



Monumental Ambivalence: The Politics of Heritage (Joe R. and Teresa Lozana Long Series in Latin American and Latino Art and Culture (Paperback))

Lisa C. Breglia

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From ancient Maya cities in Mexico and Central America to the Taj Mahal in India, cultural heritage sites around the world are being drawn into the wave of privatization that has already swept through such economic sectors as telecommunications, transportation, and utilities. As nation-states decide they can no longer afford to maintain cultural properties—or find it economically advantageous not to do so in the globalizing economy—private actors are stepping in to excavate, conserve, interpret, and represent archaeological and historical sites. But what are the ramifications when a multinational corporation, or even an indigenous village, owns a piece of national patrimony which holds cultural and perhaps sacred meaning for all the country's people, as well as for visitors from the rest of the world?

In this ambitious book, Lisa Breglia investigates "heritage" as an arena in which a variety of private and public actors compete for the right to benefit, economically and otherwise, from controlling cultural patrimony. She presents ethnographic case studies of two archaeological sites in the Yucatán Peninsula—Chichén Itzá and Chunchucmil and their surrounding modern communities—to demonstrate how indigenous landholders, foreign archaeologists, and the Mexican state use heritage properties to position themselves as legitimate "heirs" and beneficiaries of Mexican national patrimony. Breglia's research masterfully describes the "monumental ambivalence" that results when local residents, excavation laborers, site managers, and state agencies all enact their claims to cultural patrimony. Her findings make it clear that informal and partial privatizations—which go on quietly and continually—are as real a threat to a nation's heritage as the prospect of fast-food restaurants and shopping centers in the ruins of a sacred site.



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