Past in the Present: the Politics of Southern Heritage Tourism

The National Trust defines cultural heritage tourism as traveling to experience the cultural, historic, and natural resources that authentically represent the stories and people of the past and present. Within the above context, this course is a multidisciplinary seminar for students who wish to employ theoretical and practical approaches to examining the movements of heritage site practitioners and tourists within Southern regional spaces. Students will investigate how historic preservationists and other cultural resource managers establish, reinforce, and reconstruct Southern identities through heritage sites and, more specifically, focus on cultural representations of the South and the impacts of these representations on the historical experiences of local populations and tourists. Theoretical frameworks for this course are grounded in the fields of cultural anthropology, sociology, public history, and geography. Practical approaches to the role of public education and interpretation at Southern heritage sites are explored through student participation in the Behind the Big House program, a grassroots tourism, historic preservation, and education program which interprets the lives of the enslaved through extant former dwellings, located in Holly Springs, Mississippi.