

University of Missouri, St. Louis

IRL @ UMSL

Undergraduate Research Symposium

UMSL Undergraduate Works

January 2024

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

Dalton King
dknkd@umsystem.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://irl.umsl.edu/urs>



Part of the [Social History Commons](#), and the [United States History Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

King, Dalton, "The 1904 World's Fair: Intended Impact of the U.S. Government Building Versus Visitor Experience" (2024). *Undergraduate Research Symposium*. 157.

Available at: <https://irl.umsl.edu/urs/157>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the UMSL Undergraduate Works at IRL @ UMSL. It has been accepted for inclusion in Undergraduate Research Symposium by an authorized administrator of IRL @ UMSL. For more information, please contact marvinh@umsl.edu.

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

Dalton G. King, Department of History, University of Missouri – Saint Louis

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.

What was the intended impact of the Government Building and its displays?



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.

What was the impact of the Government Building and its displays on World's Fair 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.

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.



GOVERNMENT BLD'G.

Background Image: Image: Boehl, Emil "1904 World's Fair United States Government Building" 1904. Louisiana Purchase Exposition Collection: Original 8x10 GPNs of World's Fair: Plates 116-149, Missouri Historical Society Archives, Saint Louis, Missouri

Image: Koster, F.J. "1904 World's Fair U.S. Government Gun Exhibit" 1904. Louisiana Purchase Exposition Collection: Original 8x10 GPNs of World's Fair: Plates 180-239, Missouri Historical Society Archives, Saint Louis, Missouri

Literature Cited – Primary Source Collections

Adele Quinette Phelps World's Fair Chronicle, 1903-1904
Edward V.P. Schneiderhahn Diaries, 1890-1913
Louisiana Purchase Exposition Collection
Louisiana Purchase Company Records
Philibert Family Papers
Exposition Records of the Smithsonian Institution and the United States National Museum
Louisiana Purchase Exposition – The 1904 St. Louis Exposition and World's Fair
The Caldwell Tribune, 1904. • *The Evening Star*, 1903. •
The Hocking Sentinel, 1904. • *The Omaha Daily Bee*, 1903. •
The Vinita Weekly Chieftain, 1904. • *World's Fair Bulletin*, 1902-04.

Literature Cited – Secondary Sources

Gilbert, James. *Whose Fair?: Experience, Memory, and the History of the Great St. Louis Exposition*. Chicago, Illinois: University of Chicago Press, 2009.
Parezo, Nancy, and Don Fowler. *Anthropology Goes to the Fair: the 1904 Louisiana Purchase Exposition*. University of Nebraska Press, 2007.
Rydell, Robert W. *All the World's a Fair: America's International Expositions, 1876-1916*. Chicago, Illinois: University of Chicago Press, 1984.
Rydell, Robert W., John E. Findling, and Kimberly D. Pelle. *Fair America: World's Fairs in the United States*. Smithsonian Institution Press, 2000.