



Sense of History: The Place of the Past in American Life

David Glassberg

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As Americans enter the new century, their interest in the past has never been greater. In record numbers they visit museums and historic sites, attend commemorative ceremonies and festivals, watch historically based films, and reconstruct family genealogies. The question is, Why? What are Americans looking for when they engage with the past? And how is it different from what scholars call "history"? In this book, David Glassberg surveys the shifting boundaries between the personal, public, and professional uses of the past and explores their place in the broader cultural landscape. Each chapter investigates a specific encounter between Americans and their history: the building of a pacifist war memorial in a rural Massachusetts town; the politics behind the creation of a new historical festival in San Francisco; the letters Ken Burns received in response to his film series on the Civil War; the differing perceptions among black and white residents as to what makes an urban neighborhood historic; and the efforts to identify certain places in California as worthy of commemoration. Along the way, Glassberg reflects not only on how Americans understand and use the past, but on the role of professional historians in that enterprise. Combining the latest research on American memory with insights gained from Glassberg's more than twenty years of personal experience in a variety of public history projects, *Sense of History* offers stimulating reading for all who care about the future of history in America.

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