

outside of society. They are, after all, "creative people who simply seek . . . to communicate to others" (6).

Two of the essays that follow explore well-known examples of grassroots art that have survived intact long after the death of their creators. Father P. M. Dobberstein's Grotto of the Redemption in West Bend, Iowa, and S. P. Dinsmoor's Garden of Eden in Lucas, Kansas, continue to attract thousands of visitors each year. Other works of grassroots art, however, are endangered and require restoration to ensure their survival. Collectors Dan Dryden and Don Christensen chronicle their preservation of Emery Blagdon's displaced "healing machines." Members of the Kansas Grassroots Art Association offer accounts of their work to restore Ed Galloway's concrete totem pole in Foyil, Oklahoma, and to find permanent homes for the sculptures of Ed Root and Inez Marshall. Besides contending with the physical challenges of restoration, these preservationists openly contemplate the ways their intervention has altered the artists' original intent.

Brackman and Dwigans's attempt to define grassroots art is helpful, but their effort to place this art in a social context is even more gratifying. Artists of all types bewilder us, especially those unorthodox practitioners whose visions are flamboyantly exhibited in suburban yards and along rural roadsides. In attempting to understand the way nonacademic artists live and create, both of these books help to demystify the artistic process by placing it in the sphere of everyday life.

The Presence of the Past: Popular Uses of History in American Life, by Roy Rosenzweig and David Thelen. New York: Columbia University Press, 1998. v, 291 pp. Tables, appendixes, notes, index. \$27.50 cloth.

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How does the public connect with and use the past? How different are the popular understanding and uses of the past from those of academic historians? The search for answers to questions such as these led Roy Rosenzweig and David Thelen on a journey of exploration into the dynamics of popular history making. From an analysis of the results of a national survey on how Americans understand the past, Rosenzweig and Thelen found that while the past was important to Americans, history as defined and presented in textbooks and history classes was not. In addition, the authors discovered that racial and ethnic identification could shape the ways specific groups interacted with and interpreted the past.

A brief introduction sketches the project's background and provides information about the survey process. A team under the direction of John Kennedy of Indiana University's Center for Survey Research conducted 808 telephone interviews from a national sample of Americans. Three "minority" samples of African Americans, Mexican Americans, and American Indians added another 600 or so to the survey pool. The analysis of the quantitative and qualitative data generated by the survey falls into two parts. The first examines the nature of popular history making, the ways Americans use the past, and the levels of trust accorded to sources of information about the past. The second looks at variations in the process described in the first segment.

The first four chapters, which explore the general patterns found about popular history making, the use of the past in the present and to shape the future, and the process of connecting to the past, cover familiar terrain. It should not surprise anyone who has heard students complain about history, watched children of their own relate to history, discussed the past intergenerationally within their own families, or watched visitors in museums that the "past" remains important, especially on the individual or familial level. According to the survey, Americans use their understanding of the past to reinforce generational connections, grapple with larger human questions, construct and pass on identity, leave legacies, and affirm the importance of human agency. They draw on an intimate past, experientially derived, and use this past in personal ways. Grand national narratives and the content of history are more often than not seen as detached from the daily round of life and are accorded little importance. When Americans move beyond the authority of the extended family, museums rather than books, movies, or traditional classroom settings are seen as more credible for providing additional information and understanding.

The final two chapters compare and contrast the ways different groups of Americans understand and use the past, particularly when they connect with the larger national past. Rosenzweig and Thelen found that white Americans tend to personalize the national narrative. African Americans and American Indians integrate the national past into their own narratives and invest this connected past with agency. Mexican Americans occupy a "borderland" in which they navigate through multiple cultures and pasts as they make sense of their experience in the United States. This aspect of the study clearly enhances our understanding of popular history making because it offers fresh insights into variations of the process of understanding and using the past.

Rosenzweig and Thelen conclude with individual afterthoughts about the meaning of the information generated by the survey. While enthused about the existence of a continuing dialog between past and present and the affirmation that an appreciation of the past appears central to the lives of Americans, Rosenzweig expresses concern about the lack of balance between intimate uses of the past and the content as well as context of the larger national past. Thelen celebrates the sense of participation with the past that permeates the informants' responses and believes that all that is needed is some way to forge links between their personalization of the past and the national narrative. The bottom line, however, is that Americans are not uninterested in history; they are just engaged with it in ways that those involved in the corporate enterprise of history underappreciate.

The very fact of the public's engagement with the past is, of course, heartwarming to anyone involved with history. *The Presence of the Past* reaffirms the known—the personal identification of the past over the public, the preference for experience over content—and provides insights about specific groups of Americans' understanding of the past. The challenge will be for those involved in the more formal pursuit and interpretation of the past to build on the popular process of history making and find ways to connect that process with content that pushes public understandings of history beyond the boundaries of the personal past without losing its intimate identification.

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