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**Intro:** Welcome to the Let’s Talk Government Podcast that is provided for you by the Department of Government at Minnesota State University, Mankato located in Minnesota in the United States. I am your host Dr. Pat Nelson the chairperson of the Government Department. I want to thank you for joining us as we explore different topics about government. Some may be surprising to you and some may not, so please enjoy.

**Dr. Nelson:** Welcome to episode eight of the Let's Talk Government podcast. Today we're going to discuss dark tourism and memorials. I am joined by Doctor Beth Heidelberg from the urban and regional studies Institute of Minnesota State University, Mankato. Dr. Beth Heidelberg has been with the Institute since 2003 as a professor in the urban and regional studies program, the master’s in public administration and community management program, and the master’s in urban planning programs. Doctor Heidelberg focuses her research on local government systems in the United States and heritage preservation policy as it applies to local government. A specialty in her research is dark tourism from the perspective of local governance . So, thank you for joining me today . So, let's start with the biggest question of all. What is dark tourism?

**Dr. Beth Heidelberg:** Dark tourism is an old practice but a newer area of study. It's investigating sites associated with death disaster. Things that people tend to think of as ghoulish in the call. There's a fascination with it, but nobody really wants to talk about it, yet cities are directly impacted by the things that happened in their communities and the visitors who want to visit them no matter how dark it may have been.

**Dr. Nelson:** So why is it so important for cities to understand how dark tourism may impact them?

**Dr. Beth Heidelberg:** Well things eventually become known for the historic events like I was saying. When those start events are of a darker nature. When they're when they're not comfortable for marketing purposes, people are still going to come. City still use that revenue that comes with those visits, but it's a very uncomfortable nexus between the desire for the revenue and being respectful to the victims of those events. And so how does it manage in that context?

**Dr. Nelson:** So, before we kind of get on it further. Could you give us maybe an example? One or two examples of some dark tourism places of interest or where city might be impacted.

**Dr. Beth Heidelberg:** Sure. I've actually studied the city of Salem quite a bit because they are one of the best examples of dark tourism management that I’ve ever encountered. In 1692, there were several of their citizens who were hung under very well be considered today very flimsy evidence back then it was you know, it is just what they did. They were executed for witchcraft, and this became such and events that became identified with the city that we still talk about the same witchcraft. When you say hey I'm going to Salem people are like, “oh you're going to see the witch sites.” And so, people are visiting the next site every year. They have Halloween events that integrate some of those witchcraft trial themes, and they make millions of dollars off of it. It's not a huge city, but it draws millions of visitors every year because of its Association with witchcraft and the occult. There's a lot of discussion in that city. There are a lot of residents who support this identity. There are also residents who do not because they don't want to associated with the accult and they don't want to be associated with witchcraft, and even they don't want to be associated with executions that took place. So, the city of Salem has taken the example of the Salem witchcraft trials and used for educational purposes. They use it as an educational platform for diversity ,for memorializing victims that were pretty much innocence. And so, they don't ignore that past. They embrace it, and they use it for a modern educational platform. Likewise, the city of Clear Lake, Iowa which is a much more regional example. In 195,9 three young musicians often, airplane took off and never reach their destination. Those musicians Buddy Holly, Ritchie Valens. They were well known. They were becoming super mega stars. People in Great Britain were embracing buddy Holly's music. They were actually one of the inspirations for the Beatles. And Clear Lake understands that they were in regional entertainment center before, but that crash really put them on the map. It made them internationally renowned. People visit Clear Lake IA from all around the world because of that connection so the Buddy Holly, Richie Valens, and Roger Peterson. We don’t wanna forget about him as well. They too have done an excellent job of managing their dark tourism because they embrace that past. They acknowledge the role it has on the local economy. Which is still in the multi millions of dollars because people come to events commemorating that crash. So, those are just two examples. I mean I could literally go on and on, but I know we have limited time.

**Dr. Nelson:** I think those are great examples. I mean other ones I kind of come to mind or like the 9/11 memorials in New York and in Pennsylvania where the airplane crashed, and internationally this has to be a really big moment. Internationally specially for like cities that are so much older than even the United States existed as a country. Very interesting.

**Dr. Beth Heidelberg:** Holocaust sites. Those are the prime example of dark tourism. Cambodian killing fields. Everywhere around the world has their dark tourism sites. It is international issue, but again nobody really likes to talk about it in the local governments.

**Dr. Nelson:** So what does happen to a city if they decide to just ignore it? You know, we don’t wanna acknowledge it. We don’t wanna dealt with it. What happened to the city when that happens?

**Dr. Beth Heidelberg:** When we actually had a case of that in Amityville, NY. You've heard of Amityville horror. I'm assuming. All the movies and all the sequels as terriable they are. We know that people are still visiting the house where the original murders took place. These are people who are not given any wayfinding. They're client they are given any special treatment. The city does not talk about the original to fail murders that kind of prompted the whole family will store it. They don't talk about the ghost story associated with the property on ocean Ave. People still come. People step on the property. They go up, and they knock on the door because they want to go inside the house. They still taking pictures and posted to websites. Recently, there was in a state option at the site, and the line was out the door because people wanted to see inside of that building. So, ignoring it does not make it go away. It just makes it harder for the city to have any control over the narrative or to use it as an educational platform.

**Dr. Nelson:** So what would you say to somebody says, “well, why should a city acknowledge it. Doesn't just glorify the violence or doesn't glorify the murders that might have taken place if they're buying into this dark tourism at these sites?”

**Dr. Beth Heidelberg:** That’s exactly what cities have to face. It can be seen as glorifying murder, and it can be seen as blood money coming in because you're basically making local government revenue because somebody else is tragedy. And, so that's the balance. In Holcomb, Kansas, the in cold blood murders. It was a family that was murdered in their homes. Truman Copote wrote an international bestseller on their case. And, the local government acknowledges that people would probably not really come to Holcomb as a tourist destination, but they still draw people. So cities can again use it as an educational platform in Holcomb because it was a murder case. They chose instead to focus not on how the people died but on their life. What did the clutter family contribute to the city? And so it's one of those things that things are never going to resolve. They are never gonna resolve that it is in fact a ghoulish reason that people come to their communities. It's gotta be a dialogue between the citizens, the victims. This is very important you should include the victims or any survivors in that discussion because if you don't you are basically playing into the worst in people's natures, but some of the events are very old. And more recent events that's going to be where you really have to involve the families. I gave the case Clear Like, Iowa. They have an annual winter dance party. They have treated the Ritchie Valens, and Buddy Holly stories so sensitively that the balance family actually moved to the area. They involve the Valens family. They involved the Richardson family, and they tried to call the Holly family, who are a little bit more distant from it. And, they have such an appreciation for how it was handled. Now, this is not the case in every circumstance. There are going to be times when you can't use that input from the family in the way that they would want. The 9/11 memorial is an example. Some people really embrace what they did with the memorial, but some of the families did not feel that it properly reflected what happened and who their family members were. And, so there's a lot of disagreements on how that happens. But, in the case of 911 in some of the largest cities. they had people aren't going to New York specifically for that necessarily. Not all the time. I mean some people are. But it's one of many places they're going to visit places like Salem, Holcomb, Clare Lake, Amityville that's usually going to be the reason that people are visiting the city. So that's where the conundrum comes.

**Dr. Nelson:** So what happens if they decide, “well, let's just tear the building down. People won't come up.” Is that true?

**Dr. Beth Heidelberg:** Oh no. And here's a case out in Milwaukee, the Jeffrey Dahmer site. They did tear it down . They tore down the apartments mostly because you know, the human remains actually permeated into the structural integrity of the building. It stunk. It did not smell good, but people still drive by that empty lot to see where it happened. It gives people context. They want either connect to the victims, or they just want to see what happened out of human curiosity. Last time I drove through there, which honestly that was two years ago. People were still hanging signs on their on their desk saying, “don't stop here,”“keep going,” “nothing to see here.” So it is still happening even though the sites are removed.

**Dr. Nelson:** So if we kinf of look at a city managing, dark tourism, and a site. What are some logistics that they have to think about to manage the influx of people?

**Dr. Beth Heidelberg:** It's not too much different than what a typical city would do if they have at any point of destination, any points of interest in their tourism practices. They have to provide garbage pickup because people are going to throw trash on the ones and oftentimes privately owned properties. They may want to put I just hope please that rolls out there to prevent any pressing any congregating and disruption to traffic. They may want to provide larger pedestrian areas or places where people can kind move up of the pedestrian path. They want to add additional lighting in that area, and these are just some of the more planning based things. In Clear Lake, they used wayfinding methods to direct people from the highway to the surf ballroom which is where that last concert was played. They did that through hedging, and lampposts, and lamppost flags. And they actually renamed it, Buddy Holly Parkway. So these are kind of the more physical things. The other management techniques that need to be considered is tourism planning in your comprehensive plan. So there be a chapter included, should you address the nature of what happened and the public interest it. Monitor how many people are coming, so you can appropriately plan for it in the future. If interest is heavy in the early years and then kind of dies off, it may not be an issue. But if it is things like Salem, like Clear Lake, like any of the Holocaust sites that interest continues and even starts to build, and therefore you should probably include in your planning practices. Also, marketing and PR.

**Dr. Nelson:** So, what do you mean marketing and PR? How can you connect the media dark tourist site to another area of interest within a city?

**Dr. Beth Heidelberg:** That's kind of the thing that Salem does very well. Come for the witchcraft for miles but here's our other things. This is what else we have to offer. We are not only this. And, so people who were coming for dark tourism, may discover something new and different. Next marketing technique that a lot of people use or a lot of cities use. Clear Lake, come for our … room and our history connected to the crash, but here's our recreational opportunities. Here's our charming downtown that's been revitalized. Hold on. I haven't visited with that but they do have you know, nice recreational opportunities. There cultural community down there. So, they do try to direct people not only. They say yes this happened. It's terrible. We are more than this. We are a community. We are thriving living community, and here's what we have to offer.

**Dr. Nelson:** So in your research, have you found any ideas about why people want to go to the start tourism sites, or even how they find out where they are ?

**Dr. Beth Heidelberg:** Oh, that's such a. It that is actually where 99% of the academic focus is right now. Most of the focus is why are people doing this cause obviously it doesn't always seem to the best of our nature. What they find is that people sometimes want to connect to the victims. They have such an empathy when they hear these stories that they kind of want to see what it was like. What's the context? What was the last thing these people saw? What was the aftermath? Some people want to try to figure out why it happened. The are so invest in these stories that they try to get into the mind of the perpetrator which is another story altogether. So, it could be a connection either way. Some people just find these stories thrilling, you know. It's like reading a novel. That really happened. So there's many reasons why people want to connect this. With more recent events oftentimes it's because there's such an empathy for what happened, and maybe that doesn't speak to the worst varnish, or maybe it actually speaks to the best of our nature.

**Dr. Nelson:** So an example that I know of is somehwhat tied to dark tourism. The city of Madelia which is just Southwest of Mankato has the younger brothers days because part of the Jesse James gang the younger brothers word, and they were involved in a shootout, and one of the younger brothers died here in Jesse James got away. So they created like a whole festival about it and almost use it as a way to bring tourists to Madelia. Are there any other really like historic events maybe in the Minnesota area that you know about that help kind of drawn that dark tourism to bring people to the area or any that you can think of?

**Dr. Beth Heidelberg:** Madelia is a good one. I am trying to think. I've done more of out of state ones. One of the best examples, I do know that Mankato will host some memory Remembrance activities at the sight of the hanging of the Native Americans down by the River. And, so by acknowledging yes this happened here this was a horrible thing we learn from it. It does draw people and it draws people not only from the American community, but people who saw the story felt something about it and want to learn more. So, again is that the best of our human nature. Maybe not so bad.

**Dr. Nelson:** So how much is and I know you're very much into historic preservation. So how much does dark tourism in historic preservation tide together on having sites that are deemed as needing to be saved or needing to be visited or historic ?

**Dr. Beth Heidelberg:** It's actually very much. There's an academic argument that start tourism is actually a subset of heritage tourism which is the visiting of historic sites. And, it's pretty much one in the same .It's up to a city whether or not they want to keep the historic sites where these dark things happened. What do you do with it then? Do you turninto the museum? Do you turn it into a private residence? But the people in any bill that would have new properties still a private residence. Well, there also dark tourism insight and that can be both a pro and a con. Does it drive up your property balances, drive down your property values. So, a city itself can designate a property as historic. It doesn't necessarily have to be nationally recognized, but the city can designate it. And, if they recognize the importance of certain sites to their community, it doesn't matter if it's dark or if it's not dark, it's it could still have that historic designation. So, saving the properties is that very direct connection, and oftentimes that's why the tourists are coming .They want to see that place.

**Dr. Nelosn:** Yeah, I remember when I went through Gettysburg, and some of the buildings that were still standing there, and one of the things that tour guide pointed out was “look you can still see the bullet holes in the Canon, you know, where the cannons hidden.” That it always seemed a little bit macabre to me, but now they were talking bout dark tourism. That was part of the job, right. You wanted to step back in time to history when it happened. So

**Dr. Beth Heidelberg:** This is the soldiers actually touched that spot and it's a fascinating connection between our history.

**Dr. Nelson:** Well, I'm going to ask you about a more current event since we do see them memorials pop up, right. Where when there's a significant event, and I'm going to refer to the George Floyd, incident in Minneapolis that happened in May. We're learning that there's a very significant memorial that includes paintings and flowers. That they've literally closed down an intersection. How can a city deal with memorial cause people are coming there to visit that spot cause that's where he died? How can they manage that?

**Dr. Beth Heidelberg:** That's going to be a case, and I believe that in this case because that was such a hotbed situation. That may be what I consider a lasting memorial. Some of these memorials will pop up, and then the next news event happens and then the increase is still there but it's not quite as fervent. I believe with this one there will be lasting events, and so city organizers are probably going to plan how are we going to deal with people coming here to commemorate Mr. Floyd and want to see the site and once you touch where it happened. So what's going to happen in Minneapolis. They're going to talking about this very uncomfortable past. This is this is a very recent history, but I think it will be a larger part of the Minneapolis story. So do they designate the Cub Foods building up deli as historic site because of what happened. Typically historic sites and he said designated until 50 years after the events. Unless there's something particularly significant. City Minneapolis anyone advocate for just that, and then they can get his organizations. They can do memorial planning. They can start planning for tourists, but they will need to do almost immediately start monitoring how many people are visiting there each day, each month, etc. So they know how to plan, and that's really the city role.

**Dr.Nelson:** It's actually really interesting to think about the fact that there had they usually like the time before something can be doesn't get its historic obviously but you still have to manage the memorial or the situation or the building as things are going on.

**Dr. Beth Heidelberg:** So I usually say that part of management is providing patrols in the area. Is not going to previous to this or will have to be more the grassroots community thing? It's an uncomfortable situation .

**Dr. Nelson:** So you did mention about want to private ownership of a spot that is focused on dark tourism. What can the city do to support a private owner of a building that has people coming just to see the bulding?

**Dr. Beth Heidelberg:** Local designation as a historic site. That will give them special recognition from the city, and they may have something called an overlay district in that area just because of its historical. With an overlay zoning district they can add specific restrictions that are site specific. Sorry, I'm repeating myself there. Maybe one of those is that it's also designated like a tourist spots and XYZ, you know,extra garbage pickup, extra lighting needs to be placed in that overlay zone. So studies can help the private property owner through local controls as it would in a normal circumstances. They can also work with the private property owner to see how do they want to handle their historic sites. This is actually, I'm glad you brought that up that's actually critical piece. Do the private property owners want to participate in dark tourism planning? Do they want their house to be do they want their house to be marketed as a destination? There are some pieces like in Villisca, Iowa. There was a next murder in 1912 they want to save family members and two guests. Somebody bought the property. It is now running as a bed & breakfast called Vilisca … Murder House. So in some cases the property owners want that notoriety they want to work with the city's market and promote it because it's in their best interest too. The Lizzie Borden house is also bed and breakfast. In some cases like Amityville, it's a private citizen. They want no acknowledgement. And we're probably pretty grateful that the city is decided not to promote it or acknowledge it in any possible way just like massive public international interests. Work with the property owners. Find out what they want. Find out what the survivors want. That's really the 1st place to start.

**Dr. Nelson:** Alright, well I got one more question for you. How did you get into this line of research? What interested you in it?

**Dr. Beth Heidelberg:** Honestly, whenIi was a kid, I was a huge titanic buff, and iit was a human stories that really fascinated me. I mean what were these people thinking as they understood what was going to happen. As I got older, my father was a prison guard ,and so he would often come with tails ,and I was always kind of fascinated in true crime because of that connection. So again the Holocaust, those human stories not, you know, what were the Nazis thinking. I wanted to know more about the people who are we're experiencing this. It’s just a natural empathythat I had for them. And, so over time I realized that this wasn't as I got into historic reservation and local government, I realized nobody's researched how dark tourism impacts local governments. When I started to do reading on it because I think I saw an article somewhere about their dark tourism. And Im reading about the psychology and the why, and what's going on. And, I'm like OK. What about the citizens? We are living in the dark tourism situation, and when I submit my first article, I actually got the comments. Nobody's done this before. I'm trying to open up this whole new facet of dark tourism research.

**Dr. Neslon:** It's fascinating. I'm glad that you are going down, and you are you adressing that side nobody ever thinks about. It's the how do we manage all these people coming to this spot that don't live here, and you can't just ignore it because then it just gets worse and worse or bigger and bigger.

**Dr. Beth Heidelberg:** The citizens of that community, the citizens more than any dark sights. The citizens of that community needs to be put in the front and foremost in planning for it. And, that's an aspect of it and nobody talks about it.

**Dr. Nelson:** That's great. Well, thank you both for joining the podcast and everybody can tell we real people cause we got dogs and kids in the background, but I hope that you can continue with your research, and maybe we can check in and talk more about tourism. Thank you!

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