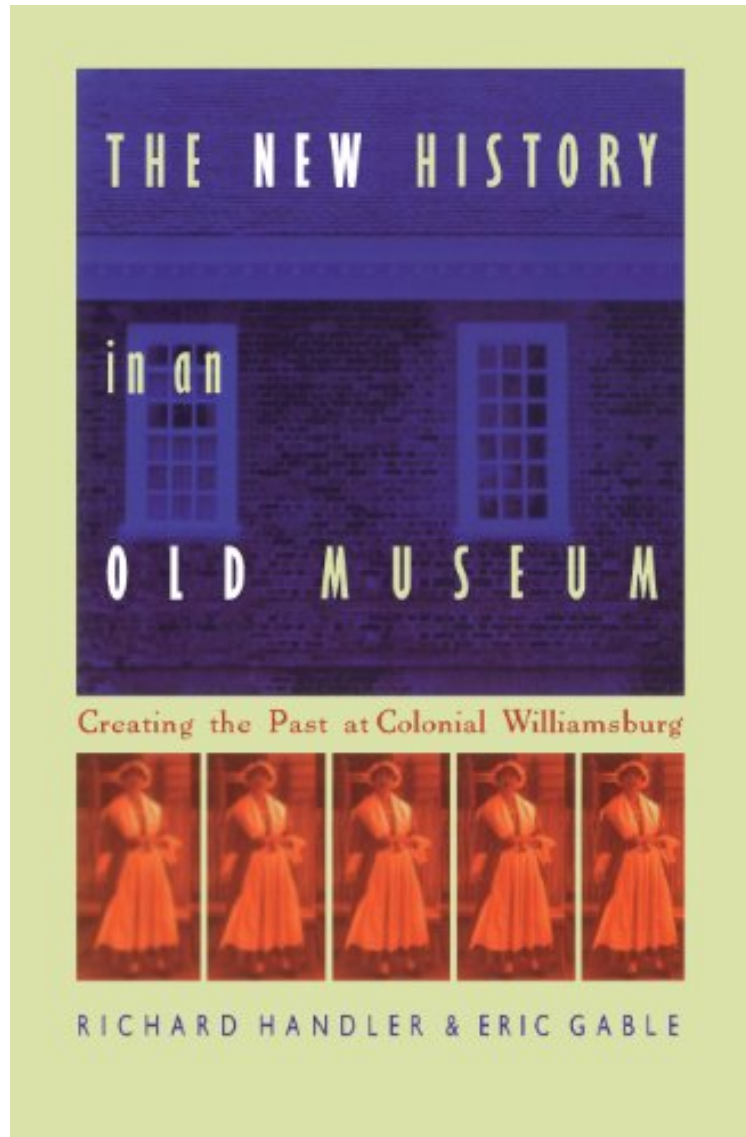


(Ebook free) The New History in an Old Museum: Creating the Past at Colonial Williamsburg

The New History in an Old Museum: Creating the Past at Colonial Williamsburg

Von Richard Handler, Eric Gable
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Von Richard Handler, Eric Gable : The New History in an Old Museum: Creating the Past at Colonial Williamsburg before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The New History in an Old Museum: Creating the Past at Colonial Williamsburg:

KundenrezensionenHilfreichste Kundenrezensionen0 von 0 Kunden fanden die folgende Rezension hilfreich. Muddled

handling of an interesting idea. Von Ein Kunde Colonial Williamsburg is an elaborate fake, run by corporate devils who mercilessly exploit their workers, while badly distorting America's colonial history. At least that is what Handler and Gable would have us believe. There is more than a grain of truth in some of their contentions, but they undermine their case by digressing into political correctness and left-wing dogma. The authors relate how Colonial Williamsburg's political agenda has changed to suit successive generations of scholars and managers, who have massaged "facts" accordingly. Front-line interpreters (costumed characters) are trained to parry controversial questions in order to avoid open discussion of them and to maintain the "official" line. They can become impatient with visitors' ignorance of history, and may resort to insulting them. When historians convey new or corrected information to the staff, interpreters sometimes override those directions in favor of their own views. The historical message is contaminated further by interference from corporate officials, who are more concerned with boosting attendance and competing with theme parks than with running an historically accurate museum. The authors condemn Colonial Williamsburg as a museum that has abandoned its educational mission in favor of showing tourists a good time by building more hotels and golf courses, and which has crassly expanded retail merchandising to compete for tourist dollars. Ironically, Colonial Williamsburg sold Anheuser-Busch the land on which the Busch Gardens theme park now stands, thus helping to create its stiffest competition and spurring its efforts to increase attendance. The authors make a number of telling points against Colonial Williamsburg's version of history, but they lose credibility by suggesting that the existing presentation merely be replaced with one designed to serve their own politically correct agenda. Although Colonial Williamsburg has come a long way in portraying the role of slaves in the colony, it isn't enough for Handler and Gable, who view those efforts as half-hearted, if not hypocritical, even on the part of some African-American interpreters. While criticizing Colonial Williamsburg for speculating about unknown areas of history in order to create a seamless presentation, the authors promote use of just such hypothetical, unsubstantiated "information" as part of a more politically correct view of 18th Century Williamsburg. For example, whether or not it can be proven that Williamsburg patriot George Wythe kept a female slave as his mistress, and perhaps fathered a child by her, the authors believe that Colonial Williamsburg should tell visitors that he did, since so many white slave owners were guilty of miscegenation. The book bogs down badly during a lengthy leftist harangue against capitalism and corporate structure, which the authors dislike and consider inappropriate for Colonial Williamsburg, but for which they offer no alternative. Although that digression is followed by a valuable discussion of the struggle between corporate and educational priorities, the authors often confuse issues of education and history with those of corporate policy and labor relations without convincingly linking them. The result is a muddled examination of Colonial Williamsburg as a place of learning. The work suffers from a lack of systematic data collection, relying instead on anecdotal information gleaned from interviews with officials, interpreters, visitors and others, and there is no sampling or survey data to support the book's broad contentions. The final chapter provides a lucid summary of the book's major points, but the authors have rambled for too long before reaching that point, and many readers will find the preceding chapters heavy going. Moreover, Colonial Williamsburg is not really a museum, and it is doubtful that patrons expect to see a flawlessly accurate reproduction of the late 18th Century city. Visitors know that the costumed interpreters they encounter are performers and they accept the convention. Even with its shortcomings, Colonial Williamsburg can stimulate interest in the people and ideas that dominated political discourse on the eve of revolution and encourage visitors to learn more about them on their own.

Allen J. Wiener
0 von 0 Kunden fanden die folgende Rezension hilfreich. Fascinating and Informative...
Von Susan E. Swogger
This book was assigned in one of my classes and I was very impressed by it. It, despite the opinions of the above reviewer, clearly strove to be balanced and sympathetic in its discussion without losing sight of its academic aims. I found it extremely helpful in finding another way to look at the history I have been presented with at every museum or class I've been to, not just Williamsburg. I went to Williamsburg for the first time after I read this book and was much more interested in what I was seeing than I might otherwise have been -- actually thinking about what I was hearing and reading rather than simply swallowing it whole. The book itself is very well written and enjoyable as well as informative to read -- a rare thing among scholarly works. Handler and Gable did an excellent job.

Kurzbeschreibung
The New History in an Old Museum is an exploration of "historical truth" as presented at Colonial Williamsburg. More than a detailed history of a museum and tourist attraction, it examines the packaging of American history, and consumerism and the manufacturing of cultural beliefs. Through extensive fieldwork including numerous site visits, interviews with employees and visitors, and archival research Richard Handler and Eric Gable illustrate how corporate sensibility blends with pedagogical principle in Colonial Williamsburg to blur the lines between education and entertainment, patriotism and revisionism. During much of its existence, the "living museum" at Williamsburg has been considered a patriotic shrine, celebrating the upscale lifestyles of Virginia's colonial-era elite. But in recent decades a new generation of social historians has injected a more populist and critical slant to the sites narrative of nationhood. For example, in interactions with museum visitors, employees now relate stories about the experiences of

African Americans and women, stories that several years ago did not enter into descriptions of life in Colonial Williamsburg. Handler and Gable focus on the way this public history is managed, as historians and administrators define historiographical policy and middle-level managers train and direct front-line staff to deliver this "product" to the public. They explore how visitors consume or modify what they hear and see, and reveal how interpreters and craftspeople resist or acquiesce in being managed. By deploying the voices of these various actors in a richly textured narrative, *The New History in an Old Museum* highlights the elements of cultural consensus that emerge from this cacophony of conflict and negotiation.