How World’s Fairs Conceive of the Future During Times of Turmoil

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How World’s Fairs Conceive of the Future During Times of Turmoil

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University of New Hampshire

In partial fulfilment for the requirements of the University Honors Program

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Introduction

It's a world of laughter
A world of tears
It's a world of hopes
And a world of fears
There's so much that we share
That it's time we're aware
It's a small world after all

Millions of people around the world have listened to these lyrics as they cruise through Disney’s It’s a Small World ride. The song, which repeats in nine languages and is enhanced through the ride’s visual representations of world cultures, carries a message of unity through shared human experiences. Another classic Disney ride, The Carousel of Progress sings:

There's a great, big, beautiful tomorrow
Shining at the end of every day
There's a great, big, beautiful tomorrow
And tomorrow's just a dream away

This ride highlights the technological advancements over time that have led to the progress of man and society. The song’s hopeful message further contributes to the perspective of technology as a means for creating a better future by drumming up visions of a “great, big, beautiful tomorrow.”

Although these songs reside within the walls of Disney theme parks in the US and around the world, they were originally developed by the Disney Company for the 1964 New York World's Fair. The Fair’s theme was "Peace Through Understanding," and these attractions were commissioned to convey this message and draw in visitors. General Electric paid Disney to

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design the Carousel of Progress, and Pepsi-Cola paid Disney to design It’s a Small World. In addition, Disney was responsible for developing the animatronic Mr. Lincoln for the State of Illinois exhibit and the Magic Skyway for the Ford exhibit. In the nine years since Disneyland opened, Walt Disney had proved himself to be a theme park and amusement expert. His success in California led many corporations to look to him for the next great attraction. Disney’s inspirational and idealistic can-do attitude also made his insight crucial for World's Fair planning because his contagious sense of hope drew in visitors.³

Although they were not commissioned to represent the 1964 New York World’s Fair as a whole, the songs written for Disney’s attractions became its unofficial theme songs. Many past World’s Fairs also had theme songs, whether or not the corporation commissioned a song to be written. In 1933, Chicago hosted a World's Fair themed, “A Century of Progress.” Its theme song, “Where Will You Be,” by Art Kassel invited guests to visit the fair in 1933 saying:

We’ll pack the old kit bag  
That we used to know  
And whoop whoop before Chicago-go  
What will you see 1933  
What will you see, a new prosperity⁴

The “old kit bag” that is mentioned is in reference to a WWI marching song called, “Pack Up Your Troubles in Your Old Kitbag, and Smile, Smile, Smile.” The “kit bag” is what soldiers packed their belongings in, but with the popularity of the song, the concept of packing up your kit bag came to mean packing up your troubles and leaving them behind.⁵ The song further

⁴ “1933 Art Kassel - (Where Will You Be) in 1933 (Official Song of the Chicago World’s Fair),” November 7, 2020, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DKwGwGw_K_2E0.
invites visitors to come see “a new prosperity,” as if trading it in for the troubles packed in the old kit bag.

The 1939 World’s Fair in New York, themed, “The World of Tomorrow,” commissioned a song to be written by the Gershwin Brothers. It was called, “Dawn of a New Day” and spoke of the promise of the future visible at the World’s Fair saying, “To the world of tomorrow we come/ See the sun through the gray/ It's the dawn of a new day.” Here, the word “gray” is used to represent the troubles of the time, while “the sun” represents the hope and opportunities the World’s Fair will convey. The song calls visitors to the fair, promising them a glimpse into the beginning of a new era.

In 1962, another World’s Fair was held in Seattle with the theme “Century 21.” This fair commissioned no official song, yet more than a few different musicians produced theme songs anyway. One of the most popular 1962 Seattle World's Fair songs was called “See You In Seattle” by The Lancers. It invited people to the fair by highlighting the exposition’s exciting focus of a future in space exploration, saying,

You zoom the moon, take a ride to the stars
you'll be in orbit wherever you are
So pack up your troubles and forget your cares
Pack up your family and head for the fair

Yet again, this theme song calls to people to leave behind their troubles in place for the new future envisioned by the World’s Fair.

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7 “1939 Horace Heidt - Dawn of a New Day (Song of the New York World’s Fair) (Charles Goodman, Vocal),” June 30, 2019, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QnvMiH0PqMA.
This brings up the question, what troubles were visitors being asked to leave behind, and even more importantly, what was the new future being promoted by these World’s Fairs? During Chicago, New York, and Seattle’s World’s Fairs the United States was plagued with various economic and political challenges. The goal of this thesis is to investigate the influence of these challenges in shaping how World’s Fairs plan and conceive of the future. Did each fair’s concept of the future change depending on the economic and political challenges the country was facing at the time? How did these three fairs evolve into oracles of the future given the circumstances of the time period in which they are set? In order to better understand why this research focuses on the World’s Fairs of Chicago in 1933–1934, New York in 1939–1940, and Seattle in 1962, it is first essential to understand the history behind World’s Fairs.

The first World’s Fair took place in London England in 1851. It was called The Great Exhibition of the Works of Industry of all Nations and was housed within an 1,851 foot long building equaling 990,000 square feet, slightly larger than the average Amazon distribution center. Because it was made of glass and cast iron, the hall was called the Crystal Palace.9

The inspiration for the 1851 World’s Fair was the dawn of the industrial age. The fair was created with the intention of further internationalizing the British economy and encouraging the growth of industries through free trade. A few years before, in 1846, England abolished the Corn Laws, which signified a successful political battle for free trade. In addition, the event was supported by Prince Albert,

who advocated that England would benefit from a broadened understanding of world practices. In total, 25 countries from around the world contributed exhibitions to the fair, in addition to a number of British colonies.

The Great Exhibition of the Works of Industry of all Nations was a major success. The event brought in £186,000 in profit, equal to $40,831,144 in today’s money. Naturally, many countries around the world saw the success and importance of hosting a World’s Fair and were eager to participate. After London’s 1851 exposition, Dublin was quick to organize a similar fair in 1853. Soon, however, World’s Fairs were popping up all across the globe and it was becoming too costly for countries to participate in, or keep track of, the substantial number of fairs going on at the same time.

In 1928 the French organization, Bureau International des Expositions (BIE), was founded by 31 countries in order to standardize and regulate World Fairs. Only the BIE can grant a fair the title of World’s Fair, and in order to be a World’s Fair there are rules that must be followed. For instance, the BIE maintains the original free-trade principle that led to the creation of international expositions and requires that countries hosting a World’s Fair must allow goods imported for sale at the fair to enter duty free. One upshot is that national governments have to be involved in many aspects of the planning process for a World’s Fair.

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11 “Expo 1851 London.”
Before the 1933 Century of Progress exposition in Chicago, World’s Fairs were much different in nature. For starters, World’s Fairs held in the United States before 1933 sought to paint the country as a nation of power by calling on the neoclassical architectural designs of Europe. In addition, World’s Fairs before 1933 were normally themed around the exposition’s location or around a centennial event of some kind. In 1893 Chicago held a World’s Fair themed “World's Columbian Exposition,” in honor of Cristopher Columbus discovering the new world. Another major US World’s fair was the 1904 Saint Louis exposition that was themed to commemorate the Louisiana Purchase. ¹⁴

![Figure 2: Photograph highlighting the neoclassical architecture at the 1893 Chicago World's Fair.](image)

A series of failed World Fairs for the United States coupled with a downturn in world fair success leading up to Chicago’s 1933 fair led organizers to reimagine World’s Fairs altogether. While these may have started as attempts to accomplish local manageable goals, their perspective evolved into larger themes through events beyond any organizers’ control. Instead of looking to the past for inspiration, World’s Fairs began to imagine the world of the future. The

1933 Chicago Exposition was the first fair to use the concept of dreaming for a better future as a theme to draw in visitors. The 1939 New York World’s Fair was the second. After some time, Seattle’s 1962 World’s Fair joined the ranks as being the third US exposition to use the notion of building a better future as its theme. These expositions are of particular interest because they were the only major World’s Fairs held in the US in the middle of the 20th century, and their themes suggested similar goals. Unlike earlier fairs, these three expositions are also unique because they all worked with the Bureau International des Expositions after its founding in 1928. For this reason, each fair needed to follow certain protocols and meet certain criteria, which makes these three expositions comparable. This thesis investigates the conception of the future and the theme’s evolution during times of economic and political turmoil at the Chicago 1933–1934, New York 1939–1940, and Seattle 1962 World’s Fairs. In each instance, the fair’s organizers felt the need to respond to world events, which caused them to shift their focus from a local attempt to increase prosperity to a national commentary on global conditions.
Chapter 1
A Century of Progress Exposition: Chicago, 1933–1934

Thomas T. Goldsmith Jr. was working on his Ph.D. at Cornell University in 1934 when he and his father took a trip to Chicago for the Century of Progress Exposition, where he was about to see something that would alter the course of his life. It was the height of the Great Depression, but hope was proliferating throughout the country. Franklin D. Roosevelt had recently been elected President, and many believed the change in leadership would facilitate a quick end to the widespread economic hardship.¹⁵ A few years before, in 1931, when Thomas Goldsmith finished his undergraduate studies at Furman University in Greenville, South Carolina, he moved to upstate New York with the $250 he had saved from working as a paperboy. He worked off the rest of his debt to the university by running a physics lab on campus where he studied under Dr. Frederick Bedell on oscilloscopes and cathode-ray tubes.

In 1934, Goldsmith never considered that what he was doing in the lab had any implications outside of the fields of radio and radar, that is, until his trip to the Chicago World’s Fair.¹⁶ It was there that Goldsmith and millions of other people from around the world first laid

![Figure 3: Television technology on display at the 1933 Chicago World's Fair.](image-url)

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¹⁵ David M. Kennedy, *Freedom From Fear: The American People in Depression and War, 1929-1945*, 1999, 113–118. [https://hdl.handle.net/2027/heb00664.0001.00](https://hdl.handle.net/2027/heb00664.0001.00)

their eyes on a television. Although the Chicago World’s Fair of 1933–1934 was not the first display of television technology, it was the first time the idea was brought to the general public’s attention on a grand scale. This exhibit was sponsored by the Hudson Motor Car Company and put on daily public displays where audience members could get the chance to communicate with someone across the room via television. The lucky fairgoers were seated in two separate booths where they could talk to each other by phone and see each other on screens using television technology.17 This device harnessed the cathode-ray tube technology with which Thomas Goldsmith was familiar. In a 1997 interview, Goldsmith recalls his experience at the fair as being an important contributing factor to his career in television development. In 1935 Goldsmith graduated with his Ph.D. from Cornell and immediately received a job at Dumont Laboratories as a research director working on cathode-ray tube television development.18

Context

Chicago’s 1933–1934 Century of Progress Exposition took place during the most difficult part of the Great Depression. Millions of people across the United States struggled to find work and buy food for their families. Following the 1929 stock market crash, the country fell into a depression exacerbated by the Dust Bowl which ravaged the farms of the Midwest. In 1930, the Wall Street Journal Chicago bureau’s analysis of the 1930 census estimated that 9.5% of all workers were jobless and predicted that the number had likely changed in the short amount of time between the census data and the article's publication, presumably for the worse. In 1931,

while the fair was being planned, news of “hunger parades” in Chicago spread across the country. Those marching were demanding 75,000,000 dollars from the federal government in unemployment pay.\(^{19}\) By the opening of the Century of Progress Exposition in 1933, many Americans had been suffering for a number of years.

Before the Depression, a decade of unprecedented economic growth gave many people around the United States an overwhelming sense of optimism for the future. In a campaign speech on August 11, 1928, presidential candidate and Commerce Secretary Herbert Hoover notably claimed that “we in America today are nearer to the final triumph over poverty than ever before in the history of any land.”\(^{20}\) His remark echoed the thoughts of millions of Americans who were experiencing the positive effects of an influx of innovations, progressive social change, and mass production.\(^{21}\) In the 1920s, the radio developed into an important and widespread communication tool, married women were becoming more common in the workforce, and new production and advertising methods brought products to consumers (especially women with a paycheck) like never before.\(^{22}\)

Car manufacturing was at the forefront of this change. In the year 1900, only 4,000 cars were sold, their price making them a luxury good of the wealthy consumer. Only twenty-nine


years later, twenty-six million cars were on the road, the majority of which were owned by average Americans. This major shift in ownership demographics was a derivative of mass production, credit-based installment payment plans, and the business technique of selling a high volume of items for a low price. As of 1930, manufacturing output was four times greater than it had been in 1900. During this same amount of time, agricultural production also saw improvements. By 1930, farmers produced 50% more than in 1900, yet suffered financially because the market for their products had not grown as quickly.23

Americans were eager to acquire the latest affordable technology which promised to make everyday life more efficient. A 1933 report titled “Recent Social Trends in the United States” claimed that “The most significant trends are to be found, however, not in the physical and biological heritages, but in the social heritage or culture. The Committee feels that changes in material culture (inventions and discoveries) are the most dynamic elements in our civilization and are the prime movers which bring about readjustments in all aspects of our life.”24 This report made by the President’s research committee investigated the previous decade and considered the changes in technology to be one of the most important trends affecting society. David Kennedy, in his book, Freedom from Fear, also acknowledges the frenzy for innovative progress in 1928, stating, “Radio corporation stock, symbolic of the promise of new technologies that helped to feed the speculative frenzy, gyrated upward in ten-and twenty-point jumps.”25

“Recent Social Trends” links these changes in material culture to the more troublesome matter of consumerism. The researchers identified four major shifts affecting consumption habits: “more money to spend, more leisure in which to enjoy goods, greater output and hence

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25 Kennedy, Freedom From Fear: The American People in Depression and War, 1929-1945. 35.
more goods to market, and new kinds of goods which the public has had to be taught to want.”\(^{26}\)

While trends linked to more money and more leisure time due to less rigorous work weeks were considered beneficial overall, it was the new goods on the market that worried the researchers reporting to the President. They were concerned about the financial suffering of those selling “long familiar goods.” The researchers suspected that this is “because many novelties are suited to installment selling, whereas such things as food and clothing are not.”\(^{27}\) Despite these findings, the researchers made no notable connection between the new consumer habits and the economic crash.

While Kennedy’s retrospective view shows how this change in material culture contributed to the economic collapse in 1929, many people during the Depression looked to new technology as a savior. During a reelection campaign speech in October of 1932 at Madison Square Garden, President Herbert Hoover warned against voting for New York Governor Franklin D. Roosevelt because “what the Governor has overlooked is the fact that we are yet but on the frontiers of development of science and of invention...This philosophy upon which the Governor of New York proposes to conduct the Presidency of the United States is the philosophy of stagnation and of despair.”\(^{28}\) President Hoover believed that the United States could pick itself out of the economic depression by chasing the success of the previous decade. He believed that scientific progress meant new efficiencies in industry and that new advancements in industry had the power to propel the United States to the prosperous future that many glimpsed during the

\(^{26}\) Robert C. Angell, “Recent Social Trends in the United States” Report of the President’s Research Committee, 641.

\(^{27}\) Robert, C. Angell “Recent Social Trends in the United States” Report of the President’s Research Committee, 641.

1920s. At Madison Square Garden, President Hoover regaled the crowd with stories about the benefits brought by past inventions and laid out his plan for the future:

I have recited to you some of the items in the progress of this last generation. Progress in that generation was not due to the opening up of new agricultural land; it was due to scientific research, the opening of new inventions, new flashes of light from the intelligence of our people. These brought the improvements in agriculture and in industry, there are a thousand inventions for comfort and the expansion of life yet in the lockers of science that have not yet come to light. We are only upon their frontiers.29

President Herbert Hoover was not the only one at this time to place an emphasis on the progress of the past as a springboard for the future. As Hoover delivered his speech on October 31, 1932, the World’s Fair Committee was finishing up preparations for an exposition emphasizing this very theme.

Planning the Fair

On January 5, 1929, Vice President Charles G. Dawes addressed the House of Representatives Committee on Ways and Means in support of hosting a World’s Fair in Chicago unlike any other, saying, “It would be unique; it has never been done before.”30 The World’s Fair Centennial Commission was in Washington D.C. to petition Congress for formal recognition of the fair so that the commission could proceed with inviting foreign nations to the exposition.31 It was four years before the fair was to be held, and many people were justifiably pessimistic toward the idea of hosting a large exposition. The last few major fairs held in the United States, chiefly the Philadelphia Sesqui-centennial International Exposition of 1926, were considered failures if not outright disasters. In addition, tentative plans for a centennial fair marking the first

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29 Herbert Hoover, “Address at Madison Square Garden in New York City | the American Presidency Project.”
31 Chicago World’s Fair Hearings before the United States House Committee on Ways and Means, Seventieth Congress, Second Session, 11.
settlement of Chicago had been planned on and off since August 1923 but struggled to bolster support and pick a captivating theme. The planning committees faced so much confidence in their failure that no one would help sponsor the fair. It was not until Rufus Dawes, Vice President Charles Dawes’ brother, became president of the fair committee in 1928 that the plan began to make headway.\textsuperscript{32}

By 1929, the fair had a theme that promised to set a new precedent for the way World’s Fairs will be held. After doing extensive research, the fair committee realized that fair failures in the past decade were due to their adherence to the model set by the successful Columbian Exposition of Chicago in 1893. There, businesses competed to bring customers the best products on the market while the classical architecture encouraged fairgoers to strive for cultural perfection.\textsuperscript{33} In recent years, however, this style of World’s Fairs had fallen out of fashion. Social reforms in the 1920s had led to more independent, thinking and the shrinking world aided by advancements in travel and communication made products already on the market less novel.\textsuperscript{34} In order to be successful, the planning committee would have to rethink the meaning of World’s Fairs. Vice President Dawes promised Congress that the “underlying idea of the exposition is different from the expositions of the past,” and predicted that the 1933 World’s Fair would be “an idea which will mean to the world, but in a new way, what the Chicago Exposition of 1893 meant to the world when it exemplified the spirit of America and the Spirit of the times.”\textsuperscript{35}

The driving force of this new idea was the concept of progress. It was a term at the forefront of society in the 1920s, and it was a perfect theme for a fair celebrating the 100th

\textsuperscript{34} Kennedy, Freedom From Fear: The American People in Depression and War, 1929-1945, 13.
\textsuperscript{35} Chicago World’s Fair Hearings before the United States House Committee on Ways and Means, Seventieth Congress, Second Session, 9–11.
birthday of Chicago. The technological advancements across all industries leading up to the 1920s flooded the economy with a surplus of wealth and products like nothing ever seen before. Scientific advancements became synonymous with progress, and progress was synonymous with optimism for the future.  

In addition to showing off the last century’s scientific improvements, the 1933 exposition wanted to show progress through industry. In a 1931 congressional hearing before the Committee on the Library, Rufus Dawes outlined how “there has been a growing tendency for closer cooperation between the members of each industry, competition is no doubt still the life of trade, but competition is gradually becoming rather a contest between industries in supplying service to humanity than between members of a particular industry.” The 1933 World’s Fair organizers wanted to captivate the public by illustrating the optimism of the future through scientific advancement on a worldwide scale. William Castle of the State Department remarked that in building the fair “there is no question of competition; there is no question of trying to show how much better we are than the French, or how much better the French are than the Germans. Everybody will go together in showing progress.”

In order to learn more about the application of science in industry the 1933 World’s Fair committee reached out to the National Research Council. This Council was formed in 1916 to “facilitate cooperation among science, industry, and the military.” In response to the fair

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38 Chicago World’s Fair Hearings before the United States House Committee on Ways and Means, Seventieth Congress, Second Session, 5.

39 Findling and Pelle, Encyclopedia of World’s Fairs and Expositions, 269.
committee’s request for help, the National Research Council reached out to 400 leading scientists across every industry and asked for reports of ideas on how to express industrial progress through an exposition. In the end, six large volumes of reports were collected which illustrated how best to carry out the fair’s main theme.

The Century of Progress Exposition, as it was titled in June 1929, also strayed from previous fairs in that it was entirely independent of government financial aid. Due to the mass skepticism about the fair's success, the exposition committee made plans from the start to raise the funds themselves. Starting in 1929 they established a “league of supporters” who donated $5 in return for ten admission tickets. The fair committee also raised over $6.5 million in bonds which were secured by ticket fares.40 Because the committee was not able to predict the amount of money they would raise for the fair, they identified several necessary buildings and built what they could as money came in. This ingenious method allowed for a fair to take place even if only money for half the buildings was raised. In this way, about 8 million dollars were acquired. Despite the fact that bond issues started just one day before the stock market crash in October 1929, the committee’s meticulous budgeting and fundraising made the Century of Progress Exposition not just a success but also a reality.41

Exhibits and Architecture

The 1933 Chicago World’s Fair’s theme of a Century of Progress urged fairgoers to think about changes in all aspects of life over the past 100 years, and visitors found themselves confronting the future repeatedly throughout their visit. This phenomenon is caused by the

40 Century-of-Progress Fair at Chicago in 1933: Hearing before the Committee on the Library, House of Representatives, Seventy-First Congress, Third Session, on H.J. Res. 448, 10-11.
41 Findling and Pelle, Encyclopedia of World’s Fairs and Expositions, 269.
duality of progress. On the one hand, progress looks back at how far you have come from some particular starting point, but on the other hand, progress invites you to consider your position in an ever-changing world. A replica of Chicago’s 1803 Fort Dearborn positioned alongside the fair’s sleek geometric buildings with neon lights helped illustrate this fact. People’s actions in the present affect the progress of the future, and there is a great deal of hope in that unwritten realm. In reference to the seemingly endless displays of progress on display, the official guidebook of the fair even pondered “whether tomorrow you may not hold achievements that will again completely revolutionize our methods of living.”

As many exhibits at the fair demonstrated, the latest inventions could be used along with the technology of the past to show trends and predict what progress might look like in the future. A photograph in a Los Angeles Times article features an exhibit showing the story of Chicago’s World Fairs through wedding dresses. The caption reads, “At the left are the 1893 bridal togs, in the center is the 1933 version, and at the right is ventured a guess, in cellophane, of what the brides will wear in 1973, the year in which Chicago will again be having a fair if the cycle is followed.”

Predictions of the future such as this one gained a lot of interest among visitors, especially when they highlighted changes in everyday life. No exhibit better illustrates this culmination of innovation, progress, and relatability than the eleven houses constructed along Lake Michigan’s shore “to illustrate in a modern way, to the family of limited means, the use of prefabricated building units, new materials, and new methods of construction.” In these homes, promotional texts claimed that “science sets the style” by designing for durability, convenience,

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livability, and affordability above all else. The results were eleven exceptionally diverse designs which included a log cabin, a three-story dodecagon house, a tropical flamingo pink house, and a house made almost exclusively of steel beams and glass. Unlike the fleeting existence of most World’s Fair buildings, these houses were erected to prove their durability to consumers. Four of these homes were barged across Lake Michigan to Beverly Shores, Indiana following the 1934 season where they still exist today.

One of these houses, aptly named, the “House of Tomorrow,” by Architect George Fred Keck, set out to solve the problem of how to include all the amenities of modern living into an inexpensive, yet agreeable design. His twelve-sided circular house had utilities, such as heating and air conditioning, at the building’s core with exterior walls made of glass and copper. Along with revolutionary new technology such as vacuums, electric stoves, iceless refrigerators, and even a mechanical dishwasher, Keck’s design also called for a garage with automatic fold-up doors and space for the family plane.

Figure 5: Outside view and floor plan for the House of Tomorrow, 1934.

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Most importantly, Chicago’s Century of Progress exhibits promoted the idea of cooperation within industries for the common good. This concept was promoted in the form of scientific halls dedicated to various trades rather than individual companies, along with the elimination of prize ribbons. Rather than having private companies compete for blue ribbons, industries such as agriculture, mining, healthcare, and education were tasked with portraying their industry’s greatest contributions to the field and society as a whole. At the 1893 exposition, Pabst Brewing Company won a first-place prize, which led to a boom in their popularity and to the adoption of the phrase “blue ribbon” in their name.

This fair promised to be different by instead asking companies like Pabst to showcase the technological improvements in their fields, such as brewing. In the end, twenty-two associations of industries agreed to be represented in collective exhibits on the fairgrounds.\textsuperscript{48} Even in instances where specific companies were advertised, their exhibits were still required to promote the innovation of their industry. For instance, the main attraction of the General Motors Building was a functioning automotive assembly line which highlighted the manufacturing process from raw materials to finished products.\textsuperscript{49}

The largest of these collective exhibits took place within the Hall of Science. Covering over eight acres, this building illustrated progress across the scientific fields of astronomy, biology, chemistry, geology, mathematics, medicine, and physics. It was in this hall that Thomas T. Goldsmith Jr. and many others first encountered the concept of television. Other exhibits in

\textsuperscript{48} Findling and Pelle, \textit{Encyclopedia of World’s Fairs and Expositions}, 269.
the Hall of Science included demonstrations on how eyeglasses correct defects in the eyes, how electricity can be used to refrigerate food, how sound waves travel, and how air-filled tires can hold large amounts of weight.\textsuperscript{50}

While the fair’s hopeful theme of progress with help from industries was important for luring thousands of people to Chicago’s 1933–1934 Exposition, other forms of entertainment were considered just as, if not more so, important for drawing in crowds. International displays such as the Belgian village and Japanese tea house were so popular with visitors that other countries like France built similar immersive attractions for the fair’s 1934 season. In fact, the fair as a whole saw a shift toward exhibits with greater entertainment during their second season. While many foreign exhibits attempted to incorporate more traditional foods and cultural activities, US companies traded out their informational movies for exciting presentations or interactive shows.\textsuperscript{51} Despite the popularity and insistence of the fair’s theme during the first season, the second season’s motivation to break even and repay bonds forced the institutions involved to cater to the popular demand for amusement over scientific exploration.

Conclusion

The 1933–1934 World’s Fair became even more successful due to the Great Depression. The economic downturn turned the Century of Progress Exposition from a collection demonstrating the past 100 years of progress into a symbol promising a future of wealth and prosperity akin to that experienced in the 1920s. During his 1932 campaign speech, President Herbert Hoover highlighted the dreams of Americans across the country to return to the

\textsuperscript{51} Findling and Pelle, \textit{Encyclopedia of World’s Fairs and Expositions}, 275.
unrealistic ever-growing prosperity of the previous decade.\textsuperscript{52} Despite the harmful role that new marketable technologies and innovations may have played in the wild speculation of the stock market, many people, including the president, viewed these scientific advancements as synonymous with progress and improved quality of life. In 1933 and 1934, fairgoers were blissfully ignorant of the longevity of the economic downturn they were facing. Nobody at the time could have known that the stock market crash of October 1929, known as Black Tuesday, not only marked the end of an era of unprecedented economic growth, but it also marked the point of no return for those dreaming of quickly reviving the prosperity they may have once experienced at the height of the 1920s.

The Century of Progress Exposition also expressed the country’s changing consumption habits. In the decades leading up to the 1930s, more and more items were being developed and marketed to the average person. People were being taught by relentless advertising schemes to want the new goods available even if they were not needed.\textsuperscript{53} Nowhere was this shift in consumerism more prevalent than at the 1933–1934 Chicago World’s Fair. Not only were the latest goods and technologies on the market being exhibited there, but the fair’s theme of progress encouraged industries to develop and showcase new items to benefit the average person. The television was just one of these products. Although the design was nowhere near ready for everyday use, technology was still marketed in daily shows at the fair which explained the possible applications and uses for the device.\textsuperscript{54} The eleven houses constructed to exhibit prefabricated house options along with the latest household products also perfectly illustrates this shift in marketing and target audience.

\textsuperscript{52} Herbert Hoover, “Address at Madison Square Garden in New York City | the American Presidency Project.”
\textsuperscript{53} Robert C. Angell, “Recent Social Trends in the United States” Report of the President’s Research Committee, 640.
\textsuperscript{54} Weber, Television Before TV: New Media and Exhibition Culture in Europe and the USA, 205.
For those feeling the struggles of everyday life caused by the Depression, the World’s Fair provided a great escape. The theme’s upbeat attitude supported by promises of advancements in their quality of life and reinforced by images of an undeveloped past gave fairgoers hope for the future. Along with engaging exhibitions of innovations were numerous performances, movies, rides, and games to entertain guests. When planning the fair, it was considered crucial that there was something of interest for everyone. Science, art, music, and sports of every kind were to be represented. Without the effects of the Great Depression, the 1933–1934 Chicago World’s Fair may not have been as successful or as important. By the 166th day, the Century of Progress Exposition surpassed the World’s Fair visitor record of 21,480,142 people set by the 1893 Columbian Exposition on its 183rd day. Although the fair may have started as an exposition of innovations, in the end, progress transformed into a symbol of hope for the future as the tides of the Depression threatened to drive visitors away.

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55 Openaccess. “Minute Book of Board of Trustees, 1933 (Folder 3-56).” Accessed February 28, 2024. [https://digital.library.uic.edu/view/ark:/81984/d3x05xk96](https://digital.library.uic.edu/view/ark:/81984/d3x05xk96).

56 Bureau, Special from Monitor. “Century of Progress Beats U.S. Record For Visitors to Fairs.” *The Christian Science Monitor (1908-)*, October 30, 1933. [https://www.proquest.com/docview/513415491/abstract/6BB92F0E1E5B4EDAPQ/1](https://www.proquest.com/docview/513415491/abstract/6BB92F0E1E5B4EDAPQ/1).
Chapter 2

The World of Tomorrow Exposition: New York, 1939–1940

The leaves were only just starting to fall in early autumn 1939 when Gustave Martens, his wife Margaret, and son Warren looked out across the World’s Fair grounds at two giant crisp white geometric structures symbolizing the world of tomorrow. The Trylon and Perisphere, as the structures were called, embodied simplicity and purity while also portraying futuristic modernist design. Mr. Martens, a cinematography hobbyist and member of the Amateur Cinema League, made sure to capture these monuments of architecture from multiple angles on his 16mm camera loaded with Kodachrome film.\(^{57}\) This trip to the New York World’s Fair in 1939 was only one of many excursions taken by the family to the fairgrounds only fifteen minutes from their home in the Borough of Queens.

The fair was of particular interest to Mr. Martens because he was an automobile salesman. Anything worth knowing about the future of cars and transportation was on display in the various exhibit halls. Eleven-year-old Warren was especially excited about the flying cars that would one day be invented to replace driving so he could fly to work or the grocery store. Warren was also struck by the Futurama exhibit in the General Motors Building. Even seventy-one years later Warren could still recall the sideways moving chairs that took fairgoers on a trip

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through time to the cities of the future. In these dioramas, sleek curves dominate the city skylines, massive highways become a focal feature, and technological industries support the world of tomorrow. General Motors’s Futurama exhibit was one of the fair’s most popular attractions. It is an impressive monument of hope for a future of stability, unity, and consumerism which starkly contrasts with the period’s political and economic reality. When the Martens family visited the New York World’s Fair in 1939, the effects of the Great Depression were still being felt across the country, and World War Two was just ramping up in Europe. At a time of great uncertainty, the World’s Fair dreamed of tomorrow.

Context

Despite the short six-year difference between the opening of the Century of Progress Exposition in Chicago in 1933 and the start of the World’s Fair held in 1939 in New York, a great deal had changed within and outside the country. In the US, the economy was finally starting to see some results in its uphill battle against the Great Depression. When fair planning was just getting under way in January 1937, six million people were recorded to have rejoined the workforce out of the thirteen million people who were unemployed at the peak in 1933. President Franklin D. Roosevelt’s efforts and his New Deal objectives seemed to be making a difference for the American people, and their support was evident in his landslide reelection in 1936 where he won every state but Maine and Vermont.

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Part of this success was due to Roosevelt’s work with the rising tide of organized labor. Across the country, downtrodden working-class Americans in almost every industry sought more rights and fairer treatment. In many instances, strikes seeking union recognition and improvement for workers ended in death and bloodshed when they butted heads with police or the National Guard. These vicious clashes were, in part, due to the communist-fueled beliefs that a radical working-class revolution was needed to enact any real change. David Kennedy in his book, *Freedom from Fear*, describes these communist labor leaders as “hard, unyielding men, brined in Marxist doctrine, contemptuous of mere ‘reform,’ intoxicated with the dream of revolution, howling barbarians at the gates of American civilization.”⁶¹ In one 1934 incident that left two dead, the communist-led Citizens Alliance brandished metal pipes and baseball bats to stop the trucking firms that refused to negotiate.

In the face of the bloody strikes that were not only deadly but also impeding economic growth, Roosevelt rose not in opposition to unions but rather as their champion. During Roosevelt’s reelection campaign in 1936, John. L. Lewis, an anti-communist organized labor leader with a large following, actively endorsed FDR and even helped fund his campaign. In return, Roosevelt did his best for the working-class Americans. Rather than appease the industrial workers with just the promise of bargaining power sought after by communist leadership, FDR planned to improve the average worker’s lot by sending to Congress laws regarding pensions, hourly wages, and unemployment as well as union bargaining power.⁶² While Roosevelt’s legislation did not put an end to union violence, his efforts appeased millions of Americans desiring reform and helped facilitate more amicable relations between organized labor and employers with bills such as the Wagner Act.

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Although the United States was progressing under its elected champion, other countries had not had such success in their fight against the economic depression. Following World War I, a financially unstable Italy quickly fell to Socialist and then Fascist leadership in 1922 under Benito Mussolini. As the 1920s and 1930s progressed, more and more struggling countries became controlled by fascist regimes whose national pride ideology lifted up the middle class.63 In Germany, Adolf Hitler seized the opportunity presented by the Great Depression to grow his political fame. As unemployment rose, so did Nazi Party membership. By January 1933 Hitler had gained so much support that when he demanded the Chancellorship, he got it.64

The growing number of fascist government takeovers stemming from the socialist attitudes of a struggling working class was a fact on the minds of many government officials during the 1930s. During his campaign speech at Madison Square Garden on October 31, 1932, President Herbert Hoover addressed the idea that people wanted to establish a new type of government by stating, “Now, I may pause for a moment and examine the American system of government and of social and economic life which it is now proposed that we should alter.” President Hoover then went on to illustrate the unique qualities of the government which make it superior to other forms of government, especially those found in Europe. Due to the inclusion of this topic in his speech, it is evident that President Hoover considered the establishment of a Fascist, Socialist, or Communist government a viable threat to the United States’ democratic republic. President Hoover had good reason to be cautious of a totalitarian movement like those happening around that time in Russia, Italy, and Germany. Not only was the US facing the same circumstances that allowed socialism and fascism to grow in Europe, but Hoover also had

64 Kennedy, Freedom From Fear: The American People in Depression and War, 1929-1945. 8-9.
millions of working-class Americans who were evicted from their homes living in shanty towns resentfully called Hoovervilles after their unsuccessful president.65

As it got closer to the opening of the New York World’s Fair in 1939, the world seemed to be descending deeper into chaos and closer to all-out war. In 1934, following the invasion of Manchuria in China, the Japanese started to build up their military in an effort to conquer all of East Asia. A year later in Europe, Mussolini launched an invasion to reconquer Ethiopia, Italy’s former territory, and Hitler broke the World War I Versailles Treaty by building up Germany’s military. In 1936 Germany continued to show signs of aggression by invading the demilitarized zone along the French border. That same year, troops led by fascist leader Francisco Franco overthrew the republican government in Spain with the support of Hitler and Mussolini. Back in the East, Japan’s democratic government fell to militarists who quickly escalated the conflict between Japan and China into an all-out war in 1937. That same year, Japan teamed up with fascist-led Germany and Italy to form the “Axis” alliance. Together, they planned to restructure Europe and Asia into their “ideal” versions. For Hitler, this meant eliminating “inferior” people such as Jews, homosexuals, Gypsies, and political opponents. In 1938 Hitler made his first grand move in his plan to unite Europe under his version of order by forcing the union of Austria and Germany, called the Anschluss. From there, Hitler set his sights for Czechoslovakia, and later, Poland.66

Despite the clear signs that Europe was heading into yet another great war, most Americans stayed true to the isolationist beliefs that had been growing since the end of World War I. After witnessing the seemingly pointless destruction in the aftermath of the Great War,

65 Kennedy, Freedom From Fear: The American People in Depression and War, 1929-1945, 89-91.
Americans wanted to make sure they did not end up entangled in a mess of alliances which could lead to a similar disaster. For this reason, the United States continued to reject membership in the League of Nations. Isolationist notions only grew with the threat of conflict in Europe. Ross A. Kennedy, in his essay on “The Ideology of American Isolationism,” illustrates how many Americans viewed European politics as a malicious and secretive chess game of evil plots between a handful of players with the power to impact the lives of millions. This was not a game in which the United States wanted to take part in. When Franklin D. Roosevelt addressed the public during his 1933 inauguration he strongly promoted “the good neighbor policy,” that no nation should get involved with the internal happenings of another nation. With isolationists on both sides of the aisle, Congress quickly approved the Neutrality Acts. The first of these acts took place in 1935 and aimed to promote neutrality by prohibiting weapons sales and American passenger travel on boats in relation to a country at war. After the addition of two more acts in 1936 and 1937, a nationwide poll investigating the acts’ approval illustrated that the majority of Americans fully supported Congress’s strong isolationist policies.

Planning the Fair

On March 23, 1937, New York World’s Fair President, Grover A. Whalen, faced a crowd at a hearing before the House of Representatives Committee on Foreign Affairs that could not have been more different than the one the Dawes brothers faced just eight years before when they proposed United States participation in the 1933 World’s Fair. This time, the fair committee

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70 Kennedy and San Francisco State University, “THE IDEOLOGY OF AMERICAN ISOLATIONISM 1931-1939,” 58.
was not only greeted by a substantially larger number of people present but they were also welcomed with an entirely different attitude.  

Roosevelt’s recent work with labor unions is clearly evident in the attendance list of the hearing. Of the 94 observers present who were not affiliated with the Fair Committee or the Committee on Foreign Affairs, around 65 were leaders of organized labor groups. All aspects of labor were interested in the happenings related to the potential World’s Fair and wanted to make sure their opinions were heard, and their support was recognized. From the very beginning, the fair’s president, Grover Whalen, made sure to gain the support of organized labor by giving labor a seat on the executive committee and by guaranteeing that all work done at the fair would be executed by union labor. At the hearing in 1937, Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Labor of the New York World’s Fair and vice president of the American Federation of Labor in New York, Matthew Woll, spoke on labor’s prominent role by claiming that “it will also be an exhibition of an industrial relationship which shall assure the construction and growth of this great enterprise without a strike, sit-down, or slowdown of any other sort.”  

Union labor was on display to show the whole world what it was capable of. When tasked with turning the chosen fair location of Flushing Meadows from a swamp and scrap yard into a 1,216 acre exposition site, workers finished in less than a year and ahead of schedule, ultimately cementing the bargaining power they had worked so hard to achieve over the course of the decade.  

The overwhelming attitude of support for the 1939 New York World’s Fair was a stark divergence from the formidable skepticism that plagued the 1933 World’s Fair in Chicago.

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72 New York World’s Fair 1939 Hearings before the United States House Committee on Foreign Affairs, Seventy-Fifth Congress, First Session, on Mar. 23, 1937, 41.
73 Findling and Pelle, Encyclopedia of World’s Fairs and Expositions, 300.
Before Grover Whalen even got the opportunity to speak at the March 23rd hearing in 1937, twelve representatives in Congress from the state of New York and one representative from New Jersey urged the Committee on Foreign Affairs to accept the proposal of the New York World’s Fair Corporation. If that show of support was not enough, the chairman of the Committee on Foreign Affairs also read off twenty-five telegrams sent in from clubs, chambers of commerce, and unions around the country requesting that the resolution be passed. One telegram from the Providence Rhode Island Chamber of Commerce read:

I sincerely hope the House Committee on Foreign Affairs will recommend to the congress generous appropriation for United States Participation in the New York City World’s Fair. We believe that the fair has wonderful possibilities for stimulation of domestic and foreign trade and that the Federal Government should cooperate closely in its support.\(^7\)

Although the 1933 World’s Fair did not proceed without some level of local support, the New York World’s Fair of 1939 was unmatched in the volume and scope of national encouragement.

Due in large part to Chicago’s success and profit against the backdrop of the Great Depression, people jumped at the opportunity to support the New York World's Fair. As Grover Whalen explains, the idea for having a World’s Fair in New York was born in 1935 when a group of businessmen and civic leaders met to brainstorm ways to stimulate trade and business. With New York being the second largest city in the world at the time, the group believed that if they built a fair even bigger and better than the one in Chicago, they could potentially bring in millions of dollars to the fair’s surrounding area and stimulate the economy not just in the US, but also in countries around the world.\(^8\) The Fair’s economic agenda was almost as ambitious as

\(^{7}\) New York World’s Fair 1939 Hearings before the United States House Committee on Foreign Affairs, Seventy-Fifth Congress, First Session, on Mar. 23, 1937, 33.

\(^{8}\) New York World’s Fair 1939 Hearings before the United States House Committee on Foreign Affairs, Seventy-Fifth Congress, First Session, on Mar. 23, 1937, 18.
their theme, titled, “Building the World of Tomorrow with the Tools of Today.” Despite the Fair’s lofty ambitions, and even loftier projected costs, people, businesses, and banks lined up to offer their financial aid. By March of 1937, $20,000,000 in bonds had already been raised out of an eventual $27,000,000. In addition, $5,000,000 was provided by the Federal Government to house state and international government exhibits. Along with money from numerous private investors, the fair received a $1,600,000 loan from a combination of 16 banks. By the time the fair opened in 1939, the fair cost $150 million and still had to operate for two years to turn a profit. In comparison, Chicago’s 1933 fair cost only $33 million.

In the Fair’s efforts to bolster business and trade, they may have given too much freedom and power to the private corporations who sponsored and held exhibits at the fair. In keeping with the fair’s theme, powerful businesses set out to show the world how they could build the world of tomorrow. Besides the exhibits themselves, every aspect of the fair appeared to be promoting private companies in some way. For instance, in the official guidebook of the fair, commentary and advertisements relating to businesses riddle the pages. One section entitled “Financing the Fair” almost appears to be gloating about how fairs held in Europe rely on their country’s government for finances, but that in America, “fairs are primarily the result of private enterprise.” In a complete 180 degree turn from the Century of Progress Exposition anti-competition mindset, New York’s fair thrrove on the competitive nature of the large companies present. In fact, while speaking to the importance of international participation, Matthew Woll, a labor leader, stated that we should

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76 Findling and Pelle, Encyclopedia of World’s Fairs and Expositions, 300.
77 New York World’s Fair 1939 Hearings before the United States House Committee on Foreign Affairs, Seventy-Fifth Congress, First Session, on Mar. 23, 1937, 8.
78 Findling and Pelle, Encyclopedia of World’s Fairs and Expositions, 300.
welcome the manufacturers of all countries to exhibit their wares and their services at this country’s world’s fair for two reasons: First, if they do produce something superior, let us know it and we shall then be able to start our manufacturing processes to compete with theirs successfully. Secondly, we want the good will of all of the nations of the world, and we look upon this world’s fair to liven interests in competitive exhibitions of material things produced.  

It is also possible that with the heavy emphasis on business and influential private enterprises, this fair was designed to showcase the power and hope of capitalism toward people and countries with radical communist, socialist, totalitarian, and fascist ideals. There is no explicit evidence of this theory other than what can be inferred given the historical context of the time period.

Exhibits and Architecture

On the fair’s opening day, April 30, 1939, Franklin D. Roosevelt became the first president to give an address on live television. Although there was only a small audience watching the NBC broadcast in the local metropolitan area, the mere achievement spoke to the fair’s theme: “Building the World of Tomorrow.” In 1933, television was more of a concept than a reality. By 1939, the technology promised to be the future of communication. Although television was still not ready to be marketed to the average consumer, the feasibility of the public watching monumental moments such as Roosevelt’s opening speech from the comfort of home was exactly the type of world the Fair Corporation had in mind when its members envisioned the world of tomorrow.  

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80 New York World’s Fair 1939 Hearings before the United States House Committee on Foreign Affairs, Seventy-Fifth Congress, First Session, on Mar. 23, 1937, 39.
81 Weber, Television Before TV: New Media and Exhibition Culture in Europe and the USA, 289.
Figure 8: Opening speech by President Roosevelt with RCA television crew, New York World’s Fair 1939.

Nowhere was the 1939 New York World’s Fair theme of “Building the World of Tomorrow” more prevalent than in the Democracity exhibit. This monumental display located within the fair’s iconic Perisphere imagined the world of 2039. A carefully considered city of the future sprawled out below guests.82 The exhibit’s designer, Henry Dreyfus, was tasked with bringing the fair’s theme alive by constructing how he believed cities in the future would be designed to best fit everyone’s needs. In this city built for the people, the center of business and industry lived at the heart of the modernistic city; however, most of the people in this fictional community lived in small satellite towns off of the main city. Surrounding these towns were the rural communities of lush farmlands. As visitors gawked at the diorama show, daylight appeared to fade within the sphere, allowing stars to be visible above the illuminated city of the future.83 Although it is still not yet 2039, the Democracity’s world of tomorrow appears to have

82 Findling and Pelle, Encyclopedia of World’s Fairs and Expositions, 302.
got at least one aspect of the future correct, and that is the rise of suburbia. It was not until the 1950s that more people lived outside of cities than within them. The 1939 World’s Fair aimed to show visitors what the near future might look like based on the technology being developed today, and the Democracity exhibit was the fair’s prime example.

![Figure 9: The Democracity exhibit located within the Perisphere, 1939.](image)

While the fair’s theme supported the concept of the world of tomorrow, the private businesses who sponsored exhibits took the opportunity to showcase what the future of the world would look like if they had anything to say about it. Unlike Chicago’s 1933 exposition, competition was at the heart of most of the exhibits, whether or not visitors were conscious of it. Instead of having a hall of science where industries came together to showcase the latest advancements and theories in science and technology, the New York World’s Fair had the Science and Education Building where three small areas taught visitors about science’s achievements and roles as a social force in creating the modern world. According to the Fair Corporation, they wanted to leave the teaching of specific theories and new technologies to “the

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commercial exhibits,” thus enabling industries to more effectively compete for the visitor’s awe and admiration.\footnote{Official Guide Book of the New York World’s Fair, 1939, 197.} In this way, businesses were given free rein to build the future in their own image.

No corporation did this more successfully than General Motors. Their exhibit, entitled, “Highways and Horizons,” consisted of four buildings, some of which were up to six stories tall. These massive structures made up the four corners of a crossroads depicting a prediction of what an intersection might look like in the 1960s. Beyond the futuristic design of the exhibit, General Motors also had two other attractions that highlighted the company’s latest scientific advancements and applications to everyday life around the world. By far their greatest attraction was a 35,738 square-foot scale model of the American landscape in the year 1960. Visitors traveled through the exhibit on 600 moving chairs equipped with a speaker broadcasting a pre-recorded tour.\footnote{Official Guide Book of the New York World’s Fair, 1939, 207–208.} Consisting of 408 dioramas on multiple floors,\footnote{Findling and Pelle, Encyclopedia of World’s Fairs and Expositions, 303.} GM’s “Futurama” was the largest scale model ever constructed at the time. Although very similar to the Democracity inside the Perisphere, the Futurama exhibit illustrated how car production was going to reshape America. While the

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{figure10.png}
\caption{General Motors Futurama exhibit with diorama visible in the foreground and the moving chairs visible in the upper left side of the photograph.}
\end{figure}
Democracy was built to accommodate people, the Futurama was built to accommodate motor vehicles. According to the future General Motors was designing, in twenty years cities would be connected by extravagant highway systems that would run from the very heart of the town to every point in America. They would build roads, bridges, and tunnels on a scale never seen before. Nothing would be able to stop vehicles from reaching their destination. As visitors faced the neatly wrapped shiny design of the future, GM’s audio tour explained that in order to have the growth and prosperity dreamed about in the future, highway infrastructure would have to be developed on a grand scale. Although the expansion of the highway system under President Dwight D. Eisenhower in 1956 proved General Motors right, the exhibit mainly stood as a prime example of how private corporations planned to reshape the world.

As the World’s Fair immersed fairgoers in glittering displays about a better tomorrow, behind the scenes, the Fair Commissioners did their best to ignore the rising tides of war in Europe as they attempted to highlight unity, trade, and overall good relations with all the countries of the world through their exhibits. In 1937, the Fair Commission planned to have German, Soviet, Japanese, and Italian participation in face of the politics being practiced by those countries. Despite Germany’s belligerent actions leading up to the fair’s opening, it was never uninvited. Ultimately, Germany removed itself from the fair, stating that it could not raise the money to participate. As for the other countries, it was mainly due to President Roosevelt’s speech promoting the United States’ “desire to encourage peace and good will among all the nations of the earth” that stopped large-scale protests. Even then, many fairgoers were not

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89 Rydell, Designing Tomorrow: America’s World’s Fairs of the 1930s, 123.
90 Findling and Pelle, Encyclopedia of World’s Fairs and Expositions, 304.
pleased by these countries’ presence. The Soviet Pavilion especially received a great deal of backlash from visitors. More than a few complaint letters were sent to the Fair Commission expressing anger or distrust about the USSR Exhibit. One letter described the USSR’s presence as “a whitened sepulcher with dead man’s bone.” Another guest wrote, “I visited the fair, in fact some twenty-odd times, always with a great deal of interest and pleasure in the different areas. My only regret each time was to see the Russian symbol aloft in the air.” Despite the fair’s lofty aims to promote trade and goodwill among nations, political tensions proved to be a difficult challenge to overcome.

In the Fair’s second season, from April to October 1940, world politics had grown so hostile that the fair had to make some drastic changes. The greatest of these alterations was to the fair’s theme. “Building the World of Tomorrow” transformed into “For Peace and Freedom” in 1940. In addition, after invading Finland in November of 1939, the Soviets had their exhibit removed from the fair. In the USSR’s absence, their site was ironically transformed into the American Common where performances celebrated free speech. At the Polish exhibit, the biggest change occurred when the Germans invaded Poland in September 1939. Despite the war, the Polish Pavilion decided to remain open for the 1940 season with the

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92“Soviet Pavilion.” NYPL Digital Collections. Accessed January 18, 2024. [https://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/9c93ecbb-6f81-6c9a-e040-e00a18065b9](https://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/9c93ecbb-6f81-6c9a-e040-e00a18065b9).
help of donations and financial support from private institutions. A letter printed within the pamphlets and merchandise from the Polish Pavilion asking for financial aid read:

Dear Visitor: I appeal to you to help us maintain the Polish Exhibit at the New York World’s Fair, 1940. It stands for the Peace and Freedom of my battered Country; it stands for a testimony given before the American People of our undaunted will to live as a free, democratic and independent nation; it stands for the ideals of Christianity and liberal Civilization dear to every decent man and woman throughout the world.93

Although the United States remained politically neutral at this time, the changes that were going on in the world were clearly reflected in the exhibits of the New York World’s Fair. Even though the world was plunging into a second world war, the World’s Fair still promoted peace and hope for the future.

Conclusion

At the end of the New York Exposition’s two seasons, the fair was $23,440,909 in debt yet was considered by many to be a success anyway. As of closing day on October 31, 1940, 25,841,633 people had visited the fair and experienced monumental displays of hope for the world of tomorrow and for a world of peace and freedom. Although the fair certainly did not make any money, it was successful in its attempt to facilitate trade and better international relations. In addition, despite the lack of empirical evidence to back it up, many New Yorker business owners believed the tourism from the fair had a positive effect on the local community and economy.94 Although the Fair Corporation was forced to claim bankruptcy, New York City


as a whole was so pleased in the outcome that they decided to host another World’s Fair just 24 years later.\textsuperscript{95} In response to the developing war in Europe and Asia, the Fair Corporation decided to make more of an effort to involve Central and South American countries.\textsuperscript{96} According to a newspaper report in the \textit{Christian Science Monitor}, Argentina’s Commissioner General to the Fair “asserted that the European war was bringing closer cultural and economic ties between the Americas.”\textsuperscript{97}

The success of labor unions working alongside powerful corporations is another great achievement for the fair. Not only did the union workers show the world the effectiveness of union labor with their assurance not to strike, but they also demonstrated their efficiency by completing the fair ahead of schedule. The use of union labor on a project so tightly entwined with the foundations of democracy and capitalism also stood to assure many Americans that not all unions functioned on communist beliefs. The Chairman of Labor Relations and Vice President of Labor in New York, Matthew Woll, made sure to highlight the importance of democracy at the New York World’s Fair in his address to Congress, saying:

\begin{quote}
I visualize the peoples of Europe, of altogether too many of the oppressed lands of Europe, coming to our shores and here behold and realize fully what democracy means as distinguished from the governments they have. Here they will receive new hope, new inspiration, new incentives, and new enthusiasms to go back into their homelands and there replant the real seed of democracy.\textsuperscript{98}
\end{quote}

It is likely that Matthew Woll felt compelled to make such a statement regarding the spread of democracy due to labor’s unpopular history involving communism. At most, other planners of the fair briefly touch on the concept of democracy in relation to the celebration of George

\textsuperscript{95} Findling and Pelle, \textit{Encyclopedia of World’s Fairs and Expositions}, 304.
\textsuperscript{96} \textit{Federal Participation in New York World’s Fair Hearings before the United States Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, Seventy-Sixth Congress, Third Session, on Apr. 3, 1940}. Washington: U.S. G.P.O., 1940, 4.
\textsuperscript{98} \textit{New York World’s Fair 1939 Hearings before the United States House Committee on Foreign Affairs, Seventy-Fifth Congress, First Session, on Mar. 23, 1937}, 40.
Washington’s inauguration and the founding of the country, but no one rings the bell of patriotism quite as much as the fair’s labor union coordinator.

In the beginning, the idea for the 1939–1940 New York World’s Fair was conceived from the fear and financial need of the mid-1930s. Based on the success of Chicago’s Exhibition in 1933, the New York World’s Fair Corporation knew they needed to pick a theme to draw in the greatest number of people possible to most effectively influence the local economy and international relations in any. So, from the despair of the Great Depression grew the champion of hope: The World of Tomorrow. In the imaginary existence of Tomorrow, almost anything was possible, and there was no better time for people to start dreaming of how great the near future could be. Although the cost of creating the fair was high, so was the overwhelming sense of the fair’s success and importance for the greater community from government officials and leaders across the country.

As the fair planning progressed and the world seemed to careen further into chaos with the rise of Hitler and other fascist leaders, the theme of the fair shifted to providing hope in a different way. In the face of yet another world war, the Fair Corporation decided to offer visitors an experience that depicted a future full of peace and freedom. Countries already feeling the effects of war, such as Poland, were able to use the fundamental aspects of peace and freedom, so dear to the American people, as a rallying cry for support at the exposition. In the end, a fair that originally started out wanting to promote trade ended up being a beacon of light, denying the darkness of war, while also attempting to bind the world together with the weak glue of understanding and fair competition.
Chapter 3
Century 21 Exposition: Seattle, 1962

Rick Steves was just seven years old in 1962 when the World’s Fair came to Seattle. At the time, he was living in Edmonds, Washington, where his parents owned a piano store. Edmonds is located only 25 minutes north of Seattle’s city center, but living even closer to the fairgrounds was Rick’s grandmother. She owned a house on Queen Anne’s Hill in Seattle, and in 1962, found herself only about a 15-minute walk from the fairgrounds. Seizing the wonderful opportunity at hand, she decided to open up her house as a bed and breakfast for the almost year-long event.

In a 2012 interview with PBS channel KCTS 9, Rick recalls the city’s overwhelming excitement for the fair. According to Rick he “was just a typical Ballard kid with no sense of the world, and suddenly the world came here,” to Seattle. His family was so excited to see the influx of people that they parked on the side of one of the main roads into town and held up signs reading, “Welcome to Seattle,” when they saw an out-of-state license plate.

Looking back, Rick Steves considers the Seattle World’s Fair to be one of the foundational experiences for shaping his love for travel and passion for better understanding cultures around the world. Rick vividly remembers going to the fair with his grandfather and buying a large and expensive Belgian waffle. This waffle was especially significant for young Rick Steves because “it was Europe and Europe was coming to Seattle”. In a way, that waffle represented a lifetime appetite for exploring and understanding the world. 

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Today, Rick Steves is best known for his guidebooks and public television show on European travel. His company aims to empower Americans to have “European trips that are fun, affordable, and culturally broadening.” Outside his travel business, Rick Steves is a major advocate for travel as a political act. He believes that travel is the best way to share cultures, facilitate understanding, and spread peace throughout the world. He is also a philanthropist and passionate activist for social justice, climate change, and the decriminalization of marijuana. In many ways, Rick Steves’ view of world travel directly mirrors the message of the Century 21 Exposition in Seattle and of the larger political atmosphere at the time.101

Context

With the end of WWII came the end of any kind of cooperation between the Soviet Union and the United States. The two countries had been on less-than-ideal terms at the start of the war, and that did not improve as time went on. In 1945, their shaky alliance came to an end when the Soviet Union took military control over the countries in Eastern Europe that it had liberated and forced the establishment of communist governments, breaking the promises they made at the Yalta Conference with Winston Churchill and Franklin D. Roosevelt, to allow free elections to be held in the nations under Soviet control at the end of WWII.102

In 1946, in response to growing tensions and fear of yet another war on the horizon, the Secretary of State asked George Kennan of the US Embassy in Moscow to analyze the communist situation. His 8,000 word response, known as “the long telegram,” highlighted the complex situation and Soviet perspective. Most concerning was Kennan’s explanation that the “USSR still lives in antagonistic ‘capitalist encirclement’ with which in the long run there can be

no permanent peaceful coexistence.\textsuperscript{103} It became clear that according to Soviet ideology, there would at some point have to be a fight between the opposing Communist and capitalist spheres of the world to see who would come out on top.

As war-torn Europe struggled to rebuild, socialist and communist parties took advantage of the opportunity to win over the desperate populations across countries such as France, Belgium, and Italy. In the late 1940s, the United States, fearing an end to democracy and capitalism, instituted policies to contain communism by supporting nations in the fight against communism and by fortifying democracy through the administration of financial and technological aid to European countries decimated by WWII. These efforts, the Truman Doctrine and the Marshall Plan, essentially attempted to stop communism in its tracks by taking away new countries for the communist ideology to prey on.\textsuperscript{104}

In 1949, the Cold War sprang to the forefront of politics yet again when news reached the United States that the Soviets had successfully developed and tested a nuclear bomb. In response, President Truman approved construction of a more powerful hydrogen bomb to deter the USSR. Most importantly, Americans now had to face the possibility of a nuclear war that could not only destroy the United States, but also the whole world. In the 1950s, basement fallout shelters became increasingly popular.\textsuperscript{105} In school, students practiced hiding under their desks in the event of a nuclear attack, and the bowtie wearing cartoon Bert the Turtle taught Americans across the country how to duck and cover at the first sign of danger.\textsuperscript{106} In November 1952 the United States successfully detonated the hydrogen bomb; however, the advantage did not last

\textsuperscript{104} Tindall and Shi, \textit{America: A Narrative History, Tenth Edition}, 1219–1221.
\textsuperscript{105} Walter LaFeber, \textit{America, Russia, and the Cold War, 1945-2002} (McGraw-Hill Humanities, Social Sciences & World Languages, 2004), 203–206.
\textsuperscript{106} Nuclear Vault, “Duck and Cover (1951) Bert the Turtle,” July 12, 2009, \url{https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IKeXJw5jw60}. 
long because just 10 months later, in August 1953, the Soviet Union also acquired the hydrogen bomb.  

In 1957 American fear climaxed on October 4th when the Soviets launched Sputnik, the first communications satellite, into orbit around the earth. Although the Soviets made no reference to hostilities, the thought on most American’s minds was that if the Soviets could send a satellite to space, they could also likely shoot a nuclear bomb across the Pacific Ocean or drop them from space. Another upsetting fact to Americans of the Soviet achievement was the recognition that the United States was not at the forefront of technological advancements in space. The existence of Sputnik not only hurt America’s pride, but it also sent undermining ripples that put into question the nation’s technological, industrial, and governmental supremacy over the Soviet Union.

Luckily, despite the animosity between the two nations, neither country was eager to start another war. In 1959 Vice-president Richard Nixon flew to the USSR to promote the opening of the American National Exhibition in Moscow which intended to help facilitate amicable relations and better understanding between the two hostile governments. Needless to say, Richard Nixon and Nikita Khrushchev’s impromptu debate in the model kitchen of an American home did not foster the more harmonious relationships they allegedly desired. In fact, at every opportunity, both leaders took the chance to promote their own government’s ideologies and accomplishments. In response to being asked his opinion of the American exhibit, Khrushchev responded:

> It’s clear to me that the construction workers didn’t manage to finish their work and the exhibit is still not put in order. This is what America is capable of, and how long has she existed? 300 years? 150 years of independence and this is her level. We haven’t quite reached 42 years, and in another 7 years, we’ll be at the

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level of America, and after that we’ll go farther. As we pass you by, we’ll wave “hi” to you, and then if you want, we’ll stop and say, “please come along behind us.” If you want to live under capitalism, go ahead, that’s your question, an internal matter, it doesn’t concern us. We can feel sorry for you, but really, you wouldn’t understand. We’ve already seen how you understand things.\textsuperscript{108}

To say that the relationship between the US and the Soviet Union was cold is an understatement. While enmity only grew between the two countries with each new attempt to promote understanding, a thin mutual tightrope of unwillingness to start a nuclear war kept the countries at bay for the time being.

In Eisenhower’s farewell address on January 17, 1961, he solidified his stance against the Soviets for the last time by noting:

\begin{quote}
America is today the strongest, the most influential and most productive nation in the world. Understandably proud of this pre-eminence, we yet realize that America’s leadership and prestige depend, not merely upon our unmatched material progress, riches and military strength, but on how we use our power in the interest of world peace and human betterment.\textsuperscript{109}
\end{quote}

Like Khrushchev, Eisenhower points out this underlying competition in production and material progress that has dominated the cold war alongside the production of nuclear weapons and, with the creation of \textit{Sputnik}, space technology.

In 1961 John F. Kennedy took this competition of production power, progress, and technological advancement to a whole new level when he declared the space race. On May 25th, Kennedy addressed a joint session of Congress to ask for a very literally astronomical sum of money totaling some 7 to 9 billion dollars to go towards the advancements in communication satellites, rocket development, and world-wide weather observation systems.\textsuperscript{110}

\textsuperscript{109} “President Dwight D. Eisenhower’s Farewell Address (1961),” National Archives, June 20, 2023, \url{https://www.archives.gov/milestone-documents/president-dwight-d-eisenhowers-farewell-address}.
In order to accomplish this goal and get the funding approved, Kennedy not only had to win over Congress, but he also had to get the support of the American people. He argued that his plan could not work “unless every scientist, every engineer, every serviceman, every technician, contractor, and civil servant gives his personal pledge that this nation will move forward, with full speed of freedom, in the exciting adventure of space.”111 With this, the Kennedy administration set out to win the hearts and minds of the general public while also putting on a show for the world that highlighted the nation’s peaceful intentions and scientific superiority. Kennedy continued to sell the excitement and necessity of space travel to the public, famously inspiring crowds during his speech at Rice University on September 12, 1962, by saying, “We choose to go to the moon in this decade and do the other things, not because they are easy, but because they are hard, because that goal will serve to organize and measure the best of our energies and skills, because that challenge is one that we are willing to accept, one we are unwilling to postpone, and one which we intend to win.”112 Along with the power of oration, there is no better outlet for winning over the masses than the interactive and informative experience of a World’s Fair.

Planning the Fair

By the 1950s, the futuristic world dreamed about by the Democracity and Futurama exhibits at the 1939 World of Tomorrow Exposition had become a reality, and Seattle hated it. With the passage of the GI Bill at the end of WWII, young men returning home from war were given financial aid that helped them secure brand-new affordable homes in newly established

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111 “Address to Joint Session of Congress May 25, 1961.”
suburban communities. Between 1948 and 1958, 11 million homes were constructed in suburbia. These new residential neighborhoods were not located in the city, but they were not considered to be rural either.\textsuperscript{113} Just as the Democracity envisioned, towns mostly made up of residents sprang up on the outskirts of cities, leaving mostly downtown urban centers to industries and less affluent people.

In addition, the cross-country highway systems dreamed of in the General Motors Futurama exhibit also became a reality. In 1956, President Eisenhower signed the Federal-Aid Highway Act which sanctioned the use of federal funding to build a network of interconnected highway systems spanning from the East Coast to the West Coast, and from Canada all the way south to Mexico and the tip of Florida. In total, 47,000 miles of road and 55,512 bridges were constructed. Although the development of the highway system connected the United States like never before and promoted tourism via road trips, it also acted as yet another mechanism leading to the decline of cities as towns began popping up along interstate highway routes. Important and prosperous city residents could easily move to the new suburbs and commute to work, also depleting Seattle of the income of the rich.\textsuperscript{114}

In the 1950s the city of Seattle was facing a huge problem; too many people were leaving the city for the new suburban communities surrounding Seattle. There were relatively no children or young married couples living downtown, leaving mostly the elderly and retired communities inside the city.\textsuperscript{115} This sudden and drastic shift in demographics severely hurt Seattle’s already relatively small business district. In addition, the struggling city had no major league sports teams or designated space for the performing arts that could help draw in outside communities.

\textsuperscript{113} Tindall and Shi, \textit{America: A Narrative History, Tenth Edition}, 1268.
\textsuperscript{114} Tindall and Shi, \textit{America: A Narrative History, Tenth Edition}, 1263.
Seattle was in desperate need of the revitalization of its urban center. In an effort to draw people downtown and secure funding for a new civic center, Seattle city planners in 1955 decided to organize a fair.\textsuperscript{116} They determined the theme would be “A Festival for the West” and would commemorate the Alaska-Yukon Pacific World’s Fair that took place in Seattle in 1909 to celebrate the city’s importance as a gateway to Alaskan and Asian ports. In addition, the original fair planners hoped that a festival would not only economically invigorate local businesses, but also draw in new industries.\textsuperscript{117}

\begin{figure}
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{Space_Needle_before_construction.jpg}
\caption{A 1957 Photograph depicting the dilapidated site of the Space Needle before construction, illustrating the city's reason for an urban renewal project.}
\end{figure}

Another major reason for the city's decision to host a fair was to lessen Seattle’s dependence on the Boeing company and the aerospace industry. At the end of WWII, Boeing’s large number of military contracts and their development of the Boeing 707 jet greatly increased the size and

\textsuperscript{116} Findling and Pelle, \textit{Encyclopedia of World’s Fairs and Expositions}, 323.
\textsuperscript{117} Findlay, \textit{Magic Lands: Western Cityscapes and American Culture After 1940}, 218.
importance of the company. By 1957 one out of every two manufacturing workers in the Seattle area was employed by Boeing. While the company was beneficial for providing jobs, it made the local economy extremely unstable because of the region’s heavy reliance on the industry’s success. Critics of Boeing in Seattle also complained that the company did not contribute any funding to bolster community or art organizations.\textsuperscript{118}

Ironically, the qualities that Seattle set out to change with their fair were exactly what drew the interest of the federal government. Originally, Seattle’s fair only hoped to catch the attention of, at most, the western half of the United States: thus its initial theme titled, “A Festival for the West.” This relatively local mindset all changed in response to the launch of the Soviet satellite \textit{Sputnik}.\textsuperscript{119} A few days after Sputnik’s launch, a group of scientists and politicians met in Washington and felt that they needed to advertise the scientific and technological advancements of the US to the world while also building up support for investments in space exploration from the American people. The opportunity presented by plans for a fair in Seattle was exactly what the government was seeking.\textsuperscript{120} Seattle was already a temple to the aerospace industry with the presence of Boeing, and the city’s history as a gateway to Asia was an added bonus. At a 1959 hearing before the House of Representatives Committee on Science and Astronautics, Representative Don Magnuson of Washington state openly supported government spending on the Seattle World’s Fair by arguing that:

\begin{quote}
If we really are going to be able to get public support for expensive programs of scientific research and development… I think it is time we showed our own people as well as the rest of the world what we are doing in these basic fields.
\end{quote}

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{118} Findlay, \textit{Magic Lands: Western Cityscapes and American Culture After 1940}, 219.
\textsuperscript{119} Findlay, \textit{Magic Lands: Western Cityscapes and American Culture After 1940}, 228.
https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=pst.000070899979;seq=3.
\end{flushright}
Every dollar spent on the exposition will be a dollar well invested in the future security of our nation.\textsuperscript{121}

As the presence of similar testimonies from congressmen at the 1959 hearing confirm, many government officials truly believed that a space age-themed fair in Seattle would help win the space race by raising support, awareness, and funding for the technology they believed determined “the future security of our nation.”

The government also saw the fair as an opportunity to influence the younger generations to pursue careers in science. When asked what the World’s Fair in Seattle meant to accomplish, Representative Magnuson answered that the theme was chosen “to evoke greater interest among the people of our country in science, which inevitably will lead to more scientists, whom we need very badly.”\textsuperscript{122} During the same discussion, Magnuson and other officials even mentioned that in an attempt to lure students to careers in science, the government could pay for their education. Although the suggestion was quickly shot down at this meeting, it does illustrate how far some members of the government were willing to go in order to encourage careers in science.\textsuperscript{123} At the time, many of the top scientists leading America’s space program were German and Jewish refugees left over from WWII, and many people in the government wanted Americans to be leading the charge. Not only did government officials feel that more American scientists would make the United States look better, but there was also the fear that foreign born scientists were not as loyal to the United States.\textsuperscript{124}

\textsuperscript{121} \textit{International Control of Outer Space (No. 7): Hearings before the Committee on Science and Astronautics, United States House of Representatives, Eighty-Sixth Congress, First Session, March 5, 6, and 11, 1959}. District of Columbia: U.S. Govt. Print. Off, 1959, 1959, 4.
\textsuperscript{122} \textit{International Control of Outer Space (No. 7)}, 4.
\textsuperscript{123} \textit{International Control of Outer Space (No. 7)}, 9.
\textsuperscript{124} Deborah Cadbury, \textit{Space Race: The Epic Battle Between America and the Soviet Union for Dominion of Space} (Harper Collins, 2007), 77–94.
Increased funding and interest from the Federal Government led to Seattle losing control over the fair’s narrative. Aeronautics, the industry Seattle wanted less of, became the fair’s focal point. In fact, on the inside cover of the fair’s *Official Guide Book*, Boeing had a full-page advertisement urging visitors to send in their application to work for the company.\(^{125}\) Instead of the fair’s theme reflecting the growth of the city and downtown businesses, the fair became synonymous with science and the future. When President John F. Kennedy opened the world’s fair on April 21, 1962, he told the nation that at the fair, “what we show is achieved with great effort in the fields of science, technology and industry. These accomplishments are bridges which carry us confidently towards the 21st century.”\(^{126}\) What JFK does not mention in his speech is anything related to Seattle’s revitalization efforts.

**Exhibits and Architecture**

Although the US government may have hijacked the 1962 Seattle World’s fair as a political tool, their investments were what attracted attention to the city and brought in visitors. Designed to be a small event, the Seattle exposition site was only 74 acres. In contrast, the last fair to be held in the United States, the 1939–1940 New York World’s Fair, was 1,202 acres. According to the regulations laid out by the Bureau International des Expositions, the fair’s small size meant that it could only be a “second category” world’s fair. Traditionally, second-class fairs do not stir up much publicity, attract many people, and become well remembered; however, with the strong support of the US government, the Seattle world’s fair rivaled many first-category expositions. Although the government physically and financially showed its support via


the five building, 9.5 million dollar, US Science Pavilion, it can also be credited with attracting support from other large companies and investors such as Boeing, NASA, the Pentagram Corporation (who financed the construction of the Space Needle), and IBM.  

The fair’s main attraction, the US Science Pavilion, received an astounding 6.7 million visitors in comparison to the next most popular attraction, the Space Needle, that received around 3 million visitors. The Science Pavilion’s massive six-acre complex consisting of five buildings attempted to teach the world about science like never before. The first of the five interconnected buildings was called “the house of science.” Here, fairgoers watched a 13 minute long film that introduced the main idea of the exhibit by using seven projectors to create interlocking images that could show one large video or six small independent videos. The second building, titled “The history of science,” told the story of the development of science through interactive

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127 Findlay, Magic Lands: Western Cityscapes and American Culture After 1940, 218–228.  
128 Findling and Pelle, Encyclopedia of World’s Fairs and Expositions, 326.
displays mostly targeting the senses and focusing on the natural world. The third building, “the Spacearium,” was a scientific marvel in itself. Here, another short video was projected on a domed ceiling and took guests on an immersive journey through space. For this display new lenses were developed in order to both film and project a movie of these dimensions. The result was a surreal feeling of flying through the cosmos very similar to a planetarium show today.129

In the fourth building, “the Methods of Science,” 27 exhibits in all fields of science demonstrated the scientific process from formulating a hypothesis to drawing conclusions. In one display, live pigeons were being trained to press buttons in order to study the question, “how do animals learn?”130 In the words of the final report sent to the department of commerce, the final building that made up the science pavilion aimed to show that “science will continue to confront us with a number of moral, social, and economic dilemmas which everyone—be he scientist or not—must help solve.”131 Although none of the displays mentioned the scientific race with the Soviets directly, the message sent by America’s expensive monument to science and innovative exhibits essentially dared the world to do better. Upon visiting the pavilion, Claude Doumic of Paris stated, “It really honors a Government to have erected such a beautiful tribute not to the glorification of any particular country or conception but to science and scientists,”132 proving that in honoring science on such a massive scale, the US was, in reality, just promoting its own image of power and prestige. Although the building stands as a monument to peace, the impressive scale and depth reveals the USA's intention of becoming a global leader in scientific development.

Interestingly enough, Seattle’s World Fair, much like New York’s 1939–1940 exposition, also displayed the world of tomorrow. Developed by the state of Washington, an exhibit located inside the newly erected permanent building called the Coliseum, exported visitors to the world of tomorrow in a circular elevator aptly named “the Bubbleator.” Located within a Minecraft-esque structure of white cubes designed to resemble a cloud, the tour of the future titled, “The Threshold and the Threat,” positions the best the future has to offer alongside the fears of the present. Images of golden light and infinite star filled skies dissolve to reveal a family trapped in a fallout shelter. In another instance, “a dreamy suburban development with rows of identical dwellings” transformed into “an urban housing project with grim gray apartment buildings, and a decaying slum section forested not with trees but with TV antennas.”\(^{133}\) The goal of these juxtaposing concepts was to make visitors aware of the serious consequences that could occur in the near future unless the correct course of action was to be taken. For instance, the depictions of the pleading family in the fallout shelter almost seemed to reach out and suggest that if the US did not hold on to its military authority through weapons development, Americans would soon fall victim to an attack by a new, ruthless, superpower.

In addition to ominous images of the future, the tour introduces a number of new technologies to improve industries and everyday life. The tour foresees home furnishings being made out of lightweight materials such as plastics and paper, a vacuum built into the walls of

homes, solar ovens, and massive plastic climate-controlled buildings to place over farmland for year-round crops. The exhibit even envisions “electronic store houses of the knowledge of the past and present to be shared by all seekers of wisdom throughout the world in free exchange.”

At the conclusion of the journey to the world of tomorrow, fairgoers are faced with the family stuck inside the fallout shelter again, but this time, as the image fades the audience hears President Kennedy’s inaugural address “calling upon listeners to use the knowledge of the present to build a brighter world of tomorrow—a world free of the threats which clouds the threshold.”

In stark contrast to the two visions of the future made in New York in 1939 and 1940, the Seattle exposition does not shy away from addressing the present problems affecting the world of tomorrow. Rather than offer sweet images of the future, some exhibits in Seattle functioned as a call to action against the threats jeopardizing a peaceful, beautiful tomorrow.

Conclusion

By the time Seattle’s Century 21 Exhibition came to an end on October 21st, 1962, around 9.6 million people had attended the fair. Although the city itself saw unprecedented foot traffic in response to the fair, there is no evidence suggesting the downtown got the revitalization and new industry influx for which they were originally planning. Through the city’s close partnership with the government, they were able to secure buildings to house community engaging activities such as sports and the arts. In divergence with almost every other world’s fair, the structures built for Seattle’s exposition were permanent. At the outset of the fair, the city made arrangements with most of the exhibitors to acquire their buildings at the exhibition’s end, and most of the structures are still there today. The US Science Center was transformed into the

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Pacific Science Center under the government’s proviso that it permanently remains “a living science center.” In addition, the Coliseum was converted into an 18,500-seat sport and convention complex. Buildings for the city’s performing arts were obtained in the same way.

While these new long overdue public buildings were extremely important for building up and revitalizing the city, they were not actually located in the downtown region that was in need of aid because there was not enough land available. In order to connect the two centers, Seattle built a monorail to both highlight the transportation of the future and connect the new cultural center with the preexisting business district. After the close of the fair, however, the two separate city centers were often in opposition over funding and where to put new infrastructure. Not only did the monorail not help in uniting Seattle, but it was never expanded into a greater transportation network.

In addition to the Century 21 Exposition promoting the aerospace industry that Seattle wanted to move away from, the fair also supported suburban living. In the future envisioned in “the Threat and the Threshold” exhibit, the suburban lifestyle was pictured as the future’s ideal reality. The perfect cookie cutter houses stood in contrast to densely populated urban centers that were depicted akin to gray landfills. The fair designers even organized the layout to resemble the shopping malls and amusement parks with which affluent and middle-class suburbanites were familiar.

If the fair accomplished anything for Seattle, it was that it successfully introduced the world to the small city. Without the help of the government, the fair would certainly never have

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138 Findlay, Magic Lands: Western Cityscapes and American Culture After 1940, 225.
140 Findlay, Magic Lands: Western Cityscapes and American Culture After 1940, 239.
reached the same levels of attendance and importance. In fact, the city’s small and obscure nature almost forced the government to build a fair to science elsewhere because they were afraid nobody would attend Seattle’s fair because of the city’s “remoteness.” Ultimately, the government decided to stick with Seattle as the site for their statement on science, and the fair proved a big deal for the city of Seattle and its residents. Many locals, such as Rick Steve’s grandmother, welcomed foreigners and out-of-staters into their homes. Famous people such as Elvis Presley helped put Seattle on the map. In 1963, his movie, “It Happened at the World's Fair,” once again brought attention to the city.\(^\text{141}\) In addition, the Space Needle and monorail remain assets to the city to this day. Their novelty continues to symbolize modernity and draw visitors from around the world.

\[\text{Figure 15: Photograph of the Space Needle as seen during the Seattle World's Fair in 1962.}\]

Seattle’s Century 21 Exposition was a product of the rising tensions between the Soviet Union and the United States. The post-WWII arms race to develop the most powerful thermonuclear bomb evolved into a race into orbit in the 1950s, and then a race to the moon in the 1960s under the Kennedy administration. Unlike previous wars, the soldiers of this new Cold War with the USSR were scientists, making the Seattle World’s Fair the government’s recruitment office dressed in sheep's clothing. With a mission such as this, it is really no wonder why the future imagined by the Century 21 Exposition during this time period revolved around scientific exploration, fear of nuclear war, and the acknowledgement that present actions determine the outcomes of tomorrow. While the fair’s end product may not have represented everything the city originally set out to accomplish, this shift in goals ultimately highlights the very essence of how World’s Fairs shift to accommodate the changing political and economic situation around them.
In Conclusion

In 1933, the Great Depression was ravaging the country. In 1939, WWII was just ramping up in Europe. In 1962, the United States and the USSR were competing not only on the frontier of space but also to see who could develop the deadliest nuclear bomb. However, during these times of great economic and political instability, these World’s Fairs sold the concept of hope to millions of people. While each exposition may have started out to better the local community in which they were located, they ultimately ended up shifting their theme and message to draw in visitors with a promise of a better future through visions of progress.

The 1920s gave many Americans a glimpse into a life of prosperity, consumerism, and independence through innovations. It was these concepts that the 1933–1934 Chicago World’s Fair set out to capture through the theme of “A Century of Progress;” however, this all changed with the advent of the Great Depression. Suddenly, a fair designed to commemorate progress became a fair which promised the downtrodden a better future through scientific and industrial innovations. Although fair planners originally aimed to use the fair as a means for showing off the wide variety of impressive industries in Chicago, the exposition grew to encompass so much more. It functioned as a means for reinvigorating Chicago’s economy through tourism and public works projects that fixed up the area around the fairgrounds. It also helped to keep the arts alive during a time when trips to the museum of fine arts might have been considered a frivolous expense.\textsuperscript{142} Despite the difficult times, it was the fair’s hopeful theme that brought visitors in to see the new technologies and houses of tomorrow which promised to improve the lives of the average person.

\textsuperscript{142} Findling and Pelle, \textit{Encyclopedia of World’s Fairs and Expositions}, 326.
Following the success of Chicago, New York set out to develop a World’s Fair to give the city a major economic boost in the face of the continuing Great Depression. While it was developed with the goals of the city and local worker unions in mind, it soon developed to deal with entirely new political problems. The world of tomorrow that the fair’s theme envisioned laid out a future of American prosperity wholly unlike the reality of the 1930s. The future that was inspired by Chicago’s World Fair drew in millions who delighted in the promises of a highway-laden, easily traversable America where everyone could have the opportunity to live the classic, home-owner American dream. Ultimately, this future too was subject to change with the arrival of war in Europe. The United States was in a difficult position with many of its allies going to war, and so, the message of the fair shifted from “The World of Tomorrow” to “For Peace and Freedom.” Just as in Chicago, New York’s aim to better its community eventually evolved into a new vision of the future based on the political situation of the time.

In Seattle, the story is no different. Originally, the fair being developed for the city was only looking for a way to draw in more people, more industries, and more community developments to the city. The goal for the fair was not in envisioning the future; however, that was before the USSR launched the artificial satellite Sputnik into space, subsequently starting the race to master space. With the country’s political agenda shifting toward science and space exploration for the sake of world peace, so too was Seattle’s 1962 fair agenda. When at one point Seattle was attempting to be free of its reliance on the aerospace industry, the changing politics of the time period made the city more reliant than ever before. The US government needed the support of American taxpayers to fund the space program, and the fair in Seattle was exactly the publicity the government needed. The fair’s theme, “Century 21,” predicted the future to be quite literally out of this world. Attractions such as the Space Needle conjured fantasies of being able
to dine amongst the stars, while attractions from NASA and the US Government science pavilion presented the idea of taking rocket ships through the solar system like one might explore the west coast. Ultimately, the mission of Seattle’s 1962 World’s Fair evolved from downtown development to selling the concept of space exploration as a means for a safer and more peaceful future.

Given the economic and political challenges transpiring during each one of these prospective World’s Fairs, it makes sense that the future envisioned in each one reflects the concerns of the present. In 1933 Chicago, the future was full of technologies to simplify your home and make life easier, when in reality, life was difficult for the average family, and owning anything, especially a house tailored to your needs, was just a dream for many Americans who were worried about simply keeping their jobs. In 1939 New York, the future was a reimagined community where all families could afford the comfort of a house with some land, a steady job in the city, and freedom without fear. With the reality of the Great Depression and the threat of war on America’s doorstep, this imagined world of tomorrow really was an ideal speck of hope for visitors to cherish. In 1962 Seattle, the future was peace and understanding by harnessing the tools acquired in space exploration. At a time when international conflict between two world superpowers who were armed with hydrogen bombs seemed ready to escalate to war at any moment while developing rocket technology, the promise of finding peace in a concept bigger than national identity was exactly the kind of future many Americans needed to hear.

Each fair was drastically altered by the politics of the time, but the 1962 Seattle World’s Fair appears disproportionally entwined with governmental influence. While there is no simple answer to why this might be, it is likely that the reason lies within many truths. One reasonable theory is that in a country with a strong military-industrial complex, the government is innately
required to have closer involvement in events which concern industry and modern technology.

Seeing how the US government used its involvement in the fair to recruit people to science in hopes of benefitting from a military standpoint, it is more than reasonable to briefly summarize the difference in government participation at the fairs from the perspective of the rise of the military industrial complex in American history.

In selling these concepts of the world of tomorrow to people all over the world, these expositions were utilizing ideas of a better future to make statements about the shortcomings of the present. Although these ideal visions of the future may turn out to create more problems than they solve, as Seattle’s fulfilled prophecy problem exemplifies, the simple effort of dreaming of an improved world says a lot about the challenges being faced by the people at the time.

This act of dreaming for the future is something that Walt Disney was especially skilled at. He had a talent for finding the essence of a subject, and the creativity to make that essence accessible to people of all ages. These qualities are exactly what made him so well suited to take on four exhibit projects at the 1964 World’s Fair. However, in Disney’s attempt to relay the message of the 1964 exposition in the Carousel of Progress, he ultimately ended up boiling the concept down to a notion of hope that has represented the message being sold to visitors at the heart of every world's fair since 1933:

There's a great, big, beautiful tomorrow
Shining at the end of every day
There's a great, big, beautiful tomorrow
And tomorrow's just a dream away

Man has a dream and that's the start
He follows his dream with mind and heart
And when it becomes a reality
It's a dream come true for you and me

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