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First in the Homes of His Countrymen: George Washington's Mount Vernon in the American Imagination

Lydia Mattice Brandt
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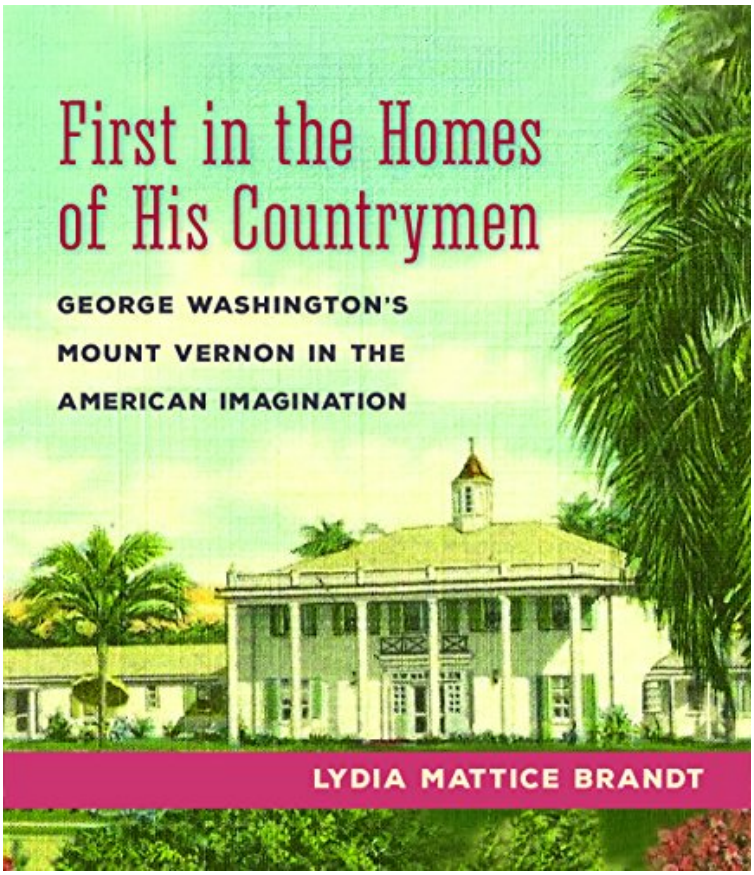

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Lydia Mattice Brandt : First in the Homes of His Countrymen: George Washington's Mount Vernon in the American Imagination before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised First in the Homes of His Countrymen: George Washington's Mount Vernon in the American Imagination:

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. More than just a homeBy HubI loved it. Excellent description of the architectural and cultural history of this historical home, i.e. the periods of its history vs what was going on in our country. The author dealt with how this "home" was used as our National Home at world fairs, how its design was copied for all kinds of uses including the ideal Colonial country home, club house for 4-H clubs, funeral homes, college and university buildings, etc. It also described the way the Mount Vernon Board dealt with the many challenges that affected Mount Vernon, including the addition of a curator as it became a true museum, the issue of slaves used to construct the home, burial on the grounds, and slavery in general. I highly recommend it.0 of 2 people found the following review helpful. Save your money folks!By anti oThe early history of the Mt. Vernon Ladies was interesting. The book went downhill from there. Hard to finish.....the author starts lecturing on racism and other "isms" at which point the reader will have to remind themselves what the theme of the book is. Definitely not worth $40.00.

Way overpriced for a 200 page book with a few black and white photos.

Over the past two hundred years, Americans have reproduced George Washington’s Mount Vernon plantation house more often, and in a greater variety of media, than any of their country’s other historic buildings. In this highly original new book, Lydia Mattice Brandt chronicles America’s obsession with the first president’s iconic home through advertising, prints, paintings, popular literature, and the full-scale replication of its architecture.Even before Washington’s death in 1799, his house was an important symbol for the new nation. His countrymen used it to idealize the past as well as to evoke contemporary--and even divisive--political and social ideals. In the wake of the mid-nineteenth century’s revival craze, Mount Vernon became an obvious choice for architects and patrons looking to reference the past through buildings in residential neighborhoods, at world’s fairs, and along the commercial strip. The singularity of the building’s trademark piazza and its connection to Washington made it immediately recognizable and easy to replicate. As a myriad of Americans imitated the building’s architecture, the Mount Vernon Ladies’ Association carefully interpreted and preserved its fabric. Purchasing the house in 1859 amid intense scrutiny, the organization safeguarded Washington’s home and ensured its accessibility as the nation’s leading historic house museum. Tension between popular images of Mount Vernon and the organization’s "official" narrative for the house over the past 150 years demonstrates the close and ever-shifting relationship between historic preservation and popular architecture.In existence for roughly as long as the United States itself, Mount Vernon’s image has remained strikingly relevant to many competing conceptions of our country’s historical and architectural identity.

First in the Homes of His Countrymen examines the sometimes puzzling, often maddening reverence with which Americans from 1799 through our own unhistorical era have regarded the first president's big, white house on the Potomac. Within a ten-minute drive from my own home in upstate New York, it is possible today to spot Mount Vernons (of every hue and material) in ritzy suburbs, older middle-class neighborhoods, shopping centers, and in several sadly decayed enclaves of folks to whom $15-an-hour wages are only a dream. Yet, as Lydia Mattice Brandt demonstrates in her exemplary study of Washingtonian architecture through the course of our national epic, all of them are products of political, commemorative, imagistic, commercial, or fanciful fairy tales that somehow link the well-off and the poor, the studious and the ignorant, the TV patriot, the seller of white paint, and just about everybody else in a United States where presidents and commoners alike aspire to big white houses (or some approximation thereof). (Karal Ann Marling, University of Minnesota, author of George Washington Slept Here: Colonial Revivals and American Culture, 1876–1986)This is a fascinating book, executed with sensitivity and imagination. Brandt has done a substantial amount of original research and has used this material very effectively in placing the famed plantation house in a fresh perspective. (Richard Longstreth, George Washington University, editor of Housing Washington: Two Centuries of Residential Development and Planning in the National Capital Area)In recounting the history of Mount Vernon, Brandt touches on the role of slavery at the plantation and how for a long time the MVLA downplayed Washington's role a as slave owner. Making effective use of black-and-white illustrations, Brandt does a good job of melding cultural and social history. (CHOICE)About the AuthorLydia Mattice Brandt is Assistant Professor of Art History at the University of South Carolina.