

Talking Back to Hollywood: Museum Representation in Popular Culture as a Gateway to Understanding Public Perception

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Abstract : Museums are enjoying quite the moment in pop culture. From discussions of labor in Bob's Burger to introducing cultural repatriation in The Black Panther, discussions of various museum issues are making their way to popular media. "Talking Back to Hollywood" analyzes the impact museums have on movies and television. The paper will highlight a series of cultural cameos and discuss what each reveals about critical themes in museums: repatriation, labor, obfuscated histories, institutional legacies, artificial intelligence, and holograms. Using a mixed methods approach to include surveys, descriptive research, thematic analysis, and context analysis, the authors of this paper will explore how we, as the museum staff, might begin to cite museums and movies together as texts. Drawing from their experience working in museums and public history, this contingent of mid-career professionals will highlight the impact museums have had on movies and television and the didactic lessons these portrayals can provide back to cultural heritage professionals. From tackling critical themes in museums such as repatriation, labor conditions/inequities, obfuscated histories, curatorial choice and control, institutional legacies, and more, this paper is grounded in the cultural zeitgeist of the 2000s and the message these media portrayals send to the public and the cultural heritage sector. In particular, the paper will examine how portrayals of AI, holograms, and more technology can be used as entry points for necessary discussions with the public on mistrust, misinformation, and emerging technologies. This paper will not only expose the legacy and cultural understanding of the museum field within popular culture but also will discuss actionable ways that public historians can use these portrayals as an entry point for discussions with the public, citing literature reviews and quantitative and qualitative analysis of survey results. As Hollywood is talking about museums, museums can use that to better connect to the audiences who feel comfortable at the cinema but are excluded from the museum.

Keywords : museums, public memory, representation, popular culture

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