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To Show What Will Be By What Has Been

Thinking like an empire

Most visitors to San Diego's Panama-California Exposition—the southern counterpoint to San Francisco's world's fair in 1915—entered by crossing the Puente de Cabrillo. The high, arcaded bridge carried fairgoers over a small canyon toward the edge of a mesa on which the exposition's miniature city seemed to float. At the end stood the California Building, its striking blue-domed roof and tower an echo of the Giralda in Seville. The richly ornamented entranceway featured a mash-up of monarchs, sailors, and missionaries made in plaster to look like marble: a youthful Padre Junípero Serra with the shield of the United States above his head; Charles III of Spain; Juan Rodriguez Cabrillo, the first Spaniard to see San Diego harbor; Gaspar de Portola, first Spanish governor of California; and English navigator George Vancouver, among others.

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In dedicating the California Building on the exposition's opening night, leading local retailer George White Marston nominated this unlikely squad to serve as guardians of "the past and present of California's life . . . true symbols of her glowing history and her wonderful today."[1] Promoters of San Diego's fair had been deploying exactly this historical logic throughout the five-year process that brought the exposition to life. In the words of its head publicist, the philosophy behind it all was "to show what will be by what has been."[2]

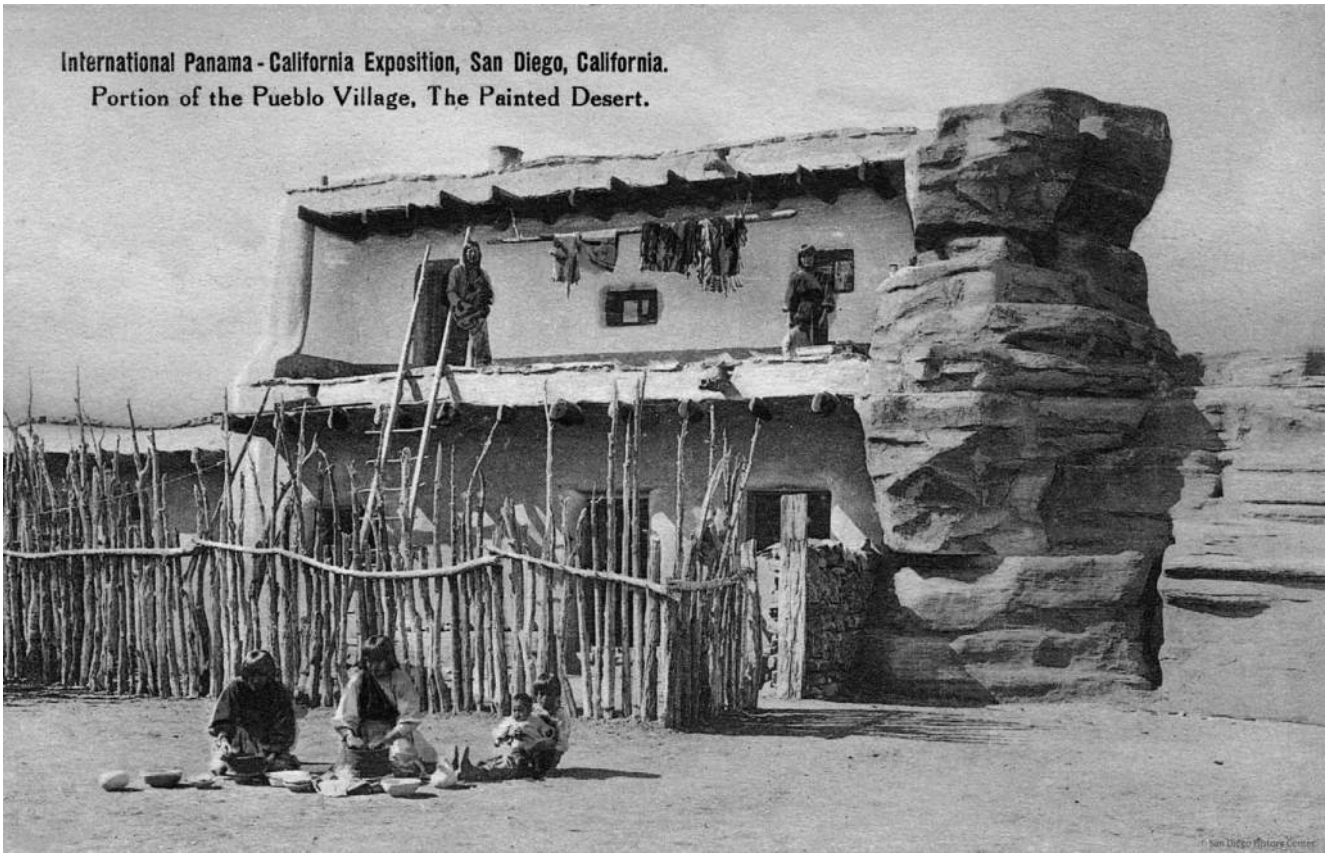
For the boosters and business leaders of San Diego, this was more than just a slogan to burnish San Diego's Spanish legacy. They felt themselves poised atop their own historical fulcrum, recalling the century since the end of the Spanish colonial era, and projecting their city as a global leader in the century to come. The hopeful link the local elite drew between California's past, present, and future was simple: empire.[3] City leaders saw themselves as inheritors of Spain's colonial empire and as the critical link to a new American empire at the intersection of Latin America and the Pacific. They hoped San Diego would in turn spearhead an American empire that now stretched across the Pacific to the Philippines.

To set the stage for their vision of San Diego's role in this imperial future—one that promised enormous economic and strategic military opportunities courtesy of the newly opened Panama Canal—fairgoers had to be made to understand the history that brought them to this "wonderful today." The exposition pulled visitors through a timeline of human progress and conquest, measuring the distance from a supposedly primitive nonwhite past and a romantic Spanish interlude to a modern Anglo empire of technological power. This embellished and distorted version of history on display at the exposition continues to have a profound effect on how Californians understand the state's past and the place they live in today.

Entering the California Building, fairgoers found themselves at the very beginning of the timeline. They encountered a display called The Science of Man, trumpeted as a "never-before attempted ethnological and archaeological exhibit" that would unveil a major new piece of the puzzle of human evolution.[4] Mounted by Aleš Hrdlička, a physical anthropologist from the Smithsonian Institution, the exhibit guided visitors to discover "proof" of a natural hierarchy within the human race—the intended conclusion being that white Americans were naturally superior to other "primitive" races. To make his case, Hrdlička meticulously arranged human and animal skulls collected from five continents according to detailed measurements of cranial capacity. Though later recognized as an erroneous signifier of intellectual ability, in 1915 craniometry asserted scientific authority to classify skulls from primitive (African to Asian and Native American) to advanced (European and American).[5] By aligning race with evolutionary progress, the exposition sought to establish a benchmark for its broader historical narrative that led inexorably toward an American empire in the Pacific, which they hoped would run through San Diego.

The California Building's architecture and decoration reinforced these notions of progress and empire. Under the dome, murals depicted the European discovery of America and the conquest of the West in glorious terms. Hrdlička's skulls and the primitive human past they sought to portray faded away as visitors walked out onto the sunlit Prado, lined with ornate, gleaming white Spanish colonial buildings. The architecture composed a city of "tiled domes and fantastic towers, archways from which hang old mission bells, . . . a fountain plashing, a *caballero* leaning lazily against the wall . . . , or the troupe of Spanish dancing girls whose bright colored skirts are awhirl to the hum of guitar and the click of the castanet."[6] Played out before visitors' eyes and ears, this romantic version of California's past played a key role in the exposition's storyline.

The fair's Spanish fantasy simultaneously celebrated the arrival of European civilization in California and marked its picturesque, old-world elements as part of a bygone world. The Spanish theme went beyond a nod to local history. Local boosters and Boston architect Bertram Goodhue ignored the fact that Alta California never brought Spain the wealth or power that other Latin American colonies did and instead imagined the region as awash in New World riches. As exposition designers, they sought to outdo anything the Spanish had built in California during its days as a remote and relatively poor colony; indeed, they revised the "what has been" portion of the exposition's concept to "what *could have* been" if the style of baroque Spain had been fully realized in California. In their hands, the exposition conjured "a city such as Cabrillo and his men must have dreamed of as they stood, perhaps, on that same lofty mesa, and looked down to the sea,"[7] as Goodhue wrote in 1910. The exaggerated visions and the florid architecture served



a purpose. The fair portrayed a quaint historical dreamland that no longer existed, surpassed by the arrival of Anglo American progress on the western side of the continent. The San Diego promoters of the Panama-California Exposition now set their sights on the future prospects of the Pacific World.

Planned in anticipation of the opening of the Panama Canal, the San Diego Exposition shared with San Francisco's world's fair the desire to make California a gateway to the Pacific World. San Diegans hoped to gain recognition as a city on par with its West Coast rivals. Local leaders and investors were eager to hitch their upstart city's future growth to economic expansion in the Pacific. The canal represented new possibilities for the development of a city that in the first decade of the twentieth century was struggling to find its economic footing—a recent history they were hardly inclined to showcase. To remedy this, local boosters conceived of the fair as the centerpiece of a publicity strategy to draw attention to San Diego's geographical suitability to be the premier West Coast transfer point between the Panama Canal and the Pacific. A map appearing in a 1910 publication promoting the exposition plotted out the "New Routes of World Commerce After Completion of the Panama Canal," with San Diego, designated with a conspicuous arrow, as the origin for a multitude of direct lines to major port cities in Asia and the Americas. Los Angeles and San Francisco were labeled in font sizes so small they are barely legible.[8]

Both San Diego and San Francisco lobbied Congress for "official" exposition status and the federal recognition and money that came with it. But when San Diego lost its bid, the city had to relinquish any claim to represent the nation and was barred from inviting international exhibits to compete with San Francisco's exposition.[9] Most observers assumed San Diego would simply withdraw. The city hardly seemed positioned to mount any sort of exposition, much less one without federal support. The 1910 census had been disappointing to San Diego boosters, showing a much slower rate of population growth than Los Angeles. Moreover, turmoil from the initial stages of the Mexican Revolution

threatened to spill over the border, making city and state leaders nervous, and potential tourists wary. Letting the bid drop would have been understandable. But local businessmen felt an increasingly dire need for the publicity an exposition might generate and were counting on the growth of San Diego commerce beyond local bounds. They were not going to let the idea die so easily.

Fair boosters developed several strategies to keep their nascent plans alive. First, they promoted the concept of "dual expositions," drawing visitors with a two-for-one appeal that could appear to pull San Diego to an equal level with San Francisco. Second, they exploited a loophole in the Congressional terms and continued the exposition's run into a second year, inviting San Francisco's international exhibitors to travel to San Diego in 1916. Enough took them up on the idea that in March 1916, the San Diego fair became the Panama-California International Exposition and, although not as successful as either of the 1915 fairs, it provided a continuing promotional engine for the city.

Finally, far from ceding their claims on Pacific empire to San Francisco, San Diego boosters sought to reorient the map. San Diego placed itself at the center of a great empire in the American Southwest, which city leaders asserted, was poised to "become the new focusing point of the world's immigration, the new land of opportunity next to be conquered by peaceful settlement."[10] In competing with San Francisco's rise to the forefront of a new Pacific empire, San Diego reinvented its hinterlands as a regional empire and then proclaimed the city a natural hinge between the Southwest and the Pacific world. The grandeur of the exposition itself smoothed out the hitch in the timeline, bypassing San Diego's uncertain state of development and portraying an unbroken history from primitive and romantic pasts to a confident future.

Fair boosters looked to the Panama Canal as "the beginning of a new and glorious history" and "the awakening of imperial enterprise" of which San Diego was "destined to play a great part." The canal not only linked Atlantic to Pacific, but past to future.[11] For architect Bertram Goodhue, the new waterway represented the "triumphant realization" of the promise of empire, and the "culmination of the Spaniards' search for a Western route" to Asia.[12] The canal seemed to offer Americans the opportunity to pick up where the Spanish left off and fulfill a new mission of empire. But the complex history of Spain's imperial decline and rising US economic and strategic interests in Latin America and the Pacific world had no place in the exposition's timeline. Instead, Hrdlička's skulls and Goodhue's baroque historicism served to showcase Anglo American succession as part of the natural order of things; the new Southwest Empire merely projected this past trajectory into the future. Throughout the fairgrounds, visitors witnessed examples of the seemingly smooth transition, or even organic evolution, from old empire to new as Spanish past and native people alike gave way to American know-how. Under the red-tile roofs of the Spanish-style exhibition halls sat a dazzling array of displays showing manufacturing processes, scientific discoveries, transportation methods, new-fangled technologies, and modern farming tools and techniques. Of all these, the last was critical in advancing the fair's portrayal of Southern California as a seat of empire and progress.

Modernized agriculture had the potential to turn Southern California into a fruit basket for the world—it was at the time the biggest agricultural region in the state—and, if San Diego could harness this productivity, it could turn the city into a major economic powerhouse, with control over a commodity in demand throughout the Pacific world and beyond. That Americans had carved a rich agricultural economy out of arid Southern California could serve as further proof not only of their superiority over native people and the Spanish colonial past, but also of San Diego's significance in imperial plans. Here too local boosters had to address potential skepticism about the region. Only a lavish display of fruit and flowers, they believed, would convince the metaphorical "Illinois tourist" who assumed the Southwest was "a kind of national sand pile especially designed for invalids, pueblo Indians, cowpunchers and prospectors, a parched waste aggravated by copper smelters." Moreover, exposition planners felt they needed to show not just the accomplished fact of fecundity, but also the process of "carving a green empire out of the gray desert . . . transforming, before the visitors' eyes, a plot of primeval sagebrush into a highly productive farm."[13]

San Diego's portrait of farm life was one of ease and bounty, deliberately meant to contrast the hard work most visitors might assume came with the territory. Jointly operated by the Southern California Counties Commission and International Harvester, the tractor manufacturer, the fair's seventeen-acre model farm contained a fruit-bearing orchard, vegetable-laden garden, and grain-stocked field as

well as demonstrations of the newest technology for mechanized farming. Fair visitors gathered in great numbers to watch electric sheep shearing, compressed-air cow milking, and orchard pesticide spraying. They eagerly accepted invitations to test-drive tractors and try out the other farm equipment. The combination of irrigation and scientific cultivation promised to yield five times the crop as by "old style" drudgery.[14]

The model ranch house on the farm property, labeled a "typical California bungalow," was shown furnished, landscaped, and fully equipped with modern appliances, including electric vacuum cleaners. The counties commission distributed blueprints of the house, "for the man of moderate means," in the hopes of luring hundreds of thousands of new model farmers, middle-class Anglo Americans escaping eastern cities.[15] Despite the fact that California agriculture was increasingly dominated by corporate farms, worked by a permanent, migratory, and largely nonwhite agricultural labor force, the model farm promoted a modern rural good life in a white man's Arcadia, free of the negative connotations of farm life, hard work, isolation, and unpredictable fortunes that were dismissed as alien to this Edenic landscape.

Next door to the model farm stood the Painted Desert, an exhibit sponsored by the Santa Fe Railway and Fred Harvey Company, which housed several hundred Indian people in replica pueblos and featured dance performances, craft demonstrations, and a souvenir trading post. If the model farm invoked the future possibilities of Anglo-driven development of the Southwest, the Painted Desert was meant to portray its antithesis, a primitive life of squandered potential.[16] It also played to the emerging tourist view of Indian culture as a picturesque object, a vanishing past to the model-farm future that fit the exposition's timeline.

Designers, ethnologists, and promoters aimed to stage the most primitive representation possible so that their message could not be missed. "The houses would be furnished as they were in ancient times and the Indians would be in ancient costume. Characteristic native vegetation would be planted about the houses and a true picture of ancient Indian life re-constructed even to the native Indian dogs."[17] Every detail of the exhibit's construction was designed to

reinforce the theme. Jesse Nusbaum, an archaeologist employed by the Santa Fe Railway, wanted the model pueblos to be built with locally made adobe. He lobbied to hire local Mexican immigrants assumed to be "versed in the making and laying of adobies [*sic*]" and available for low wages because they were fleeing "the trouble in Mexico." But he also concealed their labor by bringing a few Indian employees from New Mexico to work on the pueblo for publicity purposes. As he wrote, "The advertising plan of having Indians build the pueblo and fit it up cannot be overestimated." Once it was built, Nusbaum and other supervisors took special care to conceal Indian performers' use of modern conveniences such as electric lights, clocks, and steamer trunks.

Maintaining this "true picture" took more than intricate staging; supervisors had to manage the appearance of authenticity at every turn, making sure the Indian workers conformed to the illusion of the past. The Indian people who worked at what San Ildefonso potter Maria Martinez called, the "pretend pueblo" were entirely cognizant that they were enacting a performance, and they did so for reasons that had more to do with the modern world they lived in than any allegiance to a tourist vision of the past.[18] Yet, like the Mexican workers hired to make adobe or play Spanish characters, the American Indian presence in the present went little recognized amidst the exposition's promotional barrage. Acknowledging Indian or Mexican people as part of the modern Southwest, not to mention the future Pacific world, would have challenged the fair's carefully drawn chronology of San Diego's place in the narrative of empire.

By presenting Indianness as an ancient identity in the process of vanishing, the Painted Desert harmonized with the scientific displays and the story of the exposition as a whole. Not only did this highlight the grandeur of Anglo progress and futurity, it also linked Southern California and the Southwest to larger dominant narratives of national progress and human evolution. American and European hosts of other world's fairs flaunted their imperial triumphs and technological accomplishments, linking progress, national pride, and white racial superiority. It was, in fact, the very familiarity of this logic that provided Anglo Southern Californians with an entree onto a global stage.

To show "what will be by what has been" called present and future Anglo Southern Californians to further the growth and development of the region to complete an unfinished conquest. It cloaked the American future in the metaphorical grandeur of Spanish past, envisioning the Anglo development of Southern California in the coming century to be a more glorious conquest than the exploits of the conquistadors and missionaries. On a wall adjoining the California Building, a plaque to honor Junípero Serra exemplified this sentiment: "To the memory of Fray Junípero Serra and to his fellow pioneers whose saintly devotion and dauntless courage established Christianity and civilization in Alta California, 1769–1915."[19] By extending the date from 1769 to 1915, the exposition suggested an unbroken, ongoing conquest. Not only did these boosters include themselves as partners in Serra's project, but they also called for new ones to keep faith with the timeline.

Armed with this narrative of the region's history, Anglo Southern Californians might define their role and purpose as they looked out on the Pacific. The San Diego exposition took place on the edge of a more complicated world—with a revolution underway just across the border to the south and a world war raging in Europe, any mentions of which were carefully excised from the fair. Among the few hints of discord at the exposition was the popular exhibit War of the Worlds, a multimedia extravaganza depicting New York City destroyed by an alliance of African and Asian armies in the year 2000. A rare dystopian counterpoint to the relentlessly optimistic exposition, the War of the Worlds underscored for many the need for a Western-led, Pacific-facing push for dominion, while the historical timeline provided the logic for the pursuit of this empire of progress.

Though San Diego would not become the urban powerhouse of its dreams, the exposition's regional impact, architecturally and culturally, would be felt in the decades to come. Though San Diego settled for something less than leadership of US interests in the Pacific world, it did land a significant role as the home port for the US Navy's Pacific fleet. As a catalyst for city growth, the fair's accomplishment was impressive; the attendance estimate for the two-year run was over three-and-a-half million visitors. Though the gap between Los Angeles and San Diego's populations continued to widen, in 1920 San Diego came close to doubling the previous decade's population of fewer than 40,000, to nearly 75,000. The city and its hinterlands continued to grow, thanks in no small part to advertising the region as a new Arcadia. If popular visions of this Eden have come to

focus less on agriculture than lifestyle, it was nonetheless an appealing exposition-sponsored promotional image that has lasted.

The exposition bequeathed a more complicated legacy for those who worked to build California as a tolerant and inclusive place in the century that followed. Today, outside of the still verdant Balboa Park where several of the exposition's ornate buildings still stand, the real city of San Diego, and the region of the Southwest, developed in far more complex ways than boosters could have imagined in 1915. And yet, the adobe look and red tile roofs of the fair's Spanish colonial style have continued to proliferate, embraced as Southern California's signature look by many even today. The style's persistent popularity testifies to the exposition's spectacular production of Southern California as a mythical, yet modern El Dorado. Echoed elsewhere in the years that followed, this vision of the California good life continues to rest upon a complex and enduring combination of romantic style, imperial legacy, modern progress, and racial hierarchy that has proven difficult to disentangle. **B**

Notes

Photographs courtesy of the San Diego History Center.

1 George W. Marston, Address at the Dedication of the California Building, 31 December 1914, Edgar L. Hewett Papers, Fray Angelico Chavez History Library, Santa Fe, New Mexico (hereafter Hewett Papers).

2 Winfield Hogaboom, "Looking Into the Future: The Purpose of the Panama-California Exposition, at San Diego, in 1915, 'To Show What Will Be By What Has Been,'" *Sunset Magazine*, 32: no. 1 (January 1914), 334–39, 415.

3 For further detail about the planning, exhibits, and cultural history of the fair, see the larger treatment of it in my previous publications, particularly, Phoebe S. Kropp, *California Vieja: Culture and Memory in a Modern American Place* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), chap. 3. University of California Press provided permission to reprint portions of this book for this essay.

4 [Panama-California Exposition Company (PCEC)], *Fore-Glance at Panama-California Exposition, San Diego 1915; Unique International Year 'Round, Jan. 1– Dec. 31* (San Diego: Panama-California Exposition Company, 1910; C.F. Lummis, "Letter sent by me to all my associates in the Executive Committee of

the School of American Archaeology, In Confidence," 26 November 1911, C.F. Lummis MSS Collection, Braun Research Library, Southwest Museum.

5 Aleš Hrdlička to W.H. Holmes, Head Curator, Department of Anthropology, US National Museum, 31 January 1912; Aleš Hrdlička to W.H. Holmes, 6 October 1914, Office of the Secretary, Records, Record Unit 45, Smithsonian Institution Archives (hereafter Smithsonian Secretary Records); Aleš Hrdlička, "The Division of Physical Anthropology at the Panama-California Exposition, San Diego," TS, 1915, Aleš Hrdlička Papers, National Anthropological Archives, National Museum of Natural History, Smithsonian Institution; Aleš Hrdlička, *A Descriptive Catalog of the Section of Physical Anthropology, Panama-California Exposition, 1915* (San Diego: National Views Co., 1914), 7–10.

6 [Panama-California Exposition Company (PCEC)], *San Diego, All the Year 1915, Panama California Exposition* (San Diego: PCEC, 1914).

7 [PCEC], *San Diego, All the Year*. Bertram Goodhue was a founder of the Boston architectural firm, Cram, Goodhue and Ferguson, and lobbied hard for the San Diego commission, saying he "considered myself quite a shark on the sort of stuff they ought to have"—by which he meant the florid style of Spanish Colonial Revival. Bertram G. Goodhue to F.L. Olmsted, 28 December 1910, Bertram G. Goodhue Papers, Avery Library of Art and Architecture, Columbia University.

8 [PCEC], *Fore-Glance*.

9 Robert Rydell, *All the World's a Fair: Visions of Empire at American International Exposition, 1876–1916* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 214–19.

10 [PCEC], *Fore-Glance*.

11 Panama-California Exposition Company, *Official Program Four Days' Celebration: during which ground will be broken for the first building of the Panama-California Exposition, July 19, 20, 21, and 22, 1911, San Diego, California* (San Diego: PCEC, 1911), 15.

12 Bertram G. Goodhue, "The Architecture and the Gardens," *The Architecture and the Gardens of the San Diego Exposition*, C.M. Winslow, ed. (San Francisco: Paul Elder & Co., 1916), 5.

13 Walter V. Woehlke, "Staging the Big Show," *Sunset* 33: no. 2 (August 1914), 336–37; Walter V. Woehlke, "San Diego, the City of Dreams Come True," *Sunset* 26: no. 2 (February 1911): 136; Walter V. Woehlke, "Nueva España by the Silver Gate," *Sunset* 33: no. 6 (December 1914): 1129. Woehlke was the fair's chief publicist.

14 Panama-California Exposition Company, *Official Guide Book of the Panama-California Exposition*, (San Diego: PCEC, 1915), 14-15; Woehlke, "Staging," 336–37, 342–43.

15 C.M. Winslow, "Descriptive Notes," in *The Architecture and The Gardens*, 154–55; "Exposition Beautiful Triumphantly Closes First Successful Year," *San Diego Union*, January 1, 1916, 7; Harlan D. Smith, "As California Would Farm," *The Country Gentleman*, 5 June 1915; "Resources Shown by Southland's Model Farm," *San Diego Union*, 1 January 1916.

16 Panama-California Exposition Company, "Prospectus of the 1915 San Diego Exposition," TS, San Diego Historical Society, 152; [PCEC], *Fore-Glance*; Rydell, *All the World's*, 230–31.

17 J. L. Nusbaum to Herman Schweizer, 28 February 1914, Jesse L. Nusbaum Papers, Talley Collection, Museum of Indian Arts and Culture/Laboratory of Anthropology (Museum of New Mexico), Santa Fe, New Mexico; T. Harmon Parkhurst and John P. Harrington, "Suggestions for Exhibiting the Indians of the Southwest at the Panama-California Exposition" TS, [ca. 1912], 20–21, Hewett Papers; Geddes Smith, "California's County Fair," *Independent Magazine* 83 (July 1915), 120; "Indians at Work on Exhibit For Exposition," *San Diego Union*, 6 October 1914.

18 Maria Martinez, quoted in Susan Peterson, *The Living Tradition of Maria Martinez* (1977; Tokyo and New York: Kodansha International, 1989), 109. For discussion of the complex but "long tradition of Indians playing Indians," see Philip J. Deloria, *Indians in Unexpected Places* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2004).

19 Winslow, "Descriptive Notes," 126–27.