

Public Memory, Race, and Heritage Tourism of Early America, C. Rex, S. E. Watson (Eds.), Routledge, Abingdon (2022). 176 pp., (Hbk.), £120.00 ISBN: 9780367609986

Book Review

Public Memory, Race, and Heritage Tourism of Early America, edited by Cathy Rex and Shevaun E. Watson, is a recent edition to the Routledge series 'New Directions in Tourism Analysis'. Comprised of 8 chapters, excluding the introduction and afterword, it offers a critical review of lesser known heritage locations in America that grapple with interpreting their dark histories for consumer experiences. Contributing to recent literature that has become focused on interpretation and authenticity, this book offers a fresh perspective on how heritage tourism and its interpretation influences public memory, and consequently has the capability of exacerbating ongoing issues relating to race, prejudice, and racism. Although an essential read for academic specialists and heritage practitioners, it is also beneficial to secondary and higher education teachers, particularly in America. As a resource for case study pedagogy, this book offers students with real issues to problem solve, which could lead to a better understanding of historical pasts and how they impacts the present and future.

Stemming from the humanities, the contributors provide critical discussions indicative of their personal interests and professional work. Whilst there was a clear agenda with regard to substance, a thematic structure was not present. Of the 8 chapters, 4 focused on slavery history, which slightly overshadowed the 3 chapters on Indigenous history and the sole chapter on Mexican history. Ethnography and auto-ethnography maintained a healthy presence within the research agendas. Nevertheless, the main source of the content is academic journals and media.

The book commences with an introductory chapter by the editors who present a well-rounded overview of the book's underpinning themes – public memory, early American history, and heritage tourism – and effectively demonstrate their relationship in contributing to the historical and current treatment of race in America. Their final observation of the book's case study locations is an important commentary on the general selection of case studies in existing heritage tourism research, and more specifically dark tourism research. Addressing the over-reliance of big branded locations with high profits and strategically designed interpretations, they expose the imbalance in research, the inequality in heritage tourism business, and the ongoing issue with what histories are remembered.

Chapters 1, 3, 5, and 7 discuss unfamiliar heritage locations representative of slavery history. Barry L. Stiefel introduces Sullivan's Island, SC in Chapter 1 as the 'Gateway to Bondage'. By exposing the overshadowing effect of the romanticised interpretation of South Carolina's colonial and antebellum periods on the transatlantic slave trade history, Stiefel brings to light the fact that 40 percent or more of Africans were forcibly brought to North America via Sullivan's Island port (p. 18). Addressing the landscape heritage and preservation, Stiefel reveals the harrowing experience of Africans, which contrasts the modern day beach experience described as idyllic. The omission or sanitising of slavery history at heritage locations is a common theme throughout the book, and one that Cathy Rex addresses in Chapter 3. Through a comparative review of two Jamaican plantation houses – Rose Hall and Greenwood Great House – Rex addresses the use and abuse of their postcolonial realities of slavery, imperialism and Anglo-supremacy (p. 53). Rex provides equal attention to both locations. However, the chapter effectively demonstrates the impact of interpretation on public memory, as the sanitised interpretation seen at Rose Hall clearly influences both guest and local attitudes towards legacies of slavery and racism. This indifference is a consequence of the continued lacking narrative of slavery history in both American education and heritage

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locations, which in Chapter 5, Ella Howard confronts through Louisiana's heritage tourism landscape. While at some heritage locations slavery history is given its own narrative, Howard reveals it is traditionally a romanticised or voyeuristic one. Drawing on the issue of romanticised interpretations of the antebellum era and slavery history, in Chapter 7, Sara Harwood discusses Bulloch Hall – an antebellum house museum in Roswell, Georgia – at its use of staged authenticity. Criticising re-created idealised pasts, Harwood addresses the damage that romanticised nostalgia and sanitised narratives can have on public memory. While each of these chapters can stand alone, they complement each other in their efforts to shed light on how heritage tourism activities that extend colonial expectations and nostalgia contribute to the ongoing issues with public memory and systemic racism. They are valuable for future conversations regarding the issues with interpretation in heritage tourism and its influence on public memory, particularly in locations that promote fun and relaxation on the grounds of which so many have suffered. Moreover, they are each an essential read for heritage practitioners seeking to better balance the sensitive nature of historical content with commercialised packaged experiences.

Chapters 2, 4, and 8 are also thematically complementary, but concerning Indigenous history and interpretation within heritage locations. In Chapter 2, Matthew Duquès and Brian Murphy offer a twofold discussion on the treatment of Indigenous people and their history within heritage tourism. Drawing on the interpretation of Indian burial mounds, the authors contend previous efforts have focused on myths, legends, and material authenticity, which perpetuates a belief that Indigenous people are of a distant past, thereby instilling a sense of Otherness and exacerbating the systemic racism that continues today. This argument is echoed throughout Chapter 4, in which Kathryn Florence addresses the issue of narrative development for Indiana's Feast of the Hunter's Moon – a two-day re-enactment of pioneer and Indigenous interactions. Focusing on the use of re-enactment interpretation, Florence confronts not only the issue of re-writing history in an attempt to make it palatable and/or relatable for audiences, but also stakeholder inclusion pertaining to marginalised voices. Chapter 8 by David A. Tschida extends this stance on narratives in a twofold discussion about the cultural commentary of Indigenous people and the need for voiced participants in future interpretations to ensure inclusive narratives and to appropriately impact on public memory. Together, these chapters present a stark realisation of how Indigenous people and their heritage are performed for tourism consumption without any real inclusion in that interpretation. Consequently, these actions contribute to the Indigenous stereotypes that permeate public memory and thus, the ongoing issues relating to prejudice and racism in America.

Although a stand-alone theme, Chapter 6 by Mark Ward Sr. addresses the interpretation of the Texas Revolution, proving heritage locations generally advocate the 'Don't Mess with Texas' ideology whilst marginalizing the Mexican culture inherently interwoven into the history. Although the lead up to this commentary is stretched, the point made is essential for conversations concerning not only race in America, but also the ongoing debate between those who uphold individualism and those who seek a form of collectivism for the common good. This commentary on collectivism and the common good is echoed by Shevaun E. Watson in the afterword. Watson concludes this book eloquently with an argument that public memory is impactful on current and future issues relating to race and structural inequalities. Drawing on recent political events underpinned by individualistic arguments, Watson makes an impactful observation that to help challenge issues of race and racism, heritage practitioners must

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collectively take responsibility for helping to reshape public understandings of early American history, thereby providing productive opportunities for learning and self-reflection.

Albeit to reshape public memory is a long and arduous process, this book provides well-balanced examples of how such efforts are both possible and stunted through heritage tourism activities. To conclude, this book prompts important questions about societal values and morals, not just within America, but on a global scale, where public memory underpins the issues that continue to challenge humanity.

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