interpreting the materials it contains, such as 'The Comic Game of the Great Exhibition of 1851', a board game not unlike 'Monopoly', in which players sought to collect as many countries as possible while making their way around the board. Selecting the Fairs tab reveals short introductions to the nine case-study fairs and the option to search for

specific fairs or attractions.

The documents tab is the main section of the site and enables visitors to search the entire collection or some part of it by keyword and to filter the search by date, document type, country, archival source, etc. Advanced search options using Boolean operators are available, and there are a number of suggested 'popular search terms'. The documents are accompanied by bibliographical information and can be viewed as thumbnails or titles. By clicking on the document the visitor gains access to the original images, which can be enlarged, rotated or downloaded as a pdf. As a reviewer, I had only guest access to the site so could not test the pdf feature, but this is likely to be the easiest way to read the documents; I found it a bit difficult to read the documents in their original form using the zoom feature. To give some examples of searches, a test search using the suggested keywords 'indigenous peoples' from the list of 'popular searches' and restricted to materials pertaining to the 1904 Louisiana Purchase Exposition obtained 25 results, such as oral interviews with fair visitors, albums, scrapbooks, journals, etc. Most of the results appeared to be at least somewhat pertinent, but one, *World's Fair Bulletin*, volume 5, no. 11, had various references to 'peoples' and one reference to 'indigenous' plants of the Mississippi Valley, and nothing about 'indigenous peoples'. The search also failed to locate a very relevant pamphlet, 'Philippine Exposition: World's Fair, St. Louis 1904', which is in the collection and contains discussions and depictions of the display of different Philippine tribespeople at the 1904 fair. Another search, this time using another popular search term, 'Sputnik', gave excellent results that were all directly related to the topic, among them a scrapbook of newspaper clippings about the Soviet Union's participation in Expo 58, where models of the satellite were among the exhibits. The popular search terms, which include personal names and products, are merely suggestions and, as the website states, are 'provided as a starting point'. The use of more advanced search terms with Boolean operators or wild cards generally produced good results. Among the more unusual documents I came across was a free expo map that the Spokane Inter-Religious Committee for Soviet Jews handed out at that city's Expo 74, which had a postcard on the back addressed to the Soviet Embassy in Washington that fairgoers could post to express their support for the free emigration of Soviet Jews. It is a reminder of how groups that had nothing to do with the fairs could at times use them to convey their own messages. Some documents illustrate the afterlife of the world's fairs. For example, the collection encompasses publications concerning the Egyptian Court that was created in the Crystal Palace only after the building had been moved from Hyde Park to a south London suburb following the Great Exhibition, where it hosted various exhibitions, concerts and other entertainments until it was destroyed by fire in 1936.

Selecting the explore tab opens subsections containing essays on the world's fairs; sound recordings; interactive site plans of the fairs; introductory discussions about some of the key exhibits that have been integral to the expositions; biographical sketches of people connected to the world's fairs; suggested keywords and names for 'popular searches'; and external links to other collections and websites with materials on world's fairs. In the image gallery, visitors can download images from the fairs to a 'Lightbox' (again, my guest access as a reviewer did not allow me to test this feature, which could be useful for teachers or students in preparing visual presentations) or examine a selection of 3D images from various angles. The help section has a page-by-page guide to the entire collection, useful guidelines on searching for materials, information on fair use and copyright, and advice for using the materials in teaching.

The essays offer students a helpful introduction to the study of world's fairs. Robert W. Rydell provides an informative overview of the history and significance of the fairs, as well as of the efforts that began in 1912 to define and regulate them, leading to the establishment of the Bureau of International Expositions in 1928. He notes that what in the United States are called world's fairs are known today as world expos in most other countries, and argues that it is essential to take into account 'the political, economic, and social realities in which these events occurred'. Peter H. Hoffenberg discusses the linkages between the exhibitions and imperialism, noting that while the nineteenth and early twentieth-century world's fairs propagandized imperial ideologies, they could also generate anti-imperial interpretations amongst contemporaries that undermined the imperial narratives. Cristina Carbone explores the architectural legacy of the fairs and identifies some buildings that have survived. She points out that both the skyscraper and department store are descended from the Great Exhibition's Crystal Palace, while Frank Lloyd Wright and other architects

were influenced by the Japanese pavilions they saw at world's fairs. Sarah Louise Coletta explains why many fairs never got past the planning stage, highlighting the various social, economic, and political circumstances that led to their success or failure. Tracey Jean Boisseau examines how world's fairs have been 'crucial sites for the conveyance of ideas about gender and women to global audiences'. Focusing on the 'woman question' at the Woman's Pavilion at the 1876 Philadelphia Centennial International Exhibition, she offers students a useful guide to interpreting the documents of the world's fairs in the context of women's history, and an overview of the scholarly literature.

This is a valuable resource for students, teachers, and researchers, including but by no means limited to those interested in the history of design, technology, architecture, imperialism, nationalism, gender, anthropology, and consumer culture. It is easy to use and will appeal to many general readers. The primary source materials, most of which are relatively rare and only to be found in archives or large research libraries, are well-chosen. Making them available digitally for research and teaching affords access to sources that few students would be able to see in print, such as the multitude of visual images contained in in this collection. That said, it should be noted that a limited number of published records relating to 19th and early 20th-century fairs can be accessed free online through Gallica or Google Books.

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