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The 1904 World’s Fair: Intended Impact of the U.S. Government Building Versus Visitor Experience

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Introduction
The 1904 World’s Fair has long been known as a highly significant event in American history. Recent historians have turned their focus regarding this topic to the experience of the Fair’s Anthropological displays, however, this research investigates what the Government intended for visitors to experience in the Government Building and its War Department and Navy Department exhibits. Furthermore, I use the findings to form a more nuanced analysis on whether the visitors experienced this. These conclusions contextualize American society during the turn-of-the-century.

Methodology
By examining the Souvenir Guide to the Government Building and the official World’s Fair Bulletin, I was able to answer my first question. These sources provided detailed information about the building, the displays, and their intended purposes. Additionally, I analyzed three diaries/memoirs written by visitors to the World’s Fair and several newspapers from that time to evaluate the Government Building’s influence on visitors. These accounts and depictions enabled me to draw conclusions on the impact of the Government Building on those that attended the Fair.

Through analyzing official sources from the Louisiana Purchase Exposition Company and the U.S. Government, one can conclude that the Government Building and its exhibits were used to display American superiority and dominance. Specifically, the features of the building and its numerous displays of military prowess were employed to impose this message on Exposition visitors.

Fair visitors picked up on the impositions of the Government Building and were generally highly impressed with the Government’s displays. By analyzing newspaper articles, diaries, and photographs, one can conclude that the exhibits both strengthened and promoted a fond sentiment of American government and military might. They were particularly interested in the U.S.’s ability to wage war via the displays showcasing weapons, uniforms, naval vessels, and maps.

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