

David Glassberg. *American Historical Pageantry*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1990. 290 pages of text, plus notes, bibliographic essay, and index. Hardcover and paperback.

A generation ago American history was conceived primarily in terms of industrialization, political movements, and economic development. Today, while the old concerns have not disappeared, they have been somewhat marginalized by books on cultural institutions such as world's fairs and amusement parks, on such forms of mediation as advertising and public relations, on rituals such as street theater, and on the social construction of landscape. Robert Rydell's *All The World's a Fair* exemplifies these recent trends.¹ Through painstaking archival research he unearthed a wealth of information on the social construction of world's fairs, examining them as ideological formations that legitimated racial exploitation at home and the creation of an American empire abroad. The fairs repeatedly sought symbols to combine Darwinian theories of racial development with utopian dreams of America's future.

Rydell's book is a suggestive starting point for David Glassberg's *American Historical Pageantry*, which is also a meditation on representation, hegemony, and the social construction of popular memory. It retrieves an important part of American culture, the historical pageant, which at the turn-of-the-century combined elements of traditional holidays, drama, and carnival to create the

¹ On advertising, see Roland Marchand, *Advertising and the American Dream* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985). On street theater, see Susan G. Davis, *Parades and Power: Street Theatre in Nineteenth Century Philadelphia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986). On landscape see, John Stilgoe, *Metropolitan Corridor* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983). Robert Rydell, *All the World's a Fair* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984).

image of a community and its history. Many have heard of the pageant staged by striking Paterson workers in Madison Square Garden in 1913, but few realize that this event subverted a flourishing genre created by progressive reformers who worked with urban social elites. In the two decades before the 1920s, or before radio and film become central to mass culture, a pageant craze swept cities and towns across America. "Support for pageantry spanned the ideological spectrum from the Daughters of the American Revolution to the Industrial Workers of the World" (105). Jane Addams and G. Stanley Hall were among those who extolled its virtues in community building. The themes chosen were heterogeneous. Fresno staged "The Princess and the Magic Raisins," and Chicago promoted overseas missionary work with "The Pageant of Darkness and Light." But most often cities chose to dramatize their own history. By 1909 a Philadelphia-based company, Van Horn and Son, had nationwide offices offering to sell costumes, banners, and all the necessary equipment for "historical pageants and allegorical parades." By 1910 when Boston staged a pageant on the transition from "Cave Life to City Life," some of the originators of the movement felt it necessary to create an American Pageant Association, to "protect from misuse a form of dramatic presentation ... that is inherently the property of the people" and which they feared was "being commercialized" (107).

Glassberg helps the reader to visualize these events with one hundred photographs that are well-integrated into the text. He refers to all parts of the United States, but here we can only discuss one detailed example. In the summer of 1914 when The Pageant and Masque of St. Louis was staged, it required an enormous semicircular stage built on pilings in a lake. Across a narrow strip of water was seating for 43,000 people, plus space on the surrounding hillsides for 50,000 more. Such a festival evinced the existence of a vigorous local culture which encouraged active participation. The 7,000 actors and singers were volunteers, and the majority of their costumes were made at home. School children sold 100,000 pageant buttons for one cent each to raise a thousand dollars, and for a quarter a resident could have his name registered in a book of "native-born St. Louisians." Such efforts only began to pay the production expenses of \$125,000, however, which equalled what D. W. Griffith spent in the same year to make *Birth of a Nation*. The comparison is fascinating, for St. Louis was creating its own historical myth, from the mound-building Indians to its industrial present, rather than accepting a celluloid version of history made elsewhere. The pageant enacted every night for a week before 100,000 residents not only attempted to encapsulate their history, but to arouse and channel their emotions. It sought to create "the illusion of the public appearing to speak for itself, in the process defining the terms under which particular local interests appeared as the public interest" (199). Organizers realized that the process of creating an event with a cast of 7,000 mirrored the larger intention: to harmonize the many ethnic

groups and social classes of the city of 700,000. The organizers recruited actors through existing fraternal organizations. The Circulo Silvio Pellio chose who should play the "recently arrived immigrants," and the Swedish National Society recruited one hundred members to play hunters and trappers. Yet if recently-arrived ethnic groups were represented, Indians and Blacks were intentionally excluded.

Glassberg is particularly concerned with identifying the social elites who determined these patterns of inclusion and exclusion in their attempts to construct a unified citizenry. He does not become mired in local detail, showing that a small number of professional organizers, such as Percey MacKaye and William Chauncy Langdon, and national organizations, such as the Playground and Recreation Association, provided leadership and models for imitation. He shows that this was a national movement, whose "fervent advocates viewed it as no less than an instrument of communal transformation, able to forge a renewed sense of citizenship out of the emotional ties generated by the immediate sensation of expressive, playful, social interaction. Its combination of elite, popular, and ethnic cultural forms depicting images of a 'common' past would break down cultural and social barriers (284)." This vision was not to be, of course, and indeed until this valuable book appeared, the tradition of historical pageantry had disappeared almost entirely from view.

Readers may be surprised that there are no references to contemporary critical theory or to theorists of hegemony who draw on Gramsci. Glassberg's methodology comes from the anthropology of Victor Turner and Clifford Geertz, from reader-response theory, and from works in American studies on historical consciousness and popular memory, particularly Warren Susman's *Culture as History* and Leuka Zenderland (ed.), *Recycling the Past: Popular Uses of American History*.¹ Curiously, he seems unaware of Rydell's work on world's fairs or John Kasson's *Amusing the Million*, on the emergence of Coney Island. In short, Glassberg ideally should have done more to link his study with other work in American Studies. Nevertheless, *American Historical Pageantry* is a valuable addition to our understanding of the Progressive era, which will also be useful to anyone seeking to understand the emergence of a national popular culture.

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¹ Warren Susman, *Culture as History* (New York: Pantheon, 1985); Leuka Zenderland, ed., *Recycling the Past: Popular Uses of American History* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1978).