

The San Diego World's Fairs and Southwestern Memory, 1880-1940

Matthew F. Bokovoy



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In the American Southwest, no two events shaped modern Spanish heritage more profoundly than the San Diego Expositions of 1915-16 and 1935-36. Both San Diego fairs displayed a portrait of the Southwest and its peoples for the American public.

The Panama-California Exposition of 1915-16 celebrated Southwestern pluralism and gave rise to future promotional events including the Long Beach Pacific Southwest Exposition of 1928, the Santa Fe Fiesta of the 1920s, and John Steven McGroarty's The Mission Play. The California-Pacific International Exposition of 1935-36 promoted the Pacific Slope and the consumer-oriented society in the making during the 1930s. These San Diego fairs distributed national images of southern California and the Southwest unsurpassed in the early twentieth century.

By examining architecture and landscape, American Indian shows, civic pageants, tourist imagery, and the production of history for celebration and exhibition at each fair, Matthew Bokovoy peels back the rhetoric of romance and reveals the legacies of the San Diego World's Fairs to reimagine the Indian and Hispanic Southwest. In tracing how the two fairs reflected civic conflict over an invented San Diego culture, Bokovoy explains the emergence of a myth in which the city embraced and incorporated native peoples, Hispanics, and Anglo settlers to benefit its modern development.



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