



THE MEANING OF AUTHENTICITY IN THE DRESS OF CIVIL WAR REENACTORS

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This research presentation focuses on the concept of dress authenticity and its meaning in the Civil War reenactment movement, which continues to grow in the United States. At the September 1999 "staging" of the Battle of Chickamauga, 10,000 reenactors were expected to participate. It has been suggested that there is more beneath the surface of reenactment. Civil War reenactment may represent, to some extent, a modernday, symbolic expression of the social and cultural viewpoints of its participants. This is congruent with Hobsbawm's model of invented tradition, which contends that individuals adapt symbolic rituals, "loosely" linked to the past as a way of deriving meaning for themselves. Turner's work also speaks to the ritualized dimensions of Civil War reenactments and how they are used by participants as social, cultural and political expressions. These symbolic expressions of Civil War Reenactors, particularly in dress and the motivations underlying them, were the focus of this work.

The initial goal of this research was to explore and define more clearly the concept of dress authenticity. Findings indicate disparate views between and among reenactors, as well as sutlers, regarding the definition and importance of authenticity. A model was developed that captures the key elements of dress authenticity, including the dimensions upon which it varies. Findings also support both Hobs-bawm's and Turner's theories of invented tradition and ritual, respectively.