Questioning the Official History: War Memorials as Propaganda Art and the Development of a Nation’s Collective Memory

By

Mitra Keykhah

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To my mother, father, and sister, who have always believed in me.
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What happened, what we recall, what we recover, what we relate, are often sadly different. The temptation is often overwhelmingly strong to tell it, not as it really was, but as we would wish it to have been.

-Bernard Lewis
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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

We all know that art is not truth.
Art is a lie that makes us realize the truth.
- Pablo Picasso

Art. The word brings to mind expressions of beauty and emotion. The history of humankind’s artistic endeavors is vast, and the names and times of great artists are scattered throughout. Art is usually thought to exist outside the realms of politics, a sort of uncorrupted beauty that can withstand war and political change to serve as a visual (or aural) articulation of the past, open to interpretation. However, art cannot and does not exist on this higher plane of existence; it is and has always been constantly followed by controversy over its use and appearance. One of the most well known historical incidents involving a dispute over the usage of art took place in the Renaissance. Girolamo Savonarola, a 15th century Dominican monk and proto-Protestant, became vicar general of Florence in 1493, after which he instituted what was called the Bonfire of the Vanities. This consisted of a large pyre placed in the center square to burn what he claimed were excesses and vices that were corrupting the people

of the time, including mirrors, lewd pictures, and, most importantly, works of art. After going several steps too far in his reformist attitude, Savonarola was soon excommunicated and executed for his radical reformism.²

The art of the time, the Renaissance, was very heavily concerned with visual images of biblical figures; it was, in fact, church propaganda in many cases, to draw people into the glory and beauty of the Catholic religion. Since art is most commonly associated with a sort of free expression of one’s ideals and emotions, to associate it with propaganda, which today has a very negative connotation would seem almost contradictory. Since World War I, and especially World War II, the word propaganda has been associated with totalitarian regimes, thought of as a sort of brainwashing tactic used by authoritarian dictators, and to associate art with such a negative idea seems to be most dissonant.³ However, art has been used for propaganda and political purposes for centuries, long before World War I, long before Savonarola’s exploits, and not only by totalitarian regimes, but also by democratic governments such as that of the United States.⁴ Centuries ago, Roman emperors would create columns and arches that contained friezes dedicated to their victories in battle, much the same way Nelson’s column in Trafalgar Square, London functions today. Lord Nelson stands tall and proud at the top, surveying all of London, and at the base of the column on which he stands are four large

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⁴ Ibid. pp 9.
friezes, commemorating his victorious battles.\textsuperscript{5} Such statues are propaganda, serving to remind us, posterity, of the heroes in our history and their deeds, which helped to create nations and empires. Yet, such statues and their accoutrements are also works of art, which symbolize the cultural memory of nations.

The Oxford English Dictionary defines the word “propaganda” to mean “Any association, systematic scheme, or concerted movement for the propagation of a particular doctrine or practice.”\textsuperscript{6} There are two definitions that pertain to the word propagate: “To spread from person to person, or from place to place; to disseminate, diffuse (a statement, belief, doctrine, practice, etc.), [and] to hand down from one generation to another; to pass on to one's descendants; to reproduce in the offspring.”\textsuperscript{7} If these two definitions are put together, propaganda can be defined as that which is designed to spread the ideas of a particular doctrine from person to person, and, more importantly, from generation to generation. Propaganda is therefore designed to affect the memory of future generations as much as it is to influence people’s opinions in the present. What people remember of their past, what they remember about the history of their nations or empires is very much tied into the artistic representations of those events. Public art, or more directly propaganda art, is designed to form opinions and determine what people remember and what they will forget. Artistic expressions, visual arts in particular are able to stand the test of time, providing a visual image of past social and political events, and within the politics of a nation, there is a desire to preserve a certain kind of memory of such events. In the 20\textsuperscript{th} century specifically, there was a sudden

\textsuperscript{7} Ibid.
increase of this kind of artistic production for propaganda purposes. Government regimes, political parties, and individualized groups have conscripted and patronized artists to create works of art, the object of which is to carry across a certain political message. These works of art also send a certain message to future generations; that is, they become what people remember of the past. When the art is this sort of public propaganda, it becomes part of what may be called the collective memory, the people’s memory as a whole.

Some of these works of art are directed specifically at this collective memory, dictating what should be remembered and what should be forgotten about certain events and people. These specific works of art are commemorative memorials and exhibits, artistic representations that remind us of certain events or aspects of the past. Memorials, especially war memorials, obviously cannot tell complete stories, and more often than not, they are designed not to do so. They are intended to remind the people of the heroics of their nation’s fighters, and to have the unsavory details fade into the background of the nation’s collective consciousness. This type of propaganda was easily accomplished in totalitarian societies, but it has become harder in democratic societies, such as that of the United States. In particular, when exhibits or memorials are built that do not convey the kind of image the government and/or majority would like, controversy abounds, as evidenced by debates surrounding Maya Lin’s Vietnam Veterans’ Memorial, and the Smithsonian’s failed 1995 exhibition on the Enola Gay at the National Air and Space Museum. In both cases, what was planned did not convey the type of patriotic sentiment that some in the United States government thought was appropriate. In the case of the

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Smithsonian exhibition, originally entitled *The Last Act: The Atomic Bomb and the End of World War II*, the criticism was enough to force the cancellation the planned exhibition entirely before it opened.

In his essay *What is a Nation?*, French essayist Ernest Renan states that memories of certain events, or lack thereof, are crucial to the development of a successful and powerful nation:

To forget and – I will venture to say – to get one’s history wrong, are essential factors in the making of a nation; and thus the advance of historical studies is often a danger to nationality. Historical research, in fact, casts fresh light upon those deeds of violence which have marked the origin of all political formations, even those which have been followed by the most beneficial results. Unity is always realized by brute force. The union of North and South in France was the result of terror and extermination carried on for nearly a century. The French monarchy, which is generally regarded as typifying a steady process of crystallization and as having brought about the most perfect example of national unity known to history, when studied more closely loses its glamour. It was cursed by the nation that it was engaged in moulding, and today it is only those who can see the past in perspective who can appreciate the value of its achievement, ....

Now it is of the essence of a nation that all individuals should have much in common, and further that they should all have forgotten much. No French citizen knows whether he is a Burgundian, an Alan, a Taifal or a Visigoth, while every French citizen must have forgotten the massacre of St. Bartholomew’s and the massacres in the South in the thirteenth century. (190-191) ⁹

There is a seeming contradiction in terms here, as Renan clearly remembers the St. Bartholomew’s Day massacre, and other brutalities committed by the French government, and expects his audience to as well. ¹⁰ However, his words can be interpreted to mean that such cruel acts are meant to fade away in the minds of a nation’s citizens until they are barely acknowledged, and the people will not remember unless expressly

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reminded of the unpleasant aspects of their nation’s past. Renan’s words are as true today as they were for the world of the nineteenth century. National remembrance is a constructed effort, more difficult to achieve in democratic nations, but nonetheless attempted, in order to build a sense of national unity, and one way to influence (or construct) a national identity is through propaganda, especially by using visual images and art. The use of popular images, images easily understood by the masses increased with the advent of the totalitarian regimes of the early twentieth century. In 1933, Hitler created the Ministry for Popular Enlightenment and Propaganda, headed by Joseph Goebbels, the intention of which was clearly outlined in its title. As in George Orwell’s dystopia 1984 and its Ministry of Truth, the idea was to indoctrinate the masses by controlling all sorts of expression, including, very prominently, artistic expression. Mussolini soon followed with his own Ministry of Propaganda in 1937. However, such bureaus were not limited to the totalitarian regimes of the time. The United States had its own propaganda organization during World War II as well – the Office of War Information (OWI) established in 1942.

Propaganda is directed at the emotions, not the intellect, and visual images on posters, pictures, or statues, are most memorable. Artistic expression is thought of as an expression of emotion rather than a thoroughly rational, intellectual thought process, and the artistic images used for propaganda purposes are simpler to understand than words. Thus the message becomes obvious. The emotional connection between the purpose of

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11 Anthony Rhodes. pp 12, 22, 71.
13 Anthony Rhodes. pp 11-12.
propaganda and the outlet provided by art ironically allow the two to fit together perfectly - the emotive expression of a work of art allows for the direct connection to the emotional response evoked by propaganda. By putting a political spin on the expressive nature of artwork, a painting, poster, statue, exhibition, or monument can very easily become a piece of propaganda art.

A nation, according to Renan, is a spiritual principle, which relies on a common heritage and memory, with a devotion to heroes of the past, as well as to its collective suffering. What better way to worship the heroic ancestors of a nation and to unite around collective suffering than to build memorials to them? Memory lies within the word memorial. They are memory propaganda, that which shapes the way we see the past. Many of the memorials constructed around the world today are references to times in the past when a nation’s people went through a time of struggle. As western nations have turned towards more democratic forms of government, their commemorative art has turned towards remembering times past in which there was great suffering in order to avoid such times in the future. Commemorative memorials, museums, and exhibitions like the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, the 1995 Enola Gay exhibition, Northern Ireland’s Troubled Images exhibition, and the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum all present messages that go against the sort of hero-worship that typified totalitarian regimes and instead focus on the hardships and victimization of violent conflict. While admirable, these types of exhibitions and memorials at the same time are also forms of propaganda,

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14 Ernest Renan, in Alfred Zimmern. pp 203.
which shape our historical memory, and the way we remember history through such public art is vital to the way we view and shape the future.
CHAPTER TWO

Art and Propaganda

The word “propaganda” has a sinister ring, suggesting strategies of manipulative persuasion, intimidation and deception. In contrast, the idea of art implies to many people a special sphere of activity devoted to the pursuit of truth, beauty and freedom. For some, “propaganda art” is a contradiction in terms. ¹

In art history survey courses, one usually begins with the art of antiquity, moving through ancient Greek and Roman pieces, many of which are sculptures of various gods and monsters of myth. However, as the course moves through time, one encounters monuments built to honor specific men. Sculpture portraits of Alexander the Great, Julius Caesar, Augustus, Marcus Aurelius, and others have survived through the ages, as have columns and arches devoted to their great deeds. Battle victories are preserved in such works as Trajan’s column, a tall, cylindrical, upward spiral, telling the stories of his battles and victories of the wars in Dacia that rises

¹ Toby Clark. pp 7.
up nearly thirty meters, placed at the center of the Roman Forum, at one time boasting a statue of the emperor Trajan himself at the top.²

Before the Renaissance, it was rare, almost impossible, to find an artist recognized for his work. The artist was unimportant; it was the work of art that he was to produce that patrons expected and praised. Artists in the past were not as free to create art that reflected their own expression, living in studio apartments, furiously painting or sculpting and then selling their work as many of them do today. Instead, to make money, they had to have a patron, someone who would commission a work of art and pay them for it, outlining what he or she wanted. Obviously, it was the wealthiest members of a society that could afford to be patrons of the greatest artists, and the wealthiest of patrons was most often the church. Usually what the patrons wanted was a painting or sculpture that would show their wealth and glory and preserve their memory for the future.

During the Renaissance, when artists began to be recognized by their names and the fame that such names carried, patronage of the arts represented something of a high culture. Family names like Medici became associated with the great artists of Florence, and the Catholic Church in Rome helped a few of the artists of the era to create some of their most famous pieces. One of the well-known papal patrons of the visual arts was Pope Julius II.³ It should come as no surprise that he was also a very shrewd and powerful leader, dealing as much in politics and the military as he did with religion. His most famous association, however, is that of art patron to the likes of Michelangelo and Rafael. Julius II commissioned Michelangelo in 1508 to begin the paintings on the ceiling

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of the Sistine Chapel of the Vatican’s St. Peter’s. The paintings done by Michelangelo, as well as the art and architecture provided by other leading artists of the day, were representations of the wealth and glory of the church. They also were, in a time when literacy among the average people was very low, an easily understandable way of presenting pictorial representations of major Biblical stories. The combination of such splendor and storytelling in the art of the Vatican made it a sort of advertisement, or more appropriately, propaganda. The beauty and glory of the art represented was designed at least in part to draw people into the Church, and to remind them of its power. Indeed, the word propaganda itself comes from the Catholic Church and its committee, founded in 1622 by Pope Gregory XV, in order to “propagate” the religion. The committee was called the Congregatio de Propaganda Fide or the Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith, set up as a counterattack to the Protestant reformation’s rival ideas. Art was one of the ways that could and was used to propagate the Catholic faith, and as the Catholic Church of the time was also very active in politics, art therefore played its political role as well.

The triumphant nature of most of this propaganda art, whether it was Trajan’s column or the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel, celebrated the power and victory of such regimes. Glory was what the artists were commissioned to depict, and they provided it. It is interesting to note that the finest artists of the day were hired to create such art, and as such, their political/religious propaganda is studied today as examples of great art. A plaster cast of Trajan’s column was actually made to sit in London’s Victoria and Albert

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4 Ibid.
Museum, housed in what are called the Cast Courts, so that students of art could study it without having to travel to Italy to see it. Broken into two pieces, it is too tall to stand completed in the museum.\textsuperscript{6}

It was not until the twentieth century that the word propaganda began to carry with it a negative connotation. According to Toby Clark, it has a “sinister ring, suggesting strategies of manipulative persuasion, intimidation and deception.”\textsuperscript{7} Soon after the word became related to the dissemination of political beliefs, art became explicitly used as a means to alter and form people’s political ideals and opinions. After World War I necessitated the use of propaganda in the forms of mass media to recruit soldiers to the war effort, it became linked with misinformation and censorship, and soon after, it became associated with totalitarian regimes like those of the Soviets, and, during World War II, the fascist regimes of Germany and Italy. These one-party states developed ministries of propaganda that would produce posters, paintings, sculptures, and audio-visual creations in order to form and control the opinions of the populace.\textsuperscript{8}

Despite the fact that the idea of art represents a sort of freedom of expression, since art is also a symbol of a nation’s cultural identity, the use of art as propaganda seems rather an obvious choice. If a nation’s identity is designed by this sort of state sanctioned art, and if it is believed by enough people, what is represented in such art soon becomes the nation’s identity. In effect, such art is forming a nation’s collective consciousness. The leaders of the Soviets and the Nazis saw their movements as not only political, but also, and perhaps more importantly, cultural. With the advent of mass

\textsuperscript{7} Toby Clark. pp 7.
\textsuperscript{8} Ibid. pp 8.
media, images could be produced on a larger scale and disseminated more widely.\(^9\) By mass producing such art forms, Hitler and Stalin’s ideas of culture could be spread throughout their respective nations.

Propaganda art is the aestheticization of politics, a visualization of political and cultural ideologies. Fascism used propaganda art to its fullest extent, being very concerned about the “stylistic ‘look’ of their movement.”\(^10\) The whole manifestation of their party became a public participation in a work of art:

It has often been remarked that fascism’s public manifestations took a theatrical and ritualistic form, typified by the numerous parades, ceremonies, and mass rallies. These assembled people in ways designed to give them a sense of group identity and involvement and to make them amenable to emotional manipulation…..The rallies also borrowed from the earlier theatrical innovations of the Weimar period and in particular from the ideal of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*, or total work of art, in which drama, choreography, music, and architecture are blended together into a total experience…..Hitler’s claim to be the personification of the will of the people gives a mirror-like structure to this exchange: The people are called upon to see their leader as the reflection of their collective personality.\(^11\)

Exhibitions of art under the Fascist regimes, especially under Hitler, were very controlled. There was favored and disfavored art. Officially favored art was that which reflected a sort of classical style, hearkening back to the past and its “eternal values,” which combined artistic, moral and social values. The art was classical, except with a political spin to it. Such values were usually portrayed in visions of rural happiness, such as in Gisbert Palmié’s *The Rewards of Work* (ca. 1933; See Figure 1)\(^12\), in which the people are working happily within their rural environment, existing harmoniously with

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\(^10\) Ibid. pp 49.
\(^11\) Ibid. pp 49-51.
\(^12\) Ibid. pp 54-55.
their environment and the cycles of nature. Using archaic tools to reap and sow, the people are also painted representing Hitler’s idea of racial and genetic purity: fair skinned, blonde, and very fit. “The purest inheritors of the golden age will be blonde. The image can be interpreted as both a nostalgic allegory of a lost age and a utopian metaphor for the future world of the new Reich.”

By incorporating political ideals into the visual images of the blonde, contented peasants, it seems as though such racial purity is in harmony with nature, normal and eternal.

Such works of art were not only meant to form people’s present cultural views, but also to give them a new perspective on history. In 1933, Hitler created the first propaganda ministry with his Ministry for Popular Enlightenment and Propaganda, headed by Joseph Goebbels, a doctor of psychology. Hitler’s propaganda ministry was designed to create a complete consciousness for the people, to reform entirely their way of viewing the past, present, and future by controlling all forms of expression. Under Goebbels’ leadership, the ministry indoctrinated the people with an “image” of the Führer, aiming at their emotions and not their intellect.

One of the most effective ways Goebbels found to convey such a message to the largest number of people was through the use of artistic representation by creating posters, stating that “[n]othing is easier than leading the people on a leash. I just hold up a dazzling campaign poster and they jump through it.” Posters as we know them today are a creation of the nineteenth century. Technological developments like the printing press and color inks became inexpensive ways to create mass messages, heralding the

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13 Ibid. pp 54-56.
14 Anthony Rhodes. pp 11-12.
advent of the poster. Political messages on posters date back to the late eighteenth century, a time when they were much simpler in design. What was important about posters and their messages was that they used images as well as words. Therefore, even though there were large segments of the populations of countries like France and the United States that were illiterate at the time, “even the unlettered could puzzle out the poster’s message if an image accompanied the words.”17 Posters were first directed towards specific segments of society, such as those could be encouraged to enlist in armies. However, as they developed, posters soon became the means by which political messages could reach the general public: “Just as small newspapers published for the educated reader of the federalist and Napoleonic eras gave way to the mass-circulation popular press, so the hand-bills and proclamations of patriarchal society evolved into the modern poster.”18 First used as advertisements for musical and theatrical events, the poster soon grew into a permanent visual and psychological presence for modern society, embodied within the nation-state. As nation-states defined themselves and their ideas, they used posters increasingly to propagate their ideas and their identity, defining their position for their own citizens as well as for those outside their borders:

From the last decades of the nineteenth century to the end of the Second World War, the poster was one of the most visible and constant signs of the struggle for an audience, for customers and political supporters, and of the clash between states and ideologies. Its dominance ended only with the wider use of radio broadcasts, newsreels, and the emergence of television. Until then, posters were the battle flags of commercial, cultural, and political rivalries – symbols that themselves were part of the conflict.19

17 Ibid.
18 Ibid.
19 Ibid. pp viii-ix.
Posters, therefore, according to Peter Paret, provide a visual expression of patriotism, which is later followed by the visually patriotic form of the war memorial. Posters’ effectiveness depends on their ability to attract and inform the viewer. The most powerful posters, therefore, are those that can create a strong and unified impression at a quick glance. Since the advent of the modern poster, the artists behind poster design, like Jules Chéret, influenced the painters of the day, including Georges Seurat and Henri Tolouse-Lautrec. The interaction of such “high” art and posters, which soon gave way to much more political expressions of propaganda, made the poster into not only a work of applied art, but also “an agent of persuasion and control.”

World War II created massive propaganda movements, not only in the totalitarian fascist regimes of Germany and Italy, but also in the more democratic countries like Britain and, especially, the United States. It is harder to persuade people in a democracy than under a dictatorship, and it is harder to organize propaganda efforts in democracies, but it can be done. The United States established the OWI to create propaganda that would motivate people to help in the war effort, geared towards creating a certain kind of national consciousness that unfortunately was also based on racist attitudes. The Office of War Information, or OWI, was created in 1942 to control images and content in war messages, using all forms of visual art to influence people’s view of the war and the enemy:

For the benefit of both your studio and the Office of War Information it would be advisable to establish a routine procedure whereby our Hollywood office would receive copies of studio

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20 Ibid. pp ix-x, xv.
21 Anthony Rhodes. pp 142-150.
It was in fact the OWI’s responsibility to “sell” the war to the people of the United States, as well as to create a positive image of the United States abroad, especially by using visual arts. The Office was abolished in 1945, when it was no longer needed, and after congressional opposition to the domestic use of propaganda. Anthony Rhodes tries to draw a distinction between Nazi and U.S./allied propaganda in that Nazi propaganda was directed at the lowest human denominator while the allies were trying to appeal to reason and critical sense. This is a bit of an idealized way of viewing allied propaganda against the Germans, Italians, and Japanese, because, as Rhodes himself later points out, such propaganda, especially the resistance propaganda, was successful precisely because they used methods that Goebbels himself had perfected. Many of the posters produced by the United States during the years of World War II had blatantly racist images, especially towards the Japanese, which would definitely seem to have appealed to the “lowest human denominator.” The public policy then was to influence people to join the war effort, and such propaganda worked well for both the Allies and the Axis.

Not surprisingly, then, many of the most powerful propaganda images are produced as a result of war. War is a time during which fears and suspicions run high and

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24 Ibid.


26 Anthony Rhodes. pp 188.
vivid images of propaganda can be used effectively to play off of those fears. It does not matter if the governmental regime is democratic or totalitarian. During World War II, the term “psychological warfare” was defined by Paul Linebarger as comprising “the use of propaganda against an enemy, together with such other operational measures of a military, economic or political nature as may be required to supplement propaganda.”  

Visual depictions that played off of people’s fears were used by all nations involved in World War II fighting campaigns, to whip up the support of the people to fight and protect their livelihoods. Italy produced images such as one showing an African American soldier groping the statue of the Venus de Milo, symbolizing that Americans had no notion of culture, using the racial fear of impurity as well, in order to show that the Americans wanted to “rape” Italian high culture. (See Figure 2) The Allies produced similar images: for example, one in which a typically American looking mother holds her baby to her chest while two ugly, gnarled hands reach towards her baby, one bearing a swastika, the other the symbol of the Japanese empire, as if to rip it away, to rip away everything that is good about American culture. (See Figure 3) Such powerful images could not fail to drive people to fight for one cause or the other, perhaps more so than words ever could. As Wallace Carroll, the director of U.S. psychological warfare operations in Europe during World War II stated, “rumor breeds rumor, fear breeds fear, suspicion breeds suspicion.”

27 Ibid. pp 192.
29 Anthony Rhodes. pp 96.
Offices created for the creation of propaganda in the United States are not limited to the OWI and World War II. Towards the end of February 2002, it became known that the United States’ Department of Defense had created an Office of Strategic Influence in November of 2001. Shortly after learning of this, media stories regarding the office abounded, stating that it would covertly plant “disinformation in foreign media, a process known as black propaganda,” and that while the Pentagon is legally prohibited from spreading misleading stories domestically within the United States, nothing would stop it from planting such “black propaganda” in foreign media outlets.\(^\text{32}\) However, once again, implementing propaganda in a more democratic regime such as that of the United States is quite a bit more difficult than it would be for a totalitarian regime, especially within the free information age in which we are currently living. As news of the Office spread, there were reports that called it “Orwellian,” likening it to the Ministry of Truth in George Orwell’s *1984*, “which concerned itself with news, entertainment, education, and the fine arts….”\(^\text{33}\) Though the Pentagon denied that the purpose of the Office of Strategic Influence was ever to produce disinformation, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld stated that the office had been so damaged by the media reports regarding its function that it would not be able to operate effectively.\(^\text{34}\)

MIT professor and essayist Noam Chomsky has a very negative view of the way that the United States has used and is using propaganda to influence the public. Public

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relations, he says, is controlling the public mind, and instilling what are called the “right values.” In a democracy, he claims that the state aims to keep the people unorganized and scared so that they are not allowed to think for themselves, in which case, the propaganda does the thinking for them, echoing Ernest Renan’s thesis from more than a century earlier:

It’s also necessary to completely falsify history … to make it look as if when we attack and destroy somebody we’re really protecting and defending ourselves against major aggressors and monsters and so on. There has been a huge effort since the Vietnam War to reconstruct the history of that. Too many people began to understand what was really going on. Including plenty of soldiers and a lot of young people who were involved in the peace movement and others. ….It was necessary to rearrange those bad thoughts and to restore…a recognition that whatever we do is noble and right. …. It was necessary to make that the official and well understood picture. ….Pick the topic you like: the Middle East, international terrorism, Central America, whatever it is – the picture of the world that’s presented to the public has only the remotest relation to reality. The truth of the matter is buried under edifice after edifice of lies upon lies.  

Chomsky’s vehemently negative view of democracy’s, specifically American democracy’s handling of propaganda with regards to the memory (and promotion) of war may seem to be a bit extreme. He goes on to say that what is interesting about propaganda in a democracy is that such rewriting of history occurs “under conditions of freedom,” unlike in totalitarian societies, where is it accomplished by force. He does, however, later admit that a dissident culture has arisen and become more powerful since the Vietnam war years of the 1960s, which has had a positive effect on the way that people view America’s role in such conflicts. Chomsky is correct, however, when he

36 Ibid. pp 30-32.
37 Ibid.
cites examples in which a heavy-handed use of propaganda is present, especially with regards to the United States’ role in the conflict in Vietnam.

Affecting the collective memory of a nation is indeed a sort of psychological warfare, and as Wallace Carroll also states, the effects of such psychological warfare extend far beyond the actual physical battlefield. Such a war of “impressions, ideas, and emotions” goes on long after victory has been declared.38 Such lasting forms of propaganda can be seen in the memorials that have been created to remember those who fought and died for a certain cause. Memorials are able to create a national identity based on the grief of the families who shared in the similar experience of losing loved ones to a war. Instead of being individual losses, the war dead become the collective national family’s loss. Just as defending a nation became equated with defending one’s family, home and way of life, war memorials are also a way of nationalizing very personal forms of grief.39 A part of a nation’s identity is built around a collective expression of grief; it is as if the nation-state itself has become personified as the one family from which everyone extends.40 Propaganda images must then be created that induce a sense of patriotism among the populace as national leaders try to maintain the national fervor of unity stirred during a war, to create a common identity and an official memory of a certain conflict, just as posters had done during World War I and World War II.41

Physical monuments are very helpful in creating such an image. They are visible, tangible, and they give a form to a nation’s role in a specific conflict. Instead of having

38 Wallace Carroll. pp 17.
39 Toby Clark. pp 108.
the monuments dedicated to one man, as they were in totalitarian regimes or in the
Roman Empire, these monuments have, for lack of a better word, a very democratic
feel. Such propaganda must instill in people a sense of belonging to a whole, a
collective suffering, as it were, exemplified by the tomb of the Unknown Soldier:

> Why did Americans venerate the Unknown Soldier? In one sense, his very lack of an individual identity permitted almost everyone to claim the Unknown Soldier as his or her own. In 1921 parents, especially those whose sons were missing in action, could identify with him. Native-born Americans, but also the new immigrants from eastern and southern Europe, could embrace him. Few white Americans envisioned the Unknown Soldier as being black, but a delegation of African-American leaders disagreed and went to the Capitol to lay flowers by his casket.

Such monuments prevent certain memories from fading into the past, while also encouraging others to disappear. Physical monuments propagate a certain image of the history of a nation to its future citizens. Instead of having individual benefactors or the Church as patrons of the artists, the state itself becomes the patron. National leaders hire artists to create certain images that will last into the future, giving a certain image of heroism and righteousness. “[I]f war is politics continued by other means, preservation is also politics continued by other means. These ‘means’ revolve around the act of commemoration.”

Such historic preservation, according to Diane Barthel, represents the attempt to revalue and re-present the past through the heightened public awareness of certain things and their ignorance of others. Through the creation of war memorials, a

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nation wishes to preserve certain ideologies, creating a visual image of the past. What better way to propagate a certain image than by creating an artistic, physical representation? Such commemorative monuments are usually visually attractive, and the advantage of such memorials is that they can only present one idea, one image of a collective identity that permeates through a society and through history. A common and cliched phrase states that a picture is worth a thousand words. Such is very much the case for propaganda art throughout history. A picture, poster, painting, or statue appeals at the very basic level to the emotions, as does propaganda, and put together, they have been used to shape national histories and identities.

In George Orwell’s novel 1984, the nation of Oceania is ruled by the completely totalitarian government of a man known as Big Brother (who does not actually exist but is the embodiment of the governmental system). The government, run by the Brotherhood, has three Ministries: the Ministry of Truth, the Ministry of Peace, and the Ministry of Love. Winston Smith, the main character, works at the Ministry of Truth, and it is his job is to alter newspaper articles, books, any kind of literature, participating in the complete alteration of the knowledge of the past, present, and future, so that the Brotherhood can propagate itself as the savior of good values. The goal behind such revisions was to control the memories and thoughts of the people of Oceania, and it is effectively able to crush any sort of opposition. Such a vision of the

future was surprisingly close to what the totalitarian regimes of Hitler, Mussolini, and Stalin managed to create. Their propaganda was fashioned to make people see a different history, a different story of the present and future. They sought to create a national identity based around the altering of so called national memories, and as they were shaping new memories, they sought to wipe away the old ones and indoctrinate the future generations with certain memories of their present through the use of films, sculpture, and other artistic endeavors.

The creation of a collective memory is very important to the cohesion of a nation. As Renan points out in his essay *What is a Nation?*, a nation’s identity and stability is centered around what the people remember and what they forget, and some of the most powerful memories come from times of war, when nations are fighting for their constructed identities. Thus, the war of ideas must begin well before the actual fighting begins, and, more importantly, it continues long after the fighting is over.²

Maurice Halbwachs’ treatises on collective memory give a good glimpse into what is necessary for the creation of such a memory and how it is affected by the society that creates it. Every social group holds a certain sway over its members, and for all intents and purposes, a nation is just a large social group, within which there are many subdivisions, but as a collective group, it must retain cohesion for it to be successful, and the way to keep such cohesiveness, members of the group must have shared memories in order to be able to connect with one another.³ Collective memory, of course, must be based to some extent on the individual memories of the members of the group. The smaller the group, the more people have shared in the actual experience of that memory.

² Wallace Carroll. pp 19.
National memory, since it is a sort of overarching umbrella covering an entire nation-state, is therefore less connected to individuals. Instead it is based more on the remembrances of others. It borrows memories from certain sub-groups in order to create its own conceptions and symbols.\(^4\)

Collective memory is more than just historical memory. Historical memory, according to Halbwachs, is more objective than the collective memory. It remains external, concentrating on names, dates, and facts, acting as an auxiliary to personal memory in order to show demarcations in time.\(^5\) As Renan stated in his essay nearly seventy years earlier, the study of such objective history is damaging to the creation of a national identity.\(^6\) Historians are meant to be impartial and objective.\(^7\) This sort of historical memory, according to Halbwachs, enables people to link their lives to national or international events as forms of mental landmarks. Collective memory, unlike the more objective historical memory, is not detached and secondary.\(^8\) In a collective framework, the group develops certain reigning conceptions and mentalities of their society according to the time period.\(^9\)

In national history, the most important events that changed the “life” of the nation will be those that stand out. The individual citizens, however, are aware of only those historical events that are of interest to them, invoking certain memories.\(^10\) If one

\(^4\) Ibid. pp 50-52.
\(^5\) Ibid. pp 53.
\(^6\) Ernest Renan, in Alfred Zimmern. pp 190.
\(^7\) Maurice Halbwachs. *The Collective Memory*. pp 83.
\(^8\) Ibid. pp 54.
\(^9\) Ibid. pp 64-65.
\(^10\) Ibid. pp 77.
considers the nation to be a type of social group composed of smaller groups, then it must
needs behave like any other social group, especially with regard to its collective memory:

[T]he group, living first and foremost for its own sake, aims to perpetuate
the feelings and images forming the substance of its thought. .... [T]he
collective memory is the group seen from within during a period not exceeding, and most often much shorter than, the average duration of a
human life. It provides the group a self-portrait that unfolds through time,
since it is an image of the past, and allows the group to recognize itself
throughout the total succession of images. The collective memory is a
record of resemblances and, naturally, is convinced that the group remains
the same because it focuses attention on the group, whereas what has
changed are the group’s relations or contacts with other groups. If the
group always remains the same, any changes must be imaginary, and the
changes that do occur in the group are transformed into similarities. Their
function is to develop the several aspects of one single content – that is,
the various fundamental characteristics of the group itself. .... What is
essential is that the features distinguishing it from other groups survive
and be imprinted on all its content.\textsuperscript{11}

Halbwachs also points out that any individual remembrances or reproductions of the past
will be highly influenced by the social milieu in which we live.\textsuperscript{12} That is, collective
memory does not allow us to remember history in a purely objective way. However, our
view of the past is not only influenced by the society in which we live. It is also
influenced by the social milieus of the past as well, since they create their own views of
what is happening around them, and by recording such images, project them into future
generations. Present society either amplifies or erases those images according to the
objectives of the current group:

Our modern societies impose many constraints on people. Without using
the same authority and unilateral pressure that primitive tribes employ in
regard to their members, modern societies nevertheless penetrate and
insinuate themselves more deeply into their members because of the
multiplicity and complexity of relations of all kinds with which they

\textsuperscript{11} Ibid. pp 85-87.
\textsuperscript{12} Maurice Halbwachs. \textit{On Collective Memory}. Ed. and trans. Lewis A. Coser. Chicago, IL: University of
envelop their members. It is true that modern societies pretend to respect individual personality. ....

But I believe that the mind reconstructs its memories under the pressure of society. Is it not strange then that society causes the mind to transfigure the past to the point of yearning for it? .... May I not paraphrase and say that the cult of the past, far from binding the hearts of people to society, in fact detaches them: there is nothing more opposed to the interest of society? ....

Society from time to time obligates people not just to reproduce in thought previous events of their lives, but also to touch them up, to shorten them, or to complete them so that, however convinced we are that our memories are exact, we give them a prestige that reality did not possess.\(^1\)

Halbwachs asks if a present society emphasizes the past, would that not detach the members of that social group rather than bring them together. He goes on, however to refute that point by saying that present society itself, especially modern society, while seemingly staying out of individual minds, is heavily involved in the way that we as individuals view the past. Society may even amplify certain memories, attributing to them more importance than was given to them in their own time.

Author Paul Connerton took Halbwachs idea of society’s influence on collective memory one step further by first questioning how group memory can be conveyed or sustained, and then considering social memory as a dimension of political power.\(^2\) He continues by saying that our experience of the present depends on the knowledge of the past. Present experiences are connected to the past events in such a way as to place our present into a certain context, depending on how we remember the past. This sort of contextualization does not only function in one direction. Past events, or rather the way in which we remember past events, do influence or even distort our views of the present. It is also the case that present factors distort our views of the past.\(^3\)

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\(^1\) Ibid. pp 49-51.
\(^3\) Ibid. pp 2.
Thus certain images of the past are used to legitimize the present social order. To participate in any social order, according to Connerton, presupposes a shared memory.\textsuperscript{16} Connerton shares Halbwachs’ view regarding the difference between historical and social memory. History itself is impartial, but societies can reconstruct it in order to present a certain view of the past and thus how that past affects the present. Totalitarian regimes take this sort of historical rewriting to the extreme by instituting enforced forgetting, what can be thought of as a sort of collective amnesia.\textsuperscript{17} This is the sort of “mental enslavement” that was attempted by the totalitarian regimes of the early twentieth century, and exemplified by Orwell’s \textit{1984}.

The most powerful of these images are often related to war. In the effort to create a national identity, war is a very defining event. In war, a nation can define enemies and allies, and it can define its role within the conflict. War also provides the opportunity for a nation to come together as a cohesive community under the umbrella of political nationalism. The memory of war and a particular nation’s role in it therefore can keep the thread of national unity running through the national community. The creation of a nation’s memory is as much a political process as a social one.\textsuperscript{18} According to Connerton, the “ruling group will use its knowledge of the past in a direct and active way.”\textsuperscript{19} That is, the nation’s memory can be manipulated in order to bring out certain events that can legitimize the way that the current ruling group is governing the nation. The question then is how the ruling group can advocate certain memories and events without seeming too heavy handed. The goal is, without a doubt, to create some sort of propaganda, but

\textsuperscript{16} Ibid. pp 3
\textsuperscript{17} Ibid. pp 14.
\textsuperscript{18} Ibid. pp 17.
\textsuperscript{19} Ibid. pp 17-18. (See footnote 21 of Chapter 1).
Chapter Three: Collective Memory

also to make it elegant and sophisticated enough so that it can be more easily accepted and treasured.

The most successful way to promote such a memory, according to Connerton, is through commemorative monuments and ceremonies, not only to remind people of certain events, but also to re-present them, to preserve a certain viewpoint of the situation. A state will want to show and celebrate its national heroism, to stimulate certain emotive responses that will promote nationalistic feelings. By creating commemorative rituals and memorials, the national government creates “emotionally and symbolically charged signs of club membership…” According to Eric Hobsbawm, there are three types of this “invented tradition:”

They seem to belong to three overlapping types: a) those establishing or symbolizing social cohesion or the membership of groups, real or artificial communities, b) those establishing or legitimizing institutions, status or relations of authority, and c) those whose main purpose was socialization, the inculcation of beliefs, value systems and conventions of behaviour. While traditions of types b) and c) were certainly devised…, it may be tentatively suggested that type a) was prevalent, the other functions being regarded as implicit in or flowing from a sense of identification with a ‘community’ and/or the institutions representing, expressing or symbolizing it such as a ‘nation.’

The construction of a collective memory through such invented traditions, therefore, is thus crucial to the development of the national community. Without having a past (or creating a past) to legitimize certain views or actions, the leaders of a nation would have a difficult time convincing their people to follow them. In order to create such a cohesive community, Hobsbawm argues that nation states have a need to create pasts for

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20 Ibid. pp 43.
21 Ibid. pp 52.
23 Ibid. pp 9.
themselves, and in order to do that, they must invent traditions and practices that are of a ritual and symbolic nature in order to instill “certain values and norms of behaviour by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past.”

While the need to legitimize a nation’s government by connecting it to the past is quite necessary, the nation itself also has to create a past of its own. Once again, it is commemorative memorials that are an integral part to the construction of a certain national view of itself. Commemoration has much to do with the field of historic preservation, especially the historic preservation of war artifacts. “[I]f war is politics continued by other means, preservation is also politics continued by other means. These ‘means’ revolve around the act of commemoration.” Diane Barthel calls this the “preservation project,” which includes ideological preservation and promoting a certain image of the past.

The Preservation Project is an attempt to revalue and re-present the past through saving, maintaining, and/or reconstructing historic structures and artifacts, and through heightening public awareness of their significance with local, regional, and/or national history.

According to Barthel, the act of commemoration is important for a society, especially since war calls for sacrifice in the interests of the nation. The commemoration of such sacrifices is meant to encourage future sacrifices to be made when the nation’s leaders feel it is necessary for the nation’s survival. She calls commemoration “an unwritten pact between the dead, the living, and the unborn,” enacted through social rituals.

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24 Ibid. pp 1.
26 Ibid. pp 5.
27 Ibid. pp 2.
28 Ibid. pp 80.
remembrance of such events by future generations is therefore crucial to the stability of the identity of the nation.

A nation’s identity depends on its memory and a nation’s memory depends on its identity. There are constant revisions to the memory in order for it to fit with the current identities, and thus it must be determined what should be remembered and what should be forgotten. Memory and identity are subjective and selective and both are tied to the politics of the nation.\(^\text{29}\) According to John R. Gillis, the relationship between memory and identity is historical, and that relationship can be traced through acts and works of commemoration, which are inevitably tied to group or collective memory. Commemoration, thus, is inherently political, because though it presents a unified picture, the path towards the completed commemorative project is fraught with intense struggle and the deletion of memories.\(^\text{30}\) Pierre Nora observed that “[m]odern memory is, above all, archival. It relies entirely on the materiality of the trace, the immediacy of the recording, the visibility of the image.”\(^\text{31}\) Thus, commemorative memorials provide a tangible representation of memory, and a permanent one.

In the quest to forge an identity and create a unique heritage that would be in the communal interest, there is oftentimes a drive towards embellishment of events.\(^\text{32}\) In constructing a view of the past that legitimizes the current and/or future order of things, there is a need to create legends.\(^\text{33}\) Both history and legend are socially constructed

\(^{29}\) John R. Gillis. “Memory and Identity: The History of a Relationship.” In John R. Gillis. pp 3-4. (For more on the role of forgetting in the stability of a nation, see Ernest Renan’s *What is a Nation?*)

\(^{30}\) Ibid. pp 5.

\(^{31}\) Ibid. pp 15.


representations of the past through narrative. When a nation creates an official memory of a war or conflict, the leaders are in the business of nationalizing the war. The creation of these commemorative memorials even presses the dead soldiers back into the service of their country by becoming symbols of a certain image. They become representations of a nation’s involvement and commitment to a certain cause or fight. The effort of the national leaders to create such ubiquitous rituals and symbols works towards creating a common purpose and identity for the people of that nation:

Such a theoretical framework must, it seems to me, begin with a conception of collective memory not as something inherent to a group or groups, reflected unproblematically in objects like monuments, but as a socially constructed discourse. In this view, as culturally specific beliefs about a historical even merge with individual memories and take on visible and legible form, collective memory emerges as a construct of the political, social, and economic structures that condition, if they do not determine, the production of those forms. Similarly, what we conventionally call “commemoration” I take to be the practice of representation that enacts and gives social substance to the discourse of collective memory.

The construction of both discourse and practice involves either the production or the reconfiguration, in terms specific to their purpose, of certain cultural forms: monuments, of course, but also literature, film, and popular visual imagery in such media as postcards, cartoons, and posters.

This sort of construction of history and recognition through a flood of commemorative images, however, run into trouble in countries with more democratic forms of government, where the question of the truth of history comes into play more than it would in a totalitarian environment. Debates surrounding monuments and memorial sites have centered on the principle of forgetting that Renan wrote about in the late nineteenth century. Critics of traditional memorials argue that such “memory sites,” as they call them, “discourage engagement with the past and induce forgetting rather than

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34 Ibid. pp 117-18.
remembering.” Such critics have advocated an “anti-monument” movement, that seeks to “deritualize and dematerialize” memory in order to close the gap between memory (subjective) and history (objective) so that memory comes to more closely resemble objective history.\textsuperscript{37} However, there is still a dependence on the past, a reliance on memory and tradition, without which nations can neither function nor plan ahead.\textsuperscript{38}

The function of a war memorial has become more than just a commemoration of the dead. Monuments have come to embody the values for which the soldiers gave their lives as well. The government’s control over the construction of war memorials means that it can control the way the nation views its role in the respective war for which the memorial was designed. In this way the government can “maintain official control over the imagery of war and nationhood and...prevent...[the expression of] critical or oppositional sentiments” that might come out of non-official memorials.\textsuperscript{39} In the United States, one deviation from this trend, for example, is Maya Lin’s 1982 Vietnam Veteran’s Memorial, which was not commissioned by the government, but instead was privately funded. Because of the design that was chosen, various government officials were angry about what they saw as a negative portrayal of the United States’ role and values regarding the war in Vietnam.\textsuperscript{40} Wars provide valuable material for a nation’s cultural narrative, especially when politicians use those narratives to cast the country’s actions in the best light.\textsuperscript{41} This ideology, however, has been heavily questioned in the past two decades, especially in the United States. With the Vietnam War and America’s apparently ambiguous role in the conflict, people started to question the image of war that had been

\begin{itemize}
  \item Daniel J. Sherman. In John R. Gillis. pp 186.
  \item David Lowenthal. In John R. Gillis. pp 43.
  \item Toby Clark. pp 118.
\end{itemize}
presented over the years by politicians and the memorials that glorified a soldier’s sacrifice for the values of his (or her) country. The interpretation of the events of war has been changing since the mid-1970s, and more rapidly since 1989. The trauma, victimization, and human rights abuses involved in war have superseded the glorious view of war that held true in the past, exemplified by Maya Lin’s concentration on grief in her memorial.\(^2\) The myth of what Studs Terkel called the “good war” is no longer a convincing narrative.\(^3\) The way that the United States viewed Vietnam has had an impact on the way the people have viewed our role in past wars in which the United States glorified its role. Now, people have come to question the actions that were taken in the interests of our national values, and criticism has also been raised regarding the people who were involved in certain conflicts but have not been remembered, such as women and African Americans.\(^4\)

The whole idea behind a war memorial is to instruct posterity. The question, then, that must necessarily be asked is this: What is worth recovering and what is not?\(^5\) The government construction of memorials is the construction of a political iconography, and nowhere is this more especially true than on the National Mall in Washington, DC:

On the Mall, then, matter is put to rhetorical use. It is made to educate and edify the citizens of the present as well as form those of the future by persuading them to live out the virtues of the past. It is memory in stone, earth, and water, a patrimony articulated by measured expanses and the interplay of symmetrically arranged symbols. The word “monument”

\(^0\) Ibid. 120.  
\(^1\) Diane Barthel, pp 92.  
\(^3\) Diane Barthel, pp 92-93.  
\(^4\) Ibid. pp 94-95.  
derives from the Latin *monere*, which means not just “to remind” but also “to admonish,” “warn,” “advise,” “instruct.” It follows that the Mall says a great deal, in what it portrays and in what it omits to portray, about how Americans wish to think of themselves. In still another formulation: the Mall is a sort of political mandala expressing our communal aspirations toward wholeness.\textsuperscript{46}

A war memorial is an affirmation of the patron’s unstated intention.\textsuperscript{47} In this case, the patron is the government, and these memorials are works of public art made to promote a certain image and to “instruct” future generations. Such public art is powerful precisely because it stands for “the powers that be.”\textsuperscript{48} As Vaclav Havel stated in his 1975 letter to Dr Gustav Husák when he described the psychological effects of an imposed official history, such actions can turn into what he called “organized oblivion.” “We begin to forget what happened when, what came earlier and what later, and the feeling that it really doesn’t matter overwhelms us.”\textsuperscript{49}

Claudia Koonz, however, added that without a shared memory, a society would not have the cohesion it needs to survive:

Like a common currency and culture, the public memory of historical events structures a sense of civil society across generations, classes, and regions. Without a shared memory, as Havel had predicted, identity fades and unity dissolves. Public cynicism about the fabricated past in the Soviet Union was captured in a joke that gained universal currency in the post-*glasnost* era. A television host asks his sociologist guest about the uncertain future. The expert retorts, “Ah, the future. We can foresee that with total accuracy. It’s the past that we have trouble predicting.”\textsuperscript{50}

\textsuperscript{46} Ibid. pp 74-75.


\textsuperscript{48} “Thus, as recent events in the former Soviet Union have once again shown, a political coup is immediately followed by the destruction of public art images of the previous rulers and heroes. Even public art without specific political connotations may fall prey to the political agendas of different administrations and the political climate of the time.” Ibid. pp 243.


\textsuperscript{50} Ibid. pp 269
This sort of prediction of the past is heavily tied into war memory, since wars represent the struggle to create or maintain a national identity. According to T.G. Ashplant, there are two main paradigms for the function of war memory. The first is that its function is politically motivated, that is, the memories and the rituals surrounding them are symbols for national identification and binding the citizens into one collective identity. The second function is psychological. Ashplant cites Hobsbawm and Ranger’s *The Invention of Tradition*, in which they state that constructed versions of the past enable the establishment of social cohesion, legitimated authority and a common culture.\(^{51}\) In his book *Imagined Communities*, Benedict Anderson agrees, further stating that the living generations of a nation feel a connection to the nation’s dead, which thus secures “the nation’s imagined continuity and transcendence of time.”\(^{52}\)

War commemoration is thus a combination of politics and psychology, which enables national governments to form the opinions of its citizens with regard to history and their role in it. Indeed, the present day conceptions various peoples have of each other is dependent on how they remember the past:

As the term ‘ethnic cleansing’ has entered popular discourse, so too has the possibility of recognizing the extent to which present-day enmities and antagonisms may feed off memories of past wars, and the cultural constructions of otherness encoded therein. In the case of the Serbo-Croatian War of 1991, the evident connections between current conflict and the unresolved legacy of the Nazi wars of national expansion and ethnic ‘purification’ have fed into renewed debate about the role of war commemoration and indeed war itself in the reproduction of national and ethnic identities.\(^{53}\)

National and/or ethnic identity is very tied into one group comparing itself to another, wanting to make itself seem better or more righteous than the other groups or “imagined


\(^{52}\) Ibid. pp 8.
communities,” as Anderson calls them. Thus the official state memory will try to place the nation in the best light compared to the other nation-states. This is most easily done with war memories, since there are, when the view is very simplified, only two (or possibly three) sides, and they are often portrayed as the “good” and the “bad.” A nation wants to be remembered as being on the side of “good” in a war, and therefore, some actions and some groups must be forgotten as it makes an image for itself and its progeny. As the state attempts to create its own official memories, the weaker marginalized groups would not be able to have their memories voiced along with the other more prominent ones, especially not if their memories clash with the way that the nation wants itself to be officially remembered.

This approach to marginalized groups, however, is starting to break down in many democratic nations, especially in the United States. As existing elites try to form and manipulate the memory of the nation, war memory has come to have a more “democratic” feel, that is, the focus has moved away from praising leaders to showing the horror of war.\(^{54}\) In this way, official war commemoration can be and is contested when certain groups feel that they are being excluded from the dominant official narratives, and no longer want to be the dominated group, but instead, forcefully want to have their voices heard.\(^{55}\) In this way, war memory and commemoration approaches a more objective stance. Though all forms of commemoration are forms of propaganda, since each group is voicing its own propaganda, one official message is not sent to the citizens of the nation. Rather, many memories are broadcast through varying memorials and ceremonies, enabling the people to get a more rounded, three dimensional picture of the

\(^{53}\) Ibid. pp 5.
\(^{54}\) Ibid. pp 22, 25.
past, rather than a two dimensional government constructed edict. This sort of objective viewing of history through war memorials has not completely happened yet, not even in a country like the United States, which prides itself on the ability of all citizens and groups to have their voices heard. However, war memories have, since the mid-1970s, become less one-sided, and more and more people are beginning to question official government histories of events.

From the earliest times works of visual art have directly served and reflected the beliefs and institutions of the societies that produced them.¹

The artwork used to affect collective memory can come in many forms. However, there are two main ways in which wars are commemorated, and they are quite different in their approach. One common commemorative design is that of the permanent memorial, of which there are many in the major cities around the world, the central place in the United States being the capital city of Washington, DC. The other form that commemoration can take is that of a temporary museum exhibition, which can either be travelling or stationary. Travelling commemorative exhibitions, like the Troubled Images exhibition from Northern Ireland have the ability to export the commemoration of a nation’s suffering to other cities and countries, where it may be able to teach certain lessons or allow others to identify with a certain conflict. The stationary exhibition, such as the one planned around the Enola Gay

in 1995, is designed for the citizens of that nation to travel to it and remember certain sacrifices made, battles won, and their consequences. The Vietnam Veterans Memorial is an example of a new style post-modern war memorial: permanent, but more ambiguous in terms of a message. There is also one museum that combines both the ideas of a permanent memorial and an ostensibly temporary exhibition: The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, DC. Within the museum, there is a memorial space, along with a permanent exhibition, which also contains materials that were brought to the United States for the exhibition. The concepts of the travelling and stationary exhibitions have been combined into a permanent memorial museum, bringing the suffering of a non-American event to the foreground of American commemorative space in order to teach the United States and its citizens never to allow something like it to happen again. These four commemorative projects represent the current shift in policies and attitudes towards more contemplative, interpretive, and multifaceted memorials.

I. Troubled Images Exhibition, Linen Hall Library, Belfast, Northern Ireland, 2001

So how do the Irish view art? What do they mean by political art? Do they see a relationship between politics and art? For Una Walker ‘all art is political. Art is never neutral. It either reinforces the status quo or asks questions….’

The history of Northern Ireland is a long and tortuous one. “The Troubles,” as the near civil war in Northern Ireland is known, began approximately thirty years ago, but to look for the causes of such a conflict, one must go further back. The entirety of Ireland was ruled by the British between the seventeenth and early twentieth centuries, and

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during those nearly three centuries, the British encouraged the settlement of Protestants in the northeastern part of the country, which was originally predominantly Catholic. In the 1920s, Britain granted home rule to Ireland, but partitioned the island. In 1922, the Republic of Ireland was born, but the northern part, Ulster, remained under the control of the British government. Out of this division came two political movements in Northern Ireland: the Nationalists or Republicans and the Loyalists or Unionists. The Nationalists wanted to be united with Ireland in its independence from Britain, while the Loyalists wished to remain part of Britain.³

“The Troubles” began in the 1960s. When a civil rights protest by Catholics became violent and caused rioting, the British army was called in to restore order. However, terrorists soon began to trouble Northern Ireland, and in 1972, the regional parliament was dissolved and direct rule from London was imposed by 1974. With tensions running high, extremist groups soon organized into factions for both major sides of the conflict. Two such groups became internationally famous: the Irish Republican Army (IRA) and the Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF), militant terrorist groups for the Republicans and Loyalists, respectively, both of whom saw violence as the only means to reach their goals. There were, however, also political parties that spanned the spectrum of views on how to negotiate a peaceful solution.⁴

Over the past thirty years the violence that has oftentimes ruled the streets of Ulster has claimed more than 3,000 lives, becoming the subject of outcry and mourning as more and more innocents were caught in the middle of fights between extremists. In 1972, one of the most famous incidents, “Bloody Sunday,” occurred. On the 30th of June

that year, thirteen unarmed Catholic civilians were killed by British soldiers during a
demonstration in Londonderry. This led the British government to impose direct rule
from London, and to begin to arrest certain leaders in the Republican movement and
imprison them. In 1981, the Republicans in Maze Prison began a hunger strike in order to
gain status as political prisoners, which would thus confer on them certain human rights.
Ten of the hunger strikers died, the first of whom was Bobby Sands, a Member of
Parliament, elected while he was in prison.\(^5\) Deaths due to the Troubles were of course
not limited to the Republican side of the conflict. Countless members of the Royal Ulster
Constabulary, the British police force in Northern Ireland, as well as numerous civilians
were also victims of Republican terrorist acts, such as the Real IRA’s bombing of a
market in the town of Omagh in August 1998.\(^6\)

Despite all the violence that troubled the region, efforts towards peace were being
pursued by the major political parties of Northern Ireland, such as the nationalist Social
Democratic and Labor Party (SDLP), led by John Hume, and the loyalist Ulster Unionist
Party, led by David Trimble. Hume led the way in the 1980s, beginning peace talks
between the SDLP and London, and though Sinn Fein joined in the effort, the violence
continued in major fashion until 1993, when the IRA communicated to British Prime
Minister John Major that “the conflict [was] over,” which paved the way for the
possibility of a cease-fire. By 1995, the British and Irish governments started working on
proposals for the future of Northern Ireland, and decided to start multi-party talks in
February of 1996, combined with the hand-over of guerrilla weapons. Former United
States Senator George Mitchell was chosen as the mediator for the peace talks, which

\(^4\) Ibid.
\(^5\) Ibid.
began as planned in 1996. Sinn Fein was barred from joining the talks until 1997, because its militant wing, the IRA, had not abided by the cease-fire until July of 1997. After two years of negotiation, an agreement was reached by Good Friday of 1998.\(^7\)

On May 22 of 1998, voters in both Northern Ireland and the Irish Republic approved the “Good Friday Agreement” by referendum, and later that year David Trimble and John Hume shared the Nobel Peace Prize for their efforts towards creating a peaceful solution to the Northern Ireland conflict. The agreement has three main provisions. First, direct rule from London was replaced by an elected provincial assembly. Second, a North/South Council would be established in order to bring together those responsible for executive decisions in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland to discuss matters of mutual interest on a cross-border, all-island basis, and to exchange information and agree on the adoption of common policies. Finally, a British-Irish Council was established to promote cooperation among the peoples of the British Isles. Members of the council, representatives of the British, Irish, Northern Irish, Welsh, and Scottish governments, as well as representatives from the Isle of Man and the Channel Islands, would meet twice a year to discuss issues ranging from transportation and the environment to culture, education and the European Union.\(^8\)

Despite the agreement, however, the violence did not end. Deadlines for the implementation of the Good Friday Agreement passed, and in 1999, the peace process collapsed once again, causing Northern Ireland to be once again ruled directly from London, although portions of the agreement were implemented, including the release of jailed paramilitary personnel and efforts towards giving Catholics legal claims for equal

\(^6\) Ibid.  
\(^7\) Ibid.
treatment. However, plans to increase cooperation between Ulster and the Republic through the North/South Council collapsed, and the IRA still refused to disarm, requiring the return of former Senator George Mitchell, who helped to reestablish an agreement, in which a new government was established. The Ulster Unionist Party and Sinn Fein became part of a power-sharing executive, and in December of 1999, power transferred from London to Belfast for the first time since 1972. However, in early 2000, problems once again plagued the agreement, and Britain suspended the Northern Ireland Assembly because the IRA refused to decommission its weapons, once again reestablishing direct rule. Problems have continued since then, including another reinstatement and dissolving of the parliament at the end of 2002. The violence may have cooled, but the Troubles are far from over.

It is against the backdrop of these events that an upsurge of political propaganda art emerged. The city of Belfast especially displays some of the most vibrant representations of political art ever seen. The walls of many of the buildings in the city are covered with murals dedicated to carrying across a political message, whether it be Nationalist or Unionist. The murals are striking in their use of colors and images, which, when used together, create a powerful impact on the viewer. The force of the murals was also translated to the political posters that were created throughout the Troubles, and pasted across the country to communicate varying messages, ranging from a commitment to peace to a call to arms.

The Linen Hall Library, a private library in the center of Belfast, and its Northern Ireland Political Collection have been collecting these posters, and other political

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8 Ibid.
9 Ibid.
paraphernalia since the beginning of the Troubles in 1968 when then head librarian Jimmy Vitty collected the first political pamphlet of the collection. Now the library has over a quarter of a million items, including books, pamphlets, reports, manifestos, political papers, press cuttings, artifacts, posters, and videos. The collection of posters alone numbers approximately five thousand. When the library was fire-bombed in error by the IRA in 1993, the librarians of the Northern Ireland Political Collection realized that they could not afford to lose the collection that they had, and so began the process of putting all of the posters onto CD-ROM. This proved to be a difficult process, because by creating the CD-ROM, they were bringing the posters to a wider audience, so there was the need to contextualize them, to find out who designed them and why.

“Posters were meant for the moment. They were meant to get that day’s message out, not for library collections 20 years later.”

These posters provided day by day snapshots of the Troubles, and as the CD-ROM was created, the librarians decided to create an exhibit to launch it. (See Figure 4) Deciding to hang the posters on makeshift scaffolding in the Library, which recreated the feel of where the posters were originally hung, “on scaffolding or lampposts,” the Belfast exhibition opened in October 2001. The head of the Northern Ireland Political Collection of the Linen Hall Library, Yvonne Murphy, was amazed by the number of people that came to see the exhibition, and by the impact that it had. She was most pleased that it

12 Ibid.
13 Troubled Images: Posters of the Northern Ireland Conflict. Linen Hall Library Poster Post Card.
seemed to have the ability to bring people together despite what their political views might be. The posters were indeed “symbols that...were part of the conflict.”¹⁴

And the Belfast exhibition, so many people came, and had reasons for coming. It may be the biggest difference between let’s say in Dublin, or Spain, or America. We had a lot of people who had lost loved ones, or who had lived through the Troubles, or who had contributed to the Troubles, or just lived in areas of Belfast where they’d suffered because of it. And I can remember three very distinct groups. The first day, a woman turned up, and she said, ‘My brother is in that poster, could I have my photo taken beside him?’ And her brother was Joe McCann, an IRA leader in the early ’70s, and she wanted her photo taken beside it. There was a young fella looking ‘round the exhibition at the same time…. Joe McCann was Irish Republican, and this young fella was Loyalist. Loyalist is exactly the other side, and she was saying, she said to him, ‘My brother Joe, when he was 17 he was arrested, when he was 19 he was in prison, and when he was 23 he was dead. Don’t get involved in this.’ ... And he listened to her, and he agreed. People who wouldn’t normally meet came to the exhibition.

We were asked to do a lot of school groups, and we had 17-18 year olds from two local schools, one Protestant school, one Catholic. And their teachers brought them, and they’d never met before, because our schools are mainly virtually all segregated, and they walked around the exhibition together, and their teachers asked them to say what the posters meant to them, and at first they didn’t want to. They were too polite to each other, they didn’t really want to say what they thought or show their feelings. But after about an hour, they started opening up, and at the end of the visit, I noticed that they started to share mobile numbers and email addresses. The following Saturday I came in to work on the exhibition, and I noticed a group from both schools sitting in our coffee shop, and I said to them, ‘Oh did you come back to see the exhibition?’ and they said, ‘No, we came back to see each other.’ That was brilliant.

We often say in this place, it’s difficult when you stick your head above the parapet. When you deal with political issues, very sensitive issues, everybody wants to shoot you down and criticize you. We spent a very long time on the project, trying to make sure everything was neutral, balanced, and inclusive. The terminology we used, what we said about events or issues, just everyone’s viewpoint. One day I got a call from the front counter saying there’s a woman that wants to see you. She’s just asked to speak to Yvonne. And I thought, ‘How have I offended her? Is she not happy?’ I went down to look for her. ... She was very well dressed, very respectable, very shy, and she said, ‘My husband was killed in the Troubles, and he’s in the poster of the RUC dead of the three hundred police officers that were killed.’ And she said, ‘I’d heard that the

exhibition was on and that his picture was there, and I just came in to say thank you for remembering him.’ I couldn’t say much more, she couldn’t say much more. So many people locally, it meant a lot to them, it was cathartic. The fact that they could discuss politics, they could meet other people or they could remember events, issues, or their loved ones who were killed. When it went to Dublin, it was almost like one removed from that.¹⁵

Even though the exhibition was not created to be cathartic, it turned out to be so for many people. Even though the Troubles are not nearly over, in this post- cease fire environment, the *Troubled Images* exhibition became a sort of proto-memorial, focussing on the grassroots aspects of the Troubles, the political messages, and the people who died for one cause or the other. The exhibition demonstrated the shift towards memorials that focus on the victims of a certain conflict rather than creating heroes. Even though it was not designed to be a commemorative memorial exhibition, the collection of the political propaganda posters and their display together in one space made it so. For Professor Richard English of Queens University, Belfast, the most fascinating part of the exhibition was watching people look at the exhibition and take it in. He also pointed out that the collection of Linen Hall Library, specifically the posters, create a memory of the early days of the Troubles, which many in Belfast are too young to remember. However, instead of giving them a one-sided view, by exhibiting posters from all sides of the conflict, the *Troubled Images* exhibition provides a more objective perspective, aiming as well to show that the Linen Hall Library collects material from all sides for use in remembrance and research.¹⁶

The 2001 exhibition was not the first exhibition to bear the name *Troubled Images*. There had been a similar exhibition in 1987, at the height of the Troubles.

¹⁵ Yvonne Murphy. Interviewed by Mitra Keykhah.
However, it was not as much of a success, though it did draw large crowds. The exhibition was posters without any captions except a statement of when the posters were produced and by whom. There was no contextualization, no basis of actual historical events that people could contemplate. The exhibition was held in an art gallery rather than the Library, and it was criticized as being more propaganda than a display of art. The 2001 exhibition, on the other hand, had much more funding and resources behind it, and by exhibiting it in the Library, adjacent to the Northern Ireland Political Collection, the posters were not being exhibited merely as art, as they would have been in an art gallery. Rather, they were displayed with captions that detailed as much as possible their full political intent as propaganda art. The timing of the current exhibition may also have been important. The Troubles are now not as violent and the instability in the region is not as precarious as it had been in the late 1980s, which may have allowed more people to come to the exhibition in a more open frame of mind.17

There is a memorialization debate that goes on in Northern Ireland with regards to the types of memorials that should or should not be set up to remember the Troubles and those who have died. According to Professor Bill Rolston of the University of Ulster, the question is always one of inclusivity:

…[W]hen there is a discussion about memorialization, it falls down on the issue of inclusivity, right? You go for some sort of memorialization that includes everybody, somebody’s going to object. Some police widow is going to say ‘How dare you put up an IRA man’s name along with my husband’s name?’ or some Republicans are going to say ‘How dare you suggest that our freedom fighters were on equal par with these Loyalists who were just dogs and curs?’ You know, you’re always going to get something like that.…

16 Richard English. Professor of Politics, Queens University, Belfast, interviewed by Mitra Keykhah, October 29, 2002.
…You’re right to suggest that you can only properly memorialize when something is over. On the other hand, and it’s not contradictory, the effort to memorialize can be one of the ways you bring things to a conclusion, so the two things can play off one another. And certainly the experiences of other places…have been that the attempt to memorialize is part of what brings you beyond transition to solution, you know?18

Professor Rolston believes that the exhibition was not as cathartic as it could have been simply because a larger number of people were not able to see it. However, in a larger public setting, Troubled Images has the potential to be highly therapeutic. While the exhibition was not designed to be anything more than a launch to a CD-ROM collection, it turned out to be much more for many people. The proto-memorial status that the exhibition gained has garnered it international attention. The example of having people from all sides of a conflict come together to grieve collectively and remember can be used to impact the way that we remember and deal with other conflicts. The impact of the Troubled Images exhibition, and the way that it was received has the potential to represent a new type of influence in the construction or creation of memorials to violent conflicts.

One important aspect of the Troubled Images exhibition is that it is a travelling one. After its opening in Belfast, other cities and countries began to show and interest in viewing the exhibition. After Belfast, the exhibition traveled to such places as Dublin, France, and northern Spain, where it received a good deal of media coverage because of the similarities between the situations of strife between ETA and the Spanish government and the IRA and the British government. Finally, it is to make a two-year tour of the United States beginning this year. As Yvonne Murphy stated, the distance from the actual

18 Bill Rolston, Professor of Sociology, University of Ulster, Jordanstown, interviewed by Mitra Keykhah, October 30, 2002.
theater of violence dulls the cathartic effect of the exhibition, but the lesson of the conflict can still be gleaned from the images in the posters and their captions.\textsuperscript{19} It serves a more educative purpose, then, and less of a cathartic one when it travels to other countries by displaying through images what a civil conflict like the Troubles can do to a country. In that way, it expands the role of a commemorative exhibit to contain educational aims as well.

\textit{II. The Cancelled Enola Gay Exhibition, National Air and Space Museum, Washington, DC, 1995}

[T]his is the history, as clearly as I have been able to reconstruct it, of an exhibition that never took place, never was seen by anyone, and yet gave rise to the most violent dispute ever witnessed by a museum.\textsuperscript{20}

Another commemorative exhibition that attempted to have an educative cathartic effect was the planned 1995 Enola Gay exhibition at the National Air and Space Museum in Washington, DC, as part of the fiftieth anniversary of the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki and the end of World War II. The exhibition, however, was doomed even before it was launched. The controversy that the proposed exhibition caused became a story of international importance. There were Congressional hearings regarding the appropriateness of what was being proposed, and the Smithsonian gave into the political pressure of Congress and the Veterans’ lobbies, canceling the proposed exhibition and in its stead mounting a much sparser, less historically broad display.

On August 6, 1945, the Enola Gay dropped the first atomic bomb onto the Japanese city of Hiroshima, destroying it and eighty thousand of its citizens. The

\textsuperscript{19} Yvonne Murphy, interviewed by Mitra Keykhah.
unprecedented destruction of the city and the bomb dropped onto Nagasaki in the following days ended World War II with the Japanese surrender to the United States.\footnote{Martin Harwit.\textit{An Exhibit Denied: Lobbying the History of Enola Gay}. New York, NY: Copernicus, Springer-Verlag New York Inc. 1996. pp xiv.} Fifty years later, 1995, was the launch date of an exhibition at the National Air and Space Museum entitled \textit{The Last Act: The Atomic Bomb and the End of World War II}. The goal was to put the actions of the United States in those final days of the war into a historical context, to portray “motives, actions, and fates factually, and in the light of their times.”\footnote{Ibid. pp vii.} Martin Harwit had been named director of the National Air and Space Museum in 1987, and it was he who had dictated the course of the planned exhibition, intending to depict the history of aviation in a manner historically accurate.\footnote{Blain P. Friedlander, Jr. “Former Smithsonian director lectures about Enola Gay controversy.” In \textit{Cornell Chronicle}. October 17, 1996. Online. Available: \url{http://www.news.cornell.edu/Chronicle/96/10.17.96/Harwit.html}.} His effort, he claims, was thwarted by political machinations and an effort to hide true history:

> Within the United States, the controversy reflected the ways our nation has begun to settle important issues – not through substantive debate, but through partisan campaigns aimed at victory by any means. ….

> For whatever it costs to buy influence, you can now have your own version of our nation’s history displayed and opposing views suppressed at the Smithsonian Institution. Since the Smithsonian has close to thirty million visitors a year, three quarters of them American citizens, this tampering threatens a widespread misapprehension about our nation’s history, with potentially disastrous consequences. \footnote{Ibid.}

According to Harwit, contrary to what was portrayed in the media and by lobbyist groups opposed to the exhibition, the museum leadership was not uninformed with regards to the content of the exhibition, and when Smithsonian Secretary I. Michael Heyman apologized and cancelled the exhibition, claiming that the museum and its exhibit
designers had not given much thought to how the veterans’ groups would react, he was speaking an untruth. In his book *An Exhibit Denied: Lobbying the History of the Enola Gay*, Harwit outlines his role in the Enola Gay exhibition process, which began, he says, with his installation in 1987, and his efforts to restore the Enola Gay, which had been wasting away and was badly in need of repair. Debates began even then about how to accurately represent the history of the Enola Gay and its role in ending World War II. Harwit and his team met with Brigadier General Paul Tibbets, the commander of the force created to carry out the nuclear bomb attacks, and other veterans in order to inform them of the exhibition and to attempt to address their concerns. Harwit states that “[t]he Smithsonian had every intention of honoring the nation’s veterans.”25 Working closely with the Office of Air Force History’s Dr. Richard H. Kohn, whom Harwit called “the Air Force’s chief representative on historical matters,” everything seemed to indicate an exhibition honoring the fiftieth anniversary of the Enola Gay mission with a broad historical presentation.26

After much painstaking work and concentration on the public relations of such an exhibition that seemed to be set to open in 1995, the mid-term elections of 1994 began the derailment of Harwit’s exhibition. The main lobby group that Harwit argues stopped the display of his exhibition was the Air Force Association (AFA). Claiming that the exhibition lacked balance by putting too much of an emphasis on Japanese casualties and the atrocities produced by the usage of the atomic bomb, the AFA lobbied Congress heavily to stop the exhibition in its original form. The AFA, the American Legion, and other critics of the exhibition argued that the exhibition did not portray history in an

24 Martin Harwit. pp vii-viii.
25 Ibid. pp ix-x.
unbiased light, and in fact was “partisan, left-wing, anti-American, and politically correct,” calling it “historical revisionism at its worst.”\(^{27}\) They charged the museum with distorting history and ignoring the historical context of using the atomic bomb at Hiroshima. On August 29, 1994, the Wall Street Journal editorialized that there “is the clear impression given by the Smithsonian that the American museum whose business it is to tell the nation’s story is now in the hands of academics unable to view American history as anything other than a woeful catalogue of crimes and aggressions against the helpless peoples of the earth.”\(^{28}\) Veterans who had been imprisoned in Japanese camps during the war were horrified that the proposed exhibition seemed to place the lost Japanese lives over the lives of the Americans who had fought and died in the war, claiming that statements in the first draft like: “For most Americans, this…was a war of vengeance. For most Japanese it was a war to defend their unique culture against Western imperialism.” belittled the role that American soldiers played in bringing about the end of the war.\(^{29}\)

That statement was later edited out of the script during revisions, but the tensions still ran high. The corrected version of the script was still said to be “revisionist, unbalanced, and offensive” by Senator Nancy Kassebaum (R-Kan.), who also stated that the duty of the museum was to “portray history in the proper context of the time.”\(^{30}\) In January of 1995, the Air Force Association called for the cancellation of the exhibition, stating that the Smithsonian, and more specifically the National Air and Space Museum,

\(^{26}\) Ibid. pp x.
\(^{28}\) Ibid.
\(^{29}\) Ibid.
\(^{30}\) Ibid.
had committed a breach of faith, and that the director-curator team of the exhibition, instead of portraying events accurately, were pursuing their own political agenda.\textsuperscript{31} The Enola Gay, they said, was being used as a prop in a “politically rigged program about the atomic bomb.”\textsuperscript{32} In response to the pressure put on by veterans’ groups and finally by Congress, Smithsonian Secretary Heyman relented and cancelled the exhibition, stating:

> We made a basic error in attempting to couple an historical treatment of the use of atomic weapons with the 50\textsuperscript{th} anniversary commemoration of the end of the war…. Veterans and their families were expecting, and rightly so, that the nation would honor and commemorate their valor and sacrifice. They were not looking for analysis, and frankly, we did not give enough thought to the intense feelings such an analysis would evoke.\textsuperscript{33}

However, Harwit disagrees. He states that the Veterans and their sacrifices had indeed been taken into consideration, and that as much thought as possible had been put into the intense feelings mentioned by Secretary Heyman.\textsuperscript{34}

Heyman decided to scrap the originally planned exhibition, and in its stead put up an exhibition completely devoid of any “substantial discussion of either the mission’s historical context or its impact – on the Japanese and the postwar world.”\textsuperscript{35} Harwit was appalled by this decision:

> Heyman’s promise to erase all traces of history from his own exhibition on the Enola Gay suited members of Congress. In contrast, the historic approach the museum had intended to present


\textsuperscript{33} Martin Harwit. pp viii.

\textsuperscript{34} Ibid. pp ix.

in *The Last Act* was dubbed a violation of the museum’s charter. The museum should desist, some congressmen asserted; it had not been created to discuss history. They wanted the *Enola Gay*, this most famous airplane of World War II, to be displayed simply – as a masterful piece of technology that had permitted delivery of the first atomic bomb ever dropped from an aircraft.

Forgotten was the preamble to the 1846 act of Congress that had accepted the bequest of an Englishman, James Smithson of London,

> to found, at Washington, under the name of the “Smithsonian Institution,” an establishment for the increase and diffusion of knowledge among men….

Forgotten was the museum’s own enabling legislation directing us to mount educational, historic displays:

> The national air and space museum shall memorialize the national development of aviation and space flight … display aeronautical and space flight equipment of historical interest and significance … and provide educational material for the historical study of aviation and space flight. [italics mine]36

Harwit’s planned exhibition was doing exactly what the museum charter had outlined. In his mind, it was the veterans’ groups and the political interests of members of Congress that had dominated and in fact violated the museum’s charter. However, those who critiqued the exhibition cited the part of the congressional statute, which stated that exhibitions should show “[t]he valor and sacrificial service of the men and women of the Armed Forces … portrayed as an inspiration to the present and future generation of America.”37 The exhibition, by bringing the consequences of nuclear war to the fore, did not, according to critics, accomplish that task. In fact, they felt that it went directly against such a mandate.

After the news that the exhibition was to be cancelled, Harwit cites high-ranking veterans and several historians who were opposed to the revoking of the exhibition. President of the Society for Military History and former dean of the faculty at West Point, 

36 Martin Harwit. pp xi.
retired Brigadier General Roy K. Flint, stated in a letter to the chancellor of the Smithsonian Board of Regents, Chief Justice William H. Rehnquist, that the Smithsonian had a duty to place the actions of United States and the crew of the Enola Gay into an historical context:

Ending the war against Japan by employing atomic weapons was perhaps the most significant historical event of the time and therefore deserves...careful treatment. Moreover, the Smithsonian’s prominence as the leading museum of our nation and its possession of the Enola Gay demand a full presentation of the context and history of those events. .... The Smithsonian must stand publicly against the politicizing of scholarship in public discourse, and it must resist all efforts to impose conformity in the rendering of history.\(^{38}\)

Propaganda does not always consist of the production and dissemination of material. Censorship of material is also propaganda; in an attempt to avoid controversy and appeal to the status quo, museums may not put on certain exhibitions.\(^{39}\) According to Harwit, this is exactly what happened at the Smithsonian’s National Air and Space Museum. Heyman had originally been in favor of the exhibition that Harwit had been planning since 1987, saying that the exhibition had struck the correct balance between historical context and commemoration of soldiers’ sacrifice. However, after pressure from Congress, he apparently declared that he had been unaware of the intent of the designers of The Last Act exhibition, and that they had not taken into consideration the feelings of the veterans and their families.\(^{40}\)

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38 Martin Harwit. pp xii.
40 Martin Harwit. pp xii, viii.
In response to the cancellation of the Enola Gay exhibition and the banning of its catalogue, Eric Foner, Gary B. Nash, and Michael Kammen, former presidents of the Organization of American Historians, wrote to Chief Justice Rehnquist, stating:

We are concerned about the profoundly dangerous precedent of censoring a museum exhibition in response to political pressures from special interest groups. .... [It] will send a chilling … message that certain aspects of our history are “too hot to handle,” so susceptible to contested points of view that they must be excluded from the public mind. .... History museums should not be confined only to exhibitions about subjects for which a perfect consensus exists. Where consensus already exists, there is the least need for the presentation of information and the opportunity for members of our diverse society to be educated and formulate opinions.41

Nevertheless the exhibition was cancelled, and a more sedate display featuring the fuselage of the Enola Gay was shown. Richard H. Kohn called the cancellation of the exhibit “one of the worst tragedies to befall the public presentation of history in the United States in this generation.”42 He worried that the cancellation of the exhibit would cause museums, especially the National Air and Space Museum, to refrain from tackling exhibitions of a controversial nature because of possible political repercussions. (See Figure 5)43 There had also been the opportunity to educate a worldwide audience about an event that represented a turning point in history – the end of World War II and the start of the Cold War, which ushered in the nuclear age.44

World War II happened nearly twenty years before the Vietnam War and questions of legitimacy in the United States’ use of force. For fifty years, the United States’ soldiers had been viewed as the heroes of a conflict that had two distinct sides.

41 Ibid. pp xiii.
Therefore, an exhibition at the most visited museum in the world that was apparently questioning the one act that had been viewed as the heroic end to a war in the Pacific, a war that could have caused the deaths of thousands more American soldiers, struck Veterans as inherently unpatriotic and unnecessarily cruel to those who had given their lives. Richard Kurin, who has been involved in the creation of many Smithsonian exhibits, believes that those like Harwit and Kohn are overly biased in their assessment of what happened, stating that Harwit was not nearly as compassionate to the veterans’ point of view as he should have been when creating the exhibit. He cites the fact that most Americans believe that the Smithsonian stands for an American national identity, what Americans would show to the world as a representation of who the people of America are as a collective and unified nation. When history becomes a public representation, when it is presented by a national institution like the Smithsonian, it represents an entire national identity, and reasonable people, he states, expect the Smithsonian to use “good solid knowledge, not preachy moralism or politics, or commercialism as [their] compass.”

We should then ask whether a commemorative exhibit or memorial should cause people to question the past actions of their nation. Are such exhibitions appropriately intended only to propagate an image of a righteous past or can other interpretations of history be allowed? As Foner, Nash, and Kammen stated, the National Air and Space Museum is a “history museum,” and removing all reference to the consequences of the Enola Gay mission removed the historical contextualization for which the veterans’ lobby groups were ostensibly arguing. The approved exhibition failed to “increase the knowledge

43 Martin Harwit. pp 404-406.
among men,” and became another representation of a one-sided commemoration of events and heroes. “The commemoration the Museum [had] planned [was] designed largely for the benefit of those generations of Americans too young to remember how the war ended….It is they who [would have had] the most to gain from the lessons to be learned.”

III. The Vietnam Veterans Memorial, Washington, DC, 1982

The Wall has helped, and continues to help, a nation heal from a bitterly divisive war by recognizing the human cost of war. …. It is a place of quiet, a place of serenity. A good place for reflection, for acceptance. In recognizing the sacrifice of those who fell, the Wall also affirms the courage, patriotism and humanity of all the men and women who served. It is a place of raw emotion, painful in some ways, inspiring like few other places. Truly, a place beyond the tears.

The United States first contemplated getting involved in Vietnam in the early 1950s, and the first major troop contingent arrived in Vietnam in 1961. By 1965, a large number of United States troops were in Vietnam, having increased from 23,000 to 184,300 soldiers, to aid the South Vietnamese in their fight against the Communist North. Despite protests across the United States regarding the validity of the United States’ presence in Vietnam, the war escalated, and extended into Cambodia, where President Nixon began a bombing campaign in 1969. Disagreement about the war was so strong in the United

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States that it led to violence and perhaps most famously to the deaths of four students protesting against the war at Kent State University at the hands of the National Guard.\textsuperscript{50} The United States finally pulled its troops out of Vietnam in 1973 after a Cease-Fire Treaty was signed in Paris. Just over 58,000 Americans were killed in Vietnam, with more missing in action.\textsuperscript{51}

In 1980, the United States Congress authorized the non-profit organization, the Vietnam Veterans’ Memorial Fund, to construct and maintain a national memorial dedicated to all members of the United States Armed Forces who served in Vietnam. After they had raised approximately $8,000,000, President Carter allocated two acres of land near the Lincoln Memorial for the planned memorial’s site. A competition was then held, judged by a jury of internationally acclaimed sculptors and architects, to find a design for the memorial. The design of then 21-year-old Maya Lin, a student at Yale University was chosen out of 1,421 entries. For her design, Lin “thought about what death is, what a loss is … a sharp pain that lessens with time, but can never quite heal over. A scar. The idea occurred to [her] there on the site. Take a knife and cut open the earth, and with time the grass would heal it. As if you cut open the rock and polished it.”\textsuperscript{52} Ground was broken on the site on March 26, 1982, and the wall was completed by October of the same year, dedicated on November 13, 1982 – Veterans’ Day.\textsuperscript{53}

In her own words, Maya Lin described her design for the memorial in 1995:

\textsuperscript{50} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{52} Toby Clark. pp 118.
Walking through this park, the memorial appears as a rift in the earth, a long, polished black stone wall emerging from and receding into the earth. Approaching the memorial, the ground slopes gently downward, and the low walls, emerging on either side, growing out of the earth, extend and converge at a point below and ahead. Walking into the grassy site contained by the walls of the memorial, we can barely make out the carved names upon the memorial walls. These names, seemingly infinite in number, convey the sense of overwhelming numbers while unifying those individuals into a whole. For this memorial is meant not as a monument to the individual, but rather as a memorial to the men and women who died during this war as a whole.

.... At the intersection of these walls, on the right side, at the wall’s top, is carved the date of the first death. It is followed by the names of those who have died in the war in chronological order. These names continue on this wall, appearing to recede into the earth at the wall’s end. The names resume on the left wall as the wall emerges from the earth back to the origin where the date of the last death is carved at the bottom of this wall. Thus, the war’s beginning and end meet. The war is complete, coming full circle, yet broken by the earth that bounds the angle’s open side and contained within the earth itself. As we turn to leave, we see these walls stretching into the distance, directing us to the Washington Monument to the left, and the Lincoln Memorial to the right, thus bringing the Vietnam memorial into historical context. We the living are brought to a concrete realization of these deaths. Brought to a sharp awareness of such a loss, it is up to each individual to resolve or come to terms with this loss. For death is, in the end, a personal and private matter and the area contained within this memorial is a quiet place meant for personal reflection and private reckoning.

.... This memorial is for those who have died, and for us to remember them....

I consider the work I do memorials, not monuments; in fact I’ve often thought of them as anti-monuments. I think I don’t make objects; I make places. I think that is very important – the places set a stage for experience and for understanding experience. I don’t want to say these places are stages where you can act out, but rather places where something happens within the viewer.54

Initial reaction to the memorial was fierce. There was an extreme contrast between the sunken black granite walls and the two monuments that stand nearby. The Washington Monument is decidedly heliocentric, pointing upwards in a triumphant fashion. Though

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both the Washington Monument and the Vietnam Veterans Memorial are abstract in design (compared to the realistic statues that comprise other commemorative monuments like the Lincoln Memorial), the Washington Monument is much more of a celebratory design, expressing America’s greatness by pointing upwards in a confident manner full of strength, not drawing the viewer into an atmosphere of contemplation. The Lincoln Memorial also presents a heroic aura. It is modeled after ancient Greek temples to the gods, and Charles Griswold describes the memorial as having a similarity to approaching the temple of a hero-god. Instead of celebrating righteous heroism, the Vietnam Veterans Memorial symbolizes personal grief. Its downward sloping incline, in contrast to the two more heroic memorials, makes it seem almost as though one is walking into a grave, creating a chthonic effect.\textsuperscript{55} An important difference exists between monuments, like that which is dedicated to Washington, and memorials, like that which is dedicated to Lincoln and the Vietnam Veterans Memorial:

Its status as a memorial, rather than a monument, situates the Vietnam Veterans Memorial within a particular code of remembrance. Monuments and memorials can often be used as interchangeable forms, but there are distinctions in intent between them. Arthur Danto writes:

\textit{We erect monuments so that we shall always remember, and build memorials so that we shall never forget. .... The memorial is ... where we honor the dead. With monuments we honor ourselves.}

\textit{.... Whereas a monument most often signifies victory, a memorial refers to the life or lives sacrificed for a particular set of values. Whatever triumph a memorial may refer to, its depiction of victory is always tempered by a foregrounding of the lives lost. [italics mine]}\textsuperscript{56} 

\textsuperscript{55} Charles L. Griswold. In Harriet F. Senie, et. al. pp 78-79

Critics of the memorial were upset by the fact that it did not convey any sort of patriotism or heroism on the part of the soldiers who fought in Vietnam. This lack of heroism displayed by the memorial caused one commentator to label it a “ditch of shame.” This design, however, corresponds to what the veterans who had commissioned it were planning. They wanted no political statement to be made by their memorial. It was not to be dedicated to the war, the nation, or any political ideal. It was to be simply a remembrance of those who had given their lives in the Vietnam conflict. There arose a hostile response to this lack of triumph and heroism depicted by the memorial, led by President Ronald Reagan’s Secretary of the Interior, James Watt, claiming that the cause for which they died should also be praised.\textsuperscript{57}

As a result of the pressure by critics like Watt, another memorial, a statue by Frederick Hart entitled \textit{The Three Servicemen/Soldiers}, was commissioned. The statue depicts three soldiers carrying infantry weapons and dressed in the military garb of the time, one White, one Hispanic, one Black, behind whom stands a flagpole flying the American flag. The three soldiers face the memorial with stern gazes, the seals of the five armed forces are marked on the base of the flagpole, engraved with the inscription: “This flag represents the service rendered to our country by the Veterans of the Vietnam War. The flag affirms the principles of freedom for which they fought and their pride in having served under difficult circumstances.” \textsuperscript{58} This seemingly more patriotic (and realist) memorial statue satisfied the critics of the memorial. (See Figure 6)\textsuperscript{59}

\textsuperscript{57} Toby Clark. pp 120.
Chapter Four: Case Studies

Despite the controversy surrounding the design of the original memorial, which was specifically designed not to have any sort of propagandistic or nationalistic message, it has become the most visited memorial in Washington, DC.\textsuperscript{60} The Vietnam Veterans Memorial follows the trend towards war commemorations that are less about heroics and more about sacrifice, something that seems to have grown out of and typified the memorials to the Holocaust, such as George Segal’s San Francisco memorial entitled \textit{The Holocaust}, also from 1982. (See Figure 7)\textsuperscript{61} In that memorial, a lone survivor stares out from behind barbed wire, while behind him lies a heap of corpses.\textsuperscript{62} The Vietnam Veterans Memorial does not send a clear message – it is open to interpretation. The purpose of it was to be an apolitical, subjective “living” memorial, participatory in nature. One can get close to it, touch it, leave letters and flowers, almost like a cemetery, unlike impersonal hero monuments placed on pedestals. Rather, this memorial allows people to determine their own message:

In any event, by emphasizing the sacrifice so many individuals have made, the VVM [Vietnam Veterans Memorial] surely asks us to think about whether the sacrifice was worthwhile and whether it should be made again. The VVM is, in my opinion, fundamentally interrogative; it does not take a position as to the answers. It implies some terrible questions: Did these individuals die in vain? …. For what and when should Americans die in war? That the person contemplating the monument is implicated in these questions is also emphasized by another crucial aspect of this memorial, namely that the polished black granite functions as a mirror. This fact gives added depth to the monument and mitigates any sense of its being a tomb. In looking at the names one cannot help seeing oneself looking at them…. The dead and living thus meet, and the living are forced to ask whether those names should

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be on that wall, and whether others should die in similar causes….  

Because of this mirroring effect, the viewer is forced to face herself as a possible casualty of war. According to Charles Griswold, the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, coupled with the Washington Monument and the Lincoln Memorial, force the viewer to consider questions regarding when it is appropriate to sacrifice human life for a stated cause, compelling the viewers to contemplate the definition of a just war without providing any answers. Both the Washington Monument and the Lincoln Memorial remind the viewer of two of the wars that were fought in order to defend a threatened American identity, the defense of an apparent way of life that justified the sacrifice of soldiers. The very “interrogative” nature of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial separates it from a singular focus on glory and instead concentrates on the immense human cost of the war. As Griswold mentions, the dedication of the Memorial itself showed an attempt to move away from partisanship that might have clouded a moment of collective grief. Absent were any sectarian politicians; the veterans of the war themselves were the ones who designed the mission of the Memorial and organized its dedication.

The purported neutrality of the Memorial thus gives it a therapeutic nature. It honors the veterans who served in the war without passing judgement on whether or not it was right to fight such a war. Each person who visits, therefore, is compelled to make that judgement for him or herself. The memorial does not think for the viewer; rather, it requires the viewers to think for themselves. Also of interest was the choice of Maya Lin as the designer of the memorial. As a young woman of Asian-Pacific descent who was

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64 Ibid. pp 78-79
65 Ibid. pp 91-92.
too young to take a participatory role in anything to do with the war itself, Lin makes the healing nature of the Memorial evident. Lin herself represents a sort of reconciliation of east and west.  

However, Griswold’s interpretation of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial is not accepted by all. In her book *Tangled Memories*, Marita Sturken interprets the Vietnam Veterans Memorial as a screen, the walls sifting out personal and collective memory. The walls of the memorial also act as a screen for the many interpretations surrounding the history of the war and its aftermath. “The memorial does not endorse any of the contested versions of the Vietnam War,” and thus it has spurred debates regarding the truth of one version of history versus another. The memorial itself, according to her, most assuredly does not glorify war, and the pacifist, anti-heroic nature of the memorial led critics to call it a monument to defeat. She also points out that by enforcing the memory of the American soldiers that died in the conflict, the memorial forgets the many more Vietnamese that died. Using James Young’s term “forgetful memorial,” the Vietnam Veterans Memorial apparently casts the veterans “as the primary victims of the war.” However, Sturken is not a critic of the memorial. She cites it as something that gave the ostracized veterans an identity, a place for them to “visit their memories,” and that the lack of military rank on the wall enables the names to “transcend a military context and to represent the names of a society.”

Ironically, however, the lack of a definite message can be thought of as an appreciation of the American values that encourage freedom of thought by allowing

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66 Ibid. pp 93.  
67 Marita Sturken. pp 45, 82.  
68 Ibid. pp 51.  
69 Ibid. pp 63.
people to interpret the memorial for themselves. There is no clearly stated message. The only shared significance that everyone can take away from the memorial is that of an overwhelming sense of grief and loss. Since the memorial also raises questions, questions that each viewer has to answer for him or herself, the ideals of freedom of expression and thought idealized in the United States are presented in a living form by how people formulate answers to those questions. In other words, the Vietnam Veterans Memorial is not in any way anti-American, and it is not meant to stir anti-American feelings, as some critics might state. However, it is also not a place to find easy answers. It projects a new, more abstract image of the nation into the future that requires critical interpretation. The message for posterity is to always preserve a sense of “reflective and interrogative patriotism.”

IV. United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Washington, DC, opened 1993

The Museum's primary mission is to advance and disseminate knowledge about this unprecedented tragedy; to preserve the memory of those who suffered; and to encourage its visitors to reflect upon the moral and spiritual questions raised by the events of the Holocaust as well as their own responsibilities as citizens of a democracy.

The challenge of bringing the international tragedy of the Holocaust into the American collective memory faced many obstacles involved in planning and construction of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. The idea seemed simple enough: to create a memorial dedicated to the victims of the Holocaust. However, carrying out such an idea proved much more difficult. Location, architecture, exhibition design, religion,

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70 Ibid. pp 60, 65.
71 Charles L. Griswold. In Harriet F. Senie et. al. pp 93
and nationality all had roles to play before the museum opened in April of 1993, almost fifteen years after the original concept of an American Holocaust memorial.

In 1978, then President Jimmy Carter announced the creation of the President’s Commission on the Holocaust, formally establishing it with an Executive Order in November of that year. The task assigned to the Commission was, within six months, to submit a report to the President and the Secretary of the Interior that would consist of “recommendations with respect to the establishment and maintenance of an appropriate memorial to those who perished in the Holocaust.” The Holocaust, which had for so long been at the periphery of the American memory of World War II, was now being moved to the foreground of recollection and commemoration.

The first obstacle to overcome was the location of the memorial. New York and Washington, DC were the alternative choices. The advocates for making New York the center of the national Holocaust memory argued for it because New York is the epicenter of the Jewish population of the United States, and the Holocaust had been mainly a Jewish tragedy. However, those who advocated Washington, DC convincingly made the case that they were attempting to make a national memorial, and that New York’s association with the Jewish community would not give a national feel to the memory of the Holocaust. By placing the memorial in Washington, DC, the memory could be expanded to encompass the entire nation, as well as acknowledging the “other victim

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groups,” as they were called – among whom were the Poles, Gypsies, homosexuals, and Soviet political prisoners.\(^{74}\)

With the city chosen, the United States Holocaust Memorial Council was established in 1980 to carry out the recommendations of the Presidential Commission. The Council chose a site in Washington, DC that was located adjacent to the National Mall. This central location was very important to the survivors of the Holocaust, who had been worried that their memory would have been pushed aside again, that they would face a “second victimization: the murder of their memories.”\(^{75}\) However, by placing the memorial to the Holocaust very close to other centrally located national commemorative structures, their memories became central to the memory of the United States. The choice of this ostensibly central location off the Mall angered many critics. Some argued that other earlier genocidal crimes, such as those committed against the Native Americans, should be commemorated on the Mall first before the Holocaust. Others were arguing for a memorial that would commemorate the heroism of the American troops, who had given their lives to liberate the concentration camps. Others still argued that such a memorial was out of place because the Holocaust was not “an American event.”\(^{76}\) Further arguments included the thought that the National Mall had been designed to be a place of celebration and patriotism, and that the placement of such a museum memorial would contaminate that aspect of cheerfulness and affirmation of American identity. However, such opposition was countered by those who thought that the Holocaust had been a turning point in history, that it was important to tell its story and commemorate those who perished, to serve as a warning and to teach lessons. According to columnist George Will,

\(^{74}\) Ibid. pp 224-225.  
\(^{75}\) Ibid. pp 226.
“[t]he museum would teach Americans that the world was dangerous, ‘a mind-opening reminder of the furies beyond our shores … an antidote to our innocence.’”\textsuperscript{77} It would teach lessons about responsibility and the dangers of being bystanders to a conflict. Such a memorial would be a warning against such hatred and dehumanization as was displayed by the Nazis during World War II. “The museum … should remind visitors that ‘no one is immune from inhumanity.’”\textsuperscript{78}

The Council did not want just the items inside the museum to create an impact. Rather they wanted the building itself to make an architectural statement about the Holocaust. They envisioned a building which would exude what could be called the “feeling” of the Holocaust, a building of equal size and strength to the other museums and memorials on the Mall. When the idea was presented to the Commission of Fine Arts for approval, however, the members of the Commission asked the Council to make it a more welcoming and loving museum – in the words of Edward Linenthal, “to soften the impact of the Holocaust” by making a less prominent building. The approved design, which had been revised by the Council, still had its critics, however, for being too austere and pointedly focussed in its design towards the inhumanity of the event that was the Holocaust.\textsuperscript{79}

In late 1986, the Council chose James Ingo Freed as the architect for the museum building. Himself an escapee of Nazi violence, coming to the United States in 1941, Freed remembered that his family had tried hard to forget the Holocaust, even though it had claimed much of his mother’s family. In his efforts to design the building, he visited

\textsuperscript{76} Ibid. pp 227.
\textsuperscript{77} Ibid. pp 228.
\textsuperscript{78} Ibid. pp 229.
\textsuperscript{79} Ibid. 232-236.
several of the original concentration camp sites in Europe to be able to put himself inside the Holocaust, so he could put the museum visitor there as well:

Freed decided that this could not be a neutral container, or a “black box,” which only held a meaningful story inside, but “had nothing to tell you, neither outside nor inside.” Such a building, would say, “I give up.” It would indicate that there could be no adequate architectural statement about the Holocaust. Nor could he envision a high-tech building “that would not fit into Washington, would not fit into this subject matter.” His building had to be “expressive of the event.” It would have to communicate though its raw materials and its organization of space the feel of inexorable, forced movement: disruption, alienation, constriction, observation, selection. …. “I wanted to do this … so that you are forced to acknowledge your separation from … Washington, from the world you’re in.”

Freed’s building is meant to take the visitors out of Washington, DC, to disorient them, because if they do not, they will not be able to devote their entire concentration to the memory of the Holocaust. The architecture of the building prepares the viewer for experiencing the Holocaust. After passing under the arches of the 14th Street entrance, arches that, according New York Times columnist Herbert Muschamp gape instead of welcome, one enters the Hall of Witness. Muschamp described it as the “atrium from hell, a room purged of every pleasure that large indoor spaces often provide.” When one enters the Hall of Witness, there are hardly any chairs to sit on, and one is situated in the bottom of what seems to be a bowl like structure; looking up, one can see that those on the upper floors look down onto those who are seemingly trapped in the Hall. The design of the skylight and ceiling of the hall creates a space that Linenthal describes as “a space that screams as it seemingly strains to rip itself apart.”

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80 Ibid. pp 241.
81 Ibid. pp 243.
82 Ibid. pp 244.
floors, one looks down onto the Hall of Witness through glass panes on which are etched the names of people and communities murdered during the Holocaust.

One enters the exhibition by picking a “passport,” which contains the name, picture, and details of the life of a victim throughout the Holocaust, and with it, the visitor becomes that victim. Once the members of the tour group each have a passport, they are herded into an elevator and taken up to the fourth floor of the building, where the exhibition starts. Upon stepping out of the elevator, there is a distinct change from the wide-open space of the Hall of Witness. It is much smaller, and the exhibition opens with the beginnings of Nazi propaganda and the derision of the Jews in the early days of their persecution. From the fourth floor, “[y]ou circle down … gathering information as you come,” until you reach the Hall of Remembrance. Throughout the exhibition there are no windows to the outside, never a glimpse of the security of being in Washington, DC. One is completely removed, displaced into a complete experience.

The internal exhibit is divided into three parts: “Nazi Assault – 1933-1939,” “Final Solution – 1940-1945,” and “Last Chapter.” Once again, through the glass of the bridges from the fourth and third floors, one looks out onto the Hall of Witness:

The bridges provided, wrote architectural critic Adrian Dannatt, a double sigh, of relief from the pressures of history on either side and of sadness at the tale that continues before and after. It is also only from these bridges that the full crookedness and distorted proportions of the main hall below can be understood … [which] reveals itself as a distorted, ruptured, structure, just as the classical foundations of fascist society seen from the overview of history appear as barbarism, insanity, chaos.” …

…The feel and rhythm of the space and the setting of the mood were important. [Museum designer Ralph] Appelbaum identified different qualities of space that helped to mediate the narrative: constrictive space on the third floor for example, where, as visitors enter the world of the death camps, the space became tight and

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83 Ibid.
mean, heavy and dark. Indeed, walls were not painted, pipes were left exposed, and except for fire exits and hidden elevators on the fourth and third floors for people who, for on reason or another had to leave, there is no escape.\textsuperscript{84}

The enclosed, visceral nature of the exhibition provides no respite for the viewer. She must continue the journey until she reaches the Hall of Remembrance, the hexagonal, simple space designed for remembrance of the victims of the Holocaust. This is the contemplative memorial space in which one can reflect upon the exhibition just finished. Small slivers of windows allow some light in, but one is not returned to Washington, DC quite yet.\textsuperscript{85} In the Hall of Remembrance, there burns an eternal flame, under which soil from Holocaust sites and soil from American military cemeteries is buried. Visitors are allowed to light memorial candles, located in niches on the outside walls before they leave.\textsuperscript{86}

Despite the repeated requests to “soften the blow” of the memories contained within the building, and indeed by the building itself, the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum has become one of the most visited museums in Washington, DC. By

\textsuperscript{84} Ibid. pp 250-251.

\textsuperscript{85} The size of the windows in the Hall of Remembrance were cause for debate between Freed and the Commission of Fine Arts. The Commission wanted the building to “resolve” the Holocaust somehow, and provide some hope. Vice Chair of the Commission, Neil Porterfield asked if there were “any part of this memorial that gives hope and gives joy for the future.” Commissioner Diane Wolf was bothered by the windows in the Hall of Remembrance, which arebricked up. She argued that they should be opened up to let in light and reflect hope; the slits of glass that let in sun were not enough. Wolf claimed that the bricked up windows “were blocking those symbols of America. Don’t block the symbols,” she said. “Incorporate them into your building. Hope means open arms, it doesn’t closed, blind windows.” But, as Linenthal remarks, the “closed, blind windows served a particular purpose: they kept American space from contaminating memorial space.” Freed “did not want the Mall to be a player in the museum. … Freed’s architectural strategies were designed to alter the way in which visitors perceived the Mall, just as the permanent exhibition was designed to alter perception of citizenship in a modern state. … Freed spoke of the Hall of Remembrance as a space betwixt and between the story of the Holocaust, told in the Hall of Witness, and American Mall space. Visitors must go through the Hall of Remembrance before emerging from the museum, he argued. ‘I think that memorials are not gazebos….We want people to have a moment of concentration, because after you have seen all of this, I don’t think you are ready to go out’” Ibid. pp 246-347.

virtue of its distance from the original sites in Europe, the museum does indeed provide a buffer of insulation from the actual impact of the memory of the Holocaust. However, in its attempt to embody the “feel” of the Holocaust, the memorial museum has made the Holocaust part of American national memory, in the hopes that the lessons it is trying to teach will be heard.\(^87\) The museum is not meant to be a triumphant symbol to the end of the war or to the heroics of American soldiers as liberators; rather, each image in the exhibition and the building itself are meant to ensure that no one in the United States forgets the atrocities that resulted from Nazi intolerance during World War II. It also emphasizes the need for the people of the United States to step away from their innocence, as George Will stated. The security enjoyed by the population of the United States, and displayed by the cheerful patriotism that characterizes so many of the monuments and museums in Washington, DC, engenders a sense of contentment and separation from the harsh victimization and violent conflict that so often has plagued other nations. The Holocaust Memorial Museum constructs a collective memory for the people of the United States, many of whom were not directly affected by the Holocaust. This is not an easy memory or a happy one; rather it is a memory that compels people to recognize the ugly side of war and the consequences of not intervening when it actually is needed. The museum also expands the United States’ official view of history by incorporating “non-American” memory, viewing World War II from a different

perspective, and by association, hopefully creating an awareness for other atrocities committed both within and outside our own borders. (See Figure 8)\textsuperscript{88}

Memory is important, letting that memory be sufficiently ambiguous and open-ended so that others can inhabit the space, can imbue the forms with their own memory.

-James Ingo Freed ¹

Government officials and historians have always had a conflict of interest. As Renan stated in his essay *What is a nation?*, the practice of studying history undermines any government’s effort to strategically forget certain events in the nation’s past, in order to create a successful, smoothly functioning nation-state. This trend has not lessened over the past one hundred years since Renan wrote his essay. By maintaining secret archives and releasing certain propaganda images, governments have it within their power to engineer history, as the Party does to the terrifying extreme in Orwell’s *1984*. A government oftentimes employs the talents of historians who are willing to produce a sort of “patriotic history,” for the public to take as the “official” view of events. The creation of an official history has a direct impact on the collective memory of a nation’s citizens and academic historians.

¹ James E. Young. pp 283.
have little input: “[I]n the forging, or shaping, of the collective memory, the role of governments has always been greater than that of historians, and is likely to remain so. … For governments, patriotic history is the only legitimate kind of history.”

In collective memory, or collective remembrance, as Jay Wilson and Emmanuel Sivan choose to call it, commemorative exhibits and memorials are a major conveyer of official versions of history. More often than not, controversy accompanies the designing of any commemorative memorials, monuments, or exhibitions, especially since most of them are dedicated to sacrifice and heroism shown during war. Questions regarding who will be remembered and how to remember them spur fierce debates about the perception of history. One social group will want a certain version of events represented, while another remembers a different version; and those that try to cater to an ostensibly impartial reading will be attacked for their own biases in the matter:

This is apparent in the uproar that greets some public exhibitions, presenting a narrative which varies from individual recollection, from the official version of events, or offends some particular sensibilities. Collective remembrance is apparently too important a subject to be left to the historians.

This is evident in the way wars have been remembered in public. In all combatant countries there has been a proliferation of monuments, understood as literary, visual, or physical reminders of twentieth-century warfare. … Here too the dialectic between remembering and forgetting is visible. …

Academic historians ordinarily have a wide view of history that does not suit a government’s narrower interpretation of events. Much of the controversy has to do with the psychology behind collective memory, elaborated by Maurice Halbwachs.

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Propaganda, especially visual propaganda, is the most effective way to manipulate the collective memory in the short term. Since memory inevitably will fade, especially as time creates a distance between the current generation and the conflict being remembered, displaying certain artifacts and other visual interpretations of history will have a significant impact on the way people in a certain nation will remember a war. Visual propaganda in particular is very important, because psychologically, “the distortion and selection of visual memories is easier than in the case of verbal ones.” Governments can therefore use visual representations to create their “official history,” specifically through the use of war commemoration, a practice that is centuries old.

Commemorative exhibitions or memorial statues are the types of propaganda art specifically used to affect collective memory. The vehement reactions against the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, and the original Enola Gay exhibition because they were not bastions of the traditional cheerful patriotism reveals the fact that they were meant to be memory propaganda. Those who opposed them seemed indeed to want to forget certain parts of history. This view is in keeping with what Renan said would be necessary for the functioning of a successful nation. Since they are commissioned by the state, government monuments and memorials are at least in some part an attempt to silence critical sentiments directed towards the nation’s actions in a certain conflict. Heroes are created for the benefit of the people, so that actions, which may have been questionable, can soon be seen as right and indeed honorable. In 1896, Chief Justice Rufus Peckham stated that monuments and memorials are funded by the state in order to “enhance [the citizen’s] love and respect for those

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5 Toby Clark. pp 118.
institutions for which heroic sacrifices were made."\textsuperscript{6} This type of indoctrination is easily accomplished in a homogeneous society in which the people all have similar views of history.

What would seem problematic in a country like the United States, therefore, is its very multicultural nature. Art, especially public art, is a potent weapon in what Sanford Levinson calls “culture wars.” The art is designed to “symbolize the public order and to inculcate in its viewers appropriate attitudes toward that order.”\textsuperscript{7} However, in a country like the United States, there are differing views of history that exist simultaneously within the same society, different views of heroes and villains, and when a memorial, monument, or commemorative exhibition is to be constructed, these differing concepts of history essentially “go to war” as different groups try to propagate what they view to be the “correct” version of what happened.\textsuperscript{8}

Memorials are the surface of collective memory propaganda. By having a positive visual representation of a nation’s role in a conflict, the citizens will be comforted and will not be impelled to question actions taken or decisions made, and this sort of unquestioning loyalty and acceptance of a directed history was what embodied the totalitarian ideal. The livelihood and cohesion of nations is based heavily on symbolic representations and visual communication, exemplified by the preponderance of statues and monuments in countries around the world.\textsuperscript{9} However, democratic countries like the United States function differently than totalitarian regimes. The people are (ostensibly) encouraged to question everything their government decides to do, keeping it in check.

\textsuperscript{6} Sanford Levinson. pp 88.
\textsuperscript{7} Ibid. pp 38.
\textsuperscript{8} Ibid. pp 37-38, 64.
\textsuperscript{9} Ibid. pp 130.
War memory at the national level has also started to become more democratic. That is, memorials are beginning to show more and different interpretations of events, exemplified by recent projects that focus on the victimization and horrors that are a result of war.  

Memorials have also become less about creating heroes and more about consequences and lessons. Commemorations like the Troubled Images exhibition of Northern Ireland, and the United States’ Vietnam Veterans Memorial and Holocaust Memorial Museum encourage what Griswold called “interrogative patriotism.” However, it is interesting to note that none of these exhibitions were funded or produced directly by a government. The production of the original Enola Gay exhibition at the National Air and Space Museum was, of the four, the one most directly associated with the government itself (rather than a committee or private institution), and it is also the one that failed in its mission most spectacularly.

The political nature of the debate behind the cancellation of The Last Act before it opened should serve as a cautionary tale. The United States prides itself on the freedom of expression, which should also extend towards its national museums and monuments. In order to refute Noam Chomsky’s vision of a populace that is totally ignorant and controlled, and a nation in which the truth of history is buried underneath “lies upon lies,” expressions of patriotism, in the form of national war memorials, should come to embody those ideals for which such wars are ostensibly fought: namely, a freedom to think for oneself and determine one’s own ideas. In the United States, the emergence of memorials like the Holocaust Museum and the Vietnam Veterans Memorial demonstrate

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11 Noam Chomsky. pp 32.
a breakdown in the traditional rigid structure of heroism and glorification in war memorials:

These are all signs of the civilizing effect, despite all the propaganda, despite all the efforts to control thought and manufacture consent. Nevertheless, people are acquiring an ability and a willingness to think things through. Skepticism about power has grown, and attitudes have changed on many, many issues. It’s kind of slow, maybe even glacial, but perceptible and important.  

Chomsky describes skepticism as a danger of democracy. Once people begin to think for themselves, they will come to question the government more, an implied undercurrent of Renan’s essay. If a nation is unable to engineer the forgetting of certain events in national history, then people will come to question the government’s motivations and actions. This interrogation of the government will, according to Renan, lead to a nation’s eventual collapse, regardless of its form of government.

This idea of possible chaos, however, may prove to be a false one. If, instead, war memorials were created with the interrogative sense directed towards the viewer, such as that which is apparently inherent in the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, a nation might actually be able to make more informed decisions by having more critical and interrogative citizens. The message propagated by the art of memorials could thus do what art is best known for – its ability to express and encourage thought and individual interpretation:

There is a chance that … we may drown in floods of memories, just as we may be torn apart by the multitude of identities. The future is unpredictable, and not a little frightening, but there is no turning back. We have no alternative but to construct new memories as well as new identities better suited to the complexities of a post-national era. The old holidays and monuments have lost much of their power to commemorate, to forge and sustain a single vision of the past, but they remain useful as times and places where groups with very different memories of the same

12 Ibid. pp 34.
events can communicate, appreciate, and negotiate their respective differences. ...[D]emocratic societies need to publicize rather than privatize the memories and identities of all groups, so that each may know and respect the other’s version of the past, thereby understanding better what divides as well as unites us. In this era of plural identities, we need civil times and civil spaces more than ever, for these are essential to the democratic processes by which individuals and groups come together to discuss, debate, and negotiate the past, and, through this process, define the future.¹³

This sort of contemplative public that indulges in skepticism, which, according to John Gillis would actually strengthen a democratic nation, begins with the way that a nation remembers its past. It is difficult to create one national version of history in democratic nations like the United States, simply because the country is so heterogeneous. The approved version of the Enola Gay exhibition and the arguments against the Vietnam Veterans Memorial and the Holocaust Memorial Museum demonstrate that the attempt has been made to direct the memory of the people of the United States. However, this nation can never escape its policy of freedom of expression, which enables its people to freely criticize the government’s decisions as loudly as those who criticized the original Enola Gay exhibition had done. As much effort as possible should be put into reflecting that heterogeneity through commemorative projects.

Gillis’ design for a “contemplative public,” though, is premature, if not a bit naïve. Renan’s thoughts on the forgetfulness of a nation still seem more relevant. Memorials cannot include everyone’s memory of events, especially not in a country like the United States. The example of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial again serves as an example. Maya Lin’s design for the wall was originally meant to stand alone. However, Congress and many veterans groups did not agree, thinking that it was incomplete, not

paying tribute enough to the living veterans, so Hart’s statue of the three servicemen was added. Soon after, the women who had served in the Vietnam War began to lobby for their own memorial, and were rejected in their first attempt by the Commission of Fine Arts, the approval body for all designs of such memorial artwork. J. Carter Brown, then chair of the Commission and director of the National Gallery stated that Hart’s statue was “symbolic of human kind and everyone who served.” Adding a specific women’s memorial would “open the doors to others seeking added representation for their ethnic group or military specialty,” citing the example of the National Park Service receiving requests from Scout Dog associations. Needless to say, the women in the Vietnam Women’s Memorial Project were incensed at being compared to dogs. Later attempts were successful, however, and the Vientam Women’s Memorial, designed by Glenna Goodacre, was eventually approved and dedicated in 1993. Even with the addition of the women’s memorial, however, there were those who still felt it was incomplete, like artist Chris Burden, who designed a sculpture in 1991, entitled *The Other Vietnam Memorial*, to commemorate the Vietnamese who were killed in the conflict. (See Figure 9) In many ways, all memorials are incomplete, and are still exercises in forgetting: “all memorials [are] essentially…‘forgetful monument[s],’ to use James Young’s term. He writes, ‘A nation’s monuments efface as much history from memory as they inscribe in

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14 Marita Sturken. pp 67.  
16 “Burden’s piece consists of large copper leaves, twelve feet by eight feet, arranged as a kind of circular standing book, on which are engraved 3 million Vietnamese names to commemorate the 3 million Vietnamese who died in the war. …. Burden’s listing is not unproblematic; he was unable to get an actual listing of the dead, so he took 4,000 names and repeated them over and over again. Despite its awkward generic naming, however, Burden’s sculpture exposes a fundamental limit of commemoration within nationalism. Why must a national memorial reenact conflict by showing only one side of the conflict? What is the memory produced by a national memorial?” Marita Sturken. pp 83.  
Chapter Five: Conclusions

This idea can be directly linked to the preemptive cancellation of the Enola Gay exhibition; Congress and veterans groups did not want the people who visited the National Air and Space Museum to remember the end of the War in the Pacific in the way that academic historians like Martin Harwit viewed it – as part of a larger picture, with consequences that reached far beyond the heroics of the soldiers involved.

Commemorative memorials have traditionally served as a legitimization of a government’s policies, and indeed they have been a part of the public policy of legitimization, especially of a government’s role and policies connected to war. It is the policy that is specifically aimed at future impressions of history. By creating heroic images, commemorative memorials serve to glorify fighting in wars that ostensibly preserve the values and institutions of one’s nation, making it noble and honorable to fight in future wars and make similar sacrifices. Such memorials, according to G. Kurt Piehler, press even the dead into national service in order to create an official memory of a conflict. However, commemorative artwork of the latter quarter of the twentieth century in many ways seems to de-legitimize a government’s war policy in particular; that is, they make war less palatable. The Linen Hall Library’s Troubled Images exhibition, the original Enola Gay exhibition at the National Air and Space Museum, the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, and the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum all have a distinctly anti-war and anti-violence message. The message gleaned from these

18 Marita Sturken. pp 63.
19 Ibid. pp 83-84.
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memorials is that war no longer represents glory and honor; now it represents the human cost, the victims, and the consequences. All four of these commemorative works are designed to make the viewer think; they are meant to be contemplated with regard to the legitimacy of the use of force and its consequences. The government made efforts to block such interrogation by canceling the original Enola Gay exhibition and by adding Hart’s statue of the three servicemen to the Vietnam Veterans Memorial.

The Vietnam Veterans Memorial and the Holocaust Memorial Museum, as well as the Troubled Images exhibition are all successful in their efforts at creating a contemplative atmosphere because they personalize the experience. The viewer is always reflected as potentially being a part of the conflict, whether it be through the “passport” one uses as a guide through the Holocaust Museum, or the reflective mirror quality of the black granite of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial. Troubled Images likewise involves the viewer as a potential participant because it is an exhibition of propaganda posters. The posters are meant to persuade the viewer, whoever he or she may be, wherever, whenever. Thus by looking at the posters, the viewer is in the same position as anyone who might have seen those very same posters up to thirty years before. The designers of the Enola Gay exhibition perhaps attempted to accomplish the same task by highlighting the consequences of nuclear warfare, but government policy regarding commemoration has never been one to incorporate self-criticism, and thus the exhibition was cancelled before it could have that effect.

Another aspect of the three successful commemoration projects that has made them so admired is viewer response. Word-of-mouth is a powerful tool in artistic endeavors, and when reactions to a certain exhibition or monument are positive, more
people will flock to it, and thus more people will be able to contemplate the artistic representation. Once again, art is an expressive medium directed at the emotions. Good art is art that is able to connect with the viewer through contemplation. Viewer response to the Vietnam Veterans Memorial has been so positive that it has become the most visited memorial in the United States, while the Holocaust Memorial Museum is one of the most active museums in Washington, DC. The Troubled Images exhibition attracted viewers from all over the world, including former President Bill Clinton, and received generally glowing reviews from those that viewed the exhibit.\textsuperscript{22} Visitor reaction to contemplative memorial projects has been generally positive, exemplified not only by reactions to Troubled Images, the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, and the Holocaust Memorial Museum, but also eventually to such memorials in other countries, such as the Monument Against Fascism, War and Violence – and For Peace and Human Rights, erected in Harburg, Germany in 1986 to commemorate the horrors of World War II. (See Figure 10)\textsuperscript{23} It was designed to “involve its audience:”

The memorial consisted of a pillar 12 metres high and one meter square, made of hollow aluminum plated with a thin layer of soft lead….The artists encouraged passers-by to write their names on the lead surface, testifying to their opposition to fascism and violence. The pillar was designed to be gradually lowered through the ground into the chamber below. While it sank, the upper areas made space for more names, which in turn would slowly disappear. … A temporary inscription near the base said: “We invite the citizens of Harburg and visitors to the town to add their names here to ours. In doing so, we commit ourselves to remain vigilant. … One day [the monument] will have disappeared completely, and the site of the Harburg monument against fascism will be empty. In the end it is only ourselves who can rise up against injustice.”\textsuperscript{24}

\textsuperscript{23} Toby Clark. pp 122-123
\textsuperscript{24} Ibid. pp 121-122.
The designers of the monument did not want “an enormous pedestal with something on it telling people what they ought to think.” 25 Rather people were to add their own thoughts to the memorial.

The contemplative nature of the monument in Germany can be likened to that of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, DC as well as the Washington Monument. Neither of them tells the viewers “what they ought to think.” This freedom of interpretation is directly linked to the abstract nature of the memorials. The more abstract the design, the more the viewer has to contemplate the message. A realist representation is apparently much easier to interpret, and thus more quickly absorbed. It is less complicated to detect, and it excludes alternative interpretations on a quick viewing. An abstract monument or memorial, however, presents a more ambiguous message. It may be favorable, and it may not be – it is left up to the viewer to determine.

This is not to say, though, that more realist memorials cannot be contemplative. There are several examples of realistic memorials that inspire deliberation and reflection – the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum is one of them, and the realist memorials added to the Vietnam Veterans Memorial also inspire thought in the viewer. However, abstract nature of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial enables it to conjure different emotions in different viewers. The abstraction of the memorial, and especially its tactile and mirror aspects, draw the viewer into an unexplainable black void. He or she is not given an easy answer to the questions raised by the memorial, and thus further contemplation is necessary. The emotional effect of an abstract memorial is not as easily explained away as it could be if it were a realist design. The purpose of such

25 Ibid.
contemplative memorials, however, is not to devalue the efforts of those who fought and
died in violent conflicts, but rather to contemplate the government’s decision to get
involved (or not to get involved). The deliberation of such previous choices made by the
government can then be compared to current situations in order to take possibly more
informed actions. However, it is easier and more common to create a less interrogative
memorial with more realistic and easily recognizable figures. That is, it is easier to create
“an enormous pedestal with something on it telling people what they ought to think.”

It can be said that the impact of an exhibition, compared to that of a memorial, is
weaker because of the fact that it is temporary. However, the impact of such
commemorative displays like Troubled Images and The Last Act is not lessened by their
temporality. Rather such temporality restricts their ability to have an impact on as many
people as possible. The permanence of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial and the
Holocaust Memorial Museum translates into the ability to have the interpretations of their
respective events remain a part of the nation’s permanent collective memory – their
images cannot be changed, altered, or cancelled. Exhibitions, however, can be, even
before they are launched.

Exhibitions, though, can affect the view collective memory takes of certain
events, and be the catalyst to a reinterpretation, which may or may not be what is desired
by the state. This is apparently what happened to the Enola Gay exhibition – it tried to
critically evaluate the role the atomic bomb had in ending World War II, and though it
was cancelled, it fueled a strong debate. The Troubled Images exhibition likewise appears
to have been a catalyst to communication between at least some of the civilians living in
Belfast, encouraging communication between those situated on different sides of the
conflict. If the exhibitions had been permanent, like the Vietnam Veterans Memorial and the Holocaust Museum, then they would provide constant provocation to critical thought. The impact of Troubled Images and The Last Act, however, has lasted long after the exhibitions were closed. Several books and articles regarding The Last Act have been written, and Troubled Images, after producing a CD-ROM and book, has an impending two-year tour of the United States. Though the physical exhibitions are temporary, their commemorative effect and thought provoking intent can last much longer, even in the case of an exhibition that never opened.

As visual representations, commemorative projects unfortunately cannot include all interpretations of events. The ideal would be to have more memorials that provoke a thoughtful look into and the consequences of violent actions that have ensured our current state of well being. However, the issue is still one of how much we want to recognize and take responsibility for. In 1973, author Ursula Le Guin wrote a short story entitled The Ones Who Walk Away From Omelas. The story tells the tale of the city of Omelas, a utopian society that has no need for soldiers, war, the bomb, kings, slaves, clergy, pain, or, especially, guilt. However, their constant state of joy and prosperity comes at a price: one child is kept locked in a closet, barely fed or visited, living a subhuman existence:

They all know it is there, all the people of Omelas. Some of them have come to see it, others are content merely to know it is there. They all know that it has to be there. Some of them understand why, and some do not, but they all understand that their happiness, the beauty of their city, the tenderness of their friendships, the

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26 Yvonne Murphy, interviewed by Mitra Keykhah.
health of their children … depend wholly on this child’s abominable misery.  

Some of those who come to see the child, however, experience such disgust at its position that they leave the city of Omelas; no one knows where they go. No one who remains in Omelas, however, proposes taking the child out of its misery, because then the society would begin to feel guilt for its actions.

I liken this story to the remaining inability to have more wartime memorials like the Vietnam Veterans Memorial and the Holocaust Memorial Museum that make us think about the consequences of our actions (or lack of action) in war. In many cases, we have yet to even acknowledge the existence of “the child in the closet,” the atrocities we have committed ourselves or allowed to happen elsewhere in order to ensure our current prosperity. Contrary to Renan’s opinion, I believe that knowledge and recognition of both the heroics and the mistakes of war will build a stronger nation, especially in a democratic and multicultural society as our own. The ideals of freedom of expression and thought should be upheld by the way that the government presents history through commemorative works of art.

Visual art has been and will be used as government propaganda because of its ability to impact the way people view the government and its policies quickly and directly. Government policies regarding commemorative art, therefore, should endeavor to direct collective memory to the larger picture of the necessities and consequences of violent conflict in order to create a more educated public. That is, a broader view of history should be propagated in the collective memory; the government should, in a sense, “democratize” its official view of history. The “official” version of history in the

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28 Ibid. pp 282.
United States should be one in which the heterogeneity of our nation is taken into account. This is not, however, the same as a forced consensus, in which forgetting certain events and their consequences is encouraged. Such an “enforced consensus” would not be in keeping with the ideals of freedom for which we ostensibly fight our wars. Some of this type of democratization is starting to happen in commemorative art: more and more memorials being dedicated to the victims of conflicts. Unfortunately, no memorial sculpture, museum or exhibition will ever be “complete,” but government policy towards building such monuments and memorials should endeavor to “always remember…and…never forget.”

Memorials and commemorative exhibitions that are planned in the future, therefore, should be either more abstract in design, and thus more open to personal interpretation of events, or include (in the exhibition) as many artifacts from as many sides of the conflict as possible. In both cases, those who come to view the memorials will thus be able to see a broader picture of history. In this way, Wilson and Sivan’s term “collective remembrance” is more appropriate than “collective memory.” Collective remembrance involves a more active and thinking public, whereas collective memory can be constructed and absorbed passively. By encouraging citizens to think about both the heroics and the consequences of our actions in violent conflict, the art of commemorative war memorials can begin to separate itself from the “sinister ring” of propaganda and blind acceptance and move towards a more open and interpretive public contemplation of events.

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Figure 2: Italian anti-American poster, by Gino Buccasile (ca. 1942)
Figure 3: Allied poster by G.K. Odell (ca. 1942)
Figure 4: Troubled Images: Posters of the Northern Ireland Conflict Postcard, Linen Hall Library, Belfast, Northern Ireland, 2001
Figure 6: The Vietnam Veterans Memorial
by Maya Lin, 1982
The Three Soldiers/Servicemen
by Frederick Hart, 1984
Washington, DC
Figure 8: Interior of the Hall of Remembrance, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, opened 1993, Washington, DC
Figure 10: Monument Against Fascism, War and Violence – and for Peace and Human Rights, Harburg, Germany by Jochen Gerz and Esther Shalev-Gerz, 1986.