

Vietnam Veterans Memorial

Annotated Bibliography for 2016 NEH Summer Institute on Veterans in Society

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Bleakney, Julia. *Revisiting Vietnam*. New York: Routledge, 2006.

This book looks at the impact of the aftermath of Vietnam as it has manifested in American society, Vietnam veterans, and memorializations related to the war. Specifically, she looks at how contemporary memory of the war has been revised and reshaped both through popular culture renditions and also through a commodification of memorializing practices.

Bodnar, John E. *Remaking America: Public Memory, Commemoration, and Patriotism in the Twentieth Century*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992.

This book addresses the Vietnam Veterans Memorial within the context of the commemoration practices in America. Specifically, he talks about public memory and how the something like the Vietnam Veterans Memorial has contributed to the public memory of the war. Also, he considers the political climate and events surrounding the time of its creation, suggesting that recasting what was essentially a failure on military and social terms, had a bearing on diverting attention for the real-time political issues of the Reagan era.

Caruth, Cathy. *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995.

This book incorporates trauma theory and discusses the mechanics of trauma and its impact on memory. While not specifically addressing the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, it is useful in understanding traumatic experience and the way that one processes those experiences, especially since trauma rarely manifests in direct ways. It presents a variety of literature, approaches, and studies that can be useful in Veterans Studies.

Danto, Arthur. "The Vietnam Veterans Memorial." *The Wake of Art: Criticism, Philosophy, and the Ends of Taste (Arthur C. Danto Essays)*. Gregg Horowitz, Tom Khun, Saul Ostrow (Critical Voices in Art, Theory, and Culture), eds. Amsterdam: GB Arts International, 1998: 153-158.

Originally published in *The Nation* after the Vietnam Veterans Memorial was erected, he discusses the success of this monument to a defeat. He talks about the irony that, if we had won the war, it is likely that we would not know of any of those who fought it, because the stipulation that it contain the names of the dead and missing was inherent in its design. He not only compares the memorial to the surrounding monuments, but contextualizes its unique materials and aesthetic features. He also notes that the bronze group of soldiers—added as a compromise to the minimalist form of the memorial—could never have stood alone as Maya Lin's design can and does.

Doss, Erika. *Memorial Mania: Public Feeling in America*. Chicago: University of Chicago, 2010.

A discussion of the American need to memorialize everything, the author discusses the memorializations of all kinds, both personal and public, and how they manifest—in symbolic forms or related to political agenda. These, she feels are a byproduct of an obsession with memory and history. This book is important to understanding memorializations to war and individuals who participate in them, as often they arise for an individual soldier's death.

Hagopian, Patrick. *The Vietnam War in American Memory: Veterans, Memorials, and the Politics of Healing*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2009.

This is an exhaustive study of how Americans have tried to come to terms with the Vietnam War. Indeed, it includes an analysis of the national memorial, as well as descriptions of Vietnam memorials throughout the country. In doing so, it tries to understand the image and representations of the Vietnam veteran in American society.

Lembcke, Jerry. *The Spitting Image: Myth, Memory, and the Legacy of Vietnam*. New York: New York University Press, 1998.

This book was perhaps the first to contest the conceptualization of the Vietnam veteran as one who returned home only to be spat upon. It discusses not only the impact of anti-war movements upon our understanding of veterans, and they of themselves, but also of the “Right” who was likely dismayed by the “loss” in Vietnam. In addition, he was one of the first to discuss the myth of the Vietnam veteran as created by depictions in popular film that portray him as unbalanced, militant, or misunderstood.

Savage, Kirk. *Monument Wars: Washington, D.C., the National Mall, and the Transformation of the Memorial Landscape*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009.

A thorough history of the National Mall in Washington, DC, Savage discusses its purpose and development, specifically the delicate handling of war memorials in the space. Indeed, he defines concepts of American space, especially the park-like area that the Mall enacts. He discusses how these object represents the nation, its views, and values, and what happens when specific interests create monuments to themselves. He also discusses how the combination of all of these monuments and memorials, especially those in the national venue of the Mall, create an experience and a narrative for understanding history and politics.

Sturken, Marita. *Tangled Memories: The Vietnam War, the AIDS Epidemic, and the Politics of Remembering*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997.

This book establishes a theory of cultural memory, suggesting that the shared memory of the Vietnam War that exists has been shaped by many factors, particularly that of the “screen” or Hollywood. She also discusses how the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, and the image of the Vietnam veteran, is tied to the AIDS crisis in the 80s and specifically the redefinitions of manhood that result from the trauma of the war and widespread PTSD (which also figures into Hollywood representations of the Vietnam veteran). The memorial also brings to the fore ideas of sacrifice and honor, prevalent to a military interpretation of the war, but because of the controversy over the war, were not necessarily part of the popular understanding of the war or its veterans.

Theriault, Kim S., “Go Away Little Girl: Gender, Race, and Controversy in the Vietnam Veterans Memorial,” *Prospects*, ed. Jack Salzman, *Cambridge University Press Annual of American Cultural Studies*, Vol. 29 (2005), pp. 595-617.

Like the controversy of the Vietnam War itself, the endeavor to create the Vietnam Veterans Memorial was embattled. From the planning and approval of the attempt to that of the design itself, there was constant unrest. This article problematizes the race and gender issues inherent in the history of the Vietnam War that resurfaced when the memorial’s designer was revealed as a twenty-one year old Chinese-American woman. Designer Maya Lin was thrown into a firestorm and subjected to sexist and racist attacks. In addition, there were comparisons of the design to scars and gashes (crude slang for female genitalia) as well as the correspondence of its black color with that of “shame” (which can be interpreted as racist). The article discusses these issues, as well as the resolution to add figural sculpture and a flagpole to the memorial, and suggests that the actions that took place were part of residual war trauma.

Therault, Kim S. "Re-membering Vietnam: War, Trauma and "Scarring Over" After "The Wall." *Journal of American Culture*, 26:4 (December 2003), pp. 421-31.

This essay established the key elements of the Wall's success, explaining the manner in which its minimalist form, listing of names in a tangible manner, and items that visitors leave there, contribute to healing. It discusses the aesthetic choices that designer Maya Lin made: constructed as two wings of a mirrored surface, the choice of black granite, the chronological name list, the slant of the memorial into the earth. It collates numerous accounts that discuss the memorial's impact on veterans and the public, and posits that it is the primary motivator for reconciliation of the war in the American consciousness.