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Assembling the dinosaur: fossil hunters, tycoons, and the making of a spectacle

by Lukas Rieppel, Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 2019, 325 pp., $29.95 (hardback), ISBN: 9780674737587

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Assembling the dinosaur: fossil hunters, tycoons, and the making of a spectacle, by Lukas Rieppel, Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 2019, 325 pp., $29.95 (hardback), ISBN: 9780674737587

Based largely on Rieppel's dissertation, *Assembling the Dinosaur* is the latest book dealing with dinosaur paleontology during the last third of the nineteenth century and the first decade of the twentieth, a period which Rieppel calls the Long Gilded Age. Dinosaurs in Rieppel's telling primarily served as social and nationalistic currency for America's wealth elite, particularly Andrew Carnegie and "his" dinosaur. Dinosaurs and paleontologists actually occupy a small portion of the book. Rather, the emphasis is on how wealthy benefactors supported dinosaur research and exhibition as a means of justifying their affluence, as well as on how the bureaucracy of Big Business caused a revolution in museum governance and record keeping. In Rieppel's telling of this narrative, correlation implies causation. The reality is seldom that simple. For example, the conflict between museum director Frederick Skiff (of Field Columbian Museum) and the curatorial staff was probably due more to his prickly personality than to the bureaucratic changes he was implementing.

The Long Gilded Age is also a time when museums were undergoing radical transformation. Exhibit labels, for example went from conveying minimal information (taxonomic name, geological age, catalog number, and locality), which had little meaning to non-paleontologists, to a brief narrative about the fossil. This and other changes were the natural result of museums maturing and becoming more than simple storerooms for fossils. In actual fact, many of these developments became codified as museum best practices advocated by the American Association of Museums (est. 1906) and had little to do with the intrusion of Big Business bureaucracy into museums.

As for Andrew Carnegie, the social and nationalistic significance of his 80-foot-long dinosaur and his gifts of the skeleton's casts to museums in various countries are greatly diminished when placed alongside the entire museums and concert halls gifted by Carnegie. I would even argue that Carnegie's greatest impact on American society (and on the culture of other countries) was actually the 1800+ libraries he gifted, especially those established in rural communities where the quality of education was low. These other gifts are not as showy, which is why I have begun to think there is a myth that has developed in the various retellings of the connections between dinosaurs and America's wealthy elite. Another myth is that the notorious feud between O.C. Marsh of Yale University and E.D. Cope of Philadelphia characterizes American paleontology. This narrative is so widely believed, even today, that there was a recent proposal of a reality TV show that would feature paleontologists verbally attacking other paleontologists. In actuality, the Marsh-Cope feud was an aberration. There were other paleontologists in 1880s and 1890s, and some were working

cooperatively, such as the joint American Museum of Natural History – Princeton University expeditions.

Despite its faults, Rieppel's book is well researched as attested by the large number of references; I just cannot agree with some of his correlations and causations. Compared with other books that cover the Long Gilded Age, the book is a bit dry and academic, but it does contain a wealth of information for those seeking to understand the (minor) role dinosaurs may have played during America's economic ascension at the beginning of the twentieth century.

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Raced to death in 1920s Hawai'i: injustice and revenge in the Fukunaga case, by Jonathan Y. Okamura, Champaign, IL, University of Illinois Press, 2019, xii, 231 pp., $27.95 (paperback), ISBN: 978-0-252-08443-0

Jonathan Okamura's riveting account of Myles Yutaka Fukunaga's 1928 kidnapping and murder of ten-year-old George Gill Jamieson takes you back to interwar Hawai'i, a pivotal moment in the territory's volatile history of race relations. Within three weeks following Fukunaga's capture and confession, authorities charged the nineteen-year-old Nisei, or second-generation Japanese American, with first-degree murder and sentenced him to be hanged. Fukunaga's hasty trial and execution cannot be understood without a thorough analysis of Hawai'i's distinct racial hierarchy in which the sizable Japanese American community was increasingly seen as a threat to Haole (white) dominance.

Through extensive research and compelling prose, Okamura's day-by-day review of the Fukunaga case puts oligarchic rule on full display. He convincingly argues that Haole officials "raced" Fukunaga to death, with the dual meaning implying both Fukunaga's racialization and Haole society's race for immediate revenge. The verdict sent a reverberating message to anyone who dared threaten Haole authority against the background of Oahu's "first interethnic" sugar strike in 1920 (27). Okamura juxtaposes the Fukunaga case with the oft-cited representation of Hawai'i as a "racial paradise." He posits the prosecution's use of "constitutional colorblindness" to justify the Fukunaga trial as yet another instance of injustice, which only served to privilege Haole interests by denying the very existence of racial difference (111).

As Okamura unravels the intricacies of the criminal investigation and subsequent jury selection, the racial bias of the police and of the state rears its ugly head. In "The Insanity Question," the subject of Chapter 5, Fukunaga's mental status