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John C. Putman’s *Boosting a New West* presents a fascinating element of West Coast boosterism that has been largely unexplored: the West Coast exposition fair. Building on earlier works by Carl Abbott, Robert Rydell, Abigail Markwyn, and David Wrobel, Putman explores four fairs held on the US western coast in the early twentieth century: the Portland Lewis and Clark Exposition (LCE), the San Francisco Panama-Pacific International Exposition (PPIE), Seattle’s Alaska-Yukon-Pacific Exposition (AYPE), and the San Diego Panama-California Exposition (PCE). Putman contributes to a growing field of scholarship focusing on exposition fairs and their cultural impact. Most scholars focus on larger, more eastern fairs, such as the 1876 Centennial Fair, the 1893 World Columbian Fair in Chicago, or the St. Louis Exposition of 1904; the LCE, PCE, AYPE, and PPIE are often overshadowed due to their size, geographic disconnect from major urban centers, and the fact that they occurred just before the outbreak of World War I. Putman explores these four fairs that are lesser known to understand West Coast boosterism, westward migration patterns during the early twentieth century, and the formation of the West.

West Coast exposition fairs were born as marketing strategies to both entice eastern migrants and dispel largely held notions that the West was wild, dirty, and unruly. Such notions were perpetuated by mass-produced dime novels and theatrical Wild West shows replete with barbaric Native Americans, hangings of outlaws, and gunfights. West Coast exposition fairs created publicity teams that were tasked with designing dynamic marketing campaigns that could convince people to travel thousands of miles for a fair. These fairs sold the idea that the West was a place where anyone could be successful, even relatively ordinary people, and a new land for those who were looking to escape eastern industrialism. Largely focusing on newspapers, magazines, and advertisements, Putman looks beyond the conventional examinations of fairs as symbols of economic growth and innovation, instead focusing specifically on what it took to “sell the West” to living...
in the Midwest and on the East Coast, as well as how each of the fairs chose to approach and portray race.

Central to *Boosting a New West* is the fact that the fairs were both a symbol of national pride and a vehicle to “demonstrate the marvelous progress of Western America” (p. 21). Exhibits of modern irrigation techniques, ultra-modern houses, showcases of the abundant raw materials to be found in the West, and a clear emphasis on the feasibility of trade with the Far East helped fairs to illustrate America’s destiny. Though the actual scope of the fairs, in terms of both size and attendance, is not made clear, Putman paints a vivid picture of West Coast fairs trying many different techniques to attract not only tourists but also potential permanent settlers. The vast array of exhibits functioned as major selling points for the exposition fairs hosted in Washington, Oregon, and California, which, blessed by simple geography, could count on their eastern-facing ports to receive goods from Asia. In exploring the connections between the “Orient” and the “Occident,” Putman examines American perceptions of Asian and Native American cultures and fairs as a pageant of imperialism. Racially themed exhibits helped to enforce a clear racial hierarchy in which whites were placed at the top. The Japanese, the Chinese, Filipinos, Hawaiians, and Native Americans were presented as living curiosa exhibits in the four West Coast fairs, proving that American perceptions, stereotypes, and racialized attitudes were large parts of boosting these fairs.

Explorations of fairs presenting “primitive” Native American, Asian, and Hawaiian cultures and points of interest as utterly inferior to whites play a central role in *Boosting a New West*. West Coast exposition fairs served as important tools for white Americans to reaffirm their power and racial superiority. For example, Native American students from boarding schools were ushered in to play orchestral pieces or create handicrafts to show the possibilities of human domestication, especially for visitors who could remember seeing “savage Indians” in Wild West shows. These Native American showcases were juxtaposed with exhibits of Filipinos and Hawaiians, who were always depicted as lazy, backward peoples. Hawaiians were often shown as passive and lazy with Hawaii itself depicted as a relaxing vacation destination. On the other hand, Filipinos were shown as barbaric and the “lowest in civilization of the inhabitants of Uncle Sam’s domain” (p. 138). To illustrate the sheer barbarism of the Filipino people, a voyeuristic Philippine village was installed in the LCE, complete with fifty “dog eating” Igorrote Filipinos serving as actors. Exhibits such as these placed in proximity to clearly domesticated Native American groups served to prove how these people could be molded into proper American citizens. More important, these exhibits were sensationalized by fair marketers and the press to arouse interest in easterners and midwesterners and convince them to see these primitive cultures without crossing the Pacific Ocean.

Putman’s examination of Japanese and Chinese peoples, as well as the nations they represented, proves to be equally interesting. The presence of both Japanese and Chinese exhibits in the fairs presented American understandings and stereotypes of both cultures. With the opening of direct trade with the Far East, exhibition officials envisioned the American West as the new center of commerce. As Putman explains, Asia had a commanding presence in the West Coast exhibition fairs. Exhibits, such as those in the AYPE, were intended to foster positive cross-cultural interactions and introduce visitors to Asian manufacturers and products. Despite the positive view of Asians that the fairs were trying to present, racialism was clearly present. Portrayals of Asians were often inconsistent and fair officials were tested with the creation of exhibits that would have to entice visitors with Asian exoticism, please Asian businessmen and officials, and ensure the creation of trade deals, all while not provoking local groups such as the Asiatic Exclusion League.
into fits of racial violence. To promote the real possibility of shorter trade routes for eastern goods, fair officials introduced visitors to Asian products through exhibits, celebrations of Asian cultural events, and parades complete with Japanese and Chinese officials and businessmen, brought in specifically to demonstrate the possibility of establishing trade networks. Although these fair events were meant to positively portray Asians, marketing strategies often took a different approach. Outside of exhibits, advertisers often referred to Chinese people as “slant-eyed Chinamen” and relied on exotic tropes to attract visitors (p. 132). This could be seen in the PPIE fair, which allowed visitors a chance to see the “fate of the opium smoker and drug fiend” and to see prostitutes from San Francisco's Chinatown (p. 212). Depictions of Asians were often clearly contradictory and drew ire from local Chinese residents and Chinese businessmen. In response to Chinese displeasure for the unsavory opium den and Chinese prostitute exhibit, fair directors agreed to close the Underground Chinatown attraction, only to reopen it weeks later with the name Underground Slumming.

**Boosting a New West** is beautifully illustrated and provides more than a social and cultural history of West Coast exposition fairs. The text explores agents of westward expansion that are rarely studied and will prove insightful for students and scholars of US imperialism, the American West, and the Progressive Era. Though some discussion of the receptions of West Coast fairs by eastern migrants and travelers would be a welcome addition, Putman’s examination of fairs as a cultural phenomenon is astonishing and illuminating.

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