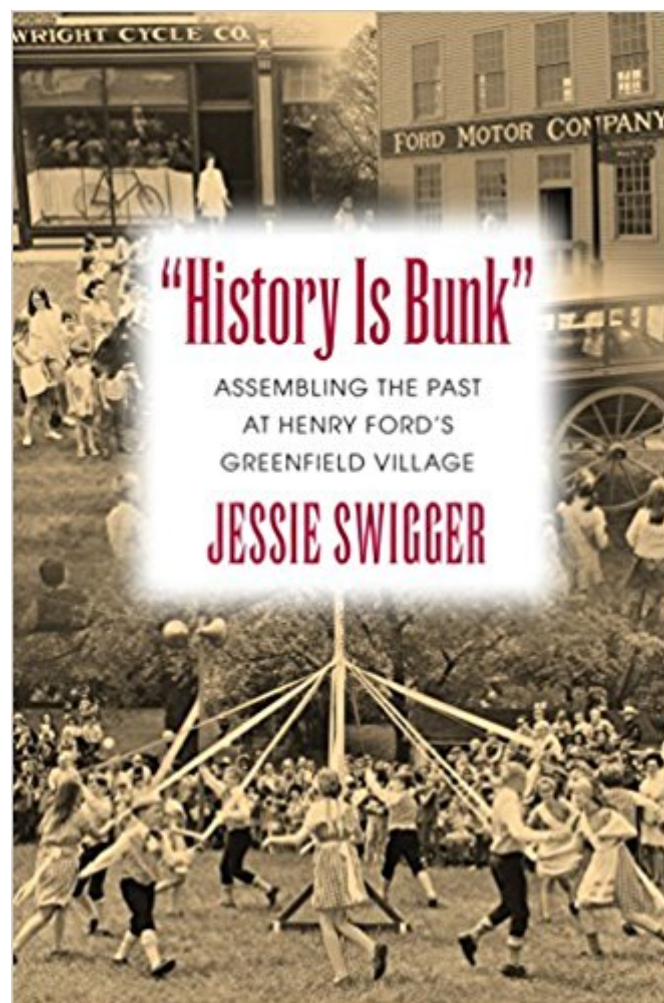




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"History Is Bunk": Assembling The Past At Henry Ford's Greenfield Village (Public History In Historical Perspective)



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Synopsis

In 1916 a clearly agitated Henry Ford famously proclaimed that "history is more or less bunk." Thirteen years later, however, he opened the outdoor history museum Greenfield Village in Dearborn, Michigan. It was written history's focus on politicians and military heroes that was bunk, he explained. Greenfield Village would correct this error by celebrating farmers and inventors. The village eventually included a replica of Thomas Edison's Menlo Park, New Jersey, laboratory, the Wright brothers' cycle shop and home from Dayton, Ohio, and Ford's own Michigan birthplace. But not all of the structures were associated with famous men. Craft and artisan shops, a Cotswold cottage from England, and two brick slave cabins also populated the village landscape. Ford mixed replicas, preserved buildings, and whole-cloth constructions that together celebrated his personal worldview. Greenfield Village was immediately popular. But that only ensured that the history it portrayed would be interpreted not only by Ford but also by throngs of visitors and the guides and publicity materials they encountered. After Ford's death in 1947, administrators altered the village in response to shifts in the museum profession at large, demographic changes in the Detroit metropolitan area, and the demands of their customers. Jessie Swigger analyzes the dialogue between museum administrators and their audiences by considering the many contexts that have shaped Greenfield Village. The result is a book that simultaneously provides the most complete extant history of the site and an intimate look at how the past is assembled and constructed at history museums.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

"An important study of one of America's leading historical enterprises. What makes this book so original is its comprehensive sweep, its illuminating comparison of Greenfield Village with other historical projects of the same era, and its systematic scrutiny of the written reactions by visitors." — Howard Segal, author of *Recasting the Machine Age: Henry Ford's Village Industries*

"In this excellent study, Swigger offers a richly detailed and well-contextualized analysis of Ford's museum from its founding to the present day. The result is a highly readable book that strikes a good balance between narrative and interpretation. . . . Ideal for classroom use. . . . I hope it gains a wider readership, however, as it is one of the most clearheaded examination of public historical work I have encountered." — American Historical Review

"Swigger's work is well written and would be easily accessible to a wide-ranging audience. . . . She has provided us with an important study not only of Greenfield Village, but also of Henry Ford himself." — Public Historian

"Illustrative of the growing tension between curatorial authenticity and aggressive marketing . . . The book is easy to read, well illustrated, and presents an interpretation of one of America's foremost historical villages in an engaging way." — Michigan Historical Review

"Nicely crafted . . . Jessie Swigger's method of juxtaposing archival research and material culture analysis will please those who have long awaited a serious weighing of Greenfield Village's significance, as well as those more broadly interested in the course of public memory during the last century. Even more interesting is Swigger's sifting through the museum's interpretive trajectory, which she contends has varied over time in 'dialogue' with diverse stake holders." — Winterthur Portfolio

Jessie Swigger is assistant professor of history at Western Carolina University.

Great book about public history, museums, and Ford's life and legacy.

Fascinating history of one of the most important outdoor history museums in the country. What sets this book apart is that it places Greenfield Village into the broader narrative of public history.

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