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## Review of Jack Santino's Signs of War and Peace

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point for folklorists into this important figure in the history of our discipline.

**Signs of War and Peace: Social Conflict and the Use of Public Symbols in Northern Ireland.** By Jack Santino. (New York: Palgrave, 2001. Pp. x + 145, preface, 22 photographs and illustrations, epilogue, references cited, index.)

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Although there is a rich and significant body of scholarship about the folklore of Ireland and Northern Ireland, the sectarian violence that has plagued it has received scant attention from folklorists. This oversight is remedied in eloquent style by Jack Santino's latest book, which takes the Troubles and their folkloric underpinnings as its subject.

Studies of Irish folklore often treat its *oral* tradition, but *Signs of War and Peace* is a welcome addition to this body of scholarship because of its emphasis on Northern Ireland's contemporary *visual* traditions: political and paramilitary wall murals, flags, banners, curb painting, decorated street arches, and spontaneous shrines dedicated to victims of the violence. Customs are also considered, especially the marking of various holidays with parades, effigy burnings, and bonfires. Santino also documents contemporary personal experience narratives about the Troubles from politicians, neighbors on both sides of the political divide, convicted terrorists, and children who lost parents to the violence.

The first of the book's six chapters, "History, Conflict, and Public Display in Northern Ireland," is a concise and supremely readable summation of the history of the Troubles. Santino argues that public display plays a crucial role in the conflict, that these signs and symbols are related to class-based aesthetics and traditions, and that they form a popular and performative style. He asserts convincingly that these folk symbols fight an "all-encompassing but not always violent war" (p. 16) and that political attempts have failed to resolve the conflict because politicians incorrectly assume that an agreement on one level of culture effects change on all levels of culture.

The next chapter, "Ritual Display and Presentation," explores Northern Ireland's tradition of public display and custom, especially the July 12 celebrations and the staggering number of parades (around 3,000) that take place annually in this small province. Santino also interviews the artists who create the murals and delineates their performative functions. Chapter 3 is centered around "*Assemblage*," a term that Santino introduced several years ago to refer to the arrangement and juxtaposition of items to create a symbolic public statement. He argues that the parades, arches, and bonfires he refers to are the principle means of dialogue between different groups: "They . . . take their place with the sectarian shootings, that are but an extreme on a range of dialogic activities" (p. 62).

Death and mourning made concrete are the subjects of a moving chapter, which treats a terrorist attack at a betting office that killed five Catholic men. Santino analyzes the "spontaneous shrines," a term he coined in a 1992 article, that are created at such sites of untimely and bad deaths. These shrines "allow those who disapprove of the violence employed by the paramilitaries to express their feelings with less risk of retaliation or intimidation," thus functioning rhetorically as a response to the murals (p. 90).

Arguing that issues of politics are found in varying degrees throughout the entire range of festival and celebration, the next chapter, "Conflicts," takes a "subaltern perspective" to show how the dynamics that are "painfully obvious" in Northern Ireland also operate elsewhere. Santino demonstrates how rituals and holidays often involve social conflict, citing such examples as the class conflict evident in the public mourning rituals at Princess Diana's death. He then argues that the popular style employed by the protestors on both sides in Northern Ireland can identify the protestors as lower class and set them apart from the elites in institutions that the protestors support. A chapter on "Shared Style and Paradox" concludes the book with an astute application of Bakhtin to some of the parades Santino witnessed. This chapter includes interviews with those who work from within the Belfast community to mend the sectarian ruptures.

The range and depth of this book, along with the quality of its scholarship, make it one of the

most important folkloric studies to appear in contemporary times. Despite his attention to conflict, Santino reminds us that violence in Northern Ireland is statistically less frequent than in the United States, and he never lets the reader lose sight of the intelligent humanity of the people he studies. Scholarly yet readable, relevant to several academic fields as well as to the general, educated public, *Signs of War and Peace* is a model of the best kind of folkloric research.

**Sense of History: The Place of the Past in American Life.** By David Glassberg. (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2001. Pp. xvii + 269, notes, illustrations.)

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This collection of essays by David Glassberg provides an interesting, thoughtful, and highly readable selection of public history case studies that will be equally useful to folklorists working in the public sector or in the classroom. Organizing his work under the interdisciplinary rubric of “memory studies,” Glassberg takes us on a journey through his own research as both academic and public historian. Through these essays, he addresses issues of current and ongoing significance for all who work with living cultures or train future workers: specifically, the processes by which people remember and use the past and how a better understanding of these processes can inform the work of folklorists.

The unifying theme of the book is the “sense of history,” which Glassberg defines as “akin to what environmental psychologists describe as sense of place—not quite territoriality, as among other animals, but a sense of locatedness and belonging” (p. 7). This sense of history locates people spatially, temporally, and communally and is at work in all levels of historical remembering from the autobiographical to the public. He goes on to provide an accessible, succinct summary of the scholarship on memory, an area of research that examines how people create, debate, use, understand, and reshape the past over time. He identifies politics, popular culture, and place as three interpretive foci to be

found across disciplines in the literature addressing the “sense of history” and organizes his essays as illustrations of these three approaches.

Glassberg identifies two competing approaches to the politics of memory: one that focuses on the shared historical myths and symbols bringing diverse groups together in an “imagined community” and another that looks at the uses of history in struggles between competing social groups. In his chapters on a local memorial to World War I veterans in Orange, Massachusetts, and the urban “Portolá Festival” in early twentieth-century San Francisco, Glassberg skillfully balances these two approaches, producing a nuanced view of the political forces at work in memorialization and civic celebration.

Glassberg notes that there is much research to be done on the question of how people actually receive and respond to the history being presented to them. In his chapter on Ken Burns’s documentary epic, *The Civil War*, he analyzes the letters that Burns received from the public after it appeared on public television. This approach moves beyond the public debates between Burns and professional historians to explore how people contextualize historical representations by means of their own experiences and interpretations of the past.

In his exploration of place as both the physical and subjective site of memory, Glassberg addresses the issue of “placelessness” that some scholars claim is a peculiarly American affliction springing from geographic mobility and the homogenizing influence of mass culture on once-unique local spaces. He dismisses some of these charges as “merely intellectuals’ nostalgia for past agricultural communities and ethnic neighborhoods” (p. 20). His discussion of “place-making” moves beyond the notion of American placelessness to examine how migration, attachment to place, and sense of history shaped the image of New England town character and the emergence of historical sites in California between 1850 and 1940.

This fascinating collection of essays illustrates how historians and other researchers of culture and tradition can contribute to the continuing enterprise of making the past, its interpreters, and its uses more intelligible, more humane, and more enlightened.