

History Comes Alive: Public History and Popular Culture in the 1970s by M. J. Rymysz-Pawlowska. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2017. 1 + 241 pp.: illustrations, notes, bibliography, index; clothbound, \$90.00; paperbound, \$29.95; eBook, \$19.99.

In *History Comes Alive*, M. J. Rymysz-Pawlowska argues that during the 1970s, Americans changed the ways in which they engaged with the past. At times a direct response to transformative social and political moments, and at other times a result of ongoing transitions in museum methods or entertainment genres, she explores the impact of a wide variety of influential and changing public history practices. Compelling and provocative in her selection and interrogation of these sites, Rymysz-Pawlowska has produced a welcome book on a critical period that continues to impact not just the work of public historians, but the manner by which Americans have since related to the past.

The book explores several modes of historical production that did not typically originate in the 1970s, but that took on additional degrees of significance in that moment. The modes include television, federal and grassroots commemorations (as well as protests) of the bicentennial, historic preservation efforts, national and living history museums, and reenactments. Although a number of scholars have commented on the decade's impact on these individual modes, Rymysz-Pawlowska effectively combines this scholarship and builds upon it, arguing that through the collective assessment of this wide breadth of historical exercises and sites, we can see the decade fomenting a critical turn in public historical practice. "In this moment," she writes, "popular and public history across multiple fields shifted from instructive, reflective, or visual efforts to represent the past to ones that encouraged emotional, as opposed to informational, production of historical knowledge. History came alive: it moved from the past into the present. It became as much about feeling as about thinking, about being inside the past instead of looking upon it" (5). This argument sets the stage for the chapters that follow. Differentiated by mode of historical engagement, each chapter juxtaposes practices before and during the 1970s in order to reveal the decade's significant interventions in how Americans encounter the past.

History Comes Alive begins with a survey of television programs from the 1950s through the 1970s. Rymysz-Pawlowska argues that television network programming in the 1950s and 1960s was for the most part invested in progress and modernity. When rare programs such as CBS's *You Are There* explored historical moments, or when episodes of popular shows such as *The Twilight Zone* or *Star Trek* were set in the past, they each ultimately reinforced the notion that the progress and modernity of the present day and future is superior to the weird, dangerous, and distant past. The 1970s, in contrast, marked "the moment at which, in the midst of social, political, and economic turmoil, this investment began to weaken as Americans stopped envisioning and anticipating the future and began looking toward the past" (13). This took place most obviously in nostalgia comedies like *Happy Days* or dramas like *Little House on the Prairie*, where audiences were invited to find common ground and relate to the emotional lives of the shows' protagonists, rather than view the past through a didactic lens. The television genre that truly arrived during this period, however, was the mini-series. Rymysz-Pawlowska's study of *Roots* as a nationally gripping phenomenon is particularly compelling and reveals the moment

when television programming rose to serve as one of the most influential arbiters of historical imagining.

Each of the following chapters revolves at least in part around the public's engagement with the American bicentennial. Early federal efforts began with the 1966 bill for the formation of the American Revolution Bicentennial Commission (ARBC). The ARBC was originally purposed with creating in quite conventional terms a nationally coordinated celebration of America's place in the world, rooted in the success of the Revolution and the conviction that all Americans had benefited from its promise. However, this sentiment by this time felt quite out of step with the experience of most Americans. As Ada Louise Huxtable noted in the *New York Times* in 1970, "Are gaudy, extravagant, technology displays obsolete? Is a World's Fair-type Bicentennial festival appropriate for a country racked with social, racial, and environmental agonies?" That sense would only deepen, particularly after the Watergate revelations. In consequence, Rymza-Pawlowska reveals a fascinating turn, when commemoration efforts decentralized and increasingly sought to recognize the bicentennial as a moment not of celebration but of reflection and reexamination, "turning to the past as a means of making sense of current events" (61). Later chapters explore exhibitions inspired by the bicentennial in Boston and Washington, DC. The final two chapters view the bicentennial through the lens of a number of reenactment or activist organizations such as the Black Panther Party and the People's Bicentennial Commission, both of which sought to use the occasion to criticize the federal government and its leaders for a variety of failures and shortcomings.

Of course, no break from previous practice is this abrupt or clean, and Rymza-Pawlowska takes a risk in arguing that everything changed during the 1970s. Early living history museums, Wild West Shows, period dramas, radio and television serial Westerns, World Fairs and their Midway spectacles each worked in various ways to conjure emotional responses to an imagined past, long before the 1970s. Following the 1970s, likewise, a litany of instructive, reflective, and visual representations continue to loom powerfully in how Americans make sense of the past. We should not lose sight of the porous nature of these practices across time. However, Rymza-Pawlowska effectively establishes the 1970s as a moment when many novel practices gained unprecedented momentum and dissemination on both national and local levels. *History Comes Alive* will make a fine contribution to undergraduate as well as graduate courses in public history.

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