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The Combing Of History



Synopsis

How is historical knowledge produced? And how do silence and forgetting figure in the knowledge we call history? Taking us through time and across the globe, David William Cohen's exploration of these questions exposes the circumstantial nature of history. His investigation uncovers the conventions and paradigms that govern historical knowledge and historical texts and reveals the economic, social, and political forces at play in the production of history. Drawing from a wide range of examples, including African legal proceedings, German and American museum exhibits, Native American commemorations, public and academic debates, and scholarly research, David William Cohen explores the "walls and passageways" between academic and non-academic productions of history.

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Customer Reviews

With all the things which have happened historically, only a spattering of details ever gets recorded and only a sprinkling of those get remembered. It is in fact the details and what details individuals and groups will remember that is the point behind David William Cohen's book. Cohen argues that there is always an important story behind the writing of history; it is in this story that we discover individuals, cultures, families, etc. fighting for a voice in the history that will finally be "heard." The production of history involves either "natives" or "outsiders" of historical events deciding which details are the most useful and relevant to the present time and the continuation of the memory, this decision is heavily affected by the training and accustoming of the past. After this sifting of facts, the actual writing and performing of history takes place with its own unique relevance from various

points of view. This process is vital. The very metaphor that Cohen bases his book on in the first chapter is all about details as well. Camella Teoli, decided to leave details out of her story to her children. Her daughter who combed her hair everyday didn't know why she had a bald spot; she just knew it was there. Camella deeming her safety and social acceptance more important always left the historical facts of her industrial accident out of reach. However it was eventually through combing back through history that the incident was brought to memory again. In this way she combed over the details and later historians and others combed them back up according to their differing values. Of course Cohen himself cannot escape the selecting, judging and combing over that take place in writing his history.

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