

Wanted: new premises for SA's real history

Defence Force) and the fortified villages of Mukumbani and Mutele in Venda?

By contrast, Frescura also listed some of the sites which have been proclaimed national monuments, including a now barren piece of ground where the house in which General Louis Botha once stood and Hendrik Verwoerd's house at Betty's Bay (known as "Blaas 'n Bietjie"), which, said Frescura "is reputed to have been designed in 1961 by a man better known as the 'architect of apartheid'".

But why all the fuss over historical sites and museums? According to the editor of the *Journal of American History*, David Thelen, it is because both memories and monuments are central to the way in which people make sense of the world.

"The process of remembering and the content of our memories are our ways of defining who we are in the present, of framing choices for the future, of finding solace from immediate troubles, of building competence

just cheap imitation?

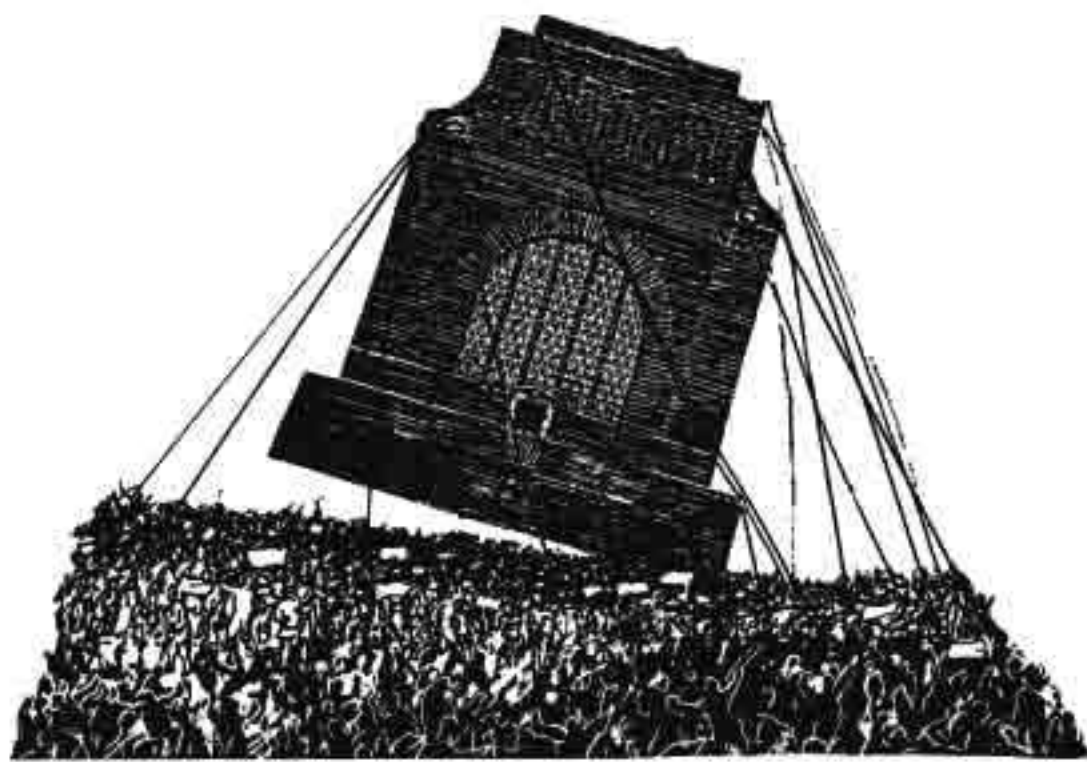
the past – but also because it encourages passivity". She says Gold Reef City's past is "a past without compounds or segregation". The role played by blacks in the gold mining industry is little more than hinted at and the blacks at Gold Reef City are mostly "happy songsters, music-makers and dancers". The version of history presented makes no mention of the restriction of movement on black miners, no hint of repression, exploitation, loneliness, fear or mutilation.

However, says Kros, visitors to Gold Reef City do show an interest in the past and how the living conditions have changed and appear to want to learn more about how life

If memories are important and help us to define who we are and where we come from, how should history be remembered by South Africans and just whose stories should be told?

and confidence as interpreters and participants in our everyday relationships," he said.

Thelen argued that monuments could be used in various ways – to show how different people or groups remember the same event differently or to show how the construction of memories have



changed over time. For example, the battle of Little Big Horn in the United States should be shown from the perspective of both the cavalry and the Sioux, or a monument at the battle of Blood River should show how the trekkers and the Zulus experienced the battle differently.

At all times when remembering and reconstructing the past, said Thelen, questions must be asked such as what is being retained and what is being forgotten, what is not included and what is not explained.

used to be a century ago.

But for those actively seeking to understand more about how Johannesburg was shaped Gold Reef City is "too insubstantial".

According to Kros its past is "soothing but unhelpful – pleasant but irrelevant... Gold Reef City allows us to relax in the village square, but it doesn't explain to us how we lost our real square in the real city it claims to represent. "Its duplicity game with history and authenticity arouses our initial interest but it patronises us – offering us trinkets and curios and whimsical glimpses into an anonymous, monochrome past, edged with broekie lace."

For many at the conference a burning question was how South African museums would present the realities of policies implemented by the South African state. How to confront white, museum-going audiences with the (previously untold) stories of the past, and how to make museums accessible and meaningful for all South African?

Another American delegate, Lonnie Bunch of the Smithsonian Institute, suggested that museums could play an important role in society as a "moral educator".

He said museums should be places that allowed diverse people to interact and engage with each other and their history. "There aren't many places in society that allow people to do that; museums can be forums for dialogue and vehicles for empowerment."

He said if South African museum curators and historians embraced the black African past, it would provide a means to illuminate "all the dark corners of the South African past".

Museums needed to change their approach and to build up relationships with the people and groups they wanted to study.

"Museums must enter into collaborative relationships with communities over the long term. Communities must recognise that their opinions are valued and that they are participants in history," said Bunch.

Sue Valentine is media co-ordinator with Idasa.

Challenge to heritage industry

SOME might say it's history up for sale, others might be more accommodating and suggest that at least it is making people think about their past even if it's not entirely accurate, but whatever way you look at it, the "heritage industry" is big business.

In South Africa a prime example is the rapidly developing and highly successful Victoria and Alfred Waterfront (which has enjoyed an estimated six million visitors in the last two years). But just what picture of