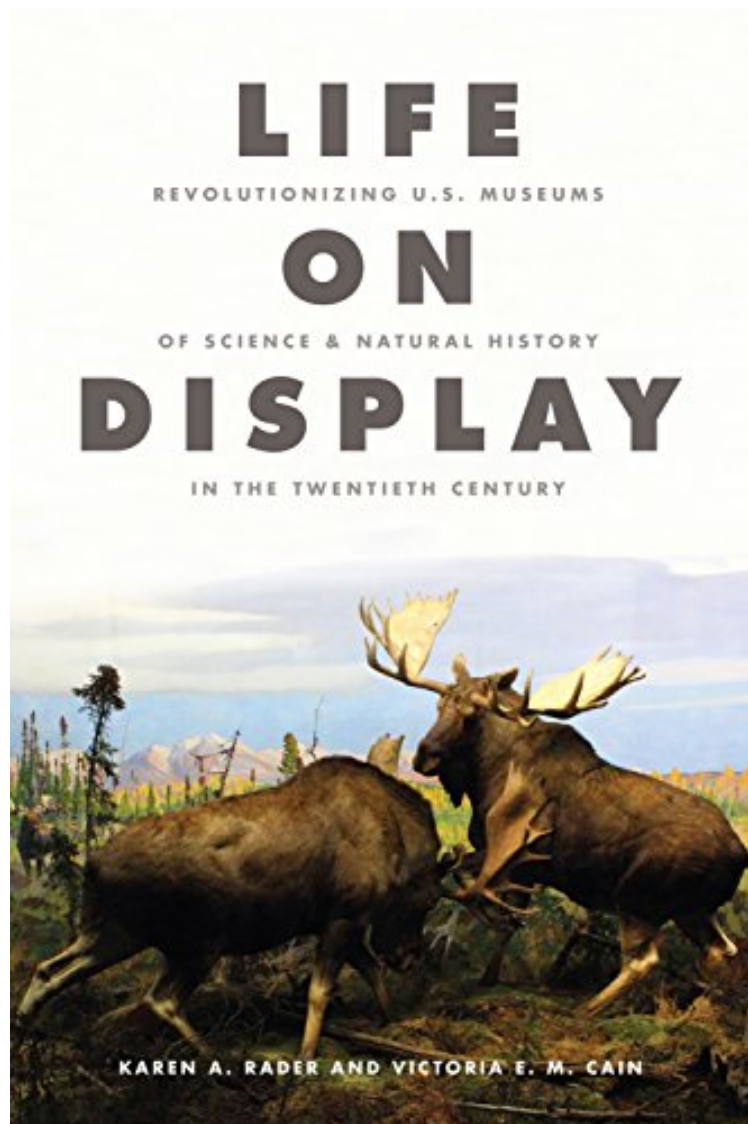


[Online library] Life on Display: Revolutionizing U.S. Museums of Science and Natural History in the Twentieth Century

Life on Display: Revolutionizing U.S. Museums of Science and Natural History in the Twentieth Century

Karen A. Rader, Victoria E. M. Cain
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Karen A. Rader, Victoria E. M. Cain : Life on Display: Revolutionizing U.S. Museums of Science and Natural History in the Twentieth Century before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Life on Display: Revolutionizing U.S. Museums of Science and Natural History in the Twentieth Century:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. This is an awesome book.By Maria DansWell-written fascinating

account of the evolution of science natural history museums in the US during the 20th century. Two enthusiastic thumbs-up! 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Great historical tidbits, interesting lessons! By Chris G4.5 stars would be more accurate, as it could be a little difficult to get through at times and the authors use a repetitive style that isn't my preference, but a good book all around. I'm more experienced with general history museums, science centers, and narrowly-focused institutions like aviation, space, or rail museums, than natural history museums, this book was fascinating. Using a roughly decade-by-decade analysis of the tensions between the public and the professional, informal education and entertainment, etc, the book contains generalizable lessons for almost any modern museum: for example, the museums which commit early often find success, but overcommitting creates a problem when the times change, and the most flexible institutions are the ones most likely to thrive. Interesting historical tidbits were sprinkled throughout, as well. I was surprised to learn about the age of science centers (hint: they started to appear in the 1930s, then had a revolution in the 1970s/80s), and the constant push for interactivity by some of the museums audiences.

Rich with archival detail and compelling characters, *Life on Display* uses the history of biological exhibitions to analyze museums' shifting roles in twentieth-century American science and society. Karen A. Rader and Victoria E. M. Cain chronicle profound changes in these exhibitions—and the institutions that housed them—between 1910 and 1990, ultimately offering new perspectives on the history of museums, science, and science education. Rader and Cain explain why science and natural history museums began to welcome new audiences between the 1900s and the 1920s and chronicle the turmoil that resulted from the introduction of new kinds of biological displays. They describe how these displays of life changed dramatically once again in the 1930s and 1940s, as museums negotiated changing, often conflicting interests of scientists, educators, and visitors. The authors then reveal how museum staffs, facing intense public and scientific scrutiny, experimented with wildly different definitions of life science and life science education from the 1950s through the 1980s. The book concludes with a discussion of the influence that corporate sponsorship and blockbuster economics wielded over science and natural history museums in the century's last decades. A vivid, entertaining study of the ways science and natural history museums shaped and were shaped by understandings of science and public education in the twentieth-century United States, *Life on Display* will appeal to historians, sociologists, and ethnographers of American science and culture, as well as museum practitioners and general readers.

"Focuses on the evolution of U.S. science and nature museums from the late 19th century to the early 21st century, stitching together a number of surprising insights into an excellent history."