analysis of how Britain’s museums and other cultural institutions weighed in on the interpretive themes. The national celebration “inevitably forced confrontation with the difficult and probably irresolvable question of whether it is possible to represent the memory of the trauma of Atlantic slavery through museological display” (318). Attempts at honest and sincere interpretations were abundant, but no less oblivious to the irony of abolition itself.

“It is the unnatural coupling, the impossible equation, of an imagined emancipation with the reality of the inherited trauma of Atlantic slavery that justifies the compounding of the words freedom and horrible in the title of this book” (3). The problem with England, writes Wood, is “that there is still an ugly enjoyment in the ownership of guilt. There is a feeling that it is enough for the white British establishment to parade the specter of an easily assumed and rather superior sorrow, to shed a bitter tear, and that this show of emotion is true and proper and just what the slave’s descendents deserve and want. . . . Such theatricalized sadness also provides the support for its emotional counterbalance, the celebration of the ‘heroes of abolition’” (354).

The Horrible Gift of Freedom is, among other things, a survey of the gross propagandistic manifestation of moral capital in the context of the emancipation movement. Freedom has a market value. Wood’s analysis of how propaganda generated by the emancipation movement of the nineteenth century was co-opted, and ultimately, encoded for mass market consumption, might appropriately describe for contemporary audiences how the violent imposition of “liberation” is currently being packaged for markets in far-off Iraq or Afghanistan.

Rick Moss

African American Museum and Library at Oakland


One can read this book as a series of biographical sketches that provide insight into a complicated and driven man or as a call to action to utilize the power and possibilities of memory, history, and museums to change people and communities.

Lonnie Bunch’s expert storytelling conjures up precise visual images of human experiences we all share. His easy flowing, insightful words reach out and pull even the most reluctant bystander into the game. As a result, Call the Lost Dream Back: Essays on History, Race and Museums evokes excitement and energy that can fuel research, discussions, projects, and exhibits. Bunch opens his first essay with “Catch the nigger!” “Get Him,” (17), a phrase often associated with the discussion of slavery. However, this story is about Bunch being attacked and chased by white kids after a baseball game in the early sixties. Bunch goes on to recount how he was saved by a young
white girl. He explains this as a pivotal incident in his life, one that began his life-long journey of “wrestling with the omnipresent specter of race” (18), and studying history.

The young Bunch’s enthusiasm for reading and learning about the past expanded as he confronted “issues of race in all the corners of [his] existence: from school to the Boy Scouts to the athletic field” (25). He states, “But at first, embracing history was simply a means of escape. . . . The burdens of race seemed to ease as my fascination with history grew.” But eventually, Bunch came to view history as “my teacher and my protector . . . my weapon of choice” (25).

An “obsessive visitor” (26) to the library, Bunch read every biography available to him. As his love affair with reading about the past deepened, he found himself moving beyond the biographies of American presidents to “unacknowledged heroes, such as Frederick Douglass, Fannie Lou Hamer and Ida B. Wells” (26). As Bunch explores the personal remembrances of his early years and family life, he channels broader themes in African American history.

In chapter 2, “And I Was Never the Same: My Global Transformation,” readers follow Bunch on his international journey to South Africa, Germany, Ghana, New Zealand, England, Israel, China, and Australia. Although every experience did not have the same impact, each one offered a unique opportunity for growth. He explains, “Not every visit or international connection has the personal meaning and power of that early trip to South Africa” (32). Bunch was deeply moved by the stories he heard and the people he encountered on his trip to Robben Island, where Nelson Mandela was imprisoned for nearly twenty-seven years. Despite being invited to South Africa to “educate, to share [his] knowledge about museums, the interpretation of the past and how to engage audiences,” Bunch became the student. He writes, “Yet it was I who was schooled. . . . It was I who returned home changed” (32).

Bunch recounts experiences at a Nazi concentration camp outside of Munich, the slave castles in Ghana, the holiest sites of Christianity, Judaism, and Islam in Israel, the national Museum of New Zealand, and the District 6 Museum in South Africa. Bunch says that “working internationally challenged me to rethink many of my assumptions—about race, about the uniqueness of America’s history, about presenting complexity and the many roles that museums can play” (33).

Bunch explains the impact of his work with scholars from fifteen countries to help organize the seminar “Public History and National Identity.” This gathering sharpened his perception of the roles museums can play in what he considers the “most significant issues of the 21st century: Who are we as a nation and what does it mean to be an American?” (37).

In chapter 5, Bunch discusses the challenge of interpreting African American history in museums. He covers a number of themes and cites several concerns, including the challenge of transcending the rosy glow of the past, the challenge of resisting monolithic depictions, the challenge of ambiguity, and, most importantly, the challenge to find a “new integration” that re-centers
African American history. He prods public historians and museum professionals to raise the bar and expand their audience and story. He states, “What a gift it will be when museums help the public understand that they are shaped and touched by African American history—all the day, every day” (70).

In several chapters, Bunch confronts such subjects as diversity in museums, interpreting the recent past, and museum challenges ranging from funding to politics—all in essays he has written between 1984 to 2005. He also includes reprints from several of his scholarly publications on African American history in California. He pushes for the profession to have the courage of their convictions and for their scholarship to “fight the good fight.”

However, Bunch does not throw out challenges without solutions. Throughout the book he offers sage suggestions about how we can be better teachers, historians, stewards, curators, fundraisers, and, most importantly, better people.

It is through his very personal and powerful stories that Bunch teaches the importance and impact of history. We go along because he invites us to remember our own journey. This book is not only useful for public historians, museum professionals, and academic historians; it is inspiring and encouraging. We close the cover on this book knowing that people influence one another and history influences us all.

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Life Stages of the Museum Visitor: Building Engagement Over a Lifetime

Life Stages of the Museum Visitor: Building Engagement Over a Lifetime is one of a number of recent publications that explore visitor demographics, psychographics, and motivations for attending museums. Published by the American Association of Museums Press, the book synthesizes research studies conducted by consultants at Reach Advisors, as well as other studies performed by single institutions, in total representing more than one hundred museums of all varieties—from children’s museums and science centers to outdoor history parks and historical societies. Primarily intended for museum practitioners, Life Stages of a Museum Visitor by Susie Wilkening and James Chung makes a valuable contribution to the growing body of literature by focusing primarily on the characteristics, interests, and motivations of museum visitors at different stages of their lives and within distinct generational categories. It is a practical and timely publication for museum staff and consultants interested in producing exhibitions or programs for diverse visitors, or developing marketing and membership approaches to attract their attendance and support.

Over the past thirty years or so, museum leaders have begun increasingly to recognize that their work and, indeed, the long-term viability of their institutions demand more than presenting objects, art works, artifacts, or specimens