

The Humanities in Our Lives

THE VALUE OF HISTORY

In a national survey in the early 1990s, Americans expressed doubts when asked about the value of “history” but spoke passionately about the value of understanding the past as a connection to family and a way of understanding contemporary issues and events. History shapes connections to communities, as well as perceptions of current events.

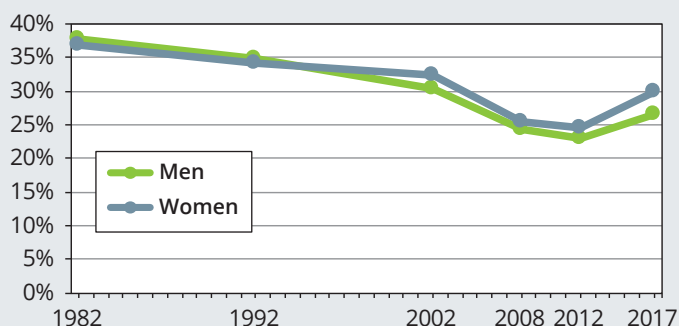
HISTORIC SITES IN THE U.S.

Americans often think about themselves through their family histories and their more general connection to the past, which helps explain the widespread popularity of genealogy in the nation. Despite these personal ties, the share of Americans visiting historic sites has declined substantially since 1982, even after a small improvement in 2017.

KEY FACTS

- In 2017, 28% of American adults reported visiting a historic site in the previous year, an increase of over 4 percentage points compared to 2012.
- As people aged, they were less likely to visit a historic site. The drop-off in historic site visitation over the life course is at least 25%.

Share of American Visiting Historic Site, 1987–2017



INNOVATIVE PROGRAMS

For two decades, the **Trails and Tales Institute**, run by Peru State College in Nebraska, has offered summer courses and tours to teachers to improve their ability to guide students in the state’s history and literature. At the institute, Peru State faculty teach a five-day course, followed by a six-day tour of over 25 locations.

“Our intent is to inspire and invigorate these teachers, who will in turn develop a better appreciation for our state in their students.”

Participants travel to Fort Robinson, where Crazy Horse died; the hometowns of writers John Niehardt and Willa Cather; Chimney Rock; Ash Hollow; the Nebraska State House; and many other sites. Dr. Holtz, one of the program’s faculty, said of the history the mini-course covers, “So many of these stories are inspiring, not just because they show milestones of progress, but because they show the kind of progress that is only earned through perseverance and battles with prejudice and injustice.”

The Humanities in Our Lives series (#HumInOurLives) highlights the many and diverse forms of humanities activities in the nation, and key facts about the health of the field.

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For more on the broad trends that mark American engagement with various forms of the humanities, visit humanitiesindicators.org or email humanitiesindicators@amacad.org.

 **HUMANITIES INDICATORS**
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