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William Faulkner’s well-known statement: “The past is never dead. It’s not even past” captures an idée fixe Southerners have about history, past, and memory. Southerners’ pride in their region and their fetish for explaining its distinctive past found its way into booming heritage tourism. There seems to be a peculiar national interest in the region which is so much unlike the rest of the country. Karen Cox’s volume, Destination Dixie: Tourism & Southern History, offers a thought-provoking, finely wrought collection of scholarly essays to explore tourism in the American South.

Karen Cox, a professor of history at UNC Charlotte, is well versed in Southern history. Before editing the volume under analysis, she had already published two books about the American South: Dixie’s Daughters: The United Daughters of the Confederacy and the Preservation of Confederate Culture (UP of Florida, 2004) delineates the history of an organization which honored the Lost Cause. In her other book, Dreaming of Dixie: How the South Was Created in American Popular Culture (UNC Press, 2011), Cox examines how the nostalgic image of the pastoral American South has been marketed by the agents of popular culture. Cox’s venture into the reception of the South outside the region and Southerners’ embrace of the marketed image seems to signal her interest in Southern heritage tourism, which she takes up in the volume under review.

The breadth of the material covered in the thirteen essays which comprise Destination Dixie will not only usher newcomers into the territory of heritage tourism, but will also satiate a historian’s appetite for original directions of historical research. In her introduction, Cox gives a comprehensive appraisal of the field of heritage tourism in the
American South. She explains that diverse cultural heritage is an asset which can be exhibited for financial gain. Thus, heritage becomes a commodity in a profit-driven market. The American South is strewn with historical places (beginning with George Washington’s Mount Vernon in Virginia and ending with Civil Rights Movement sites). As such, the South participates in the cultural (re)production of historical past and artifacts which are “consumed” by innumerable tourists every year.

After some insight into the socio-historical background behind heritage tourism (the West as a different tourist destination, the emergence of the Northern middle class, and “‘chasing [the] myths’ about a preindustrial America”), Cox mentions one important factor in the tourist industry – what MacCannell calls “staged authenticity.” The demand for historical authenticity and a vicarious experience of the past enables the scripted narratives of the past designed for tourists: “many historic sites have been developed with the intention of providing tourists with an authentic experience – even when that experience is staged or modified to appease local audiences” (4). Next, Cox explains that although there has been a spike in academic interest in Southern tourism since 2000, all the publications present a partial picture of the broader phenomenon of Southern heritage tourism. Given the perpetuation of narrow research models in Southern tourism – there are either publications about the mountain South, urban tourism (especially New Orleans), commemorative tourism as well as publications analyzing tourist destinations connected with slavery– *Destination Dixie* is a unique contribution to the increasingly vibrant fields of cultural history and heritage tourism.

In terms of conceptual order, Karen Cox divides the contributions to *Destination Dixie* into four thematic sections. Essays in the first thematic section –“People & Places”– analyze how the birthplaces of famous individuals are memorialized in an attempt to commemorate the agenda of their communities or Southern society at large. In the first essay in the section –“Persistence of Fiction: One Hundred Years of Tom Sawyer and the Mark Twain Boyhood Home”– Hilary Iris Lowe traces how Hannibal residents were conflating the childhood of Mark Twain and that of his fictional characters to capitalize on popular interest in his writings. Lowe mentions intentional misleading of tourists – the sign “TOM SAWYER'S FENCE” in front of Mark Twain’s boyhood home being the most telling example of superimposition of one ontological level onto another. Lowe also pays attention to the fact that after the 1985 sesquicentennial of Twain’s birth, the Mark Twain Boyhood Home and Museum underwent a full-scale historical renovation which had to change its interpretation of Twain’s life and work. So far Twain’s “anti-racism was overlooked entirely by the rest of Hannibal” (31) to advertise it as “the white-family-friendly site” (32). After the publication of Shelley Fiskin’s groundbreaking book *Was Huck Black?* in 1993, the museum staff and board members of the foundation could no longer ignore the race issue in Twain’s life and fiction. Lowe lucidly analyzes how after the latest museum renovation in 2003 the “interpretation at the boyhood home simultaneously embraces both fiction and biography” (37). Barkley Key devotes his essay “From ‘Lawrence County Negro’ to National Hero: The Commemoration of Jesse Owens in Alabama” to the analysis of the complicated reception and consequent memorialization of the four-gold-medal Olympic hero by his community. Key establishes the connection between three historical trends which made it possible to begin a debate about memorialization of James Cleveland Owens: the exercise craze (taking up distance running), “the evolution of southern politics after the Voting Rights Act of 1965,” and finally the controversies about commemoration of black historical figures, such as Martin
Luther King Jr. After unsuccessful attempts to place the monument of Jesse Owens on the Lawrence County courthouse lawn in 1983, the construction of a museum dedicated to Owens came to fruition in 1996. With the next essay “Saving ‘The Dump’: Race and the Restoration of the Margaret Mitchell House in Atlanta” the book returns to literary tourism. Kathleen Clark presents a short history of preservation of the place where *Gone with the Wind* was penned. Clark brings an exhaustive discussion of how the 1997 opening of the Margaret Mitchell House and Museum was complicated by the specters of the novel’s racial controversy, by Atlanta’s embrace of the New South creed, by two destructive fires, and by the initial opposition of Mitchell’s descendants who believed that “a historical site and museum in her honor ... contradicted the author’s wishes” (72). Clark pins down the ultimate success of presenting the author in the Margaret Mitchell House not as “a racial progressive but rather as a committed racial paternalist” on Mary Rose Taylor’s inspired leadership whose vision allowed to shift “the focus away from the content of Mitchell’s novel and onto her philanthropy and volunteerism” (81). In “‘A Tradition-Conscious Cotton City’: (East) Tupelo, Mississippi, Birthplace of Elvis Presley,” Michael T. Bertrand analyzes how the memory of Elvis is created, consumed and contested via the “authenticity” of his birthplace. Bertrand arrives at an interesting conclusion that the town officials initially sabotaged Presley’s connection to his hometown (e.g. the failure of Elvis Presley Youth Center) before they grasped that showcasing of the created historical memory will bring in tourism dollars. For this reason they were not interested in historicity and authenticity of Presley’s shotgun shanty. The version of the fabricated house tells “a story that appealed to tourists while shedding little light on the structural conditions of the society that bore and beat down thrown-away people like the Presleys” (101).

However, the arrangement of essays in the first part is intriguing. The insights into Jesse Owens’ commemoration presented in Barclay Key’s piece would suitably lead to the next section of the book about race and slavery, while Clark’s piece about restoration of Margaret Mitchell’s house is more thematically akin to Lowe’s essay about Mark Twain’s boyhood home. This editorial drawback is more than amply compensated for by the quality of the essays.

The second part of the book –“Race & Slavery”– begins with Alia Y. Harrison’s essay “‘History as Tourist Bait’: Inventing Somerset Place State Historic Site, 1939-1969,” in which Harrison carries an exhaustive discussion of how the notion of authenticity is informed and influenced by dominant contemporary values. Harrison sees the restoration efforts of both Conservation and Development and Archives and History as a mode of cultural (re)production in the 1960s that has recourse to the romanticized version of the past (from moonlight and magnolia writings). In order to “inculcate regional, state, and national pride” (121), the restorers decided “to erase the slaves from the story of the antebellum era and to sugarcoat the nature and consequences of decades of planter rule” (128). It took one person and a TV miniseries *Roots* to change the version of history offered in Somerset. In a thematically related essay –“‘Is it Okay to Talk about Slaves? Segregating the Past in Historic Charleston,” Ethan J. Kytle and Blain Roberts make a compelling case for the city’s historical segregation which finds its expression in the segregated historical tourism in “America’s Most Historic City.” In a richly documented article, these historians prove that both traditional tour guides (preserving and promoting Charleston’s “official” history, 139) and black heritage guides equally well recourse to historical inaccuracies to offer alternative versions of Charleston’s racial
history. Not surprisingly, traditional tour guides offer a romanticized version of the past that upholds dominant values to tourists. While black heritage guides cater for the demands of history buffs. Both however, try to validate the visitors’ impressions and experiences of authenticity, because “in the end, tourists’ interests ... dictate the narratives provided by tour guides and historical sites in Charleston” (152). Glenn T. Eskew’s essay “Selling the Civil Rights Movement through Black Political Empowerment in Selma, Alabama” examines a town which made “a multimillion-dollar business” out of two ideologically contradictory events: the Battle of Selma in 1865 and the Selma-to-Montgomery March in 1965. With the first reenactment of the battle (in 1986) and opening of the National Voting Rights Museum (in 1992) the town seems to sell simultaneously neo-Confederate and Afrocentric political versions of cultural heritage with no apparent internal conflict. Eskew points to an interesting phenomenon that the town plays to the contradictory expectations of two groups of consumers while turning its weakness into marketable asset: “Selma stood to profit from the negative reputation it had been unable to shake. ... The curious juxtaposition of civil rights memorialization alongside Civil War commemoration enabled Selma to sell its racist past” (172).

The thematic thread connecting the essays gathered in the third part –“War & Remembrance”– is the ability of battlefield tourism to redefine and strengthen regional identity, and to nurture (local) patriotism. Sarah M Goldberger’s “‘Challenging the Interest and Reverence of all Patriotic Americans’: Preservation and the Yorktown National Battlefield” analyzes how the site of one of the greatest patriot victories of the Revolutionary War became Colonial National Historical Park. Even though, as Goldberger suggests, Yorktown could never compete with Colonial Williamsburg in terms of visitor turnout (199), the battlefield serves to sacralize the event which secured American independence. As such the Yorktown Battlefield offers “a numinous experience.” John Walker Davis and Jennifer Lynn Gross contribute an important essay on creation, consumption and contestation of historical memory along the racial lines. Their essay, “Calhoun County, Alabama: Confederate Iron Furnaces and the Remaking of History,” demonstrates that memory and history in Ohatchee, a historically insignificant town, are at odds. The historians persuasively argue for the town’s “historical amnesia” (217) with regards to the race issue. Davis and Gross compellingly demonstrate that inhabitants of Ohatchee engage in rewriting of the past in ways that fit the current racial imperative. J. Vincent Lowery’s “A Monument to Many Souths: Tourists Experience Southern Distinctiveness at Stone Mountain” shows how the Stone Mountain Confederate Monument and park built around it shifted its focus from being “the last bulwark of white supremacy” (224) to marketing other southern historical experiences which balance sectional and national identities” (234). Lowery poignantly demonstrates that Stone Mountain Park capitalizes on both a mode of living of the past and demands of the present times. It caters for the needs of nature seekers (serene scenery), recreational tourists (expansive physical topography), Civil War enthusiasts (pilgrims to the Monument), as well as those afflicted with anxiety about the future (with a Tara-like plantation mansion and Crossroads, a replica of southern town). Apparently, that is why it manages to lure estimated five million annual tourists “in search of other Souths” (239).

Essays in the fourth part –“Landscape & Memory”– aim to explore “the spaces of memory” heavily encoded with cultural meaning which do not belong to the mainstream heritage tourist industry. Anthony J. Stanonis’ essay “Dead but Delightful: Tourism and
Memory in New Orleans Cemeteries” continues to mine the cultural and historical landscapes of the dead from the previous section of the book. Yet, in contrast to the previous section, Stanonis’ essay analyzes tourism which caters for the needs of enthusiasts of a different kind of “thanatourism.” The author seems to be particularly interested in how the racial and ethnical divisions among the living in the Big Easy are transposed onto two cities of the dead: St. Louis No.1 and Metairie Ridge and what they came to represent in local lore. Stanonis arrives at the conclusion that the former necropolis stands for “the French attachment to the past … [which] led to death and decay,” while the later symbolizes “the distance between past deeds and present demands” (256). In “Tourism, Landscape, and History in the Great Smoky Mountains National Park” Richard D. Starnes makes an interesting contribution to the discussion of the scripted landscape created by the Park Service which is at odds with the human history of the most visited park in the National Park system. The preservation and interpretative efforts of the staff erased Native American presence from its official history, while offering a less than authentic representation of southern Appalachians. Even though historical interpretation has been more ethnically inclusive in recent years, the Great Smoky Mountains National Park remains “an artificial creation of space, landscape, and history defined by those charged with its care and those who visit” (280). In the last essay of the book – “Authenticity for Sale: The Everglades, Seminole Indians, and the Construction of a Pay-Per-View Culture”– Andrew K. Frank vividly contextualizes the conflation of the image of “unconquered” Seminole peoples and the untamed Everglades, the wetlands of Florida, in order “to attract and cater to tourists and seasonal residents” (288). Frank wittily points out the ironies of the (in)authenticity of marketed produce: inconsistencies of Seminole Sun Dance Festival or the commercial villages with gator wrestling as their main attraction. Tourists are lured with the promise of advertised hyperreality that would satisfy their demands for ethnographic realism and vicarious pleasure.

Destination Dixie is vigorous collection of essays. The expertise and competence of its contributors guarantees a well-documented research that reveals the complexities of telling and selling of southern history. All these essays show a penchant for an approach to tourist trade which unmasks the processes of (re)production, showcasing and selling of socially accepted truth, (often selective) history, or memory-making. The essays collected in this volume invite a reconsideration of how the concept of (historical) authenticity becomes a commodity, how it is constructed, experienced and employed for financial gain or for a particular agenda, and how Southern history becomes an asset in heritage tourist industry.

NOTES

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