


1-2004

Review of Landscapes of Leisure: Building an Urban History of Tourism

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Original Citation

J. Mark Souther. (2004). Landscapes of Leisure: Building an Urban History of Tourism. *Journal of Urban History*, 30(2), 257-265.

Repository Citation

Souther, J. Mark, "Review of Landscapes of Leisure: Building an Urban History of Tourism" (2004). *History Faculty Publications*. 59.
https://engagedscholarship.csuohio.edu/clhist_facpub/59

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LANDSCAPES OF LEISURE

Building an Urban History of Tourism

- MANSEL BLACKFORD, *Fragile Paradise: The Impact of Tourism on Maui, 1959-2000*. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2001, pp. xiii, 277, illustrations, maps, notes, bibliographic essay, index, \$35.00 cloth.
- CATHERINE COCKS, *Doing the Town: The Rise of Urban Tourism in the United States, 1850-1915*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001, pp. xiii, 287, illustrations, notes, bibliographic essay, index, \$37.50 cloth.
- HARVEY K. NEWMAN, *Southern Hospitality: Tourism and the Growth of Atlanta*. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1999, pp. x, 372, illustrations, tables, notes, bibliography, index, \$24.95 paper.

In the past ten years, historians have begun to examine the intersection of tourism with other historical developments. Many focus their attention on how tourism promoters invested public places and spaces with meaning or marketed attractions to tourists eager to connect with the historic, exotic, or sublime. Others explore the impact of tourism on the natural environment. To date, most historians of tourism in the United States concentrate on the shaping of tourist regions such as New England, the West, and the Appalachians, leaving the study of urban tourism mostly to social scientists.¹

Studying urban tourism promises to shed new light on the ways in which cultivating an image attractive to outsiders affects cycles of growth, decline, and revitalization that many cities have faced. For example, Angela Blake demonstrates the importance of Manhattan's cosmopolitan image in validating New York as a cultural capital in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Phoebe Kropp studies the fabrication of a "Spanish fantasy past" in and around Los Angeles as a marketable image to attract tourists and new residents. My own work traces how tourism reshaped urban culture, social relations, and public policy in New Orleans in the postwar period and how conscious efforts to promote historic architecture, jazz, cuisine, and hedonism furthered New Orleans's popularity as a tourist destination.²

The three books reviewed here hint at the breadth of approaches scholars are adopting as they write the history of urban tourism. Though the works represent widely varied interests (environmental, economic, social, cultural, and

southern history), together they afford a sharper image of the evolution of urban areas, whether in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, in the recent past, or over the broad sweep of more than a century. In addition to exploring tourism in urban places and spaces to further an understanding of their authors' own interests, the three monographs should stimulate interest among urbanists in the role of tourism in shaping urban life.

Mansel Blackford's *Fragile Paradise: The Impact of Tourism on Maui, 1959-2000* demonstrates very effectively that the Hawaiian island of Maui endured the same dilemmas of rapid growth that vexed many American cities after World War II. Like Oahu, whose tourist trade blossomed in the 1950s and 1960s, Maui and other Hawaiian islands gradually saw their agricultural economies give way to tourism by the 1960s and 1970s. Devoting chapters to land use, water service, electric power distribution, airport improvements, and the development of community growth plans on Maui, Blackford approaches the study of tourism as a historian interested in business and economic history, environmental history, and linkages between the American West and the Pacific Rim. In doing so, he heeds historian Hal Rothman's call in *Devil's Bargains*, his groundbreaking work on Western tourism, to examine how tourism affects both civic life and the physical landscape.

Tourism is simply the latest chapter in a long history of divisions within Maui society. The travel industry brought the promise of prosperity yet also taxed the island's infrastructure and fragile ecosystems and shaped public discourses as islanders struggled with the changes wrought by the newest incarnation of colonialism. *Fragile Paradise* places the Hawaiian experience with outside capital into the framework of dependency theory. Blackford also grafts that experience onto the older center-periphery relationship of the American South and West to eastern sources of capital. The struggle with the impact of tourism in Maui should interest both students of similar occurrences in other regions of the United States and those who weigh the fallout from transnational encounters in the Caribbean, Latin America, and other developing parts of the world. The imposition of a tourist economy promising exotic escape on Acapulco and Yucatán, as well as the Club Méditerranée phenomenon, comes readily to mind.³

Fragile Paradise succeeds best in reconstructing the direct role of islanders' reactions to tourism in bringing about policy aimed at managing natural resources and containing urban sprawl. Blackford sets the stage for a detailed account of the interplay between tourism and policy by recounting how, after stiffening world competition hurt Hawaiian sugar and pineapple growers in the wake of World War II, Maui's population reached its nadir in the mid-1950s. The contraction of the island's plantation economy encouraged county officials to set up the Maui Economic Development Association in 1955 to improve the island's infrastructure. Similarly, the "Big Five" agricultural firms began investing heavily in tourism development by the early 1960s, heralding a turnabout in Maui's fortunes. Thereafter, Maui became increasingly popular

as both American and Japanese investors funneled funds into the island's burgeoning tourism sector. Derived from extensive personal interviews, official documents, and newspapers, much of Blackford's research addresses how, as early as the late 1960s, voices of dissent on Maui tempered this development.

To a limited extent, Maui's experience with tourism fostered a consensus favoring sustainable development, cultural preservation, and environmental stewardship. Blackford contends that Maui's small size encouraged a high level of face-to-face discussion of tourism-related issues and produced "a climate of compromise" (p. 45). As Blackford demonstrates, however, efforts to manage tourism and diversify the island's economy hardly kept pace with the relentless concentration of monies in tourism development. Politicians' profits from tourism eroded their commitment to legislation that might have offset rampant urban growth. Indeed, the Maui County Council shepherded variances on land use restrictions as favors to developers, ultimately bringing the whitening of South Maui's majority Native Hawaiian community and "a strip where everyone got in on the game" (p. 198). Responses to tourism did not arise solely from native islanders' fear of losing access to ancestral lands and roads along beaches. Indeed, many found in tourism development a welcome opportunity to make a living without depending on the Big Five companies, a consideration that sometimes outweighed concern for aesthetic and cultural losses. Rather, environmentalists from the American mainland also contributed to the chorus of dissent in a generally prodevelopment milieu.

Among Blackford's most compelling examples that illustrate the multiple, often overlapping agendas that motivated opponents of unchecked growth was the Kahului Airport controversy. Blackford relates how the continuing rise of tourism in the 1970s and 1980s provided the stage for an ardent struggle between those who wished to upgrade the island's airport to allow more international flights and those who urged banning direct international flights and channeling resources to economic diversification. Airport opponents feared the influx of an unmanageable number of visitors, the introduction of alien plants and animals (a perennial problem in major portals for international visitors such as Miami and Honolulu), adverse effects on bird life at Kanaha Pond, and the disruption of native Hawaiian burial sites. Like many of Blackford's examples, this one remained unresolved at the time of publication, diminishing the author's ability to assess the results of the debate. However, it serves as a window into the dynamics of public discourse that result from both tourism and, more generally, unchecked urbanization.

At times, Blackford's prose becomes a blow-by-blow account of the vicissitudes of Maui's political economy as he reconstructs county council meeting activities in great detail. Blackford goes to great lengths to outline the intricacies of the public debate that swirled over whether to accommodate developers or uphold the island's delicate natural and cultural landscape through careful growth management. He might have strengthened his argument with a more thorough exploration of the corrosive forces of tourism and American-

ization on native islanders' culture, which would elucidate Native Hawaiians' responses to untrammelled development. Nevertheless, Blackford's interests clearly revolve more tightly around issues of economics and environment. *Fragile Paradise* makes an essential contribution to anyone interested in understanding how Hawaii's boosters in some ways embodied the same set of values that characterized those who touted the economic potential of the western United States.

If Blackford focuses on the impact of tourism on the urbanization process in a peripheral rural region still reeling from a legacy of colonialism, Catherine Cocks seeks to illuminate the origins of Americans' interest in spending leisure time in four leading American cities—New York; Chicago; Washington, D.C.; and San Francisco. In *Doing the Town: The Rise of Urban Tourism in the United States, 1850-1915*, Cocks argues that urban tourism heralded and speeded “the erosion of a Victorian, ‘refined’ understanding of class, gender, and ethnicity and the gradual emergence of a cosmopolitan, commercial conceptualization of these social relations in the early twentieth century” (pp. 1-2). Because most elite Americans favored European cities or romantic natural destinations where they might experience and reflect on the sublime, the “quest for beauty and uplift took one out of the American city, never into it” (p. 22). Indeed, they viewed American cities as upstart, dirty cauldrons of capitalism where their bourgeois sensibilities might be offended.

Through a combination of improvements in rail travel and hotel accommodations, growing efforts of tour operators to package cities for tourists, and changing social ideas and relations, urban tourism by 1915 became both thinkable and highly profitable. The advent of extra-fare cars, dining cars, and glass-enclosed observation cars on passenger trains ameliorated cramped travel conditions and reduced the possibility of unwelcome social contact with lower classes. Likewise, first-class hotels furnished refined, semipublic spaces where well-to-do travelers could retreat from the uncertainties of street life outside.

Cocks argues persuasively that urban tourism brought the “domestication” of urban spaces by affluent Americans and changed what she calls the “spatial practice” of moving about in cities. Through her imaginative use of itineraries in tourist guidebooks, travel articles, and travel diaries, Cocks reconstructs perhaps the most sophisticated window into the redefinition of American cities as places of consumption yet published. If wealthy Americans approached cities with trepidation in the early nineteenth century, often assuming the air of natives to avoid mishap, by the close of that century they effectively claimed certain spaces in the city as their own and sometimes knew the city's attractions better than lifelong residents. Women in particular became empowered as the custom of separate gendered spheres gave way, enabling both men and women to experience those portions of the city that promoters touted. Importantly, Cocks argues, urban boosters and tour promoters encouraged Americans to conceive of leisure—not home—as the opposite of work.

Through guidebooks, tour promoters emphasized that tourists could sense the city as an organic whole rather than a collection of many disparate locales and, with the help of mass transit lines and special “seeing-the-city cars,” simplified the city into a set of identifiable landmarks. The author hints at the intersection of tourism operators’ efforts to “sell” the city as an entity and city planners’ use of expositions and the ideals of the City Beautiful movement to create ideal urban places and spaces, noting that Americans had to be “educated” on how to move about in cities (p. 142). In promoting certain aspects of a city’s past, tourism interests attempted to whitewash class and ethnic conflicts in the present. Harnessing urban landmarks to the rising tide of interest in national history, they gave tourists and locals a sense of ownership of that city. Tourists, for their part, responded by implicitly reasserting their control over urban districts “lost” to ethnic inhabitation (p. 182). They transformed ethnic minorities from a social danger to a quaint spectacle or, as Cocks aptly describes them, “artifacts of their culture rather than members of a social realm shared with the tourists” (p. 194).

Cocks’s conception of tourism may strike some readers as overly narrow, for her argument that urban tourism was unthinkable prior to the latter half of the nineteenth century reflects primarily upper income Americans’ notions about urban life. She seemingly discounts the possibility that some Americans may have chosen to visit cities for reasons aside from personal uplift. She also argues throughout the book that urban tourism served as a vehicle for the formation of an ideal public and thus constituted one element in a larger effort to create a republican society in the United States. At times, it is unclear whether such an ideology informed conscious decisions on the part of the architects of modern urban tourism, particularly when one considers that the tourists she describes, if more middling than their ultra-wealthy forebears, were still quite upper class when viewed from the vantage point of the early twenty-first century. Based on their predilection for socially exclusive accommodations, they seem anything but committed to social equity. As Cocks points out, by the early twentieth century, most tourists were distanced from natives and interacted with them “chiefly in making purchases and asking directions” (p. 88). Even so, as Cocks shows, urban tourism in the early twentieth century encouraged greater interaction among diverse peoples than in the mid-nineteenth century, if not on equitable terms, for it made people value ethnic differences.

Cocks accomplishes what few scholars of tourism have by considering both the production of a marketable tourist image and how tourists “consumed” that image, sometimes on their own terms, as they moved about the city.⁴ In the process, she links the blossoming of urban tourism to transportation improvements, the rise of a middle class, and the maturation of American urban life in the latter half of the nineteenth century. *Doing the Town* is likely to remain for years to come a work of national importance in understanding the place of urban tourism in the formation of modern ideas about urban space, social relations, and commercialized leisure.

While Cocks illustrates how the rise of urban tourism interacted with a host of other social and cultural developments, Harvey Newman focuses primarily on how cultural and social conditions built a foundation for tourism in one city. In *Southern Hospitality: Tourism and the Growth of Atlanta*, the first published book on urban tourism in the South, Newman traces more than a century of Atlanta's economic, social, and cultural development through an examination of the role of tourism in the city's growth. Drawing primarily on newspaper articles and secondary sources, Newman goes to great lengths to argue a rather simple premise—that a reputation for southern hospitality drove the city's development throughout its history. One wonders whether it could be equally well argued that rather than a commercial expression of southern hospitality, Atlanta's tourist industry was simply a logical extension of the city's restless pursuit of urban eminence, a thesis for which the author has supplied rich evidence.

While Newman situates his study in the context of studies of southern urban regionalism pioneered in the 1970s and 1980s by David Goldfield and Blaine Brownell, at times he seems more interested in connecting his subject to the work of Bertram Wyatt-Brown and other scholars on the southern dialectic of violence and hospitality.⁵ Newman's emphasis on southern hospitality, which he defines as an aspect of "shared culture that united residents behind the process of urban growth" (p. 9), begs the question whether southern hospitality rendered a booster ethic fundamentally different from that in scores of other American cities in rivalry with each other in the decades since the Civil War—a regional anomaly that the author never explores in broader context.

In Newman's opening chapters, we learn that Atlanta's nineteenth-century development relied heavily on its excellent railroad connections and its embrace of northern capital during Reconstruction, a defining period in which southern cities either embraced sectional reconciliation and its lucrative dividends or moldered in the shadows of more progressive burghs. Although late-nineteenth-century outsiders flocked to the city's businesses and markets, health resorts such as Ponce de Leon Springs, and even, for a time, its short-lived Mardi Gras celebration, boosters staged a series of industrial and agricultural fairs and expositions to showcase Atlanta's receptivity to outside investment. Newman describes elements in the urban development of Atlanta that also characterized that of New Orleans, San Francisco, and many others, notably efforts to stroke bourgeois sensibilities by ridding the city of rampant vice, opening great department stores in the emerging central business district, and creating a "Great White Way" on Peachtree Street (a development whose analogue may be seen on Broadway in New York and on New Orleans's Canal Street, itself once billed as the "Broadway of the South").⁶

At times, Newman's argument for the importance of tourism in Atlanta's development is overdrawn, notably when he suggests in chapter 4 that tourism interests drove the racist practices that accompanied urban renewal and the routing of interstate highways through the central city. In doing so, he leaves

the reader with the impression that tourism, rather than business investment, lay at the center of the ascendancy of the modern South's principal city. Nonetheless, Newman succeeds in demonstrating how forces such as urban renewal and the interstate highway program facilitated the ongoing flowering of Atlanta's hospitality industry infrastructure, notably providing sites for and access to new convention hotels.

Among Newman's most important contributions is his contention that hospitality "has been conditioned by race, gender, ethnicity, and class" (p. 9). The author addresses issues of labor conditions in the tourist and convention industry that seldom appear in the rapidly growing catalogue of tourism histories. In illustrating the deleterious effects of discrimination and social inequality on Atlanta's tourism workers and on the city's tourist image, Newman adds an important chapter to existing scholarship on Atlanta.⁷ He provides perhaps the only scholarly account of the city's ambivalence toward its Freaknik celebration. He also offers perhaps the best available portrait of the workers themselves. Newman finds that tourism provided a key source of employment for women and African Americans across the period he covers and that black workers generally earned significantly less money than their white counterparts. His treatment of the 1996 Summer Olympic Games reveals the difficulties Atlanta faced in trying to project an image to the world that unified the city's increasingly diverse population, but unfortunately he does not develop the story of the city's unimpressive efforts to reconcile its economic dynamism with lingering insecurity about lingering images of racial inequality, which manifested itself most glaringly in the debate over whether to address slavery in tours of Bulloch Hall in the Atlanta suburb of Roswell.

If *Southern Hospitality* tends to stray often from its umbrella thesis about the centrality of the tradition of hospitality, it is because Newman strives, with much success, to produce a comprehensive piece on Atlanta tourism. Newman demonstrates convincingly the importance of successive boosters to make Atlanta a regional city first, then a national city, and ultimately an international city. *Southern Hospitality* provides a much-needed model that should interest urban historians in exploring the role of tourism in other southern and American cities.

Together, these recent studies of urban tourism shift the focus on tourism scholarship beyond the question of whether tourism erodes local culture in the process of repackaging places and spaces for tourist consumption. Clearly, tourism does alter urban society, but it does so in more complicated ways that confound efforts to deliver a simple good versus bad verdict. For instance, in New Orleans, reliance on tourism has in some ways caricatured and oversimplified certain aspects of the city's culture and marginalized the city's African Americans culturally and economically, yet it has also contributed to local campaigns to preserve historic districts, revive traditional jazz, and, recently, begin rescuing sites of black memory from neglect or demolition.⁸ Similarly, the monographs reviewed here reflect fresh perspectives that try to understand

the place of tourism in urban society rather than simply to condemn it. As such, they enrich both the field of urban history and numerous other areas of inquiry.

However, the history of urban tourism remains largely unwritten. We still do not understand the dynamics of tourism development in many American cities, much less how tourism has informed public policy, reshaped citizens' images of their cities, molded social relations, and affected both the natural and built environment. For instance, to what degree did the rise of urban tourism influence progressive reform? How did tourism redirect efforts for revitalization from embattled urban renewal initiatives? How important was tourism in stimulating interest in parks and green spaces, both in Olmsted's day and in recent decades? To what extent has rampant resort development elicited activism on the part of displaced native residents and environmental advocates? What place has tourism had in stemming flight to the suburbs? These are only a few of the questions urban historians must explore if we are to integrate tourism into urban history. Perhaps of greater importance, many more studies of individual cities are sorely needed in the building of an urban history of tourism. Blackford, Cocks, and Newman offer fine models.

NOTES

1. On the commodification of places for tourists, see David Lowenthal, *The Past Is a Foreign Country* (Cambridge, UK, 1985); Michael Kammen, *The Mystic Chords of Memory: The Transformation of Tradition in American Culture* (New York, 1991); Stephen D. Hoelscher, *Heritage on Stage: The Invention of Ethnic Place in America's Little Switzerland* (Madison, 1998); Stephanie E. Yuhl, "Rich and Tender Remembering: Elite White Women and an Aesthetic Sense of Place in Charleston, 1920s and 1930s," in W. Fitzhugh Brundage, ed., *Where These Memories Grow: History, Memory, and Southern Identity* (Chapel Hill, 2000); and Jack E. Davis, *Race against Time: Culture and Separation in Natchez since 1930* (Baton Rouge, 2001). On tourism and the environment, see especially Hal K. Rothman, *Devil's Bargains: Tourism in the Twentieth-Century American West* (Lawrence, KS, 1998), and Margaret Lynn Brown, *The Wild East: A Biography of the Great Smoky Mountains* (Gainesville, FL, 2000). Examples of the creation of a regional tourist image include Dona Brown, *Inventing New England: Regional Tourism in the Nineteenth Century* (Washington, DC, 1995); Marguerite S. Shaffer, *See America First: Tourism and National Identity, 1880-1940* (Washington, DC, 2001); Chris Wilson, *The Myth of Santa Fe: Creating a Modern Regional Tradition* (Albuquerque, 1997); Leah Dilworth, *Imagining Indians in the Southwest: Persistent Visions of a Primitive Past* (Washington, DC, 1996); Sarah Hill, *Weaving New Worlds: Southeastern Cherokee Women and Their Basketry* (Chapel Hill, 1997); C. Brenden Martin, "Selling the Southern Highlands: Tourism and Community Development in the Mountain South" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Tennessee, 1997); and Richard D. Starnes, "Creating the Land of the Sky: Tourism and Society in Western North Carolina" (Ph.D. dissertation, Auburn University, 1999).

2. Angela M. Blake, "Beyond Darkness and Daylight: Constructing New York's Public Image, 1890-1930" (Ph.D. dissertation, American University, 2000); Phoebe S. Kropp, "'All Our Yesterdays': The Spanish Fantasy Past and the Politics of Public Memory in Southern California, 1884-1939" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of California, San Diego, 1999); and J. Mark Souther, "City in Amber: Race, Culture, and the Tourist Transformation of New Orleans, 1945-1995" (Ph.D. dissertation, Tulane University, 2002).

3. On Club Med, see Ellen Furlough, "The Business of Pleasure: Creating Club Méditerranée, 1950-1970," in K. Steven Vincent and Alison Klairmont-Lirgo, eds., *The Human Tradition in Modern France* (Wilmington, DE, 2000), 185-97.

4. Most studies of the commodification of culture for tourists have focused overwhelmingly on the production of an image rather than on how tourists perceived commodified culture. The debate over

commodification dates to Dean MacCannell, *The Tourist: A New Theory of the Leisure Class* (New York, 1976). See also Lowenthal, *The Past Is a Foreign Country*, and Tom Selwyn, ed., *The Tourist Image: Myths and Myth Making in Tourism* (Chichester, UK, 1996).

5. David R. Goldfield, *Cotton Fields and Skyscrapers: Southern City and Region* (Baltimore, 1982); Blaine A. Brownell, *The Urban Ethos in the South, 1920-1930* (Baton Rouge, 1975); and Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor: Ethics and Behavior in the Old South* (New York, 1982).

6. An excellent treatment of the rise of central business districts that appeared after Newman's book is Robert M. Fogelson, *Downtown: Its Rise and Fall, 1880-1950* (New Haven, 2001). John A. Jakle's *City Lights: Illuminating the American Night* (Baltimore, 2001) places the "Great White Way" phenomenon in a broader narrative of efforts to render American cities more attractive.

7. See especially Ronald H. Bayor, *Race and the Shaping of Twentieth-Century Atlanta* (Chapel Hill, 1996).

8. Souther, "City in Amber."

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