

Envisioning the Nation

The Early American World's Fairs and the Formation of Culture

Bearbeitet von
Astrid Böger

1. Auflage 2010. Taschenbuch. 321 S. Paperback

ISBN 978 3 593 38790 1

Format (B x L): 14 x 21,3 cm

schnell und portofrei erhältlich bei


DIE FACHBUCHHANDLUNG

Die Online-Fachbuchhandlung beck-shop.de ist spezialisiert auf Fachbücher, insbesondere Recht, Steuern und Wirtschaft. Im Sortiment finden Sie alle Medien (Bücher, Zeitschriften, CDs, eBooks, etc.) aller Verlage. Ergänzt wird das Programm durch Services wie Neuerscheinungsdienst oder Zusammenstellungen von Büchern zu Sonderpreisen. Der Shop führt mehr als 8 Millionen Produkte.

Leseprobe

Introduction:

The early American World's Fairs as Sites of Culture Formation

It is frequently argued that world's fairs have lost much of their relevance today as most people-at least in western societies-have access to travel facilities, television and the internet, making such giant spectacles appear increasingly superfluous. And although the world's fair genre is clearly alive and well, to which the most recent world expositions staged in Aichi (2005), Zaragoza (2008), and Shanghai (2010) testify, the organizers of such massive efforts have always had to legitimize, and all too often defend, the huge expense involved. A case in point was Germany's first (and in all likelihood, last) world's fair, Hannover's Expo 2000, which sparked a prolonged public debate largely over its intricate financing scheme. Apart from having to compete with other media, moreover, the focus of the fairs themselves has changed considerably since their inception in the mid-nineteenth century. In short, whereas today's world's fairs are basically spectacles by globally operating corporations loosely united by a universal theme such as "Humankind-Nature-Technology" (2000) or "Water and Sustainable Development" (2008), the early world's fairs were organized as competitions between different nations, without such universal themes serving as a unifying umbrella. They were thus considered, in President McKinley's famous dictum, "time-keepers of progress," with each participating nation aiming to come out ahead in the race for world leadership.

Although exhibiting distinct, national cultures in peaceful competition with each other, the nineteenth century world's fairs were also intended as nationalizing spectacles. The American expositions under consideration in this study, ranging from 1853 to 1915, took place in a core period of nation formation and played, in fact, a seminal part in it. Although there were numerous other international exhibitions staged in America following the success of the World's Columbian Exposition in 1893, this study limits itself to the principal ones representing primarily national rather than regional interests, i.e., the 1853 Exhibition of the Industries of all Nations in New York, also known as the New York Crystal Palace; the 1876 Philadelphia Centennial Exhibition; the 1893 Chicago World's Columbian Exposition; the 1904 Louisiana Purchase Exposition in St. Louis, and finally the 1915 San Francisco Panama Pacific International Exposition. With the exception of the very first one, which lacked the required international participation and attendance, these fairs simultaneously represent the American contribution of so-called 'universal class expositions' officially recognized by the Bureau of International Expositions founded in 1928 to oversee and regulate international expositions.

Broadly speaking, the early American expositions have to be placed in the context of nationalism and imperialism, whereas the world's fairs after 1915 went in the direction of globalism and the ensuing competition of opposing ideological systems rather than of individual nation states. Thus, communism and fascism emerged as alternative ideologies to capitalism, which had been the uncontested economic model of earlier world expositions. In the aftermath of World War II, then, they have come to represent a world order based on the seemingly free flow of capital and people, increasingly de-emphasizing national borders. More specifically, however, each fair has to be

placed within its own historical context to be properly understood; or, following Fredric Jameson's well-known dictum, we must "always historicize."

The first American world's fair, the New York Crystal Palace, staged just two years after the original London Crystal Palace, attempted to promote national unification at a time of growing tension between the northern and the southern states in the period leading up to the Civil War. Though emphasizing world peace, the fair focu