

Revisiting the Past in Museums and at Historic Sites, A. I. Lasc, A. McClellan, Ä. Söll (Eds.), Routledge, Abingdon (2022). 274 pp., (Hbk.), £120.00, ISBN: 9780367707224

Book Review

Revisiting the Past in Museums and at Historic Sites, edited by Anca I. Lasc, Andrew McClellan, and Änne Söll, is a contribution to research and practice concerned with interpretation. As a new edition to the series 'Routledge Research in Museum Studies', this book offers 14 chapters, excluding the introduction, organised thematically by historic sites, museums, and period rooms.

Within its first few lines, a guiding perspective is defined, suggesting history is not closed. Rather, it remains open to alternative interpretations. From this, the aim of this book is made clear – to demonstrate how historic sites, museums, and period rooms are utilizing contemporary interventions to 'reformat and reconceive' the past in order to 'revitalize public interest', remain 'relevant for contemporary society', and 'generate new revenue streams'. In addressing how the past is remembered through interpretation, this book offers a range of interdisciplinary, dynamic perspectives on interpretation strategies and changing heritage tourism consumption practices. Underpinning much of it is an acknowledged break from the antiquated methods of glass boxes and text panels, and the growing presence of edutainment inspired practices that produce co-created, experiential, and immersive experiences.

The book is carefully curated in accordance to the physical structures discussed: historic sites, museums, and period rooms. This helps to neatly arrange the chapters in a logical manner. However, the number of chapters focused on the interpretation and presentation of history and heritage materials dominate the few focused on art. With this in mind, and in following the themes of disruption and alternative interpretations, the chapters could have been arranged in accordance with three underlying topics observed throughout the whole of the book: remembrance through interpretation; methods for bringing the past to life; and the framing of interpretation processes.

The book commences with a well-developed introduction that emphasises the importance of renewing the past, which establishes a foundation for discussion of how the past is remembered. From this, remembrance through interpretation becomes a prominent focus in the first few chapters of the book, and reappears periodically throughout subsequent chapters. Challenging traditional narratives of the enslaved experience at plantation museums, Chapters 1 and 2 pose important questions about how history is both remembered and overlooked through interpretation practices. These considerations not only echo existing research concerning darker histories, but are also extended in Chapter 12, where the history of the Ballantine House is reimagined in order to challenge the dominant narratives surrounding race, class, and cultural authority. While this reimagined history is controversial considering the long-standing concerns for authenticity within heritage practice, it presents an important discussion about what history is, how we know it to be, and how alternative versions can elicit new ways of thinking about society and its relationship with the past.

Recent heritage studies have identified a shift in tourism consumption practices which appears to be in response to a growing demand for immersive and interactive experiences, largely induced by media and technological advancements. As such, the cases presented in Chapters 3, 4 and 13 highlight the significance of immersion and co-creation, which through technology and sensory simulation, help to bring the past to life and foster meaningful learning experiences. This effort is extended in Chapters 7 and 11, where the past is brought to life in the storytelling of spaces and artefacts. When explored through overlapping dimensions of

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time, these chapters demonstrate how such experiences encourage audiences to think more deeply about how and what they know about the past. Yet, to reformat and reconceive the past requires a discussion of how long-standing traditions in museum interpretation may be disrupted. Such discussions are presented in the cases of Chapters 5, 10 and 14, which not only present alternative, and perhaps controversial, interpretation methods, but also create thought provoking discussions about societal norms and values. However in creating disruption, curators and artists are often faced with challenge and opposition, which Chapters 6, 8, and 9 address in their discussions concerning the imbalance of power and authority within interpretation practice.

To conclude, this book contributes to the ongoing discourse of interpreting the past and prompts important discussions about interpretation practice, its management, and how disruption can create balance and profound learning. It is thus recommended to academics and practitioners interested and involved with interpretation. Students of museum studies and heritage programmes will also find this book useful considering the variety of cases that provide essential considerations they may take in their future careers of managing the past for the present.

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