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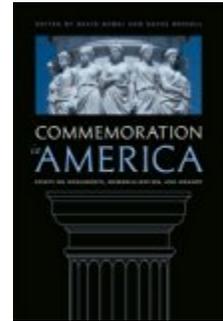


David Walter Gobel, Daves Rossell, eds. *Commemoration in America: Essays on Monuments, Memorialization, and Memory*. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press. 346 pp. \$75.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8139-3372-6; \$35.00 (paper), ISBN 978-0-8139-3373-3.

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How and Why America Remembers

The drive to remember and honor can divide as well as unite. Memorialization has been fraught with disagreements on purpose, narrative, interests, and design. Consider the World War II Memorial in Washington DC, dedicated in 2004. Many agreed that a memorial was long overdue, but disputes arose over the chosen location and design. Also, acceptance of memorials and monuments can change over time. The American South—home to slavery and later hot spots in the civil rights movement—offers examples. Once-lauded nineteenth-century heroes fell into disrepute. What has happened to their statues?

What about remembering controversial events, such as a 1913 tragedy in Calumet, Michigan? How did Philadelphia honor Marquis de Lafayette with a parade in 1824? The contributors to *Commemoration in America: Essays on Monuments, Memorialization, and Memory* answer these questions. Editors David Gobel and Daves Rossell worked with scholars of varied backgrounds to produce this work—architecture, history, southern history, historic preservation, study of cultural rituals, and geography. The book of twelve essays is divided into four parts: “Discovering the Monumental Theme,” “The Triumphant Market,” “The Weight of History,” and “Forgoing Memory.”

Dell Upton brings out that there have been two periods of concentrated monument building in America: 1880 to 1930 and 1982 to the present. The first period was a time of rapid growth both of the county and the

economy. With the growth came many changes, including southern blacks moving north to urban areas, and numerous immigrants. According to Upton, new monuments at that time, such as the Statue of Liberty, “are better understood as reassertions of values that monument builders believed needed reinforcement amid turmoil” (p. 20). The second spurt of monument building began in 1982 with the dedication of the Vietnam Veterans’ Memorial in Washington DC, and continues today with many memorializing the victims of 9/11.

The story of a monument is more than the story of the person or group it represents. Who pushed for its creation? When? Why? Contributor Catherine Bishir grew up in Kentucky and often saw a statue in Lexington of Brigadier General John Hunt Morgan of the Confederate cavalry. Kentucky was deeply divided during the Civil War, but the legacy of Morgan promoted by the state and others idealized him, the South, and Lexington’s fame as the “Horse Capital of the World.” To them Morgan nobly served and died during the war; they glossed over his ignominious raids on civilians and banks. A statue erected in 1911 by the Kentucky United Daughters of the Confederacy had Morgan astride a large stallion, rather than his favorite horse, a small mare named Black Bess. Image over accuracy had won that argument, further idealizing the Old South and Lexington horses. Along the same lines later in the book, Sally Greene discusses Judge Thomas Ruffin (1787-1870) of North Carolina, who had a proslavery background, and the history

of his statue.

As for non-constructed memorials, the American elm stood strong—physically—in New England, but often with incidents from history constructed around it. Elms were viewed as “witness trees.” They had an impressive silhouette, and since they were not very useful to the New England colonists, they were left to grow. (Elm trees were tough and not ideal for building.) Because of their rapid growth, elm trees could appear to have been around at the time of colonial events. However, looks could be deceiving. Often, an elm that supposedly shaded a historical figure or event, was found too young for that when its rings were counted. In the case of the “Washington Elm” in Cambridge, Massachusetts, the tree perhaps became more famous than the event that gave it fame. The tree was a tourist attraction and remembered in song and verse; James Russell Lowell penned “Under the Old Elm” in its honor. Legend held that General George Washington took command of the Continental Army under that elm. When the story came under scrutiny, it appeared that Washington did formally take command at that location. But would a general truly take shade under a tree, or would he earn respect by being in the sun with his sol-

diers? Despite doubts about the story, when the Washington Elm died in 1923, people swarmed the tree to take pieces. Ultimately, fragments were distributed around the country and world—the legend of the tree continued.

Other subjects in *Commemoration in America* include memorialization in early Boston, including the Puritan influence on paintings, literary works, and epitaphs; civil rights memorials and museums in southern cities and the varied interests at stake in the development of those sites; and how Japanese Americans interned during World War II remembered their heritage. The book closes with an essay by David Lowenthal on how cities, constantly changing and viewed as inferior to the countryside, only sometimes commemorate. Perhaps, he indicated, the “remains” and absences, such as those caused by wars or attacks, speak for themselves.

This thorough and professionally written book will inform readers of various backgrounds and pull them from one chapter to the next with unique perspectives on familiar topics, which are clearly explained and discussed. Footnotes and an extensive bibliography provide information for further insight and analysis.

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