



# Legacies: Collecting America's History at the Smithsonian

*Steven Lubar, Kathleen M. Kendrick*

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The Smithsonian Institution has been America's museum since 1846. What do its vast collections -- from the ruby slippers to a piece of Plymouth Rock, first ladies' gowns to patchwork quilts, a Model T Ford to a customized Ford LTD low rider -- tell Americans about themselves? In this lavishly illustrated guide to the Smithsonian's National Museum of American History, Steven Lubar and Kathleen M. Kendrick tell the stories behind more than 250 of the museum's treasures, many of them never before photographed for publication. These stories not only reveal what America as a nation has decided to save and why but also speak to changing visions of national identity.

As the authors demonstrate, views of history change over time, methods of historical investigation evolve and improve, and America's understanding of the past matures. Shifts in focus and attitude lie at the heart of *Legacies*, which is organized around four concepts of what a national museum of history can be: a treasure house, a shrine to the famous, a palace of progress, and a mirror of the nation. Thus, the museum collects cherished or precious objects, houses celebrity memorabilia, documents technological advances, and reflects visitors' own lives. Taking examples from science and technology, politics, decorative arts, military history, ethnic heritage, popular culture and everyday life, the authors provide historical context for the work of the Smithsonian and shed new light on what is important, and who is included, in American history. Throughout its history, Lubar and Kendrick conclude, the museum has played a vital role in both shaping and reflecting America's sense of itself as a nation.

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