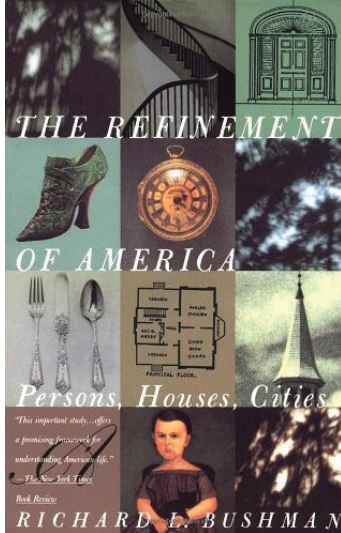


September 2015

Reading Guide: *The Refinement of America: Persons, Houses, Cities: Part 2* by Richard L. Bushman (1992)

1. How was 19th-century gentility different from the 18th-century version? What caused these changes?
2. If you had to pick one object to represent the idea of gentility, what would you choose?
3. Are you convinced by Bushman's arguments about the interactions between gentility and democracy? Do you think the pursuit of gentility encouraged or discouraged the growth of democracy? Why?
4. Did we see ripple effects of the phenomena Bushman talks about in the 20th century? Is there any such thing as gentility in the 21st century? If not, where did it go and what replaced it?
5. What did you find most memorable or surprising about the second half of *The Refinement of America*?
6. What areas do you wish Bushman had written more about or analyzed more deeply?
7. Are there related books, museum exhibitions, websites, or other resources that you would like to share with fellow readers of this book?

Author Biography

Richard Bushman is Gouverneur Morris Professor Emeritus of History and specializes in the social and cultural history of the United States. He received his B.A., M.A., and Ph.D. from Harvard University. His publications include: *From Puritan to Yankee: Character and the Social Order in Connecticut, 1690–1765* (1967); *King and People in Provincial Massachusetts* (1985); *The Refinement of America: Persons, Houses, Cities* (1992); and *Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling* (2005). (From Columbia University website)

Other Related Texts

If you liked *The Refinement of America*, you may enjoy these other books (descriptions courtesy of Amazon.com):

- *Death in the Dining Room and Other Tales of Victorian Culture* by Kenneth Ames (1995)
In this book, the author examines how home furnishings in the Victorian era reflected the culture of the time with a particular interest in how they relate to class, gender, and place. Featuring five once-prominent home furnishings, he reconstructs a vanished culture and demonstrates the importance of studying artifacts for historical understanding. The book focuses on five specific types of furnishings—hallstands, sideboards, embroidered mottoes, parlor organs, and seating furniture—within the context of broader cultural issues and concerns.

- *Confidence Men and Painted Women: A Study of Middle-Class Culture in America, 1830–1870* by Karen Halttunen (1986)
Karen Halttunen draws a vivid picture of the social and cultural development of the upwardly mobile middle class, basing her study on an in-depth survey of the conduct and etiquette manuals and fashion magazines of mid-nineteenth-century America. The book focuses on the middle class and its culture with a focus on two archetypal figures that appeared to concern the middle class in particular: the confidence or “con” man and the painted woman, a woman of fashion and questionable morality.
- *At Home: The American Family 1750–1870* by Elisabeth Donaghy Garrett (1990)
Elisabeth Donaghy Garrett analyzes early American family life by examining letters, diaries, travel accounts, novels, poetry, household inventories, newspaper advertisements, and house-keeping manuals as well as paintings, prints, and drawings for her study of early American family life to provide a fuller picture of what life was actually like for American families of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The book focuses on different rooms in the house and is densely illustrated.
- *Rudeness and Civility: Manners in Nineteenth-Century Urban America* by John F. Kasson (1990)
John F. Kasson argues that the 19th century was an important era in the development of standards of public decorum that still have effects today. He examines how economic change in the 19th century led to a growing middle class capable of participating in social activities previously reserved for a small upper class, and to the growth of cities where many people were brought into close contact. As a result, social commentators believed it essential to improve the manners of the 19th-century middle class. He examines the transformation of our notion of “gentility” from the period before the American Revolution to the early 20th century.

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