

THE PAST IS A Foreign Country

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DAVID LOWENTHAL

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"Dazzling and wide-ranging ... packed with vivid examples and a vast range of pithy quotations, and throughout expressed with verve and wit."

Robert Tombs, Evening Standard

"The range is truly impressive and the understanding, indeed vision, at play in the presentation of past legacies makes for an enthralling read." Standpoint

About the Author

David Lowenthal is Emeritus Professor of Geography and Honorary Research Fellow at University College London. He is a gold medallist of the Royal Geographical, the Royal Scottish Geographical and the American Geographical Societies, a Fellow of the British Academy and honorary D.Litt. Memorial University of Newfoundland. In 2010 he was awarded the Forbes Lecture Prize by the International Institute for Conservation. His books include The Heritage Crusade and the Spoils of History (1996), George Perkins Marsh, Prophet of Conservation (2000) and The Nature of Cultural Heritage and the Culture of National Heritage (2005).

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The past remains essential - and inescapable. A quarter-century after the publication of his classic account of man's attitudes to his past, David Lowenthal revisits how we celebrate, expunge, contest and domesticate the past to serve present needs. He shows how nostalgia and heritage now pervade every facet of public and popular culture. History embraces nature and the cosmos as well as humanity. The past is seen and touched and tasted and smelt as well as heard and read about. Empathy, re-enactment, memory and commemoration overwhelm traditional history. A unified past once certified by experts and reliant on written texts has become a fragmented, contested history forged by us all. New insights into history and memory, bias and objectivity, artefacts and monuments, identity and authenticity, and remorse and contrition, make this book once again the essential guide to the past that we inherit, reshape and bequeath to the future.

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Lowenthal needed a much more severe editor. This tome is smart, stylish and stuffed with interesting and relevant references, but reads as a breathlessly rambling, tediously repetitive accumulation of information rather than a sustained, well wrought argument. I would suggest a 3rd revisitation that overhauls and

compresses the outline, edits out the mass of less compelling details, and elaborates the most significant examples in enough depth to truly illustrate his main points. Otherwise, so many of Lowenthal's scholarly tidbits merely evaporate rather than sink in. For a book that runs more than 600 pages, it feels frustratingly superficial.

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