# Fashion Nation

Picturing the United States in the Long Nineteenth Century

In the late nineteenth century, the United States was known internationally as a place full of gaudiness and glitter. While scholars have long assumed that this visual excess was literal, linked to the United States' utilization of sophisticated modern light and consumer technologies, *Fashion Nation* argues that far from being linked to technology or consumerism, the reputation of the United States as a place of glittery bodies and landscapes was rooted in early nineteenth-century British and European ethnic nationalism, and the fashion of wearing colorful ethnic costuming that was adopted as part of these movements.

In this work, Sandra Tomc traces the history of the idea of America as a gauche, flashy place from its early proliferation in the 1820s and 1830s, when American flashiness was associated primarily with colorful clothes, to its fruition in late nineteenth-century mass entertainment when the notion of American visual audacity shifted from clothes to elaborate lights and technological displays. Tomc argues that in the wake of pressure in the first half of the nineteenth century to embrace racially and ethnically saturated national types, significant branches of U.S. nationalist culture developed national types distinguished by their refusal to divulge racial and ethnic affiliation. To make its case, *Fashion Nation* reads literature alongside an extraordinary, colorful, and largely forgotten archive of international costume books, theatrical spectacles, travelogues, and world's fair extravaganzas to show how America was textually and visually constructed for transatlantic audiences.

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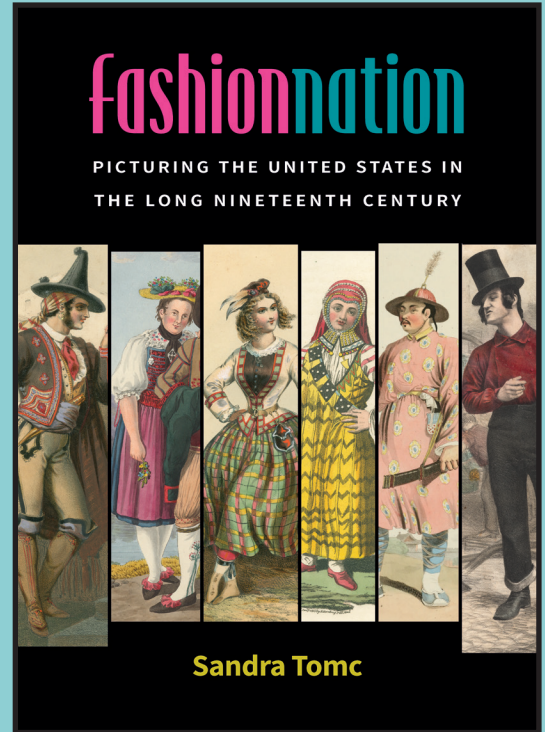
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