Erika Doss, *Memorial Mania: Public Feeling in America.*

Memorial Mania: Public Feeling in America by Erika Doss.

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*Winterthur Portfolio*, Vol. 47, No. 1 (Spring 2013), pp. 115-116

Published by: The University of Chicago Press on behalf of the Henry Francis du Pont Winterthur Museum, Inc.


Accessed: 02/09/2015 11:06
sailors they commemorated. The conclusion follows maritime memorialization into the twenty-first century, making clear the value of examining this “living tradition” to better understand maritime culture.

The Sea Their Graves is a pioneering study of a neglected component of Anglo-American maritime culture. In the best tradition of material culture studies, it offers an analysis of an object (in this case 2,182 maritime memorials) to make a broader humanistic argument. I only wish an appendix had been included to clearly chart the quantitative data that underly the book’s conclusions. More important, Stewart dared to cast a wide chronological, disciplinary, and geographical net in an academic environment that rewards specialization. Specialists will debate many of his conclusions. How, for example, can there be a “maritime mind” in light of recent scholarship that demonstrates just how heterogeneous and parochial Anglo-American maritime culture was during the Age of Sail? Close readers will also find that the book’s argument too often outpaces the evidence presented. But The Sea Their Graves convincingly demonstrates the centrality of death to maritime culture and will become required reading for anyone interested in Anglo-American maritime culture.

Like all good conversation starters, The Sea Their Graves raises far more questions than it answers. What role, for example, did the producers of maritime memorials have on their material form and cultural meanings? How did these memorials reflect social, cultural, and economic differences among Anglo-American mariners? Stewart aptly concludes with an extended discussion of future research directions and suggests broadening his analysis to include the memorials of other maritime folk groups and “the study of power relations” (213). Wherever future scholarship sets sail, however, it will be in the wake of The Sea Their Graves.

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Echoing the “statue mania” that swept through the United States during the Gilded Age and Progressive Era, the period in which we now live has seen an explosion of public memorials for a wide variety of causes. Noting the feverish pace with which Americans have marked their landscape in recent years, Erika Doss offers a thoughtful explanation rooted in collective psychology and identity politics.

Doss deserves our thanks for simply trying to comprehend the sheer diversity of modern American memorial-making practices. Although this well-researched book will primarily be of interest to Doss’s fellow art historians and American Studies scholars, it deserves a wider reading. It encompasses everything from the temporary memorials hastily built by the roadside at the site of traffic accidents to the elaborately planned and exhaustively debated complex in New York City honoring the victims of the World Trade Center attacks of September 11, 2001. Casting her trained eye over the contemporary scene, very little escapes her attention.

After chapter 1, which offers a history of the transition from “statue mania” to “memorial mania” over the course of the twentieth century, the book is organized according to five emotions: grief, fear, gratitude, shame, and anger. Many of her examples depict more than one emotion, so could fit into any chapter, but overall the organization works. The “grief” chapter analyzes the seemingly spontaneous memorials that arise in the wake of tragedies such as the murder of thirteen students at Columbine High School in 1999. In the “fear” chapter, Doss focuses on state-sanctioned memorials to the victims of terrorist attacks such as the 1995 Oklahoma City bombing and the 2001 World Trade Center attack. The “gratitude” chapter surveys the most recent crop of war memorials, looking not only at the large, national ones, such as the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, DC, but also the more modest ones scattered in small towns and cities across America. “Shame” examines contemporary efforts to recognize publicly the victims of past injustices such as slavery, lynching, and the Japanese-American internment during World War II, while the “anger” chapter largely discusses the heated conflicts between Native Americans and whites over memorials to western conquest.

The heart of Doss’s argument is in her subtitle—that while earlier statues and monuments were designed to communicate lofty ideas, the new memorials, often built in a minimalist, modern style, offer “experientially based memory practices” (62) designed to provoke a certain feeling among the people who experience them. Visitors to Columbine are supposed to feel grief; those to the Clayton-Jackson-McGhie lynching memorial in Duluth are directed

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to feel shame, while those to the World War II Memorial in Washington, DC, are to feel gratitude. Doss would be the first to admit that the problem with this argument is that the memorial creators and the public do not necessarily share the collective emotions attributed to them. Short of an ethnographic study, it’s hard to determine how visitors experience what they see. We can assume that there is a difference between the families who are mourning loved ones at public memorials and the strangers who are there alongside them. While Doss does try to include evidence of how the meanings of the memorials have been communicated and understood by various groups, overall this is a book of cultural criticism in which readers learn as much about Doss’s likes and dislikes in memorials as about the ways that other Americans feel.

Throughout, Doss does an excellent job of exploring the contested nature of American nationalism. As she notes, through mass and social media Americans instantly experience and share emotions such as grief or fear more easily than their political beliefs. Although she introduces the master narrative of “peace through unity” only in her last chapter, when describing the new memorial landscape at Little Big Horn, it is clear from her earlier examples that the new experiential public memorials, like the old didactic ones, are designed to give the illusion of consensus around a particular national identity. While Doss seeks greater complexity and expressions of ambivalence in her memorials, the trend seems to be going the other way, toward the simple and the obvious. If Americans are to discover an “emotionally productive politics” (376), it is likely that they will need to look elsewhere than their memorials.

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