Encounters with Popular Pasts.* Mike Robinson and Helaine Silverman, eds. New York: Springer, 2015. 253 pp.

Reviewed by Malgorzata J. Rymsza-Pawlowska

For many years now, scholars working from different disciplinary perspectives have been grappling with the complicated interplay between history and memory, between “official” (i.e. state-sanctioned) and popular engagements with the past, and (most recently) with the increasing role of commerce in public history and heritage. We often tend to see many of these categories—the popular vs. the official, the sponsored vs. the nonprofit—as binaries, but this is, of course, not always the case.

Encounters with Popular Pasts is a collection of essays that emerges from an ongoing partnership between the University of Illinois-Urbana Champaign and the University of Birmingham, UK, and had its genesis in a workshop that involved scholars from these two institutions and beyond. Its purpose is “to focus discussion and debate upon forms and formats of heritage that are constructed, valued, and consumed outside of the apparatus of state agencies, beyond closed notions of tradition, and that is mobile and rooted in the popular” (2). In a useful introductory essay that explains the contours and terms of this scholarly landscape, the editors, Mike Robinson and Helaine Silverman, also emphasize the global scope of this collection. Subsequent chapters address heritage initiatives around the world: from Silverman’s description of Peru’s efforts to mobilize its “nation brand;” to Sara Jones’ analysis of the commodification of state socialist material culture in Romania, Hungary, and Germany; and Paul Hardin Kapp’s reading of the Mississippi Blues Trail and the Virginia Crooked Road.

These case studies and others survey popular engagements with and between history and heritage. Individual essays consider such diverse topics as Swedish heritage tourism in Rockford, Illinois (Lynne M. Dearborn); the Shrine of St. Padre Pio of Pietrelcina (Michael A. Di Giovine); the use of trees and greenery in public memorialization (Joy Sather-Wagstaff); and a series of parodic travel guides (Richard W. Hallett). What we get is a snapshot of an array of practices and engagements, but one that is generative, and that gives the reader a good introduction to a multifaceted array of objects and approaches. The keywords that inform these essays reflect the complexities of the field: mobility, intersection, process. Also indicative of numerous investments in “heritage” writ-large are the varied disciplinary backgrounds of contributors, scholars working in anthropology, political science, architecture, linguistics, and marketing, among others. Together, these essays model an ongoing conversation that attends to the flows of culture, capital, and memory across many fronts.

While the collection reflects the wide-ranging timbre of inquiry, each of the thirteen essays in *Encounters with Popular Pasts* approaches the questions surrounding the convergences between popular culture and heritage through close analyses of individual examples that then move outward in order to address some of the salient questions introduced by Robinson and Silverman. This works particularly well with examples that are attuned to locality and place: Noah Lenstra’s

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survey of genealogical practice in Urbana, Illinois; Robert Pahre's comparison of the National Park Services' western fort sites; or Anna Woodham's description of the material legacies of the 2012 London Olympics. What is particularly strong in the essays that make up this collection is the focus upon intersections between myriad cultural artifacts and experiences that make up "the popular." For example, in Joy Sperling's "Women, Tourism, and the Visual Narrative of Interwar Tourism in the American Southwest," the author reconstructs the gendered dynamics of southwest tourism using film, photographs, postcards, and popular magazines. Likewise, John Woodrow Presley combines industrial history, oral interviews, and archived guidebooks in his study of the changing meanings of mobile travel as exemplified by the US motel chain Quality Courts. In their essay on Historic Royal Palaces' "Enchanted Palace" exhibit in London, Julian Hartman, Caitlin Carson, Cele Otnes, and Pauline Maclaren make use of a range of evidence including posters and promotional material, visitor reviews, and various aspects of the exhibit itself.

Although not all essays employ ethnographic approaches, I was struck by those that did: heritage studies has often concentrated upon the object and not the subject, and some of these essays provide an important corrective to this tendency, adding particularity, and using individual voices to help emphasize the disparity of meanings that are made across history and memory. Likewise, the careful attention to commerce also makes this collection unique.

These essays express the multiple meanings that are made through popular culture, and weigh carefully the way in which the popular tends to spin through webs of capital. They are thoroughly researched and straightforward, making a special effort to situate individual examples within careful and helpful surveys of secondary literature. This collection, then, while valuable to specialists, is also particularly useful for those looking for an introduction to this particular field, and likewise is well suited for adaptation in undergraduate courses. With its mix of the particular and the general, *Encounters with Popular Pasts* is a welcome addition to the ongoing conversation.

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