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Fascism, National Socialism, and the 1939 New York World's Fair

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Abstract

This article considers the involvement of Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany at the 1939 New York World's Fair. It considers the form, function, and content of the Italian Pavilion designed for this fair and asserts that the prefabricated monumental structure would be best interpreted, not in isolation, but as an element of the larger architectural conversation which continued to unfold across contemporary fascist Europe. Such reconsideration of this building makes it possible to evaluate the relationship between Fascist design, the assertion of political will, and the articulation of national identity and cultural heritage within a larger, transnational context. The author also investigates the American exhibition committee's earnest and persistent, yet ultimately unheeded, solicitation of Nazi German participation and argues that motives behind German withdrawal from this event had as much to do with the threat of popular protest as economic pressure.

Keywords

Fascism – National Socialism – World's Fair – diplomacy – material culture – heritage – national identity

Two years after pioneering American journalist Anne O'Hare McCormick labelled the ideologically-charged national exhibitions of the 1937 International Exposition in Paris 'Temples of Propaganda' (Figure 1), the world turned its gaze to a similar event held in Flushing, New York.¹ There, further 'national

1 Anne O'Hare McCormick, 'Europe: National Exhibitionism at Paris Fair,' *New York Times*, July 24, 1937, 14.



FIGURE 1 Postcard album, Paris 1937: *Promenade à Travers l'Exposition, Série 3* [Promenade around the Exposition, Series 3], H. Chipault, Boulogne-sur-Seine, France, distributor. The Wolfsonian–Florida International University, Miami Beach, Florida, Gift of Michael Weintraub, Photo by Lynton Gardiner.

projections' similarly dedicated to demonstrating 'superior efficiency, ingenuity and power' would once again be on full display while geopolitical and military tensions continued to mount from Munich to Mongolia.

The 1939 World's Fair was one of several such international expositions to be held during the interwar period and was attended by representatives of both National Socialist Germany and Fascist Italy. The rhetorical capacity of these events should not be underestimated. Over six months in 1937, more than thirty-one million visitors came into contact with Albert Speer's German pavilion in Paris. Two years later, more than forty-five million were treated to the Fascist interpretation of Italian 'classical-modern' design at Michele Busiri Vici's Pavilion in New York.² Such international expositions offered participants a significant rhetorical platform and provided space for countries in a rapidly changing postwar world to present a coherent, undoubtedly idealized, self-image through an astoundingly diverse range of displays. In this way, national identities that had been challenged, reinforced, or even forged as a consequence of

2 As described by the Italian-authored *News Release* no. 328 with regard to its national pavilion at the 1939 New York World's Fair. 'Italy folders, Countries files, Foreign Participation Department subseries, Government Department series,' New York World's Fair 1939–1940 records. Manuscripts and Archives Division. The New York Public Library. Astor, Lenox, and Tilden Foundations (hereafter: NYWF-NYPL).

the First World War were given (almost) equal opportunity to project a certain status or role within a large field of government-sponsored peer-exhibitors.³

While each participating country made bold display of its reimagined role within the global community, the utopian mood of these fairs also made it possible for the new regimes of certain nations to promote, and effectively normalize, their self-styled 'totalitarian' form of rule. This process was facilitated by the explicit invitation to construct national pavilions and exhibition areas which would engage, encourage, and even educate an international public. Through this personal interaction with Baudrillardian hyperrealistic representations of national identity and cultural heritage, both the Fascist and National Socialist programs sought to mediate their renegotiated place within the new world order.⁴ The erection of imposing national pavilions on a global stage figured to be part of each regime's strategy to assert itself as a popularly-supported government whose political project was to be taken seriously, respected, and even admired. These expositions offered both regimes an opportunity to demonstrate to the world that they were the rightful stewards and genetic heirs to a revived civilization comparable to that of a glorious antiquity which it had cynically resurrected in various ways.⁵ Such exploitative measures rendered the international exhibitions, once celebrated for their ability to unify, a grand forum for the type of political and ideological posturing which precipitated a second wave of world conflict.

The Fascist and National Socialist material contributions to the world's fairs of the interwar period have already generated some scholarly discussion. As Marla Stone has recently noted, the medium of an exhibition, for its 'ability to direct the gaze, propagandize any message, control the narrative (and) regulate emotions' served as 'a central weapon in the National Socialist and Fascist cultural crusade.'⁶ Yet surprisingly little attention has been drawn to Italian and German involvement in the 1939 World's Fair, and even less to the controversial American efforts to ensure Nazi participation. The widespread attention these international negotiations came to inspire, their influence on the

3 To be sure, media and spectator attention depended, at least in part, on the size and position of a given country's exposition space within the fairgrounds, as well as the current cultural or political appeal of the country.

4 Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation* trans. by Sheila Faria Glaser, (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994), 12–14.

5 See Helen Roche and Kyriakos Demetriou, ed., *Brill's Companion to the Classics, Fascism and Nazi Ideology* (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2018).

6 Marla Stone, 'Collaboration and Conflict: The Wartime Culture of Display in Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany,' Paper presented at the Comparing the Cultural History of Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany International Workshop, Freie Universität Berlin, March 2019.

Reich's ultimate refusal to participate, and the simultaneous success of the Italian exhibition at this event remains underexplored. This article will extend the relevant body of scholarship in a variety of necessary directions and look to the 1939 fair as a way to begin to gauge the transatlantic response to what can be described as a globalized fascism of the interwar period. It will assess the design and reception of the Italian pavilion at the 1939 New York World's Fair alongside the private dealings between representatives of Grover Whalen's World's Fair Corporation and National Socialist Germany which ultimately came to renege on an early commitment to participate. While demonstrating that representatives of each regime were well aware of the significance of this world's fair, this study will also reveal an interesting divergence in American popular opinion with regard to Fascist and National Socialist participation. In arguing that participation in this event was a critical element of Fascist Italy's campaign to win the respect and admiration of foreign opinion through asserting cultural dominance, the article will also assert that it was negative public opinion, at least as much as any financial concerns, which ultimately triggered the Third Reich's refusal to participate as originally planned. While Fascist Italy was able to use the 1939 New York World's Fair to advance its already well-promoted and generally well-received cultural agenda, Nazi Germany was, despite efforts of the fair's lead organizers, effectively shut out by popular indignation and threats of high-profile embarrassment.

This article briefly considers the general dynamics of the 1939 New York World's Fair in order to contextualize its more detailed overview of the origins, aims, and processes by which the fair was organized. It then explores Italian involvement in the fair, beginning with an assessment of Fascist Italy's aims in participating and ending with a detailed study of the Italian pavilion itself in order to make sense of its role within the greater Fascist cultural and diplomatic program. The study then moves into a discussion of the process by which Germany withdrew from its contractually guaranteed commitment to participate and considers the various reasons for its change in course before a final section draws comparative conclusions regarding the geopolitical consequences of the relationship maintained by each regime to this particular fair.

1 Contextualizing the 1939 New York World's Fair

The ideologically-charged aesthetic confrontation between nationalistic regimes at the 1937 Paris Exposition has been the subject of several other recent

studies by historians such as Karen Fiss, Ihor Junyk and Danilo Udovicki-Sleb.⁷ Yet scholarship has unduly neglected to consider the dynamics which came to shape the 1939 fair in New York, where somewhat similar patterns of appeasement and political miscalculation once again proved decisive. The later event remained open nearly twice as long as its European predecessor and actually bridged the temporal expanse between the 'Phoney War' and the German invasion of Poland in September 1939. Sponsored by the United States government, the last fair to be held until 1947 played host to sixty foreign governments and allotted highly coveted exhibition space to thirty-three nations over sixteen months. Thus, while prior studies have either offered a general overview of the event in terms of its recreational or commercial appeal⁸ or chosen to consider the event from a more nation-specific angle, this article offers a comparative study of the relationship maintained to the New York fair by the two largest fascist states to have accepted the official invitation to participate.⁹ Such a stereoscopic approach will build off the recent work of scholars such as Bianca Gaudenzi, Christian Fuhrmeister, and Marla Stone in an effort to improve our understanding of the interplay between Fascist and National Socialist cultural, commercial, and political (in this case specifically diplomatic) policy.¹⁰

7 Karen Fiss, *Grand Illusion: The Third Reich, the Paris Exposition, and the Cultural Seduction of France* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009); Ihor Junyk, 'The Face of the Nation: State Fetishism and "Métissage" at the Exposition Internationale, Paris 1937,' *Grey Room* 33 (2006): 96–120; Danilo Udovicki-Sleb, 'Facing Hitler's Pavilion: The Uses of Modernity in the Soviet Pavilion at the 1937 Paris International Exhibition,' *Journal of Contemporary History* 47 (2012): 13–47.

8 See Helen Harrison, Joseph Cusker, ed., *Dawn of a New Day: The New York World's Fair, 1939–40* (New York: New York University Press, 1980).

9 Francoist Spain rejected its invitation outright while the Greek Metaxas regime enjoyed a fairly popular showing, wasting no time in commissioning the construction of a classically-inflected modern structure to house its many imported archaeological exhibits. Salazar's Portugal also participated, and the national pavilion designed by Antonio Lopez and Jorge Segurado, though adorned with an overabundance of rather gratuitous arches, contained museum-style exhibits related to the purported Portuguese glories of the sixteenth century. See Countries files, Foreign Participation Department subseries, Government Participation, NYWF-NYPL.

10 See Bianca Gaudenzi, 'Tra autarchia e vita comoda: La politicizzazione della comunicazione commerciale nella Germania nazionalsocialista e nell'Italia fascista,' in Stefano Cavazza and Filippa Triola, ed., *Parole sovrane: Comunicazione politica e storia contemporanea in Italia e Germania* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2017), 135–156; Bianca Gaudenzi, 'Dictators for Sale: The Commercialisation of the Duce and the Führer in Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany,' in *Rewriting German History: New perspectives on modern Germany*, ed. Jan Rieger

Consideration of the (eventually) divergent responses of these two allied regimes to the official invitation to participate in a truly global and, at least superficially, amicable event can aid our understanding of not only the specific fair, historical actors, or period in question, but also the broader relationship maintained by each regime to the court of global opinion. What were the limits, both temporal and geographic, to fascist iconographic materiality, and how penetrative were Fascist or National Socialist ideals in a global, as opposed to national or regional, context?¹¹

Though the official dealings explored in this article between organizers of the fair and Nazi Germany were largely private in nature, archival evidence suggests that these American overtures in fact became something of an open secret and inspired a wave of popular criticism directed toward both the Nazi regime and fair organizers. Very recent scholarship maintains that despite the desire of 'Wiedemann, Speer, and many others' to 'follow up the Reich's success at Paris with a barnstorming performance on the other side of the Atlantic', it was Hitler himself who vetoed German participation in the 1939 event out of concern over the economic viability of such an undertaking.¹² Yet we

and Nikolaus Wachsmann (London: Palgrave Macmillan 2015), 267–287; Christiaan Fuhrmeister, Johannes Griebel, Stephan Klingen and Ralf Peters, ed., *Kunsthistoriker im Krieg: Deutscher Militärischer Kunstschutz in Italien 1943–1945* (Köln: Böhlau, 2012). Marla Stone, 'Collaboration and Conflict: The Wartime Culture of Display in Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany,' Paper presented at the the Comparing the Cultural History of Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany International Workshop, Freie Universität Berlin, March 2019.

- 11 For an insightful survey of various forms of fascist iconographic materiality, see Valentina Follo, 'The Power of Images in the Age of Mussolini' (PhD diss., University of Pennsylvania, 2013), chapter 2 and 4. The title of Follo's dissertation appears to pay tribute to Paul Zanker's influential *The Power of Images in the Age of Augustus* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1987). For an analysis of the form and content of what Marla Stone has referred to as 'the most enduring propaganda event of the fascist dictatorship' see Marla Stone, 'Staging Fascism: The Exhibition of the Fascist Revolution,' *Journal of Contemporary History* 28 (1993): 215–243. For more general discussions of classically inflected Italian Fascist iconographic materiality see Antonio La Penna, 'La rivista Roma e l'Istituto di Studi Romani: Sul culto della romanità nel periodo fascista,' in *Antike und Altertumswissenschaft in der Zeit von Faschismus und Nationalsozialismus*, ed. Beat Näf (Mandelbachtal: Cicero, 2001); and Flavia Marcello, 'Building the Image of Power: Images of Romanità in the Civic Architecture of Fascist Italy,' in *Brill's Companion to the Classics, Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany*, ed. Helen Roche and Kyriakos Demetriou (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2018), 325–369.
- 12 Brendan Simms, *Hitler: Only the World Was Enough* (London: Penguin, 2019), 295. Significantly, while Simms cites Fritz Wiedemann's memoirs *Der Mann, der Feldherr werden wollte: Erlebnisse und Erfahrungen des Vorgesetzten Hitlers im 1. Weltkrieg und seines späteren persönlichen Adjutanten* (Kettwig: Blick und Bild Verlag für Politische Bildung, 1964),

must be very cautious about taking the Reich's claims over its financial insecurities at face value. As the regime would have known full-well in the spring of 1938, such discourse about the Nazi state's lack of foreign credits shifts focus away from the furor caused by earlier announcements of German participation. While the problem of foreign spending was a legitimate concern at this time, the popular uproar caused by its planned participation contributed equally to Nazi disinclination. Indeed, as Brendan Simms has also pointed out, both the Propaganda Ministry and Foreign Office came to advise against participation in an event which would leave the Party vulnerable to 'grandstanding' critics such as Fiorello La Guardia within 'the belly of the capitalist and Jewish beast.'¹³ Yet the Foreign Office was also quick to note that the fair was to be hosted by the federal government and organized, not by the city of New York, but by 'a private society whose president is very well-disposed to us.'¹⁴ By attributing its withdrawal solely to a lack of foreign credits and insurmountable trade tariffs, the Reich was able to draft its own narrative and cast itself as the victim of discriminatory transatlantic tariffs and global economy even though the maximum dollar value the Reich ever needed to secure had been capped (by its own volition) at \$1.5 million.¹⁵ Significantly, by 1940 Germany's \$387 billion GDP value was more than double that of its transalpine ally which sat at \$147 billion.¹⁶ Yet Fascist Italy had long established itself as an eager, if sometimes overeager, international exhibitor. After furnishing the Chicago Century of Progress with a surplus of exhibition material, Italy continued to spend lavishly on international opportunities for self-representation and had even begun to devote an inestimable amount of resources to its own 1942 international exposition (hereafter referred to as the 'E.U.R.' [Esposizione

222–223, the records of the Auswärtiges Amt related to the 1939 New York World's Fair (R901/106932-7) make no mention of Speer or his offices, indicating something of a disconnect between the Reich's cultural and diplomatic policy. Speer's main official preoccupation remained that of General Building Inspector through the onset of war and was not appointed Reich Minister of Armaments and War Production until after the death of Fritz Todt in February 1942. For more on Speer's influence on Nazi architectural policy and the competition amongst party draftsmen following the death of Paul Ludwig Troost, see Magnus Brechtken, *Albert Speer: Eine deutsche Karriere* (Munich: Siedler, 2017), 73.

13 Simms, *Hitler*, 295.

14 Record of meeting concerning German participation in the exhibition in New York. Berlin, 13 April 1938. Records of the Federal Foreign Office, R901/114753 Bundesarchiv-Lichterfelde, Berlin.

15 Ibid.

16 Christian Goeschel, *Mussolini and Hitler: The Forging of the Fascist Alliance* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018), 179, 233.

Universale Roma]) intended to outpace even the 1939 New York event in scope and scale.¹⁷

2 Constructive Comparisons

Although many fairgoers were boldly opposed to ancillary endorsement, or (the even hypothetical) exhibition of the type of National Socialist materialities put on bold display in Paris, both the popular and critical response to the Fascist-sponsored Italian pavilion proved positive. Even in the wake of its ever-expanding record of diplomatically destructive behavior (the invasion of Abyssinia in October 1935, formal withdrawal from the League of Nations in December 1937, and adoption of anti-Semitic racial laws in November 1938), the regime's invitation to exhibit itself in New York City went largely unchallenged. This discrepancy is significant to our historical understanding of European fascism's prewar global sociocultural currency. In the first serious and consequential attempt to consider both of Fascism and National Socialism together, Roger Griffin not only acknowledges the value of comparative analysis, but explains that as a political program, fascism depended upon a spiritual renewal made possible by cultural regeneration.¹⁸ Griffin's comparative consideration of the palingenetic rebirth of both Italy and Germany pushed forward the existing body of scholarship which hitherto seemed content to evaluate the narratives which framed the cultural and material production of each regime in isolation. This, consequentially, led to the understanding that the rush by a 'spiritually renewed' Italy and Germany to rebuild and rebrand themselves as culturally superior imperial entities evidences the existence of profound insecurities regarding national prestige throughout the first several years of their rule. This is borne out in the extensive cultural programs of each party, which, alongside commitments to policies of hygiene, organization, potency, and racial purity, represented considerable components of fascism's restorative mission. Such systematic, long-term goals fit quite naturally alongside that imperial zeal which underpinned an increasing bellicosity and disdain for diplomacy. What value, then, did such temporary fora hold for nascent governments and the entwined, nationalized artistic impulse

17 For a discussion of Italy's overeager participation at the 1933 Chicago Century of Progress Exposition see Cheryl Ganz, *The 1933 Chicago World's Fair: A Century of Progress* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2008), 134.

18 Roger Griffin, *The Nature of Fascism* (London: Routledge, 1991), 32.



FIGURE 2 Italian Pavilion built for the 1939 New York World's Fair (from the Official Catalog of the Italian pavilion published by the General Commissioner of Italy, 1939).
SOURCE: *L'ITALIA ALL'ESPOSIZIONE UNIVERSALE DI NEW-YORK 1940* (ROME: COMMISSARIO GENERALE D'ITALIA, 1940), COVER PAGE.

they sought to nurture and cast as an extension of their enlightened political systems?

To answer such a question, it is best to consider the prefabricated Fascist structure which dominated the Italian national pavilion at the 1939 World's Fair (Figure 2) part of the larger architectural conversation which continued to unfold across contemporary fascist Europe. Reevaluation of this structure in the section entitled 'The Italian Pavilion' will make it possible to consider the relationship between state design and the assertion of political will, national identity, and cultural heritage within a larger, transnational context. In this way, such an approach should also supplement the growing debate regarding the totalitarian deployment of state-sponsored architecture and design as tools of propagandistic persuasion. Although studies of the larger Fascist and National Socialist architectural programs abound, there has been little attempt to draw a link between these classically-inflected domestic or colonial projects

and those of ambassadorial design build at foreign world's fairs.¹⁹ As a critical arm of the Party's ideological messaging apparatus, this program was defined by cultural arbiters of the regime as 'the expression of the new artistic climate that is forming in Italy . . . a sign of the orientations, the revisions, and the realizations . . . of all the spiritual forces of an era's artists, to fix in a single building a moment in the civilization of a people, to pass down to the ages.'²⁰ Such a description suggests that in its fluidity, Fascist design was intended to reflect the 'dynamic' nature of the larger cultural program on which it so heavily relied. In blending 'robust modernity and an affirmative stance towards progress' with 'dreams of the past', the historicist eclecticism of Fascist Italy's design program also mirrored the 'high technological romanticism' Thomas Mann once identified in National Socialist Germany.²¹ Yet there remains a degree of hesitation on behalf of architectural, cultural, and social historians of this period to

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- 19 For a discussion of the Nazi domestic building program, see Alex Scobie, *Hitler's State Architecture* (State College: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1990); or Helmut Weihsmann, *Bauen unterm Hakenkreuz: Architektur des Untergangs* (Vienna: Promedia, 1998). Though light on analysis, Weihsmann's work remains the most comprehensive 'field guide' to the National Socialist building program. Nerdinger and Tafel's similar book offers greater context but has less to say about the buildings constructed between 1933–1945. See Winfried Nerdinger, Cornelius Tafel, *Guida all'architettura del Novecento Germania* (Milan: Electa, 1996). For a similarly uncritical, but expansive survey of the regime's architectural output, see also Jost Dülffer, Josef Henke, and Jochen Thies, *Hitlers Städte: Baupolitik im Dritten Reich: Eine Dokumentation* (Böhlau: Vienna, 1978). For a discussion of the Fascist domestic building program, see especially Paolo Nicoloso, *Architetture per un'identità italiana* (Udine; Gaspari, 2012); and Aristotle Kallis, *The Third Rome, 1922–43: The Making of the Fascist Capital* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2014). For a discussion of Italian colonial architecture see Mia Fuller, *Moderns Abroad: Architecture, Cities, and Italian Imperialism* (London: Routledge, 2006). For a discussion of the prefabricated structures designed for a Fascist exhibition of the 'Italian Colonial Empire' held in Naples in 1938, see Giovanni Arena, 'The Last Exhibition of the Italian Colonial Empire: Naples 1938–40,' in *Cultures of International Exhibitions 1840–1940: Great Exhibitions in the Margins*, ed. Marta Filipovà (Burlington: Ashgate, 2015), 312–332.
- 20 *È l'espressione del nuovo clima artistico che si è andato formando in Italia. È una segnalazione di orientamenti, di revisioni, di realizzazioni, che può valere anche per tutte le altre arti, per le quali sono difficili gli accentramenti, di tutte le forze spirituali degli artisti di un'epoca, per fermare in un sol blocco un momento della civiltà di un popolo da tramandare ai secoli.* F. S. Palozzi, *Il nuovo stile littorio: I progetti per il Palazzo del Littorio e della Mostra della Rivoluzione Fascista in via dell'Impero* (Milan: S.A. Arti Grafiche Bertarelli, 1936), vii. Quoted in Andrew Manson, 'Rationalism and Ruins in Roma Mussoliniana: The 1934 Palazzo del Littorio Competition' (PhD diss., Columbia University, 2015), 16–17.
- 21 Quoted in Martin Kitchen, *Speer: Hitler's Architect* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015), 37; Konrad Jarausch, *Out of Ashes: A New History of Europe in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015), 263.

consider the world's fair structures as an extension of the regime's larger domestic building program. If, as generations of scholars have suggested, the aim of those domestic projects was to aestheticize politics street by street and articulate the will of the party through the strategic distribution of massive, overpowering, classically-inflected designs, then there is no reason to discount the role of the national pavilions built to persuade abroad.

3 Planning the 1939 New York World's Fair

In its quest to organize the second American-based global exposition of the decade, Grover Whalen's World's Fair Corporation successfully managed to earn federal support, and with the passing of Congressman Sol Bloom's Public Act #105, invitations to foreign governments were formally issued by President Franklin D. Roosevelt himself in 1936. Whalen, a former prohibition-era Police Commissioner known as much for his charisma as for his abject brutality, was president of New York-based Shenley Distilleries when he began shopping his vision for a renewed take on the World's Fair project.²²

It is unknown just how familiar Whalen's organization might have been with the geopolitical dynamics and organizational difficulties which tainted the Paris Exposition by its close in November 1937. Still, however, the ways in which the American organizers perceived of the event's significance can be gleaned from the remarks made on the occasion of the fair's opening by President Roosevelt and future Chairman of the National Democratic Party, Edward Flynn, who served as the United States Commissioner General to the fair in both 1939 and 1940. In the more public of these two speeches, the President stood before the fair's Lagoon of Nations and solemnly declared to newsreel cameras and the gathered crowd that his New Deal United States 'stands today as a completely homogenous civilization from Coast to Coast and from North to South . . . united in its desire to encourage peace and good-will among all the nations of the Earth.' Roosevelt went on to explain (in the rather folksy parlance of an American frontiersman) that 'the eyes of the United States are fixed on the future. Our wagon is hitched to a star . . . a star of friendship, a star of progress for mankind, a star of greater happiness and less hardship a star of

22 J. Cusker, H. Harrison, *Dawn of a New* 3. For more on Whalen's dismissal as Police Commissioner, see Harvey Klehr, *The Heyday of American Communism: The Depression Decade* (New York: Basic Books, 1984), 33–35.

international good-will, and, above all, a star of peace.²³ Just five days earlier, at a dinner held at the Plaza Hotel in honor of the Commissioners from foreign governments to the fair, Flynn deployed somewhat similar metaphorical imagery in describing the role of the exposition. He referred to the fair as a 'symbol of the world' and lauded its potential as a uniquely unifying force: 'For now the world itself, once a collection of distant states, has become a village, populated by the neighborhood of nations, living within sound of one another's voices.' He also, however, took a moment to lament the reality that 'unfortunately the world is not so tidy a community as the one we have built on the meadows.'²⁴ From the perspective of American government officials, such a 'tidy' community had been engineered not for the sake of profit and mere spectacle, but in an increasingly desperate bid to advance an American-authored vision of peace through maintenance of the Wilsonian order.

The fair commission's readiness to link spatial or structural design to the lasting health of a cooperative civilization was made clear by Flynn from the very outset of the fair. Without naming a specific pavilion, architect, style, nation, or government, the hosting Commissioner General seemed to celebrate the unique stylistic predilections of each participating country while ostensibly also offering to overlook any of the unsavory socio-political baggage those countries may have mapped onto their assigned exhibition space:

In the community of nations there are various discordant kinds of architecture that cannot be remodeled overnight, there are weeds in every backyard that cannot easily be landscaped, there are conditions that are far from man's ideal for the world as he would rebuild it nearer to his heart's desire. But in building the Fair we have created an ideal new world in microcosm, a preview of what civilization is capable of doing for itself. Here each nation has brought the flower of its achievement, the best it has to contribute. Leaving behind the weeds in our backyards, giving no space to the features in our national lives in which we take no pride, we, the representatives of sixty nations, have clustered our houses around

23 FDR, address delivered at the opening of the New York World's Fair, 30 April 1939. Master Speech File, Series 1, Box 46, Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library, Hyde Park.

24 Remarks by Edward J. Flynn, U.S. Commissioner General, upon the occasion of a dinner given in honor of the Commissioners from foreign governments to the New York World's Fair, on 25 April 1939 at the Hotel Plaza. The Papers of Edward J. Flynn, box 24, Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library, Hyde Park.

our village green, the Court of Peace, and around our village pond, the Lagoon of Nations.²⁵

Although the somewhat hackneyed scholarly assertion that American interwar diplomacy was dogged by a certain naiveté has already pervaded the rather limited and underwhelming historiography of the 1939 World's Fair, such a remark betrays a willingness on behalf of the Fair Commission (and by extension, the United States Government) to proactively sanitize any instance of the type of programmatic messaging embedded within the physical expression of certain political movements on display in Paris two years prior.²⁶ This was, in effect, a coping mechanism for a perceived eventuality, more of a cynical method of censorship than an authentic display of utopian idealism as exemplified by the League of Nations through the construction of its own modest pavilion at this same fair.²⁷ Nonetheless, perhaps only an overly-Panglossian sense of entrepreneurial optimism, at least on the part of its financiers, could explain this gathering of nations which persisted in spite of increasingly ominous rhetorical-political, and eventually militaristic escalation across Europe.

While Whalen's World's Fair Corporation may have been officially labeled as 'a nonprofit-making' endeavor and operated under the legal status of an educational institution, the scale, ambition, and overtly commercial tone of the New York World's exposition helps distinguish it from its predecessors in Chicago and Paris.²⁸ At least three times larger in total area than Chicago's 1933 Century of Progress Exposition and almost five times larger than the 1937 International Exposition of Arts and Technology in Modern Life in Paris, the New York World's Fair provided ample space for the interpenetration of global

25 Remarks by Edward J. Flynn, U.S. Commissioner General, upon the occasion of a dinner given in honor of the Commissioners from foreign governments to the New York World's Fair, on 25 April 1939 at the Hotel Plaza, OF 2446, Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library, Hyde Park.

26 P. Rotholz, 'Foreword,' in H. Harrison, J. Cusker, ed. *Dawn of a New Day: The New York World's Fair* (New York: New York University Press, 1980), vi. On the naiveté of FDR, see also M. Stoler, 'A Half Century of Conflict: Interpretations of U.S. World War II Diplomacy,' *Diplomatic History* 18, (1994): 378–380.

27 Marco Duranti, 'Utopia, Nostalgia and World War at the 1939–40 New York World's Fair,' *Journal of Contemporary History* 41, (2006): 663–683.

28 *Building the World of Tomorrow: Official Guidebook of the New York World's Fair, 1939* (New York: Exposition Publications, 1939), 26. The Guidebook explicitly points out the financial assistance of the French government in the organization of the Paris Exposition.

diplomatic and business interests. Indeed, despite its vocal support of the project, the federal government never offered more than a meagre five million dollars in financial support.²⁹ Organized around a central theme of technological innovation and discovery, the fair housed large exhibits dedicated to, and staffed by, its corporate sponsors. The exhibits furnished by General Motors and IBM, for example, continued the efforts of the Chicago fair which featured a giant Westinghouse Electric and Manufacturing Company Pavilion and full-size test track engineered by Chrysler Motors to offer visitors the chance to ride in the newest vehicular models. Fair-sponsored films such as the Robert Snody-directed and Westinghouse-produced 'Middleton Family at the 1939 New York World's Fair', reinforced the consumer-capitalist tone of the exposition through the dramatization of a love triangle between the middle-class daughter of the family, her Bolshevist boyfriend (who happened to be a local professor of art history), and the 'all-American', family-favored young entrepreneurial heartthrob (somewhat anticlimactically destined to win her affection by the end of the short film). Notably, however, the commercial overtones of this particular fair (a giant cash register recorded the daily attendance figures) were not enough to deter Soviet participation, and in fact, it was Boris Iofan and Karo Alabian's USSR Pavilion, outfitted with Alexey Douchkine's full-scale model of the Moscow Mayakovskaya Metro Station, which took home the fair's prize for design.³⁰

The overwhelming emphasis on the relationship between technological progress and the universal consumer was one of the superficial ways the fair intended to combat the nationalistic superciliousness exhibited at recent expositions. The fair also purported to maintain relatively strict guidelines for international participation. For example, its embargo on the dissemination of political propaganda in any form was front page news,³¹ and after observing the way in which the Nazi and Soviet pavilions physically dominated the Paris Expo, organizers made a point of stressing to international participants in New York that the general height of any foreign building was not to exceed the height of the U.S. Government exhibit.³² Furthermore, any sculptural figure would only be acceptable on the exterior of buildings if it was not 'of such

29 Letter G. Creel to FDR, 26 April 1937. Interestingly, the fair's official guidebook reduces this number to 3 million dollar. See *Building the World of Tomorrow*, 25–27.

30 Marianne Ström, *Metro-art in the Metro-polis*, (Paris: ACR Édition, 1994), 96.

31 Unattributed, 'Reich Withdraws from World's Fair,' *New York Times*, 27 April 1938, 1.

32 Memorandum, Admiral Standley, 24 November 1937, Memoranda folders, General Administration and Operations, Foreign Participation Department Subseries, Government Participation, NYWF-NYPL.

character, size, or height as to compete with the fair's central statue of George Washington.³³ Such regulations were duly enforced, and Italy, though having reluctantly agreed to relegate its statue of Mussolini to the interior of its pavilion, was indeed reprimanded for having erected a gilded statue of the goddess Italia (tellingly, 'Italia' is sometimes also referred to as 'Roma' throughout Italian-authored documents related to the fair) erected along the main façade of its free covered space.³⁴ More severe, still, might have been the commission's use of foreign lots to effectively form a border zone around the fairgrounds, a decision which set the 1939 World's Fair even further apart from its predecessors, and was presented as a direct attempt to avoid the political posturing on display at Paris.³⁵ (Figure 3 and 4)

Also contrasting the last exposition was the attention paid by fair organizers to questions of architectural homogeneity. Whereas in Paris stylistic plurality had come as a consequence of the decision to include certain national pavilions on the fair's main thoroughfare, architectural historian and critic Lewis Mumford steered the so-called 'Fair of the Future Committee' in a more inventive, modernist direction and explicitly away from any possibility of his team designing a 1939 fair which might embody a pastiche of neoclassicism or the inclusion of any structure that might resemble a 'Parthenon on a Flushing Swamp.'³⁶ While the much smaller 1929 exposition in Barcelona had birthed what became known as the 'Art Deco' style, one critic decreed that this World's Fair had produced what might rightly be called the 'Corporation Style' of architecture.³⁷ Even if we are to overlook such opprobrium and attribute some degree of success to the planners and architects that sought to compose the fair of more homologous forms evocative of the new futuristic and experimental designs of the International or academic Beaux-Arts styles, Italy's architectural contribution to this fair was decidedly unique in its decision to craftily marry the fair's calls for sleek modern design with its own slowly-hardening affinity for imperial classicism.³⁸

33 Ibid.

34 Letter Cantù to Whalen, 24 April 1939. Italy folders, Countries files, Foreign Participation Department subseries, Government Department series, NYWF-NYPL.

35 Eugene Santomaso, 'The Design of Reason: Architecture and Planning at the 1939–40 New York World's Fair,' in H. Harrison, ed., *Dawn of a New Day: The New York World's Fair, 1939–40* (New York: New York University Press, 1980), 32.

36 Santomaso, 'The Design of Reason,' 30. See also Unattributed, 'World Fair Friends Rally to Keep "Parthenon off Flushing Swamp"', *New York Herald Tribune*, December 12, 1935, 26.

37 Frederick Gutheim, 'Buildings at the Fair,' *Magazine of Art* 32 (May 1939): 286–89, 316–317. Quoted in Santomaso, 'The Design of Reason,' 39.

38 Santomaso, 'The Design of Reason,' 39.



FIGURE 3 German Pavilion at the 1937 Paris International Exposition. Speer's 54-meter tower was capped by a 9-meter tall eagle and punctuated by a pair of bronze statues designed by Josef Thorak. Image in the public domain.



FIGURE 4 General plan of the 1939 New York World's Fair. Julian E. Garnsey's spatially-oriented color scheme organized the fair into themed zones. The tone assigned to each zone was realized in the flora and flags which accented each spoke of the fair's axial design. As one moved deeper into the fair and closer to the foreign exhibit zone the tones grew markedly more intense.

SOURCE: *OFFICIAL GUIDEBOOK OF THE NEW YORK WORLD'S FAIR* (NEW YORK: EXPOSITION PUBLICATIONS, INC., 1939), 7. COLLECTION OF R. GALLO.

4 Italian Participation

In its decision to build Busiri Vici's classical pavilion, Italy placed its modern, nationalistic vision of resurrected antiquity on proud display. The spoils of recent archaeological excavations, including reconstructions by Professor Luigi de Gregori and Italo Gismondi, were presented as part of the larger effort to fuse a connection between what Fascist leadership referred to as the 'First' Rome of the Caesars and 'Third' Rome of Fascism.³⁹ Such reconstructions were presented alongside other presentations of the classically-inflected architectural program which continued to redefine the capital city in an increasingly pronounced classical mode.⁴⁰ The scaled model of Angelo Mazzoni's new Roma Termini, for example, 'the largest and most attractive railroad terminal in Europe . . . a great artistic building decorated with many of the most beautiful Italian marbles and architectural structures worthy of ancient and imperial Rome,' was placed steps away from exhibits relating to the ancient Roman emperors and writers in the pavilion's 'Hall of Rome Down the Ages,' an exhibition organized exclusively by the Institute of Roman Studies.⁴¹ Admiral Giuseppe Cantu, Commissioner General for Italy's Participation in the fair, described Busiri Vici's pavilion as 'an ingenious synthesis of the architecture of classical Rome and modern dynamic Italy.'⁴² Later written versions of this statement printed in the fair's guidebook were even altered to further classicize the exhibit. Changes as substantial as the addition of entire phrases such as 'The growth of Rome from the time of the Caesars to the present,' represent the Italy of Mussolini not just as the logical heir to the glory and imperium of the past, but also as something of a living, breathing socio-cultural organism whose lifespan had been regrettably interrupted by the disorganization and fractured state of the pre-unification, pre-Fascist Italian Peninsula.⁴³ Other, nearly undetectable changes, such as the addition of the word 'ancient' to the description of the rare book exhibit, betray the tireless commitment of Party-dominated design teams to render this structure a complimentary embodiment of the

39 Unattributed, *Italy at the World's Fair, 1939* (Rome: Vallecchi, 1939). Busta 1099, Fasc. 10708, S. Fasc. 49, EUR Archives, Archivio Centrale dello Stato, Rome.

40 For more on the regime's classicizing tendencies and the built environment of Rome, see especially Joshua Arthurs, *Excavating Modernity: The Roman Past in Fascist Italy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2012); Emilio Gentile, *Fascismo di Pietra* (Bari: Laterza, 2007); and Kallis, *The Third Rome*.

41 Unattributed, *Italy at the World's Fair, 1939*. Busta 1099, Fasc. 10708, S. Fasc. 49, EUR Archives, Archivio Centrale dello Stato, Rome.

42 Ibid.

43 Ibid.

Mussolinian interpretation of *romanità*.⁴⁴ As the work of Lisa Schrenck has made clear, such a fusion of the historicized past and celebration of the Fascist-engineered successes of the present had already proven palatable to international audiences at prior fairs, and through commissioning a new architect to design the 1939 pavilion, the regime committed itself to a very public renegotiation of its treatment of the classical and modern mode.⁴⁵

5 The Italian Pavilion

According to the official exhibit plans for the Italian Pavilion issued to the fair's Department of Feature Publicity (curiously submitted in Italian), the three-storied structure, which occupied '100,000 square feet of space' on plot GJ-1 at Presidential Row North and Continental Avenue, represented an expenditure of more than three million U.S. dollars.⁴⁶ Such a financial commitment ranks Italy second, behind the Soviet Union, and ahead of France and French Morocco, Great Britain, and Poland in terms of total dollars spent before the fair's opening.⁴⁷ The plans explain that the tower, set to surmount the Italian Pavilion, would support a thirty-three foot 'replica of the ancient statue of the Goddess Roma, the original of which stood on the Capitoline Hill in Rome.'⁴⁸ The treatment of columns and arches, meanwhile, would 'recall the classical architecture of Imperial Rome's temples and aqueducts.'⁴⁹ An official news release described the style of architecture as 'modern-classical' while its later descriptions of the shimmering waterfall dedicated to Marconi's world-changing invention of the modern radio offered a more colorful depiction of the structure intended to represent 'the resurrection of Imperial Rome, the fountainhead of civilization, made greater than ever by Fascism.'⁵⁰ This pool was flanked by

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- 44 Busta 1099, Fasc. 10708, S. Fasc. 49, EUR Archives, Archivio Centrale dello Stato, Rome.
- 45 Lisa Schrenck, *Building a Century of Progress: The Architecture of Chicago's 1933-34 World's Fair* (Duluth: University of Minnesota Press, 2007), 93.
- 46 Engineering records list this space has actually having only 99,579 square feet. Italy folders, Engineering Records, Construction Department subseries, Operating Division, NYWF-NYPL.
- 47 Ranked billing statement, 10 November 1939. Italy folders, Countries files, Foreign Participation subseries, Government Participation, NYWF-NYPL.
- 48 Busta 1099, Fasc. 10708, S. Fasc. 49, EUR Archives, Archivio Centrale dello Stato, Rome.
- 49 Ibid.
- 50 *News Release*, no. 328 (undated). Italy folders, Countries files, Foreign Participation subseries, Government Participation, NYWF-NYPL. See also Busta 1099, Fasc. 10708, S. Fasc. 49, EUR Archives, Archivio Centrale dello Stato, Rome.

lofty colonnades which linked the structure's entrance and exit while rising high above the frontal peristyle and oblong-shaped block of the building itself. (Figures 1, 5, 6) Though the pool was graced by the bust of Marconi, the recurring aquatic theme here served to further reinforce the regime's '*mare nostrum*' message of Mediterranean reclamation. In typical Roman fashion, the base of the edifice was composed of light-yellow Italian travertine. Above the base rose rusticated walls of stucco.

Another ten thousand feet were contracted for Italian use in the fair's Hall of Nations. There, the mosaic floor was to be graced by a high pillar upon which rested the ubiquitous She-Wolf, mother of Romulus, the legendary founder of Rome. Above Nino Giordano's Capitoline She-Wolf extended the lines of a Roman triumphal arch.⁵¹ The long side walls, adorned with 'the emblems of ancient and modern Rome' as well as maps of 'Her new colonial empire' were divided into three sections by columns with rostra rising on a plinth of black marble and accentuated by 'Roman stucco of a velvety-white color.'⁵² These walls sheltered Romano Romanelli's bronze statue of the *Duce*, which stood tall upon a black marble pedestal in the very center of the room.⁵³ Although neither the mosaics nor maps survive, they are reminiscent of similar ornamentation which had recently graced certain areas of the Eternal city. These maps appear very similar to those mounted along the newly constructed *Via dell'Impero* from 1934 to 1936 to illustrate the empire's gradual accumulation of territory from the Flavian Dynasty of 69 A.D. to the period of Fascist rule.⁵⁴

Although the regime had long proven skillful at broadcasting its ability to subordinate nature and its bounty to Roman imperial will in the name of monumental construction,⁵⁵ the 1939 Italian Pavilion was pieced together by a mélange of materials. Whereas the more visible, exterior elements were indeed imported from Italy, the majority of the structure was made of American

51 Busta 1099, Fasc. 10708, S. Fasc. 49, EUR Archives, Archivio Centrale dello Stato, Rome.

52 *News Release*, no. 328 (undated). Italy folders, Countries files, Foreign Participation sub-series, Government Participation, NYWF-NYPL.

53 Unattributed, *Italy at the World's Fair, 1939*. Busta 1099, Fasc. 10708, S. Fasc. 49, EUR Archives, Archivio Centrale dello Stato, Rome.

54 See B. Painter Jr., *Mussolini's Rome: Rebuilding the Eternal City* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 24.

55 Though it never did appear in full-force, Cinecittà Luce had lobbied for permission to document the glories of the Italian Pavilion so that it could be 'shown in the different movie houses.' See the letter from Cantu to Collins, director of the fair's News Reels Division, 7 June 1939. Busta 1099, Fasc. 10708, S. Fasc. 49, EUR Archives, Archivio Centrale dello Stato, Rome.

materials and assembled by American labor.⁵⁶ While most of the wood used for the pavilion came from Idaho, the frame of this structure was composed of steel purchased from the Bethlehem Steel Company of nearby Pennsylvania.⁵⁷ Aside from its steel frame, the inclusion of an aquatic monument to Marconi represented the extent to which this structure sought to imbue any novel sense of aesthetic modernism. Instead, this structure largely fell in line with what can arguably be described as an increasingly uniform style of Fascist-sponsored

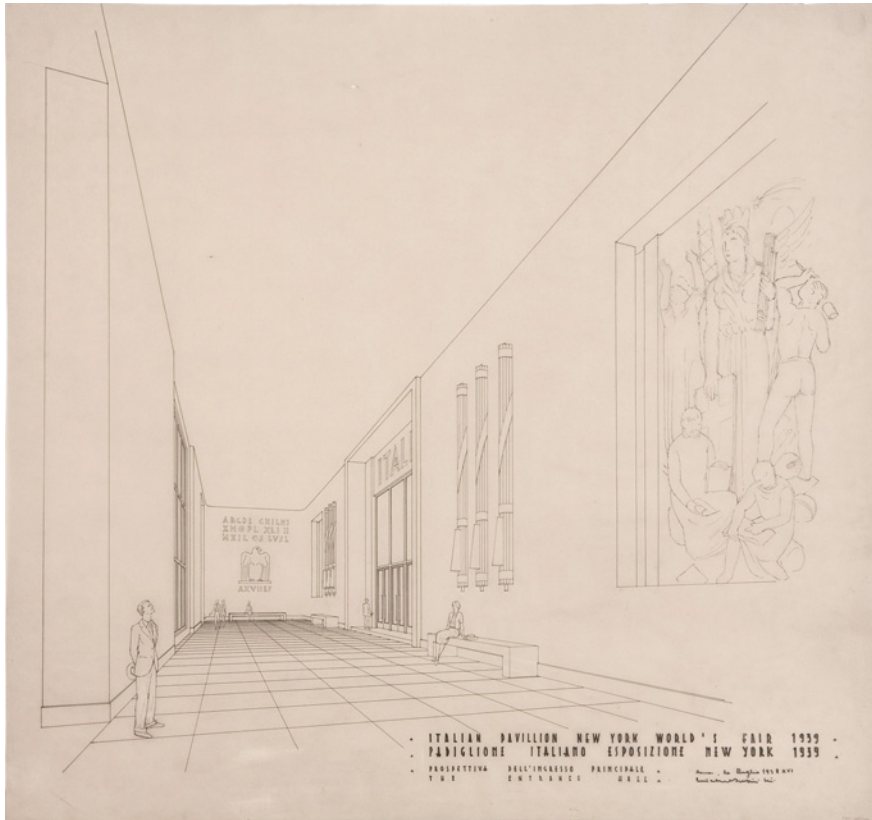


FIGURE 5 Design Drawing, *Italian Pavilion New York World's Fair 1939: The Entrance Hall, 1938*, Michelle Busiri Vici, architect.

SOURCE: THE WOLFSONIAN – FLORIDA INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY, MIAMI BEACH, FLORIDA, THE MITCHELL WOLFSON, JR. COLLECTION. PHOTO: SILVIA ROS.

56 Letter Cantu to Voorhees, 29 September 1937. Busta 1099, Fasc. 10708, S. Fasc. 49, EUR Archives, Archivio Centrale dello Stato, Rome.

57 Busta 1099, Fasc. 10708, S. Fasc. 49, EUR Archives, Archivio Centrale dello Stato, Rome.

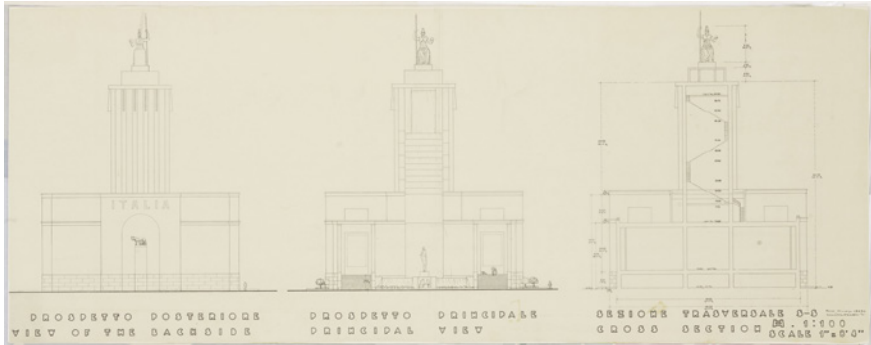


FIGURE 6 *Design Drawing, Italian Pavilion New York World's Fair 1939: View of the Backside, Principal View, Cross Section, 1938, Michele Busiri Vici, architect.*

SOURCE: THE WOLFSONIAN – FLORIDA INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY, MIAMI BEACH, FLORIDA, THE MITCHELL WOLFSON, JR. COLLECTION. PHOTO: LYNTON GARDINER.

architecture which, in spite of the commission of different draftsmen, was already beginning to work towards the development of the E.U.R., which would offer the regime something of a *tabula rasa* upon which it intended to inscribe its most coherent argument in defense of reactionary modernism to date. To do so, it would deploy carefully aligned constellations of architectural forms and the aesthetic convictions they embodied. The attendance of a global audience, meanwhile, would amplify the Fascist message embedded within every meter of the E.U.R. quarter.

The carefully-detailed plans for this exhibition, dating as far back as 1936, betray a skillful deployment of Fascist iconography and ideological praise, while still bending toward conformity in order to contribute whole-heartedly to the commercial thrust behind the fair at large. In this way, the regime saw itself as able to court both the public opinion with which it was unceasingly concerned, as well as valuable business interests. The regime's preoccupation with the former, at least in this very specific context of the 1939 World's Fair, can be traced back to certain documents preserved in the archives of both the World's Fair Corporation and the regime's own Propaganda Ministry. The World's Fair Corporation spent considerable energy working to avoid some of the more obvious mistakes made by Whalen's team in its own preparation of the E42.⁵⁸ Meanwhile, the regime's ostensibly genuine belief that

58 Italian translation of Emile Benoist's 15 July 1939 article in the Montreal-based *Le Devoir*, Busta 1100, Fasc. 10708, S. Fasc. 61, EUR Archives, Archivio Centrale dello Stato, Rome. The translator working for the propaganda office highlights the journalist's criticism of the

participation at the 1939 fair would yield certain desperately-needed financial advantages is evidenced in the advertisements of private companies which adorn several editions of fair guidebooks. Selected private vendors housed within the pavilion offered everything from custom leather goods and designer fashion to spaghetti and imported mineral water.⁵⁹ Advertisements, such as the one for Milan-based *Società Italiana Ernesto Breda*, whose images add a burst of color to the otherwise grayscale 1939 Vallecchi-edited guidebook, promoted Italian-made 'military tractors, aircraft, machine guns, rifles, hand grenades and bombs, and shells', while an advertisement for the Turin-based FIAT, which had benefitted tremendously from the regime's recent conquest of Africa, also peddled 'special motor vehicles for civil and military purposes.' (Figure 7) These advertisements can actually be interpreted as statements, in their own right, of Italian military capabilities, and were thereby as rhetorical as they were commercial. By exhibiting at the New York World's Fair, Fascist Italy was able to again remind the world of its military potency and project an image of economic stability, when in reality, Mussolini had complained that same summer of having been 'bled white' by the Spanish Civil War.⁶⁰

6 German Withdrawal

The Reich's late reversal of its decision to participate in the 1939 World's Fair, in spite of the fervent attempts on behalf of American organizers to finally confirm such participation (even at the expense of several other would-be participants), suggests that National Socialist Germany came to believe the controversy surrounding the very idea of its involvement in the event would limit its ability to make use of the same propagandistic or diplomatic opportunities enjoyed by Fascist Italy. Evidently, the significance (political, commercial, or otherwise) of these expositions to foreign exhibitors, then, even to the two most identifiably 'fascist' regimes, was not universal. This renders exploration of the German non-appearance at the final world's fair to be held before the onset of the Second World War as important to our understanding of the period as study of the Italian material contribution. The Reich's decision to

meandering streets in which 'it is easy to get lost and the visitor abandons himself to chance.'

59 Contractual amendment, 19 June 1940. Italy folders, Foreign files, Participation subseries, Central Files, NYWF-NYPL.

60 Angel Viñas, 'The Financing of the Spanish Civil War,' in *Revolution and War in Spain, 1931-39*, ed. Paul Preston (London: Routledge, 1984), 273-277.



Locomotives (Electric and Steam) · Electric Trains · Railcars · Railway and Tramway Coaches and Wagons · Trolleybuses · Military Tractors · Cross-country Lorries · Aircraft (Military and Civil) · Machine Guns · Rifles · Hand Grenades and Bombs · Shells · Shipbuilding · Electric, Agricultural and Industrial Machinery · Ore-dressing Mills · Road Rollers · Boilers · Reservoirs · Carbon and Alloy Steel · Steel Structures · Mining Researches and Development.

BREDA
SOCIETÀ ITALIANA ERNESTO BREDA - MILAN

FIGURE 7 Advertisement for Società Italiana Ernesto Breda.

SOURCE: *ITALY AT THE WORLD'S FAIR: NEW YORK 1939* (ROME: VALLECCHI, 1939), 3.

reverse course with regard to the New York event was preceded by a loud wave of both popular and political criticism within the host country itself. Questions as to why such objections were not raised over Italian presence, and how exactly fair organizers remained committed to doing all they could to ensure German presence in spite of these protests, can only begin to be answered through close examination of the surviving records of the World's Fair Corporation in New York and the Federal Foreign Office in Berlin.

Even without any surviving architectural design plan or detailed record of what the Ministry of Propaganda and its Reich Chamber of Culture might have intended for the World's Fair of 1939, in Germany's highly conspicuous absence, we can learn a great deal. For one, the Nazi policy of autarky was symbolically defended in such an absence. Throughout the fair's rather protracted planning phase, the Reich spent a considerable amount of energy attempting to confirm its right to use imported German material and manpower throughout the event as late as spring 1938.⁶¹ Numerous Nazi officials and German dignitaries, including Fritz Wiedemann,⁶² personal adjutant to Hitler, Princess Stephanie von Hohenlohe,⁶³ and a group of twenty-eight German mechanical engineers⁶⁴ were dispatched across the Atlantic to inspect the grounds and reassure Berlin that the space was indeed worthy of a National Socialist structure (and the foreign exchange it would require).⁶⁵ There was even some discussion of Hitler venturing to the world's fair himself, as Wiedemann explained to Whalen's representatives that the Führer 'was very anxious to see New York, as he is an architect and tremendously interested in what (the world's fair corporation) was doing.'⁶⁶ In this way, before publicly admitting so through benevolent reference to the fair as a 'magnificent spectacle which millions of

61 Letter Killeen to Standley, 31 March 1938. Germany folders, Countries files, Foreign Participation subseries, Government Participation, NYWF-NYPL. See also, Letter Auswärtiges Amt to Wiedemann, 38 December 1937. Records of the Federal Foreign Office, R/901/114751, Bundesarchiv Berlin-Lichterfelde.

62 Letter Hartigan to Standley, 23 December 1937. Germany folders, Countries files, Foreign Participation subseries, Government Participation, NYWF-NYPL. Wiedemann's personal papers are held in the Institut für Zeitgeschichte Munich.

63 Letter Hartigan to Standley, 5 November 1937. Germany folders, Countries files, Foreign Participation subseries, Government Participation, NYWF-NYPL.

64 *News Release*, 31 January 1939. Germany folders, Foreign files, Participation subseries, Central Files, NYWF-NYPL.

65 Letter Auswärtiges Amt (unsigned) to Wiedemann, 38 December 1937. Records of the Federal Foreign Office, R/901/114751, Bundesarchiv Berlin-Lichterfelde.

66 Letter Hartigan to Standley, 2 December 1937. *Ibid.*

visitors would be unable to forget',⁶⁷ Germany had quietly acknowledged the event's geopolitical significance, and the absence of official German representation can thus be interpreted as either a very public acknowledgement of its inability to overcome financial constraints, or a calculated defensive decision made in response to threats of a boycott and protest by some particularly powerful American voices, including the mayor of New York City himself, Fiorello La Guardia.

While Mussolini had previously expressed his determination to use the Fascist pavilions built abroad for previous world's fairs in order to win the political support of local Italian-American communities, the National Socialist presence across the United States had never achieved a formidable foothold and there is little reason to believe that the appearance of a German delegation at the 1939 World's Fair would have prompted any meaningful surge amongst German-American Nazis or Nazi sympathizers.⁶⁸ Brendan Simms has recently noted that while an *Orstgruppe* had been founded in Chicago as early as 1924 and there 'appears to have been some sort of [American Nazi] presence in New York City', National Socialist attempts to establish any viable foothold within the interwar United States largely failed.⁶⁹ Likewise, the more organic threat of the German American Bund which caused some distress throughout the late 1930s appears, in retrospect, to have been 'exaggerated.'⁷⁰ In the words of Leland Bell, the Bund 'neither warranted the attention it received nor ever presented a threat to American institutions.'⁷¹

Although, to an extent, the common explanation for German withdrawal related to financial concern is indeed plausible given the Reich's well-documented concern over exchange, it is worth considering some additional layers of financial concern which extend beyond questions of foreign exchange credits. Given the increasingly severe taxes levied against German

67 *News Release*, 31 January 1939. Germany folders, Foreign files, Participation subseries, Central Files, NYWF-NYPL.

68 For a discussion of the 'wild enthusiasm' generated by the roundtrip, multi-stop tour of Fascist Quadrumvir Italo Balbo and his 'flying armada' of twenty-four Savoia-Marchetti SM.55X seaplanes from Rome to the Chicago World's Fair, and the positive effect it may have had not only on Italians back in Europe, but also the millions of Italian-Americans whose political support Mussolini was determined to win, see Schrenck, *Building a Century of Progress*, 93. See also, John Patrick Diggins, *Mussolini and Fascism: The View From America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972).

69 Simms, *Hitler*, 80.

70 Leland Bell, 'The Failure of Nazism in America: The German American Bund, 1936–1941,' *Political Science Quarterly* 85 (1970): 585.

71 *Ibid.*

imports, the commerciality of the fair would have placed German participation on an uneven footing. Furthermore, as Göring's Four Year Plan increasingly focused financial resources and drew Germany closer to full-scale military mobilization and war, Reich administration saw little point in committing to an overseas exposition which might temporally conflict with explosive military action. Surely, the latter idea was not considered by the Polish government, whose sizable financial commitment to its own exhibition area at the fair was only rewarded with some twelve weeks of earnest participation. Following the Nazi invasion that September, Warsaw's economic support of the exhibition waned and then halted as the Polish pavilion, after being draped in black cloth, came to rely on public donations and local fundraising efforts to remain open throughout the rest of the exhibition period.⁷² Confoundingly, meanwhile, the invasion of Poland and general escalation of tensions prompted one frequent fairgoer to write the Chairman of the Board of the World's Fair Corporation to ensure the Italian Pavilion, 'one of the most beautiful building (sic) in the Worlds' (sic) Fair, with its magnificent architecture and lovely display which had been visited and admired by 9,271,165 persons from May 15th to October 30th', would not be demolished as was evidently rumored.⁷³

In any case, records indicate that the World's Fair Corporation was resolved to lobby for German participation in spite of considerable protest and severe criticism from a variety of sources across the United States. In a letter dated 15 December 1936, Fred Dannick, Secretary at the American League Against War and Fascism wrote Grover Whalen asking for more information regarding the invitation known to have been extended to Nazi Germany. A response would come one week later, not by Whalen himself, but by an administrative assistant who curtly (and dishonestly) reminded Dannick that 'as far as we know no country has yet accepted the President's invitation to participate . . . The President sent invitations to all countries with whom we have diplomatic relations.'⁷⁴ The World's Fair Corporation again deflected responsibility in its similarly terse response to the letters of protest authored by Morris Mallinger, Chairman of the Anti-Nazi Federation of Pittsburgh, and Samuel Untermayer, President

72 For a provocative discussion of the contents of the Polish Pavilion at the 1939 New York World's Fair and its role in advancing a state-authored narrative of national homogeneity, see E. Zimnica, 'Making History: Poland at the 1939 World's Fair in New York,' unpublished M.A. thesis, Queen's University, 1999.

73 Letter H. W. Gibson to M. Hughes, 6 November 1939. Italy folders, Countries files, General Administration and Operations subseries, Foreign Participation Department, Government Participation, NYWF-NYPL.

74 Letter F. Dannick to H.A. Flanigan, 15 Dec 1936. Germany papers, Foreign files, Participation subseries, Central Files, NYWF-NYPL.

of the Non-Sectarian Anti-Nazi League: 'Invitations to foreign nations to participate in New York World's Fair were issued by the President through the State Department under an act of Congress requesting the President of the United States to invite nations having diplomatic relations with this country to participate in the fair. Matter of invitations to foreign nations being entirely in hands of federal government are therefore beyond our control.'⁷⁵ Almost identical responses were addressed to leaders of the joint boycott arranged by the American Jewish Labor Committee and American Jewish Congress,⁷⁶ while the objections raised by academics at schools such as the University of Michigan,⁷⁷ New York University,⁷⁸ and Oberlin College⁷⁹ also went ignored.

After Germany's strong showing in Paris 1937, it was apparently thought to have been good business to ensure a German delegation was on hand two years later in New York. Undeterred by the drama prompted by Nazi participation in the 1933 fair, Whalen was ready and eager to cash in on the free publicity generated by any further excitement as long as the State Department maintained its open stance toward German inclusion.⁸⁰ In fact, such excitement came rather early on, when Mayor La Guardia launched a verbal attack on the very idea of German participation, introducing his infamous 'House of Horrors' proposal for the German Pavilion at a luncheon of the Women's Division of the American Jewish Congress at the Hotel Astor in Manhattan on 3 March 1937. Besides prompting Becker of the German Consulate General to cancel dinner plans with Whalen in New York, dispatches from Berlin indicate that La Guardia's derision actually bothered the Führer personally, and was likely to have been an early, yet insurmountable obstacle on the path to German participation.⁸¹ La Guardia also served on the provisional organizing committee of the so-called 'Freedom Pavilion' planned for the world's fair without the approval of Whalen's corporation. In the end, fair officials prevented the pavilion from ever opening, but according to its own description 'the purpose of the proposed pavilion . . . (would have been) to show Americans everything that fell to ashes in Germany as the Nazis rose to power' and to serve as 'a vivid

75 Letter, Flanigan to Ostroff, 16 February 1937. Ibid.

76 Letter from the Joint Boycott Council of the American Jewish Congress and Jewish Labor Committee to Grover Whalen, 22 October 1936. Germany folders, Foreign files, Participation subseries, Central Files, NYWF-NYPL.

77 Letter from Prof. M. Levi to Whalen, 9 December 1936. Ibid.

78 Letter from Robert Cohn to Gerhardt Seeger, 15 June 1938. Ibid.

79 Ibid.

80 For more on the uproar caused by a swastika-clad German zeppelin and Goebbels' cancelled visit to Chicago in 1934, see Ganz, *The 1933 Chicago World's Fair*: 144.

81 Letter from E.F. Roosevelt, director of Foreign Exhibits Division to W.H. Standley, 4 March 1937. Germany folders, Foreign files, Participation subseries, Central Files, NYWF-NYPL.

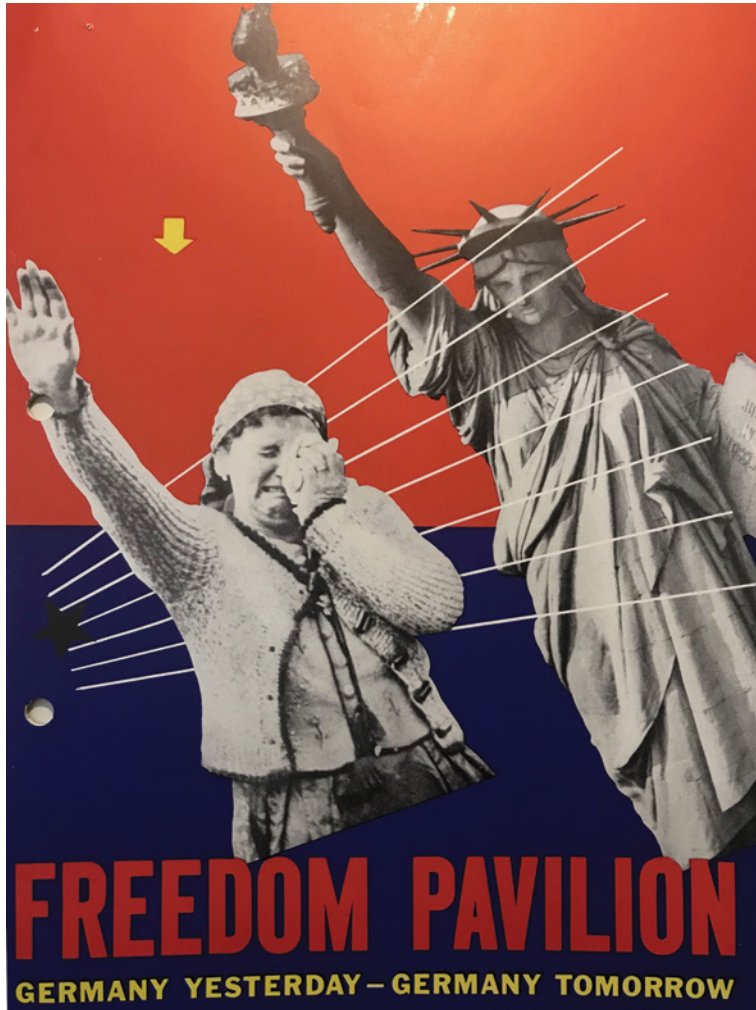


FIGURE 8 Cover of informational brochure for the anti-Nazi Freedom Pavilion
 SOURCE: *DEUTSCHES VOLKSECHO*, 6 MAY 1939, 3.

reminder that Germany before Hitler was a land where thought and religion were free; that most Americans of German ancestry, and millions of Germans in Germany today, sorrow for that lost freedom.’⁸² (Figure 8) Archival records also demonstrate that high profile members of the local Jewish community

82 L. Hobson, ‘Der verhinderte Freiheits-Pavillon: Monsignor Lavelle droht mit Krieg: Die rolle des Herrn Victor Ridder: Mr. Whalen ueberlegt es sich,’ *Deutsches Volksecho*, 6 May 1939, 3.

took to politically threatening. La Guardia as he tried to reconcile his fervor for hosting the fair with his disdain for Nazi politics. One local rabbi went so far in January 1937 as to threateningly remind the mayor that it would seem

highly inconsistent of you as a leader in the anti-Nazi boycott and in view of your splendid record in humanitarian endeavors to allow in this city . . . an exhibit of Nazi merchandise in connection therewith under the detestable swastika which can only arouse widespread unrest and sharp disapproval among a considerable section of the population of this city with possible serious consequences to public peace and to the success of the World's Fair itself.⁸³

In addition to apologies issued by U.S. Secretary of State Hull,⁸⁴ there were, to be sure, counter-protests launched by the likes of the Board of Trade for German American Commerce,⁸⁵ Steuben Society of America,⁸⁶ and the New York-based Citizens Protective League,⁸⁷ but the overwhelming majority of relevant material on file within the archives of the World's Fair Corporation indicate that fair organizers were prepared to endure staunch opposition to any German involvement.

Evidently, only to United States Congressmen did Whalen respond directly, opting more often to delegate the duty to a secretary or other representative. In a letter of 13 November 1937, Representative Emmanuel Celler of Pennsylvania described Germany as 'alone, the cursed parish among the nations of the world', and urged Whalen to remember that 'those who are entrusted with the privilege and responsibility of guiding the destinies of the Fair, take not one step, by word or deed, to give even the slightest encouragement to that barbaric reversion which has come to be known as Hitlerism.'⁸⁸ If, he continued, the objective of the fair was 'the improvement of international relations by portraying interrelationship and interdependence of all groups and peoples', then 'to permit Germany to exhibit . . . is, in a sense, making excuse for the horrific

83 Letter, Rabbi Gross of the Jewish Examiner to La Guardia, 8 January 1937. Germany folders, Foreign files, Participation subseries, Central Files, NYWF-NYPL.

84 'Reich Withdraws from World's Fair,' *New York Times*, 27 April 1938, 1.

85 Telegram from Board of Trade for German American Commerce to Whalen, 4 March 1937. Germany folders, Foreign files, Participation subseries, Central Files, NYWF-NYPL.

86 Letter to Whalen from Steuben Society of America, 20 January 1937. Ibid.

87 New York City municipal election pamphlet printed by the Citizens Protective League, 15 December 1936. Ibid.

88 Letter Celler to Whalen, 13 November 1937, Germany folders, Foreign files, Participation subseries, Central Files, NYWF-NYPL.

damage that Nazism has done, in the short span of five years, not only to the German people, but to the entire world.⁸⁹ Predictably, Whalen responded by reminding the congressman that the invitation was extended by 'the Federal authorities pursuant to an Act of Congress and remains beyond the control of the Fair Corporation.' Shortly after, the *New York Times* reported that Johannes Brochers, Consul General for Germany, had signed a contract at Whalen's office in the Empire State Building guaranteeing German participation in the 'most truly international exposition ever held.'⁹⁰ (Figure 9) In official comment,



FIGURE 9 Dr. Hans Borchers, (left) German Consul General in New York and Grover Whalen, President of the World's Fair Corporation signs contract for German participation in the New York World's Fair during ceremonies held in Fair Corporation offices in the Empire State Building.

SOURCE: *GERMAN-AMERICAN COMMERCE BULLETIN*, JANUARY 1938, 6.

89 Ibid.

90 'World Fair Space Taken by Germany,' *New York Times*, 31 December 1937, 17; 'Sixty Nations Accept World's Fair Bids,' *New York Times*, 20 December 1937, 2.

Brochers expressed his belief that the occasion 'augurs well for a cordial relationship in the years to come between this great country and my own.'⁹¹

Efforts to distance the fair administration from the invitations were as superficial as they were cynical. Correspondence between Whalen and his fair's own ambassador to Europe, John Hartigan, evidence what can only be described as an active and rather persistent period of courtship between Nazi Germany and Whalen's World's Fair Corporation. While tirelessly working to find 'a solution to our German difficulties', Hartigan kept Whalen informed through almost daily updates across the continent.⁹² After a series of discussions in both New York and Berlin with Fritz Mahlo,⁹³ to whom Hartigan referred only as 'one of the important persons in Dr. Goebbels' Ministry of Propaganda', more persistent (and last-minute) efforts were made to secure German participation.⁹⁴ The nature of German expectations for participation in the fair can be discerned through examination of a dispatch sent following a tense and occasionally 'brutal'⁹⁵ winter meeting at the Reich's Ministry of Economics on Behrenstrasse in Berlin. Hartigan finally appears to understand the Reich's key points of negotiation when he reports that:

They at once began trying to trade on our helping them in Washington with the government on the trade situation . . . the attitude of the government was not to participate if they could not do business with us . . . they brought up the fact that they did not have the money with which to pay for their exhibit expenses in America but that they could try and find a way, if possible, to work something out if we would help them. They are spending about Fr. 66,000,000 at Paris . . . They were surprised that Italy had consented to go in and wondered where they were going to find the money. I had been advised from the embassy to let them know that

91 'World Fair Space Taken by Germany,' 17.

92 Letter from Hartigan to Nolan, 4 February 1937. Italian folders, Countries files, Foreign Participation Department subseries, Government Participation, NYWF-NYPL.

93 According to C.I.A. records, Mahlo was the Head of the Tourist Department in the Propaganda Ministry [*Ministerialdirigent, Leiter der Fremdenverkehrsabteilung im Reichspropagandaministerium*], born in 1895, war service 1914–1918, journalist, business executive, civil servant. For more on the role of Mahlo within Goebbels' ministry, see K. Semmens, *Seeing Hitler's Germany: Tourism in the Third Reich* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 139–149.

94 Letter Standley to Downes, 5 May 1938. Italian folders, Countries files, Foreign Participation Department subseries, Government Participation, NYWF-NYPL.

95 12 January 1937 report from Hartigan on meetings held at Reichswirtschaftsministerium, Behrenstrasse 43. Germany folders, Countries files, Foreign Participation Department subseries, Government Participation, NYWF-NYPL.

they were the only one of the Big Four in Europe who had not agreed to go in.⁹⁶

More than merely exposing actual concern over finances, such a report suggests that Reich officials had been conditioned by the special treatment they had received during the recent planning and development of the Paris Expo.⁹⁷ In short, the Reich was looking to leverage the Americans' obviously sincere hope that it would participate with a favorable adjustment in more lasting trade standards. Although Hartigan alleged that the Foreign Office, Propaganda Ministry, and Göring personally⁹⁸ had already authorized participation, the Nazi strategy was to hold out for financial aid so as to ensure that they would perform 'as well as they had in Paris.'⁹⁹ Hitler's personal vacations, military maneuvers, Party congress days in Nuremberg, and visits by Mussolini, were all cited as reasons for the Germans' delay in offering a definitive response.¹⁰⁰ When they finally asked directly for 'help with dollars,' Hartigan refused to acquiesce and rather flippantly responded that such a problem was theirs alone.¹⁰¹ He did, however, report back that the situation was 'looking favorable' and requested that fair officials keep space available for Germany until they receive a definite response.¹⁰²

Whalen's staff worked diligently with Hans Thomsen, Counsellor at the German Embassy, to find creative ways to stifle further criticism of German involvement, knowing full well that public reception could be as large a consideration as finances for the Nazis.¹⁰³ Spurred on by the inflammatory comments of *La Guardia*, Hitler was alleged to have raised his concern over the lack of 'federal-level guarantees' of protection (economic and otherwise) at the fair, because he had 'absolute proof' that communists were planning to disrupt the event, as they had attempted at Paris before French security forces kept them at bay in 1937.¹⁰⁴ In any case, it is clear that the German side appreciated just how strongly Whalen's team desired their country's participation and

96 Ibid.

97 See Gordon Dutter, 'Doing Business with the Nazis: French Economic Relations with Germany under the Popular Front,' *Journal of Modern History* 63 (1991): 296–326, cited in Fiss, *Grand Illusion*, 46.

98 Letter Hartigan to Standley, 7 April 1938. Germany folders, Countries files, Foreign Participation Department subseries, Government Participation, NYWF-NYPL.

99 Letter Hartigan to Standley, 22 September 1937. Ibid.

100 Ibid.

101 Ibid.

102 Ibid.

103 Letter Hartigan to Nolan, 4 February 1937. Ibid.

104 Letter Bonney to Whalen, 3 September 1937. Ibid.

consequently held the upper hand throughout negotiations. The considerable advantages offered to Nazi officials by Hartigan in his capacity as representative of both the World's Fair Corporation and United States Government were still considered unsatisfactory, especially after having so recently dealt with the unctuous Gréber in Paris.¹⁰⁵ Over the next several months, a furious barrage of probing correspondence was dispatched from New York to Berlin in a last-ditch effort to salvage German interest. By 10 May 1938, however, some three weeks past the internal deadline Hitler had set for a final decision, a telegram addressed to Secretary of State Hull from the American Embassy in Berlin unceremoniously related that 'the German Government regrets not to be able to participate in the World's Fair in New York as originally planned.'¹⁰⁶

Until 1938, the fair organizers and certain political forces had been confident that final approval would be granted and construction on the reserved lot would begin. Even before the telegram dispatched on 10 January 1938 from Berlin to the offices of the U.S. State Department in Washington reported that 'the Foreign Office is able to orally confirm the decision of the German Government to participate . . . and will record acceptance of the invitation in a formal note to the embassy',¹⁰⁷ Germany had been afforded several special privileges. After being assigned the largest lot of any foreign exhibitor¹⁰⁸ (roughly twenty-five percent larger than that of Italy), Reich officials refused to share a border with Yugoslavia and demanded that the south Slavic nation's exhibition be relocated so as not to detract from the grandeur of the (yet undesigned) German pavilion.¹⁰⁹ For no apparent reason, German would-be organizers also arranged for 'Germany Day' to be changed from the fair-assigned early summer date of 4 June to 2 February.¹¹⁰ Such demands were made mere weeks before the regime's sudden decision to renege on its previous commitment of participation.

As leader of the National Socialist architectural program, Albert Speer's role was to aestheticize political ideology and will, but also to affirm the Reich's

105 As explained above, scholarly consensus maintains that Gréber is likely to have furnished the German delegation with Boris Iofan's plans for the Soviet Pavilion before construction on the German structure was completed.

106 Letter from Frentiss Gilbert, Counsellor of Embassy, to U.S. Sec of State Cordell Hull, 10 May 1938. Germany folders, Countries files, Foreign Participation Department subseries, Government Participation, NYWF-NYPL.

107 Telegram Holmes to U.S. Embassy in Berlin, 10 January 1938. Ibid.

108 Letter Hogan to Director of Foreign Government Participation, 4 March 1938. Ibid.

109 Letter Standley to von Koop, 11 April 1938. Ibid.

110 Letter Standley to Lennox office of the Dir of Foreign Gov Participation, 24 February 1938. Ibid. See also Letter Standley to von Koop, 2 February 1938. Ibid.

status amongst rival nations and past empires alike. Amidst his sensational success at Paris, it seems unlikely that Whalen's team would not have expected, or even sought out, his input regarding German participation in the New York fair. Curiously, though, the written records which prove the organizers' courtship of the Nazi regime, make no mention of Speer, his offices, expectations, or demands.¹¹¹ Goebbels, however, along with many lower-ranking officials within his Ministry of Propaganda, is mentioned several times. This signals something of a disconnect between the Reich's cultural and diplomatic policy and again betrays the fact that despite its well-publicized ban on propaganda, Whalen's World's Fair Corporation was completely aware of the likelihood that certain foreign nations would exploit its venue as a platform from which they would be able to further advance their propagandistic, rather than artistic designs. It is also possible that that Whalen's organization, though optimistic throughout its dealings in Europe, was simply out of touch. The most damning evidence to suggest such a profound disconnect comes in a January 1937 dispatch from Hartigan to the U.S. Embassy in Berlin wherein he cheerfully reports that he has been advised to meet with Professor Mies van der Rohe (commonly referred to as Mies), 'architect of the German Pavilion in Paris and the probable person who would do the German participation in our fair'.¹¹² No such meeting ever took place, as after NSDAP Minister of the Interior and Education Wilhelm Frick closed down Mies' Bauhaus School in 1933 and replaced it with one of the more conservative, Party-approved schools raised in its stead, the professor had, by the time this letter was sent, already decided to leave for the United States and assume a key role at the Armour Institute's School of Architecture in Chicago.¹¹³ While a 'desperate' Mies had indeed submitted (unsuccessful) designs for the new Reichsbank in 1933, designed the exhibition hall of the 1934 Berlin *Deutsches Volk-Deutsche Arbeit* exhibition, accepted an invitation from the president of the *Reichskammer der Bildenen Künste* to design the German Pavilion at the Brussels International Exposition of 1935 (from which the Reich also ultimately withdrew its commitment to participate), and designed several gas stations for Fritz Todt's new highway system, Mies left Germany by the end of 1937, making such participation in

111 Records of the Federal Foreign Office, R901/106932-7, Bundesarchiv-Lichterfelde, Berlin.

112 Report Hartigan to US Embassy after interview with Dr. Paul Kempner at Jaegerplatz 49, Berlin, 13 January 1937. Germany folders, Countries files, Foreign Participation Department subseries, Government Participation, NYWF-NYPL.

113 Magdalena Droste, *Bauhaus, 1919-33* (Berlin: Bauhaus-Archiv, 2002), 227.

Nazi-sponsored designs for the 1939 fair impossible.¹¹⁴ As there exists no hard evidence to suggest Mies' involvement in the designs for German site at the 1937 Paris Exposition, it is not unreasonable to interpret this 'advice' as cool mockery.¹¹⁵ Even without extant architectural plans or sketches, the sheer size of the space afforded to Germany suggests that fair organizers expected its participation to have been underpinned by one of the event's more substantial structures. Tellingly, the lot which was finally vacated by Germany was so large that it came to be occupied by five different countries which otherwise would have been excluded from the event in Portugal, Iceland, Haiti, the Dominican Republic, and Greece.¹¹⁶

7 Comparative Conclusions

Although the Pact of Steel was signed one month after the opening of the 1939 World's Fair on 22 May, Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy had been nurturing its military alliance for years. With socio-political 'struggle' a clear leitmotif of both programs, the regimes shared a desire to achieve respectable international status and managed to find early common ground on the battlefields of Spain. On 11 July 1939, the front page of the internationally distributed *Weltdeutscher Beobachter* reported colorfully on Count Ciano's reception in Spain and his efforts to advance the status of the Axis powers by establishing the "European order sought by Germany and Italy."¹¹⁷

The regimes shared a common ambition to extend their borders and spheres of influence, and though by 1939 they each had managed to do so, such expansion proved costly, both in terms of economic and diplomatic capital. For that reason, the ways in which each regime diverted its wealth is also telling. Despite

114 Roger Griffin, 'From Weimar Modernism to Nazi Modernism,' *The German Quarterly* 90, no. 3 (2017): 361; C. Welsch, 'Mies van der Rohe's Compromise with the Nazis,' *Wissenschaftliches Kolloquium vom 18. bis 21. Juni 1992 in Weimar an der Hochschule für Architektur und Bauwesen zum Thema Architektur und Macht*, 105; M. Kitchen, *Speer*, 34.

115 Karen Fiss suggests that Mies van der Rohe 'may have played a role' in the design of German displays related to medical and chemical equipment at the Paris Expo only to have his name struck from the credits. See Fiss, *Grand Illusion*, 108–109. On Nazi thoughts regarding the unsuitability of Bauhaus 'Stilarchitektur,' see R. Etlin, 'The Perverse Logic of Nazi Thought,' in *Art, Culture, and Media Under the Third Reich*, ed. R. Etlin (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 11.

116 'Five More Countries Take Fair Space,' *New York Times*, 23 May 1938, 19.

117 Unattributed, 'Spanien steht an der Seite der Achse: Cianos Empfang in Barcelona,' *Weltdeutscher Beobachter*, 11 July 1939, 1.

Italy's sizable (and extremely high-profile) military support of Francoist Spain, its own imperial campaigns in Africa, and frequent demonstrations of its new air and naval forces (including an extremely popular air display at the 1933 Chicago Century of Progress Exhibition), it devoted a relatively small amount of its GDP to military spending. As Christian Goeschel points out, the regime never, at any point, spent more than twenty-two percent of its GDP on arms, while Germany steadily increased its military expenditure from forty percent in 1940 to sixty-four percent in 1942.¹¹⁸ Yet while the Reich's highly conspicuous absence at the 1939 World's Fair is indeed suspicious given its behavior in the late summer of 1939, the expenses it amassed in sending delegates to and from Flushing, paired with its decision to entertain official discussions for well over a year suggest that for a time, participation had indeed been a very serious possibility. Considerably better off in financial terms than its transalpine ally, German participation only came to be undermined through a combination of the World's Fair Corporation's refusal to prove as generous as its French predecessors and the popular American opposition which threatened to further undercut the Reich's public image. Italy, meanwhile, undeterred by what ultimately amounted to a multi-million dollar buy-in, was, above all other diplomatic considerations, as eager as it had been throughout the earlier fairs to use the high-profile platform to further project its strengthened ties to Imperial Rome.¹¹⁹ It would spare no expense in proving to the world that Italy had arrived and the Fascist revolution had rendered the culturally well-endowed country superiorly capable of war, diplomacy, leisure travel, and scientific or technological discovery. Through the established conventions of the regime, this relationship was to be animated, mobilized, and deployed through an historiographic and aesthetic material commitment to rebranding and reemphasizing, indeed 'fascistizing' the classical mode. Within the literal framework of the regime's neoclassical structure, the heft, import, and pan-historic significance of the 'Third Rome' was to be promoted and reinforced at New York through various elements of material culture expected to transcend any ornamental role and take on a certain rhetorical function. In the words of a German

118 Goeschel, *Mussolini and Hitler*, 179. Goeschel suggests that the German numbers could have been exaggerated for effect by the Nazis.

119 Unattributed, 'Sixty Nations Accept World's Fair Bids,' *New York Times*, 20 December 1937, 2. For more on the regime's enthusiastic participation at Chicago in 1934, see Ganz, *The 1933 Chicago World's Fair*, 134.

press release of April 1938, the Italian pavilion was being built to 'demonstrate progress in all areas of economy and culture.'¹²⁰

That the Fascist contribution to the New York World's Fair was already benefitting through an early iteration of the '*Italiani brava gente*' myth by the time Italy had been invited to remain open into the fair's second year in 1940 is significant.¹²¹ In some ways, the lack of animosity towards the representation of an outwardly bellicose and desperately belligerent Fascist Italy reinforces the prevalence of the *brava gente* idea and suggests just how unthreatening the regime was seen through the eyes of the world. Not even after committing so many resources to the Francoist cause in Spain, invading Africa, proclaiming the reestablishment of the Roman Empire, or withdrawal from the League of Nations in a grand gesture of defiance towards what was left of the Wilsonian order was enough to draw the casual ire of the fair-going public. With regard to foreign opinion, Mussolini's regime was at its most powerful when dealing in cultural terms. Its exhibitionist behavior and the ambassadorial emphasis placed on its cultural program by party leaders such as Dino Alfieri demonstrate that it was acutely aware of this. The string of roughly biennial international expositions provided the regime with a regular opportunity to emphasize such cultural popularity and served to echo the widespread discourses on beauty which had become a hallmark of the Fascist brand. Exhibitions permitted the regime to consistently build upon its narrative of monumental greatness and document its own process of cultural regeneration. This is illustrated quite plainly in its decision to promote its own upcoming international exposition in the national pavilion built in New York. (Figure 10) Almost paradoxically, the Fascist emphasis on culture both deflected from and accentuated its politics. Yet, put another way, in the words of Hannah Malone, 'the regime's true culture was always politics.'¹²²

In its major retreat from the stage of international diplomacy furnished by the 1939 fair, Nazi Germany made the calculated decision to further alienate itself from an increasingly skeptical court of international public opinion, opting instead to entrench itself even further along the lines of uncooperative and

120 Draft Press Release of the Deutschen Nachrichtenbüros, 24 April 1938. Records of the Federal Foreign Office, R901/114753 Bundesarchiv-Lichterfelde, Berlin.

121 For a discussion of the '*italiani brava gente*' idea and postwar Italian memory politics more generally, see Claudio Fogu, 'Italiani Brava Gente: The Legacy of Fascist Historical Culture on Italian Politics of Memory,' in *The Politics of Memory in Postwar Europe*, ed. Ned Lebow, Wulf Kansteiner and Claudio Fogu (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 147–176.

122 Hannah Malone in the opening remarks of the Comparing the Cultural History of Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany International Workshop, Freie Universität Berlin, March 2019.

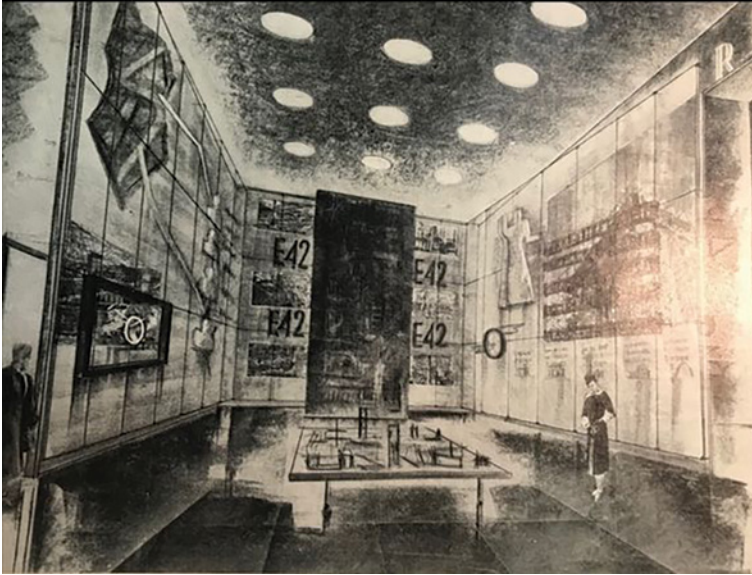


FIGURE 10 Unattributed, sketch for 'Hall of the E42'.
SOURCE: *ITALY AT THE WORLD'S FAIR: NEW YORK 1939* (ROME: VALLECCHI, 1939), 7.

expansionist rhetoric. This risk was acknowledged during last-minute discussions about the pros and cons of withdrawal in which some Reich officials warned that failure to participate would have permitted 'the Jewish agitators' to claim that they had 'beaten the Führer off the track' and simultaneously 'nourish the prejudice that we consciously isolated ourselves from the world.'¹²³ Yet, its role as pariah was all but confirmed when its demands that the World's Fair Corporation cancel all plans for the construction of a Czechoslovakian pavilion were met with public derision. Whalen's State Department-backed defiance of Nazi calls for the immediate sale of the pavilion (to be negotiated through the German embassy) in defense of Czech sovereignty was broadly interpreted as 'a notice to Hitler'.¹²⁴ Significantly, the contract for the Czechoslovakian pavilion was not signed until after the Germans had failed to meet

123 Record of meeting concerning German participation in the exhibition in New York. Berlin, 13 April 1938. Records of the Federal Foreign Office, R901/114753 Bundesarchiv-Lichterfelde, Berlin.

124 Unattributed, 'Fair Defies Nazis on Czech Pavilion,' *New York Times* 14 April 1939, 6. See also, Letter, Holmes to Vseticka, 14 April 1939. Records of the Federal Foreign Office, R/901/114754, Bundesarchiv Berlin-Lichterfelde.

the April 1938 deadline to confirm their participation, raising questions as to whether or not the inclusion of a Czech delegation contributed to the Reich's fear of embarrassment or was some sort of Whalen-engineered reprisal for Nazi faithlessness.¹²⁵ In any case, the opening of the 1939 World's Fair marks the closure of many of Germany's most significant transatlantic diplomatic channels.

Conversely, Fascist Italy remained committed to maintaining its 'Janus face' diplomatic strategy which saw it devote as much careful attention to matters of imperialistic militarization as it did cultural policy. Italy remained committed to this approach until declarations of war in 1941 rendered continuation of such a strategy impossible. Until that point, however, the invitations extended to each totalitarian regime by a World's Fair Corporation acting under the auspices of both the executive and legislative branches of the United States government only served to reinforce each regime's international standing and effectively legitimize their rule. The differences in foreign opinion of these two regimes, especially as related to their cultural output and the social moment which facilitated their rise to prominence, deserve further scholarly attention. The unduly overlooked world's fairs of the interwar period represent an excellent place to start.

125 Copy of contract, Records of the Federal Foreign Office, R/901/114754, Bundesarchiv Berlin-Lichterfelde.