WHAT CAN PHOTOGRAPHS FROM 1976 TELL US ABOUT AMERICA?

WHAT'S HAPPENING?

A new exhibition at the Smithsonian American Art Museum brings together more than 200 photographs taken across the United States during the 1970s. The photographs were part of a project funded by the National Endowment for the Arts to mark America's 200th birthday in 1976. Photographers recorded cities, rural communities, celebrations, workplaces, families and changing landscapes. Some images show ordinary daily life, while others capture major changes such as new transport systems, damaged towns and the effects of the eruption of Mount St Helens. The project involved 72 photography surveys and thousands of pictures, but it was later almost forgotten. The new exhibition, called Much Here Is Beautiful, presents the photographs as a record of what the United States looked like during a period of change. It also shows that history is not only made from famous leaders and major battles. Everyday people and places can provide important evidence too.

WHY IS THIS INTERESTING?

Photographs can act as evidence of social change. They show clothing, buildings, technology, work and family life in ways that written sources may not. These images also remind us that national history is made from many local stories, not only the events that appear in textbooks.

THINK LIKE A HISTORIAN

"What can an ordinary photograph tell us about life in the past?"

Source: Smithsonian Magazine

https://www.smithsonianmag.com/smithsonian-institution/in-the-1970s-the-us-commissioned-photographers-to-document-the-countrys-people-and-places-you-can-