

***The Politics of Public Memory: Tourism, History, and Ethnicity in Monterey, California.* By Martha K. Norkunas. (New York: State University of New York Press, 1993. Pp. xii + 123, bibliography, ISBN 0-7914-1418-1 pbk.)**

Barbara Le Blanc

Volume 19, Number 2, 1997

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1087693ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/1087693ar>

[See table of contents](#)

Publisher(s)

Association Canadienne d'Ethnologie et de Folklore

ISSN

1481-5974 (print)

1708-0401 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this review

Le Blanc, B. (1997). Review of [*The Politics of Public Memory: Tourism, History, and Ethnicity in Monterey, California.* By Martha K. Norkunas. (New York: State University of New York Press, 1993. Pp. xii + 123, bibliography, ISBN 0-7914-1418-1 pbk.)]. *Ethnologies*, 19(2), 159–160.
<https://doi.org/10.7202/1087693ar>

The Politics of Public Memory: Tourism, History, and Ethnicity in Monterey, California. By Martha K. Norkunas. (New York: State University of New York Press, 1993. Pp. xii + 123, bibliography, ISBN 0-7914-1418-1 pbk.)

In this well-written case study of tourism, history and ethnicity in Monterey, California, Martha K. Norkunas examines cultural texts and their underlying assumptions. She shows how public memory can be constructed by museums, monuments, historic sites, historic homes, natural settings, literary landscapes, community, ethnicity and history. She points out how a combination of these tourist sites can be used as a “complex of messages to authenticate themselves” (p. 93). She also notes how the texts and subtexts represent political choices reflecting messages about past and present identity, values, and ideology (p. 4, 16).

Her ethnographic approach, involving observation and interviews, serves as the basis for her descriptive analysis. After describing the historical, cultural and ethnographic contexts of Monterey, she examines the politics of history and ideology as it is embedded in identity construction (Chapter One). The selectively reconstructed history that she examines shows how it represents an upper-middle class socially elite society (Chapter Two). She then studies the relationships among the areas of history, economics, nature and literary landscape (Chapter Three). Finally she looks at nature and ethnic monuments as they are presented in Monterey (Chapter Four). She defines her work as a “modern ethnography” of the relationships between the powerful and the powerless (p. 10). Her critical analysis shows how the “ideology of the powerful is systematically embedded in the institutions and public texts of tourism and history” (p. 10).

Her study reveals how the construction of public memory in Monterey has failed to recognize the various social classes and ethnic groups that have contributed to local history. Rather an emphasis has been placed on the history and culture of the white upper middle-class — those involved with historical societies and commercial promotions that cater to a similar group: middle-class tourists (p. 8). When finally, in the 1970s, monuments commemorating minority and ethnic history were installed, they were relegated to marginal physical areas of the city.

To prove her hypothesis, she guides us through three examples found in Monterey: 1) The Path of History, 2) Cannery Row, and 3) Fisherman’s Wharf. On the *Path of History*, a 2.8 mile route winding through downtown Monterey, Norkunas examines two houses: Pacific House and Larkin House. She points out how these construct two public texts of the official sanctioned history of the city, omitting events concerned with such groups as Native Americans, Mexicans, and southern Europeans, as well as the working classes involved in the industrial economy. *Cannery Row*, initially made famous because of John

Steinbeck's novel of the same name, blends historical and fictional time. A literary landscape is created as a result of the interplay among tourist caricature, fiction and history, industrialism and postindustrialism (tourism) (p. 49). *Fisherman's Wharf* "highlights the denial of its ethnic past," states Norkunas (p. 75). Over time the site was transformed from an active wharf to one in disrepair, then finally to a tourist area with shops and restaurants. All three examples discussed in the study blend reality and fantasy.

Norkunas leaves us with a strong message that the dominant and majority groups must be willing to share power with minority populations. The issues and concerns addressed in the study are not unique to Monterey. Canada, with its rich diversity of landscapes and ethnic groups, certainly offers fertile ground for such studies. Upon examining the construction of Canada's public memory, we will probably make some of the same discoveries that Norkunas does in her study: upper class homes on display, boards of governors composed of the socially elite, non-inclusive museum exhibits.

Canada is a rich terrain for the study of many such possible literary landscapes, natural environments, museums and monuments. Norkunas' work can without a doubt inspire Canadian researchers if they are interested in pursuing questions concerning the politics of public memory. Scholars interested in exploring the fertile ground where ethnicity, public history, ritual, pageantry, expressive culture, museum studies and the politics of memory intersect will find Norkunas' book a stimulating read. They will also see potential research areas if they are interested in public cultural landscapes.

BARBARA LE BLANC
Université Sainte-Anne
Pointe-de-l'Église, Nova Scotia

Halloween and Other Festivals of Death and Life. Edited by Jack Santino. (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1994. Pp. xxviii + 280, bibliography, ISBN 0-87049-812-6 cloth, ISBN 0-87049-813-4 pbk.)

This collection of essays documents a complex of customs that, for a variety of reasons, is becoming increasingly popular among certain groups of North American adults. The wide range of approaches and perspectives of these thirteen contributions (including the introduction), from solid scholarly research to personal musings, suggests that anyone inclined toward the study of festivals will find something of interest. For the same reason it proved difficult to review the book as a whole.