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## Peer-Reviewed Articles

*Post-modernity and the exceptionalism of the present in dark tourism*

*Legacy of the Lorraine Motel and the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr.*

*Management issues in dark tourism attractions: The case of ghost tours in Edinburgh and Toledo*

*Solemnity and celebration: Dark tourism experiences at Hollywood Forever Cemetery*

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DARK TOURISM SPECIAL ISSUE

Post-modernity and the exceptionalism of the present in dark tourism . . . . . 2  
Rebecca Casbeard and Charles Booth

Legacy of the Lorraine Motel and the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr. . . . . 9  
Steven N. Waller and Wanda M. Costen

Management issues in dark tourism attractions: The case of ghost tours in  
Edinburgh and Toledo . . . . . 14  
Beatriz Rodriguez Garcia

Solemnity and celebration: Dark tourism experiences at Hollywood  
Forever Cemetery . . . . . 20  
Linda Levitt

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# POST-MODERNITY AND THE EXCEPTIONALISM OF THE PRESENT IN DARK TOURISM

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*The paper is a polemical essay concerning approaches to the historical other; a critique of the exceptionalism of the present displayed in some of the contemporary dark tourism literature. We review claims in this literature that dark tourism is both a product of and signifier for post-modernity. We utilize the criteria underpinning these claims to analyze two historical cases of thanatological travel in the first half of the 19th century and conclude that, as both cases self-evidently demonstrate recognizably 'contemporary' aspects of dark tourism, conceiving of the latter as 'post-modern' is historically inaccurate and misguided. The essay closes with a plea for a historically-informed sensitivity in researching the field.*

Ludwig Wittgenstein (as cited in Monk, 1990, p. 536-7):

*Hegel seems to want to say that things that look different are really the same, whereas my interest is in showing that things that look the same are really different.*

This is a polemical essay concerning contemporary approaches to the historical other in the dark tourism literature (Sharpley & Stone, 2009). Our main aim is to subvert and critique what we call the *exceptionalism of the present*. That is, to take issue with presentist arguments about dark tourism that contemporary society is somehow bracketed off from the past, and that contemporary social and cultural conditions can or should therefore be accorded exceptional status. We argue in this paper that claims that dark tourism is a post-modern phenomenon are exceptionalist, presentist, and do not stand up to historical investigation. However, in denying this particularistic claim, we do not wish to endorse Hegel's universalism, which in historical terms implies what we might ironically call a "Flintstones" view of history (Booth & Rowlinson, 2006, p. 3) where historical agents are "just like us."<sup>1</sup> We disagree. Neither, however, are they "nothing like us." The past might be a foreign country, and they might do things differently there, but that does not imply

that the things they do are out of our reach, or that they don't share a "family resemblance" to the way we do things. In particular, although we recognize that significant historical events may give rise to historical discontinuities (typically, the American Civil War and First World War are variously claimed as events of this type) we consider that – as has been pointed out by revisionist historians of both conflicts – continuity is often concealed by discontinuity.

In a sense, claims about post-modernity exemplify the least convincing historical arguments for discontinuity, given that it seems impossible to agree on the nexus point, though we note in passing Charles Jenck's perhaps sardonic suggestion that "the post-modern epoch began on 15 July 1972 at 3.22 p.m. when the Pruitt-Igoe public housing development in St Louis, Missouri...was knocked down, having been recognized as uninhabitable" (as cited in Johnson & Duberley, 2000, p. 92). In any case, we think conceiving of post-modernity as a distinctive historical epoch is wrong, as are arguments that dark tourism is solely a phenomenon of post-modernity, and we explore our counter-argument in the paper.

We are, of course, by no means alone in contesting the claim that dark tourism is exclusively a product of, and signifier for, post-modernity. Lennon and Foley (2000) themselves expressed a limited ambiva-

lence about their conceptualization, as they stated that they do not propose to debate the philosophical implications of their position, and readily admit that their chosen terminology of post-modernity is interchangeable with alternative conceptions such as "late capitalism, or late modernity" (p. 11). Other approaches have also been highly critical, including that of Seaton (2009) in his most recent review of the field. In his attack on post-modern approaches to thanatourism (his preferred term) he argued that such accounts, characterized by the work of Rojek (1993) are "radically unhistorical" (Seaton, 2009, p. 524). He also considered that Lennon and Foley's earlier philosophical position is subverted by the realist turn that their later work (at least Lennon's – e.g., Wight & Lennon, 2007) has taken.

Whilst we accept and endorse the first point, we think the second misses the mark. The problem here is not that Lennon and Foley (1999, 2000) exemplify a *philosophical* commitment to post-modernism (although Rojek clearly does); if so the ambivalence, remarked on above, reveals a singularly weak set of philosophical commitments. Like Wight (2006), Seaton (2009) appears to be conflating epistemological approaches with questions of historical periodization. Rather, our position in this essay is that it is claims regarding the *exceptionalism* of post-modernity (or late capitalism, etc.) which render many assumptions about dark tourism deeply problematic. We concur, in other words, with Seaton (1996, 1999, 2009), when he argued that thanatouristic behavior has existed for centuries. In his 2009 chapter, he points to specific cases (the ancient and medieval Christian cult of death, antiquarianism and the 'discovery' of heritage, and romanticism and thanatourism) which stress the traditional and enduring nature of thanatological travel which, he argued, has been given particular impulse by emergent forces in European social and cultural history over time. In this essay, we limit ourselves to two very different episodes within the last of Seaton's periods of historical thanatourism, the Romantic era. Specifically, we are concerned to show, not only that thanatouristic travel existed in this era (surely a rather well-established point), but also that this phenomenon exhibits precisely the attributes that Lennon & Foley (1999, 2000) used to justify their exceptionalist position. The latter, we

therefore conclude, is philosophically self-refuting and historically inaccurate.

This paper is organized in five sections. Following this introduction we briefly establish, with some inevitable redundancy in the context of this special issue, some key definitional and methodological issues concerning dark tourism and/or thanatourism. Next, we review approaches to the field that contend that dark tourism is an exclusively post-modern phenomenon. Unfairly, we single out the bestselling book by Lennon and Foley (2000) as the paradigm example of this tendency. We then present two historical case studies which, we argue, clearly match Lennon and Foley's criteria and thus render their post-modern argument deeply problematic. We conclude the essay with suggestions for future research orientations and directions in the dark tourism field.

## DARK TOURISM

It is a commonplace argument that sites associated with death, disaster, and atrocity are becoming an increasingly pervasive feature in contemporary heritage tourism, providing a journey "for the tourist who wishes to gaze upon real and recreated death" (Stone, 2006, p. 145). Foley and Lennon (1996) argued that dark tourism is positioned at the crossroads of the recent history of inhumane acts and the representation of these in news and film media, coining the term to "encompass the presentation and consumption (by visitors) of real and commodified death and disaster sites" (p. 198). This pervasiveness has thus been attributed to continuing human curiosity about death and related topics, and to the media and technological advances that, arguably, accelerate processes of public awareness and of the commodification of such topics: "Significant media and technological advances, particularly of late, have exposed societies around the world to the latest news of human conflict, death and suffering like never before" (Best, 2007, p. 30).

Earlier, Rojek (1993) adopting a consciously post-modern approach, defined "black spots" as "the commercial developments of grave sites and sites in which celebrities or large numbers of people have met with sudden and violent death" (p. 136). Subsequently, Rojek (1997) distinguished black spots, which he argued had an enduring historical element, from "sensation sights" [*sic*] in which the tragedy that is the source of attraction is contemporary: "these are places in which violent death has occurred, or where abduction, chase or siege is occurring, or has recently

occurred, and to which sightseers travel both physically and through reverie" (p. 63).

There is considerable literature attending to definitions, shades, and categories of dark tourism, and space precludes more than a general overview in this essay. One conception relevant to our argument is that of thanatourism defined as the travel to a location wholly, or partially, motivated by the "desire for actual or symbolic encounters with death, particularly . . . violent death" (Seaton, 1996, p. 240). Seaton (1996, pp. 240-242) suggested a typology of thanatourism comprising of five categories. The first, a travel to witness public enactments of death, dates back to gladiatorial combat and public executions, and has modern manifestations in the sightseers who rush to disaster scenes. The second category is travel to see sites of mass or individual deaths, after they have occurred, and encompasses a vast amount of dark tourism behavior. A prominent example of this in the literature is the travel to Holocaust death camps (see Ashworth, 2002; Beech, 2000; Charlesworth & Addis, 2002). The third is travel to interment sites of, and memorials to, the dead; this includes visits to graveyards, catacombs, crypts, war memorials, and cenotaphs. A fourth activity is travel to view the material evidence, or symbolic representations of death, in a location unconnected with its occurrence. This includes museums where weapons of death, the clothing of murder victims, and other artifacts are put on display. Lennon and Foley (1999), for example, focused on the permanent exhibition in the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum, Washington, D.C. One final category, the travel for re-enactments or simulation of death, has come to encompass staged battle re-enactments (e.g., Thompson, 2004), and the organization of war-weekends (see, for example, Wallace, 2007).

In terms of the categories proposed by Seaton (1996), the most common research areas relate to the second and third categories. Wight (2006) confirmed that, as a field of academic enquiry, dark tourism research has primarily examined the movement and motivation of visitors to sites of death and disaster. A significant proportion of academic research (e.g., Blackburn, 2000, 2002; Grundlingh, 2004; Henderson, 2000; Iles, 2006; Lunn, 2007; O'Dwyer, 2004; Seaton, 1999; Smith, 1998) focused on tourism associated with war, battlefields, and other aspects of military history. Other areas of investigation common to the field include historical sites associated with former communist, fascist, or apartheid regimes (e.g., Wight &

Lennon, 2007), slavery heritage (e.g., Teye & Timothy, 2004), sites of confinement and punishment (e.g., Blackburn, 2000), and those associated with the deaths of celebrated individuals, such as John F. Kennedy and Diana, Princess of Wales (such as Walter, 2001).

As a result of the predominantly site-specific nature of dark tourism or thanatourism research (Seaton, 1996), current literature consists almost exclusively of case study enquiry. Wight (2006) argued that the methodologies adopted focus chiefly on qualitative inquiry including cumulative case studies (e.g., Lennon & Foley, 2000), discourse analysis (e.g., Siegenthaler, 2002) and questionnaires and mixed methods (e.g., Austin, 2002; Wight & Lennon, 2007). A number of academic papers (e.g., Siegenthaler, 2002) engage in semiotic or hermeneutic analysis. However, Dann and Seaton (2001) commented that no studies within this field of investigation can be described as constructivist. Notwithstanding this claim, others have argued that "[p]hilosophical approaches to academic research in the area of dark tourism have been commodiously post-modern or poststructuralist<sup>2</sup> making prevalent reference to the recreation of authenticity and to the dilemmas faced by attraction managers attempting to bring history closer to the audience through the use of imagery, multi-media and other more engaging interpretation" (Wight, 2006, p. 121).

## THE PROBLEM OF POST-MODERNITY

We believe this insistence on categorizing dark tourism as a phenomenon of post-modernity presents a number of fundamental problems. We argue, first, that there arises a contentious issue of historical periodization. Lennon and Foley (2000, p. 3) argued that "tourist interest in *recent* [our emphasis] death, disaster and atrocity is a growing phenomenon...we intend to signify a fundamental shift in the way in which death, disaster and atrocity are being handled by those who offer associated tourism 'products.'" The insistence on dark tourism as a phenomenon of post-modernity thus arguably rules out the identification of many "dark" sites (e.g., sites associated with the slave trade) as actually dark due to (a) temporal distance from the present, and (b) as we shall see below, the failure of such sites, allegedly, to arouse anxiety and doubt about the modernist project. This narrow definition is therefore only *historical* in the sense that the phenomenon is temporally



located within an epoch characterized as post-modernity. However, as stated above, Seaton defined the related idea of thanatourism, as “travel to a location wholly, or partly, motivated by the desire for actual or symbolic encounters with death” (1999, p. 131). Such encounters are temporally unrestricted, both explicitly and by implication, in Seaton’s (1999) account of tourism and Waterloo, thus implying a more inclusive categorization of dark tourism than that of Lennon and Foley (2000).

Implied within Lennon and Foley’s (2000) project, then, is a sense firstly that dark sites can only be classified as such if the events connected with them occurred within living memory (generously, in the last 100 years). In principle, this would not preclude a visitor to the Gettysburg battlefield in 1875 from being classified as a dark tourist, was periodization the only question at stake. In this sense, (see Figure 1) the period in which dark tourism can occur slides through and over time, with sites receding out of living memory and thus out of darkness in the process.

We would probably accept that this conception holds for sites which, even though they may at the time excite considerable interest, are connected with transient or ephemeral events, or with cultural or political issues that are themselves time-limited. We would, on the other hand, strongly argue that variants of dark tourism that primarily concern *enduring* issues of memory, identity, resistance, and sacrifice (e.g., the Holocaust and sites associated with the attempted genocide of European Jewry, Gallipoli tourism by Australians or New Zealanders, or tourism connected with slavery sites by African Americans) would not satisfy this criterion. Scholars of social memory (e.g., Cubitt, 2007; Misztal, 2003) have, moreover, long since dismissed living memory as a construct of any theoretical or historical significance in the study of collective memory.

However, the second aspect of the Lennon and Foley (2000) thesis is that dark sites enjoy such a status if and only if they give rise to anxieties about the modernist project. This necessarily confines dark tourism to the period after 1870 or so, if quotidian scholarly understandings of modernism are applied in this

case. However, it is far from clear whether Lennon and Foley are in fact referring to *modernism* or to *modernity* (which we would characterize as associated with post-Enlightenment rationality, rise of industrialization, establishment of recognizably modern forms of liberal democracy, etc., thus extending the potential historical starting point for dark tourism a century or so further back). Their terminology suggests – though their historicization denies – the latter to be their target.

Lennon and Foley’s (2000) further insistence on the role of global communication technology in facilitating dark tourism negates this uncertainty, as they make it clear that they consider the rise of this technology (connected to the development of radio/wireless telegraphy and associated technologies) to be a twentieth century phenomenon. They suggested interdependence between communications technologies and dark tourism: “global communications technologies are inherent in both the events which are associated with a dark tourism product and are present in the representation of the events for visitors at the site itself” (Lennon & Foley, 2000, p. 16). They go on to say “it has been argued that the sinking of the *Titanic* was the first, real, global event, due to its impact upon news and media worldwide” (Lennon & Foley, 2000, p. 17).<sup>3</sup>

Previously, Foley and Lennon (1996) argued that dark or tragic tourism:

is an intrinsic part of the post-modern world. The simulation of experiences, the critical importance of reproduction and duplication and the centrality of media and technology are characteristically present in any examination of these locations. Thus the contemporary context for dark tourism is that of post-modernism. (p. 199)

In a later article, they repeated that “[d]ark tourism is consistent with accounts of post-modernity” (Lennon & Foley, 1999, p. 47).<sup>4</sup> We find this conception deeply problematic.

## HISTORICAL CASE STUDIES

We outline below two brief historical case studies which we consider exemplify recognizably – if we accept Lennon and

Foley’s (2000) definition – post-modern dark tourism occurring within the early nineteenth century; both of which gave rise to widespread feelings of anxiety about humankind’s relation to the natural and social world at the time, and both of which were facilitated and disseminated by relatively novel contemporary technological developments. The first is the case of the Willey House, which we believe has not received any attention in the dark tourism literature hitherto. The second is tourism connected with the Battle of Waterloo, which was the focus of Seaton’s 1999 paper. Although there is some overlap, our concerns are different to those of Seaton (1999), and we hope that we are presenting material new to the readers of this paper. We stress that neither account is particularly detailed or original, and we confine ourselves to the use of one main secondary source in each case. The accounts are therefore intended to be suggestive rather than definitive.

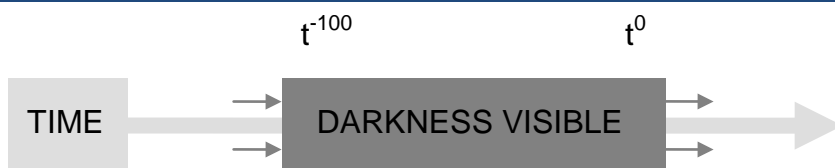
### THE WILLEY HOUSE

On Monday night, 28 August 1826, the entire Samuel Willey household – Mr. and Mrs. Willey, five young children, and two hired men – were killed by an avalanche in Crawford Notch in New Hampshire’s White Mountains. Triggered by a fierce thunderstorm, the slide started near the top of Mount Willey (4,300 feet), carved a channel fifty feet deep, and obliterated the road at the bottom of the valley. Incredibly, the Willey’s house was spared: a boulder had divided the landslide directly behind the house so that it passed by on either side. But for some reason the family had gone outside and was buried under the stream of earth, stones and uprooted trees. An open bible, a burnt candle end, and unmade beds were later found as evidence of the family’s sudden departure. No survivors witnessed the disaster. (Purchase, 1999, p. 1)<sup>5</sup>

As Purchase (1999) made clear in his extended account, the Willey House tragedy caught the imagination of the nation, and both immediately and over time engendered an outpouring of journalistic, literary, and scientific comment. Reference was made to it in a variety of widely circulating cultural forms including poetry, painting, memoirs, and travel writing.

More significantly, in the context of this paper, the tragedy and responses to it encapsulated a profound cultural shift in American attitudes towards landscape, and, by extension, with nature itself. Purchase (1999) argued that, prior to the

FIGURE 1. Dark Tourism, Time, and Memory



early nineteenth century, the pastoral ideal in America was rooted in a Jeffersonian notion of stewardship. Here, humans realized their relationship with nature by managing it. By extension, land was either manageable (for human benefit), or it was literally worthless. The farmer was the productive citizen whose efforts underpinned the wealth of the nation. Where land was not productive in this sense, it was a non-place, a nowhere, with neither cultural nor economic value. Prior to the Willey tragedy, the White Mountains (and by extension, all America's wild landscapes), were nowhere. The Willey disaster changed this. As travelers, intellectuals and commentators struggled to make sense of the seemingly arbitrary and remorseless nature of the tragedy, they borrowed from European notions of the romantic sublime in re-defining the relation between nature and humankind. Instead of being nature's master, humans instead were subject to nature's vagaries and whims, as described in Thomas Cole's 1828 diary:

the sight of that deserted dwelling standing in a little patch of green in the midst of that dread wilderness of desolation...though the slides rushed on either side they avoided it as though it had been a sacred place. We walked among the rocks and felt as though we were but worms, insignificant and feeble, for as worms a falling rock would crush us. We looked up at the pinnacle above and measured ourselves and found ourselves as nothing. (as cited in Purchase, 1999, p. 75)

Whereas cultural value could be ascribed to this new sense of *sublimation*, and the resulting reflexive apprehension of our relationship to a vast and indifferent universe, the economic value of this landscape could only readily be realized through tourism. However, in the early years of the nineteenth century, the Willey site was not readily accessible to tourists. The artist Thomas Cole (above) was among early visitors who managed to make their way to the house, and he later founded his artistic reputation on paintings of the White Mountains. Similarly, Moses and Mary Jane Thomas visited the house in 1831, finding it "shut against vandals, 'relic hunters, with yankee blades' who liked to hack off pieces of the furniture to keep as souvenirs" (Purchase, 1999, p. 28). Likewise, referring to a visit a few years later:

We went into the bed rooms where the slumbers of the ill-fated inmates had been broken on that terrible night by the voice of the slide, and into the kitchen where they had lived, with the

desolate hearth around which they had gathered and heard the evening storms howling along the Notch. The walls and plastering were scrawled over with names. We wrote...our own linked together on the wall with a fragment of coal. (Nathaniel Rogers, *Miscellaneous Writings*, pub. 1849, quoted in Purchase, 1999, p. 39)

Generally, large scale tourism to Crawford Notch had to wait for new technologies of tourism and travel infrastructure (e.g., all-weather roads, regular coach – and later, rail – services, and hotels) to facilitate access. This occurred from the 1850s, and the Willey House (itself subsequently converted into a hotel annex) and the White Mountains remained a popular tourist destination, publicized through the work of the emerging Hudson River School of fine artists,<sup>6</sup> until the house burnt down in a fire at the turn of the twentieth century. Today, the locality is a featured Historical Site in Crawford Notch State Park.

#### THE BATTLE OF WATERLOO

On the top of the ridge in front of the British position...we traced a long line of tremendous graves, or rather pits, into which hundreds of dead had been thrown...The effluvia which arose from them was horrible...deadly was the smell that in many places pervaded the field. From one of them the scanty clods of earth which had covered it had in one place fallen, and the skeleton of a human face was visible. I turned from the spot in indescribable horror, and with a sensation of deadly faintness which I could scarcely overcome. (Charlotte Eaton, *Waterloo Days: The Narrative of an Englishwoman Resident at Brussels in June, 1815*, cited in Shaw, 2002, p. 75)

The Romantic sublime also played an important part in shaping attitudes and practices of tourism relating to the battle site of Waterloo (1815).<sup>7</sup> Although tourists were unimpressed by the "dreary" natural scenery (see Wordsworth's sonnet, to follow), the scale of the battle, the number of casualties, and its role in ending the once seemingly-invincible Bonapartist Empire, engendered similar feelings of dread, horror, and sublimation as did glimpses of wild and merciless nature. That it was combined, at least among British tourists, with a sense of national victory, meant that responses to the battlefield site were often<sup>8</sup> extremely complex, involving the plurivocal expression of visual and emotional reactions, often contradictory, as in this case where triumphalism and irony, horror and elegy

vie with the perception of the bleakness and mundanity of the physical setting:

*A WINGED Goddess – clothed in vesture wrought / Of rainbow colours; One whose port was bold, / Whose overburthened hand could scarcely hold / The glittering crowns and garlands which it brought – / Hovered in air above the far-famed Spot. / She vanished; leaving prospect blank and cold / Of wind-swept corn that wide around us rolled / In dreary billows; wood, and meagre cot, / And monuments that soon must disappear: / Yet a dread local recompence we found; / While glory seemed betrayed, while patriot-zeal / Sank in our hearts, we felt as men 'should' feel / With such vast hoards of hidden carnage near, / And horror breathing from the silent ground!* (Wordsworth, 1820, lines 1-14)

In a similar sense to that in which contemporary dark tourists' motivation is argued to be connected to such tourists confronting the prospects of their own death (Stone & Sharpley, 2008), some romantic commentators extended this focus on human finitude to that of their own culture itself. Of course, the end of Bonapartism engendered considerable public and private reflection on the impermanence of glory and of achievement. Shelley's sonnet *Ozymandias*, published shortly after Waterloo, is certainly a reflection on the outcome of the battle; it is also worth quoting, however, Shelley's friend Horace Smith's sonnet, ostensibly on the same ancient object found in the sand. The annihilation contemplated here is not the historical figure of Ozymandias, or that of the author/tourist, but of entire modern civilization:<sup>9</sup>

*In Egypt's sandy silence, all alone, / Stands a gigantic Leg, which far off throws / The only shadow that the Desert knows: / "I am great OZYMANDIAS," saith the stone, / "The King of Kings; this mighty City shows / The wonders of my hand." The City's gone, / Nought but the Leg remaining to disclose / The site of this forgotten Babylon. / We wonder, and some Hunter may express / Wonder like ours, when thro' the wilderness / Where London stood, holding the Wolf in chace, / He meets some fragments huge, and stops to guess / What powerful but unrecorded race / Once dwelt in that annihilated place.* (Smith, 1818, lines 1-14)

Needless to say, the poems of Wordsworth, Shelley, and Smith were not the only written responses to Waterloo.

Mirroring the battlefield itself, where the books and letters of the dead were “spread over the field like the rubbish of a stationer’s shop” (contemporary account cited in Shaw, 2002, p. 67), the battle engendered public and private accounts (and artistic representations) of every description and of varying degrees of factual reliability and literary or artistic worth.<sup>10</sup> With the exception of the poems quoted above, we will confine ourselves to two aspects of “tourism at a distance” related to the battle, and mediated by artifactual and representational technology.

Travel to the battlefield, albeit within the financial reach of some of the “shopkeeping classes” and above, was clearly not an option for reasons of time, money, or convenience for all those who wished to be a Waterloo tourist. Nevertheless, some aspects of dark tourist consumption could be experienced in London and elsewhere. The first, minor, example is that of Napoleonic memorabilia. Following the battle, interested Londoners could view Napoleon’s clothes (at 1 St. James Street), his horse (at 97 Pall Mall) or his coach. The hyperbolic advertising copy for the latter exhibition, at Bullock’s Museum in Piccadilly, echoes messages of sublimity common to many responses to the battle and is thus worth quoting here:

in approaching this carriage, an immediate connection is formed, with the greatest events and persons, that the world ever beheld....The diversity of thought that must arise, and the energy of those feelings that must be involved in regarding this object, surpass those which could be excited by almost any other on earth. (Bullock, 1816, p. 9)

Cruikshank’s caricature of the exhibit indicates that the coach was of considerable interest to the fashionable London public. A cartoon, dated 1816 and entitled *A swarm of English bees hiving in the Imperial carriage*, shows dozens of spectators crowding into, clambering over, and surrounding the coach, tussling with each other in the crush. Several people were trampled underfoot, and a variety of “inappropriate” responses to the artifact – including an amorous couple canoodling inside the coach – are illustrated. A disconsolate Frenchman is shown weeping before a bust of Napoleon in the background.

More central to our case are the great Waterloo panoramas, enormous battle paintings exhibited in the round at huge purpose-built venues. The first was the *Battle of Waterloo* panorama exhibited first at Barker’s Leicester Square Rotunda

from March 1816 to May 1818 (with subsequent displays in 1820-21, 1842-43 and 1852-53. Barker was said to have retired on its profits). In a curious prefiguration of Baudrillard’s (1994) notion of the hyper-real, the *Times* wrote of panoramas, that “there are aspects...which in great panoramas...are conveyed to the mind with a completeness and truthfulness not always to be gained from a visit to the scene itself” (as cited in Shaw, 2002, p. 81). A more ambitious, revolving, effort was displayed in 1820 by the entrepreneur Peter Marshall:

Together with a full military band, state-of-the-art lighting, pyrotechnics and other technological effects, the audience were treated to a revolving display of the main incidents of the battle. As the band played *See the conquering hero*, the charge against the French and the appearance of Wellington were met with a rousing chorus of cheers. (Shaw, 2002, p. 84)

Thus we find the *virtual representation* of the battle of Waterloo some 75 years before the invention of commercial cinematography, with sound and special effects, and in color.

## CONCLUDING REFLECTIONS

In a sense, these selective accounts stand for themselves.<sup>11</sup> We consider that both cases amply illustrate that dark tourism of a recognizably contemporary nature existed during the early nineteenth century. Moreover, we would argue that technological developments (in the case of tourism infrastructures in the Willey house), and representational media (in the case of Waterloo) significantly facilitated the consumption of dark tourism products in these cases. In both cases, the events associated with each site were very widely publicized in journalistic, literary, artistic, and (in some cases) scientific media, as well as in the case of the Waterloo panoramas, where they actually formed part of the tourist experience. Finally, there can be no doubt that the two events aroused considerable anxieties, doubts, and reflections concerning the relation of humankind to nature and to the universe, connected as they were to contemporary notions of romantic sublimation. In these respects the cases, we argue, fully meet the criteria for post-modern dark tourism as specified by Lennon and Foley (2000). This leaves us with the provisional conclusion that the categorization of dark tourism as a phenomenon of post-modernity is incoherent and unhistorical. The reasons for this post-modern periodization ascribed to dark tourism are beyond the scope of this paper, and would

perhaps be an interesting subject of study and further research. We would only make a plea, as the field continues to develop depth, breadth, and theoretical sophistication (e.g., Sharpley & Stone, 2009), for a historically-informed sensitivity in our research that recognizes both familiarity and strangeness in the historical other, and which does not seek to exemplify the spurious doctrine of an exceptionalism of the present.

## NOTES

1. In the sense that Fred and Wilma Flintstone drive a car, go to the supermarket, etc.
2. We note that Wight’s point here seemingly refers to, and arguably conflates, *post-modernism* as an epistemological position as well as *post-modernity* as a historical epoch.
3. The technologies they specifically mention (2000, p. 8) in this respect are photography, telegraphy, sound and cinematic recording, radio and television, and communication satellites. Although they cannot but concede to the historical record that some of these technologies existed prior to 1912 (their “relatively arbitrarily” selected tipping point) they insist that the time-space compression they connect with post-modernity is associated with a “congruence” of at least some of these inventions”. They go on to claim that visual and verbal media reports (for example) from earlier conflicts using some of these technologies were “relatively divorced from the day-to-day lives of all but those directly affected”. Our case studies suggest historically documented contra-indications to this argument.
4. The fourth aspect of Lennon and Foley’s thesis is that post-modern dark tourist sites combine educative and commercial aspects which accept “that visitation...is an opportunity to develop a tourism product” (2000, p. 11). We do not explicitly engage with this aspect of their project in the paper, although we should note that other conceptions of dark tourism might not concur with according definitive status to this conjunction. In the two (non post-modern) cases we discuss in the paper this aspect is unquestionably present, if “education” is broadly conceived, as it is by Lennon and Foley themselves.
5. The source for this section is Purchase (1999), except where otherwise identified.



6. For a useful source on the relationship between art and tourism in the New Hampshire White Mountains, the reader is directed to Garvin (2006) and the accompanying website <http://www.nhhistory.org/cv/crawford.htm>. Needless to say, we consider the use of both cultural media and tourism infrastructural technology in facilitating longer term popular tourism to the Willey House to be highly significant to our argument.
7. The main source for this section is Shaw (2002) unless otherwise stated.
8. But not always. Contemporary sources noted "a group [of sightseers] who called themselves 'the Brentford Lads,' members of the lower professional or shopkeeping class...Two of the lads picked a finger each from a Frenchman's half-buried hand, to be taken home pickled in spirits" (Shaw, 2002, p. 67).
9. This notion of the tourist contemplating ruins, and in the process reflecting on the finitude of past, present, and future civilizations, was a common enough Romantic trope as to receive satirical comment almost contemporaneously (see for example, Thomas Love Peacock's 1829 novel *The Misfortunes of Elphin* (as cited in Dingley 2000, p. 19), where a traveller's "soliloquy of philosophical pathos on the vicissitudes of empire and the mutability of all sublunary things" is accompanied by "an occasional peep at his watch" so as not to miss dinner). By 1865 *Punch* magazine, referring to Macaulay's reference to "some traveller from New Zealand [who] shall, in the midst of a vast solitude, take his stand on a broken arch of London Bridge to sketch the ruin of St Paul's", declared that Macaulay's New Zealander headed the list of a number of clichés that were henceforth to be outlawed as "used up, exhausted, threadbare, stale and hackneyed" (Skilton, 2004, p. 1). See also Skilton, (2007) for a more general account of 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century literature on anticipated ruins.
10. In passing, we would certainly not agree with the assertion that these accounts were "relatively divorced from the day-to-day lives of all but those directly affected" (Lennon & Foley, 2000, p. 8).
11. It may be, of course, that the Romantic period is a special case. Against the background of a series of pan-European, if not world wars, it would be surprising if concerns about war, mortality, and societal finitude were not central in shaping cultural

phenomena (e.g., Shaw, 2000). The need for further historical research in the dark tourism field, to extend, qualify, or limit Seaton's (1996, 1999, 2009) lists of examples of historical instantiations of thanatological travel, for example, is pressing.

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## LEGACY OF THE LORRAINE MOTEL AND THE ASSASSINATION OF MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.

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*On April 4, 1968, Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. was assassinated by James Earl Ray in Memphis, Tennessee, while standing on the balcony of the Lorraine Motel. This tragic event cast a bright light globally on the civil rights movement in the United States. The Lorraine Motel was later transformed into the National Civil Rights Museum (NCRM). This case study examines the NCRM as a dark tourism site and its impact on visitors. Content analysis was conducted on 70 web postings about visits to the NCRM obtained from TripAdvisor. Four key themes were identified based on the analysis of the data: remembering the assassination of Dr. King; immersion into the "aura" of death at the Lorraine Motel site; the conveyance of history related to the civil rights movement in the U.S.; and the transformative power of the NCRM and its related exhibits. Key findings included: (a) The exhibits featured at the NCRM play an important role in conveying the history of civil rights movement to U.S. born and international visitors; (b) visitors experience the "aura of death" when visiting the more graphic exhibits displayed by the NCRM; and (c) for both U.S. and international tourists, a visit to the NCRM, and the assassination site of Dr. King specifically, is both transformative and commemorative. The NCRM has evolved into an attractive destination for African American families, as well as regional and foreign tourists.*

Henry David Thoreau (1854) once wrote, "For every thousand hacking at the leaves of evil, there is one striking at the root" (p. 72). Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. was one who struck blows at the root of evil. During the civil rights movement of the 1960s, King's America was a bastion of racial and social inequality that prompted protests across the nation. On April 4, 1968, at 6:01 p.m., a nation and the world became paralyzed for a brief moment in time. A single shot rang out that extinguished the life of one of the world's greatest peacemakers as he stood on the balcony of the Lorraine Motel in Memphis, Tennessee. Within seconds, the once vibrant proclaimer of peace and social justice lay sprawled on the balcony's floor with a gaping wound covering a large portion of his jaw and neck. One of the eye witnesses to the assassination was Reverend Jesse Jackson, a close associate of King's and stalwart in the civil rights movement. Jackson reportedly observed "He had just bent over. I reckon if he had been standing up he would not have been hit in the face" (British Broadcasting Company, n.d.).

History is comprised of significant events, places, and leaders that influenced and shaped our future. The legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s assassination and the Lorraine Motel are events and places that remain earmarked in U.S. and world history. Two important tourism-related questions surface in relation to the conversion of the Lorraine Motel into the National Civil Rights Museum (NCRM): (a) How does visiting the site of Dr. King's assassination impact tourists; and (b) Do the exhibits and assassination site help to educate visitors about the civil rights movement in the United States?

This case study examines the NCRM as a dark tourism site and the impact it has on visitors. The present case study is important because there is little scholarship that examines historical sites associated with the civil rights movement as dark tourism attractions. This paper also contributes to the growing corpus of dark tourism literature by highlighting the experiences of visitors after encountering one of the most significant death-related sites of the civil rights movement in the United States. Equally important is the

global appeal of the NCRM as a "site of conscience." Moreover, the NCRM is seldom discussed in tourism-related journals like other assassination sites such as The Ford Theatre or Dallas Book Repository. Each of these sites (including the NCRM) involved the assassination of important public figures and changed the culture, history, and politics of the United States. As such, it is essential to explore the NCRM and the Lorraine Motel as dark tourism sites.

### DEATH-RELATED SITES AS A TOURISM DRIVER

Death, grief, and suffering are all potential drivers of tourism. The death and suffering that dark tourism sites record are not occurrences that stem from diseases such as cancer, but in many instances, surround extraordinary events (Walter, 2009, p. 52). Our natural curiosity about death, destruction, and the locations of these occurrences frequently catalyze the desire to travel (Vowell, 2005). The balcony outside of room 306 at the Lorraine Motel is one such site (Figure 1). Traveling to and experiencing places associated with death is not a new phenomenon. People have long been drawn towards sites, attractions, or events linked in one way or another with death, suffering, violence, or disaster (Stone, 2005). Furthermore, Stone and Sharpley (2008) suggested that death-related tourism has become more widespread, with sites such as the Dallas School Book Repository becoming destination attractions.

Foley and Lennon (1996) defined dark tourism as "the presentation and consumption of real and commodified death and disaster sites" (p. 198). The authors further claimed that the boundaries between the message (educational and/or political) and its commercialization as tourist products have become increasingly blurred (Foley & Lennon, 1996). Later, Lennon and Foley (2000) further posited that "dark tourism is a chronologically modern (twentieth century onwards), primarily Western phenomenon based upon purposeful visits due to 'serendipity, the itinerary of tour companies or the merely curious who happen to be in the vicinity'" (p. 23). Moreover, Reader (2003) suggested that the general lack of attention paid in academic research to understanding the motivations of tourists

FIGURE 1. Site of Martin Luther King, Jr.'s Assassination



who venture to dark tourism destinations is a significant oversight.

Stone (2006) found that some dark tourism sites now offer a *darker* product, and subsequently a darker experience. As such, researchers are now better able to refine the conceptual framework in which to locate various types of dark suppliers. Viewing these dark suppliers across a spectrum implies that there are “shades of darkness,” which reflect the perceived levels of macabreness in this type of tourism (Stone, 2006, p. 149). The degree of darkness at a tourism site is measured by several factors. One factor is whether the location has an educational or commercial appeal. For example, in the case of the NCRM, the museum has an educational mission but also markets itself as a tourism enterprise in that the civil rights-related exhibits and amenities are consumed for a fee. Another factor is the degree to which the location has political influence (Stone, 2006, p. 149). In light of the fact that NCRM was born in part out of the civil rights movement and an urban redevelopment initiative designed to revitalize the Southside of Memphis, the museum and its location remain politically charged. See Armada (1998) for a discussion of the historical, emotional, and symbolic meanings of the NCRM.

## METHODS

Case study methodology is used to examine the NCRM as a dark tourism site.

Case studies provide an opportunity for the examination of a single social phenomenon and allow researchers to develop in-depth descriptions of organizations (Babbie, 2007; Riddick & Russell, 2008; Yin, 2003). To illustrate the impact of visiting the NCRM as a dark tourism site, information was gathered from TripAdvisor, a travel website that allows consumers to rate and comment on tourist destinations, hotels, restaurants, and the like. Comments about the NCRM were posted predominately by non-local visitors, particularly by visitors from outside of the state of Tennessee. Unfortunately, there are not enough data on the website to present an accurate demographic profile of the people who posted comments about the NCRM.

Content analysis was used to study the comments because of its “appropriateness for case studies and usefulness in analyzing small samples of text” (Krippendorff, 2004, p. 42). The researchers extracted 70 posts about visits to the NCRM and analyzed them using QDA Miner-WordStat qualitative analysis software. The constant comparison method was employed to determine similarities and differences among the postings (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Creswell, 2003). Subsequent to examination, similar comments were grouped together into four emergent themes: remembering the assassination of Dr. King; immersion into the “aura of death” at the Lorraine Motel; conveyance of history

related to the civil rights movement in the U.S.; and the transformative power of the NCRM and its related exhibits.

## FINDINGS

### REMEMBERING THE ASSASSINATION OF DR. KING

One common theme that emerged when examining NCRM visitor comments was that visiting the NCRM forced the visitor to recall the assassination of Dr. King. The assassination date and location were prominent in the visitors’ memories. A visitor from California expressed this sentiment (Walker, 2008):

I'm of an age to be part of the civil rights movement graduating from high school in '63. And it broke my heart to hear Dr. King had been murdered, what a loss. I guess we are like other animals in being curious [about] where it happened. This tribute will be a lasting reminder that it happened at a motel.

Comments suggested that visiting the NCRM, experiencing the exhibits, and physically seeing the site of the Lorraine Motel helps visitors recall the impact and horror of Dr. King's assassination.

### IMMERSION INTO THE AURA OF DEATH AT THE LORRAINE MOTEL

It is not uncommon for visitors to experience the atmosphere of death when visiting the more graphic exhibits displayed by the NCRM and then viewing the balcony in front of room 306 at the Lorraine Motel. The presence of the blood stain on the balcony directly in front of the room, and the photographs of a mortally wounded Martin Luther King, Jr. surrounded by friends and aides create a sense of awe. In concert, the photographs of King's lifeless body, the stained concrete on the balcony, the commemorative wreath placed on the railing of the balcony, and the backdrop of Mulberry Street create a powerful sense of death for the visitor. A regional tourist from Georgia provided insight into the personal emotional response one might experience by visiting the assassination site with the following comment (suscrowe, 2009):

In the tour, you can actually see up close the real hotel room where MLK and his friends were staying. You can also see the exact spot where he was shot; it felt like you were standing right on the balcony where he died. It brought tears to my eyes. The tour also includes the building across the street which was the boarding house where James Earl Ray shot MLK from.



FIGURE 2. Room 306 at the Lorraine Hotel



The atmosphere created by the maintenance of the room where Dr. King lodged contributes to the dark aspect of the Lorraine Motel (Figure 2). This section of the Museum stirs the emotions and evokes empathetic responses from visitors.

#### CONVEYANCE OF HISTORY RELATED TO THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT

The exhibits featured at the NCRM play an important role in conveying the history of the civil rights movement to all visitors regardless of their race, ethnicity, or nationality. For some who encounter this history through the museum's media presentations, the information is new and alarming, but for others it serves as a staunch reminder of the racial divide the United States experienced during the decades of the 1950s and 60s. A visitor from the St. Louis area conveyed this message (Illinoisview, 2009):

Too many people do not understand their country's history, and this museum will edify anyone on the civil rights movement not [sic] matter how knowledgeable they think they are on the topic. Plan on spending at least two hours reading the copious documents and studying the telling photos. Then move across the street to the second part of the museum, which is devoted to the assassination and subsequent investigation.

A comment from a Canadian visitor illustrates how the NCRM enlightens

international visitors about the civil rights struggle in the United States during the 1950s and 1960s (ELMG, 2009):

The copy of the "Montgomery bus" was powerful and not tasteless in my opinion. It helped me to try and wrap my head a little bit around the experience in the segregated south. My thanks for the efforts to preserve this historic site. It's fantastic that you can walk up to it and it looks the same (I'm assuming) as it did in the 1960's. Once I swallowed all the lumps in my throat I could walk through the front door.

This theme was reiterated by another international visitor from the United Kingdom (traumatizer, 2007):

I am a british [sic] male and visited the Civil Rights museum in apr 2007. I'd like to think I had an idea of how black people were treated in the southern USA, but this museum still shocks and surprises, and reminds you just how unfair things were just when you think you are becoming desensitised to it all. The story of Emmett Till from Chicago did that for me, more than anything else in the museum. I would echo that having the museum at the site of MLK's slaying makes it all the more potent.

Visitors, from both the United States and abroad, found the exhibits both provocative and educational. Many exited the NCRM experience with a heightened awareness of the civil rights movement as

a dark period in U.S. history.

#### TRANSFORMATIVE POWER OF THE NCRM

The NCRM, with its exhibits and the Lorraine Motel, is a powerful tool for transformation. Through the experience of the NCRM, visitors' awareness of the civil rights movement and the struggle of African Americans during the 1950s and 1960s are heightened. Additionally, many visitors are moved by the great influence of Dr. King in helping to heal a nation's race relations wounds and the penultimate sacrifice he made on behalf of civil and human rights. For example, a native Californian attests to the transformative power of the exhibits and the Lorraine Motel site by stating (jrileymail, 2009):

Take time to read the displays in order to get a true sense of black Americans' struggle. At the end, you are inside the Lorraine Motel room where King spent his last night, standing feet from the spot where he died, seeing what was his last sight on earth. You will not leave unaffected by your visit.

A Canadian patron's comments also confirm how the experience serves to transform individuals. The 27-year old woman stated (ShanMcG, 2006):

Like I said, I never expected much from my visit to the National Civil Rights museum but I emerged a different person. I was slightly stunned and quite mournful for several days and I still think about the museum often. Everyone should visit this museum, or at least visit the memorial outside. Visiting places like Graceland and Beale Street are exciting but this museum will have a meaningful impact on you forever.

Finally, a visitor from Wisconsin indicated that the property's realism contributed to the NCRM's transformative power (DAR1234, 2006): "After viewing both buildings and then walking outside and seeing the hotel, the cars as they were and the wreath marking the spot where it happened, you can't help but being moved." For both U.S. and international tourists, a visit to the NCRM, and the assassination site of Dr. King specifically, is both transformative and commemorative.

#### DISCUSSION

The primary purpose of this study was to examine the impact of the National Civil Rights Museum (NCRM) at the Lorraine Motel, a dark tourism site, on visitors. The Lorraine Motel in many ways was very ordinary until the tragic death of Dr. King. The motel's practice of accommodating

African American travelers when the majority of hotels and motels in Memphis and the south would not lodge persons of color, positions the location as a relevant piece of civil rights history. However, the event at 6:01 p.m. on April 4, 1968, solidified the motel's place in U.S. history. This event also created a dark tourism site.

The findings suggest that visiting the NCRM compels tourists to not only remember the tragic death of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., but to also think about the struggles of African Americans during the civil rights movement. Regardless of age, NCRM visitors appear to experience a deep sense of loss and grief when confronted with the physical remnants of the assassination. Visitor comments also suggest that tourists are fascinated by the opportunity to actually see where this civil rights hero was slain. Perhaps even more insightful is the notion that the NCRM exhibits and the Lorraine Motel seem to encourage these tourists to assume the role of eye witnesses. Many of the comments indicate that the visitors' deep emotional responses to the NCRM were tied to their sense of feeling like they had actually been there when Dr. King was shot.

The second purpose of this study was to determine whether the NCRM helps educate visitors about the civil rights movement in the United States. Based upon the data available at the time this study was conducted, the answer is a resounding yes. Visitor comments suggest that visitors to the NCRM will increase their knowledge of the civil rights movement. International tourists, in particular, noted how much they learned or deepened their knowledge of the plight of African Americans during the civil rights era.

It is clear that the NCRM is a dark tourism site because it presents and allows the consumption of the site where Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. was assassinated. Perhaps even more importantly, the NCRM took on political significance when it was accredited in 2009 as a Site of Conscience by the International Coalition of Sites of Conscience. In order to be a Site of Conscience a museum must "interpret history through historic sites; engage in programs that stimulate dialog on pressing social issues; promote humanitarian and democratic values as a primary function; and share opportunities for public involvement in issues raised at the site" (International Coalition of Sites of Conscience, 2010). Finally, preservation of the evidence of the assassination (e.g. the actual blood stain) and the layout of the NCRM (e.g. the physical and visual

proximity to the specific assassination location) indicate that this is a site that both targets and markets to humans' curiosity about death (Vowel, 2005).

Foley and Lennon (1996) suggested that the boundary between delivering an educational message and commercializing death has become blurred. This phenomenon is evident in the NCRM visitor comments. Some tourists viewed the NCRM as a museum filled with exhibits and artifacts that served to educate visitors on the evolution of civil rights in the United States. Others, however, viewed the NCRM as a place to witness the death of an important figure in American history. Regardless of one's background, it is apparent from the visitor comments that one becomes more fascinated with and drawn to the artifacts associated with Dr. King's assassination as one moves through the museum.

This lure to explore Dr. King's assassination more in-depth illustrates Stone's (2006) assertion that dark tourism sites are now offering an even darker product. Eight years after its opening in 1991, the NCRM purchased the properties facing the Lorraine Motel (National Civil Rights Museum, n.d.). These properties include the rooming house where James Earl Ray, the convicted assassin, lived in 1968. Now visitors not only have a view of the exact location where Dr. King was assassinated, but they can also experience Ray's perspective.

## LIMITATIONS & FUTURE RESEARCH

While this exploratory study provides new insight into how a dark tourism site impacts visitors, it still has limitations. One of the limitations of this research effort was the lack of data about the NCRM as a destination attraction. The lack of economic impact, visitor demographics, and visitor motivation data forced the use of a more inductive approach. In order to gain some insight into the NCRM's impact on visitors, the researchers had to rely on written narrative accounts of visitors to the Lorraine Motel, the evolution of the NCRM, and Internet-based information to tell a powerful story. While these sources allow a diverse group of visitors to share their experiences, a more structured research design is ideal.

A more comprehensive study is needed in order to more fully appreciate how the NCRM operates as a dark tourism site. First, it is important to explore visitor motivations for choosing the NCRM as a destination attraction, as well as to document tourists' demographics,

including who visits the NCRM and why. Second, understanding employee motivations for choosing to work at the NCRM could help develop recruitment practices for dark tourism sites. Finally, a major contribution of a more comprehensive study would be to explore the influence of the NCRM on the public memory of Dr. King's assassination and the civil rights movement.

## CONCLUSION

Dark tourism sites are not just locations where visitors can experience death; they also educate. In the case of the NCRM, visitors not only relive a tragic moment in U.S. history, but they also feel the deep emotional angst of having lost a civil rights hero. This case study illustrates the impact a dark tourism site can have on visitors and what role these sites can play in encouraging citizens to become more involved in social justice issues.

## NOTE

Photographs used with permission from the National Civil Rights Museum for the sole purpose of publication in a scholarly journal.

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# MANAGEMENT ISSUES IN DARK TOURISM ATTRACTIONS: THE CASE OF GHOST TOURS IN EDINBURGH AND TOLEDO

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This article explores the interpretative, managerial, and ethical issues present in dark tourism, namely ghost tours. Accordingly, a comparative case study of ghost tours in Edinburgh, Scotland, and Toledo, Spain, was conducted utilizing key informant interviews and participant observation. Because the academic literature on ghost tours is rather limited, this study presents unique findings in relation to managerial perspectives on issues of ethics, interpretation, and operations in ghost tours as a dark tourism activity. It also provides observational evidence on these aspects by means of participant observation in ghost tours. The study concludes with a note to possible future studies.

Dark tourism can be described as visitation to places that are related to death, war, the macabre, or the paranormal. Because of the sensitive nature of dark tourism, turning sites into tourist attractions poses challenges to practitioners. This article explores the main issues of interpretation, ethics, and management of dark tourism sites in general and how these issues are addressed in a specific type of dark tourism, i.e. ghost tours. Ghost tours were chosen for this study because ghosts provide a metaphysical interpretation of real human tragedy and thus turn the experience of visitation of dark tourism sites into a "thrilling" experience. As Thompson (2010) stated, ghost tours "hinge on humanity's near-universal fascination with the spirit world" (p. 79). Tour operators may sideline the real history and human tragedy behind these sites in favor of thrilling tour experiences. It is important to explore how managers of these sites interpret dark tourism, in general, and their sites, in particular, to understand how they strike a balance between ethics and running a commercially viable operation. These issues will be explored in a comparative case study of ghost tours in Edinburgh, Scotland, and Toledo, Spain.

## DARK AND GHOST TOURISM LITERATURE

Foley and Lennon (1997) were among the earliest contributors to the dark

tourism literature. Even though their work was significant in identifying specific issues related to dark tourism sites, they focused mainly on concentration camps and battlefields leaving aside many other seemingly lighter entertainment activities, such as ghost tours. More recent studies provide a thorough discussion of creation, marketing, and management of traditional and new forms of dark tourism sites. For instance, Stone (2009a) explored re-created dungeons, namely the London Dungeon Experience (also in Edinburgh and York), as a lighter form of dark tourism experience or attraction. These lighter experiences include ghost tours and are part of what Stone (2006) called dark fun factories, "which predominately have an entertainment focus and commercial ethic, and which presents real or fictional death and macabre events" (p. 152).

Ghost tourism refers mainly to the desire to encounter ghosts, interest in the supernatural, and visitation of places associated with the spirit world such as cemeteries, haunted houses, castles, and historic towns. Blain, Hallam, and Cornish (2007) defined ghost tourism as "engagement with places and other worlds...that range from the thrills of a ghost walk or a haunted house, to potentially transformative experiences sought through journeying to pertinent graves" (p. 133). They added that these activities may necessitate "commodification, rationalisation, conservation and sacredness, and

contested interpretations of place and experience" (p. 133). Seeman (2002) agreed that ghost tours are commoditized and argued that the proliferation of ghost tours has led to homogenization regardless of the location. He asserted that all ghost tours "follow a fairly standard format ...where the guide tells you ghost stories while taking you on a short stroll" (para. 9). Although Curran (1978) concluded that "tours are people, and just as no two people are exactly alike, neither are two tours" (p. 5), as a commercial product, all ghost tours and their narrative and physical performances are designed and performed mainly by the providers. In that respect, the whole paranormal experience is predictable and repetitive. This is what makes it commercially viable and manageable.

From the consumer perspective, participants engage in ghost tours with varying motivations. When people take a ghost tour, they know there is a possibility that they might be frightened and even disturbed by the tour performance; however, it is the anticipation and then perhaps the realization of these feelings that makes the experience all the more enjoyable. Some might take ghost tours in an attempt to find an answer to the question of whether ghosts exist or to force an encounter with ghosts (see Guiley, 2008; Radford, 2007). It is from that will to encounter ghosts that the "tours build a performance to entertain their audiences" (Thompson, 2008, p. 1). Ghost tour narratives are used to create an expectation of paranormal activity. This narrative can be presented in a fun or serious manner; however, the use of humor extends the entertainment aspect of the tour (Thompson, 2010) and is part of its main appeal. In line with what Campbell (1987) argued about greater pleasure potential from negative feelings, ghost tours are consumed as a form of entertainment for the ultimate goal of having a pleasurable experience that engages with visitors' negative emotions, namely fear. However, the fact that dark tourism sites deal with human emotions raises questions about not only the ethicality of exploiting them for commercial purposes but also how they are managed and presented to visitors. This is an issue that is likely to be present in every dark tourism site including ghost tours.

## GHOST TOURS IN EDINBURGH AND TOLEDO

Inglis and Holmes (2003) explored the role of ghosts in Scottish tourism as a marketing tool. They found that this type of tourism has been firmly established in the country and has increased the appeal of Scotland as a tourist destination for the paranormal. In comparison, despite a rich history of the macabre, Spain's image as a tourist destination has been dominated by sea, sun, and sand (Bernier, 2006). Yet, there is a burgeoning ghost tourism scene in Toledo. The present study thus compares Edinburgh in Scotland, an established destination for ghost tourism, with Toledo in Spain, an emergent destination for this type of tourism. The purpose is to gain a cross-national perspective of ghost tours, understand how managers rationalize their commercial activity in terms of ethics, and identify specific management issues related to ghost tours.

Both Edinburgh and Toledo have a deep-rooted history of human tragedy. For instance, Edinburgh is considered one of the most haunted cities in the United Kingdom due to mass deaths and murders in the city over the centuries. According to Wade (2008, para. 7), "death is hard to avoid in Edinburgh. Over 1000 years of lively history will do that for a place, and wherever you turn there is another violent story waiting to be told." Inglis and Holmes (2003) observed that Edinburgh offers a wide range of ghost tours and walks. Toledo is also an important city in terms of dark tourism attractions in Spain. Bausá (2009) highlighted a few important sites including Table of Solomon, Holy Grail Trail, Templars, underground caves, and preserved mummies. Even though Toledo is one of a small number of cities in Spain, its burgeoning ghost tour industry offers tours on a regular basis.

## METHODOLOGY

Most dark tourism research has been qualitative in nature (Wight, 2006) with little emphasis given to the meanings managers and visitors co-construct and attribute to dark tourism attractions. It is precisely those meanings that create and shape our experiences of them. Such a social constructivist approach aims to focus on the process of meaning construction by entering "the everyday social world [of relevant actors] in order to grasp these socially constructed meanings" (Blaikie, 2000, p. 114). In line with this methodological approach, this study conducts an exploratory and qualitative case study of

two ghost tour companies, one in Edinburgh and one in Toledo. The study employs different data collection methods such as participant observation and semi-structured interviews to ensure consistency of findings achieved by different methods (Denzin, 2006, pp. 471-2). Because the ghost tours in both cities are mostly delivered by companies for commercial purposes, two companies were approached to explore the following questions:

- What are the main features of each tour in terms of the tour content, delivery methods, number of tourists, and their profiles?
- How are the historical events that took place in each ghost tour site interpreted?
- How do managers handle the ethical issues surrounding their interpretation?
- What are the main management issues of creating and running a ghost tour?

In order to maintain the anonymity of the companies contacted, the ghost tour company in Edinburgh will be referred to as Company E, while the company in Toledo will be named Company T. In the same manner, the manager of the first company will be Manager E (Edinburgh) and the latter, Manager T (Toledo). Company E has 10 permanent and several other part-time staff, while Company T is run and managed by two permanent employees that also act as tour guides.

## KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEWS AND PARTICIPANT OBSERVATION

Semi-structured interviews were carried out with tour managers in Edinburgh on July 16, 2009, and Toledo on June 19, 2009. Both interviews were digitally recorded and later transcribed. The interviews were conducted in the native language of each country, being Spanish in Toledo and English in Edinburgh. The researcher, who is fluent in both languages, later translated the transcript of the interview with Manager T into English. The interviews lasted approximately one hour each and the questions asked covered the following topics: company's objectives and profile; tourists' profile; tour content and narratives used; devising the tour route; and ethical issues.

Although the number of interviews may seem rather limited, both companies have a limited number of staff and executive decisions about content and delivery of tours are (co)made by the managers interviewed. After the interviews, a tour was taken on the same day

as a participant observer in both locations. Here photographs and notes were taken, as well as a video footage of the ghost tour in Toledo. The participation in the tours was important to collect data about the performance given by the guides during the tour. Being a participant observant differed from non-participant one because the researcher could assume a role in the situation (tourist) and get an insider view of events, and even contribute to the tour performance. The emergent themes in the interviews as raised by the informants were then compared with the observations made during the tours. This comparison helped find discrepancies between the official and/or managerial views on interpretation and ethics, and how these rationalizations were actually played out during the tours by the guides.

## RESULTS

Several themes emerged from the semi-structured interviews and the participant observation of the ghost tours. These themes have been divided into four categories: structure of ghost tours, ethical issues, interpretation and narratives, and management issues. Both Edinburgh and Toledo seem to be very similar in most of the themes even though there are some differences in the tours themselves.

### STRUCTURE OF GHOST TOURS

Both companies have a similar way of structuring the tours in terms of the number of visitors in each tour and the timing. The maximum number of people taken on a tour varies from 20 to 30 approximately. Manager E stated that it is important for a ghost tour to keep the numbers to this level as taking more visitors would jeopardize the quality of the tour. This was similarly reflected by Manager T who suggested that the quality, atmosphere, and even the tour guide performance would be affected if the tour audience was very large. Both companies suffer from seasonality, like any other tourism business, and so there would be times where they have only two to eight people in the tour. Manager E said, "It is harder to tell stories and frighten visitors when the tour is small [as the experience becomes] quite personal." When this happens, the tour guide has to make it clear that the tour is not going to be the same experience as when the group is bigger. According to Manager E, if the tour has 10 people or more then the guide can do a normal performance and try to frighten visitors with the stories.

Thompson (2010) claimed that ghost tours traditionally follow a guided walking

route, in which ghost or esoteric stories are told while stopping at important landmarks. This was also the case in Edinburgh and Toledo. Both tours have the same main structure, in which a group of guided people will walk around the city, stopping only at important places at which time a ghost story will be told. These tours are done in the evening when it is dark. This factor is very important for the ghost tour as it creates an atmosphere of fear straight away. According to Manager E, "It has to be dark to do the tour in order to create that scary feeling." Despite this, some tours have to be done early during the summer to accommodate larger numbers of visitors. All tours are done at night in Toledo; however, private tours may be conducted at earlier times.

The final walking tour route both in Edinburgh and Toledo is decided according to the stories that are told. Once the stories take form, then the landmarks in the walking route are decided, choosing, whenever possible, the original places where actual events in the story took place. When this is not possible, the managers look for a landmark that would approximate the actual scenery in the original story. Despite both tours being quite similar in the way they are devised and created, the walking distances differ quite significantly. Both tours are around two hours in length; however, the walking route in Edinburgh is much shorter than that of Toledo. Company E does a ghost tour only around the old town of Edinburgh, specifically around the Royal Mile and some side streets. In Toledo, the route is much longer, which means that a significant part of the tour is spent walking from one site to another. Consequently, it was observed that in Toledo some visitors were quite exhausted at the end of the tour.

The visitation to "spooky" places is an essential component of both tours, such as the Edinburgh vaults or the underground caves in Toledo. Company E has the sole rights for the commercial use of the vaults and so it is one of the key attractions to take their tours. On the other hand, Company T has to share the use of the underground landmarks with other competitors in the city. Regarding this issue Manager T stated, "The main difference between us and the other companies is that we tell a real story, based on real facts inside the caves. We do not invent spooky stories just to scare people."

In relation to the reasons why visitors might take a ghost tour, both managers stated that most take a ghost tour when they have extra time and once they have visited other important landmarks in the

city. The main audiences identified by both managers are adults, day visitors, or short-break vacationers. However, Manager T further explained that they distinguish between three types of visitors that they encounter in almost every tour. These are "curious," who are somewhat interested in the occult and the paranormal; "bored," who just want to do something in their free time; and "passionate," who are really interested in the paranormal. Due to this varying audience interest in the ghost tours and the fact that ghost tours are not a main attraction compared to other more established landmarks in the city, such as the Edinburgh Castle or the Toledo Cathedral, the tour companies have to put in a lot of effort to market their businesses.

In Edinburgh, all the ghost tour companies have some sort of advertising concentrated on the Royal Mile. This comprises a permanent display board on which tourists can read about various ghost tours offered by the different ghost tour companies, including Company E. Moreover, Company E has permanent employees that walk up and down the Royal Mile distributing flyers to people passing by. This person is casually dressed unlike the employees of other ghost tour companies who do the marketing as such in a costume (for example dressed as The Reaper or a witch). Company T relies mostly on flyers distributed by a casually dressed employee and word-of-mouth. This is because the Toledo City Council does not allow the placement of permanent advertisements on the street. However, the city council promotes Company T in the council's tourism office by handing the company's flyers to tourists when asked for a ghost tour. Despite the limitations of offline advertisement, both managers pointed to the great importance of internet marketing to promote ghost tours. Both companies have web pages where potential visitors can read about the different ghost tours, about the company itself, and the context in which they are set (Toledo or Edinburgh). In this respect, both managers stated that there had been an increase in visitor numbers in recent years in line with the advent of internet advertising, and this also improved their business.

#### ETHICAL ISSUES

Dealing with the past is a laborious task as sufferings of real people are involved and not everyone accepts that stories about atrocities should be told to tourists just for the sake of entertainment. Charging money for telling horrible and macabre stories is also believed to be wrong by many, as grief is transformed

into a commodity just to please the increasing number of tourists. However, when the managers were asked what they thought of such points of view, they both had the opinion that it was an exaggeration and it was taking ghost tours totally out of context. They were of the view that ghost tours are mostly an activity for entertainment purposes, and to some extent an educational one, and, as any other service commodity, money was charged for this service.

Both managers insisted that the tours were kept on the "ethical side" by basing their stories and tours on facts. They argued that nothing in their tour stories were invented or changed in order to please the tourist, perhaps only embellished slightly. Manager T stated that "doing a tour in which real stories are told, however horrible they might seem, should not offend anyone" and that "talking about our past proves to be a necessity. There is no point in denying history." He also boasted about the endorsement by the Toledo City Council in the form of flyer distribution and explained "this is because we are the only ones that do not come up with random invented stories but base them entirely on facts."

The importance of telling the history, no matter how macabre it is, was similarly reflected by Manager E, who suggested that the stories told were part of the city's past and that "there is no harm in talking about them, even though they might be horrible." Such ethical issues were further addressed by trying to create a ghost tour that would not only entertain the visitors, but also perhaps educate them about the city's past and "hopefully [avoid] anything like that happening in our time." Despite all these justifications presented by the managers, the narratives and interpretation of events might also affect the ethicality of the tour.

#### INTERPRETATION AND NARRATIVES

Interpretation of dark tourism sites creates different dilemmas for managers mainly because of the persistent tension between creating entertainment but at the same time educating visitors. As discussed previously, both managers claimed that they ensure the veracity of stories and that in no moment during the tour the suffering of the people is diminished. Both managers confirmed that the stories and places behind the tours were thoroughly researched by historians and experts in the field. In the case of Edinburgh, Manager E briefly explained that all the stories told in the tours were researched and verified by Scottish historians but she gave no specific names. In Toledo, the stories behind the tours were researched



by the managers who described themselves as “passionate experts and researchers” of the city’s history and its esoteric past. Both managers were of the view that the quality of the tours depended mainly on this research and the further interpretation of events. For this reason, both tours used a historical approach for the interpretation of events.

The tours differed in style and tone in that the Toledo tour was solemn, while that in Edinburgh was almost comical. A probable reason for this difference is that children were allowed in the tours in Edinburgh, while in Toledo they were aimed only at adults. This does not mean that adults taking the tour in Toledo did not want to be entertained, but this was delivered in a more complex and sophisticated way compared with entertaining children. The entertainment factor was delivered by addressing the curiosity of adult visitors about paranormal events. According to Manager T, the stories told during the tour would also be hard to comprehend by children and younger visitors because of the complexity of the language used (e.g., necromancy). He added that although the main purpose of the tour was not to frighten anyone, it was possible that some children might also find the places and the stories scary. On the other hand, Company E guides used simple language easy to understand by all audiences. This was done intentionally as their tours were mainly aimed at families and included re-enactments of events that created an opportunity for kids to get involved in the action and learn history in a fun way.

Each tour has a different approach as to how the guide has to address the audience and in which tone. In Edinburgh the tour is almost a comedy performance by the guide, a tour in which the audience will be laughing most of the time and having a good time listening to the gore stories being told in amusing ways. Related to amusement, Company E does not offer any technological devices or paranormal evidence to consolidate the stories told during the tour. In contrast, Toledo delivers a humorless type of entertainment, a walking tour in which the audience listens to the guides almost in an academic way. At one point in the tour, Manager T (who was also the guide) played a tape recording he claimed to be psychophony. According to Manager T, psychophonies are voices or sounds from ghosts or spirits that can only be heard after they have been recorded by an electronic device. After explaining this to the group, the guide played the tape on a portable stereo. The group was kept at this particular place for a long time while

the guide explained how the recording was done, what equipment was used, the specific dates of recording and so on. It should be noted that Manager T stated that the tours “do not try to educate people; they just want them to have a good time and learn something about the esoteric side of the city.” Although everybody seemed very interested in the technical explanation, after a while it was observed that the audience seemed to be losing interest in the less “scary” stories and started looking around for some other form of entertainment (i.e. talking to each other or looking at people passing by instead of the guides). The loss of interest can also be attributed to the way stories were delivered. The guides in Toledo told several stories in the same site. Whereas in the tour in Edinburgh, the audience was constantly moved on the tour route while a new story was introduced.

Another key component of the narratives used in each tour is the way they involve the audience with the stories and the places visited. The tour in Edinburgh involves the audience in a constant manner during the whole tour, by engaging with the audience during every story told and in every landmark. People are taken to pose and act as they were being tortured while the rest of the tour cheers for it. In Toledo, the audience is rarely addressed as part of the story and it seems they are treated as mere listeners. During the observed tour, the audience was addressed directly two or three times by the guides to ask questions as in a lecture format (e.g., Does anyone know why this is named Devil’s Alley?).

#### MANAGEMENT ISSUES

One of the management issues raised in both locations was competition and differentiation in the ghost tour market. There are multiple companies offering ghost tours or walking tours, even for free, in both cities. As a strategy to deal with competition, both managers mentioned their uniqueness in the market by stressing their intellectual investment in different aspects of the tours. Manager E stated that their company is different because they have a unique approach to storytelling from that of their competitors. This uniqueness comes from the training of their guides and that their overall walking route is more extensive than any other ghost tour around the city. Manager T argued that what makes their tours special are the “aesthetics, the contents of the tours, and the general approach of the company towards the paranormal theme in the city of Toledo.”

As ghost tours are an open air walk and mostly done in the usually crowded

city center, it is sometimes possible for other people to sneak into the tour without paying. When this happens, the guide will try to persuade the “intruders” to leave by staring at them in a subtle manner, and if necessary a quiet comment will be made such as “excuse me...this is a private tour.” The fact that the walk is done outdoors brings other concerns for the managers, such as the weather. In Edinburgh and Toledo, it was hard not to bump into other ghost tours from other companies that stopped at the same spots. During the observation, it was clear that the guide in Company E tried to pull the group away to find a more secluded spot to continue the talk. In Toledo the same problem was observed during the tour and also mentioned by the manager during the interview. In both companies, the guides of the tours are given flexibility to change the route of the tour slightly as they go along to avoid such situations.

#### DISCUSSION

The main aim of ghost tours and of the interpretation of dark sites relies on the idea of entertainment. Ashworth (2004) and Stone (2006) believed that the key factor of dark tourism is the entertainment factor. Thompson (2010) argued that the main entertainment of a ghost tour is precisely the fact that it incorporates humor into it. The use of humor was very evident in Edinburgh’s ghost tours but not in Toledo. Both managers referred several times that the overall aim of the ghost tour was to allow visitors to have a good time. However, the notion of entertainment or having a good time as understood by the managers had direct effect on the way the tours were delivered. As was evident in the Toledo tour and contrary to what Manager T claimed, the entertainment was provided with a more educative approach than that of the Edinburgh tour. Therefore, it is not plausible to expect uniformity in the understanding of entertainment from a managerial perspective when it comes to ghost tours.

In terms of ethical issues in ghost tours, it seems that there are two strands of concern in the literature, namely paying for entertainment in places of death and macabre, and the translation of human suffering into entertainment. In relation to the first concern, there are different normative views in the literature about the ethics of people paying for visiting places of death and the macabre (see Ashworth, 2004, and Lennon & Foley, 2000, for opposing views and Stone, 2009b, and Wight, 2009, for a general discussion on the morality and ethics of dark tourism

from the perspectives of consumers, managers, and stakeholders). The managers in this study believed their ghost tours are services just like any other tourist activity for entertainment. Furthermore, they viewed their tours as an indirect way of preserving local history and a way to prevent such sufferings taking place again. These points seem to be offered as a way of justifying and legitimizing ghost tours. Nevertheless, the actual delivery of the tours, which is shaped by concerns about entertainment or education, may contradict such normative aims. This was observed in the Edinburgh tour's overreliance on gore to entertain and in the Toledo tour's focus on the paranormal to educate people about Toledo's history.

With regard to the managerial issues in interpretation of the past and creating a tour from it, the findings somehow contradict previous arguments such as that of Lennon and Foley (2000) that correct interpretation will determine not only the success of a dark site as a tourist activity, but also will contribute to diminishing possible unethical practices. In the ghost tours studied, as well as in most dark tourism activities, it is not certain whether all the stakeholders are taken into consideration while researching and devising the final product. Moreover, there is no mechanism in place that would make sure that interpretations made by each tour company are "correct" and ethical. Despite these uncertainties, both companies have been in business successfully for a considerable time and both managers pointed to the recent surge in visitor numbers. In terms of the entertainment factor in ghost tours, both managers prioritized entertainment over more normative aims such as educating the visitors. Nevertheless, they resorted to those normative aims when it came to legitimizing or justifying the seemingly unethical practices such as "bad" interpretation or charging a fee for the tours that might be seen as thriving on human suffering.

Dealing with the past is complicated, but dealing with people is harder as far as the managers are concerned. The managers are more concerned with entertaining the customers and catering a product for all tastes than they are with delivering the *right* history. Although the managers claimed that the interpretation used in the ghost tours was based on historical facts, meaning that the events and people are real, some scholars such as Uzzell (1989) believe that in some dark tourism sites, facts might have been changed in order to give visitors a lighter version of human suffering. This study observed that in the case of Edinburgh,

stories of human tragedy are used for entertainment and engaging the audience in amusing ways whereas in Toledo, they were presented in quite graphical ways without any concern for audience amusement. Despite this difference, from the perspective of a participant, it seems like both tours aim to ameliorate the human suffering and gore by linking them to the paranormal. It can thus be concluded that the very nature of talking about ghosts or paranormal trivializes the facts about the horrible pasts of both cities despite any wish on the part of managers to the contrary.

## LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE STUDIES

In terms of generalizability, it is important to mention that since the study explored interpretations about history and ethics in two specific sites, it is hard to generalize the research findings to other contexts as each dark tourism site may have its historical, administrative, and marketing peculiarities. However, it can be argued that commercial concerns shape the interpretations of tour managers and override concerns about ethics or historical accuracy. As this has been observed in both Edinburgh and Toledo, one can transfer this specific conclusion about the nature of interpretation with stronger confidence to other dark tourism sites. The overall generalizability of this study however should be explored in future studies of ghost tours. With regards to reliability or whether the study can be repeated with the same research design and research results, qualitative studies cannot be subject to credibility tests (Bryman, 2004) such as reliability designed for quantitative studies (Adams, Khan, Raeside, & White, 2007).

It can be said that further regulation of or changes in perceptions about dark tourism and ghost tours in the future may affect the findings of a similar study conducted in the same sites and with the same companies. However, this does not compromise the overall quality of this study since it aims to explore the issues of interpretation and ethical concerns from the managers' perspectives which are time specific and open to change.

Future studies about ghost tours or other forms of dark tourism attractions can use similar methodology and data collection techniques as those used in the present study in order to explore more about the actual practices of ghost tours and contribute to the current knowledge about them. Additionally, topics such as how cultural differences shape the management styles of a tour or how the

organizational structure of ghost tour companies affect the tours' overall success can be explored by in-depth case studies and comparative methods. It will also be of benefit for the industry and academic literature if future researchers look at the management issues, but from visitors' perspective as this aspect has yet to be fully explored. Yet, the current state of literature on ghost tours in Edinburgh and Toledo and other locales may prevent establishment of meaningful conclusions about the topic. Hence, this justifies the need for further exploratory studies on the topic and specific sites.

## CONCLUSION

This paper has contributed to the existing literature on dark tourism by exploring ghost tours as sites for dark tourism and demonstrating the main issues faced by the managers of such sites in two exemplary cases. The main issue with ghost tours seems to be the tension between education and entertainment as the historical material on which these tours are based is mainly related to human suffering. From the interviews with the managers and the observations of two tours it can be concluded that the ghost tours appear to be somewhat educational, but at the end of the day their final purpose is entertainment as a commercial activity. The managerial challenge of such tours comes mainly from ethical, interpretative, and operational considerations. This study has also demonstrated that the problems encountered by ghost tour managers in Edinburgh and Toledo are similar regardless of nationality, historical period, or time in business. This may imply that in the long run, burgeoning ghost tourism sites such as Toledo will resemble more established and commercially successful sites like Edinburgh in terms of managerial challenges. As demonstrated, this is mainly due to the nature of ghost tours or dark tourism, which thrives on the trivialization of gore and human suffering via their commoditization. However, more research on ghost tours is necessary to further explore and explain the above mentioned aspects and challenges of ghost tours.

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## SOLEMNITY AND CELEBRATION: DARK TOURISM EXPERIENCES AT HOLLYWOOD FOREVER CEMETERY

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As the final resting place of celebrities and notable public figures, Hollywood Forever Cemetery in Los Angeles has long served as a tourist attraction and a site of public memory. Unique among dark tourism sites, Hollywood Forever brings together the gravity of death and a celebratory sense of remembrance. This is made possible in part by the cemetery's history as a tourist attraction and by its use as a site of festivals, film screenings, and other events. Tourists are encouraged to use the cemetery as social space, transforming relationships to the site. Many visitors respond warmly to these events, yet the cemetery faces disapproval from those who find these practices irreverent and lacking respect for the dead.

In a scene from the documentary *The Young and the Dead* (Baumel, Berman, & Pulcini, 2000), Bill Obrock, executive vice president of Hollywood Forever cemetery in Los Angeles, sits on the steps outside of a mausoleum. Obrock appears in profile with a brightly lit corridor of mausoleum crypts behind him. He straps on a pair of rollerblades and heads off to skate through the cemetery. Obrock's voiceover provides a foundational perspective for Hollywood Forever not only as an operating cemetery, but also as a tourist attraction: "We love this place. It's a world treasure. You step on the grounds and you can feel it. It is seething with something magical." While the cemetery can provide a peaceful respite from the hectic pace of the city, Obrock noted that it has another dimension:

*Los Angeles Magazine* declares us one of the 101 sexiest places in L.A. And a lot of people do find cemeteries to be a little bit spooky, but it's also an extremely romantic place. It's an extremely exciting and mysterious place, and it's a very sexy place. (Baumel, Berman, & Pulcini, 2000)

That a cemetery is considered an exciting and romantic location in the popular discourse immediately raises questions about the use of this space beyond typical expectations of mourning and paying tribute to loved ones interred there. While Obrock shared these perceptions in the 2000 documentary, public perceptions of this cemetery as a site with multiple meanings and uses clearly precede his relationship with it.

Obrock relocated to Los Angeles to join his childhood friend, Tyler Cassity, in the operation and management of the cemetery. Cassity and his family business, Forever Enterprises, are behind the transformation of the former Hollywood Memorial Park, which he bought out of bankruptcy in 1998. Cassity wanted not only to restore the cemetery but to transform the death care industry: he espouses the idea of celebrating life rather than mourning death and encourages this shift in cultural perspectives by inviting the use of the cemetery as leisure space (Bernhard, 1998; Friend, 2005). The cemetery has long invited visitors to pay their respects to the actors, directors, and Hollywood celebrities interred on the grounds, whether through organized tours and events or as casual guests. As a dark tourism site, Hollywood Forever draws on its history, mystique, and relationship to celebrity culture. The celebrity cemetery attracts visitors who are able to experience a sense of proximity to the famous, if only by virtue of that star's mortal remains.

Both historically and with regard to contemporary practices, Hollywood Forever is somewhat unique among dark tourism sites because the gravity of death is intermingled with a celebratory sense of remembrance. This is made possible in part by the cemetery's history as a tourist attraction and by its use as a site of celebration, festivals, film screenings, and other events. The contradictory perspectives on dark tourism at Hollywood Forever bear examination. Many find the use of the cemetery as social space disrespectful, maintaining the perspective

that as a burial site, a cemetery is sacred space that should be respected, while others embrace a shifting attitude toward death as a fundamental part of life that should be neither feared nor shunned (e.g., Lynch, 2000; Nadle, 2006; Matson, 2000; Palmer, 1993). The perceived morbidity of the gravesite pilgrimage for fans of stars buried at Hollywood Forever is tempered by the cemetery's social events and by the increasing popularity of dark tourism focused on sites of celebrity death and disaster (Laderman, 2003; Sturken, 2007). This essay considers the questions raised by contested uses of these sites as dark tourism grows as a commercial phenomenon worldwide.

Heritage tourism is inherently interpretive, and the perspectives presented to visitors are not necessarily aligned with those who have a personal, vested interest in a site. This analysis draws on Marita Sturken's (2007) notion of "tourists of history," which she defined as:

a particular mode through which the American public is encouraged to experience itself as the subject of history through consumerism, media images, souvenirs, popular culture, and museum and architectural reenactments, a form of tourism that has as its goal a cathartic 'experience' of history. (p. 9)

Although Sturken's work deals primarily with sites of significant tragedy like the Oklahoma City bombing and September 11 attacks, the packaging of dark tourism sites as experiential and driven in part by consumption resonates with the practices at Hollywood Forever.

### CEMETERY TOURISM

In their book *Dark Tourism: The Attraction of Death and Disaster*, John Lennon and Malcolm Foley (2000) excluded cemeteries from their definition of dark tourism. They argued that "visits, whether by friends and relatives of the dead or by those with other motives, can be broadly considered under similar categories to pilgrimage" (p. 14-16). In their analysis of sites related to John F. Kennedy's life and death, Lennon and Foley singled out the eternal flame at Arlington National Cemetery as the location that holds the least reverence, despite being the gravesite of the former president. Their critique is drawn from the

commercialization at the cemetery where tourists are told they have only a few minutes to visit and photograph the site before the next tour bus arrives (Lennon & Foley, 2000, p. 88).

Tony Seaton's (2009) more recent work took issue with Lennon and Foley's early defining principles, dispensing with some cynicism that may be inherent in critical views of tourism that commodify death and disaster. Rather than seeing dark tourism exclusively as a postmodern spectacle, Seaton posited that "dark tourism experiences may be consumed in order to give some phenomenological meaning to tourists' own social existence" (Sharpley, 2009, p. 17). While sites of disaster and atrocity demand introspection, a visit to the cemetery can be contemplative as well, giving visitors the opportunity to consider their own mortality. Such moments of self-reflection may be uplifting rather than morose, as one may choose to leave the cemetery wishing to make the most of the time that remains. One may also find peace in cleaning the gravesite and spending time with the memories of a loved one. This is a deeply personal experience, different from the visit to a dark tourism site that marks the intersection of individual and cultural tragedy.

This intersection is, however, commonly addressed in considering cemeteries such as Père Lachaise in Paris and Pierce Bros. Westwood and the Forest Lawn cemeteries in Los Angeles, which are the final resting places of well-known public figures. At Hollywood Forever, fans and tourists visit the gravesites of celebrities from across time and culture, from silent film stars Rudolph Valentino and Douglas Fairbanks to cartoon voice master Mel Blanc and *Golden Girls* star Estelle Getty. Blanc and Getty are both interred at Beth Olam, the Jewish section of the cemetery. In addition to its stars, more than 80,000 everyday Angelenos are interred at Hollywood Forever. The cemetery is thus a site of both personal and cultural memory, and often the two are intertwined as tourists seeking the gravesite of a favorite celebrity cross paths with mourners leaving a funeral or paying respects to a loved one.

The cultural conflict and ambiguity created by varied uses of sites of death and disaster is a longstanding concern. While meaning-making by a local or affected community remains primary, the tourist gaze becomes a norm of interpretation for those whose understandings of place are shaped by tourism's point of view. Claude Jacobs (2001) drew on John Urry's notion of the tourist gaze as assigned to rhetoric and interpretations

that are "socially organized, systematized, and culturally specific, with consequences for individuals who have this sort of vision as well as for the places, events, people and things that become its object, i.e., tourist attractions" (p. 311). Anthropologist Jack Kugelmass (1995), for example, made a distinction between Jewish tourists, particularly from the United States, who transformed Auschwitz from a site of Polish memory and martyrdom to a site of Jewish memory. In her study of German memory, Karen Till (2005) considered how physical places that are landmarks of Nazism and World War II should be marked and understood and what kind of commemoration is appropriate and necessary.

Studies of Day of the Dead celebrations in Mexico and the United States point to the difficulties of dark tourism in an instance of cultural convergence. Tourists visiting cemeteries in Mexico find the celebrations colorful and charming, yet view the holiday as culturally "othered" from the distance of the tourist gaze. Stanley Brandes (1998) observed that Day of the Dead rituals have been transformed in many Mexican villages as certain practices are enacted to meet expectations of tourists. This is not uncommon for heritage tourism sites. Brandes reported that some villagers mourn the loss of longstanding traditions while others enjoy the financial benefits of inviting tourists to observe Day of the Dead rituals. Greg Palmer (1993) also found Day of the Dead traditions being threatened by commercialism brought on by tourists who lack reverence for the cultural traditions that bring them to the cemetery for celebration.

Hollywood Forever is among the few cemeteries in the United States that invite observation of Day of the Dead, hosting a community-wide celebration with more than 30,000 visitors building altars and enjoying live music, face painting, crafts, and food. As Day of the Dead blends respect and humor, celebration at the cemetery blends Mexican tradition with Hollywood kitsch. At most cemeteries, family members come to clean and decorate the graves of their loved ones, but Hollywood Forever invites anyone interested to build an altar. Hundreds of altars honor and remember the personal, political, and famous as both Latinos and non-Latinos invite the dead to return and spend time among the living. These cultural practices reflect the perspective embraced by Hollywood Forever, celebrating life rather than mourning death.

As theoretical work in dark tourism progresses, many researchers question motives for seeking out sites related to

death and disaster. Not only is there a broad spectrum of reasons for such experiences, but the sites themselves offer varying degrees of shock, horror, reflection, and introspection. Recognizing that both are well-known and popular tourist attractions, it is clear that a visit to Auschwitz has a different tenor than a visit to Graceland. Richard Sharpley (2009) offered a typology of dark tourism in which he envisioned these practices fitting into four areas of consumption: dark tourism as experience, dark tourism as play, dark tourism as integration, and dark tourism as classification. In his discussion of play, Sharpley noted the importance of shared experiences:

That is, although it is the death of an individual or group of people that is the initial driver, it is the collective celebration, remembrance or mourning that is the dominant factor. Thus, dark tourism becomes pilgrimage, or a journey followed by the experience of 'communitas,' either as 'one-off' events such as the funeral of Princess Diana or at annual celebrations like the anniversary of Elvis Presley's death at Graceland. (p. 18)

As Sharpley (2009) asserted, dark tourism at death sites and cemeteries may involve both mourning and celebration. This is certainly the perspective embraced by Hollywood Forever, where both pilgrimage and revelry are common and encouraged. Along with the Rudolph Valentino memorial service, held every year since 1927, Hollywood Forever hosts memorial events celebrating the lives of Douglas Fairbanks, Tyrone Power, and Johnny Ramone. Each of these events blends solemnity and celebration with performances of live music, film screenings, and – in the case of Fairbanks – champagne and cake.

Tourists who enjoy Hollywood Forever for its social events or for its green space (as Bill Obrock contended), may not be aware that they are reviving social practices that began in the 1830s in America. This period marks the establishment of Mount Auburn Cemetery in Boston and similar "rural cemeteries" that used it as a model. Established on the outskirts of urban areas, rural cemeteries provided a refuge of nature for city dwellers. The rural cemetery also became leisure space, a location for strolling along shaded paths and picnicking before the development of city parks allowed citizens to escape the noise and chaos of urban life. Cemeteries provided the primary space available for enjoying the outdoors in an urban context (Linden-Ward, 1989.)

Public parks began to take over some of the green space functions of cemeteries

at the turn of the last century; however, Hollywood Forever continues to draw people to its gardens and paths. Visitors stroll through the cemetery and are welcome to do so. Yet the quiet and peace of the cemetery easily yields to public events, whether a memorial event in honor of a celebrity or an outdoor screening at the cemetery's film series Cinespia. The transformation of space is influenced by traditional use of Hollywood Forever for tourism and cultural activities and also because of the landscape. For Cinespia, visitors gather on the Fairbanks Lawn, the vast expanse of green space behind the sarcophagus of Douglas Fairbanks, Sr. and Jr., and films are projected on the external wall of the Cathedral Mausoleum. Having open space away from gravestones and mausoleums is unusual, and the lawn provides a welcoming open area for a variety of events including musical performances, plays, and yoga classes.

The events at Hollywood Forever are unconventional, yet sites like Arlington National Cemetery and Green-Wood Cemetery in Brooklyn have attracted tourists as well as those on a pilgrimage to see the final resting places of politicians, military leaders, celebrities, and artists they admire. Many cemeteries offer guided tours as well as maps for visitors to locate the gravesites they seek. Like Hollywood Forever, Atlanta's Oakland Cemetery provides a quiet respite in the city center. The last lot at the cemetery was sold in 1884 so visitors are far less likely to encounter mourners at Oakland than at Hollywood Forever, which is still accepting new interments. Priding itself on its architecture, horticulture, and historical significance, Oakland Cemetery positions itself much like a museum or city park, offering tours and hosting both an annual Easter egg hunt and Arts in the Park – ten days of performances, lectures, and art installations on the cemetery grounds (Historic Oakland Foundation, n.d.).

#### THE CEMETERY AS SOCIAL SPACE

The practices of tourists at Hollywood Forever demonstrate the significance of celebrity culture, showing how people use their relationships to celebrities as sites of identity formation and expression. Flowers and remembrances they leave behind draw the interest of other visitors and are material evidence that a particular celebrity is remembered and commemorated. Along with official events sponsored by the cemetery, Hollywood Forever welcomes fans to initiate events in honor of stars. The Douglas Fairbanks Memorial, for example, is organized by Fairbanks fan and film historian Sparrow Morgan. Announcing the 2008 event (Laugh & Live

Festival, 2008, para. 5), Morgan echoed the philosophy of Hollywood Forever:

Fairbanks wanted to be remembered through his films, which is why I do this. I feel it's more in keeping with the Fairbanks *joie de vivre* to host a celebration, so I chose to throw a birthday party instead of mourning the anniversary of his death. While there's no doubt he's missed, I can't imagine Doug thinking a wake in his honor was anything short of ridiculous.

The Fairbanks Memorial temporarily transforms the cemetery into a space of celebration. Using the cemetery as social space raises questions about protocol. If these are unconventional practices, what are the guidelines for appropriate behavior? How should tourists and visitors behave in the company of mourners? Who decides what constitutes respect for the living and the dead?

Should dark tourism sites be used only for a moral or social lesson? If tourists spend time at the Gettysburg Battlefield, for example, critics argue that visitors should mourn the loss of some 50,000 Civil War soldiers in a violent and bloody battle rather than cavort through the grounds searching for evidence of ghosts (see Stone, 2009 for discussion of moral implications of dark tourism). The implication of such perspectives is that those who celebrate life without the guise of solemnity typically associated with the cemetery intend disrespect for the dead. In popular discourse and within the death care industry, many reflect the sentiments of those who find such activities in the cemetery irreverent. In his book of essays, *Bodies in Motion and at Rest: On Metaphor and Mortality*, essayist, poet, and funeral director Thomas Lynch (2000) found fault with the performance of a play at a community cemetery. When family members of those buried in the cemetery complained about the play, the thespian group argued that the performance was a celebration of the lives of the dead. In the town's newspaper, opponents argued the cemetery:

...is full of fathers and mothers and daughters and sons who have no obligation to educate or entertain or instruct the living. Museums and libraries, art galleries and public parks, serve these purposes. The bodies of the dead make Oak Grove a sacred place. (p. 240)

Lynch added his own concern to that of his neighbors, warning that "the harm, of course, is that once the gate is opened it is hard to close, and lost forever is the sacred and dedicated space that is only a cemetery and needs be nothing more" (p. 242). Lynch maintained a traditional

perspective on burial and was unwilling to allow what he saw as corruption of the sacred space of the cemetery. Yet this is also a perspective on death: that the lives of the dead should be revered, but not celebrated, in the cemetery. For Hollywood Forever, the effort to change the public's relationship to the cemetery means overcoming opposition from within the death care industry as well as encouraging new social practices within the cemetery space. Such arguments are strained by the use of the cemetery as a venue for entertainment for which visitors are charged admission. These paid guests are, as Sturken (2007) described them, tourists of history who are experiencing the past through the lens of consumption and popular culture. This perspective colors the experience of the cemetery as a site of leisure and pleasure rather than a site of mourning.

#### CINESPIA: CINEMA AND THE CEMETERY

On a typical summer Saturday night, more than three thousand Angelenos enjoy picnic dinners, music, and movies on the cemetery grounds. Cinespia, which draws large crowds and has become a popular cultural outing in Los Angeles since its inception in 2002, works to change the public's meaning-making about Hollywood Forever. When thousands of people visit the cemetery for leisure and entertainment, how that space is understood in public discourse is transformed. Because of the festive environment created by the comfortable rituals of sharing food with friends and gathering with hundreds of others to listen to music and watch a film, visitors can easily forget they are in an operating cemetery where burials still take place. The cemetery may cease to be ominous or morbid through its transformation into social space.

Cinespia creates and perpetuates a temporary but recurring public space. Jackson (1980) posited the idea that a landscape like the Fairbanks Lawn at Hollywood Forever can serve a social function merely by virtue of being space shared among individuals within a community. It is, after all, in public space that people can spend time with others and establish the bonds that form community. Jackson wrote:

A landscape should establish bonds between people, the bond of language, of manners, of the same kind of work and leisure, and above all a landscape should contain the kind of spatial organization which fosters



such experiences and relationships; spaces for coming together, to celebrate, spaces for solitude, spaces that never change and are always as memory depicted them. (p. 16-17)

By situating Cinespia on cemetery grounds, Hollywood Forever becomes a space that can alternately provide both celebration and solitude. The conjunction of these two things – the social space of summer Saturday nights and the everyday space of quiet and reflection – allows Hollywood Forever to become a uniquely meaningful place for visitors.

Horror films have become an end-of-season tradition for Cinespia, with George Romero's *Night of the Living Dead* screened at the end of the 2006 season. The film opens in a cemetery in which the dead come back to life to search for living humans who will be their cannibalistic prey. Originally released in 1968, *Night of the Living Dead* was added to the National Film Registry in 1999, one of 25 films selected that year because they were deemed "culturally, historically or aesthetically significant" and thus worthy of preservation for future generations (National Film Preservation Board, 1999). Despite the recognized significance of Romero's work, screening horror films in the cemetery lends a different aura to the space than a silent film or film noir, which can enhance the appreciation for the historic significance of Hollywood Forever by virtue of the stars and directors buried there. When the film was suggested for the 2003 season, *LA Weekly* reported that Tyler Cassity "ruled that zombie films in a cemetery pushed the boundaries of good taste just a little too far" ("Alfresco Theater," 2003); eventually, he relented and deemed the Romero classic as acceptable fare for the venue.

Events at Hollywood Forever are somewhat in keeping with the social and cultural functions carried out at other cemeteries, albeit with a Hollywood twist. Many who feel comfortable with the presentation of a play or performance of classical music at a cemetery disapprove of Cinespia: showing films in the cemetery and projecting them on the mausoleum wall seems disrespectful toward the dead. In some regard, this disapproval veils a highbrow/lowbrow critique, namely that "culture" can find its place on sacred ground but popular culture cannot. Similarly, Stone's (2006) typology of dark tourism experiences demonstrated degrees of comfort with these cultural practices. On one end of the spectrum are "dark fun factories," where death and the macabre are presented for commercial entertainment. At these sites, visitors may tolerate a lighter mood and interpretation

compared to "dark camps of genocide," which occupy the far end of the spectrum and focus on widespread human atrocities.

#### BEYOND CINESPIA

Building on the experience of Cinespia, participatory audiences now gather at the cemetery for a variety of events, often focused on premiering television series, films, and new musical releases. Many of these events capitalize on the relationship between these cultural productions and the cemetery as a site where, quite plainly, the dead are buried. Jay Boileau, executive vice president for Forever Enterprises, told this to the *Los Angeles Times*:

When you walk on the grounds here, you go through a mind shift. You look at life differently. That, in itself, is a cultural resource. And you have all of these stories, the ritual, the remembrance. You can look at it as a collective artwork. So it's a logical place for there to be gatherings and cultural events. (Lee, 2007, para. 10)

Hollywood Forever's notion of a cultural center is expansive, including historical tours, summer theater performances, and a series of Shakespeare plays using the Fairbanks sarcophagus as part of the scenery. Events at the cemetery also draw on the darker sensibilities of the site, such as those held by the heavy metal band Korn. The band began its 2007 Family Values Tour with a party held in the Cathedral Mausoleum. At the event, Korn lead vocalist Jonathan Davis, who is also a former coroner's assistant said, "We just show up, brother. You're having a party in the cemetery and it's like OK, cool. We did it last year, too. It's a cool place to throw parties. Not a lot of people get to party in a cemetery" (Miller, 2007, para. 3). If the cemetery is an ominous place after hours, then the spectacle of a heavy metal tour party seems to add to perspective of disrespect often voiced in response to alternative cultural uses of the cemetery space.

Yet Korn is not the first metal band to use Hollywood Forever as social space. In 2001, the thrash metal band Slayer held a listening party for the album *God Hates Us All* at Hollywood Forever. While many metal bands were critiqued during the "Satanic panic" of the 1980s for their seemingly evil content, Slayer's lyrics are overtly and deliberately anti-Christian. Music critic Adrien Begrand (2006) described the 2001 album as one that "had the band looking inward more, exorcising their own personal demons....The album's rampant anti-Christian theme was as heavy as the

music, with enough lines to stop even the most hardened metal fans in their tracks" (para. 3). Slayer's use of Hollywood Forever is another means of the band appropriating cultural symbols for their own purposes, to render what might be deemed sacred as something not only secular but a manifestation of malice and evil. The executive producer of *God Hates Us All* is Rick Rubin, who has a long history with the cemetery. Rubin co-founded Def Jam Records with Russell Simmons in 1984. When he discovered the word "def" was one of the new words scheduled for inclusion in the 1993 edition of Webster's dictionary, Rubin bought a burial plot at Hollywood Memorial Park and organized a funeral for "def" with Reverend Al Sharpton presiding (Keister, 2004). Rubin's relationship to the cemetery offers evidence that Hollywood Forever has a long history as a space where the solemnity of funereal practices does not exclude the possibility for whimsical or social uses.

#### CONCLUSION

Sturken (2007) argued that "people make pilgrimages to sites of tragedy in order to pay tribute to the dead and to feel transformed in some way in relation to that place" (p. 11). This perspective can be enlarged to address tourism more generally: the desire to experience a place is a strong driver to destinations of cultural significance. Yet how one chooses to experience a place, and the opportunities available for visiting and interpreting that site, can determine not only the personal meaning but can shift the public understanding of a place as well.

The multiplicity of meanings attached to Hollywood Forever is not unique to cemeteries, nor is it unique to public spaces in general. As a site of both personal memory and cultural memory, visitors have different reasons for coming to Hollywood Forever: some to mourn, some to commemorate, and some as a pilgrimage. At the celebrity cemetery, these meanings can overlap, not only as tourists walk discreetly past mourners, but also as each visitor intent on paying respects to an admired celebrity has his or her own personal reasons for doing so. Seaton (2009) noted that "although most thanatourism sites are historical ones, they are often bound up with *important issues of personal identity* for people who encounter them in the present" (p. 97). His examples include visitors to antebellum plantations who feel the resonances of slavery in the South, yet cemetery tourism provides innumerable instances of those

who aspire to pay their respects to actors, musicians, political leaders, and others whose public and creative work provide avenues of identity formation for fans. In these instances, one's parasocial relationship to a particular celebrity may serve as motivation for the cemetery visit. Along with those paying respects to a celebrity or a loved one, Hollywood Forever invites tourists who are interested in the natural or architectural features of the cemetery as well its history. For these tourists, the cemetery is largely seen as a heritage site. Further, the events hosted by the cemetery create another kind of relationship with the space. In addition to offering yoga classes on the Fairbanks Lawn, the cemetery has renovated the Masonic Lodge on the grounds and uses it as performance space for music, live theater, and the "Comedy is Dead" standup series. The cemetery that hosts this comedy series, and those who attend, are clearly comfortable with a lighthearted perspective toward death.

Hollywood Forever can host these cultural events with minimal conflict because of its long history as a tourist attraction, its location in Los Angeles, and its position as a cultural destination. The cemetery now has a substantial history of hosting Cinespia, live music, and comedy performances, establishing itself as a cultural center in ways that enable visitors to be comfortable with the reality of being entertained while thousands are buried nearby. These events have normalized the use of Hollywood Forever as leisure space, and those who choose it as a final resting place now do so with the understanding that the sanctity of the cemetery is often colored by other rituals and practices.

As previously noted, many cemeteries welcome cultural, social, and historical events that have a positive effect on the community and on public perceptions of the cemetery. Some communities remain adamant that, as Lynch (2000) argued, the cemetery need only serve one purpose, to be the final resting place of the dead. As a contested space, Hollywood Forever has pushed the boundaries of entertainment by hosting metal bands and horror films, as well as the carnivalesque celebration of Day of the Dead. This cemetery could be dismissed as unique by those who fear cultural experiences among the dead are irreverent. Yet the increased popularity of sites of heritage tourism and dark tourism, along with changing attitudes toward death and dying, indicate that events like those at Hollywood Forever are likely to become more commonplace.

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