

TEMPO

SPOTLIGHT

Monuments built to inspire, to enlighten, to challenge

This monthly feature serves to explain the efforts now under way to replace the Civil War Monument and Statue of Fame that mark the earliest days of Sewickley Cemetery.

This effort is borne by Citizens for Soldiers, a group of dedicated residents of the Sewickley Valley, but the success of this project is dependent upon the support of all of the people of the valley.

"Poor is the nation having no heroes. Shameful is the one having them that forgets."

~ Unknown

The "conflict" in Iraq rekindles within many of us memories of previous wars and brings to light the fragility of our existence.

As death tolls rise we are forced to confront these issues and concerns, which are not a regular aspect of our day-to-day lives. The sacrifices of so many men and women impact our society as a body, and stir within us a desire to remember and to understand why we need to remember.

Monument building has an extensive history difficult to trace to its origin. Statues, pottery and building foundations excavated from sites dating back thousands of years provide religious, political and practical articles representing different eras and influences. These items give insight into history, social customs and belief systems.

Why were these statues carved and special buildings and monuments constructed?

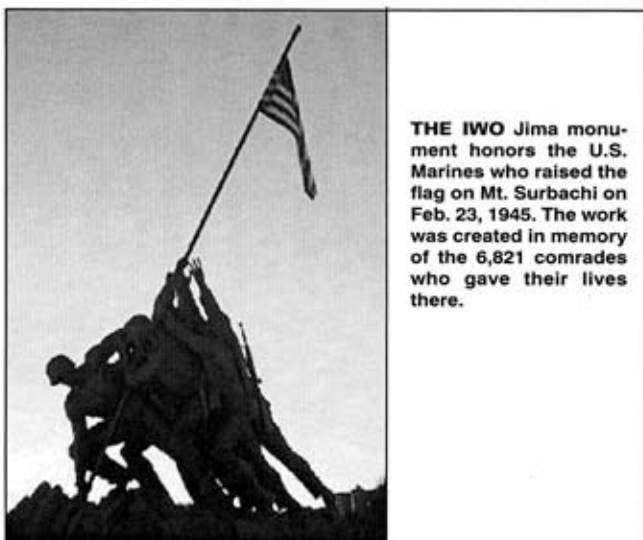
The root of our English word monument is the derivative of the Latin word "monere" which means "to remind."

Monuments freeze in time a moment of history or the fleeting existence of man. They act to perpetuate achievements and memories. Unfortunately, our understanding of these works is more theory than certitude.

A monument can be conceived as something specific, meant to have an "intentional" impact.

According to Alois Riegl, they are "erected for the specific purpose of keeping single human deeds, and/or events, alive in the minds of future generations."

Monuments also can be more subjective in nature while still being associated with a specific memory. Open to our modern perceptions, these monuments carry an "unintentional" impact; we attribute different meanings to a single memorial.



THE IWO Jima monument honors the U.S. Marines who raised the flag on Mt. Surbachi on Feb. 23, 1945. The work was created in memory of the 6,821 comrades who gave their lives there.

Collective memories of specific events are supported by a group and defined in time. The shared recollections give a monument its authority, enabling an artist to fuse events and emotions into a universal form that can be appreciated by many.

Some see the beauty and elegance of a monument while not understanding the social or political impact, while others are not affected by the art so much as the event commemorated. This type of diversity generates the controversy that arises concerning the acceptance of many monuments.

War memorials are of particular significance within a society's collective conscious and unconscious awareness. Their mere physical presence places them in the mainstream of daily life.

Not only do they record the names of those who died, but monuments present particular versions of people and events; they can give validation to a war or to the sacrifices made.

Many of these memorials have a tendency to convey the general public's approval or support, which may or may not exist. The value structure of the society, its history and a physical affirmation of its goals are made tangible.

Monuments commemorating wars and conflicts from the past, as well as those to individuals involved, are numerous.

National Parks protect and maintain

many large sites but these reminders are present on city and school malls as well as being found in cemeteries and on public grounds. They can stir up debates and dissension because of the history they are there to remind us of — evoking pride, anger, shame, hope, pity, grief and for some, fear.

Monuments are works of art to be appreciated for their aesthetic value and prized for their craftsmanship. They can also be harbingers of social, political and religious change.

In our own country, as well as many others, monuments are often the objects of vandalism. Defacing these memorials, as a form of protest, has nominal effect in arousing support for one's cause.

Gettysburg was the target of vandals armed with oil, which was poured over a number of monuments. Fifteen Vicksburg monuments and artillery pieces were spray-painted in January of this year. Efforts to repair the damage cost \$10,000 and have not been successful in removing all the paint.

Deliberate, malicious damage done to these memorials and monuments is a violation. It speaks of intolerance and an arrogance of mind that demonstrates a lack of humility within our society.

Monuments, as noted, are placed as reminders, not infallible statements of truth but testaments to memory and

recorded history, which are fallible. They can never be other than a reflection of a group's collective memory and those memories can not reproduce history, only reconstruct it.

In light of this, their use as vehicles for advancing social, political or religious agendas puts them at risk, not only for vandalism, but also for dismissal.

As witnessed in Afghanistan, the Taliban's efforts to destroy all religious idols in the country has resulted in the irrevocable destruction of numerous pieces of ancient sculpture.

Two Buddhist statues, which stood 165 feet tall, built around the second century, have been demolished. Appeals for their preservation made by 11 countries, including Pakistan and the United Nations (UNESCO), plus the offer to purchase them, made by the New York City's Metropolitan Museum, had no effect in dissuading the Taliban.

Their reason: "They are only objects made of mud or stone."

Books can be reprinted and cities can be rehabilitated but these markers to history around the world can never be restored.

Here in the United States, the University of Texas has been struggling to address the controversy surrounding statues located on the school's mall of Jefferson Davis, Robert E. Lee, John H. Reagan and Albert Sidney Johnston — all members of the Confederacy.

There are those who would have the statues removed because they are "disturbed by the past they represent," and believe these objects reinforce the idea of slavery as acceptable and perpetuate racism.

Another Confederate statue in Colleton County, S.C., has aroused similar debates and is also at risk of being removed from its public location.

The opposing viewpoint: Removing the monument dishonors the dead by judging them and applying a label they do not deserve.

We can not simply ignore the offense others perceive in these monuments. Many of the issues are real for us today.

In these highly controversial debates concerning the removal of a memorial there is rarely a clear right or wrong.

The problems arise from the competing versions of collective memory. The fact that these inanimate objects have the power to challenge our way of seeing and thinking, encourages us to look beyond the barriers we have erected, and begin to reevaluate our values and

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belief systems.

Despite the many complex issues surrounding memorials, they can instill pride, give a sense of belonging, and connect us to our past.

Should we stop using them as reminders because we no longer notice or understand the ones we pass every day? We deprive ourselves of something important as we continue to drift away from these reminders.

Isn't it time to stop, reflect, remember and honor the monuments around us?

Throughout the world, people have always recorded their presence in some form.

While memories are colored by time and retelling, they are an integral part of every individual and are therefore uniquely interpreted and stored.

Memorials and monuments, like all other art forms, illustrate and hold immortal our past and present while

continuing to record the constant transformations going on within and around us.

Perhaps this is why we need to revisit those places that remind us of where we have been; and to reconsider our investment in preserving and maintaining the monuments and memorials that give us a hold on who we are as a people, as a nation, and as a world.

Tax-deductible donations may be sent to: Citizens for Soldiers, Fame Fund, P. O. Box 293, Sewickley, PA 15143.

No Donation is too small or too large.

Citizens for Soldiers is a Pennsylvania not-for-profit organization. It has a 501(c)(3) designation from the IRS.

The committee meets the third Wednesday of each month and welcomes your interest and support

Visit www.CitizensForSoldiers.org, or call 412-980-6013.