

BOOK REVIEW

PROFOUND INSIGHT INTO THE AMERICAN WORLD OF SPIRITS AND GHOSTS

Alan Brown 2011. *Ghosts along the Mississippi River*. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 238 pp.

Alan Brown's book brings to the reader a voluminous selection of spirit and ghost stories from America. The author has used the Mississippi River as an imaginary axis to organize his material. After having given a cursory historical overview of the explorers who visited the Mississippi region in the past centuries, of the economic use of the river and the geographical location of the spots described in the book, the author proceeds with his stories. Brown follows the river's course, moving from one state to another, visiting the towns and villages along the riverside, ransacking museums, interviewing the relevant people, and participating in special guided ghost tours, this way collecting stories, historical facts related to them, current and former viewpoints, attitudes and explanatory versions. Additional commentaries are provided by museum workers, parapsychologists, owners of ghost hotels and houses, their visitors and people in the neighbourhood. The original texts are preceded and followed by the author's comments, which offer information about the settlement history of the particular region, life stories of the former residents of ghost houses, and also parallels in the traditional motifs in ghost stories (e.g., the motif of the glass casket). The author's style is neutral and benevolent, and leaves it up to the reader to decide if concrete ghost phenomena should be taken seriously or they have rather persisted due to pre-determined tradition. The ghosts, undoubtedly, make up a motley assortment – black slaves and Native Americans, soldiers and pastors, buccaneers and aristocratic ladies, unhappy lovers and murder victims. It is remarkable that the majority of the ghosts described in the book are also currently active, i.e., people in these spots continue to hear, see and perceive signs of their existence. It is interesting to realize how significant is the role of spiritual creatures in modern American tourism and entertainment business. For instance, for years accommodation businesses have been competing for the title of *The Most Haunted Hotel in America*; some hotels advertise packages referring to ghost experiences (such as the *Ghostly Get-Away Package for Two* in Magnolia Mansion; in several towns tourists are offered guided tours of ghost spots, and in addition to all this, ghost houses are eagerly investigated and tested by parapsychologists, herewith confirming the public opinion that in a certain sense these are special and anomalous places.

The book is logical, informative and well readable, and might disabuse some people of the delusion that in developed countries and urban contexts ghost stories ended up extinct long ago.



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