

History, Memory, and Monuments: An Overview of the Scholarly Literature on Commemoration

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“Monuments are good for nothing,” a North Carolina Congressman declared in 1800. In the founding years of the United States, many argued that democracy and the spread of literacy had made commemorative rituals and monuments obsolete, a leftover from the days of monarchy and superstition. Reflecting on Congress’s reluctance to fund a monument to George Washington, John Quincy Adams famously observed that “democracy has no monuments.” “True memory,” many Americans liked to claim, lay not in a pile of dead stones but in the living hearts of the people.

Since those early days of the Republic, democracy has changed its tune. Commemoration has become utterly commonplace, deeply rooted in the cultural practices of the nation. Not only did Americans come to embrace traditional forms of commemoration, but they pioneered new practices, particularly in the remembrance of war dead. Today American commemorative practices have multiplied and spread in ways no one could have imagined, extending now even into the solar system (with a monument to the fallen *Columbia* crew on Mars).

While commemorative practices have been expanding for nearly two centuries, the academic literature on commemoration has mushroomed in the past twenty years. So many scholars from such a variety of disciplines have joined the “memory boom” that mapping the field has become effectively impossible. Moreover, scholars often talk at cross purposes with one another or simply in ignorance of each other’s work. This essay, while by necessity impressionistic, will try to pinpoint key questions, debates, findings, and trends.

The first key question might be, what is commemoration? Dictionary definitions tell us that to commemorate is to “call to remembrance,” to mark an event or a person or a group by a ceremony or an observance or a monument of some kind. Commemorations might be ephemeral or permanent; the key point is that they prod collective memory in some conspicuous way.

French sociologist Maurice Halbwachs ushered in the modern academic study of collective memory with his book *The Social Frameworks of Memory* (1925) in which he argued that all memory – even personal memory – is a social process, shaped by the various groups (family, religious, geographical, etc.) to which individuals belong. In an even more influential posthumous essay, “Historical Memory and

Collective Memory” (1950), published after his death in a Nazi concentration camp, Halbwachs insisted on a distinction between history and collective memory: history aims for a universal, objective truth severed from the psychology of social groups while “every collective memory requires the support of a group delimited in space and time.” Thus our view of the past does not come primarily from professional historical scholarship but from a much more complicated and interwoven set of relationships to mass media, tourist sites, family tradition, and the spaces of our upbringing with all their regional, ethnic, and class diversity – to name just a few factors. Just as personal memory is now understood to be a highly selective, adaptive process of reconstructing the past, shaped by present needs and contexts, so collective memory is a product of social groups and their ever evolving character and interests. Hence the now commonplace notion that collective memory is “constructed,” amidst a perpetual political battleground. Almost everyone now agrees with American historian Michael Kammen’s assertion, made in his magisterial volume Mystic Chords of Memory (1991) that “societies in fact reconstruct their pasts rather than faithfully record them, and that they do so with the needs of contemporary culture clearly in mind – manipulating the past in order to mold the present.”

Yet even when collective memory is qualified in this way, many scholars remain skeptical of the notion. In a 2001 essay on “The Memory Boom in Contemporary Historical Studies” social historian Jay Winter asserted that we need “a more rigorous and tightly argued set of propositions about what exactly memory is, and what it has been in the past.” Some scholars even question the existence of collective memory. The very idea of collective memory seems to assume a unity of purpose – as if many different people somehow share a common mind – that belies the reality of even the smallest family group, let alone a diverse nation like the U.S. James Wertsch has argued in Voices of Collective Remembering (2002) that collective memory is not a thing in itself but many different acts of remembering, shaped by overarching social forces and cognitive frameworks such as narrative. Susan Sontag in her final book Regarding the Pain of Others (2002) went even further and argued that there isn’t a collective memory at all but there is “collective instruction,” a complex process – left mostly unexplained in her book – by which certain ideas and images become more important than others.

“We speak so much of memory because there is so little of it left,” French scholar Pierre Nora has famously argued (Realms of Memory, orig. 1984). Nora claimed that modern societies invest so heavily in

“lieux de memoire” [memory sites, such as monuments, museums, archives, and historic places] because these have replaced “real environments of memory,” the living memory that was once nourished spontaneously in premodern societies. Nora’s claim echoes the anti-monument rhetoric of early American republicans. Like the republicans before him, Nora suspected that modern commemorations were invented to make up for a lack of organic unity within modern nations and societies. David Lowenthal’s book The Past Is a Foreign Country (1985) made a similar point, arguing that modern societies try desperately to resurrect the past because it has already disappeared from living culture. While this core insight has been productive – modernity does indeed disrupt old patterns of collective memory – it is also reductive, failing to take into account not only the importance of commemoration in premodern societies but also the persistence of the past and “spontaneous” practices of memory in modern societies such as the U.S.

Nora’s attention to sites of memory and the politics surrounding them has had a profound influence on American scholarship, but many scholars who cite him simply ignore or overlook the assumptions that underpin his work. Whatever their theoretical allegiances, scholars keep circling around the same basic questions. Who guides the process of remembering and towards what ends? Why do specific commemorative projects take particular forms? How do commemorative practices actually shape social relations and cultural beliefs (rather than simply reflecting them)? Inevitably this last question raises the key issue of how conspicuous acts of commemoration like public ceremonies and monument building relate to the more everyday practices of schooling, reminiscing, and unconscious habit that carry knowledge and tradition from one generation to another. This question is the least directly addressed issue, probably because it is the hardest to research, though it haunts much of the scholarship on memory.

In the U.S. the “memory boom” seems to have been inspired largely by two phenomena: the coming to grips with the Holocaust, which began in earnest in the 1970s, and the unexpected success of Maya Lin’s Vietnam Veterans Memorial, dedicated in 1982. While the literature on Holocaust memory is now vast and intricate, James E. Young’s book The Texture of Memory (1993) has become indispensable. Focusing on the unique problems posed by the trauma of the Holocaust, Young surveyed a range of memorial solutions in Europe and the U.S. from traditional heroic figurative monuments to avant-garde installations that deliberately undermined the very premise that monuments are permanent. Throughout the book Young argued that monument building is a living process, in some sense always unfinished; no matter how much a monument may pretend to be eternal and unchanging, its meaning always evolves as its viewers bring new concerns and understandings to it. Since the Holocaust was so clearly an event to be pondered rather than celebrated, monuments could never hope to fix its meaning for all time.

The phenomenal power and popularity of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial almost immediately revived scholarly interest in the subject of public monuments. Traditionally, public monuments had been the most prestigious forms of commemoration because they were designed as permanent showcases of public memory, to last for the ages. But in the twentieth century, scholars came to consider the public monument a dead form. Lewis Mumford wrote in The Culture of Cities (1938) that “the notion of a modern monument is a veritable contradiction in terms.” While public monuments did continue to be erected in the mid-20th century, scholars paid little attention until Maya Lin’s design for the Vietnam Veterans Memorial offered a new, distinctly contemporary memorial format,

an open solution – to follow James Young’s suggestion – that deliberately encouraged multiple meanings and uses. This spawned an immense literature on the monument itself and a renewed interest in how monuments and other public practices of commemoration work in modern society.

Fittingly, one of the most frequently cited books on American public memory, John Bodnar’s Remaking America: Public Memory, Commemoration, and Patriotism in the Twentieth Century (1992), began with a discussion of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial. Bodnar, an eminent social historian of ethnic and immigrant communities, was dissatisfied with the all too frequent assumption that commemorations were top-down affairs imposed by ruling elites on a passive populace. The success of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial demonstrated to him that commemoration interwove what he called “official” and “vernacular” memory, official memory driven by the need of the state to mythologize itself and maintain the loyalty of its citizens and vernacular memory driven by the need of ordinary people to pursue their social and political concerns in their local communities. Surveying a broad range of local commemorations including monuments and anniversaries, Bodnar argued that national patriotism worked to “mediate” or reconcile the competing interests of official and vernacular memories. While Bodnar’s distinction between official and vernacular can break down in practice, his book has helped establish that commemoration “involves a struggle for supremacy between advocates of various political ideas and sentiments.”

An interesting example that complicates Bodnar’s framework is Melissa Dabakis’s book, Monuments Of Manliness : Visualizing Labor In American Sculpture, 1880-1935 (1998), which studied various intersections of class, gender, and politics in the

generally elite form of monumental sculpture. Her investigation of the competing monuments to the Haymarket protest in Chicago in 1886 – one to the police, one to the anarchists – demonstrated that the “struggle for supremacy” was not only a conflict over which version of events would become officially enshrined in public space but also a shifting political conflict between left-wing and right-wing groups. Ironically the official police monument had a more “realistic” vernacular form and definite vernacular appeal, at least among police recruits, while the anarchist monument had a more elite form laden with art-historical associations.

Art historians like Dabakis, trained to study both the patronage and the reception of works of art, have realized for decades that monumental works become especially contested arenas, precisely because the work has a high public profile. One of the earliest and best studies of U.S. monuments was Michele Bogart’s Public Sculpture and the Civic Ideal in New York City, 1890-1930 (1989). Bogart’s book centered on the golden age of the public monument, a time when sculptural monuments proliferated not only in New York but throughout cities across the continent. Her book traced the rise of an unabashedly elite genre of edifying commemoration at the end of the nineteenth century, supplied by well-known artists and their powerful political patrons. But the story concluded with a fascinating account of how this elite consensus unraveled in the early twentieth century, as various groups – such as newly enfranchised women – began to acquire a voice in the process and to challenge the dominant sculptural language. Since then that story has been extended by scholars such as Andrew Shanken, whose 2002 essay in Art Bulletin focused on the mid-twentieth century movement to replace sculptural monuments with “living memorials” (utilitarian memorials such as highways,

parks, and concert halls). Throughout the twentieth century memorials increasingly transformed from mere sculptural objects into more complex spaces, often with museum or archival functions. Benjamin Hufbauer's book Presidential Temples: How Memorials and Libraries Shape Public Memory (2005) has shown how gargantuan Presidential libraries have become a dominant type, overshadowing or even supplanting the older hero-on-a-pedestal that had once been the preferred type of monument to a great leader.

As noted above, however, traditional public monuments never disappeared, and they continued to be a powerful form of commemoration even as they lost their appeal to cultural elites. Karal Ann Marling and John Wetenhall's Iwo Jima: Monuments, Memories, and the American Hero (1991) is a study of one such monument, the Marine Corps War Memorial erected in Arlington, Virginia in 1954. Their book embedded the monument within popular culture, where the iconic image originally came from (a wartime newspaper photo) and where it continues to live and thrive. The phenomenon in which particular monuments have become icons of the nation has been studied in books such as Marvin Trachtenberg's Statue of Liberty (1976), Rex Alan Smith's Carving of Mount Rushmore (1985), Christopher A. Thomas's The Lincoln Memorial and American Life (2002), and most recently Nicolaus Mills's Their Last Battle: The Fight for the National World War II Memorial (2004). Albert Boime in The Unveiling of the National Icons: A Plea for Patriotic Iconoclasm in a Nationalist Era (1998) demonstrated the authoritarian and exclusionary character of many of these icons, although he did not fully take into account what Bodnar might call the vernacular attachment to iconic forms of commemorative art.

Washington, D.C. has received a great deal of attention because it is the commemorative heart of the nation. The role of the Capitol building in commemorating the western expansion of the nation, and the defeat of Indians who stood in the way, has been examined in Vivien Fryd, Art And Empire : The Politics of Ethnicity in the United States Capitol, 1815-1860 (1992). Other aspects of the Capitol's commemorative program have been explored in American Pantheon : Sculptural and Artistic Decoration of the United States Capitol, a collection of essays edited By Donald R. Kennon and Thomas P. Somma (2004). The development of the "monumental core" of the capital city has been much studied, but the single best volume on the national Mall as a commemorative landscape remains The Mall in Washington, 1791-1991, edited by Richard Longstreth (1991). Countless specialized studies on commemorative practices in the capital have been produced – on parades, ceremonies, cemeteries, city plans, outdoor sculpture – but surprisingly few serious synthetic studies of how the city has worked as a commemorative landscape.

More scholarly work in this direction is likely as the collective memory field continues to expand beyond its traditional base in sociology, history, and art history and embraces the work of geographers, landscape historians, ethnographers, archaeologists, and other academic practitioners. Richard Handler and Eric Gable's ethnographic study of America's most famous living museum, The New History in an Old Museum: Creating the Past at Colonial Williamsburg (1997), is an excellent example, investigating how the historical lessons of this site are continuously reshaped or even ignored as they are put into practice by reenactors and consumed by tourists. Much of the newer work is in essay form. Geographer Derek Alderman, for example, has investigated the issue of

commemorative street naming focusing on Martin Luther King, Jr., in a series of articles in professional geography journals. Some recent work has been collected in anthologies, such as Myth, Memory, and the Making of the American Landscape (2001), edited by archaeologist Paul A. Shackel; Social Memory and History: Anthropological Perspectives (2002), edited by Jacob J. Climo and Maria G. Cattell; and Places of Commemoration : Search for Identity and Landscape Design (2001), edited by Joachim Wolschke-Bulmahn. What all this work tends to have in common is an effort to map individual commemorative sites within larger contexts of remembrance – landscapes, geographic and administrative units, and social networks created by tourism, professions, and other factors.

This should remind us that commemoration entails not only building, naming, or shaping physical sites. Commemoration as a practice also involves ritual acts in and occupations of public space as well as other kinds of performance and consumption that may leave no lasting trace on the landscape. W. Lloyd Warner's classic study The Living and the Dead: A Study of the Symbolic Life of Americans (1959) was an early examination of the role of patriotic parades and other symbolic observances in civic life. David Glassberg's American Historical Pageantry : The Uses of Tradition in the Early Twentieth Century (1990) examined the craze for commemorative pageants in the beginning of the past century, but this phenomenon has a long history in the U.S. David Waldstreicher's In the Midst of Perpetual Fetes : The Making of American Nationalism, 1776-1820 (1997) and Sarah J. Purcell's Sealed with Blood: War, Sacrifice, and Memory in Revolutionary America (2002) both showed that in the early national period, festivals and anniversaries helped overcome partisan and class divisions and cement a national

identity. In our own time, new electronic media have greatly expanded and altered the terrain of commemoration. Marita Sturken's Tangled Memories: The Vietnam War, the AIDS Epidemic, and the Politics of Remembering (1997) has made a pioneering contribution in this area; her study examined commemoration across many different media, by charting the ways in which memories of the victims of national crises circulated throughout American culture in films, monuments, medical practices, and domestic grieving turned public. Yet George Lipsitz's Time Passages: Collective Memory and American Popular Culture (1990) has argued that even in age dominated by television and commercial culture, popular traditions of storytelling and festivity among disenfranchised groups, such as working-class blacks in New Orleans, have still played a part in upholding their own versions of the past.

All these diverse commemorative practices come together most powerfully around the remembrance of war. It is no surprise that much of the literature on commemoration in the U.S. deals with war and its aftermath. G. Kurt Piehler's Remembering War the American Way (1995) has remained a useful synthetic study, but the literature has grown to the point where synthesis now seems quixotic. The memory of the Civil War has stood out as a particularly fertile topic. In recent years a great deal of work has been done on memory and race, as scholars from numerous angles have shown how the commemoration of the Civil War helped to shape new racial relations within American society – removing African American soldiers from mainstream public memory, defeating the dream of racial equality, and advancing the cause of white supremacy. David W. Blight's ambitious synthesis Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory (2001) has become the indispensable reference for this argument.

The book surveys an enormous range of commemorative practices from oratory to pageantry to monuments and beyond. More specialized studies of the racial relations of war memory include Kirk Savage, Standing Soldiers, Kneeling Slaves: Race, War, and Monument in Nineteenth-Century America (1997), Paul A. Shackel, Memory in Black and White: Race, Commemoration, and the Post-Bellum Landscape (2003), and Mitch Kachun, Festivals of Freedom : Memory and Meaning in African American Emancipation Celebrations, 1808-1915 (2003). Recent studies have made ever more nuanced analyses that interweave the issue of race with gender, class, and region. Exemplary collections along these lines include Where These Memories Grow : History, Memory, and Southern Identity (2000), edited by W. Fitzhugh Brundage, and Monuments to the Lost Cause : Women, Art, and the Landscapes of Southern Memory (2003), edited by Cynthia Mills and Pamela H. Simpson.

In addition to reshaping racial relations and beliefs, the scale of the Civil War dramatically changed and expanded commemorative practices, creating a new cult of the veteran and new modes and technologies of remembering the war dead – innovations that preceded comparable developments in Europe by years or even decades. For the first time, photographers shot images of battlefield corpses, a profound shift in the understanding and memorialization of warfare analyzed in studies such as Timothy Sweet, Traces of War : Poetry, Photography, and the Crisis of the Union (1990) and Alan Trachtenberg, Reading American Photographs : Images as History, Mathew Brady to Walker Evans (1989). The emergence of veterans organizations and their role in promoting the memory of the common soldier have been explored in Stuart McConnell's Glorious Contentment : the Grand Army of the Republic, 1865-1900 (1992) and in

Cecilia Elizabeth O'Leary's To Die For : The Paradox of American Patriotism (1999). Kirk Savage in Standing Soldiers, Kneeling Slaves has examined the resulting democratization of war memorials, and the phenomenal spread of a new type of ordinary-soldier monument. Another innovation, the creation of national soldier cemeteries such as Gettysburg, was briefly examined as a precedent for twentieth-century European practices by historian George Mosse's Fallen Soldiers: Reshaping the Memory of the World Wars (1990). Since then this line of research has been extended by others such as Susan-Mary Grant in a series of essays, most recently in the journal Nations and Nationalism (2005).

Battlefields too have been witness to dramatically changing patterns of commemoration, and thus have posed intricate problems for their stewards, most notably the National Park Service. Edward T. Linenthal in Sacred Ground: Americans and their Battlefields (1991) examined the ways in which battlefields from the Revolution to WWII have been transformed into "sacred" landscapes which various groups fight to protect from political or racial or commercial defilement. Any commemorative narratives that stray from the narrowly defined script of military heroism become suspect. For instance the National Park Service's efforts to expand the historical significance of Civil War battlefields beyond military history into social and political issues such as slavery have encountered resistance both inside and outside the agency, as Paul Shackel has shown in his case study of Manassas (Memory in Black and White). More recently Jim Weeks in Gettysburg : Memory, Market, and an American Shrine (2003) has called into question the notion of the sacred by arguing that tourism and the marketplace have profoundly shaped even the most revered battlefield from its very inception. He has

shown that, as cultural norms have changed, the standards of appropriate commemorative behaviors have also changed – sometimes in surprising ways. For example, battle reenactments originated as commercial entertainments that elites discouraged as frivolous, but in the past two decades have grown into a wildly popular participatory sport, with ever more stringent standards of authenticity. Ironically, the hundreds of regimental and officer monuments that were once the heart of the commemorative landscape have now become intrusions into the “authentic” experience of the past!

Besides battlefield reenactments, another major new participatory phenomenon of memorialization is the spontaneous offering of personal mementos at national memorials, which began in the early 1980s at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial. Kristin Ann Hass has examined the roots and meanings of this phenomenon in Carried to the Wall: American Memory and the Vietnam Veterans Memorial (1998). At the same time recovery efforts and reverence for the bodies of the war dead have reached new extremes of emotional and financial cost, as Thomas M. Hawley has recently investigated in The Remains of War : Bodies, Politics, and the Search for American Soldiers Unaccounted for in Southeast Asia (2005). All of these developments indicate an extension and transformation of the popular sphere of memory practices of the late nineteenth century. Ordinary citizens increasingly have become the subject and the actor in commemorative initiatives, even as the power and cost of the “military-industrial complex” have grown mightily.

In recent times the remembrance of war has become connected almost inextricably with the issue of trauma. Once again the Holocaust and the Vietnam Veterans Memorial have served as the key landmarks in this process. Young’s Texture

of Memory and Sturken's Tangled Memories have shed light on the new importance of victimization within commemorative practices. Geographer Kenneth E. Foote's study Shadowed Ground: America's Landscapes of Violence and Tragedy (1997) examined how Americans have dealt with landscapes marked by war, mass murder, and other traumatic events. In a related development, the remembering and forgetting of Indian removal, confinement, and extermination have become increasingly important subjects in studies of national historic sites such as Dispossessing the Wilderness : Indian Removal and the Making of the National Parks (1999) by Mark David Spence, and The Politics of Hallowed Ground : Wounded Knee and the Struggle for Indian Sovereignty (1999) by Mario Gonzalez and Elizabeth Cook-Lynn. Edward Linenthal has created the most extensive body of work on trauma and commemoration, in a series of meticulously researched books on subjects spanning from the late nineteenth century to the beginning of the twenty-first: Sacred Ground, Preserving Memory: The Struggle to Create America's Holocaust Museum (1995), and The Unfinished Bombing: Oklahoma City in American Memory (2001). Since 9-11, the subject has become even more important, and numerous scholars have already entered the field. Two new examples include Savage's study of the "therapeutic memorial" in an essay in the collection Terror, Culture, Politics: Rethinking 9/11, edited by Daniel Sherman and Terry Nardin (2006), and Terry Smith's examination of the contemporary struggle over iconic architecture in Architecture of Aftermath (2006).

While work on commemoration continues to multiply, and to examine ever more carefully how memory practices penetrate all facets of our collective life, much work remains to be done on the actual impact of all these practices. Few scholars have

attempted to theorize the relationship between commemoration and tradition, what we might call the exterior and interior faces of historical consciousness. On the one hand are public sites and rituals of memory, and on the other hand are ingrained habits of thought and action that persist in individuals, families, and communities across long spans of time. While few scholars would agree with Nora that interior memory has disappeared, most scholars have focused on the exterior struggles to construct memory in one form rather than another. One of the only scholars to argue against this trend has been social scientist Barry Schwartz, who has written a series of articles and books on American Presidents in historical memory. In Abraham Lincoln and the Forge of National Memory (2000) Schwartz has argued that memory is not constructed anew in each new commemorative project; instead, he has asserted that in a democratic society historical facts have serious weight and help create “core elements” of memory that persist over long periods of time. Yet his belief in an authentic “core” memory led him, ironically, to downplay certain historical facts, such as the outright fraud and hucksterism involved in “assembling” the log cabin in which Lincoln was supposedly born. (For more on the log cabin story, see Dwight Pitcaithley’s meticulously researched essay in Shackel’s Myth, Memory, and the Making of the American Landscape.) In fact, historical errors and deliberate distortions abound in the landscape of commemoration, as James W. Loewen’s amazing study, Lies Across America: What Our Historic Sites Get Wrong (1999), has so amply demonstrated. But Schwartz’s point remains well taken: scholars must take into account not only the changing politics of commemoration but also the stubborn persistence of traditions and beliefs – some of which persist even when they conflict with historical fact or common sense.

This perspective might have helped scholars prepare better for the emotionally charged controversy over the Smithsonian's ill-fated *Enola Gay* exhibit, which was intended to mark the 50th anniversary of the bombing of Hiroshima by putting the event in historical context. The controversy was a particularly dramatic example of how the work of historians, based on supposedly apolitical principles of evidence and analysis, came into conflict with powerful "memory constituencies," whose long-cherished beliefs about the righteousness of the American military cemented their group identities as veterans and patriots. Edward T. Linenthal and Tom Englehardt's History Wars: The *Enola Gay* and Other Battles for the American Past (1998) untangled this controversy and showed how the partisan politics and "culture wars" of the time helped fuel it. At the same time the book showed how the *Enola Gay* fiasco was not simply another episode in the "politics of commemoration." The controversy transcended the politics of the moment and became a classic confrontation between history and collective memory – anticipated in Halbwachs' original distinction – where history inevitably loses precisely because it lacks the unshakeable beliefs of psychically invested constituencies. Some of the contributors to History Wars asked whether the "patriotic" narratives of commemoration could be expanded and humanized to encompass the multiple realities of war, to bring the longstanding traditional stories of triumph into contact with more tragic stories of the human cost and moral ambiguity of warfare. The question has no easy answer.

One pioneering effort to integrate the various realms of internal and external memory, of invisible traditions and visible histories, is Martha Norkunas's Monuments and Memory: History and Representation in Lowell, Massachusetts (2002). Her book

traced the changing relationship between the public, mostly masculine face of memory in Lowell – in honorific monuments and historical sites – and the largely oral traditions, passed on by women, that preserved the memory of those who kept the community intact and functioning outside the public eye. While her study would benefit from more analysis of the interaction between these realms of memory, her book points in a useful direction. Likewise, Bodnar’s distinction between vernacular and official memory remains intuitively useful, but needs further refinement, retesting, and revision in order to understand better how these realms of memory interpenetrate one another. This might help explain, for example, the persistence and power of military commemoration. How does the inner/vernacular memory of women, ethnic groups, and other ordinary Americans help support the outer/official memory of such a quintessentially top-down, masculine institution as the military? Pursuing questions like these would eventually help bridge the gap between the spectacular “politics of commemoration” and the more inconspicuous workings of tradition. How the past is produced, consumed, internalized, and acted upon will no doubt remain a rich and complex problem for scholars as they work further to extend and integrate the approaches outlined in this essay.

Start by marking "Commemoration in America: Essays on Monuments, Memorialization, and Memory" as Want to Read: Want to Read saving... Commemoration lies at the poetic, historiographic, and social heart of human community. It is how societies define themselves and is central to the institution of the city. Providing an overview of American memorialization and the impulses behind it, Commemoration in America emphasizes a universal tendency for individuals and groups to use monuments to define their contemporary social identity and to construct historical narratives. The volume shows that while commemorative acts and objects affect the community in fundamental ways, their meaning is always multivalent and conflicted, attesting to both triumphs and tragedies. Collective memory encompasses both the shared frameworks that shape and filter ostensibly "individual" or "personal" memories and representations of the past sui generis, including official texts, commemorative ceremonies, and physical symbols such as monuments and memorials. Sociological work on collective memory traces its origins to Émile Durkheim and his student, Maurice Halbwachs. In the United States, the contemporary sociology of memory coalesced in the 1980s and 1990s, after Barry Schwartz brought renewed attention to Durkheim's focus on commemoration as well as Halbwachs's interest in