

# Episode 8: Halloween-Leave the Dead Alone

## Transcript:

**Easton:** Welcome everyone to yet another episode of This is Problematic a Conner Prairie podcast. I'm Easton.

**Hannah:** And I'm Hannah

**Easton:** and we're so happy to have you all back for an yet another dive through some problematic history.

**Hannah:** As we're recording today, we are approaching the holiday of Halloween, and so today's episode developed our conversation and we started to have about the holiday and activities that people might be taking part in all year round, but especially at this time of the year.

And so we're really going to be talking about the problematic nature of when history and historical tragedies become a vessel for entertainment and why we're okay with using certain spaces and environments as entertainment spaces, when there are also spaces in which people may have tragically lost their lives. So we'll really be diving into that just the two of us today. Do you want to give us a rating?

**Easton:** Sure. This one is also going to cover some heavy topics. So we're going to do rated-R.

**Hannah:** Yeah, I think that's probably about right.

**Easton:** Yeah, leave the kids out of this one.

**Hannah:** Yeah.

**Easton:** We do want to say that it's not like we're condemning people for putting a skeleton on your front porch. Like we like that we're fun. You know, we like...

**Hannah:** We like Halloween.

**Easton:** We like Spooky time. But it's interesting for us to think critically on what we're looking at because a lot of us will never see a real skeleton. But if you found a skeleton in the middle of the woods, you'd probably have a different reaction than, you know, finding a skeleton on a porch, you know, because you think like, are these actual human remains who do I call? Do I call the police or do I call an archeologist and, you know, that kind of thing. And so we started asking a lot of

questions about how death is portrayed in media. And one of the more interesting examples of this is actually the catacombs in France.

**Hannah:** So a catacomb is an underground cemetery, which consists of subterranean galleries with recesses for tombs, as was constructed by the ancient Romans. So the first kind of recognized catacomb was in ancient Rome. Um, it's obviously tunnels under the ground, holding many skeletal remains, um, in Rome, in Paris and other spaces. Um, these areas were used because of health problems from graveyards, because of space limitations, of graveyards. So despite these not having, you know, your traditional headstones or crypts or anything like this, these are still the final resting place of many people and many people's relatives.

I think it is really important to take a second and look a little bit at human nature. One of the people we're going to be quoting quite a bit today is one of the few people who've really dove into scholarship on a lot of this. Philip R. Stone, who has done a great deal of research to create a foundation for this idea. So a term that you will really hear use quite a bit is dark tourism, but it really crosses over with our discussion of visiting historical spaces, because obviously when you're spending time in historical spaces and being entertained by them, that's a form of tourism. Right. So he acknowledged that interest in death is a really core element of being human. Human beings have always been interested in death, and there is nothing wrong with that and there's a lot healthy with that. We are all going to die, right? So it's healthy to talk about it. It's healthy to engage with practices around death. But as he points out, the current quote unquote dark tourism phenomenon and the way it looks at death is a very Western contemporary form of fascination with death, be it real or fictional.

He compares examples of things like their Roman gladiatorial games or public executions, which were sites where people would come to witness death and they were quite comfortable with that throughout time. Right. But he compares the relatively small scale of these events in the relatively local nature of these events to people who aren't coming from halfway across the world to engage with these events usually. And so he's he really talks about how over the last century dark tourism has boomed and has actually become, quote unquote, the dirty little secret of the tourism industry. It's very widespread and varied and can include so many sites. You know, we're going to start talking about here in a minute, the catacombs. But we'll also talk about others later on. And his major concern with it. And I think it's a concern we're going to come back to this one I really share is these spaces initially often were designed to be educational environment or even to carry a political message. But as you commercialize that and sell it to people, that becomes really blurry. Right.

**Easton:** Yeah. I don't know if anyone out there I don't know if you have read *The Cask of Amontillado* by Edgar Allan Poe. For those of you who have read, you know that the catacombs are kind of this, you know, this really weird eerie type of space where bones line the walls and skulls are everywhere. And, you know, it was it was featured in this a very new movie called *Gemini Man*, where Will Smith fights a CGI version of his younger self. And I don't know if any of you read the *39 Clues* book series, but it was featured in one of those books. And it really doesn't it almost feels like it's used. And I guess this is more in the movie space than the literature space. It's just used to be like a cool space for a fight scene. It's not really, you know, it's just like if we have to film something anywhere we're in, we're in France. Let's just have a chase scene through the catacombs. And, you know, there are many catacombs throughout Europe. Paris' was consecrated as the Paris municipal ossuary back in 1786.

And it's using the term catacombs is actually in reference to the Roman Catacombs. Catacombs is actually like a mythical name. I mean it's a spooky setting. I'm sure it's I mean, I've visited the website and because that's like eight, 800 hectares of like legitimate human remains. But I think because it's like a medieval type thing, the association is like what's old? And so, you know, you wonder if the people who go there actually see it as important enough to warrant a look at its history, its medieval relevance, or is it just like, you know, a cool place to kill an afternoon or cross it off the bucket list?

**Hannah:** I will say I was really impressed by the official Catacombs website. It's definitely worth look at like you said, there are some disturbing pictures, but I did think they had a visitors guide on their website and map. And when you pay the €27 to take a tour includes an audio guide all of the materials I could see seemed really solid and their historical foundation.

**Easton:** Oh yeah.

**Hannah:** They seemed like they had the intention of really educating people and informing them on what this space meant and where the people came from whose remains ended up down there, which I was really pleased with. But it does contrast quite significantly with some of the activities that have gone on down there, which we will definitely explore in a moment.

I do want to ask you a question and kind of raise one point of do we think so? Obviously the human remains began to be moved there in the 18th century. The bones were from the they really they think they go back to the 1200s. They were moved from many Catholic cemeteries around the city. The fact that the remains are so old and most of the people whose remains are down there, their relatives probably have no clue that that's where they are. Do you think that's part of the reason that the attitude towards it can be quite lax because there's no one talking about who these bones were as people and connecting to them in that way?

**Easton:** Yeah, I, I would say that it's a good guess that because it's so old it's easy to dissociate. Not a lot of people are going to be interested in fighting to see which bones are which. And there's a whole process of, you know, identifying the remains and all that. It's almost like it doesn't even really register as if it's like a funeral space or a space for remembrance. It's more of just now these people's bodies have become part of the setting, and it's like

**Hannah:** Almost like an art piece.

**Easton:** Yeah.

**Hannah:** Almost like something to see and witness.

**Easton:** Unfortunately, through the research, we've seen plenty of spaces in churches where human remains actually comprise the space. We saw a very, very scary looking human skull chandelier in one of these spaces. And it was just it looks like something you'd see on the set of the Addams Family. But it's real, like it's not a fake corny set piece. It's actually bodies.

**Hannah:** And it's such a different thing to think about that, like, in theory versus like, if my great grandmother's skull was part of that chandelier.

**Easton:** Yeah.

**Hannah:** It does make me feel differently. So I do think having a personal connection, but then why as human beings do we not look at that and think, that could be me, that could be my kid's skull?

**Easton:** Yeah.

**Hannah:** In a chandelier.

**Easton:** Even if it was a distant ancestor, it's like, I'd rather that be put to rest instead of put in a decoration.

**Hannah:** It's troubling. Coming back to the catacombs, talking in a troubling we found some really interesting things that have been going on down there. Okay. So twenty...

**Easton:** This is nervous laughter, people.

**Hannah:** Yeah, 100%. 2015. The catacombs partnered. And this is where Halloween really comes into the discussion that we see a lot of these activities. And in my opinion, I'm not quoting anyone here, but in my opinion, disregard for the historical nature seems to go by the wayside around Halloween. Um, so at 2015 Halloween, the catacombs partnered with Airbnb and they offered the opportunity to spend the night in the catacombs. This quote unquote spooky experience was to include a personal ghost storyteller, a musical performance, and dazzling food. How do we feel about people sleeping in the catacombs?

**Easton:** I mean, it, it reminds me of like a, I don't know, somewhere between a church and a cemetery, like, I don't want it. I mean, it's just not really a place where you should be having sleepovers. Definitely in the cemetery space.

**Hannah:** It's not a damn hotel.

**Easton:** No, not at all. And I'm like Airbnb. I mean, they're a pretty respectable company. Like, why? Why do this for nothing else than Money?

**Hannah:** Fans who engage people's curiosity, right? It's not an experience you get to have every day. And so people are going to be curious.

**Easton:** I mean, I know there's there's people out there. I probably know some people who would probably do this if they had the chance, but I'm just like, there's just something that seems kind of disrespectful about it.

**Hannah:** Yeah. Well, and I think that that is in and of itself problematic. Right. We we both feel a bit weird.

**Easton:** And maybe it's a I mean, and we'll get to this, of course, but like, it could also be our cultures. You know, different cultures look at death in different ways. We'll talk about.

**Hannah:** So it could be I think even more problematic as we can continue on with the catacombs as this cat Halloween, um, thing that seems to happen every year I read an article about it from 2018 and basically it's an annual celebration where people break into the forbidden parts of the catacombs. The parts are not open to the tourists every day and they are still a gravesite there still where people's remains are. So they're breaking into these spaces and then they have huge parties down there, leaving behind litter, leaving behind tons of graffiti. I mean, I saw images of, you know, graffiti on things that should not be being graffitied. Um, I don't have a fundamental problem with graffiti as an art form, but let's not Graffiti skulls.

**Easton:** No.

**Hannah:** And a real risk to people's lives as well. Like these people could get themselves hurt, could get themselves injured. So we're kind of talking about different risks and problems here. But like fundamentally, they're doing harm.

**Easton:** Yes. Absolutely.

**Hannah:** To people's gravesite.

**Easton:** Uh huh.

**Hannah:** That's messed up.

**Easton:** It really is. I mean, you wouldn't go spray painting on people's, like, mausoleums but it's also just crazy to me how. Okay, so you're in this space. You've been given permission to go into certain sections of this space, and yet now you're breaking into the forbidden parts of a space that you already probably shouldn't really be in. And now that you're outright defying, I mean, that that's also historic. I mean, so what if you fall in, knock over something important and a skull hits the ground and shatters you're accountable. But who's responsible?

**Hannah:** Well, I think it comes back to this this idea of why does Halloween make them just abandon morals sense like and I'm not against Halloween. It's an awesome holiday. But what is it about this obsession with the macabre, with spookiness that suddenly leads to people losing their minds and forgetting what these spaces actually are and what the history is behind them?

**Easton:** Yeah. I mean,

**Hannah:** So selfish.

**Easton:** Mm hmm. You know, our wonderful boss, Dr. Fletcher, has taught us some wonderful vocabulary and a in her words, sometimes people actually got no home training. And it could possibly be that we a lot of folks just simply don't have that type of reverence for, you know, these things. But, I mean, this has to be something that someone who works. You and I went on a cemetery tour.

**Hannah:** Hmm. Yeah.

**Easton:** We spoke with people before said tour, and we were just driving through and walking around, like, surely there has to be staff of some kind that's telling you, like, this is what you do. This is what you don't do. This is literally for the preservation of our space. So, I mean, they must be ignoring all the rules if a person is probably talking to them and they still probably have it set in their minds. Probably once they got there, like seeing this person turns their back and leaves us alone, we're going to that forbidden part. So it's really it's really unfortunate.

**Hannah:** And people know that it's forbidden. Like, I was reading reports of them, like they'll break in through, like subway stations, through sewer grates, like they go to extreme odds, number one to get in, but then also to hide that they're getting in because there are significant fines. So it's not a secretive thing. I think what's also interesting, though, and it's worth talking about for a minute is the fact that this catacomb situation has become such a marketing tool. And even Indianapolis, like there's an underground bunker underneath the city market that they've renamed the catacombs to feature Indianapolis after dark tours. They don't have any bodies there. So it's not technically a catacomb room. But in capitalizing on it's now seen as something that brings in money.

**Easton:** Mm hmm.

**Hannah:** It makes me question sometimes humans, I'm not going to lie. We're kind of messed up.

**Easton:** Yeah. I mean, it's unfortunate, too, that, you know, pretty much in a lot of American cities, like, people probably passed away here. You know, I'll put my beautiful city on blast. Cincinnati has ghost tours downtown just sometimes you go into, like, places. And I've actually talked with some people, some family friends of mine just took on some of those tours, and they're like, I mean, they just showed us the same thing. They take you on the over the Rhine to where they show you, you know, the cellars, the secret cellars that they had during prohibition and all that. But they've now mixed in this whole well, this is a is an old building. So somebody probably died here. So now this is part of a ghost tour. Or we can just name this hole in the ground, a catacomb and make it make it spooky

**Hannah:** Because there's that, that, that that interest in it. Right. Especially this time of the year. And they know they can make money. I mean, I think there are very real ghost tours and very real Halloween time events like I have I have seen some that were really using it as an opportunity to highlight stories that wouldn't otherwise get told. Or who'd done a really great historic research and had found, you know, slightly untold stories that maybe had had a murder element or had a, you know, violence element. And we're using them to have bigger conversations.

**Easton:** Mm hmm.

**Hannah:** That's kind of cool. I mean, it is kind of cool to capitalize on people's interest at this time of the year, but then also force them to learn something.

**Easton:** That's true.

**Hannah:** You can, you can not just do one, but do both. Um, but I do think a lot of spaces aren't.

**Easton:** Yeah, I'd like to think that we did a good job when we talked about dear Kent Brown.

**Hannah:** I hope so.

**Easton:** Yeah.

**Hannah:** I hope so.

**\*Music\***

**Hannah:** I will say, for me, I couldn't help but contrast this in my reading with something that honestly really shook me and made me kind of emotional. Um, so we're obviously talking about the catacombs. These people have been dead for almost a thousand years, and we're saying maybe that's the why. Um, but as many of you will know in June of 20, 17 in North Kensington and West London, Grenfell Tower caught on fire. Um, it killed 72 people and injured a great deal of others. Um, in the days after the disaster tourism immediately sprung up. It was much to the behest of grieving families and they were obviously calling it out publicly. Um, but people were fascinated with this brand new immediate grave site. They were taking selfies in front of the burnt building, in front of body bags. There were families still there searching for their loved ones, and these people were just... That is obviously not okay. I mean, that that's sick.

**Easton:** I'm sorry. I didn't even know that this happened. I'm just reading it now for the first time.

**Hannah:** It was a sad it was a really sad thing that happened. I had never heard that there was like, tourism, quote, unquote that sprung up immediately afterwards. I mean, I know there's a lot around, and I was reading quite a bit about Nine-Eleven. You know, there's obviously tourism to that site, but there is now a museum there that is designed to educate. I don't know what tourism was like in the days immediately after 9/11, but I wasn't finding that same kind of level, but then they also had it really well shut down. I don't know, but it's, it's messed up. This idea that you would but then why do it? Why do maybe we feel okay with people being tourists at the 9/11 site? Is it because we know the remains have been taken care of. It has been designated as a historical site now like where is our...

**Easton:** I can't say where the line is

**Hannah:** Neither can I.

**Easton:** And I wonder if it's like this so this was an accident but then I know people do like murder tours for like you know seeing where different people stayed and where different killings have taken place and murderers and stuff like that.

**Hannah:** And I think everybody's interesting curiosities are different. Like I don't want to condemn anybody for like having an interest. But I think I think the pivotal thing is if you're not harming others in that situation with the Grenfell Tower right. You're getting in the way of these people's grief and in their search for their family members, you're disrupting necessary activities that are

going on like I even felt like that with. And I guess sometimes it takes longer for those activities to take place. Like I was reading about Hurricane Katrina tours, there was these tours that not long after Hurricane Katrina, um, would be given in New Orleans. And I kept coming back to and I was reading it. I was like, you know, what if these tours are able to help fund recovery efforts, then

**Easton:** It was yielding the benefit. Kind of like what we said. Gentrification episode.

**Hannah:** Yeah. And I can find very little about any of these situations. To actually suggest that that the money is going to not necessarily non-profits. You know, it's often a commercial enterprise and that just feels wrong, period. I mean, even when I come to the catacombs, I think they are maybe a nonprofit, actually, but that money could be being used to identify those bodies, you know?

**Easton:** Yeah they could be.

**Hannah:** I mean, like there are ways to do it, I feel like, and engage with people's interests, engage with people's curiosity. But not cause harm and maybe to do some good.

**Easton:** Yeah.

**Hannah:** But I don't feel it. That's what's at the heart of it.

**Easton:** And one thing that just came to me and of course, I'm not trying to make any excuses for any of this or this type of behavior, especially when you're disrupting a scene where a tragic thing has happened. But I'm wondering how it's advertised to people, because it could be this whole thing about, okay, this topic interests me. I want to go do this thing. And I wonder if it's advertised in the spirit of scarcity. Like, Well, if I don't do this now, I'm never, ever going to be able to do it. And then I won't be able to tell my friends hey, I stayed in the catacombs and in an in a of course, more awful severe lens, it's like, well, they haven't shut this space down yet, so let me go in and get as close as I can before they do so, because I'll have the only pictures and I'll have all the you know, the inside scoop and regardless of their reasons for doing it, it's just I do I wonder if that's a factor. Like, you know, how some stores, when they're about to close, they do the whole everything must go and hurry up and get this before we shut down and stuff like that for different goods just to make people think like, holy crap, if I don't get it now, I'm never going to get it you know, we're only taking certain batches of 100 people. So, you know, put your bids in now and reserve a spot so you can spend the night in the catacombs here. I don't know. When did Halloween become the become this holiday?

**Hannah:** Well and, I think for a lot of people it's not for a lot of people. It's getting dressed up and getting some sweets and going home. But I think anything right, can open the door to problems. And I think part of our purpose with having this discussion is just think, please, Lord, think, think before you take a tour or something like this. Think about where money's going. Think about what you might take away from it, your motivations. And think about if you're harming anyone. And if you can take those three boxes and say, mm hmm, then enjoy. Like if that's if that's something that sparks your curiosity and your interest. Otherwise, maybe read about it in a book.

**Easton:** Mm hmm.



**Hannah:** Maybe that space is not ready to be invaded with tourists.

**Easton:** Right.

**Hannah:** Who are going to potentially get in the way or disrupt and harm

**Easton:** A night of research. I've made a lot of decisions based on just a single night of research.

**Hannah:** Yeah. And yeah.

**\*Music\***

**Easton:** One of the things that I've seen that's emerged as far as this time of year and it's something that's kind of happened year after year that I haven't really taken notice of until we started doing this research. There's a weird fetishization of spooky type things around Halloween. I have taken Spanish for a very long time. I've been I did it in high school. We learned it from basically kindergarten all the way up to high school. At my high school, you had the option to switch to like Latin, Mandarin or French, or you could continue with Spanish once you actually hit ninth grade. And I just continue with Spanish. I took it in college. I'm not fluent yet, unfortunately, but I'm close. And every year around this time we talk about Dia de los Muertos. So that's the Day of the Dead. So for those of you who don't know, the Day of the Dead is a sacred holiday for reverence and respect for relatives who have passed on. And it's and you know, when I kind of touched on cultures, it originated in Mexico, but it celebrated in varying capacities, depending on your locality. By people of Mexican heritage. It's in Central America, South America, and people celebrated here in the United States. It's just it was the first time I ever looked at it because we would always watch videos about it. The video would be narrated by a guy named Senor huesos, which was he was literally a talking skeleton, but he would like sit here and talk to you. The first time I saw it, it was so strange because it's like people go out here and they make altars and they decorate them with the pictures of the people who have passed on. Maybe some of you listeners have watched the movie Coco in their talks. It's basically this this entire story, but their family

**Hannah:** That movie makes me so emotional. Side, side note.

**Easton:** Yeah, I cried. I'm not going to lie.

**Hannah:** I did too.

**Easton:** I cried. I held it together until I got to like the last portion. And I just I like I yeah, yeah. But yeah, you make these altars and you decorate the roads with all these marigold flowers, and then you literally go out and you just party. You cook those people's favorite foods and you sit them out for them because it's their belief. On that night, your ancestors and your family members they come back and you spend time with them.

**Hannah:** It's So beautiful.

**Easton:** It really is beautiful. Like, it got so weird. But seeing it day after day... or, year after year and you know, eventually for Spanish class, of course, we'd make some of these things. I like the bread of

the dead, the Pan de Muerto, we'd come in and share it and there's like stuff that you do. People get off school and it's just one of the more interesting things is that you go to the cemetery and, you know, in America, cemeteries are like weird places. You don't really go like, you know, there's always interesting things associated with cemeteries. I have friends who like have always said, like, when you, like, drive past a cemetery, you they hold their breath. And I'm like, oh, that's interesting. I never thought about that. And there's, there's different things that people do. When we went on the cemetery tour, I'll just say I was always raised that you never walk on someone's grave.

**Hannah:** Me too.

**Easton:** It's disrespectful. So as I'm walking, of course, trying to avoid graves, there are people walking right on people's graves and like one guy, like, propped up on someone's like Tombstone. And I'm like, I know I shouldn't say anything because I'm trying to listen to the lady speak and I'm trying to do all this stuff. But, you know, so again, that's our culture, But

**Hannah:** I think it goes back to what Stone said right? Like it's this westernization of how we deal with that and how we should view death. And by us transplanting, it's not their fault. The DIA de los Muertos falls right after Halloween.

**Easton:** Right after Halloween.

**Hannah:** And so naturally, a lot of people have made this connection and will transplant their kind of Halloween type mindset, their beliefs onto this holiday. And fundamentally that is harmful.

**Easton:** That's an issue.

**Hannah:** Yeah that's a huge issue. It's trying to erase culture and...

**Easton:** It's bad. Every time I go to a cemetery, I usually do see like a family or two, just like sitting out, picnicking, just hanging out. And during the Day of the Dead in Mexico, every cemetery is packed with people and they're just sitting there. They're playing music, they're listening to music. They're eating, their fellowshiping, in that space. And that's when you go and clean off the grave and make sure it looks good and, you know, you decorate it. It really kind of bugs me to see people taking the DIA de los Muertos stuff and making it Halloween-y because it's not the same holiday. One thing that's interesting is sugar skulls. I found out at a very early age. You're not supposed to eat sugar skulls. They're for decoration. Sugar skulls are for your ofrenda or your altar. They're for honoring your relatives. But some people like to slap sugar skulls on their porch for the little ones to kick over on their way to, you know, the please take one piece of candy bowl right out in front of your door just because it's spooky looking doesn't mean the holidays are similar.

And I actually did some cool research about the history of Halloween. I think the history of Halloween is really interesting because it's literally a hodgepodge of a ton of different holidays. Forgive me, because I'm condensing a ton of history into this little tiny piece. But what we celebrate now in America, as best as I can describe it, is an odd version of All Souls Day. So All Souls Day is like the quote unquote offspring of a Celtic holiday called Samhain and the Christian celebration of All Saints Day. So that's how you get like the whole feasting and sharing of food in the spirit of reverence. And then the supernatural aspects of like the world of the living in the dead kind of come

together that night. And, you know, there there's costumes to scare spirits away. But Halloween, as we know it in America was only like first celebrated in like New England and Maryland. That's how you get a lot of like the witch stories from that area. But nowadays it's become so, you know, Charlie Brown warned us it's become so like commercialized. And I wrote Americanized.

**Hannah:** Oh, no, it definitely has like I even find it interesting because obviously we had Halloween... Actually, I don't know how far back I assume it goes back to something like I assume that we have continued to have celebrations being a Celtic and I'm originally Scottish, if I've not talked about that in the podcast before. And but as a child, we always called what you call trick or treating. We call it gazing, you're going off candy or sweets. And so when we go out looking for sweets, we call it gazing and but also at least in my mom's time and before my grandparents, they always carved turnips and made them look spooky because that was what we had. But now it's pumpkins.

**Easton:** it's pumpkin.

**Hannah:** So it's definitely an Americanization. Those have come over just slowly. I've even in my lifetime, I've seen our traditions around a holiday like Halloween slowly get shifted. And it is interesting, is interesting to see how that kind of comes in and

**Easton:** Yeah.

**Hannah:** kind of eats up.

**Easton:** And it's like I do sit and wonder, like, when did the feast get supplemented with candy? You know, like it's like I assume it's just because candy is cheap and gives the kids something to do. I mean, I would like to it would be really cool to go back and see, like, when did the switch occur? Because like, I mean, I don't know if there was ever an instance where people were making feasts and just giving out food to the general populace. Here in America. But it definitely could have been.

**Hannah:** I don't know if it goes back to our at home, but I remember a lot of the older people in our neighborhood would give out bags of food. We'd get nuts and fruit. It wasn't just sweets. And it wasn't like I've heard here, there's jokes about like the dentists give out fruit, you know, I mean, like

**Easton:** Raisins yeah. But you always ended up with a box of raisins in my neighborhood.

**Hannah:** But like, I do wonder and I wouldn't be able to say this 100%, but I do think there was a bit more of like cooking. I would get baked goods sometimes, you know, I mean, so I do think maybe that maybe could go back to the feast. Actually, I wonder that's something I'm going to have to go away and I'm curious now. We've totally sidetracked, but there's an interesting conversation about. It Does all feed into that Westernization and even Americanization of holidays and whilst there are fun things with that, it's also important to talk about what we're losing and what we may need to bring back some of. And I think remembering that it's supposed to be this time of reverence for the dead.

**Easton:** Yeah.

**Hannah:** And not just this spookification of the dead is really important. I also really like that word. I think I made that up.

**Easton:** spookification. I like that.

**Hannah:** My new word.

**Easton:** And unfortunately, even looking at like the official websites and articles about the catacombs in Rome and Paris, a ton of people that were photographed showing up to that, you know, spending the night in the catacombs, just visiting our like did their make up in this very day of the dead style of like, hey, look, we're painted like skeletons and they put them like they put work into those ensembles. Like, I know that's why a lot of people here really, really like Halloween is because they can go just crazy and make themselves look just like whatever they want. And they go out and, you know, party. I have yet to like experience the whole adult revival of Halloween. Halloween usually just kind of makes me feel bummed out because I'm like, oh, I can't. I can't go around trick or treating anymore. But um,

**Hannah:** It can be really fun as an adult. Like, I've had some good Halloweens. I also really enjoy now that we have a house. I love giving out sweets to kids.

**Easton:** Yeah.

**Hannah:** Like there's a really lovely aspect to that. Although I learned here last year, again, total sidetrack, we can take this out, but it blew me away. I learned here kids don't have to tell a joke.

**Easton:** No, so you actually you've actually told me this whole thing about telling a joke.

**Hannah:** Yeah,

**Easton:** We know. We never I mean, the best you'd get was a I was never allowed to say this, but most kids would go trick or treat, smell my feet, give me something good to eat. But, like, that was disrespectful. So I was just like

**Hannah:** Heck no, we worked for weeks. We had to learn our jokes, and we would practice singing songs. You had to perform for your sweets.

**Easton:** Yeah, no.

**Hannah:** And if they didn't like it, they didn't have to give it to you, like.

**Easton:** Yeah.

**Hannah:** It was a trade. I'm just saying, Work for those sweets.

**Easton:** We could maybe we could use a little bit of that.

**Hannah:** I tried last year. The kids were having none of it. They were like, I don't want to tell you a joke. Fine. Anyway, side note. That was my dad's favorite thing. He loves turning kids away. I was like, it wasn't good enough going back with a better one.

**Easton:** He didn't love giving out candy, but he loved turning him away.

**Hannah:** Oh, he does.

**Easton:** So you can come back with a better joke?

**Hannah:** Oh, yeah. Heck yeah.

**Easton:** Okay. So if I miss my guize, so house is given out full bars, right? Like king size Kit-Kat cat and I go out there and shoot my. Hey, why did the skeleton not take someone to the dance? Because he didn't have the guts to ask anybody. And then they're like: Ugh bye. I could re practice and then come back and try again.

**Hannah:** Yeah. Yeah.

**Easton:** See, I almost feel like, that version of halloween would have done us a lot better in the long run.

**Hannah:** It takes longer.

**Easton:** Yeah, it would take longer, but, you know, that's okay. Anyway, back to

**Hannah:** Back to the actual topic ahead. Okay, so I think there is an important element here as well as time which we've discussed. Which has mixed evidence for it, right?

**Easton:** Very much so.

**Hannah:** Culture. Is culture another aspect here where people will feel okay versus feeling disgusted with engaging with atmosphere in a certain way. What do you think?

**Easton:** I think I guess the culture bit. Of course, cultures aren't monolithic. They're all always outliers. And yeah.

**Hannah:** Do you think it's that if people can't connect in the same way, like we were talking about that, right? Like if you're down in the catacombs you're not connecting with these people as human beings. So if we're talking about being in another country, maybe you can't connect with the ways that they commemorate death and deal with remains of the dead, or you don't understand or feel emotionally connected to events that happen. Like I'm thinking of the research we did into genocide memorials. Do we want to talk a little bit about that and kind of how that might connect to this?

**Ryan:** Oh, this may actually be a good way to talk about the genocide sites, because there is an obvious like if you're of Jewish descent, to go to Auschwitz is obviously a very powerful

**Hannah:** yeah.

**Ryan:** an impactful like, not pilgrimage, but like experience to go visit so. And I've been thinking about this while you guys are having your conversation. What is that trigger that makes it okay? Quote unquote, to go to dark tourism sites. And while I'm not endorsing this to be okay, I think what you see is there has to be some separation of culture. So either you view the other person as an other. So like white people looking at mummies, even if Egyptians are still practicing those cultures, or even in France, I think as soon as the French shift from sticking bones in catacombs to burying their dead, all of a sudden, oh, this is a weird experience that I don't have a personal connection to because that's that the cultural thing that I do. And so now that suddenly becomes an okay thing to do because it's different.

**Easton and Hannah:** Mm hmm.

**Ryan:** And so I don't think time is really that much of an issue. It's just

**Hannah:** Culture.

**Easton:** The change, the shift,

**Ryan:** People didn't recognize it as an other is what makes it interesting. Conversation about why people make me curious outside of the grievance part is,

**Hannah:** Okay.

**Ryan:** people like the adrenaline they feel like if there is a safety risk there, they like to go there because then they feel like they are participating in this risk. And we like to have adrenaline and have some sort of it's like being around death or places of death. And us living sort of is a weird but like disconnect that gives us adrenaline sometimes.

**Easton:** So unfortunately, as we started talking about the whole, you know, Airbnbs and things like that, this whole dark tourism thing kind of goes in my eyes beyond dark tourism now. Now it's more like murder tourism. One of the places I think the article had a really inappropriate title it was like top places to go for Lovers of the Macabre. And one of the spaces was from in Rwanda, from the genocide. And you're just seeing rooms upon rooms of just skulls and bones. And I'm like, that is absolutely horrific. I don't know if anybody has seen the movie Hotel Rwanda that that goes through that or just people know. But I kind of sat back and thought like, you know, not as many... Like you would never see Auschwitz on that list. I'm not trying to speak for anyone and saying that any one thing was in any way comparable to another. Genocide is genocide. And it's just interesting to me how most people in America, they know what a concentration, what a death camp is, what a concentration camp is,

**Hannah:** And how you should behave when you visit one.

**Easton:** Absolutely.

**Hannah:** And what's...

**Easton:** what's acceptable.

**Hannah:** Acceptable. Yeah.

**Easton:** And so it kind of made me raise this question of like, is it once again easier to disassociate when it's not something that's like common knowledge? Is it more like because not as many people know about this, this can be a fun, macabre thing and may and I don't know who gets the you know, because you have to pay. So again, it goes right back to the whole I don't know who gets the who's reaping the spoils of that, but it just feels so wrong. And especially the massive paranoia and the circumstances of these people's deaths, like why would you even want to go anywhere near that space, especially now with my camera? Like, Oh, I'm ready to experience something take pictures of something. It's horrific.

**Hannah:** Yeah. I think I'm reading more about it right now to commemoration it's really interesting. I'm reading I'm the minister of Education in 1996 was talking about how people were really shocked by the way that they had chosen to memorialize. The one that we're primarily talking about is the um, the school at Murambi and it says on the second anniversary of the genocide, the mass graves in the vicinity of the technical school were opened the remains of some 5000 victims were exhumed and hundreds of intact skeletons were laid out in their dozens and the school classrooms with skeletons were part of bodily remains not claimed by relatives. And the idea, the Minister said at the time of education. Joseph Habineza, he said, we're refusing to bury our dead. Some people say the genocide never took place here. They say we exaggerate. These corpses will stay in the schools a testimony to the genocide and the genocide must live on. So the intention behind it is from the local people to force the world to look at what happened, which is completely valid.

**Easton:** Yeah,

**Hannah:** but then it's ending up on these lists of tourism websites.

**Easton:** And that's why research is so important.

**Hannah:** That's really messed up.

**Easton:** Yeah because it completely takes that aspect away. Like it's now just not look at what these people are doing to not come to terms, but to try and, and speak the truth about this horrible awful thing that's happened. But now it's just, hey, I wonder how this will interest you.

**Hannah:** And when you really dig into it and you, you look at a lot of the information about it, even look at reviews, people have left. They, um, many appear to be visiting for exactly the right reasons. But I think people will sit in other countries and see these pure images without reading any of the background, but that engaging with the sights and put them on these lists and suddenly you're turning something tragic and very recent into and maybe that is the, the distance of culture, of not understanding, of not having a connection to the people of not that you can disconnect yourself and turn it into a

**Easton:** A spectacle.

**Hannah:** Yeah.

**Easton:** Oh, boy.

**\*Music\***

**Hannah:** One of the things that struck me, looking at the images and commentary from Rwanda that also is a way that people have disconnected culturally. Um, frequently I think that we should probably also talk about as many of the bodies are mummified. Why do we think it's okay as Westerners to go see mummified bodies and natural history museums would we feel okay if those were our ancestors?

**Easton:** No, definitely not.

**Hannah:** Would we be dressing up as that was a Halloween costume do you have any thoughts on?

**Easton:** Well, to flex my minor a little bit because anthropology is my minor.

**Hannah:** Sure is.

**Easton:** Mummies being displayed as attractions. This topic is at the pinnacle of like historical fetishization because they're not culturally respectful windows to this history. Which is usually fetishized because another thing that we learn about is like, you know, Egypt was in Africa, and I feel like Egyptian history and African history are always told in this weird separation.

I was actually in an anthropology class. Shout out to Miss Williamson. I hope you're doing okay. Where we were talking about this. So this was during COVID, so we were all at home taking classes through Zoom and then doing these little chat boxes. And one of these little chat props was we were asked on what we felt was the best way to display a mummy in a museum setting. Hypothetically speaking, we're not actually doing this. We got to since it's anonymous, you got a slew of perspectives from everyone and you know, the majority said something along the lines of, well, there's a right way and a wrong way to do it. And some people said, well, it doesn't matter, the person's already dead. Some said it shouldn't be done at all, considering how horribly it's been done already throughout history. Not to toot my own horn, but my professor said that my take was the best from all of them.

**Hannah:** Yeah, it was.

**Easton:** I said and I said that pretty much. If I could go back and grab it verbatim, I would. But I've lost access to those files unfortunately. I basically said the only way you can ensure you're doing justice is to consult the community of the people whose history you're trying to tell. And depending on what you're trying to show, you know, that could be a pretty large undertaking on its own, just putting it into context. But you should at least make sure that you don't let your Western biases corrupt the exhibit and place everything in its proper cultural context based on whose mummy it is and why it's important for non Egyptian eyes to see it. And she was like, who? Who said this one? Because she couldn't tell. And I was like, well, I said it. And they're like, everyone was like, Oh, that,



that's actually really, really good. This doesn't have anything to do with like dressing up as a mummy for Halloween per se. Although I would recommend you probably don't do that. I won't be doing that, but it does open up a whole nother section of discussion on like how does the religious significance of other people's cultures and their burial traditions. I mean, it's pretty much been ignored altogether. I mean, there's some horrible stuff. I spoke with Sara, our, our dearest newest member of the curatorial department. She was talking to me about all the things that people would do when mummies were first being excavated from the ground. I mean, people were just taking them and selling them and consuming them. There was a painting made Mummy Brown, they made a paint, they made tea out of the mummies, and it would trade hands from person to person. They'd have mummy parties.

**Hannah:** This is news to me. I have never dug much into the history of mummies. Okay... People are so messed up.

**Easton:** I know. And it's like, I mean, they'd have mummy parties where they'd sit the mummy on the table and put food around it.

**Hannah:** Okay.

**Easton:** I mean, I'm sorry. I'm sorry it hasn't been taken with the respect that you'd expect until pretty recently as we were learning this, as we were being taught this, I mean we were reading articles about like, hey, the first mummy new mummy was found in Cairo and we actually asked the Egyptian government if we could take it before we took it. And it's like this whole thing where people in Egypt are like, okay, well if we're going to take our people, we'd kind of like to at least get the money, if not display it ourselves. And it's like, that's a 100% valid statement.

**Hannah:** I just wanted to say I feel like you dropped the mic on this whole conversation. And, and, and we didn't, we didn't mic drop it enough. But I think the point when you said that all you can do to ensure justice is to consult communities whose histories you're trying to tell, like that's the make drop right there.

**Easton:** Well, thank you.

**Hannah:** And if you think anyone, anyone is going to be uncomfortable, it's not a site for tourism. It's not a site for commercialization that's for communities to decide and if they are then able to fund projects and programs that they need funded off of curiosity and interest. Um, but be able to manage the way in which it's handled like that's the whole ballgame right there. Like there is a way to engage with histories like we've been talking about today tastefully. But I do think when we come back to Halloween times of year like this, I think people lose their minds.

**Easton:** They really do.

**Hannah:** Just stop thinking!

**Easton:** I can't even I've been trying to silently come up for reasons for why that is. I don't know. Maybe it's because it's late in the year and it seems like New Years are kind of like a start over point. Maybe it's because there's a general reverence around Christmas kind of and then into a I guess to a

lesser extent, Thanksgiving, although that's got some awful history too. But like I think Halloween may be that one holiday that just kind of like a freebie holiday.

**Hannah:** I think is yeah.

**Easton:** There's not like an established

**Hannah:** The safe holiday.

**Easton:** Yeah. It's not like there's no established like for Thanksgiving, you usually have a feast. For Christmas everybody comes home and you usually chill out.

**Hannah:** And you're free from your family. You're getting drunk with your friends are completely hyped up on sugar.

**Easton:** Yeah. I mean, Halloween is just I don't know what happened Halloween, but it just it just became this whole throw everything... throw everything to the wind.

**Hannah:** We still love you, Halloween. Let's just...

**Easton:** We do. I mean, but

**Hannah:** Not let it be an excuse to be terrible. People, please. And thank you.

**Easton:** Yes. Thank you all. Or I'm sorry. I feel like I have to keep apologizing at the end of these episodes now. Thank you all for coming and spending some time with us talking about more problematic history.

**Hannah:** I'm glad we got the chance to have this discussion. I feel like it's been one we've been talking about having for a long while. So I'm glad we got the chance to sit down and do it. Don't forget to leave us a review, rating on wherever you listen to your podcasts and you can continue to find us wherever you find us today. But also Spotify, Apple Podcasts, any other podcast resources. Also, don't forget to follow us our social medias. If you search Problematic Pod on Instagram or Twitter, you should easily find us.

**Easton:** Until next time. Stay safe this Halloween.

