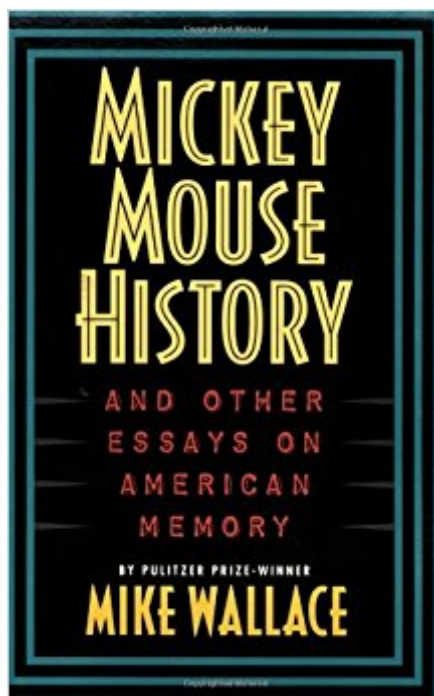




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# Mickey Mouse History And Other Essays On American Memory



## Synopsis

Shows how popularized historical images and narratives deeply influence Americans' understanding of their collective past. This book observes that we are a people who think of ourselves as having shed the past but also tourists who are on a 'heritage binge, ' flocking by the thousands to Ellis Island, Colonial Williamsburg, or the Vietnam Memorial

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

In essays that previously appeared in the *Radical History Review*, Wallace (history, CUNY) explores the purposes of museums, particularly as popular tourist attractions. He is concerned with what the people who started museums originally had in mind to attract poor people and immigrants, for example, in the large urban technology museums and the early, mostly rural reconstructions such as Colonial Williamsburg. In his later chapters, Wallace deals with recent controversies such as the Enola Gay exhibit and Disney's America. He writes from a radical viewpoint in proposing the necessity of bringing people of color into museums; this is usually worn lightly but can become didactic. His style is lively and his musings productive, but the book's ideological focus (and, for the cloth edition, bloated price) make it a purchase only for libraries collecting heavily in curatorship or local history. ?Fritz Alan Buckallew, Univ. of Central Oklahoma Lib., Edmond Copyright 1996 Reed Business Information, Inc.

Mickey Mouse History probes into the struggles over public memory and the trivialization of history

that pervades American culture. The recent imbroglio surrounding the National Air and Space Museum's proposed Enola Gay exhibit was reported as centering on why the U. S. government decided to use the A-bomb against Japan. Mike Wallace scrutinizes the actual development of the exhibit and investigates the ways in which controversy drew in historians, veterans, the media and the general public. Whether his subject is multimillion-dollar theme parks owned by powerful corporations, urban museums, or television docudramas, Wallace shows how depictions of history are shaped by assumptions about which pasts are worth saving, whose stories are worth telling, what gets left, and who decides. Mickey Mouse History is emphatically recommended for anyone with an interest in how history gets written and transmitted to the general populace, the politics of history, and how contemporary events shape historical perceptions -- and how historical perceptions shaped contemporary events! -- Midwest Book Review

i got it for school and found the readings dry and boring. however this class was an elective and i may have felt differently

This book was purchased as a textbook for a course I will be taking this fall. I will not be reading it until then.

Mike Wallace uses the kind of academic writing all scholars should aspire to achieve--lively, free of jargon, and entertaining. His subject, as suggested by the book's title, is history and the debates that surround its depictions. Wallace observes, astutely, that struggles over how to portray history reveals much about ourselves, our beliefs, and our agendas. Wallace repeatedly points out that history is never neutral, a point well worth reinforcing. My particular interest is Disney Studies, and Wallace has a section (actually two essays) devoted to Disney and its use of history. That's the focus of this review, although some of its points can be generalized to the book as a whole. The first essay concentrates on Disney's portrayals of history in its theme parks. It focuses on certain attractions, such as the Hall of Presidents and Carousel of Progress, and EPCOT. Wallace does not shy from criticizing Disney's use of history, referring to it as "Disney Realism." But he also does not simply dismiss the potential in integrating history, entertainment, and the kind of technological wizardry Disney is known for. The essay makes a serious case for reconsidering Disney and its techniques, seeing in Disney's depictions of history both the potential and the pitfalls. In his second essay, Wallace concentrates on the failed Disney's America theme park. The chapter provides background information on the proposed park, including the academic and public debates

surrounding the project. But it's also a call to re-examine Disney's use of history. For Wallace, simply dismissing Disney as (public, corporate) historian is not an effective strategy. To do so ignores the issues Disney's America raised and the potential in combining entertainment and education to portray the past. Wallace's essays on Disney demonstrate several strengths. 1) They look critically at Disney's use of history as well as the (varied) critical reactions to Disney and "Disney history." 2) They encourage envisioning how the portrayals of the past might usefully employ entertainment techniques and strategies ("edutainment" without the pejorative). 3) They reinforce Wallace's call for critical presentations of the past that open history to even further investigation and discussion - a conversation rather than a static script. Generally, the book's approach requires a careful balance that addresses the challenges of depicting history, different approaches and responses, and critical self-consciousness. For the most part, the book succeeds although more on the public's response would have been welcomed. There is one aspect or element I feel is missing in "Mickey Mouse History" - the stronger development of the strategies Wallace supports. How could/should history be presented? That topic could be a book in itself, but it would have been useful to see greater engagement with, and even answers to, the larger questions the essays have raised.

This is a very easy-to-read, jargon-free book about various ways in which the American past has been marketed to the American public. Wallace makes clear that the past should not be sanitized or exaggerated for any purpose, no matter how noble. And he makes clear how dangerous distortions of the past can be, particularly in chapters that discuss Ronald Reagan's or Newt Gingrich's . . . shall we say, passing acquaintance with history as it happened, as opposed to how they wish it had happened. That last sentence makes pretty clear that Wallace has an ideology of his own. He interprets much of American history in terms of the conflict between classes. He does not insist that his interpretation is the only valid interpretation, but the force with which he makes some of his ideological points keeps me from giving this a five star review. That said -- everyone should read this book. It pokes away at some of the myths that keep us from doing what we can to make American society even better. Mickey Mouse History might make you uncomfortable -- but it's a discomfort that has plenty of rewards in understanding.

Aside from a proverbial axe that Mr. Wallace is grinding (especially in the Reagan essay), the text employs a down-to-earth approach, avoiding the typical multi-syllabic lingo that is usually associated with academia. In addition, the broad purpose of his text is applaudable: the deconstruction of the

myths and ideologies of history and the return to historical research and study. However, I can say that while I agree with most of Mr. Wallace's viewpoints, I should also note that he has many fallacies in his case studies, particularly those with Disney. As a former Disney employee, I have to wonder how much time he truly spent researching the inner cogs of the "Mouse Machine," and who he spent time interviewing. As a volunteer museum curator/collections manager, I must agree with other reviewers about Mr. Wallace's critical analysis of museums. "Could," "should," and "would" are great words when theorizing and idealizing about the historical preservation process, but until one actually experiences the real-world struggles of museum revitalization and artifact preservation, I tend not to pay any heed to the noisy cymbals of criticism. Finally, as a graduate student of Popular Culture, and from an academic viewpoint, the lack of detailed citations and direct references in this book raises my concern about the integrity of the research that was done. The bibliography, while impressive in its depth, is not annotated enough to make up for the missing footnotes of works cited.

for someone interested in museum, spaces of exhibition and the like you will find section one and two of this book quite interesting. the first deals with different sorts of museums placing a critical point of view from communitary museums to open air museums, to technology museums. the second part is great dealing with the forms of exhibition at disney. dystory, that special kind of reality that it is at once purified and sanitized and tha is quite part of the essence of thematized environments. parts three and four deal, respectively, with the restoraton movement in america and the politics of culture during regan's era, specially with the enola gay case.

needed the book for class.

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