

Imagining Tombstone: The Town Too Tough to Die (Culture America (Hardcover))

By Kara L. McCormack

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When prospector “Ed” Schieffelin set out from Fort Huachuca in 1877 in search of silver, skeptics told him all he’d find would be his own tombstone. What he did discover, of course, was one of the richest veins of silver in the West—a strike he wryly called Tombstone. Briefly a boomtown, in less than a decade Tombstone was fading into what, for the next half-century, looked more like a ghost town. How is it, Kara McCormack asks, that the resurrection of a few of the town’s long-dead figures, caught forever in a thirty-second shoot-out, revived the moribund Tombstone—and turned it into what the Arizona Office of Tourism today calls “equal parts Deadwood and Disney”?

A meditation on the marketing of “authenticity,” *Imagining Tombstone* considers this “most authentic western town in America” as the intersection of history and mythmaking, entertainment and education, the wish to preserve, the will to succeed, and the need to survive. McCormack revisits the facts behind the feud that culminated in the Earp brothers’ and Doc Holliday’s long walk to their showdown with the Clantons and McLaury’s—a walk reenacted by so many actors that it became a ritual of Hollywood westerns and a staple of present-day Tombstone’s tourist offerings. Taking into account decades of preservation efforts, stories told by Hollywood, performances on the town’s streets, the fervor of Earp historians and western history buffs, and global notions of the West, *Imagining Tombstone* shows how the town’s tenacity depends on far more than a “usable past.” If Tombstone is “The Town Too Tough to Die,” it is also, as this edifying and entertaining book makes clear, the place where authentic history and its counterpart in popular culture reveal their lasting and lucrative hold on the public imagination.

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Editorial Review

Review

"In *Imagining Tombstone*, readers encounter detailed and incisive analysis of the town's numerous popular representations. . . . Indeed, the book's greatest strength might be that it moves beyond the tired discussions of authenticity that too often plague studies of tourism and historic preservation."—*Montana The Magazine of Western History*

"*Imagining Tombstone* is a highly informative text, suitable for students, scholars, and nonacademic audiences alike. McCormack provides a significant contribution to the fields of historic preservation, tourism studies, and the American West."—*H-Net Reviews*

"This insightful and imaginative book investigates the twisted trail of Tombstone from silver boom town to dusty ghost town to tourist 'Wild West' mecca. The struggle over historic preservation—or the lack of it—has created a cast of characters as colorful and driven as any who strolled down Allen Street in 1881. The gunfight at the O.K. Corral is reenacted repeatedly in modern Tombstone, but many a showdown preceded it in the struggle to find an uneasy balance between historic preservation and the imaginary West of our collective fantasies. McCormack tells this remarkable story with scholarly objectivity, but also with grace, wit, and considerable empathy."—**Paul Andrew Hutton**, author of *Sunrise in His Pocket: The Life, Legend, and Legacy of Davy Crockett*

"Site of one of the most celebrated confrontations of the American frontier, Tombstone has remained a contested landscape perpetually subject to a range of competing interpretations, political shifts, and the vagaries of consumer demand. In her lively and multifaceted analysis, McCormack deftly illuminates the tensions and trade-offs underlying efforts to manipulate places to match the contours of our collective imagination."—**Alicia Barber**, author of *Reno's Big Gamble: Image and Reputation in the Biggest Little City*

"Kara McCormack takes us from the famous "gunfight at the O.K. Corral" and its remarkable legacy in Tombstone tourism, historic preservation, and memory wars, to the broader global consumption and recontextualization of western mythology, and Tombstone's new reality as a hotspot of Wild West style border patrol vigilantism. The end result is a fast-paced, insightful, and compelling account of how iconic events in the western past are remembered purposefully, and powerfully, though not necessarily honestly or accurately."—**David Wrobel**, author of *Promised Lands: Promotion, Memory, and the Creation of the American West*

About the Author

Kara L. McCormack is a postdoctoral teaching fellow in the Thinking Matters Program at Stanford University.

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