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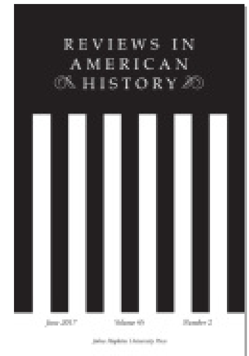


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# IN MEMORY'S EYE: THE IMPROBABILITY OF WAR'S REMEMBRANCE

**Kate C. Lemay**

**Geoffrey M. White.** *Memorializing Pearl Harbor: Unfinished Histories and the Work of Remembrance.* Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2016. xi + 352 pp. Illustrations, appendices, notes, references, and index. $26.95 (paper); $94.95 (cloth).

**Michael R. Dolski.** *D-Day Remembered: The Normandy Landings in American Collective Memory.* Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2016. xix + 310 pp. Illustrations, notes, bibliography, and index. $45.00.

In 1962, while giving a speech to accept the Thayer Award from the U.S. Military Academy, an aging Douglas MacArthur remembered the former cadets who sacrificed their lives for their country. He declared, "The long, gray line has never failed us. Were you to do so, a million ghosts in olive drab, in brown khaki, in blue and gray, would rise from their white crosses, thundering those magic words: Duty, Honor, Country." His speech, which today historians regard as one of the greatest in American history, demonstrate the degree to which affect and emotion are necessary vehicles for purposeful remembrance. Motivated by a sense of responsibility to soldier dead, as well as by a desire for war reconciliation, people build memorials and museums; they write novels and film movies. There is no lack of material for historians interested in war memory, especially those interested in World War II. An important question scholars must contend with, however, is whether or not any of it matters, or will matter, given a hundred years. The term "Lest we forget" is one example of faded memory. Many (if not most) Americans have little idea what November 11, Veteran's Day, originally commemorated. It won't be long until "the Day of Infamy" means nothing to Americans outside of Pearl Harbor, or until reference to "D-Day" is understood only to mean an important deadline, rather than to the greatest amphibious invasion in history.

Regardless of pessimistic forecasts of the future of public memory of war, we can definitively say that in the recent twentieth century, Americans remembered, in great detail, December 7 and June 6. Two recent books by Geoffrey M. White and Michael R. Dolski, *Memorializing Pearl Harbor: Unfinished Histories*

*and the Work of Remembrance*, and *D-Day Remembered: The Normandy Landings in American Collective Memory*, respectively, define and clarify the ways in which, historically, the public recalls the two most iconic U.S. battles of World War II. Both authors ask questions about the goals of war memory, including the influences and forces behind it, and the resulting kinds of history it produces. The book by Dolski is immensely teachable, and the one by White offers a variety of minority viewpoints never before considered.

*Memorializing Pearl Harbor* is a tour-de-force account of the long history of the complex of memorials located in Pearl Harbor. Broken into six chapters and a conclusion, the book ostensibly focuses on the planning and creation of the USS Arizona memorial, but it weaves together so much information that it is clear from the outset that only someone with outstanding field research and years of study could write such a book. Notably, the book's insight often stems from the author's own roles on various advisory groups and organizational entities that were part of the planning of the most current memorial complex. The book's thirty illustrations, many of which are photos by the author, accompany the text, helping to clarify the complex web of research presented. The book also includes four important appendices that organize the political chronologies pertaining to Pearl Harbor, indigenous Hawaiians, Japanese Americans, and films mentioned throughout.

Densely packed with case studies, interviews, excerpts, and other forms of ethnographic study, *Memorializing Pearl Harbor* examines viewpoints of U.S. and Japanese veterans, as well as Japanese American citizens and indigenous Hawaiians. White explains how these groups were (and, particularly in the last case, remain) at odds with traditional remembrance of U.S. military sacrifice. White's book traces how commemoration of the war in the Pacific has evolved since 1980, when the *USS Arizona* first opened as a sacred commemorative space. The book demonstrates the responsibility museums have today to include a variety of perspectives that support the overall message of commemoration while also allowing for opportunities to engage in critical thinking. Sometimes White makes the mistake of relating too much information. For example, he asks important questions about whether or not the state-made memorial will be able to fill in the gap of emotion after living memory of Pearl Harbor has passed away and the last GI dies. Yet White does not exert his own expertise to form an answer. The reader wishes for White's opinion, for, after all, there is no doubt he has the definitive research to come up with the best answer.

The main conundrum presented by White is how Pearl Harbor remains a core component of American identity and patriotism, yet its museums forego accounts of the history of Hawaii's indigenous population. This narrative is a refreshing perspective of Pacific War memory, studying what White refers to as "entangled histories" (pp. 2, 215), or the forces behind the various memorials

in Pearl Harbor. White includes multiple viewpoints of the minority groups who objected to "the matter of absence in the representation of 'factual' histories" (p. 186), and he describes how it was felt by museum planners that local histories of Pearl Harbor—the story of its naval base or how Hawaii became the fiftieth state—"simply [were] not relevant" to a national, collective memory (p. 3). It comes as no surprise, then, that, when local visitors saw the histories presented, they wanted a fuller consideration of their experiences and not a boiler-plate narrative in "familiar terms of enemies, traitors, and heroes" (p. 193) Because minority voices are considered more and more intrinsic to the national story, White's theory that "representing war history at a national memorial is likely to be an unstable and unfinished process" makes sense, and exploring the "unfinished process" is well worth further consideration by other scholars (p. 131). By writing about these social histories, White refutes what he describes as "postcolonial critiques of Pearl Harbor as a symbol of U.S. military power " explaining that 'Other perspectives are not forgotten . . . they are excluded by virtue of the logic of colonialization and nationalization" (p. 5). The factual histories amounting to the story of U.S. imperialism, White argues, can and should be related alongside the memorial dedicated to militarism and sacrifice—hence, the "unfinished histories" of his title.

The chapter on tourism and the ways in which the Pearl Harbor historic sites take on the tone of a theme park reflects another interesting approach that scholars of memory and war are pursuing. Normandy, for example, has become a veritable circus every June 6th. With Saint Mère Église as its epicenter of re-enactors, commemorative events are rendered hokey by the attendance of Belgian and Dutch men clad in replicas of American GI uniforms, complete with greased faces, faux guns, and beer. Scholars such as Sam Edwards have studied tourism in the former European Theater (Edwards, *Allies in Memory: World War II and the Politics of Transatlantic Commemoration, c.1941–2001*, 2015); until White, little attention has been focused on similar, myth-driven reenactments that contemporary audiences make of the Pacific War.

White describes how, in the absence of their own memorials, Japanese veterans ritualized visits to the *USS Arizona*. Because American war memorials of World War II have, until recently, "remained steadfastly focused on the experience of military veterans," it is fascinating that the visitation to the *USS Arizona* memorial by the vanquished—the defeated Japanese veterans—surged in the 1990s and 2000s (p. 38). White highlights how, "outside of official ceremonial time and space . . . a genealogy of rites of reconciliation" transpired in Pearl Harbor between Japanese and U.S. veterans. Similarly, European survivors of World War II "borrow" American memorials in the former European theater as places to visit for pilgrimage, in part because they have few memorials dedicated to their own experiences. How many other cases provide evidence to the appropriation of war memorials, or the borrowing of a very powerful memory, by an unintended audience?

White's inclusive, long-view study of the multiplicity of voices in collective memory distinguishes his scholarship. His book emerges from field research, rather than archives or secondary sources. Because of the many narratives considered in this book, students will not easily keep sight of a tight arcing story with a clean take-away. Nevertheless, the book offers useful, often unparalleled moments of teachable history, because it so deeply considers memorialization as a social process. *Memorializing Pearl Harbor* is unparalleled in its contribution to the study of collective memory of World War II in the Pacific.

Dolski's *D-Day Remembered* is a solid cultural history whose approach mirrors influential historians such as Kurt Piehler, Alex Kershaw, and Michael Kammen. Seven short chapters and a conclusion trace the ebb and flow of the U.S. memory of D-Day from the 1940s through the 2000s. One important point the book makes is how, during the 1940s and 1950s—an era full of U.S. opposition to Cold War communism—the memory of D-Day "assumed greater importance as evidence of the Western love for freedom" (p. 58). This point cannot be underscored enough in today's understanding of early Cold War history.

Readers will appreciate the study of lesser-known written histories of D-Day, such as *The U.S. Army's Cross-Channel Attack* (1951) by Gordon Harrison and the novel *The Americanization of Emily* (1959) by William Bradford. In his exploration of D-Day's remembrance during the Korean War, Dolski expands on Piehler's point that the federal government attempted "to emphasize the continuity between World War II and Korea" (p. 48). The short segment on the topic outlines how D-Day's influence "offered lessons and reassurance," a point that opens up the discussion and encourages more critical assessment (p. 49).

Those interested in Eisenhower and his postwar leadership will find Dolski's archival research immensely useful, as will those interested in the role of the American Battle Monuments Commission in the American GI's immediate postwar attempts to commemorate D-Day through material culture, such as plaques and other small monuments. Additionally, the study of Cornelius Ryan's *The Longest Day*—from the eleven years it took to write, through the publication of the account in 1959, then the film in 1962 and its influence on other forms of collective memory—is excellent. Dolski's prose is particularly illuminating when he describes how "Americans had faced a virtual bombardment of cultural constructions depicting D-Day" by the mid-1960s, the ultimate effect of which "created a paradigm that made subsequent wars seem more acceptable" (p. 79).

Unfortunately, the thirty-one black-and-white illustrations are condensed into two separate groups that function as blasts of imagery rather than illustrations interspersed and integrated into the author's text, which would have been more effective. While Dolski's consideration of film and literature

is good, this book prioritizes military history first and reads culture second, rather than engaging culture as the lens to understand and interpret the influences of military history on U.S. memory and society. For example, his analysis of the memorial in Bedford, Virginia, would have been rounded out quite nicely had the author included a citation and discussion of Erika Doss' *Memorial Mania: Public Feeling in America* (2010). In her chapter "Gratitude," Doss brings the Bedford commemoration up to date, describing the $25 million National D-Day Memorial (dedicated in 2001) as an instance of "war porn . . . [having] all the commemorative decorum of a water park."[1] Although Dolski recently edited another book dealing with D-Day as it is remembered in other nations, to neglect any mention of Mary Louise Roberts' book *D-Day Through French Eyes: Normandy 1944* (2014), even in the bibliography or in a footnote, is a major oversight and further keeps his approach strictly within the bounds of traditional military history.

Students will easily access *D-Day Remembered*. Clear, strong prose outlines the ways in which American militarism was re-invoked by recalling D-Day in the early years of the Vietnam War, and how its prominence subsequently faded as the war in Vietnam dragged on and was eventually lost. The narrative continues into the 1980s, demonstrating how President Reagan called upon the memory of D-Day to "reinvigorate America's confidence and sense of moral worth" after Vietnam (p. 147). The fiftieth anniversary of D-Day became the most profitable opportunity for military historians to date, as their "engaging tales of heroism . . . vindicated America's democratic ethos" (p. 160). Dolski observes how, by the last quarter of the twentieth century, "D-Day served as a guide that kept the pursuit of freedom at the center of a narrative of American international leadership" (p. 165). Dolski's final words on the obsession of D-Day as a signpost of heroism admit that "perhaps D-Day commemoration has passed its prime," but he concludes that "America's D-Day story has not finished just yet" (p. 230). I would go further and argue that eventually, an emotional or affective D-Day remembrance will be lost.

Many, if not most, U.S. war memorials from the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries have completely lost their dedicated meanings to contemporary audiences. For example, Indianapolis's Soldiers and Sailors Monument (dedicated 1902), a war memorial in Monument Circle, the busiest part of downtown, was once the focal point for early twentieth-century parades and gatherings. This monument to Indiana veterans of the Revolutionary War, the War of 1812, the Mexican-American War, the Spanish American War, and the Civil War was considered by most nineteenth-century citizens of the state to be sacred. A tall column topped by an allegorical figure of Victory, the monument reaches a height of 284 feet and reflects vernacular memory and pride in the citizen soldier. The official recognition of the state, however, marks each corner through sculptural effigies of specific leading figures from

the history of Indiana and the Midwest. Over 15,000 people were present at the dedication ceremony on May 14, 1902. During the conflict of the Great War, the monument became a symbol of patriotism and even the progress of the city itself. Today, however, the monument that once drew thousands to commemorate its veterans is noted merely for its complications to downtown traffic. The one exception is during the winter holidays, when white lights are strung down from its highest point, to form a silhouette of a Christmas tree. Since 1962, the monument-turned-symbolic-Christmas-tree hails the holiday season with ambient lighting. Within the efforts spearheaded by the chamber of commerce to bring downtown businesses profit, not a single mention is made about the monument's original meanings. Instead, much is made of the 4,784 lights and fifty-two strands of garland used to decorate the "tree." More than 100,000 people attend the lighting ceremony, held the day after Thanksgiving, and the event is televised to an even larger audience.

Stylistically, because the language and aesthetic ornamentation used in war memorials is vague and often employs a visual vocabulary of yesteryear (such as allegorical figures, obelisks, or draped and broken columns), these memorials carry no impact on today's viewer. Records of civic celebrations centering on the memorial reveal their once important history, but with the passing of several generations, the war memorial loses its emotional immediacy and instead becomes a boring history lesson, just one of thousands of nineteenth-century memorials that are nearly invisible to contemporary viewers who happen to walk by. It is ironic and disappointing that such monuments eventually lose their social relevance, for the motivations to build them in the first place was to sustain a permanent memory, "lest we forget." What is more interesting is how originally these monuments were intended to be destinations of pilgrimage and were used as such. Their presence greatly facilitated the understanding and grieving of loss of life from war. Beyond the vernacular realm of ritual, grief, and mourning, however, war memorials always have been instrumental for nation building. They both heroicize and justify militarism and the sacrifice of U.S. soldiers on behalf of government interests. Yet even within the scope of official purpose, with time, these memorials are rendered obsolete or even offensive, as in the case of many Confederate monuments.

Obsolete memorials are not unique to American landscapes. In France, for example, the Franco-Prussian War is, for most contemporary audiences, a mere hiccup in collective memory. Mars-la-Tour, a tiny village in the department of Meurthe-and-Moselle near the German border, once witnessed a decisive victory by the Prussians. At one point Prussians held 160,000 French soldiers immobile for an entire day, which in turn allowed them to seize the important nearby French city Metz, which became a turning point in the war. During the Battle of Mars-la-tour, approximately 16,000 French soldiers died, most of whom were buried in a crypt in a field. The crypt was later marked by a stoic

allegorical figure of France standing on a raised pedestal. Her dignified arms hold a dead French soldier, on whose head she places a laurel of peace. At their feet, a small child reaches to pick up the soldier's gun—an action meant to symbolize hope for those eastern regions in France. (As MacArthur stated in his 1962 Thayer Award acceptance speech, "Only the dead have seen the end of war.") The statue was dedicated in 1875 as a place of pilgrimage for French citizens shocked at their defeat.

Between 1875 and 1910, as Rachel Chrastil related in *Organizing for War: France, 1870–1914* (2010), 530,000 people gathered annually at this memorial statue. Today, the statue sits in an abandoned space located in the knoll of a highway overpass. Hidden from view, few know it even exists, making Mars-la-Tour one more example of a worldwide amnesia over past wars. Within the context of the twentieth century, as White and Dolski have demonstrated, American remembrance highlights personal memory and underscores the distinctive individual's role in war, war's sacrifices, and war's reconciliation. But how long will these latest iterations of war memory remain influential?

Kate C. Lemay is a historian at the Smithsonian's National Portrait Gallery, where she is curating forthcoming exhibitions on Marlene Dietrich (2017), the American women's suffrage movement (2019), and the War of 1898 (2020). She is the author of *Triumph of the Dead: The American War Cemeteries in France* (2017).

1. Erika Doss, *Memorial Mania: Public Feeling in America* (2010), 217.