



Scrapbooks: An American History

Jessica Helfand

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Combining pictures, words, and a wealth of personal ephemera, scrapbook makers preserve on the pages of their books a moment, a day, or a lifetime. Highly subjective and rich in emotional content, the scrapbook is a unique and often quirky form of expression in which a person gathers and arranges meaningful materials to create a personal narrative. This lavishly illustrated book is the first to focus attention on the history of American scrapbooks—their origins, their makers, their diverse forms, the reasons for their popularity, and their place in American culture.

Jessica Helfand, a graphic designer and scrapbook collector, examines the evolution of scrapbooks from the beginning of the nineteenth century to the present, concentrating on the first half of the twentieth century. She includes color photographs from more than two hundred scrapbooks, some made by private individuals and others by the famous, including Zelda Fitzgerald, Lillian Hellman, Anne Sexton, Hilda Doolittle, and Carl Van Vechten. Scrapbooks, while generally made by amateurs, represent a striking and authoritative form of visual autobiography, Helfand finds, and when viewed collectively they offer a unique perspective on the changing pulses of American cultural life.

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