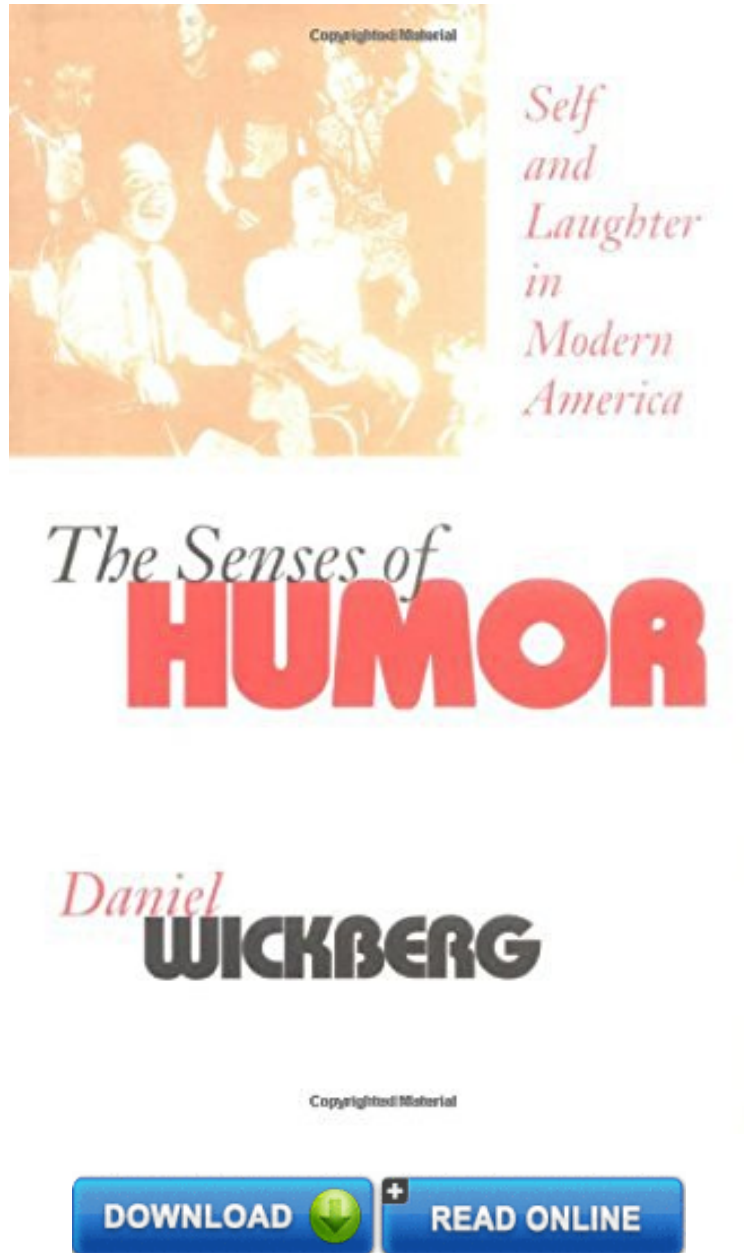


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The Senses of Humor: Self and Laughter in Modern America

Daniel Wickberg

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Daniel Wickberg : The Senses of Humor: Self and Laughter in Modern America before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Senses of Humor: Self and Laughter in Modern America:

Why do modern Americans believe in something called a sense of humor and how did they come to that belief? Daniel

Wickberg traces the cultural history of the concept from its British origins as a way to explore new conceptions of the self and social order in modern America. More than simply the history of an idea, Wickberg's study provides new insights into a peculiarly modern cultural sensibility. The expression "sense of humor" was first coined in the 1840s and the idea that such a sense was a personality trait to be valued developed only in the 1870s. What is the relationship between Medieval humoral medicine and this distinctively modern idea of the sense of humor? What has it meant in the past 125 years to declare that someone lacks a sense of humor? How is the joke, as a twentieth-century quasi-literary form, different from the traditional folktale? Wickberg addresses these questions, among others, using the history of ideas to throw new light on the way contemporary Americans think and speak. The context of Wickberg's analysis is Anglo-American; the specifically British meanings of humor and laughter from the sixteenth century forward provide the framework for understanding American cultural values in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The genealogy of the sense of humor is, like the study of keywords, an avenue into a significant aspect of the cultural history of modernity. Drawing on a wide range of sources and disciplinary perspectives, Wickberg's analysis challenges many of the prevailing views of modern American culture and suggests a new model for cultural historians.

"Wickberg adds a new dimension to our knowledge of contemporary cultural sensibility. He also does what surely all good cultural historians do; he redraws the boundaries of what lies within history, and makes us look again at social habits and assumptions that we had perhaps taken for granted." *Times Literary Supplement* "Using a vast range of materials (jokes, jests, and gags) and writers of every ilk (Carlyle, Chaplin, Freud, Twain), Wickberg charts the development of the modern sense of humor. The book suggests a great deal about American society and its values, and leads readers to recognize the socially constructed nature of reality. Because of its intriguing topic and engaging writing, this book will interest a broad variety of readers?from undergraduates through faculty?in many disciplines. Highly recommended." *Choice*