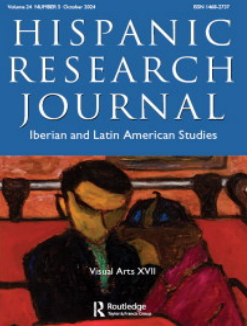


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# "The Spanish Element in Our Nationality": Spain and America at the World's Fairs and Centennial Celebrations 1876–1915 and España y América: Construcción de la identidad en las exposiciones internacionales (1876–1915)

**By M. Elizabeth Boone. State College, PA: Penn State University Press, 2019. Pp. 272 (hardback). £92.90. ISBN 9780271083315. and By M. Elizabeth Boone (traducción de Juan Santana Lario). Madrid: Centro de Estudios Europa Hispánica, Center for Spain in America, 2022. Pp. 298 (hardback). €40. ISBN 9788418760075**

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**España y América: Construcción de la identidad en las exposiciones internacionales (1876–1915)**. By M. Elizabeth Boone (traducción de Juan Santana Lario). Madrid: Centro de Estudios Europa Hispánica, Center for Spain in America, 2022. Pp. 298. €40 (hardback). ISBN 9788418760075.

"Impressed by New England writers and schoolmasters, we tacitly abandon ourselves to the notion that our United States have been fashioned from the British Islands only, and essentially forms a second England…. which is a very great mistake." So wrote Walt Whitman in an 1883 essay which lends its title to the original English edition of Professor Boone's immense study concerning what and who constructed the history of the United States. From her examination of imagery and promotional writing attached to specific world fairs we are treated to some disturbing insights about the origins of US political culture.

What part did such bombastic exhibitions play in the invention of North American history? The evidence examined here reveals how influential these public shows became. Passionate claims, from the US-British "special relationship," to the demonization of Mexican immigrants, to white Protestant evangelicals in the present-day Republican Party, emerge with frightening clarity from long-forgotten events originally intended to be celebratory.

The first and most significant of these entertainments was the 1876 Centennial at Philadelphia, the city in which the Declaration of Independence had been signed one hundred years earlier, and here, in spite of the efforts of Spanish designers, artists, architects, administrators, and politicians, Spain was determinedly "written out" of American history (42). With the growth of aggressive publicity generated by this huge spectacle, the United States became essentially a democracy inhabited by Protestants; its origins firmly rooted in Britain. The whole event began badly for Spain. Spanish dignitaries arriving on New Year's Day 1876 were met by a hostile press and little space allotted to Spanish exhibits. The welcoming banquet in New York was dominated by Catalan Nationalists; the final arrangement of the Spanish Pavilion had its entrance placed in an obscure position and the total square footage provided for the exhibits was less than that allowed to other European countries so two thousand items from Spanish art and industry were jammed into an area without adequate means of display.

Subsequent world fairs appear to have continued the taste for Spanish marginalization. Understandably perhaps, the Universal Exposition of 1888 held in Barcelona was dominated by Catalan supremacy despite its supposed function of serving "as a means by which Madrid's Restoration government sought to define and defend its notion of Spain" (50). The 1889 Paris World Fair organized Republican France and Restoration Spain into a visual confrontation between modernity and tradition, with designs for the Eiffel Tower set against Spanish "Romantic stereotypes" (70) with posters, photographs, and tourist advertisements displaying gypsies, Flamenco dancers, and bull fights. Spanish representation at the Palace of Machinery was "non-existent" (72). The sole truly original contribution was Arturo Melida's (1849–1902) "Pavilion of Spain." This hybrid construction designed from a brilliant amalgamation of Islamic and Catholic architectural details was dismissed by critics who insisted the different styles did not harmonize and the whole construction was "disparate" (72).

World Fairs were held in the nineteenth century with increasing frequency but became less popular in the early twentieth century because the immense financial outlay failed to reap economic rewards. The partisan nature of the Spanish-US confrontations in exhibition terms also drew unexpected results such as public outcries, damage, and even riots. Centennial Fairs celebrating national independences held in Buenas Aires, Mexico City, and Santiago de Chile encountered unexpected difficulties as the venues competed with each other for public attention.

Professor Boone has written an entertaining and well-structured book pivoted around World Fairs carefully chosen to identify historical moments, when the origin of North America became Plymouth Rock rather than Florida, New Mexico, or any other part of the United States with Spanish roots. She traces what is essentially a process of erasure in the invention of America, a gross distortion of history, and one which has persisted to this day. The transnational histories of Spain and the United States promoted by these international exhibitions subverted and marginalized the Spanishness of US national identity. The last section of this book has the bitter and self-explanatory title: "Using Spain to Ignore Mexicans at the 1915 California Fairs" (155). California's Spanish Fantasy here produced a European, racially pure history that ignored Mexico's presence entirely. Mexican women were depicted as "dark, sexual and bad [ … ]" unlike the Spanish who were "European, white, aristocratic and good" (186).

The title of the Spanish edition of this book eschews Whitman and makes the issues clearer. Essentially this edition focuses more on the way exhibitions can politicize history when ideals of refined public shows of culture become trampled in a duel between two factions struggling to assert historical supremacy. The translation of the original text is accurate, but the designers have rendered subtle differences in interpretation. The covers of the two editions reveal divergent aims: the English-language Penn State edition chooses a dustcover with details from three postcards; one, the reconciliation between Argentina and Spain at the 1910 centennial celebrations, ironically marks the deposition of the Spanish viceroy in 1810. Two stately girls in long frocks embrace while holding their national flags. The second postcard shows the "Court of the East": a pavilion from the 1915 California exhibition. The third cover image is part of a photograph showing a procession symbolizing Mexican Independence. This emphasis on the ephemeral nature of visual evidence recording the drive for independence from Spain by the Americas is neutralized by the cover of the CEEH volume which reproduces a single image: a composite of Spanish mission architecture designed by the San Francisco-based architect Arthur Page Brown (1859–96). This appeared in the Californian *Book of the Show* of 1893, held to memorialize four hundred years since Columbus sailed to the Americas. Accompanied by a partisan rant from the historian and ethnologist Hubert Howe Bancroft (1832–1918), Brown's many-belfried structure was said to be a hybrid of colonial missions founded by Padre Junípero Serra (1713–84). Bancroft's overflown rhetoric states basically that in such buildings the Catholic "padres franciscanos (hombres españoles) comen, beben y duermen, mientras los neófitos (indios convertidos) hacen el trabajo" (173).

Through subtle details the Spanish edition also emphasizes the uses of visual culture in the political bias of these World Fairs. The more generous space given to the illustrations in this edition draws attention to unusual close-ups and juxtapositions. In 1915 San Francisco and San Diego competed to produce the most lavish events to celebrate the opening of the Panama Canal. San Diego photographer Joseph Collins produced souvenir postcards portraying the variety of people a visitor might meet in San Diego at the "Panama-California Exposition." His souvenir portraits in the Spanish edition are arranged into significant comparisons, a change from the Penn State original. Collins had allowed his subjects to choose their own costumes. Loretta Orozco, a Spanish visitor to the fair, is photographed wearing a belted Norfolk jacket and a fashionable hat with a white feather. Her youth and beauty—she was apparently only eighteen—is emphasized by the editors of CEEH who set her image on the same page (259) as other visitors to San Diego, notably a grim-looking, white middle-aged pioneer couple holding a dead fish. The man points a revolver at his wife, consciously or unconsciously expressing patriarchal dominance as a true American virtue.

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