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"What is the Best and Most Typical": Nostalgia, Transgression, and Capitalism at the Virginia State Fair, 1946-1976

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Nostalgia, Transgression, and Capitalism at the Virginia State Fair 1946-1976

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ABSTRACT PAGE

In this thesis I contextualize the mid-twentieth century State Fair of Virginia as an event both steeped in local tradition and fundamentally affected by the national cultural and political climate. I begin in 1946 with the renaming of the state fair post World War II and close in the mid 1970s with the bicentenial of the American Revolution. This period represents an era of fundamental change for the state fair, both in content and in ideology. As a tool of local elites, the state fair invoked a nostaligc veneration of the white southern past in an effort to shore up flagging faith in traditional power structures and the cultural centrality of agrarian life. Simultaneously, the fair used the midway as a space of controlled transgression that reinforced hierarchies of gender and race.

Although nostalgia and historical reenactment remained fundamental to the state fair, I argue that the State Fair Assoication employed two related strategies in an effort to boost the fair's cultural relevence. Recognizing the waning focus on agrarian interests, the State Fair Association employed Cold War symbols such as balistic missiles and nuclear power plants to place the state fair at the center of modern concerns. Simultaneously, the State Fair Association actively sought out a national popular culture that focued on urban and suburban youth entertainment. I argue that ultimately this second effort would cause fundamental change to the fair, bringing it away from its roots as a local, participatory event and closer to national, media-driven spectacle event. Ultimately, because the fair was unable to harness consistant local interest despite these efforts, I characterize the State Fair of Virginia as a failed tradition that was unsucessful in identifying the needs and aspirations of the local rural population.

Contents

Introduction

In 1961 cowboys were cool. For the past two decades Westerns had dominated the American Entertainment industry, with movies and television shows like *Shane* (1953), and *Gunsmoke* (1955), and *Giant* (1956), teaching Americans the virtues of rugged individualism and masculine assertiveness. Country music had gained national popularity and thanks to Walt Disney, Davy Crocket was a household name. Although *The Lone Ranger* television series had been off the air for three years by 1961, when it was announced that the title character would be appearing at the State Fair of Virginia, the local Richmond press went wild.[1] Press across the state gushed about his wholesome family values and good influence on children. After the announcement *The Kenbridge Victoria Dispatch* a small-town Virginia paper articulated these feelings: "Three generations of young people have listened to the well-modulated, precise speech of the Lone Ranger...The Lone Ranger is able to be forceful without swearing and emphatic without shouting." The author went on to exclaim that "Over the past 23 years the Lone Ranger has brought about a new and accepted concept of cowboys, western life during the frontier days, and behavior patterns of the honest people who conquered these frontiers."

This melodramatic reception, echoed in the *Richmond New Leader* and in the *State Fair of Virginia Magazine*, says much about the state fair, and Virginia culture, at that moment. In 1961 the Lone Ranger, not the independent farmer or the Confederate hero, was considered emblematic of the values and beliefs that the State Fair of Virginia wanted to perpetuate. This was a big change. Although the state fair remained a

[1] *Kenbridge Victoria Dispatch*. Victoria, VA, August 11, 1961, np.

celebration of agriculture and rural people in the mid-twentieth century, it also changed with the community – a community of people that increasingly conceptualized their social relationships and identities, affiliations and aspirations, through the lens of a commodified, mass consumer culture.

The commodification of the state fair did not take place immediately, nor was it entirely successful. Rather this was an incomplete process spurred largely by a perceived need to redefine the state fair in the image of a changing population. In this thesis I will examine the impact of local and national culture on the State Fair of Virginia, beginning in 1946 and ending in the mid-1970s. This period encompassed many changes in American, and Virginian, society, such as the influx of wealth after World War II, the emergence of the Cold War, and the effects of the burgeoning civil rights movement on the South, all of which are visible at the State Fair of Virginia.[2] I close in 1976 with the State Fair's celebration of the bicentennial anniversary of American Declaration of Independence. This period is marked by the full effects of an exponentially shrinking rural population, the predominance of mass media and corporate sponsorship at the fair, and the fair's extensive focus on youth, events that fundamentally altered the look, content, and meaning of the fair. Further, I use the lackluster public response to the 1976 fair, along with the general waning interest in the state fair in the 1970s, as emblematic of the waning power of local elites and a change in acceptable ways to display local pride and national identity.

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[2] See Rita Barnard, *The Great Depression and the Culture of Abundance* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995).; William Graebner, *The Age of Doubt: American Thought and Culture in the 1940s* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1990).; James T. Paterson, *Grand Expectations: The United States 1945-1971* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996).

In my analysis I conceptualize the mid-twentieth century state fair as an event that invoked nostalgia for a mythic, invented past even as it embodied changes to both rural Virginia and rural America. The fair demonstrated the growing influence of mass media and mass culture on rural life and reflected increasing challenges to traditional ideas about race and sexuality. Importantly, these changes were coupled with a decrease in the influence of local authority– a move from local community affiliation to identification as part of a regional and national culture.[3] Employing Hobsbawm's idea of the "constructed tradition," I examine the ways the Virginia State Fair Association worked desperately to please multiple audiences, to redefine the fair as mechanized, modern, and relevant while still expressing a desire for the "good old days" thorough an idealized version of an agrarian past. I argue that these rather frantic efforts reveal anxiety about the waning of local elite power and that the fair should be viewed as a desperate – and ultimately unsuccessful – effort to reinforce traditional hierarchies of race, class, and gender, rather than a simple celebration of the status quo.

When discussing the changes to the state fair in the twentieth century, Victor Turner's distinction between the "liminal" and the "liminoid" is useful. Turner characterizes liminal space as a neutral space between work and play that is "set aside from the mainstream of productive or political events."[4] He equates liminal space with pre-industrial societies, characterized by the lack of a clear distinction between work and play. At the same time, he emphasizes that liminal spaces are built into social apparatus

[3] Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, eds, *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).
[4] Victor Turner, *From Ritual to Theater: The Human Seriousness of Play* (New York: PAJ Publications, 2001), 32-33.

and "do not usually subvert the status quo, the structural form, of society." In contrast, Turner sees liminoid space as a product of the modern era, as fragmented, transgressive, yet commodified versions of the liminal: "Supposedly 'entertainment' genres of industrial society are often subversive, satirizing, lampooning, burlesquing, or subtly putting down the values of the basic work-sphere society."[5] He sees the growth of liminoid spaces out of the remnants of older liminal traditions. This process is at work at the State Fair of Virginia.

Using Turner's conceptual framework, I place this thesis in dialogue with other work on the state fair. However, while much has been written about fairs and public amusements generally, the state fair is relatively uncharted territory. In *Fair America*, Robert Rydel synthesizes the work on American fairs into six different strains: The cultural hegemony school which privileges the intentions of fair organizers and emphasizes the fair as a place to solidify support for nationalist and imperialist causes; audience centered studies which highlight ways in which audiences derive their own meanings from fairs; the counterhegemony school which focuses on the ways in which disadvantaged groups use fairs as spaces to subvert the ideological intentions of elites; the anthropological slant that compares the fair to a modern potlatch as a place to celebrate agricultural abundance and to give gifts; technological analysis that characterizes the fair as a place to showcase new inventions; and popular histories characterized by the nostalgic recording of fair memories and the collection of

[5] Ibid, 41.

memorabilia.[6] While demonstrating the breadth of fair research, Rydel's overview also helps to identify holes in the scholarship. Most of these studies have either focused on county fairs, which easily lend themselves to an anthropological focus on the local and the pre-modern, or on World's Fairs which as monolithic state-sponsored events act as easy examples of hegemony and elite power. The state fair, as a hybrid of the two, sits in a Turner-esque liminal space that celebrates local connection as well as state ideologies.

This hybridity might give some explanation for the relatively scant work done on American state fairs, the majority of which focuses on the construction of an "authentic" regional identity through community-based artistic expression. This trend is exemplified by Chris Rasmussen in "Agricultural Lag: The Iowa State Fair Art Salon 1854-1941." Rasmussen emphasizes the importance of the late-nineteenth century state fair as one of the few outlets for rural community and cultural development. He focuses on arts and crafts exhibitions as spaces for rural people to produce art and beauty that merged "high" culture with practical "craft" production, creating a uniquely "Iowan form of artistic expression."[7] In an important departure from this trend Chad Randall Wheaton discusses the effects of modern consumer society on the state fair in his dissertation '"And Proudly called it growing": the New York State Fair and the Consequences of Progress, 1890-1958.'[8] Wheaton characterizes changes to the New York State Fair over time as an elite-

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[6] Robert Rydell, *Fair America: World's Fairs in the United States* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2000), 5.
[7] Chris Rasmussen, "Agricultural Lag: The Iowa State Fair Art Salon 1854-1941," *American Studies* 36 no. 1 (1995): 5-29.; see also Leslie Mina Prosterman, "The Aspect of the Fair: Aesthetics and Festival in Illinois County Fairs" (PhD diss., University of Pennsylvania, 1982). Drake Hokanson and Carol Kratz, *Pure-Bred and Home Grown: America's County Fairs* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2008).
[8] Chad Randall Wheaton, "And proudly called it growing": The New York State Fair and the Consequences of Progress, 1890-1958 (PhD diss., Syracuse University, 2003).

directed project that increasingly privileged spectacle and consumerism over local community concerns and older ideologies of individualism, hard work and self-education.

With these works in mind, I place my analysis in contrast to earlier scholarship by focusing on the later twentieth century, emphasizing the important role the midway plays in the state fair experience, as well as characterizing consumerism at the fair as the integration of a national consumer society with local values, rather than as simply the replacement of older traditions at the state fair. Also, with Rasmussen and Wheaton as prominent examples, the majority of the scholarship on state fairs focuses on the Midwest, where state fairs were an important part of the nineteenth century formation of state identity and have only grown in size and attendance during the twentieth century. In contrast, my analysis will highlight the peripheral nature of the state fair to the development of state and regional identity in the mid-Atlantic South, where state formation predates the advent of the state fair by centuries. Although not crucial to the formation of state identity, by mid-century the southern state fair was broadly indicative of the presence of the Civil War in public memory, extreme racial tension in the Cold War South, and the southern public festival tradition. More scholarship is needed.

For the purposes of this project, I will separate my analysis into three sections, focusing on central places of cultural tension and ideological contradiction at the fair. First, the pastoral versus the industrial, as embodied through the fair's agricultural, government, and industrial exhibitions; second, moral conservatism versus social transgression in my analysis of the midway girlie reviews and sideshows; and third,

communal participation versus anonymous consumption demonstrated through a look at the grandstand's mass media exhibits and the cultivation of a youth audience. By breaking the fair down into distinct yet interconnected parts I highlight the disjointed yet symbiotic relationship between each, emphasizing the tension between local interests and the national amusement industry. In this framework, I will show that these places of contradiction evolved to reflect the ever increasing influence of urban values and culture on the state fair, even as veneration of an idealized agrarian past intensified. Ultimately, I argue that by the mid-1970s, the State Fair of Virginia bore little resemblance to the locally operated, communal events of the nineteenth century, becoming a nationally similar, standardized, monopolized spectator event that celebrated a stereotypical version of rural, white values and lifestyles that owed more to the television western or the Grand Ole Opry than to local rural traditions.

The Exhibition: Agriculture and Industry

In order to understand the twentieth century State Fair of Virginia, a brief history of the American state fair tradition is necessary. The state fair is a relatively new addition to the American cultural landscape. Although the first American county fair was held in 1810, it was not until 1849 that the first self-titled state fair was advertised in Detroit, Michigan. Fairs spread across the county, moving west as territories became states, becoming an important social and economic event for isolated rural communities. This tradition of American county and regional agricultural fairs reached its zenith in the late nineteenth century with the largest and most well attended fairs located in the Midwest and the Great Plains states. In the twentieth century, fairs across the country began to encounter stiff competition from other forms of public amusement such as amusement parks and the movies. At the same time, changing agricultural practices as well as a shifting economic focus put both the size and national importance of the rural population into permanent decline. Importantly, despite the decline of the agricultural tradition in the twentieth century, the state fair tradition was preserved as a nostalgic tribute to this bygone era. [9]

An example of this national trend, the State Fair of Virginia was first held in 1854 in Monroe Park in Richmond. Founded by William Harvie Richardson and the Virginia State Agricultural Society, the fair was billed as an opportunity for the local agricultural elite to showcase their farm produce, socialize, and take in the sights. After a hiatus due to the Civil War, the fair resumed in 1867 and had several different locations in and

[9] Fred Kniffen, "The Agricultural Fair: The Pattern," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 39 (March 1949): 264-282.; T. J. Jackson Lears, *No Place of Grace: Antimodernism and the Transformation of American Culture, 1880-1920* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1981).

around Richmond until 1907 when the Virginia State Fair Association rented the Bryan Estate in downtown Richmond from the city. The fair would remain in this location for the next 40 years. Early fairs focused almost exclusively on agricultural exhibitions and horse races. However, over time, the fair's midway and entertainment venues expanded, with horse racing slowly giving way to stock car racing, and concerts and circus acts taking prominence of place over farm equipment competitions and livestock showcases.

Despite such changes, the fair was regularly plagued by bad weather and poor attendance. Only exacerbating this problem, the fair grounds were requisitioned for long periods during both World War I and World War II, breaking up what was intended to be an annual tradition. Because of the fair's troubled history, when long-time majority stock holder and fair manager Charles Soma died, the fair was bought out by new developers and taken in an alternate direction, both geographically and ideologically.[10] In a pivotal move, the Virginia State Fair Association relocated the fair out of downtown Richmond to Strawberry Hill in 1946, changed the fair's name to the Atlantic Rural Exposition, and embarked on a campaign to bring the State Fair of Virginia into the modern age.[11]

To create this modern image, the State Fair Association poured money into the new venue, making plans for several permanent exposition buildings, paved roads, and electric lights.[12] However, the final result did not live up the lofty plans. Despite

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[10] Lou Anne Meadows Ladin and Wayne Dementi, *The State Fair of Virginia, Since 1854: More Than a Midway*. (Manakin-Sabot: Dementi Milestone Publishing, 2006), 14.
[11] Ladin, *State Fair of Virginia*, 20.; In publications, the fair went by several names, including: The State Fair of Virginia, The Virginia State Fair, The Official State Fair of Virginia, as well as The Atlantic Rural Exposition.
[12] "Midway Operation is a Complex Business," *Richmond News Leader,* September 26, 1957, n.p.

exhaustive advertising, when the fair opened in September attendance was low due to the combination of the isolated location, bad weather, and several crucial managerial blunders.

Poor planning and mismanagement seemed to plague the 1946 fair. Strawberry Hill was a large property, but due to construction problems, only one permanent building was ready for the 1946 fair. As a result, many of the livestock and agricultural showcases were housed in rain drenched canvas tents, still filling only a small portion of the property.[13] The relatively isolated Strawberry Hill location, outside the Richmond city limits, was impossible to access without a vehicle. However, an article in *Billboard Magazine* reports that, although shuttle busses were provided, if attendance had been as expected, transportation would have been inadequate.

While these setbacks were unfortunate, among the trade press it was generally agreed upon that the death knell for the 1946 fair was manager Paul Swaffer's decision to focus his advertising campaign almost exclusively on the Fat Cattle Show. His campaign gave rise to the rumor that the fair was to be, "Primarily in the interest of stock breeders and agricultural farmers."[14] While it might be assumed that this was the state fair's target audience, president of the Virginia Association of Fairs Curtis C. Finch bellied this idea. He stated, in hindsight, that Swaffer's decision worked against the fair because, "A lot of young folks would not attend the fair if it weren't for the lure of the carnival

[13] "Rain Hurts New Richmond Event," *Billboard Magazine,* October 19, 1946, 65.
[14] "Atlantic Rural Maps Heavy Building Program for 1946," *Billboard Magazine*, June, 23 1945, 48.

attractions."[15] This assumption, apparently proven right by poor attendance at the 1946 fair, has two important implications: it signals that, increasingly, the young, urban population was a crucial component of the audience at the state fair and that this audience went to the fair to experience the midway, not to see the agricultural exhibitions.

This apparent challenge to the importance of long-standing rural traditions would become a common theme at the Virginia State Fair over the next several decades with the celebration of traditional, rural culture and agricultural production juxtaposed against the increasing promotion of urbanization and commodification in the popular press and in state fair publications. However, increasingly such efforts to celebrate rural America would equate "progress" and "modernism" with a celebration of industrialized farming and corporate ownership, a move that seems to support the very institutions that rural America supposedly railed against.

The tension between these contradictory objectives is particularly evident in the changes made to the fair after the disappointing 1946 season. In 1947, after the resignation of Paul Swaffer, the State Fair Association persuaded career fair manager J. A. Mitchell to leave his position at the nearby Anderson Fair in South Carolina and to take over management of the Atlantic Rural Exposition.[16] His extensive plans for the fair were geared towards keeping costs down while maximizing spectacle. An article in *Billboard Magazine* exclaims that, "His specialties were showmanship coupled with a sense of the necessity of making a dollar...knowledge of how the make plain physical

[15] "Virginia Plans Reorganization," *Billboard Magazine*, January, 31 1953, 64.
[16] "Around the Grounds," *Billboard Magazine*, August 9, 1947, 51.

presentations beautiful at low cost."[17] Importantly, Mitchell's plan also called for an increase in the number of commercial buildings, signaling his desire for an increased corporate, non-agrarian presence at the fair.

Mitchell's advertising-inspired design emphasized the use of lighting and false-fronts to create what a 1947 article in the *Richmond New Leader* described as a "modernist motif" at the state fair. The article emphasized that "the show will be housed in 15 circus tents – tents which are characterized by modernist fronts and gay trappings, which will cover about 5 acres of ground and will be fireproof and water proof."[18] Despite their festive appearance, these tents would be slowly phased out over the next several years to be replaced by an array of imposing, permanent exhibition halls at the new fair site. These white, minimalist buildings bore the heavy influence of mid-century modern aesthetics. The presence of numerous articles in *Billboard* and in local newspapers describing Mitchell's new design as "modern," or "modernist," or as showing "the march of progress" signal an intentional connection between the fair and twentieth century modernism. The sheer abundance of such terms demonstrates an exhaustive effort on behalf of both the State Fair Association and the entertainment industry to distance the fair from a possible association with an unindustrialized past and a backwards-looking culture.

Even as the State Fair Association advocated new buildings and "modern" style, they simultaneously strove to preserve a nostalgic, community-oriented atmosphere at the

[17] "The Mitchell Touch," *Billboard Magazine*, November 28, 1953, 52.
[18] "Mile Long Lighting Pylons Planned for Fall Exposition," *Richmond News Leader*, 1947, n.p.

revitalized State Fair of Virginia. A 1947 editorial in the *Richmond News Leader* exclaims that, "the Atlantic Rural Exposition is an ideal expression of community life, whereby the best and most typical of our region will be represented along with the best and most typical of the larger region of which we are a part."[19] The writer articulates an assumption that an appropriate fair acts as an extension of the community. In a telling move, the close paring of "best" and "most typical" equates one with the other, implying that the author believes that what is best about Virginia is what is most typical, not what is exceptional or unique. While such a statement seems to foreshadow the McCarthyist paranoia of a decade later, it also indicates a celebration of the status quo in the face of monolithic social change and geographical restructuring brought by the end of World War II.

Taking this mix of nostalgia and anxiety to the extreme, the *Atlantic Rural Exposition Magazine* demonstrated throughout the 1950s a deep longing for an idealized agrarian past even as it recognized changes to local demographics and entertainment interests. While the majority of the magazine offered human interest stories promoting entertainment acts, on the first page of each issue an essay written by the fair director honored the honesty, independence and fortitude of the Virginia farmer and praised the accomplishments of Virginia's agricultural industry. This essay regularly preceded a series of articles by local businessmen and politicians who provided nostalgic treatises on the greatness of the family farm and traditional family values.

[19]Clifford Dowdey, "Great Cultural Center Planned for Richmond," *Richmond News Leader,* 1947, n.p.

In an emblematic essay in the 1950 edition of the *Atlantic Rural Exposition Magazine* Dr. Avery O. Craven proudly exclaims "The South remains today the last stronghold of an agrarian civilization as we know it in this country," going on to detail the virtues of the independent southern farmer.[20] Similarly, the next year Allen K. Radolph writes in an article nostalgically titled "Romance Remains Strong in Virginia's Cattle Industry" that "It seems such a short time ago when the first crisp days of fall sent drove after drove of sleek, fat bullocks out onto the Valley Pike to slowly saunter to the nearest railroad siding."[21] These elegiac tributes to a vanished past explicitly placed pastoral America at odds with the increasingly mass media-driven national culture and corporate dominated industry, connecting the fair to a tradition much older than twentieth century mechanized agribusiness. Also, by singling out the South as the arbiter of agrarian tradition, both Averey and Randolph articulated a deep regional pride that belied the agricultural dominance of the Midwest and Plains states. Importantly, the two authors paint the South as the American ideal and the Virginia State Fair as the perpetrator of a national agrarian myth, a characterization at odds with Mitchel's celebrated modernism and progress in fair design and content.

Despite these passionate sermons, after the success of Mitchell's refurbished 1947 fair efforts to modernize the State Fair of Virginia continued over the next decade, with the fair continuing to expand in both size and focus under Mitchell's leadership. In 1949 construction was completed both on a new Commercial and Industrial Building and a Guernsey Building to house cattle. However, because of increased attendance, many

[20] Dr. Avery Craven, *The Atlantic Rural Exposition Magazine*, 1950, n.p.
[21] Allen K Randolph, "Romance Remains Strong in Virginia's Cattle Industry," *The Atlantic Rural Exposition Magazine,* 1951. n.p.

livestock entries had to be housed in tents next to the new building. An article in *Billboard* explains that, "Housing [was] still so short that a planned flower show and a women's home arts department had to be eliminated."[22] This statement speaks to an unexpected increase in fair attendance, and illustrates the State Fair Association's assumptions about which exhibits were more important. Flowers and home arts were not as lucrative as cattle sales, nor did the female-dominated tradition of craft production fit with Mitchell's model of a modern, industry-focused Atlantic Rural Exposition.

Illustrating Mitchell's focus on expanding the fair's commercial expositions, the 1950 Atlantic Rural Exposition advertised an Electrical Village that featured a wide array of electrical home and farm goods, sponsored by the local Electrical Association.[23] Taking this trend further, in 1955 the new Commonwealth of Virginia Building opened to house exhibits by the various state departments. It was connected by a concrete tunnel to the Commercial Building, demonstrating via architecture the perceived importance of the connection between the state and economics.[24]

Furthering the desired connection with the modern, the State Fair Association openly courted the presence of new media, as exemplified by the 1953 Press and Radio Day at the fair which featured a series of media-centered demonstrations and giveaways. The media presence would only increase throughout the 1950s with a dizzying array of gimmicks and events. For example, in 1959 the *Atlantic Rural Exposition Magazine*

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[22] "Rainfall Nixes Boff Premier for Richmond," *Billboard Magazine*, October 8, 1949, 63.
[23], "Richmond to Stage Electronic Feature," *Billboard Magazine,* July 8, 1950, 65.
[24] "Richmond Records Fall at Midweek," *Billboard Magazine,* October 8, 1955, 55.

advertised "WRVA to use new mobile studio to broadcast from state fair."[25] The next year an article in the *Atlantic Rural Exposition Magazine* exclaimed that "A mechanical man stalks the Midway," describing a stunt put on by a local radio station complete with pictures of an alternatively nervous and smiling public.[26] In 1961 the radio station WRNL broadcasted from a bomb shelter.[27] In 1969 the *Atlantic Rural Exposition Magazine* exclaimed that "A 20 foot high TV platform with camera derrick has been built just off the main entrance mall. The entire grounds can be viewed from this spot."[28] The sudden and overwhelming presence of new media at the fair indicates both the popularity of such programs and their lucrative nature.

Echoing Mitchell's architectural efforts to redefine the fair as relevant and new the *State Fair Association Magazine* ran a series of articles throughout the 1950s that put a positive spin on Virginia's agricultural decline. Many essays increasingly celebrated the power of the market and mass culture: "The real message of the Atlantic Rural Exposition is that with fewer and fewer farms and fewer and fewer farm people, Virginia's countryside each year produces more and better food products."[29] This positive interpretation of the decreasing rural population denies the waning cultural influence of rural populations, and of the state fair, in Virginia. Later, the author invokes a shared American past with an optimistic view of the future, "Just as the West was underdeveloped at the end of that tragic conflict [the Civil War] so is the South after

[25] *Atlantic Rural Exposition Magazine*, 1959. n.p.
[26] "A Mechanical Man Stalks the Midway," *Atlantic Rural Exposition Magazine*, 1960, n.p.
[27] *Atlantic Rural Exposition Magazine*, 1961, n.p.
[28] *Atlantic Rural Exposition Magazine*, 1969, n.p.
[29] Parker Brinkley, "Exposition Provides Opportunity to Broaden Horizons," *Atlantic Rural Exposition Magazine*, 1952, n.p.

World War II on the threshold of an agricultural and industrial revolution."[30] In this way the author places the South as the new frontier and attempts to connect the state fair with the post-World War II manufacturing boom.

Despite a generally self-congratulatory tone that focused on the fair's new building projects and the self-conscious invocation of a mythic agrarian past, the *Atlantic Rural Exposition Magazine* acknowledged the declining importance of agriculture to the Virginia economy and the increasing pace of industrialization. In his 1950 essay touting the South's cultural superiority Dr. Avery Craven insists that "Happiness is not entirely a matter of things; it is more than prosperity. It has to do with a way of life and a set of values. Traditions cannot be ignored without cost and the South merely becoming like the industrial North will not automatically end all her troubles or gain all satisfaction. She might gain something of richness by looking backward as well as ahead."[31] Craven's rather petulant statements speak to both the speed of Southern industrialization after World War II and an apparent popular desire to adopt a more urban value system. Further, it is impossible to ignore the racial implications of such a statement. Craven's allusion to "a way of life and a set of values" and his desire to learn something by "looking backward" call into question just what kind of past he is invoking. References to past southern prosperity immediately conger images of antebellum plantations built upon the slave trade. Craven's statements, prominently placed in the official state fair magazine articulate a desire for the preservation of existing hierarchies.

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[30] Anonymous, *Atlantic Rural Exposition Magazine,* 1955, n.p.
[31] Dr. Avery Craven, *Atlantic Rural Exposition Magazine,* 1950, n.p,

In an apparent effort to address such anxieties about the loss of older traditions, the midcentury fair worked to foster an idealized sense of community through coverage of the livestock and agricultural competitions. As long-standing fair events, these shows helped to maintain the fair's symbolic identity and retain a connection to the local rural culture.[32] Simultaneously, the State Fair Association used the fair's nostalgic image as local, timeless, and authentic to place the fair in direct opposition to other potential family amusement options and to differentiate it from a national media culture that was increasingly seen as a homogenizing cultural force.[33] Articles valorizing local agricultural contest winners, such as "Winter Grazing Paid off" and "Irene Stoneman and her Cooking" in the 1951 edition of the *Atlantic Rural Exposition Magazine,* show an intentional engagement with the local community. The State Fair Association sought to give its audience something that other competing cultural forms like television or Disney Land were thought to disrupt – a sense of local connection. By publishing the lists of past fair winners and student essay contests in the *Atlantic Rural Exposition Magazine* the Fair Association sought to remind its audience that although the national media also valorized an agrarian past and amusement parks provided entertainment and thrills on a larger scale, the fair was uniquely able to define a community apart from mainstream consumer culture.

Community events that mixed leisure activities with the buying and selling of livestock and homemade goods belied the growing sense of social anonymity and

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[32]Julie A. Avery, *Agricultural Fairs in America: Tradition, Education, Celebration* (East Lansing Michigan: Michigan State University, 2000).
[33] See ed. Peter J. Kuznick and James Gilbert, *Rethinking Cold War Culture* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2001) Chapter 3.

professional specialization that characterized twentieth century America. These events stand in contrast to Mitchell's dual effort to create a modern aesthetic and to increase the corporate, commercial presence at the fair. Most often, this celebration of traditional, community participation manifested as a heightened focus on youth competition at the state fair. While the staple animal breeding and crop growing competitions remained an integral part of the Virginia state fair tradition during this period, the tractor operation contest exhibited a unique combination of the celebration of individualistic farm labor, a conscious appeal to the emerging youth market, and pride in masculine technical knowledge.

The competition, sponsored by the local and state chapters of 4-H, was eligible to boys aged 13-19 and consisted of a written examination on tractor operation as well as a public demonstration of the boys' ability to use and maintain the machine. Illustrating its importance to the area rural community, coverage of the tractor contests take up multiple pages in local newspapers and in the state fair magazine with extensive listings of competitors and lengthy interviews with winners. The 1960 issue of the *State Fair of Virginia Magazine* exclaims that "A special event of national importance, the Eastern U.S. 4-H Tractor Operators' Contest will bring contestants from 22 states to compete for the nation's top honor."[34] The phrase "nation's top honor" is interesting, articulating an assumption that the tractor contest was more prestigious than all other fair competitions, nationally relevant on the same scale as athletic competition or political election.

[34] W. A. Turner, "Tractor Operators from 22 States in Contest," *State Fair of Virginia Magazine*, 1960, 11.

An examination of the photographs attached to these articles suggests that these competitions embodied the masculine ideal for young boys. In the photographs, boys are often shown covered in grease working on their machines or executing complicated maneuvers – hauling heavy objects or navigating intricate courses. Winners, as seen in the *Atlantic Rural Exposition Magazine*, are often depicted being kissed by a pretty girl and holding large trophies. In comparison, the winners of the youth stock and produce competitions are most often pictured standing stiffly next to the fruits of their labor, staring solemnly into the camera.

The female equivalent of the Tractor Operation Contest, the Miss State Fair of Virginia Beauty Pageant, begun in 1953 would become a popular tradition at the state fair, developing a network of country fair qualifying pageants and consistently receiving heavy coverage in the local Richmond press. The winner was crowned each year in an elaborate grandstand ceremony and for the next year participated in a variety of speaking engagements around the state, culminating with the state fair parade each fall. Illustrating the competition's overriding focus on standardized feminine beauty and gendered stereotypes, the *State Fair of Virginia Magazine* explains that "Qualifications that judges will consider in naming the new queen will be beauty of face and figure, poise, personality and the ability to successfully converse with others in personal appearances."[35] Like the tractor operation contest, the beauty pageant reinforced stratified gender roles with boys valued for their knowledge and technical skill while young girls were praised for their physical beauty, promoting a passive, inactive female stereotype.

[35] *State Fair of Virginia Magazine,* 1969, n.p.

Although deeply connected to a conservative southern social tradition, these gender stereotypes were heavily influenced by a national consumer culture. Although a few county fair pageants already existed in Virginia at that time, the inception of a state contest coincided closely with the first televised Miss America pageant in 1955. This suggests the increasing influence of national entertainment culture on local Virginia events, with the pageant an obvious effort to attract followers of the televised national pageant to the state fair. The timing of the first Miss State Fair of Virginia pageant also has local significance. An article in the 1958 *Richmond News Leader* suggests that the advent of the pageant was concurrent with growing anxiety about shifting gender roles at the fair. A headline in the *Richmond News Leader* reported "Fairer Sex to Invade State Fair" and described the large number of girls who had in recent years, begun to compete in traditionally male competitions such as livestock shows and rodeo competitions. Complaining about the movement of some women away from the sewing and cooking expositions, the article exclaims that "the Atlantic Rural Exposition is safe from the Purple People Eater but an invasion of women is imminent."[36] Despite the light tone, the article played off of traditional gender anxieties and crucially ignored the traditional presence of women in state fair craft, art, and home goods competitions, implying that such "women's" activities were not actually a fundamental part of the state fair tradition.

This idea is reinforced by the State Fair Association's initial reluctance to allow permanent space for female-dominated craft events at the fair. In the late 1950s the exhibition of "women's work" became increasingly popular at the Atlantic Rural Exposition, promoting community involvement in canning, sewing, and artistic

[36] "Fairer Sex to Invade State Fair," *Richmond News Leader,* August, 11, 1958, 14.

exhibitions. However, J. A. Mitchell delayed the building of a devoted Women's World building for several years, citing the expansion of the cattle venues as more important. Despite Mitchell's objections, the Women's World Building was finally opened in 1960 and the swelling number of entrants caused an immediate need for expansion. [37]

The lack of protest surrounding the beauty pageant and the anxiety caused by women entering into agricultural competition highlight a mid-century anxiety about the perceived female invasions of male dominated spaces. Women were free to enter the fair space as objects or observers, but once they attempted to participate in the male competitive culture they became threatening and unwanted. Some of this desperate desire for conformity should be attribute to what Elaine Tyler May has described as the elevation of gender conformity and domesticity to a Cold War national security concern.[38] However, this anxiety among rural elites and the state fair association should also be seen as anxiety about the loss of their cultural power to national popular culture and federal ideological control. Miss America was taking the place of the local pageant queen and a national industrial economy was replacing local agriculture.

Importantly, local elites' eased their own anxiety about changing authority by relying on racial segregation at the mid-century State Fair of Virginia. Black farmers were barred from general competition and black women were excluded from the home goods competitions and beauty pageants. Importantly, the *Atlantic Rural Exposition Magazine* never acknowledged the segregated nature of the state fair, preferring instead

[37] Ladin, *State Fair of Virginia*, 9.
[38] Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era*, (New York: Basic, 1988).

to ignore the existence of black people altogether. In this way, the State Fair Association excluded Virginia's black population from both the magazine and from the constructed community that it sought to foster. It is clear that this practice had strictly ideological motivations – the State Fair Association was consistently desperate to boost attendance. Excluding a population by simply ignoring their existence has a specific impact. According to Antonio Gramsci a hegemonic social structure manifests in the "cultural common sense" that ignores opposition that cannot be easily assimilated to support the dominant interests.[39] Because segregation and Jim Crow did not fit in the hegemonic "common sense" narrative of the yeoman white farmer who built the South with the sweat of his back, the rural black population was ignored in the fair press. Their very presence would invalidate the narrative.

It is important to note that despite the ubiquity of segregation and discrimination in mid-twentieth century Virginia, the African American agricultural community formed several organizations to foster community involvement and a spirit of competition. Begun in Virginia in 1927 the New Farmers of America was founded by G. W. Owens as an organization for black youth to compete in agricultural and animal husbandry events.[40] The organization would merge with the larger Future Farmers of America when it desegregated in 1965. Similarly, two local organizations, the Negro Farm Makers Club and the Home Demonstration Club Division for Negroes hosted separate competition for the black community at the State Fair of Virginia throughout the 1950s, with products

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[39] Antonio Gramsci, ed. Quinton Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith, *Excerpts from the Prison Notebooks* (New York: International Publishers Company, 1971) 120.
[40] Marvin Albert Fields, *The New Farmers of America: 25 Years of Accomplishment* (Washington D.C.: New Farmers of America, 1960).

displayed in the Negro Club Exhibit Building and in separate agricultural venues.[41] Although excluded from the widely publicized and highly lucrative general agricultural competitions at the state fair, the existence of these organizations demonstrate the visible presence of a highly-organized, black agrarian community at the state fair.

At the same time, the impetus to form these organizations in the face of white exclusion demonstrates the enduring symbolic importance of the state fair to the rural black population during this period. Organizations like the Negro Farm Makers Club or the New Farmers of American were efforts to harness the fair's ideological power for an alternate purpose. As Michael Denning points out, "The possibility of popular political readings of cultural commodities depends on the cultivation, organization, and mobilization of audiences by oppositional subcultures and social movements."[42] Although Denning was referring to leftist organizing during the Depression, his reminder is deeply relevant to the 1960s State Fair of Virginia. Only through the formation of these alterative organizations was the rural black population able to harness the state fair's self-congratulatory, community-building atmosphere. Gramsci conceptualizes the idea of counterhegemony as the formation of "alliances between different cultural and class factions by offering a new culture, a way of life, a conception of the universe" that is alternate to the dominant view.[43] These organizations, when coupled with the larger civil rights movement of the 1960s helped to give the black community a sense of purpose that did not rely on the authority of the State Fair Association or on the *Atlantic Rural Exposition Magazine* for validation.

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[41] Ladin, *State Fair of Virginia, 11.*
[42] Michael Denning, *The Cultural Front: The Laboring of American Culture* (New York: Verso, 1998) 64.
[43] Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks, 278.*

The complete absence of programs like the Negro Farm Makers Club or the New Farmers of America in the popular press or in the *Atlantic Rural Exposition Magazine* suggests the State Fair Association's anxiety at the possibility of black organization and the looming threat of integration. For example, a 1958 article in the *Atlantic Rural Exposition Magazine* contains vague references to Northern integration policies. The editor of the *Southern Planter* explains that "Virginia is not going to gain all happiness and all satisfaction by becoming a carbon copy of the industrialized north with congested cities, social frictions, and unemployment problems."[44] The local white elite used the North as a rhetorical boogeyman, equating integration with urban socioeconomic problems. According to James Cobb, in the mid twentieth century the North and South used each other, "In the way Americans had historically used empire – not only to define their identity and to say what they are not, but to escape into fantasy from what they are."[45] Accepting black contestants into fair competitions would force white elites to admit the humanity and organizational ability of the black population. In doing so they would have to acknowledge their past as slaveholders and racists, a position that fundamentally clashed with the dominant cultural narrative. At the same time, by the 1960s the segregated South was increasingly viewed by the rest of the country as a blot on America's international Cold War message of democracy and freedom.[46] Southern white resentment at such a characterization only made local elites more unwilling to compromise. Beset from without and within, white elites clung to their beliefs using publications like the *Atlantic Rural Exposition Magazine* to shore up cultural legitimacy.

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[44] *Atlantic Rural Exposition Magazine*, 1958, n.p.
[45] James C. Cobb, *Away Down South: A History of Southern Identity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005) 219.
[46] Ibid, 186.

Derek Nelson recognizes the state fair's symbiotic relationship with the agrarian community, as well as the fair's contradictory nature: "Throughout their sprawling, tumultuous history, state fairs have always reflected the basic elements of the national: the strengths and weaknesses, the common sense and faddishness, the unities and discords that have long marked America's unique development as people."[47] The state fair, far from being irrelevant to modern culture, acted as a barometer of socioeconomic change. Along with the increasing presence of national economic concerns at the Virginia State Fair, as American popular and political culture became nationalized after WWII, the State Fair of Virginia was increasingly conscious of contemporary national concerns.

The state fair was both the mouthpiece for a national Cold War dialogue that promoted the dominance of American capitalism and an agent in an international agribusiness community that sought to solidify an international American economic monopoly. These concerns are seen in an interview featured in the September 23, 1957 edition of the *Richmond News Leader*. The article included a photograph depicting the president of the Virginia Future Farmers of America wearing a leather FFA jacket, sporting the popular mid-century slicked back haircut, and holding a small model tractor. He is flanked on either side by two Japanese boys wearing matching dark suits. While the FFA president smiles patronizingly, both Japanese boys stare intently at the model tractor. Under a caption that reads "Tractor in a Rice Paddy?" the article explained that the two Japanese boys, officers in the Future Farmers of Japan (FFJ), had traveled to the

[47] Derek Nelson, *The American State Fair* (Osceola, WI: MBI Publishing, 1999), 18.

State Fair of Virginia to learn about American farming techniques.[48] Noting the small size of Japanese farms, the article continued: "the modesty of Masaru's dreams shocked several young Virginia farmers." Reinforcing this theme, Masaru Takahashi, president of the FFJ, seemed suitably impressed by American farming mechanization: "Well, if I lived in the United States and had the mechanical equipment like Americans have, I think the ideal farm would be 100 acres."[49] This article emphasizes both the superior size of American farms and the impressive nature of American farming equipment. It demonstrates pride in American industrial might, but expresses it through veneration of the traditional American ideal – land ownership. The archetypical American farmer is superior because he has more land, grows more crops, and can therefore afford expensive machinery to harvest them. These implications remade the American farmer as a modernist symbol, participating in an ever-expanding mechanized exchange of raw goods.

The context of this visit is important. Immediately after World War II, American agricultural products were in high demand in Europe and in US-occupied Japan.[50] However, this monopoly was brought into question as other countries began to rebuild. Efforts at international cooperation like the FFJ should be viewed as a strategic business decision by Virginia agriculturalists as much as a political or ideological move. By the time of Takahashi's 1957 visit, American farmers were feeling the pinch of international

[48] Begun in 1948 as the School Agricultural Club and renamed the Future Farmers of Japan in 1950, the FFJ was originally founded to "learn about American agriculture." The organization still exists today as a cultural exchange program for Japanese and American agricultural students. "About School Agricultural Club," National Future Farmers of Japan, trans., http://www.natffj.org/. content posted 2008, last accessed 12/14/2010.
[49] Bevin Alexander, "Tractor in a Rice Paddy," *Richmond News Leader,* September 23, 1957, B9.
[50] Ingolf Vogler, *The Myth of the Family Farm: Agribusiness's Dominance of US Agriculture* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1981).

competition in once secure foreign markets. The presence of the FFJ can be viewed as an effort to rectify this situation. Growers in Virginia sought to impress a new generation of potential consumers and the FFJ's presence was free advertising. If Japanese farmers witnessed powerful American farm machinery in action they might feel compelled to purchase it for themselves. The press surrounding the event – especially the ideologically significant visual power dynamics of the FFJ photograph – reassured Virginia farmers that their racial and economic dominant position had not been disrupted. Especially in the post-World War II era, celebration of Virginia agriculture at the state fair cannot be seen simply as support for local industry. Despite the continued veneration of the local, community-oriented family farm in in the State Fair of Virginia Magazine, American agriculture had long been an international operation, with the mid-century state fair only one incarnation of this ever-present trend.

While the connection between local Virginia farmers and an international agribusiness community should not be underestimated, the FFJ program was also part of a nation-wide, Cold War effort to further international good will toward America.[51] Such campaigns illustrate the paternalistic exceptionalism inherent in American postwar foreign policy toward Asia as well as demonstrate an effort to foster nationalism in American citizens.[52] The FFJ article brought the international consequences of the US World War II victory over Japan home to Virginia farmers. In contrast to their characterization as an evil, demonic "other" in WWII, here the Japanese were depicted in

[51] Robert H. Haddow, *Pavilions of Plenty: Exhibiting America Abroad in the 1950s* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1997).
[52] Christina Klein, *Cold War Orientalism: Asia in the Middlebrow Imagination 1945-1961* (University of California Press, 2003).

the article as subservient and impressed with the superiority of the United States. Critically, the invited Japanese representatives are children, innocents, who can be taught how to farm, and to live, in an appropriately American fashion. If the state fair traditionally was a place to foster community and regional pride, such an encounter signals that the local elites consider American international domination as an appropriate addition to local, rural agricultural celebration.

Further demonstrating the Virginia State Fair's ideological support for modern progress and international hegemony, the name "Atlantic Rural Exhibition" replaced the name "The State Fair of Virginia" in 1947. No official explanation for the name change was given, but there is much room for interpretation. First, the use of the word "Atlantic" is important. While it was common to use Mid-Atlantic to describe the greater Virginia and Maryland region, the State Fair Association chose not to use this name. While calling to mind this regional association, "Atlantic" also implies a connection to a trans-continental world of economic and cultural exchange, invoking an international audience in the tradition of the world's fairs. As a replacement for "state," the word "Atlantic" is significant. "Atlantic" substitutes the modern geographical boundary for a simultaneously colonial and modern title through an ideological connection to Europe and the Atlantic World. "Rural" obviously referenced the content of the exhibition –the raw goods and products made in rural Virginia. "Exhibition" is also interesting. The word choice again indicates a desired association with the world's fairs – often described as "exhibitions," – associating the Virginia State Fair with the world's fair focus on technological display and futuristic innovation. Finally, using the word "exhibition" instead of the more

traditional "fair" is an ironic choice, indicating a conscious break from the century old Virginia fair tradition and the word's longstanding associations with local community, the family farm, and nostalgia for the past – concepts that the fair constantly reinscribed through fair events and press releases.

With this name change in mind, we may compare the Atlantic Rural Exhibition to the American world's fairs as a site that that merged spectacle entertainment with political and racial indoctrination. Throughout the late nineteenth and into the twentieth century, world's fairs wowed audiences as places to view the latest technological innovations of the day and to see great anthropological spectacles that promoted both white supremacy and American imperialism.[53] The popularity of some world's fairs, such as Chicago (1893) and St. Louis (1904), might make them logical models for the Virginia State Fair Association looking to boost attendance and solidify is cultural legitimacy. The State Fair Association made this connection explicit in the 1947 edition of the *Richmond New Leader*: "There is a world's fair atmosphere in the making out at Strawberry Hill, home of the Atlantic Rural Exposition."[54] This comparison would be made both explicitly and ideologically in fair publications throughout the 1950s.

For example, a 1952 article titled "What Now Mechanical Cow!" offers a subtle allusion to the world's fairs, describing a large mechanical cow that breathed, mooed, and could be milked: "The mechanical b[e]ssy will be nodding her head while her innards consisting of a series of gadgets designed to resemble the real flesh and blood machinery

[53] Rydell, *Fair America.*
[54] "Mile Long Lighting Pylons Planned for Fall Exposition," *Richmond News Leader,* 1947, n.p.

for producing milk will churn away."[55] Although probably not intentionally, the cow bears striking similarities to a mechanical milk cow featured at the 1904 St. Louis World's Fair.[56] Later the author exclaims that "the product itself, the real thing this time, will be dispensed by relays of dairy maids dressed in appropriate costumes."[57] This contradictory image of a futuristic, robotic cow and beautiful women in traditional dress is a combination of both modern invention and pseudo-scientific spectacle that was common to the world's fairs. At the same time, the strange combination demonstrated the state fair's ideological struggle between the modern and the traditional, manifesting a desire to move forward and a reluctance to give up the past. This juxtaposition visually calls into question the viability of agrarian life: if a creature as quintessentially pastoral as the dairy cow could be simulated through mechanization, then so too could the traditional yeoman farmer be replaced with increasingly sophisticated technology. In this way, the edutainment exhibits at the State Fair of Virginia like the mechanical cow and the tractor operation contests, which celebrated a consistent narrative of progress linked to mechanization and imperialism, also furthered the decline of the agrarian community that the State Fair Association hoped to perpetuate.

Robert Rydell offers an explanation for this seemingly self-defeating faith in technology, saying that "In addition to transferring technologies and allegories of imperial triumph across national boundaries, world's fairs generated powerful feelings of technological utopianism that shored up sagging public confidence in the capacity of

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[55] "What Now Mechanical Cow!," *Richmond News Leader*, 1952, n.p.
[56] James Gilbert, *Whose Fair? Experience, Memory, History at the Great St. Louis Exhibition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009) *187.*
[57] "What Now Mechanical Cow!," *Richmond News Leader,* 1952, n.p.

industry and technology to solve social and political problems."[58] Even as technology and modernism spelled the end of traditional agriculture, it promised to answer pressing agricultural problems such as drought, insect infestation, and over-harvesting through innovations like mechanized irrigation and sprayable pesticides.[59] The seemingly blind faith in these solutions seen at the state fair masked the slow realization that only wealthy farmers with extensive acreage could afford these new products, ultimately forcing small farmers out of business.

This mix of willful ignorance and nationalistic utopianism can again be seen at the fair throughout the 1950s and 1960s in the form of hyper-patriotic military demonstrations that, although waning in the late 1960s in the face of the Vietnam War, solidified a link between the state fair and national ideological campaigns. The 1957 Atoms for Peace Exhibit fully demonstrates this link between the State Fair Association and the national government. The program was sponsored by the Atomic Energy Commission – a national agency established in 1946 to promote non-weapons based atomic energy research. In the months leading up to the fair, the federal government advertised extensively in the local press. A headline in the *Gate City Herald* reads, "Atom in Action to be at State Fair." The article promised that the new Atomic exhibit would "bring the latest developments in all fields of nuclear energy to the attention and understanding of the general public." Exemplifying the focus on edutainment at the state fair, the article describes the exhibit in great detail:

> By pushing a button the spectator can see just how a chain reaction works; by pushing another button, he can operate a 16 foot model of an atomic energy plant

[58] Rydell, *Fair America,* 135.
[59] Vogler, *The Myth of the Family Farm.*

> for producing electricity; a third button activates a visual and audible explanation of the use of radioisotopes in plant fertilization studies.[60]

This exhibit injected mid-century federal faith in atomic power into the state fair tradition, advocating for its use in traditional farm maintenance. The presence of this exhibit vividly demonstrates the way that national concerns were manipulated to reflect local issues, with agricultural production shoehorned into a debate about the viability of nuclear power.

While enthusiastic articles supporting the Atoms for Peace exhibit were reprinted in several Richmond-area newspapers, it is clear that not everyone agreed with the promotion of atomic power at the Virginia state fair. Illustrating this ambivalence towards the Atoms for Peace display is a cartoon in the 1957 issue of the *Richmond News Leader.* In the cartoon a short, chubby, bewildered-looking man stands at a crossroads facing several signs, each facing in a different direction. He is dressed formally in a hat and tie, with his white coat labeled "We the People." The signs are labeled with fair attractions such as "livestock show" or "agricultural exhibits." However, the sign reading "Atoms for Peace" is many times the size of the other markers and is the only decorated sign, accompanied by the ubiquitous atomic symbol of electrons swirling around the nucleus of an atom. The man's attention is locked on the large sign.[61] The cartoon mocks the government's exhaustive over-advertising of the Atoms for Peace exhibit, signaling that in the cartoonist's opinion no one would buy into the importance of atomic power in agriculture if it was not so heavily promoted. However, the bemused look on the "everyman's" face and his undivided attention to the Atoms for Progress sign suggests

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[60] "Atoms in Action to be Feature at State Fair," *Gate City Herald.* Gate City, VA, August 8, 1957, n.p.
[61] "Added Attraction," *Richmond News Leader.* September 20, 1957, n.p.

that the author also considers "the people" to be easily swayed by such propaganda campaigns.

The presence of this cartoon highlights just how pervasive the debate about the viability of nuclear energy was during this period, affecting even the Virginia State Fair. Even as fear of the bomb permeated the popular imagination, the federal government waged an aggressive public relations campaign to shore up not only the nuclear power industry but the myth of American might, freedom, and exceptionalism.[62] This seemingly banal publicity campaign and the tame opposition is part of an ongoing battle over the state fair's sense of itself. Again, as "Americana" the state fair becomes part of the process of regional and national identity creation. Even as the State Fair Association and local elites became worried about the fair's growing obsolescence, its traditional ideological significance allowed the fair to remain a location where larger political and ideological battles were played out. This ideological conflict was coupled with local economic concerns. Ultimately, lucrative government contracts won out over concerns about the presence of nuclear power in the area and several nuclear power plants were erected in the Richmond area during the 1970s, with the Surry Power Station in Surry County beginning operations in 1972 and the North Anna Station going online in Louisa County in 1978.[63]

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[62] Tom Engelhardt, *The End of Victory Culture: Cold War America and the Disillusioning of a Generation* (Boston: University of Massachusetts Press) Chapter 3.

[63]. See United States Nuclear Regulatory Commission, "Surry Power Station Unit 1," http://www.nrc.gov/info-finder/reactor/sur1.html.; United States Nuclear Regulatory Commission, "North Anna Power Station, Unit 1," http://www.nrc.gov/info-finder/reactor/na1.html (Last accessed 12/13/2010).

Rhetorically the State Fair Association equates the Atlantic Rural Exposition as representative of the entire state – sometimes even of the mid-Atlantic region. Such a characterization conveniently overlooks the fact that the majority of fair attendants came from a relatively small area – Richmond and neighboring towns. The State Fair Association sought to manufacture a sense of shared identity at the state fair through appeals to both white nostalgia and faith in modern progress, and to both a sense of community competition and nationalistic Cold War patriotism. However, this effort was not successful. Throughout 1950s and 1960s the State Fair Association's confusion over the best way to represent the state fair is demonstrated by the confusing and often conflicting ideological messages sent in state fair publications and seen in the agricultural competitions. This identity crisis is further articulated on the midway where continued debates about gender roles in midway shows and the proper invocation of state fair iconography further complicate the fair's fractured identity.

The Midway: Conformity through Transgression

Like the agricultural expositions, the midway at the Atlantic Rural Exposition underwent significant changes during the mid-twentieth century, reflecting the era's changing economic and ideological makeup. During this period the state fair midway bore many similarities to the circus and the amusement park as a space for transgression and titillation, a tradition that is seemingly complicated by the presence of thematic shows and historical reenactments that consciously perpetuated a homogeneous, morally conservative tradition based upon stereotypical gender roles and racial segregation.[64] This tension is linked to a conflict between the known and the unknown, a dichotomy between the stationary, local agricultural exhibition and the mobile midway show full of traveling performers. In mid-twentieth century Virginia, this uneasiness about traveling performers was only exacerbated by an often explicitly transgressive midway featuring grandstand reviews, sideshow performances, and peep shows that intensified the state fair's association with the unknown and the deviant, a fear that was intensified by the era's Communist witch hunts and obsession with national security. [65] However, as demonstrated by the bad attendance at the ranch-focused 1946 fair, the State Fair Association needed the midway to make a profit.

The local press offered some token protest to the presence of explicit sexuality on the state fair midway. However, the practice, along with the visually shocking and often

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[64] See Geoff Weedon,. *Fairground Art: The Art Forms of Traveling Fairs, Carousels and Carnival Midways* (New York: Artabras, 1994).; Janet Davis, *The Circus Age: Culture and Society Under the American Big Top,* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002).; John Kasson, *Amusing the Million: Cony Island at the Turn of the Century* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1978).

[65] See Robert Clyde Allen, *Horrible Prettiness: Burlesque and American Culture* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991).; Robert Bogdan, *Freak Show: Presenting Human Oddities for Amusement and Profit* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988).; Engelhardt, *The End of Victory Culture*, Chapter 3.

violent sideshow and daredevil acts, was ultimately beneficial to the State Fair Association's ideological project. These shows defined the fair midway as a place for exclusively male transgression and male visual pleasure, ultimately reinforcing white male gender dominance. The simultaneous predominance of historical reenactments did not disrupt this hierarchy. Instead, by reinforcing a triumphalist narrative of Virginia and American history such performances worked with the midway to reestablish the status quo.

Despite this ultimately mutually beneficial relationship, the midway and the agricultural expositions were seen as very different, antagonistic entities. Importantly, because the midway was managed by independent contractors, the State Fair Association was prevented from interfering extensively in the way the midway conducted operations. Just as the fair's general manager resigned after the disappointing 1946 season, the midway show at the Atlantic Rural Exposition changed hands that year. In 1946 the midway was run by the World of Mirth Company and although fair manager Paul Swaffer promised that, "Entertainment features will be of the highest type and will be stressed to the utmost," profits were considered disappointing and in 1947 Richmond-based Cetlin & Wilson Shows took over management of the midway.[66] Like the *Atlantic Rural Exposition Magazine* and local press coverage of the fair exposition, Cetlin & Wilson incorporated a futuristic rhetoric into their advertising, with a 1953 three-page advertisement in *Billboard Magazine* billing Cetlin & Wilson as "The Maximum Midway of Modern Times."[67]

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[66] "New One for C&W," *Billboard Magazine,* March 23, 1946, 60.
[67] "The Greatest Midway on Earth," *Billboard Magazine*, November 28, 1953, 23.

Similarly, George A. Hamid, a New York booking agent responsible for most of the live amusement performances east of the Mississippi River incorporated a modernist rhetoric into his acts. For example, two advertisements for grandstand acts in the 1954 *Atlantic Rural Exposition Magazine* demonstrate an interesting appreciation of new technology that mixed sexually charged entertainment, the national consumer culture, and midcentury modernism. First, a "Model Review" that was said to "feature a bevy of lovely New York and Chicago models presented in 3-D which has gained applause throughout the nation."[68] In another advertisement from the same year, Princess Tall Chief, described as "an Iroquois Princess" who "charms audiences with the exciting breathtaking control of her body performing on a beautiful Lucite illuminated table."[69] Both acts link sexualized performances with new technology and a world outside Virginia.

Advertisements in *Billboard* and the local press regularly focused on the increased size of the midway and fair-goers sensory overload. These ads often reflected reality. A mix of technological spectacle, dangerous animals, and the potential for violent death was a staple of both midway and grandstand shows throughout the 1950s and 1960s.[70] The early midway included a variety of daredevils and stunt artists like Ethel Purtle, a Richmond native who rode a motorcycle around the walls of a metal cage with a lion in her sidecar.[71] Another act called the Apolons performed acrobatic tricks while

[68] *Atlantic Rural Exposition Magazine*, 1954, n.p.
[69] Ibid.
[70] "VA Execs Launch Reorganization Plan," *Billboard Magazine,* January 31, 1953, 54.
[71] *Richmond News Leader*, September 26, 1957, n.p.

balancing on 110 foot poles.[72] The grandstand reflected the midway's promotion of spectacle violence and physical pleasures. For example during the 1950s and 1960s common grandstand attractions included elaborate vaudeville-esque review shows, Sam Nunis' Big Car Show, Irish Huron's Heel Drivers, a rodeo, motor-cycle races, and fireworks. [73] A *Billboard* ad for Hamid's Review in 1950 touted that, "Bobby Whaling and Yvette, unicycle act, and Ferdinand, trick bull, with a movie background will be part of a two-a-day grandstand show at the exposition."[74] Importantly, these acts would remain largely either local or part of the traveling performing circuit until the late 1960s.

Despite the midway's consistent presence in the local press and its fundamental importance to the fair's annual revenue, the relationship between the midway management and the State Fair Association was at times tense at midcentury. The Fair Association placed pressure on the midway's more traditionally disreputable attraction, specifically gambling and drinking. Such tension had historical precedent. Throughout the 1920s and 1930s the State Fair Association had worked to sever the fair's connection to traditionally deviant activities by outlawing gambling on the popular horse and stock car races. These efforts to "clean up the fair" were part of a national movement led by temperance advocates to remove vice from fairs and outdoor amusements. In the South, such campaigns were often led by preachers and local moral authorities who were concerned about their loss of control to new, urban morality and entertainment.[75] These

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[72] *Atlantic Rural Exposition Magazine*, 1951, n.p.
[73]"Marks Tumble as Attendance Builds at Richmond Event," *Billboard Magazine*, October 10, 1953, 60.; "Richmond Crowd up 50% Over '50," *Billboard Magazine,* October 13, 1951, 50.
[74] "Hamid Talent Set for Atlantic Expo," *Billboard Magazine*, September 23, 1950, 61.
[75] Ted Oynby, "Harvest Celebrations in the Rural South and the Challenge of Mass Culture 1865-1920," in *Feasts and Celebrations in North American Ethnic Communities*. ed. Ramon A. Gutierrez and Genieve Fabre (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1995).; David B. Danbom, *The Resisted Revolution:*

early movements placed local authority in opposition to the most popular fair attractions with only limited success.

In this tradition, the State Fair Association outlawed bingo in 1954, a move that was deeply resented in the amusement industry and blamed for decreased midway revenues that year. Articles in the *Richmond News Leader* demonstrate that this tension continued for decades. In an article that speaks to an entrenched local distrust of traveling performers the author describes a situation in which "[three] persons said they were taken for $31 by a concessionaire" but goes on to reassure the reader that the money was returned with the help of the police. The same article states proudly that "only [three] people out of an estimated million visiting" had been arrested for drinking.[76] Importantly, female review and girlie shows, the arguably most transgressive attractions at the fair, would only rarely be brought up for censure in the local press. Such shows would last until the mid- 1970's when they were reportedly shut down for financial reasons.[77]

Mikhail Bakhtin offers some explanation for this tension between the midway and the State Fair Association and the seemingly arbitrary distinctions between what transgressions were acceptable on the state fair midway. Bakhtin argues that the medieval carnival was important as a time for the poor to temporarily ignore social norms and mock the ruling class; he believes that carnival spaces were not simply a way for the

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Urban America and the Industrialization of Agriculture 1900-1930 (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1979).

[76] "Buzzing Blitz Begins at Fair," *Richmond News Leader*, September 27, 1969, n.p.

[77] "Richmond Potential Up $150,000," *Billboard Magazine*, October 23, 1954, 53.; "Costs Drives out Fair's Burlesque," *Richmond Times Dispatch*, September 26, 1975, n.p.

common people to let off steam, but a truly subversive space. [78] The concept of the "carnivalesque" was a form of subversive communication that mocks authority. In this framework the presence of gambling, drinking, and girlie shows at the fair subverted Cold War middle class respectability, and the antagonism of the state fair association was not an altruistic effort to clean up society but rather a move to reinstate social power. However, complicating this understanding is the lack of a social outcry against girlie shows. Victor Turner's framework offers some explanation for this absence. According to Turner, Bakhtin's "carnivalesque" would be a part of a liminal space that is seemingly socially transgressive but, because it took place within a set of prescribed festive days and did not disrupt society's traditional hierarchical order, ultimately did not overthrow the dominant social order. Turner characterizes the liminoid as a modern, coopted, commodified version of the liminal space, as something that does not provide even the structured transgression of the liminal. Elements of the liminal, carnivalesque space and Turner's commodified, fragmented, liminoid space are present at the mid-twentieth century state fair. The intentions behind the State Fair Association's policies toward the midway can be seen as an effort to foster a productive liminal space, but by the 1970s the fair had become a liminoid space, fractured and confusing, like twentieth century America.

Supporting a conceptualization of the midcentury fair as an increasingly liminoid space is the steady professionalization and consolidation in the amusement industry. The presence of the traditional carnies and barkers who, with their gaudy costumes, loud

[78] Mikhail Bakhtin, trans. Helene Iswolsky, *Rabelais and His World* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), 7.

words, and itinerant lifestyle, inspired both fascination and fear in the local population was an important part of the mid-century fair's liminal quality.[79] During this period, this performance culture was slowly being replaced with an increasingly monolithic corporate structure. Indicative of this change, when midway again switched hands in 1968 the Florida based Delliger shows advertised heavily that they were going to clean up the midway, symbolized by instructing all employees to wear matching white uniforms.[80]

This process of corporate consolidation is visible immediately after World War II. In 1946 representatives of the Virginia State Fair Association attended a meeting of the Virginia Association of Fairs, a group responsible for the management and coordination of Virginia county fairs. Through this organization, the competitive rounds in the beauty pageant and agricultural competitions were scheduled and organized for the next several years. In a move that hoped to make the Atlantic Rural Exposition truly a regional affair rather than just a state event, the Virginia State Fair Association merged with the West Virginia Fairs Association in 1953, making competitors in both states eligible to compete at the Atlantic Rural Exhibition.[81] The booking agent George Hamid was present at each annual meeting of the Virginia Association of Fairs. He advocated that the Virginia Association join the newly formed International Association of Fairs and Expositions, of which he was an influential member. As early as 1953 the State Fair Association was

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[79] Amanda Dargan Zeitlin. *American Carnival Talkers: The Art of the Carnival Show Pitchman and Other Itinerant Showman Vendors.* (Ph.D. diss., University of Pennsylvania, 1992).; Roger D. Abrahams. "The Language of Festivals." *Celebration: Studies of Festivity and Ritual*, Victor Turner, ed. (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institute Press, 1982).
[80] *State Fair of Virginia Magazine*, 1968, n.p.; Ladin; *State Fair of Virginia.*
[81] "VA Execs Launch Reorganization Plan," *Billboard Magazine*, January 31, 1953, 54.

beginning a consolidation process that would remove local performers and seasonal entertainers from the midway and the grandstand.

In the 1950s and 1960s girlie shows remained one of the most visibly liminal aspects of the state fair midway, preserving the midway's transgressive character as a place where male fantasy could break the bonds of Cold War monogamy without social consequences. The removal of girlie shows in the 1970s would signal the final movement of the state fair from a liminal to a liminoid space. However in earlier decades, dozens of "girlie" shows were featured at the state fair under a variety of ambiguous names – "Beautiful Girls," "Hi Frenchie," and "Posing Show" – that superficially disguised their explicitly sexual content.[82] Such acts were highly lucrative for midway companies as demonstrated by their heavy advertisement in both trade and popular publications. Hamid's Grandstand Review frequently included a "girl line," and Cetlin & Wilson advertised burlesque dancers as some of their starring attractions.[83] Raynelle's Review, a particularly popular burlesque show during this period, took out several full-page ads in the 1953 issue of *Billboard Magazine*.[84] An article promoting Raynelle's Review at the 1960 State Fair of Virginia advertised a wide variety of dancers:

> The principle attraction of the midway will again be Raynelle's Review which continues to offer the finest in high-class night club entertainment presented under canvas. This year's features are Syrena, the exotic Swedish bombshell and Ct Landry and Grace, whose 'spoofing of the strip' an exciting comedy novelty act, has proved quite a hit in many of the nation's major night spots. [85]

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[82] Ladin, *State Fair of Virginia,18.*
[83] "Hamid Talent Set for Atlantic Expo," *Billboard Magazine*, September 23, 1950, 61.
[84] "Here's What They Say About Raynelle's Review," *Billboard Magazine*, November 28, 1953, 25.
[85] "New Rides, Shows Make Appearance at State Fair," *Halifax Gazette*. September 1, 1960, n.p.

Shows like Raynelle's Review exemplify the state fair's contradictory nature. On the one hand, these shows employed women in a traveling show in a time when the feminine ideal was a contained life as a wife and mother; on the other hand, they reduced women to sex objects: silent receptors of the male gaze.[86] In this way, because traditional gender hierarchies remained intact, the presence of girlie shows is liminoid, not truly transgressive to the social order. While these shows might seem to flaunt middle class versions of propriety, they do nothing to dismantle the larger social framework that supported male gender dominance.

In a particularly bizarre assertion of this dominance, an article in the *Richmond News Leader* sensationalizes the presence of girlie shows in a description of the fair's Preview Night. The article lists new acts available on the midway, such as giant twelve pound rats, the abominable snowman's feet, and the Festival of Tahiti. In the midst of this litany of standard oddities, the author identifies a sign outside a girlie show tent that exclaimed "See for the first time the way women of all nations are sold in to slavery – the year's sensational expose." Further playing up the presence of forbidden titillation the article describes a second sign under the first that read "Hear them moan. See them suffer."[87] The article includes no picture, nor does it describe anything that happens inside the tent. However the act continues the tradition, seen in in popular fiction and film, of captured, endangered women as sexual objects. This pseudo-ethnographic midway act, coupled with the girlie shows, emphasizes the fair as a space for male

[86] Allen, *Horrible Prettiness.*; Allison Kibbler, *Rank Ladies: Gender Hierarchies in American Vaudeville* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999).
[87] Dean Levi, "Preview Night is Tomorrow," *Richmond News Leader*, 1969, n.p.

observation of women, a trend that Alan Nadel, among others, recognizes as particularly popular in the cold war era.[88]

Important to an analysis of sexualized performance on the state fair midway is Bakhtin's discussion of "grotesque realism" as a key component of the carnivalesque, liminal space. He equates the grotesque with things of the "lower body," such as eating, sex, and defecation. As a result, for Bakhtin, carnival transgression is "not only parody in the narrow sense" but should be understood as one of many forms of grotesque realism that "degrade, bring down to earth, turn their subject into flesh."[89] This preoccupation with "earthly" excitement can be seen in the midway and grandstand entertainment at the fair. Newspaper advertisements for girlie shows, daredevil acts, and sideshows illustrate that sex and violence are what sold on the midway. For example, an ad for the Hollywood Sky Rockets stated that, "[The show] combines an appreciation of aerobatic grace and agility with the terrifying expectation of disaster."[90] In another example, an article about the appearance of the winner of the Indianapolis 500 at the state fair promised, "The stunt studded bill includes ramp to ramp leaps of both stock sedans and motor-cycles, barricade crashes, slide for life, crash slap rolls, and head on crashes."[91] Similar advertisements for acts like Sam Nunus's Big Car Show, the Congress of Daredevils, or the demolition derby also hint at the possibility of imminent death.[92] As a foil to the highly ideological Atoms for Peace exhibit or the symbolic exchange of knowledge through international

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[88] Alan Nadel, *Containment Culture: Postmodernism and the Atomic Age* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995) Chapter 5.
[89] Bakhtin. *Rabelais,* 20.
[90] "Thrilling Acts, Events Featured at Richmond Fair," *Richmond News Leader,* August 28, 1952, n.p.
[91] *Atlantic Rural Exposition Magazine,* 1950, n.p.
[92] "Fair Awaits Show Ride Equipment," *Richmond News Leader*, September 19, 1957, n.p.

FFA programs, the midway connected the state fair to the carnivalesque tradition, celebrating the "lower body" pleasures of sex and violence. Bakhtin's assertion that grotesque realism acts as a way to "degrade" high ideals offers an explanation for the constant tension between the midway and the State Fair Association. As the fair association aspired to lofty consumer and patriotic heights, the constant contrast offered by the midway's grotesque realism thwarted these attempts, burlesquing them, and in the process, lowering them to the same level as any other form of public entertainment.

Even as the midcentury state fair midway was characterized by the liminal and the grotesque, the press symbolically contained potentially transgressive elements through a rhetoric that desexualizes female performers by highlighting their professionalism and playing upon assumptions of female vulnerability. An article in the 1960 *Richmond News Leader* titled "Dancer on Display, Mind Far Away" is reminiscent of the State Fair Association's negative reaction to "immoral" acts like gambling at the state fair and puts a decidedly human face on these burlesque shows. The exposé features Dottie Rice, a dancer in Raynelle's Review. Emphasizing her vulnerable position, the author describes her as "20 years of age" and "5 foot and 96 lb" and implies that she does not enjoy her job: '"You're always scared to death the first few times. All these men and all those looks and some wanting to touch and see if you're real." She explains, "But after a while you learn to look just over their heads and think about other things."[93] Her tone of disinterested practicality is indicative of a veteran performer and belies the article's focus on her youth and physical stature. However, the article undercuts her confidence, disapproving of her choice of employment and describing her actions as "semi-sinful."

[93] "Dancer on Display, Mind Far Away," *Richmond News Leader,* September 14, 1958, n.p.

When Rice confides that she "dislikes the 'unjustified' reputations that go with girl show girls" the author inserts quotations surrounding the word 'unjustified,' casting doubt upon her assertion, seemingly supporting the opinion of Fair Association officials that such entertainment did not belong at a respectable fair.

At the end of the article, Rice assures readers that, "Actually our show is more decent than most private parties. But the barker has to exaggerate and sell a little biology to get the people in."[94] This defensive effort to appease moralizers is a reminder that attendance at the girlie show is bought and sold based on effective advertising, not the apparent authenticity of a woman's performance. Rice is admittedly disinterested in her male viewers, actively ignoring them in favor of her own inner monologue. Although she displays herself for the sexual pleasure of men at the fair, she is not interested in an actual sexual liaison. Rice is performing for an audience. In direct contrast to her performance are the supposedly "authentic" public displays of cooking, canning, and sewing in the Women's World building and the public competitions in the agricultural exhibitions. These activities, while instilling a comforting image of time-honored tradition, also appear to lack the artificial, business-mindedness of the midway show. The issue of authenticity sits at the heart of the tension between rural and urban, modern and traditional, seen at the state fair. Dottie's protestations of respectability acknowledge the artificiality of the midway show while still making overtures to social conventions.

In contrast to the morally affronted tone of the Rice interview, 1957 the *Richmond News Leader* ran a series of articles on Sally Rand, a nationally recognized fan dancer

[94] Ibid.

who first rose to fame by posing seemingly naked on a white horse at the 1933 Chicago World's Fair.[95] She appeared many times with the Cetlin & Wilson midway show at the State Fair of Virginia and was a common feature in the *Richmond News Leader* throughout the 1950s and 1960s as a coy, yet relatively tame, sex symbol. An analysis of her numerous interviews reveals many of the same tensions expressed by Dottie Rice such as female professionalism in the face of a sexualized male gaze and seeming inauthenticity in contrast to the fair exposition's celebration of the traditional and the authentic. However, Rand's confidence and sense of sexual freedom defy moral conventions in a way that Rice does not. While Rand's interviews demonstrate her versatility as en entertainer, they also bring home national phenomena, such as the burgeoning feminist movement, to the state fair.

One 1957 interview with Rand titled "Fan Dancer's Due for a Change: From Fans to Test Tubes" focused extensively on Rand's experiences returning to college, stating, "Dancer Sally Rand puts her fans in mothballs and takes to the test tubes in winter." The article highlights her experience as a mother and characterizes her as living the middle class, heteronormative dream when not touring with the fair. The article focuses on the unusual situation of a middle-aged, female, traveling performer simultaneously marrying, and raising children, working, and seeking an education: "Her classmates know her as Mrs. Frederick Joseph Lalla, a serious chemistry major, and her professor knows her as the only woman in the class."[96] In 1957 Virginia Sally Rand was considered unusual. However, in the context of late 1950s America, Rand highlights an increasing number of

[95] Rydell, *Fair America, 137.*
[96] Marguerite Davenport, "Fan Dancer's Due for a Change: From Fans to Test Tubes," *Richmond News Leader,* September 23, 1957, n.p.

women who were attending college and seeking out careers. The article's celebratory tone mentions her current employment and scandalous past, but focuses on her educational goals, seeming to approve of women holding jobs and attending college.

In contrast, another article, dated a few days later, seems to revel in Rand's risqué past. The author documents Rand's presentation at a Richmond Polytechnic Institute leadership seminar, emphasizing her past exploits and the presence of impressionable male college students. Captions that contain veiled innuendo such as "currently she is *revealing* her accomplishments on the midway at the state fair of Virginia" remind the reader of Rand's attachment to the burlesque industry and convey disapproval even as they excite and inform.[97] The article appears to bow to the moral conventions of the day while still serving as sexualized publicity for her midway show. Rand is quoted as opening her discussion with, "Thank you for the nice applause for me with my clothes on." Her purposeful allusions to her show-business history signal pride in her fame, while her presence in the article, as opposed to a younger or more attractive performer, seeks to draw upon her past celebrity, using Rand as an object of nostalgic reflection. In this context, Rand embodies nostalgia for days gone by, the commercialized sexuality of the traveling girlie show, and the educated, independent attitude of the New Woman. Her contradictory image bears many similarities to the state fair as a mix of nostalgia and faith in change, commercialized entertainment and middle class values.

[97] Gene Miller, "Sally Rand to Speak to Unusual 'Fans' at R.P.I.," *Richmond News Leader,* September 26, 1957, 21.

It is important to point out that Rand's overt sexuality is acceptable because she is a traveling performer and not a local Richmond woman. For example, she is not a contestant in the state fair beauty pageant where such behavior would not be tolerated. This sense that deviance in outsiders is acceptable, even anticipated and enjoyed, is highlighted by local coverage of fair sideshow acts. Along with prolific interviews with Rand and other girlie show performers, the Richmond media featured a series of interviews with sideshow performers in the 1960s. These articles often come with large pictures of the performer, always female, with the interview below. One example, featured in the 1967 *Richmond News Leader,* is an interview with Stella the Bearded Lady. The article recounts her remarkable life as a member of both the Canadian Navy and the United States Women's Army Corps and her attendance at the University of Michigan. Stella describes herself as the "only hippie in the business" and explains that "a bearded lady nowadays is a very rare thing." The author praises Stella: "Is she self-conscious? Not at all." Later Stella reinforces this, saying "In fact I probably have a superiority complex."[98] Not conventionally beautiful, Stella's life experiences and many accomplishments are highlighted in contrast to typical interviews with sideshow performers that rhetorically repeat the voyeuristic character of the sideshow. Such articles linger on the subject's physical attributes and apparent strange beauty. For example an interview with Alligator Alice, described as a half alligator half beautiful woman from Florida or another with the "Monster for Hong Kong," described as having "the body of an ugly snake and the head of a very young girl" do not give any clue as to the life history

[98] Dean Levi, "Bearded Lady a Bit of Pride," *Richmond News Leader*, September 26, 1967, n.p.

of the subject.[99] While these women, and their transgressive lifestyle, are the subject of appreciative fascination in a way that a local Virginia girl would never be, in the World's Fair tradition, such shows explicitly connect the midway, Cold War internationalism, and institutionalized racism under the guise of spectacle entertainment.[100]

Despite segregated agricultural buildings and livestock competitions, some all black female musical reviews performed on the midway throughout the 1950s and 1960s. For example the Hi Steppers appeared in 1951 and Harlem on Parade a decade later.[101] However, rather than signaling any overtures toward inclusion and racial equality, the physical placement of these acts next to sideshow acts and girlie shows as well as a rhetorical link made in the local press only reduced women of color to exoticized sex objects. The complicated, and traditionally exploitive, history of interracial sexual desire in the South makes these girlie shows particularly problematic, both upholding the stereotype of the hypersexual black woman and validating the white man's voyeuristic desire for her. It would not be until the late 1960s that the local press would advertise African American musical acts separate from sideshow attractions and burlesque shows. Such situations compete with the midway's equalizing, grotesque realism, implicating the midway in the State Fair Association's racial project.

Also explicitly connected to the preservation of local hierarchies, the midway hosted entertainment spectacles that celebrate a very particular version of Virginia

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[99] Dean Levi, "Alligator Alice: A Florida Belle," *Richmond News Leader*, September 25, 1969, n.p.; "Rope Ladder Tries Fairgoer," *Richmond News Leader*, September 23, 1969, n.p.
[100] Gilbert, *Whose Fair?* 192.
[101] "Here's What They Say About Raynelle's Review," *Billboard Magazine*, November 28, 1953, 25.

history. In this way the State Fair Association's nostalgic veneration of a lost agrarian past, touted as racially homogeneous and ideologically unified, infiltrated the midway's potentially subversive space. Often such performances contradicted both the midway's reputation for transgression but also reflected ambivalence for Mitchel's modernist vision. Cetlin and Wilson, along with others in the amusement industry were very conscious of the power of nostalgia to sell tickets. For example a 1953 article in *Billboard* blamed the failure of the 1946 Atlantic Rural Exposition on the local population's general ambivalence to the State Fair Association's use of Atlantic Rural Exposition instead of the more traditional State Fair of Virginia. The author insists that an explicit titular connection to local geography and history is an important component of the state fair.[102]

Although the midway was considered to be a the purveyor of bad morals and the corrupter of traditional values by the State Fair Association, these performers were pointedly aware of what fair audiences wanted – the shoring up of traditional values and hierarches. The local press recognized this as well and, as part of this appeal to a traditional past, continued to use the name "State Fair of Virginia" despite the official change to the Atlantic Rural Exposition. Although the Fair Association alone persisted in using the new name for decades, it finally dropped the name Atlantic Rural Exposition completely in the 1980s, returning to the more traditional State Fair of Virginia and bowing to popular consensus.

[102] "The Mitchell Touch," *Billboard Magazine*, November 28, 1953, 152.

Although the Fair Association persisted in using the new name, it made other symbolic efforts to appeal to visitor nostalgia and sense of tradition. In 1951 the Virginia State Fair Association introduced a fair mascot named Colonel Virginia. A character that was obviously meant to call to mind Virginia's celebrated cavalier tradition, Colonel Virginia was regularly pictured in newspaper ads and fair programs throughout the 1950s wearing a white coat and bow tie, a white plantation-style panama hat, and sporting a white, pointed goatee.[103] Through his costume, Colonel Virginia was presumably meant to call to mind images of "Southern hospitality," agricultural power, and chivalrous, military expertise. His title, "Colonel," connects him to Virginia's long military tradition without explicitly mentioning contentious historical events, especially the Civil War. With these characteristics Colonel Virginia stands as a visual embodiment of Virginia's dominant social class and racial category. Colonel Virginia is an example of the power of marketing and branding techniques to imbue images with both an ideological message and social power.[104] Through Colonel Virginia the State Fair Association was both aligning itself with a sense of local tradition and reinforcing the white supremacist ideology underlying the image. Importantly, it seems clear that the State Fair Association was sensitive to the racial implications of such images. In a telling advertising move, ads for the state fair in the *Richmond Afro-American* did not feature images of the Colonel.[105] However, this omission should not be seen as an indication of racial sensitivity or reconciliation. At this moment the state fair competitions were segregated and no images of black people appeared in state fair advertising or documentation. The black population

[103]"Advertisement," *The Southern Planter*, September 1960, n.p.
[104] Jackson Lears, *Fables of Abundance: A Cultural History of Advertising in America* (New York: Basic Books, 1995).
[105]"The Return of the Old-Time Fair," *Richmond Afro-American,* November 4, 1947, n.p.

was valued as paying customers, but not as a participant in the state fair's construction of community and historical narrative.

Demonstrating the importance of Colonel Virginia to the construction of this narrative, a 1958 advertising campaign called for Richmond-based actor Tom Carlin to portray Colonel Virginia at the state fair and in a series of print advertisements. That September Carlin appeared on the fairgrounds dressed as Colonel Virginia. He posed for pictures with children and conducted in-character interviews.[106] As a smiling, costumed figure, Colonel Virginia disguises a deeply symbolic and serious invocation of elite, white cultural power in the South with a happy cartoon character who appears for children's photo opportunities. An ideological figure, Colonel Virginia merges culture and entertainment with political propaganda, reinforcing the white elite's local authority. Further, by employing the advertising techniques of a powerful, homogonizing consumer culture to propagate a symbol of local and racial significance, Colonel Virginia represents local resistance to a national consumer culture.

James Cobb identifies a mid-twentieth century fear of Southern assimilation into northern-dominated mainstream American culture in his analysis of Southern identity: "Most observers assumed that whenever Dixie finally met its demise as a distinct region, the cause of death would be drowning in an American mainstream."[107] Cobb argues that fear of such assimilation, along with deep-seated racism, was the impetus behind the South's violent defense of segregation in the 1950s and 1960s. Colonel Virginia is a

[106] "Meet Colonel Virginia," *Richmond News Leader,* September 20, 1958, n.p.
[107] Cobb, *Away Down South,* 216.

symbol of this potent anxiety. Not only does Colonel Virginia symbolically call to mind a white supremacist, plantation past, but he is a symbol of regional identity unique to the South, unsullied by a national, Northern, popular culture.

This reactionary white-supremacy would become only more explicit at the state fair in the mid-1960s due to the Civil War centennial. Although long-time fair secretary Josephine Sheperson advises readers in this issue of the *Atlantic Rural Exposition Magazine* to honor all the "heroes who wore the blue and the grey," she goes on to remind readers that in past generations the State Fair of Virginia explicitly honored Southern Civil War veterans: "They [confederate veterans] felt this courteous gesture by the fair management was an acknowledgement of its gratitude to them for defending Virginia, that it still remembered and looked upon them with affection."[108] Sheperson implies that current generations should also be grateful for those who "defended Virginia." The cover of the 1961 issue of the *Atlantic Rural Exposition Magazine* features a larger than life Colonel Virginia waving a Confederate flag above the state fair skyline. The flag is visually striking as the only color image on the page. The flag visually dominates the fair, creating an umbrella that implicates all parts of the fair in an effort at nostalgic veneration of the Civil War. The image was also an effort to symbolically assert white Southern pride in the face of a strengthening civil rights movement, with the highly symbolic freedom rides taking place just a few months before the magazine's publication. As a symbolic space that claimed to represent authentic Virginian culture, the state fair was an important location for enforcing white supremacy and regional autonomy.

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[108] Josephine Sheperson, "Confederate Veterans at Bygone Fairs." *Atlantic Rural Exposition Magazine*, 1961. n.p.

Again demonstrating the state fair's connection to national current events, Colonel Virginia disappears from the magazine cover in 1968 to be replaced with photographs of white children competing in agricultural competitions and riding midway rides. While it is possible that the state fair Association wanted to simply update a dated, decades old ad campaign, the removal of Colonel Virginia might also be a reaction to the increasingly heated debate over Richmond public school integration at that time, only exacerbated by the death of Martin Luther King Jr. earlier that year. In this context such an obvious symbol of white supremacy might have been deemed too contentious for a marketable fair mascot. Whether or not this move represents a concession to changing public opinion, the removal of Colonel Virginia did not represent a fundamental change to the State Fair Association's ideological message. This move simply allowed the State Fair Association and local elites to reassert their dominance by appearing to yield in small ways to the voices of oppositional groups while still maintaining their power.

Like the powerful ideological implications behind Colonel Virginia, the midway reviews and sideshow spectacles at the fair worked to reinforce the power of white elites even as they seemed to transgress dominant, gendered notions of propriety. For example, the 1950 Hamid Review grandstand show was titled "Plantation Time" with the description only mentioning the inclusion of a "20 girl line," "featured dancers," and a soprano.[109] Although the ambiguous advertising allows only speculation about the content of the show, it is likely that the Review included stereotyped depictions of black characters and a blindly positive depiction of the Antebellum South. In 1960, an advertisement in the *Halifax Gazette* exclaimed that, "Harlem's-a-poppin is the title given

[109] "Hamid Talent Set for Atlantic Expo," *Billboard Magazine*, September 23, 1950, 61.

to Sherman Dudley's minstrel review while Art Converse's giant Circus Sideshow has added several outstanding acts."[110] At the same time, the connection to minstrelsy and sideshows, two forms of entertainment that had seen their heyday in the 1920s, suggests that the acts were meant to be nostalgic novelties, not main attractions. The use of nostalgia in a midway show that bills itself as "the most modern" is a reminder of the central antagonism between change and the status quo at the state fair, the complicated mix of the liminal and the liminoid.

While such entertainment and advertising efforts should not be viewed as an attempt to educate or to inform, their use year after year inscribes them as an annual, integral part of the state fair tradition. Christopher Shaw argues that tradition takes the place of history for most people. "Far from being half-remembered, quaint and archaic," he argues "tradition may be selective, with the past actively organized to speak to current anxieties and tensions."[111] The midway companies and the State Fair Association consciously construct a tradition that was billed as historical truth, reinforcing stereotypes at a time of escalated racial tension. The nostalgia invoked by references to minstrelsy and the plantation South giving the white fair audience a sense of continuity that supported the rightness of white supremacy.

Similarly, J. A. Mitchell employed an actively reductive version of history in a 1951 midway stunt that was explained as "involving the acceptance of Confederate

[110] "Here's What They Say About Raynelle's Review," *Billboard Magazine*, November 28, 1953, 25.
[111] Ibid, 12.

money for shows and rides."[112] Mitchell's plan was well received in *Billboard Magazine* as a smart marketing move. However, this scheme involved several telling assumptions: that people still had Confederate money, that they would be willing to exchange a historical artifact for food and entertainment, and crucially that the gimmick would be publicly received as a positive invocation of a shared past. Although there is no public record of how many people actually took part in Mitchell's deal, the pithy characterization of the move, demonstrated by labeling it a "midway stunt," signals that those in the amusement industry were willing to forget the symbolic importance of Confederate memorabilia for Jim Crow white supremacists. This advertising stunt exemplified the tradition of omission and willing cultural ignorance at the state fair in regards to the Southern past. As James Gilbert points out, "Collective memories often deny the brute failures of life, the tough version of reality, shaping a narrative of happy endings and American triumphalism."[113] Just as the futuristic utopianism of the exposition denied the negative effects of industrial agriculture and national opposition to United States military actions abroad, these historical allusions purposefully ignore reality in favor of a nostalgic, happy, local past. Tellingly, aside from the Civil War centennial, Virginia's Confederate history was often ignored in favor of a constant celebration of the colonial past.

Colonial veneration often took the form of idealized reenactments that featured the American Revolution and performances of Virginia pioneer life. For example, in a well-publicized event, "John Smith" and five halberdiers appeared at the 1957 state fair,

[112] "Richmond Crowd Up 20% over '50," *Billboard Magazine*, October 13, 1951, 50.
[113] Gilbert, *Whose Fair?*, 1.

with the *Richmond News Leader* exclaiming that, "it will be the state fair's official recognition of the 350th Jamestown anniversary celebration."[114] That year the state fair also staged a reenactment of the Battle of Yorktown with local museums donating artifacts and advice to the project. The Richmond Marine Corps Battalion, the Valentine Museum, the National Parks Service, and even the French government donated both time and artifacts to the endeavor.[115] Signaling the local symbolic importance of the event Richmond area schools canceled classes on the day of the demonstration, allowing students the opportunity to attend. Christopher Shaw points out that "Tradition is the enactment and dramatization of continuity; it is the thread which binds our separate lives to the broad canvas of history."[116] These colonial reenactments explicitly connected the fair tradition to a triumphalist version of the American origin myth while sidestepping messy issues like the Civil War. When the State Fair Association places these reenactments in the same venue as the Atoms for Peace project and the monolithic Industry Building, consumerism and Cold War propaganda merged with the fair audience's patriotism and sense of nostalgia.

In another recurring exhibit, Tobacco Row willfully ignored the connections between the Virginia tobacco industry and slavery while carefully tracking the colonial sale of tobacco around the world.[117] At the 1957 Atlantic Rural Exposition this exhibit contextualized Virginia agriculture within the world of international commerce, important to a Cold War audience, while sidestepping the problematic parts of this story.

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[114] "Halberdiers to Visit State Fair," *Richmond News Leader,* September 18, 1957, n.p.
[115] "Battle of Yorktown Display is Planned," *Richmond News Leader*, September 19, 1957, n.p.
[116] Christopher Shaw and Malcolm Chase. eds. *The Imagined Past: History and Nostalgia* (New York: Manchester University Press, 1989) 11.
[117] "What Now Mechanical Cow!," *Richmond News Leader.* September 20, 1957, n.p.

A decade later this story would remain willfully historically inaccurate with the 1967 Virginia Tobacco Exhibit consisting of "A mannequin in a costume of the day standing behind an antique wheelbarrow which contain[ed] a hogshead of tobacco. He is supposed to be wheeling the hogshead from a Virginia dock onto a ship, ready to set sail."[118] The exhibit used a simplistic interpretation of pre-industrial commerce and agriculture as a stand-in for a complex network of international exploitation.

The State Fair Association's focus on a sanitized, whitewashed version of Virginia's colonial past, sidestepping both antebellum slavery and the Civil War, was part of a regional trend during the 1950s and 1960s. The mid-twentieth century was a period in which the South worked to redefine itself as a national historic tourism destination, attempting to repair a nationally negative perception of the region. Fitzhugh Brundage characterizes efforts to create a positive, uncomplicated historical narrative as an act of white social hegemony, but also as a strategic business decision. At these historical spectacles, "The [white] tourist experienced an enchanting, innocent, exotic and seemingly timeless past while simultaneously escaping the perceived tedium, emptiness, and artificiality of modern life."[119] His statement highlights the belief that historical tourism must contain elements of entertainment – must create an alternate sensory experience rather than a nuanced historical representation – to be financially successful. Illustrating this assumption, the celebration of local history at the state fair was reduced to an amusement attraction with costumed character, facsimile explosions, and a heavily

[118] *Richmond New Leader*, September 23, 1967, n.p.
[119] Fitzhugh Brundage, *The Southern Past: A Clash of Race and Memory* (Boston: Harvard University Press, 2008) 184.

doctored version of actual events that bore many similarities to midway spectacles such as Raynelle's Review or Sam Nuni's Big Car Show.

Although these examples demonstrate that at the State Fair Association consciously forgot the negative parts of the past in order to write history to their advantage, it is important to remember that there was still room for significant agency among fair attendees, even among marginalized groups. James Gilbert explains that people at public events often do not understand the wider context of their experiences and that they often fail to internalize events in the way social authorities intend.[120] Gilbert points out that often people do not actively resist society. Instead they mold the dominant narrative to reflect their own lives and experiences. People attended the state fair "imposing their own interpretations and meanings, picking and choosing what to understand and remember, rather than absorbing everything that was laid out for them."[121] With this idea in mind, it is impossible to know to what degree the opinions and allegiances of fair attendee's matched those of the State Fair Association. However, it is clear, through the steadily increasing attendance throughout the 1950s, that some people found the fair entertaining. Much of the fair's white audience probably found comfort and validation in the story of racial superiority and American exceptionalism presented by the State Fair Association. At the same time, many people both male and female probably enjoyed the midway's female reviews and the thrilling rides, viewing both as traditional, expected parts of the fair. At the same time, the fair audience probably spared little

[120] Gilbert, *Whose Fair?*.
[121] Ibid, 192.

conscious thought for the ideology behind the monolithic Industry Building, the Future Farmers of Japan visit, or the Atoms for Peace Exhibit.

In this context the reenactment of the Battle of Yorktown and John Smith's mock visit to the fair are just one facet of the State Fair Association's effort to define the State Fair, and Fair Association, as the purveyor of a unified state identity. As seen in these two sections, the Atlantic Rural Exposition tried to simultaneously appeal to a constantly evolving local population and to inscribe in this audience a particular set of values and traditions. Importantly, in the late 1960s this target audience was increasingly made up of urban youth who were swiftly becoming a potentially lucrative sales demographic and less interested in the state fair as a place for excitement and entertainment. Efforts to attract youth would come to dominate the State Fair of Virginia, seen most dramatically through the heightened presence of national media culture at the fair. By the 1970s, the fair would take on much of its contemporary look and feel as a child and youth oriented event, less concerned with national or regional ideological projects.

The Grandstand

The 1968 *Henrico Herald* detailed the Atlantic Rural Exposition's many attractions in a lengthy article titled "Virginia State Fair." One section subtitled "Americanism" attempts to articulate the ideological goals of the Virginia State Fair, defining complete loyalty to the United States as a central component. The article explains that "Americanism is unfailing love of country; loyalty to its institutions and ideals; eagerness to defend it against all enemies; undiluted allegiance to the flag; and a desire to secure the blessings of liberty to ourselves and posterity." The author goes on to say that "Our society is presently confronted with many diversive [sic] organizations, factional group ideologies, confusion of thought and apathetic attitude of many...which can be resolved completely if each and every American practices it [Americanism]."[122] This article speaks to regional anxieties brought about by the realities of youth protest and a counter cultural movement that had reached its zenith in 1968, offering a simple solution to perceived social ills. With these bombastic statements the author implies that the state fair would help reconcile "factional ideologies" and prevent "apathy" among attendees, qualities considered to be inherent flaws in modern American youth.

As this article implies, by the late 1960s the State Fair Association increasingly saw the youth of America as in crisis and believed that it was the job of the state fair to keep them in line. The self-appointed keeper of older traditions, rural values, and local competition, the State Fair of Virginia reemployed its ideological power in an effort to reconnect with area youth. At first glance, this seems like no change at all. In the 1950s events like the FFJ visit and Atoms for Peace Exhibit were explicit efforts to sway public

[122] "Virginia State Fair," *Henrico Herald*, 1968, n.p.

opinion. The tractor operation contest and the Miss State Fair of Virginia pageant explicitly sought to reinforce established hierarchies by fostering youth participation at the fair. However, by the late 1960s local elites recognized the failure of simple competition to attract a youth audience and increasingly sought out national media celebrities as a way to draw an audience. Instead of offering an alternative to mass culture, the State Fair Association increasingly sought to incorporate it into the fair's traditional events.

The late 1960s heightened youth focus should be seen as a new, and still ongoing, effort to define the purpose, iconography, and legacy of the Virginia State Fair. The traditional fair audience was shrinking. Local youth had traditionally been both the fair's money maker and most important ideological target. The State Fair Association's efforts to retain this audience allowed for the dilution of the white southern agrarian tradition that mixed media-influenced images of the cowboy, the hillbilly and the country music star with the tradition of the yeoman farmer. The increasingly visible presence of national media espoused a generic version of rural identity that only further eroded the power of local elites. Rather than celebrating a local agrarian tradition, the fair was forced to look at rural people generally, incorporating semi-rural, suburban families as well as poor farmers, both black and white. In this way, the move toward a national media presence fundamentally changed the iconography, target audience, and central goals of the state fair.

New exhibits such as the Youth Pavilion and Art Festival, as well as a heightened emphasis on the high school marching band competition in the late 1960s are examples of the State Fair Association's increasing effort to cultivate a youth audience. These events were distinct from the more traditional 4H and FFA competitions. Having no direct relationship to agriculture, they explicitly catered to urban and suburban youth interests. The State Fair Association were aware that their target youth audience – the youth who might espouse "factional ideologies" or become involved in "divisive organizations" -- were uninterested in traditional farm production. With this in mind, in 1967 the State Fair Association launched an explicit effort to identify youth interests and to foster youth involvement at the state fair, setting up a fair Youth Advisory Council made up of local high school students who would help decide upon fair competitions and events.

The Fair Association's interest in youth was as economic as it was ideological. In a press release, the State Fair Association explained that this council was intended to "research teens' preferences for food, entertainment and special events at the fair."[123] The State Fair Association went on to explain that "They [the State Fair Association] are aware of the teenagers increasing contribution to the economy" and promised that "many of the fair programs were already youth-geared."[124] In this way, the Fair Association hoped to demonstrate to local youth that their presence was both welcomed and encouraged. To this end, after 1967 each issue of the *Atlantic Rural Exposition Magazine* contains headshots of the teen advisory board on the third page, directly after the adult

[123] "Council to Debut at Fair," *Richmond Times Dispatch*, September 22, 1967, n.p.
[124] Ibid.

State Fair Association board members. This placement visually gives the teens a sense of direct involvement and local prestige.

The next year the State Fair Association sought to make the presence of youth even more visible at the fair, erecting a Young America Pavilion which was promised to "Cater to young adults between 13 and 25 years of age."[125] An advertisement for the Pavilion gives some clue as to its contents: "Surrounded by exhibits that will run the gamut from deep sea diving to speed equipment and will include fashion, sports cars, racing matches, motorcycles, music and things that will motivate the young adult."[126] This article articulates the assumption that the State Fair Association knew what young people were interested in at the moment. This was a logical assumption considering the introduction of the Youth Advisory Board the year before. However, upon closer inspection their efforts appear rather ham-handed. Efforts to harness youthful transgression in a family-friendly, adult-approved environment were doomed to failure.

A picture of the 1969 Youth Pavilion in the *Atlantic Rural Exposition Magazine* demonstrates this lack of knowledge. In the picture a band is playing, dressed in matching suits. The members are wearing tri-cornered colonial hats and, judging by their apathetic faces, the rather sparse youth audience is less than enthusiastic. Anachronistically, the caption reads "swinging young American Pavilion is a show built for young people."[127] This image mixes token colonial nostalgia with an explicit appeal to youth culture. Further, this youth focus both sought to attract new, young talent to the state fair as well

[125] *State Fair of Virginia Magazine,* 1968, n.p.
[126] Ibid.
[127] *Atlantic Rural Exposition Magazine*, 1968, n.p.

as increase the visibility of local youth participation at the fair, working to not simply replace local community with national media consumers but to change the community and entertainment venues to foster new audiences.

At the 1968 Youth Pavilion a performance of "Sing Out South" was listed as the featured act, giving an explicitly political tone to the youth presentations and emphasizing the fair's new focus on youth indoctrination. In 1969 "Sing Out South" again performed as part of the Up With People Movement, an ultra-conservative entertainment campaign that placed a group of young-adult singers and entertainers at venues around the world to impart a pro-America message. It was promoted in an article that highlights the group's national recognition: "Now in its fourth year that has been cites as a sing-out explosion, featuring patriotic and inspirational music for the people of America." The article goes on to explain that "The teen agers and young adults set a mood of patriotism with songs advocating renewed faith in American and its people, striving to rekindle the spark of patriotism in young and old."[128] Similar to the Atoms for Peace program, the military expos, and elaborate Commerce Buildings at the fair, these events explicitly connected the fair to a hyper-patriotic Cold War agenda and equated Virginia culture with national political concerns.

The presence of Up With People at the State Fair in the crucial years of 1968 and 1969 signal a desire on the part of the state fair association to teach impressionable local youth that rebellion was neither appropriate nor cool. The rhetoric surrounding both Sing out South and the youth pavilion suggest a fear on the part of Fair Association that they

[128] *Atlantic Rural Exposition Magazine*, 1969, n.p.

were losing the interest, and control over, Virginia youth. This fear was important. The State Fair Association could not instill the rigid power structures faithfully reinforced at the exposition and on the midway in a new generation if it did not go to the fair. These attempts to appeal to a new audience are both an effort to increase revenue and an attempt to reinforce the power of local elites over a younger generation.

These entertainment gimmicks, presumably introduced to draw a crowd of children, would appear in other forms during this period with an ad for the 1967 state fair promising a radio sponsored WLEE Teen Age Spectacular, Cowboy Arena Polo, and Jousting.[129] Symbolizing the growing predominance of leisure activities over the traditional agricultural market is the 1968 Pet Show and Parade. Led by a high school band, the annual parade consisted of small domestic pets such as dogs, cats, and rabbits, not the farm livestock traditionally shown at the state fair competitions.[130] Continuing this theme in 1970 a Dog Obedience School was advertised.[131] While still supporting the animal husbandry tradition at the state fair these events appealed to urban youth.

The new focus on youth can be seen as partially responsible for the increasing presence of national media stars at the fair throughout the 1960s. In the early 1950s even the ubiquitous female review shows at the fair advertised themselves as connected to new media. For example, in one 1954 add Raynelle's Review promised to showcase Jocque Barn, famous from NBC "Evening in Paris" series, and Mario and Valdez from the "Desi

[129] *Atlantic Rural Exposition Magazine*, 1967, n.p.
[130] *Atlantic Rural Exposition Magazine*, 1968, n.p.
[131] *Atlantic Rural Exposition Magazine*, 1970, n.p.

Arnes – Lucille Ball Show" and Baby Dumplin, from the "Ed Sullivan Show."[132] However, such association would remain infrequent until the 1960s. By 1970 even the circus acts were billed as featuring members of the television industry with Gene Holter's Movieland Wild Animal Show headlining a grandstand act in which "The famous movie chimpanzee will amaze everyone with his near human antics." In the same show "Appaloosa horses and ponies, performing elephants, that have starred in many motion pictures such as 'Around the World in Eighty Days' 'Disney's Swiss Family Robinson,' 'The Beverly Hillbillies,' and many more" were set to perform.[133] Local acts that attempted to connect themselves to the national media industry were replaced by actual members, no matter how obscure.

These acts, although heavily publicized in the Richmond area, were often either has-beens or little known media stars. This did not represent a qualitative difference in fair talent. Rather, it is representative of a growing perception that even a peripheral connection to the television and film industry would draw a crowd. Horkheimer and Adorno offer an explanation as to why mid-century Americans increasingly favored new media, explaining that "What happens at work, in the factory, or in the office, can only be escaped by approximation to it in one's leisure time."[134] As fair-goers lost touch with older forms of entertainment like vaudeville or the minstrel show, they were replaced at the fair with new reference points like television which mimicked the cycles of their daily lives in a ways that older forms no longer could. Indicative of the change in people's

[132] *Atlantic Rural Exposition Magazine*, 1954. n.p.
[133] *Atlantic Rural Exposition Magazine*, 1970. n.p.
[134] Ibid. 82.

daily lives, interactive amusements were increasingly replaced with spectator events at the fair.

Useful to this analysis is Chad Randall Wheaton's discussion of the tactics used by the New York State Fair Association to counter a growing perception that agriculture was irrelevant to modern American life. His narrative of the way modernization saved the New York State Fair from anonymity at the price of corporate sponsorship and an increased focus on midway amusement is eerily similar to the changes made to the Virginia State Fair during the same period.[135] In Virginia, the state fair experienced many of the same growing pains as the rest of the country, a connection that suggests a national shift in the content and organization of agricultural fairs.

In 1974 a memo from J. Linwood Rice, the State Fair Associations' public relations director, to local media outlets advertised "Showcase of TV Country Programs to Appear at State Fair" saying "The Beverly Hillbillies, Green Acres, Petticoat Junction will be depicted on a miniature stage in a huge van to be placed in a prominent location near the grandstand." Rice explains that "Children will have the opportunity to be a television director by pushing a button and on display will be some actual artifacts used in the shows"[136] These shows are representative of an upswing in televised representations of rural life during the 1970s. Not necessarily representative of the South, these shows lumped together diverse agricultural regions into a vaguely rural stereotype in which people were uniformly friendly, gullible, and white. In this way the fair,

[135] Chad Randall Wheaton, "'And Proudly Called It Growing': The New York State Fair and the Consequences of Progress, 1890-1958" (Ph.D. diss., Syracuse University, 2003).
[136][136] J. Linwood Rice, "Showcase of TV Country Programs to Appear at State Fair" memo, 1974.

supposed purveyor of regional identity was constructing that identity as generic, nationally similar.

The same article also promised that the exhibit would allow children to dig in a barrel to find a key that would unlock a "box from the show" and if the key worked the child would win a piggy bank "honoring Arnold the pig from Green Acres."[137] Such acts are interesting when coupled with a 1970 essay in the *Atlantic Rural Exposition Magazine* in which Virginia Governor A. Linwood Holton writes "The State Fair of Virginia offers contributions to citizens of the commonwealth that are unique from the entertainment and educational opportunities generally available throughout the year."[138] The fair is billed as a place to teach children.

In September of 1974 the *Washington Playtime Magazine* featured the State Fair of Virginia in a multi-page article and highlighted the erection of an animatronic African jungle. Called the Fantasy Fair, the article focused on the exhibit's designer Jack Smith who was described as an "Award winning cartoonist and former Walt Disney designer." Later, the article also highlights the Dancing Waters, billed as a "thrilling spectacle of jets set to music with multicolored lighting."[139] With these spectacle events, the Fair Association seems to borrow heavily from Disney's mid-century theme parks, using animatronic animal and water and light shows and even going so far as to hire one of Disney's former designers for the project.

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[137] Ibid.
[138] Holton, *Atlantic Rural Exposition Magazine*, 1970, n.p.
[139] "Virginia State Fair is a wonderland of Sights and Sounds," *Washington Playtime Magazine*, 1974, n.p.

This pervasive focus on youth and new media might seem strange. After all, the Fair Association went to great effort to fashion itself as a safeguard of public memory and social mores and used the fair as a tool to shore up racial and gender hierarchies. With this in mind, a dramatic shift toward the fair as purely entertainment might seem to invalidate the state fair tradition. The State Fair Association sold out to a homogenizing, corporate media culture. However, this is not the case. Historically, the state fair was central to the economy of rural Virginia as a place to buy and sell farm produce, test out farm products, and make business contacts. The Fair Association's long considered itself to be heir to a long tradition of agricultural fairs. A 1952 article in the *Atlantic Rural Exposition Magazine* reads "Why Fair, Why Exposition, Why Fair Ground?" and explained that "The Fair is quite literally as the dictionary states a market." The article goes on to compare the twentieth century Virginia State Fair to the market days of Ancient Greece.[140] Although in the nineteenth century fairs held greater cultural importance as a community gathering for an isolated, rural population, it was not until the original market importance of the state fair had receded into cultural memory and fair livestock shows became the purview of children that it became symbolic as an event seemingly idyllically removed from capitalistic greed. As the fair changed from a broker of market goods to a dealer in cultural products and regional identity, the State Fair Association cultivated its nostalgic image in the pages of their magazine, using its claims to authenticity as a marketing tool.

Neither a new nor unexpected development, at the State Fair of Virginia, traditions and cultural symbols were subjugated by the market – were commodified. It

[140] Atlantic Rural Exposition Magazine, 1952, n.p.

seems indicative of the power of the capitalistic ethos that the most traditional celebration of market wealth and abundance came to also symbolize all that was best in the state, and in rural America. The state fair sacrilized the marketplace and as the fair took on more and more of the elements of consumer society, also sacralized consumerism. Through historical reenactments and youth education efforts the fair dealt in Southern, rural, white identity. However, with the growing importance of the mass media to the fair entertainment, that identity was increasingly equated with a celebration of new technologies and mass entertainment.

The State Fair Association remakes its claim to be representative of "authentic" rural Virginia through events like the 1960 Antique Tractor Exhibit or the 1969 Horse Pulling Contest demonstrating a nostalgic veneration of outdated and useless farm machinery.[141] The state fair became a living museum, where the rural past is reenacted for an audience of media consumers. In 1969 historical, four reenactors committed to living in a colonial cabin on the fairgrounds for the duration of the fair. Each day, clad in colonial costumes, they demonstrated how to make baskets and corn husk dolls to an audience of school children.[142] These participatory entertainment events were conceived of as novelty, not demonstrations of necessary skills. This is in contrast to the tractor operation contest or the agricultural expositions.

In an explicit acknowledgement of the fair's new purpose, in 1969 the *Atlantic Rural Exposition Magazine* announced that "The state fair recently expanded its aims and

[141] *Atlantic Rural Exposition Magazine*, 1960, n.p.; Memo Office of J Linwood Rice Public Relations Department Richmond, 1969.
[142] Gale Cooper, "Fair Weaves Craft Magic," *Richmond News Leader*, September 26, 1969, n.p.

purposes by adding a sixth objective, to promote the leisure industry and recreation."[143] In a final blow to the belief that agriculture was of central importance to the local economy the state fair association explicitly connected itself to the local tourism industry. Describing the dedication of the former armed forces building to the promotion of travel and the local entertainment industry, this statement embodies the growing importance of new industries at the state fair. The move explicitly equates the produce of rural America with the tourism industry. Because of this connection, the fair is redefined as a novelty event, not a vital part of the community.

Turner offers some explanation for this move in his analysis of leisure culture. He characterizes the separation of leisure and work as unique to modern industrial society: "Leisure is predominantly an urban phenomenon," he writes, "so that when the concept of leisure begins to penetrate rural societies, it is because agricultural labor is tending toward an industrial, rationalized mode of organization, and because rural life is becoming permeated by the urban values of industrialization."[144] In the mid-twentieth century, agriculture was undergoing a process of rationalization and consolidation. One way the new rural culture, increasingly dominated by mega-farms, began to demonstrate "urban values" was the state fair, as signaled by the growing popularity of, and emphasis on, leisure activities such as tourism as well as the pervasive presence of the entertainment industry. In this way, the aspirations of the Fair Association seem at odds

[143] Anonymous, *Atlantic Rural Exposition Magazine* 1969. n.p, The State Fair's other goals included: To encourage the importance of livestock and agriculture, to promote the industry of agriculture, to further industrial activity and expansion to encourage the application of new technology in the house and on the farm, and to support the progress of 4-H, FFA, and other junior educational groups.
[144] Turner, *From Ritual to Theater*, 36.

with the population's expansive support of and participation in traditional activities like the tractor pull or the baking contest.

This disconnect between the needs and realities of the population and the ideologies of the local elite is a potential example of what Gramsci calls "a moment when social classes become detached from their traditional parties" in which there is a conflict between the represented and representative.[145] Sensing this potential disconnect, the State Fair Association is engaged in a local public relations campaign, fighting for the potential fair audience's time and attention.

In an example of this effort to cash in on identities mediated by mass entertainment, the State Fair Association advertised a Folk Marathon and Folk Art Festival in 1968 and 1969. Intentionally created to attract a national audience, the fair association explained that "shows will consist of modern and early American arts and crafts, folk singing, dancing, fiddling, instant drama etc."[146] Tellingly, the Folk Art Festival was not incorporated into the Women's World building with its seemingly similar array of craft fairs, sewing, and cooking contests. Through the Folk Art Festival, the State Fair Association incorporated commodified, mass culture events that mimicked older, local traditions, replacing traditional cultural practices that were longtime elements of the fair. Though these new events, the Fair Association's proclamations of cultural authenticity were subsumed into a desire to make money. Unique expression was possible at the original Women's World competitions. Art and craft competitions were

[145] Denning, *The Cultural Front*, 22.
[146] *Atlantic Rural Exposition Magazine,* 1969, n.p.

categorized by medium, not limited by style restrictions. At the Folk Art Festival authentic expression was mediated by the market, only allowing art that fit the mass media definition of "folk." The goods in the Women's World building, while also home-made, were simply considered "amateur" cultural products, not "authentic" folk art. Folk art was not defined as the artistic production of rural America, but as a consciously constructed aesthetic genre.

Although Turner defines liminal space as pre-industrial, the modern state fair retains many of the characteristics of liminal space. This is seen in the mixing of work and play in a festive, carnival atmosphere to show and to sell agricultural goods and in the fair's unquestioning celebration of Virginia history and heritage that helps to shore up dominant social values. At the same time, however, the twentieth century state fair also contains elements of the liminoid, using an increasingly commodified midway to subvert social hierarchies. In this way, the fair contains elements of both the liminal and the liminoid as a tradition that bridges the gap between pre-modern and modern. Over the period of 1947 through 1976 the State Fair of Virginia acted as a barometer of Virginia culture – as a stage on which issues of races and sexuality, youth rebellion, and a changing rural economy were played out. While it is true that the state fair reflected the monopolizing effects of the midcentury entertainment industry, it also acted as an important location to reinscribe the power of local elites over a working-class rural population.

As an example of Hobsbawm's invented traditions, the Atlantic Rural Exposition is a "response to novel situations which take the form of reference to old situations, or which establish [its] own past by quasi-obligatory repetition."[147] Because the fair no longer served a distinct economic purpose for the agricultural communities in Virginia, the fair became, by 1976, a self-perpetuating event, only existing because it always had. Local elites determined that the fair was necessary but its actual cultural work was in a steady, perpetual decline. The increased focus on youth acted as both an effort to revitalize the fair as relevant in a changing world and an indication of the fair's ultimate reduction to a peripheral entertainment event, far removed from the lofty ideological goals of the State Fair Association.

The State Fair of Virginia Association articulated its goals clearly in 1946, saying that, "It was pointed out that there was no more effective ways of creating a common community spirit and interest than a center from which could grow an expression of regional life, such as a fair or an exposition."[148] This statement implies that as early as 1946 the State Fair Association considered community and regional life to be in need of conscious construction and reaffirmation. The Atlantic Rural Exposition, as a representation of the "best and most typical" in Virginia society, embodied the paradoxical nature of twentieth century America. Although it is clear that not everyone bought into, or was allowed to participate in, the sense of community that the State Fair Association attempted to foster, the intention is clear and the fair stood, reflective of its

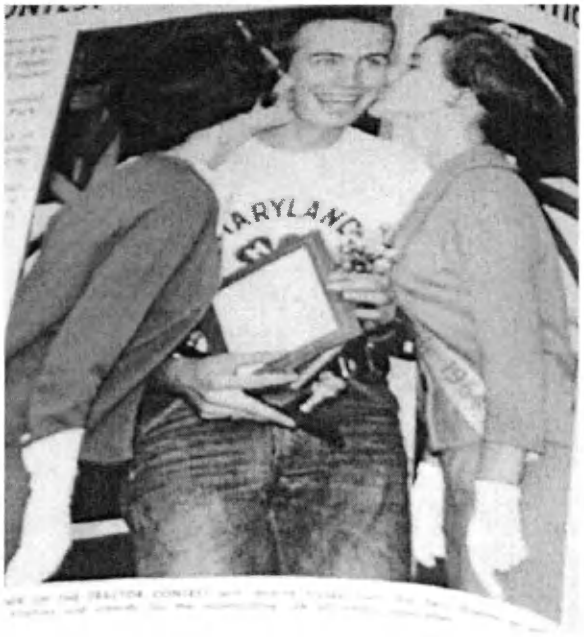
[147] Hobsbawm and Ranger. *The Invention of Tradition.* 2.
[148] Clifford Dowdey, "Great Cultural Center Planned for Richmond," *Richmond News Leader,* 1946, n.p.

era, as a contradictory amalgamation of nostalgia and progressive hope, production and consumerism, urban values and rural traditions, alienation and community.

Images

"A Mechanical Man Stalks the Midway" "A Mechanical Man Stalks The Midway" *Atlantic Rural Exposition Magazine*. 1960. n.p.

Thesis, p 17.



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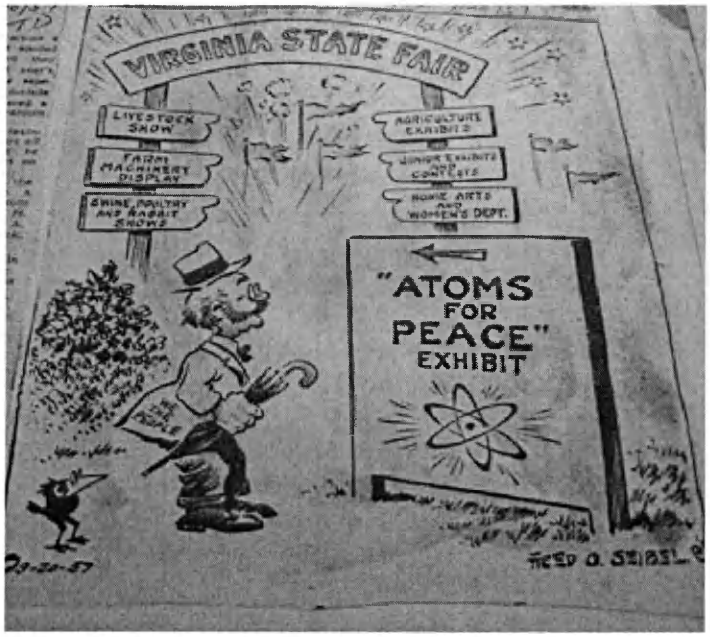

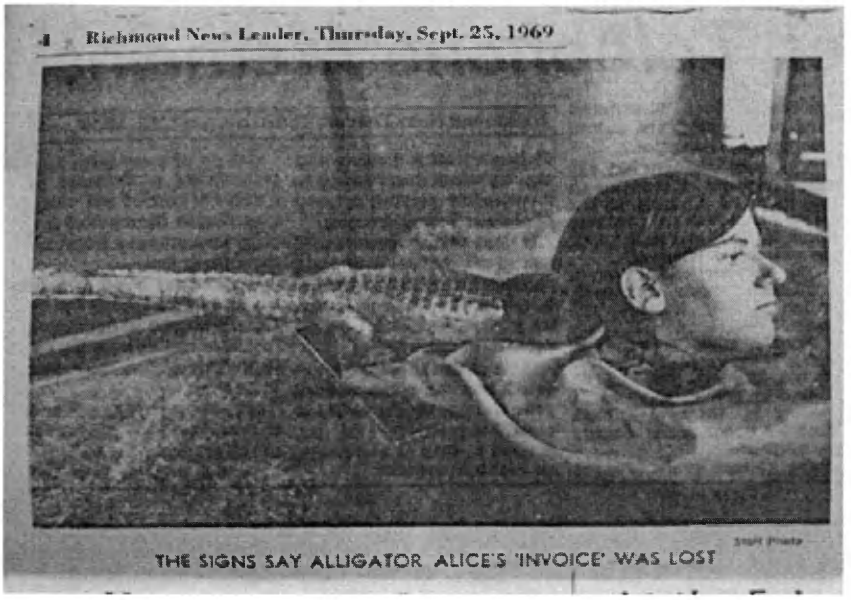

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