



Being a Historian: An Introduction to the Professional World of History

By James M. Banner Jr

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Based on the author's more than 50 years of experience as a professional historian in academic and other capacities, *Being a Historian* is addressed to both aspiring and mature historians. It offers an overview of the state of the discipline of history today and the problems that confront it and its practitioners in many professions. James M. Banner Jr. argues that historians remain inadequately prepared for their rapidly changing professional world and that the discipline as a whole has yet to confront many of its deficiencies. He also argues that, no longer needing to conform automatically to the academic ideal, historians can now more safely and productively than ever before adapt to their own visions, temperaments, and goals as they take up their responsibilities as scholars, teachers, and public practitioners. Critical while also optimistic, this work suggests many topics for further scholarly and professional exploration, research, and debate.

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Editorial Review

Review

"At once a strong advocate and an impassioned critic of the historical profession, James Banner insists in specific and telling ways that history's mansion has many rooms and a public responsibility. What a shame that so many historians are crowded into one room and cut off from our public. All historians, all humanists, should read this book." -Thomas Bender, New York University

"Being a Historian ranges widely and expertly over the past and present forms of historical work. It's the only book I know that offers anything like a survey of the multiple forms of historical practice in contemporary America, and seeks to put them into context. This book is sharp and up-to-date, and it will help to set off discussions that the historical profession and the nation's history departments need to hold." - Anthony Grafton, Princeton University

"James Banner is history's Dutch uncle. His *Being a Historian*, which examines developments, problems, and issues in the field over the last several decades, pulls no punches and should be required reading for those contemplating careers in history, as well as their teachers and mentors. But readers should not assume that Banner is here making a plea for returning to a mythical or imagined golden age in history-far from it. Informed by an impressive command of recent research and writing on history, as well as a lifetime of varied experience as an historian, Banner finds much about which to be optimistic. His chapter on public history is one of the most perceptive and informed analyses I have seen to date of how the field has developed, including its growing pains and problems, as well as its promise for enhancing historical scholarship and the practice of history in the future. Leaders in the field, for whom public history has become a major focus of interest, would do well to give this work serious attention." -Arnita A. Jones, Executive Director Emerita, American Historical Association

About the Author

James M. Banner, Jr holds a B.A. from Yale and a Ph.D. from Columbia, where he studied with Richard Hofstadter. From 1966 to 1980, he was a member of the history department at Princeton University, which he left to found the American Association for the Advancement of the Humanities. He has also been a book publisher and foundation officer. A former Guggenheim Fellow, fellow of the Charles Warren Center for Studies in American History at Harvard, member of the board of directors of the American Council of Learned Societies and Fulbright Visiting Professor of American History at Charles University, Prague, he is the author of many books and essays in American history, education and public affairs. He has written for the New York Times, the Wall Street Journal and other newspapers. His most recent works include, with Harold C. Cannon, *The Elements of Teaching and The Elements of Learning*, and *Becoming Historians*, edited with John R. Gillis. He is also the editor of *A Century of American Historiography*. Banner was a co-founder of the History News Service and of the National History Center.

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