

Abstract for: Counter-/Narratives of Punishment and Criminal Justice.

Popular and visual narratives of punishment in museum settings

Hannah Thurston

University of Brighton

Museums tell us a great deal about punishment, both past and present. As storied spaces they 'remember' punishment through accounts of brutality and benevolence; condemnation and compassion; retribution and righteousness. Indeed, these tourist sites offer powerful narratives about crime, but they are also spaces which can problematize concepts such as 'justice', 'tolerance' and 'order'. This paper will consider the stories Texas tells about mass incarceration and the death penalty within its tourist sites associated with punishment. Drawing on a museum ethnography undertaken in the Lone Star State, it will outline and analyse various narrative features found within the Texan museum stories. More specifically though, this paper will address the tensions found to be at work within the museum setting and consider how we might begin to explain these as 'counter-narratives' of Texan punishment. As this paper will argue, museums offer a unique opportunity to understand how a collective narrates its own relationship with criminal justice; they are significant sites in which meanings are made and opinions formed. It is for these reasons that criminologists are now beginning to take tourism seriously.