

# 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

## 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

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".

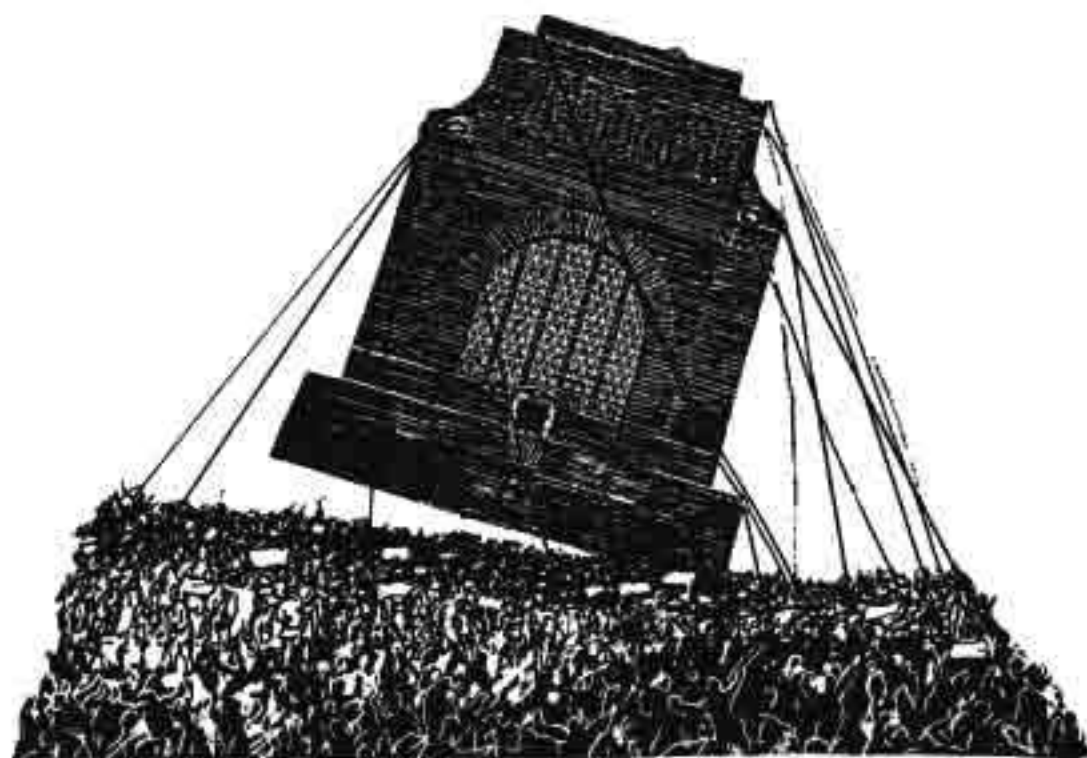
He said museums should be places that allowed diverse people to interact and engage with each other and their history. "There aren't many places in society that allow people to do that; museums can be forums for dialogue and vehicles for empowerment."

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.



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.

## 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

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."

## 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

the past does the Waterfront present?

While the Waterfront claims to restore elements of Cape Town's past, University of Cape Town historian Nigel Worden says the Capetonian past presented by the Waterfront is one of a particular form of power and privilege.

"The past of the Waterfront is an intensely British colonial one...No wider interpretation of the history of the city which was linked to the sea is permitted. Little is said about the town or its harbour before 1860. Van Riebeeck receives an obligatory but passing mention in the audio-visual show as the builder of a jetty..." said Worden.

He argues that "the sailors, soldiers, slaves, Khoi, political exiles and fishermen who crowded the harbour before then are conspicuous by their absence".

But it is not only the Dutch or French white settlers who are missing from the image of the past presented by the Waterfront. Worden says even more strikingly absent are the workers who constructed the harbour and the working class Capetonians who made a living working at the docks.

In addition, the first African migrant labourers in Cape Town, who had been recruited from the Transkei and Eastern Cape from the 1870s, were employed at the Alfred and Victoria basins. It was these workers, says Worden, who provided the nucleus of Cape Town's first segregated township at Ndabeni.

What is also missing from the history of Cape Town's waterfront as portrayed by the Victoria and Alfred development is any sense of conflict or tension in the past.

"There is no mention, for instance, of the fierce opposition to the building of a break-water put up by the Port Elizabeth representatives of the Eastern Cape in the 1850s. Strikes, convictism, slavery, migrant labour and racial tension are all missing from the Waterfront displays. The myth of Cape Town's racial harmony is thus confirmed," says Worden.

He argues that the broader appeal of the Waterfront would be greatly increased were the developers to restore the history of *people* - of ordinary men and women - as well as the few "great figures" who are presently represented.

Whether the developers can or will attempt to attract different visitors to the Waterfront and offer some insights into the past with which they can identify will, says Worden, reveal much about the future of privately funded public history in the "new" South Africa.

# Pressure is on for affirmative action

**Many of the stock negative responses to affirmative action are of little consequence, according to WARREN KRAFCHIK. He argues that it is time to discard the myths and start debating implementation.**

**T**HERE will be substantial political pressure on any new government to introduce affirmative action in favour of blacks and women. The roots of this can be seen in the current distribution of senior positions in the South African commercial and government sectors.

For example, in the top 100 companies only 2,2 percent of all managers and less than 1 percent of senior managers are African. Although women represent 36 percent of the workforce in these companies, they comprise only 13 percent of management and less than 1 percent of board members. Of the 3 239 top civil servants, only 4,5 percent are black and only 0,6 percent African (recent comparable figures for women are not available).

The repeal of racist legislation in South Africa will not in itself create equality of opportunity. Those who have traditionally been advantaged are likely to continue to inherit privileges, particularly through the exercise of economic power, over time. To prevent this it is necessary to consider the further empowerment of the disadvantaged. Affirmative action is a general term for a variety of such measures characterised by attempts to redress racial and gender imbalances. The aim is to establish the basis for effective competition and participation in society.

Affirmative action programmes may refer to the extension of additional financial, educational and training facilities to disadvantaged groups, as well as to accelerated promotion. It has been used to refer to both the redistribution of resources and to social responsibility programmes through which the private sector extends financial and other assistance to black communities. For the sake of clarity, I will limit discussion to affirmative action programmes at the workplace, whether in the private or public sector.

One of the arguments traditionally levelled against affirmative action is that it inevitably leads to falling standards and tokenism. While many programmes do end up as expensive window-dressing exercises,

this is a fault of their design and implementation rather than an automatic consequence of affirmative action.

One reason for tokenism, lowering of standards and consequent programme failure is an over-reliance on quotas. This detracts from the importance of the supportive mechanisms required for successful affirmative action programmes. Such programmes must be accompanied by training sufficient to ensure that newcomers are equipped with the necessary skills, ability and expertise. But training of the individual is not sufficient in itself. As Professor Linda Human of the University of Stellenbosch Graduate School of Business argues, not only do newcomers need orientation, they cannot be expected to simply integrate into an organisation which remains otherwise unchanged. Current organisational members have a critical role to play in the success of affirmative action programmes and managerial expectations are an important component of this. Affirmative action must therefore be aimed not only at the target group, but also at those with whom they will have to work if it is to succeed.

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A second argument often cited against affirmative action is that it amounts to reverse discrimination which is unacceptable in a society striving towards a code of non-racialism and non-sexism. This argument misses the point. A clear definition of affirmative action reveals it is a short-term, tactical measure - not a principle. It recognises that to achieve equality of opportunity it is essential to level the playing fields first.

Two related problems are of greater concern. If the beneficiaries of affirmative action are defined in terms of racial groups, policies