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## **(Re)Writing History: Public Memories of the Holocaust, Vietnam War, and American Civil Rights Movement**

Lauren Braun

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# **(Re)Writing History: Public Memories of Japanese Internment Camps, the Vietnam War, and American Civil Rights Movement**

A Capstone Project Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements of the Renée Crown University Honors Program at Syracuse University

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## ABSTRACT

Interest in the study of public memories has been growing in recent years, particularly after Maurice Halbwachs introduced the concept of collective memory in *La mémoire collective*. Differing from personal memory, collective memory focuses on the memories shared by a larger group or society, which are then used to form ideas and narratives about our pasts. It creates a connection to past events for those who were not there to actually experience it. Public memory enters into the social conscience when there is some event or time period that needs to be remembered, and can be found in a variety of forms—books, museums, public spaces, films, and monuments. Although Pierre Nora asserts that memories are stabilized and rooted in physical spaces such as archives, libraries, or monuments, recent other studies have added film to the lists of sites of public memory. It is not a spontaneous occurrence; public memory is deliberately created, which has two implications. First, public memories have intentions behind them, and secondly, as a created remembrance, they require maintenance on the part of the society to which they belong in order to survive. Unlike official history, public memories are open to a multitude of interpretations and may well change over time. They can have a significant impact on history though, and have the potential to create or alter past accounts of “official” history. This paper examines the ways in which public memories of the Japanese internment camps, Vietnam War, and American Civil Rights Movement have been created and changed over time, through studying the existing public memories of these times.

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## INTRODUCTION

An identity is created under a variety of influences. The great debate over which has a stronger influence, nature or nurture, highlights two of the most commonly thought of factors in the foundation of a person's identity. Regardless of whether one believes in the strength of one over the other, another important, sometimes overlooked, aspect is memory. Consciously or subconsciously, the way past events are remembered affect reactions to similar situations. This can be simply understood with the example of a child who touches a red-hot stovetop burner. Most likely, he or she will remember the pain the next time a similar burner is encountered, and based on this memory, the burner will remain untouched. Of course, this is a very simplistic explanation; memory is more far-reaching than a simple behavioral response. Lifelong opinions and beliefs may be shaped around memories, creating long-lasting effects. For not only does memory affect the individual owner, but it can be passed on to others and shared with future generations.

Public memory takes this idea of how individual memories form an individual's identity and applies it to a larger body. That is, the public memories shared by a society can be used in a similar way to create a national identity. Public memory does not overtly influence all aspects of life, but is available to be drawn upon when necessary, which is part of its power; as Edward Casey states, "a large part of the very power of public memory resides in its capacity to be for

the most part located at the edge of our lives, hovering, ready to be invoked or revised, acted upon or merely contemplated” (37). Public memory is pervasive without being invasive, surrounding us through commemorative statues, monuments, media, and the naming of common landmarks. Not simply an existing phenomenon, public memory can be used and manipulated to encourage a specific belief or understanding of events in the past.

This thesis focuses on the ways in which the American public memory has been crafted to highlight those aspects of United States historical events that are honorable and receive pride and patriotism, while diverting attention from those less than admirable histories. However, these “forgotten” histories are incredibly significant to ensuring that as our nation progresses, we do not repeat past transgressions. Much like many German schools taking care to teach German children about the Holocaust to prevent its reoccurrence, American mistakes should be brought to light in order to learn from them.

In particular, I focus on three areas of our national history: World War II, the Vietnam War, and the Civil Rights Movement. Upon entering World War II in 1941, the United States was a part of the Allied Forces, fighting against the Axis powers, including Nazi Germany and Imperial Japan. The American liberation of concentration camps such as Dachau and Buchenwald gave the impression of a country fighting for freedom and democracy against the tyrannical, genocidal rule of leaders like Adolf Hitler. While this was without a doubt a major part of the United States involvement in World War II, we often fail to recognize our

own similar internment camps created to separate those of Japanese descent living in the western United States.

The Vietnam War, never formally declared, is a situation which remains controversial nearly forty years after it ended. Throughout the duration of the war and in the years since, the American public has been divided over how to treat it. As President Johnson's decision to enter Vietnam was so unpopular at the time, and we were ultimately unsuccessful in our campaign, it is difficult to find a way to remember a time that cannot be celebrated. As a result, it was years after the end of the Vietnam War that any form of national recognition was instituted.

The Civil Rights Movement may seem an unusual area to highlight; after all, it was full of advances towards equality in American society, which are rightfully commemorated through days of recognition as well as a national memorial. Once again, however, the public memory of the Civil Rights Movement focuses on the great moments and leaders, while failing to recognize others. Another reason I focus on the Civil Rights Movement is its similar timeline with the Vietnam War and Cold War; these events occurred in the same approximate time frame, yet are rarely studied in proximity with each other. In part, the disparities between the receptions of each time frequently lead to their separation when discussed.

One of the qualities of public memory is that it is constantly subject to change. We can revise and edit them to be more inclusive of our history. It is not

set in stone, as evidenced by the recent controversy over Simkins Hall at the University of Texas, named for a Ku Klux Klan organizer. After awareness was raised of his Klan affiliations, pressure mounted against the university to rename the building so as not to honor a man with such a negative history. This serves as just one small example of the ever-changing nature of public memory. With a more critical lens, as UT law professor Thomas Russell showed, we can gain a more complete public memory that includes the officially sanctioned memories along with those originating in smaller, less dominant communities.

The three aforementioned times in the history of the United States have a selective public memory that drastically decreases the knowledge of these events. Without a change to add lesser known memories to the existing public memory, some of these aspects may become lost. Considering the power of public memory to shape the future of a society, this could have long-lasting implications for our culture.



## MEMORY AND PUBLIC MEMORY

The main focus of this paper is on that of American public memory.

Before covering that, it is important to understand how memories in general function within a public. The easiest form of memory to understand is that of an individual's memory, what each person can singularly remember from his or her own past experiences. These personal memories that an individual can form and hold in his or her own, singular self are easily understood because we can find countless examples of such memories within ourselves. However, memory cannot be conceived of as simply an individual process. Indeed, Barbie Zelizer notes that memory is seen increasingly as "as a social activity, accomplished not in the privacy of one's own gray matter but via shared consciousness with others" (Zelizer 215). Edward Casey identifies three other more interactive forms of memory, moving beyond the individual into memories held by groups of people as a whole.

Casey highlights social memory, collective memory, and finally public memory. Social memory is contained in a group in which the members sharing a particular memory already know each other. They may be connected through being related or living in the same area; what distinguishes a group sharing social memory is that they are not strangers to one another. Collective memory arises when a group of people with no prior connection recall the same event. In this case, the identity of those remembering is unimportant; with collective memory,

the focus of the memory itself outweighs the importance of the experience of remembering it. That is, the most important aspect of collective memory is the content of the memory, what is actually being remembered. Public memory, finally, occurs in the open, is up for discussion and as a result, revision. As its name suggests, it is shared between the entire public of a society. Public memory can often act in subtle ways. It affects much of our lives, even if we only fully acknowledge it in times of celebration or emergency. The rest of the time, our public memory is still influencing how we see and react to the world around us. Not only does public memory shape our current lives, but its ability to change over time allows public memory to be useful to subsequent generations as it is passed on.

Public memory does not simply appear without any effort behind it. Much like gender and beauty standards are socially created, public memory is intentionally constructed. It highlights what a society considers to be important; after all, it would be odd to make the effort to remember something that was not important. As Keval J. Kumar succinctly states, “that which we remember, we usually take to be important, personally or socially” (216-7). A public memory cannot be formed from the single memory of an individual. It comes instead from an “amalgam of several sources” (Teer-Tomaselli 227) that are combined and shared with one another to form a consensus. When multiple memories can be combined and corroborated, a more accurate public memory is formed and solidified. By comparing memories against others of the same event, an

individual can validate his or her own memory. We can see how a public memory develops by examining “what aspects of the past are remembered and how they are remembered and interpreted” (Shackel 655). This analysis can reveal not only what events were considered to be the most important ones, but how they are remembered can uncover the underlying intent behind that public memory.

Without a doubt, there is purpose behind public memories, whether they are immediately obvious or not. As James E. Young states, “the motives of memory are never pure” (2); they are created with to serve a purpose beyond simply remembering an event. Public memory becomes a tool used to further a particular agenda. Rather than creating public memory based on past events, Zelizer claims that we have made the past “a product of our collective memory” (218), such that we can selectively edit our past through the public memories created. More dominant memories may come at the expense of another group’s memory, leaving that minority to be underrepresented. The ability to control the dominant public memory brings with it great power; as Shackel states, “public memory can be viewed as tactical power that controls social settings” (665). This power over social settings has the potential to lead to a hegemonic state in which those who have the power to create and control public memory can write the past in a way that most benefits them. Thus, forming one public memory is a very powerful ability; while a history remains contested, a group cannot unify behind one response to it. As David Blight said, “historical memory...was not merely an entity altered by the passage of time; it was the prize in a struggle

between rival versions of the past” (Shackel 660). The struggle to create the dominant public memory is fostered by a need to “win” history, for, as the saying goes, history is written by the winners.

Why is it so important to maintain a public memory of the past, as opposed to keeping memories private and personal? Public memory ensures that lessons from the past are not forgotten when those who learned them are no longer able to remind us themselves. It goes beyond simply remembering what happened in the past to guaranteeing that the past is brought into the future. Carrying public memories in the minds of many protects them from being lost to time. Maurice Halbwachs, who pioneered the field of collective memory studies, stated that memory “retains from the past only what still lives or is capable of living in the consciousness of the groups keeping the memory alive” (140). Public memory cannot be kept alive without the conscious effort of the society; without their involvement, memories would not be preserved. Multiple scholars have stated that public memories are not solely restricted to the past; they encapsulate the past while advising the public on the future (Casey 17, Teer-Tomaselli 241, Jorgensen-Earp 151). We are able to take the lessons from public memories of our predecessors and apply them to not only the current social situation but our personal lives. Anna Reading sums up the purpose of remembering well when asking

“surely one of the reasons for remembering what happened is to enable reflection on how to prevent further atrocities by teaching

the history and memory of events in ways that enable people to make connections between the past and their own lives, actions, and responsibilities?" (69)

Once a public memory emerges, it must then find a way to be sustained. True individual memories only endure as long as that individual is alive and retains the information. However, they can be sustained through the many different forms of public memory available. Memorials and monuments are two very obvious and traditional such examples of physical forms of public memory. These memorials could take the form of archives, libraries, museums, or statues, which Pierre Nora lists as some of the "most symbolic objects of our memory" (149). The very act of building a memorial or monument provides a recognition or commemoration of a specific past event, be it tragic or triumphant. Physical forms of public memory are valuable for different reasons; in particular they provide a specific site for people to come to in order to remember the commemorated event. Particularly beneficial when that which is being commemorated is a national event or took place outside of the country, as is the case with most wars, these memorials give the public a place to come to remember, and even share memories with others. As Nora states, the sites where memories are held must be vigilantly maintained, lest the memories become lost (149). Having a defined place for this memorial helps to ensure its longevity, from which public memory "receives an anchor from which it cannot easily drift" (Zelizer 219).

Some argue that creating a monument allows us to forget the event itself, instead choosing to relegate the responsibility of remembering to the structure itself. However, it is more difficult to simply leave behind a memory at a monument. The memories are not held within the edifice, the monument interacts with its visitors to preserve the memories elicited by their experience with the memorial. This interaction depends in large part on the actions of the viewer, yet without the meanings given to the monuments by those remembering, the structures themselves do not hold any meaning. Even if one does not actively engage with a memorial, the simple act of thinking about what is being memorialized invites an interaction with the edifice. Not only do the viewers interact with the memorials to give them meaning, but they use their own reactions to the memorials to respond “to their own world in light of a memorialized past” (Young ix). That is, they are able to use memories from the past to understand their current world with a more thorough background.

Pierre Nora gives the name *lieux de mémoire* to those sites where “an immense and intimate fund of memory disappears, surviving only as a reconstituted object beneath the gaze of critical history” (149). These are places where the immediate memories of an event are lost with those who experienced it, but the memories become crystallized and sustained through memorials. Most often, these physical forms of public memory are used to commemorate past accomplishments. This is unsurprising, as no justification is needed to explain why these events are being honored. After all, public monuments have

the power to “sacralize individuals, places, and ideas” (Jorgensen-Earp 151); why would we not want to celebrate our past successes? More difficult to understand or justify is the construction of monuments recognizing defeats, or acts which do not reflect American values such as freedom or democracy. Generally, attention is usually drawn away from failures, rather than towards it. With the notable exception of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, it can commonly be assumed that “the events or individuals selected for commemoration are necessarily heroic or, at the very least, untainted” (Wagner-Pacifici 379).

At the same time as physical locations and monuments provide a site and physical form of public memory, newer media are offering other ways to preserve memories. Despite not having the same physical qualities as monuments, media such as film or photographs can serve as cultural memorials. Media forms of memory, although unable to provide a site for people to physically congregate, nevertheless can have a similar affect for “imagined communities,” Benedict Anderson’s concept of communities formed without face-to-face contact (Anderson 6). Widely circulated through newspapers, magazines, television, and more recently, the Internet, these media memories are easily accessible to nearly all. When media memories are so publicly disseminated, they bring their subject into a shared space where anyone can use them to remember. This is particularly true of memories in media with greater circulation or covering a wider area, but a community can always form through interactions such as letters to editors or message boards on the Internet. What

sets media memories apart from physical ones is that they “do not age nor can they be erased or forgotten” (Kaes 315), unlike physical monuments that can weather or be damaged through vandalism, losing their original meaning. While Kaes goes on to state that films have begun to take on the role of public memory previously held by physical monuments, this statement goes too far towards films replacing physical forms of public memory. Rather, I would argue that media are coming to share the role of holding public memory with physical monuments, with both serving as sites for people to join in sharing memories of a particular event. While both monuments and media allow people to congregate to share memories, films have a much more overt way of directing the emotions of the audience a particular direction in comparison with monuments.

While monuments enhance the public memory of an event through commemorating it, through sculpture, words, and other forms, media can provide a more direct memory of a past event. They serve as an “aid to the act of recollection by virtue of the fact that [they] facilitate access to group memory” (Zelizer 233). Through pictures, film, or audio, an audience can be drawn into the remembered past, making it a more real experience. Giving a more personal feel to the memories assists in making the memory seem like an individual memory rather than public. For example, the iconic photograph of the sailor kissing the nurse in celebration of the Allies victory over Japan, and the end of World War II, personalizes the emotions felt by the country and provides faces for any and all



who see the photograph to absorb the spontaneous joy and feel as if they were there, even for those who were not yet born.

The benefits of media creating public memories are many, but caution should still be used when referencing media as public memories; they are easily manipulated in ways that may make them more appealing or commercial yet detract from their historical accuracy. In some instances, particularly in films, well-known images are used in conjunction with the fictionalized setting and characters to validate the reality of the story. The juxtaposition of recognizable historical images with the fabricated story line “implicitly validates the historical correctness” (Kaes 312), which can easily alter the way a past event is remembered in subsequent years. Films centered on historical events can be particularly controversial when “computer enhanced and computer generated images” are used, or fictional scenes are spliced with archival footage (Burgoyne 222), making it difficult to distinguish the real footage from the scripted footage. Kaes highlights this in his discussion of the *Holocaust* television series from 1978, criticized by many, including Elie Wiesel, an Auschwitz survivor. The combination of footage of concentration camps with actors made Wiesel fear that fictionalized accounts would overshadow and obliterate a factual history, eventually coming to replace the reality with a simulation (Kaes 312).

Robert Burgoyne also notes the way films create the impression of a real interaction between the characters and “actual historical figures and events” (224) through creative editing, effectively transforming the actual event. In

*Forrest Gump*, for example, we see Tom Hanks' character interacting with President John F. Kennedy, John Lennon, and witnessing Governor Wallace's attempt to prevent black students from enrolling at the University of Alabama. The effect of embedding Gump into historical footage deliberately rewrote "the social and historical past in a way that dovetailed with conservative and reactionary political movements" (Burgoyne 231). So, while the film ostensibly was an unbiased overview of the baby boomer generation, a closer viewing can reveal an underlying agenda. With examples like *Holocaust* and *Forrest Gump*, it is no wonder that Thomas Elsaesser believes that "future generations, looking at the history of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, will never be able to tell fact from fiction, having the media as material evidence" (Burgoyne 233-4). Similarly, we cannot be sure of the realities of ancient life based solely on narratives such as the *Iliad* or *Odyssey*.

Not only can media be engineered to modify historical realities, but they can be produced in ways that blur the line between what is fact and what is fiction. As popular films can frequently be used as a reference of what the state of the country was at a particular time in our history, their ability to either bend the truth of the past or only present a particular viewpoint of events can skew future understandings of history to the point where the historical recreations are believed to be factually accurate representations. Over time, Hollywood has addressed many aspects of the past that are known of yet are complicated beyond the average person's understanding, from slavery to political

assassinations to Vietnam. These films “pose a series of questions...about the nature of popular film and its function as an appropriate or ‘authentic’ memory text” (Grainge 4). Of course, the film industry is just that, an industry, needing to make a profit, but should concessions be made to the fact that these films are supposedly representing history accurately? When films or television shows are supposed to be accurate portrayals of history, it can be difficult for the audience to determine which aspects are factual and which are created for the sake of the story. It becomes necessary to find a balance between “appealing to the historical knowledge or memory of the viewer and [being] to a certain extent verifiable” and “taking liberties with historical facts for the sake of storytelling” (Kaes 310-311). Films covering lengthy time periods, wars for example, commonly skim over the hours of waiting and focus in on the exciting battle sequences. This is in no way surprising, yet it can paint a different image of what war (continuing with this example) was like for the soldiers. Hollywood has the goal of being as true to the past they are recreating as possible, while still telling a story that is compelling enough to draw an audience. This lack of distinction between film and the true history also can come about when a film is “based on a true story.” Often, when this statement precedes a film, the subsequent story is believed to be a fairly honest rendering of what really happened, yet the audience has no way of truly knowing how exact it is.

It is not only an uninformed audience who is subject to the influence of these fictionalized accounts of the past. A study by Elisabeth Loftus found that

eyewitness testimony could be affected if they received additional information between their witnessing an event and recounting it (Storey 103). So even if someone lived through an event which they later watched a film or television show depicting, the fictionalized account of it could be confused with their actual memories. As Vietnam veteran William Adams said, “what ‘really’ happened is now so thoroughly mixed up in my mind with what has been said about what happened that the pure experience is no longer there” (Storey 104).

The manipulation of public memory is not restricted simply to changing the actual memories of past events. Not only are media able to alter memories, but memories can actually be created in such a way that they seem to be individual memories, despite not having been actually experienced by the one “remembering.” Alison Landsberg coined the phrase “prosthetic memories” to refer to those memories that people remember but did not personally experience, truly seeing through another’s eyes (“Prosthetic memory” 156). The term “prosthetic” highlights these memories condition of being inauthentic to the person, yet they are still able to be used by that individual as if they were their own. Those using prosthetic memories can use them to create a bond with the past rather than letting it fade. Halbwachs alluded to this phenomenon of “remembering” activities from the “theater” of his national society, though in reality he knows of the events “only from newspapers or the testimony of those directly involved” (Storey 102). Anton Kaes highlights the ability of films to create public memories, noting that they have created a “technological memory bank

that is shared by everyone” (310). Having these past memories available for general use gives the public the ability to draw on them as if they were their own. More recently, Brian Havel supported Landsberg’s concept when he noted that “official public memory shapes a *mediated* memory of events that have receded...from the immediate experiences of most of the living population of the State...the memory projected by State intervention is...a ‘*borrowed memory*’” (emphasis added, 685).

It has become apparent that not only are memories instilled in those that did not live them, but those memories that become “official public memories” are intended to sustain the institutions upon which cultural leaders depend. Those memories that are selected are chosen to promote a specific image or interpretation of the past, commonly with the intent of promoting the interests of the nation, as decided by its leaders. This capacity to create a national memory is an incredibly powerful ability; according to Paul Shackel, “public memory can be viewed as a tactical power that controls social settings...those who control the past have the ability to command the present and the future” (665). Controlling social settings gives leaders the ability to present an idealized image of the past to gain the most support. This may be done to create a unified memory of the past, which can bring together a society through the common bond of this memory. On a national level, this forms a sense of national pride and patriotism; those sharing in this public memory feel that they are citizens of an admirable country.

This unified memory is accomplished not only through highlighting or praiseworthy deeds, but by intentionally forgetting others, or leaving them out of the commonly shared public memory. Clearly, most of what makes up memory is what is remembered. However, following the theory that things cannot exist without their opposite, memory does not exist simply as remembering, but also as forgetting. That which a nation or its leaders choose to forget reveals a great deal about a society. It can demonstrate its values, ideals, the image they wish to present to the international community, as well as their own residents. Categorically removing a blemish on the national history can allow for a greater unity among its citizens, as “even the faintest sense of what is forgotten or excluded may prove as vital to ensuring the meaning of and unity of national history as the event that is centrally remembered and endlessly repeated” (Simpson 19). Simpson emphasizes the importance of forgetting certain aspects of history in order to concentrate on what we want to remember for years and generations to come. However, it would be unwise to ignore what we allow to slip from our national memory, as it detracts from our understanding and knowledge we could gain from our own history. Or, as Kendall Phillips phrases it, if a healthy public remembers, forgetting is dangerous (4). Forgetting allows a society to whitewash its history to a neat, comfortable past. The many different, often conflicting versions of the past do not support this simplified history. Although many may believe in this linear and

straightforward history, it only occurs when others are left out of the picture (Shackel 657).

The cultural leaders of the United States have used these manipulation tactics in the past to create an idealized version of our national history that presents a cleaner past for us. In multiple instances, the United States has modified our history to reflect a sanitized history. Three in particular will be the focus of this paper: the response to the Japanese bombing of Pearl Harbor, the Vietnam War, and the Civil Rights Movement. Of the many acts during World War II, the internment of all Japanese people on the west coast is easily suppressed. Likewise, American troops were not recognized for their service for years following the final withdrawal from Vietnam in 1975. Though the Civil Rights Movement is a well-known time in the nation's history, the focus tends to rest on just a select few people and events, namely, Martin Luther King, Jr., Rosa Parks, *Roe vs. Wade*, and the Montgomery Bus Boycotts.

## WORLD WAR II JAPANESE INTERNMENT CAMPS



American soldier guard at Tule Lake camp in California (Associated Press)

### Background Information

In 1941, World War II had been underway for two years, although the United States was not yet involved. This all changed December 7, when in the early hours of the morning, the Japanese navy launched a surprise attack on the U.S. naval base at Pearl Harbor in Hawaii. President Franklin Delano Roosevelt signed Executive Order 9066 just over two months later on February 19, requiring that all Japanese people in the United States, regardless of age, gender, or citizenship, were to be relocated into internment camps. In the aftermath of the attack on Pearl Harbor, people feared another surprise strike from those Japanese and their descendents in the United States. There was a widespread



belief in the country that all those of Japanese descent maintained their loyalty to the Empire of Japan, even if they were American citizens that had never been to Japan. Army General DeWitt was a huge proponent of the internment, going so far as to say “the Japanese race is an enemy race and while many second and third generation Japanese born on American soil, possessed of United States citizenship have become ‘Americanized,’ the racial strains are undiluted” (Kang 43). Unfortunately, this was a common belief at the time. Although this Order was challenged in the court system, it was upheld in three cases (*Hirabayashi*, *Yasui*, and *Korematsu*). Of course, the internment of the Japanese did not prevent Japanese-American citizens from being drafted to fight in the war. Interestingly, although the other main countries of the Axis powers had citizens in the United States, Germans and Italians were not subjected to the same treatment as the Japanese were.

It was not until 1982 that the Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment of Civilians was created under Reagan’s administration. They concluded that “broad historical causes which shaped these decisions were race prejudice, war hysteria, and a failure of political leadership” (Kang 44). The Commission’s findings that the internment of the Japanese had no justifiable reasoning cast the entire period of internment in a far-from-positive light. As a result, even though the “internment of Japanese Americans remains an unparalleled act in the history of the nation” (Simpson 1), it has “generally been passed over by historians and scholars of the period, who often fail to mention it

as a watershed event in America's wartime history" (Simpson 7). The lack of attention given to the Japanese internment camps continued until 1988, when President Reagan signed the American Civil Liberties Act of 1988, which formally apologized for the internment as well as granted \$20,000 in reparations to each the surviving internees (Peterson). Despite this Act, the monetary contribution was not a significant amount when considering the immense losses suffered by those moved into internment camps, who lost their homes and entire livelihoods. The money they received is not an equal compensation.

### **Public Memory**

From the beginning of the internment of Japanese-Americans, there has been a distinct lack of attention given to the Japanese internment camps. This is also evident from the length of time it took for any official response from the government, which did not come until forty-six years after Executive Order 9066 was issued.

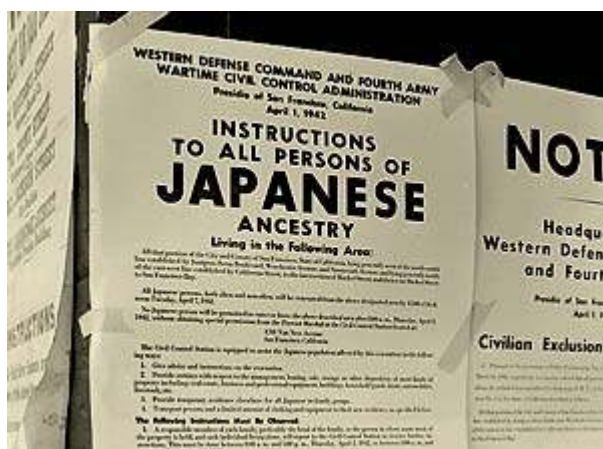
Even at the time of the internment, during World War II, the internment of Japanese-Americans was not given a high priority within our national public memory. Measures were taken to lessen the role they took in our history, not giving the camps a great deal of publicity. Caroline Chung Simpson explains why this occurred:

“Little was written in the popular press about the mass movement of mainland Japanese Americans, primarily because it conflicted with the focus on the more positive and inspirational deeds and causes of the war. The war against the tyranny and oppression of Nazi Germany and Imperial Japan often necessitated portraying the United States as a virtual paragon of democratic virtues.” (9)

Taking into consideration the general perception of the Japanese, both Japanese-Americans as well as those from the Empire of Japan itself, perhaps it should not be surprising that the forcible internment of the Japanese was not a main focus of World War II, especially for the states not immediately affected by it, that is, the states with large Japanese populations or the sites of the internment camps themselves. Simpson’s simple statement of explanation reveals more about the ideology used by the American leaders at the time; it was necessary to portray the United States as a counter-measure to the evil that was Nazi Germany and Imperial Japan. With the use of God and Devil terms (“paragon of democratic virtues” to describe the United States, while “tyranny and oppression” represented Germany and Japan), Simpson demonstrates the need to keep a distinct separation between those in Germany and Japan from those in the United States. Also of note in Simpson’s explanation is that it was only the mainland Japanese Americans that were interned, while those in Hawaii remained at work, despite Hawaii being the actual site of Japan’s original attack.

This one small word, “mainland,” reveals that while the administration was concerned about the possibility of future attacks by the Japanese, they were also concerned with maintaining the production of the Hawaiian economy, allowing Japanese-Americans living in Hawaii to continue their efforts.

What little publicity was given to the internment camps was mostly restricted to the West Coast states, as they were the most immediately affected by the internment camps. It would have been difficult for them not to notice the posters declaring that everyone of Japanese ancestry must leave their homes and move to designated camps, as seen below:



“Oregon’s Japanese Americans Learn Their Fate.” (Image courtesy National Archives, Truman Library)

However, the rest of the country did not have these posters announcing the internment placed around their hometowns. For them, news of the internment camps came from national newspapers such as the *New York Times*, which

published articles that did not reveal the true nature of Executive Order 9066. With words such as “evacuation” instead of “internment,” and claiming that a mass removal may not occur, and definitely would not occur outside of the Pacific coastal states (Wood), these articles downplayed what would come for the Japanese-Americans. The government, through the War Activities Committee of the motion picture industry, also created and released a short propaganda-style film suggesting that the “transfer” was made with careful forethought into the most considerate ways to transfer Japanese-Americans, as well as the fact that their seclusion was for their own safety from being harmed by others. From viewing the film, it is evident that while the Japanese internment was in the public’s focus, it was important that it be told from a positive viewpoint to ensure support for it. The film highlights not only the conscientious help given to the transferred Japanese, but also their supposed willingness and cheerfulness in leaving their homes and businesses behind. The alternative viewpoint from the Japanese however, is apparent in the three cases that upheld the Executive Order, as well as the United Citizens League formed in Los Angeles of American-born Japanese who attempted to prevent the mass internment of the Japanese. One member of the United Citizens League, Kay Sugahara, questioned the real intent behind the Order, saying if the reasoning behind it was “merely a question of fighting politicians that would gain favor by hopping on ‘those defenseless Japs,’ we should fight them to the last ditch” (Davies).

Throughout the time of the internment camps, which were not all closed until 1946, and since then, the public memory of the camps has been problematic. During the internment, the administration attempted to promote a positive image of the internment when it was in the national attention immediately after President Roosevelt signed Executive Order 9066. It remained a troubling time in our national history and public memory because of the parallels that can be drawn between the Japanese internment and the Nazi concentration camps. As the German Nazis were one of the biggest powers of the Axis, which the United States as part of the Allies fought against, denoting this similarity could have been extremely detrimental to support for the United States, particularly in light of the horrific toll the Nazi concentration camps had in Europe. Interestingly, historians recognize the United States' internment of Japanese-Americans as an "unparalleled act in the history of the nation" (Simpson 1), yet "the several superb accounts of the internment...have been generally passed over by historians and scholars of the period, who often fail to even mention it as a watershed event in America's wartime history" (Simpson 7). So, while the internment is known of by many Americans, it is more of an abstract knowledge, rather than a deep understanding of the details and experiences of the camps. This allows for the government to manage the public memory of the Japanese internment; they acknowledge it happened, but avoid any details and prevent it from taking a high priority role in our history.

More recently, the National Japanese American Memorial Foundation (NJAMF) has begun to counter the suppression of the Japanese internment, making efforts to return the experiences of interned Japanese-Americans into the public eye in a more detailed way. In 1988, the Foundation, then known as the “Go For Broke” National Veterans Association Foundation, initiated the efforts to create a public memorial to the Japanese internment. Not only recognizing the fact of the internment, the NJAMF wanted to recognize the contributions made by Japanese-American troops who actually fought in World War II. The term “Go For Broke” highlights the dedication of the Japanese-American soldiers; named for one of the units made up of predominantly of those of Japanese ancestry, this phrase recognizes their unswerving dedication to the Allied cause. That the Foundation was originally named for these troops gives credit and recognition not only to the interned Japanese, but also serves as a reminder that they comprised a significant part of the United States’ military force.

A main focus of the memorial, which can be found north of the Capitol Building in Washington, D.C., is the Japanese crane statue, depicting twin cranes attempting to escape from barbed wire. As Young points out, memorial artists often struggle to find a balance between creating a work that pleases both the public as well as gaining approval from those memorialized as well as the administration (9). As this work originated with the NJAMF, it assuredly was approved of by those it commemorated. The twin cranes are both aesthetically

pleasing, as well as demonstrating the significance of the Japanese internment and military units during World War II. Although the memorial is directly serving as a public memory for the internment, the symbolism of the cranes attempting to escape the barbed wire has the broader significance of the “extrication of anyone from deeply painful and restrictive circumstances. It reminds us of the battles we've fought to overcome our ignorance and prejudice and the meaning of an integrated culture, once pained and torn, now healed and unified” (“Japanese Crane Monument”). As previously stated, multiple scholars have asserted that public memory not only serves to memorialize the past but likewise to advise our future. The broader significance of the importance of a free, equal, and tolerant society reflects the ideals of American culture and is a beacon of how we wish to be.

Ownership of the memorial was transferred to the United States government in 2002, and maintenance responsibility now lies with the National Park Service. However, the project to create a memorial of the Japanese experience during World War II originated within its own community, which could easily be taken as a sign of the government’s unwillingness to promote this aspect of the past into the general public’s awareness. Other efforts made to acknowledge the internment have also received less publicity or are less widely known, from the Day of Remembrance to the Freedom Walk, both in Washington, D.C.



Other, praise-worthy aspects of the actions of the United States during World War II are frequently commemorated through statues, monuments, and a multitude of films. One of the most well-known films, at least in recent years, to reference the events leading to the Japanese internment is *Pearl Harbor*, which only uses the events to set up the background plotline for a love story that could take place in any country and any war. It earned \$198.5 million in the United States (Internet Movie Database). Meanwhile, the film adaptation of *Snow Falling on Cedars*, a novel concerning the residual mistrust of Japanese Americans even after the closing of the internment camps, earned only \$14.4 million, (Internet Movie Database) less than one-tenth that of *Pearl Harbor*. This small fact further demonstrates the ways in which the leading authorities, be they the government or Hollywood, have managed to suppress memories of the Japanese internment from the forefront of our public memory.

## VIETNAM WAR



Army medic treats a soldier in Vietnam (Associated Press)



Vietnam Veterans Memorial (Associated Press)

### Background Information

The Vietnam War remains one of the most controversial times in the nation's history, enduring through three different administrations. From the beginning, the United States' involvement in Vietnam was a contentious issue, and even after soldiers returned to the country, they were often treated with disgust or anger. Many protests were staged across the country, from college campuses to political conventions to the streets of Washington, D.C.

Following the end of the first Indochina War, the United States supported a separation of North and South Vietnam, divided at the 17<sup>th</sup> parallel, in an

attempt to limit the power of the Communist Party in Vietnam. However, the leader of South Vietnam, Ngo Dinh Diem was a corrupt leader, leading to multiple attempts to overthrow Diem's government. The National Liberation Front (NLF), commonly referred to as the Viet Cong, was formed of any who opposed Diem. The Government of the Republic of Vietnam (GVN) was succumbing to the pressures of the NLF, and reacted by raiding Buddhist pagodas claiming they were harboring Communists, which in turn led to Buddhist monks to protest in Saigon through self-immolation (Brigham). By 1963, Diem's own generals approached the American embassy in Saigon, and with the approval of the United States, led a military coup resulting in Diem's death. An attack on two U.S. ships in the Gulf of Tonkin as well as on army installations in South Vietnam led to Operation Rolling Thunder, so named for the sustained bombings over the Democratic Republic of Vietnam. Following the Tet Offensive, now seen by many as a psychological triumph for North Vietnam despite being a military defeat, the U.S. began attempting to create a peace treaty, which was not successful until President Nixon's Paris Peace Treaty, ending open hostilities between the United States and the DRV. For the next two years, the Army of the Republic of Vietnam continued fighting with the DRV until the fall of Saigon in 1975, at which point the last of the American troops left the embassy.

As previously noted, American citizens strongly condemned the war, particularly after the draft was instated. At Kent State University in Ohio, this

resulted in the particularly tragic deaths of four students killed by the National Guard at a campus protest. The Democratic National Convention in 1968, held in Chicago, was the site of a massive riot as the mayor called in the National Guard and posted thousands of police officers in the streets. While most war veterans are treated with respect and honor for having served the country, those returning from Vietnam did not find this reception. Rather, they were almost reviled for their involvement in Vietnam, regardless of whether or not they had wanted to be there.

### **Public Memory**

With all the negative memories of the Vietnam era, the immediate concern of its inclusion in the nation's public memory is how to commemorate such a time. The very act of creating a form of public memory "assume[s] that the events or individuals selected for commemoration are necessarily heroic or, at the very least, untainted" (Wagner-Pacifici 379). Few would claim that the Vietnam War was either heroic or untainted, with the events occurring in Asia, such as the My Lai Massacre, or the protests on American soil with the potential to turn violent as well. Negative events such as the Vietnam War are not something that the United States would choose to dwell on as they reflect an aspect of the society that does not match with the portrayed image of a country based on freedom, democracy, and equality. While comfortable holding a

position as a militarily powerful country, the United States did not want to be seen as one that is known for their armed involvement in other countries. To negotiate the divisive memory of Vietnam, and return some honor to those who served there, public memory focused on the “individuals who fought rather than the country’s lost cause” (Wagner-Pacifici 380). By focusing on the soldiers themselves rather than the war itself, the memory could be shifted from the losses suffered in Vietnam to the more respectable ideal of serving one’s own country.

Likely as a result of how sensitive an issue the Vietnam War was, three years passed before any sort of official public memorial was installed in 1978. It took the form of a plaque for the Vietnam Era, and was placed behind the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier in the Arlington National Cemetery. While given the respect of being placed in the National Cemetery, where veterans from all wars since the American Revolution have been buried, the plaque’s placement behind the Tomb gave the government the ability to have recognized the Americans that had lost their lives in Vietnam without drawing attention to our defeat. Unlike other war memorials, the place was rather unassuming and not imposing. The original wording on the plaque simply stated “Let all know that the United States of America pays tribute to the members of the Armed Forces who answered their country’s call” (Wagner-Pacifici 385), making no mention whatsoever of Vietnam. It was later amended to replace “answered their country’s call” with “served honorably in Southeast Asia during the Vietnam era”

(Wagner-Pacifici 385). The first iteration was incredibly vague, and it took the efforts of the Veterans Affairs subcommittee to bring about the more specific change in its phrasing, both of which demonstrate how reluctant the government was to formally recognize the war. The use of the word “era” rather than “war” on the plaque helps to subtly detract from the reminder that Vietnam was a military defeat by not forcibly reminding viewers of the actual wartime circumstances.

Following the installation of the plaque, Congress created a Vietnam Veterans Week, this time choosing time rather than a physical reminder to commemorate the survivors of Vietnam. Part of the intent behind this was to give the veterans the status of loyal patriot to our country rather than the stigma they had carried since their return. However, this week also highlighted the fact that the veterans were suffering, physically or psychologically, and needed more support from the administration. Finally, it served to separate the soldiers from the war they fought in by focusing in on the veterans themselves.

Vietnam veteran Jan Scruggs had the similar idea of memorializing the men who served rather than the war. Although his name may not be well known, he originated the idea of what has become one of the most-visited memorials in the country, the Vietnam Veterans Memorial. Scruggs was an ideal leader for the Vietnam Veteran Memorials Fund, using his experience as a wounded Vietnam veteran himself to bridge the distance between the public and those who had died. While Scruggs’ memorial would be a large physical entity, it would not have

any elements symbolizing national glory; instead, it would simply list the names of all who died in Vietnam. This was in fact a key aspect of the Memorial's approval from the Senate and the House of Representatives, that it reference only the men who fought in Vietnam, and not the war itself (Wagner-Pacifici 391). The government was not alone in its desire to separate the soldiers from the war; some donors to the Fund made sure to note that they "wished to express sorrow and respect for the living and dead soldiers, however, their contributions in no way reflected their support for the war itself" (Bodnar 4).

The eventual choice of Maya Lin's design for the memorial reflects this understated quality. Recessed below ground level, as is visible below, the walls of plain black granite are plainly inscribed with the names of lost soldiers.



Visitors to the Vietnam Veterans Memorial (Associated Press)

Lin and Scruggs both agreed that the Memorial gives no interpretation of the war, whether in support or against it, which was the original intent. Some argued that the use of *black* granite, instead of a lighter shade, demonstrated the residual shame felt after the war. As Young argued, memorials are inherently interactive, and require the interpretations of their viewers to give them power. As Lin also stated, “what people see or don’t see is their own projection” (Wagner-Pacifici 393). Others appreciated the simplicity of the wall and its ability to make all names on it equal. To give it a more traditionally memorial quality, a statue of three soldiers and a flag was unveiled two years after the original monument was dedicated. These aspects of a more traditional war memorial—recognizable soldiers, the American flag—evoke patriotism and give credence to the nobility of dying for one’s country that was not reflected in the wall itself.



Three Servicemen Statue (Associated Press)



As many have stated, memorials provide a physical place for people to come together to remember. This is entirely true of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial; it is one of the most visited memorials in the country. Not only is there a large number of visitors annually, but many of them bring small personal items, from teddy bears to military medals, and leave them in honor of the names listed. Many of these items are archived and displayed, the act of which has allowed the public to appropriate the memorial and personalize it.

Hollywood films have also done their part to minimize the more negative aspects of Vietnam by intentionally “forgetting” them; leaving them out of the films drops them from the forefront of our memories of it. Among these forgotten aspects is the widespread resistance to the war, not only among citizens still in the United States during the war, but also the deployed troops. Likewise, little reference is made to any acts of fragging, or the killing of a superior officer, which was nonetheless a tragic reality of Vietnam. According to Barbie Zelizer, “films like *The Deer Hunter* and *Apocalypse Now* said almost nothing about the real history and impact of the war” (229), despite sharing seven Academy Awards and a further ten nominations between the two (Internet Movie Database). Although both films give the audience an idea of what life was like for soldiers in Vietnam, they are unable to give the full experience. The cinematic experience is such that the viewers have an impression of Vietnam without truly delving into the realities of what it was like.

The contentious quality of the Vietnam War makes the success of its official memorial that much more impressive. The government was able to find a way to recognize the men who had lost their lives in the war without glorifying or even really drawing attention to the war itself. The listing of the names on the wall are in chronological order, with no names standing out from the others—all are *equal*, reflecting one of the main ideals of the United States. Although the wall is easily the more famous part of the memorial, the statue of the three soldiers quietly serves as a reminder of patriotism and loyalty to the United States, and the honor that comes with serving one's country. Hollywood does its part by forgetting aspects of the war that are less than honorable, and its depictions so closely follow specific characters that the films are once again more about the individual than the events of the war.

## CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT



Martin Luther King, Jr. leads the march from Selma to Montgomery, 1965 (Associated Press)

### Background Information

One of the most well known and celebrated eras in the history of the United States is that of the Civil Rights Movement, which culminated in the banning of discrimination based on race, color, religion, or nationality. It emerged out of a rising desire for equality among all races, particularly in the south, where black people were segregated and treated as a lower class by most white people. Despite the fact that slavery had ended nearly a century prior, many white people in the south retained a feeling of supremacy, resulting in a life of segregation and poverty for black people. The Ku Klux Klan was a large factor in suppressing black people, yet it was also institutionalized from voting requirements to schools.

As time passed, people in the south began to demand the equality they had never received, staging protests that took the form of bus boycotts, sit-ins, and marches. The majority of these were nonviolent, adopting the practice of large-scale nonviolent protest from Gandhi. One of the earliest steps towards ending institutionalized segregation in the south was the landmark *Brown vs. Board of Education* decision in 1954, in which the Supreme Court ruled that separate public schools for black and white children was unconstitutional, thereby overruling *Plessy vs. Ferguson*, which had previously maintained the concept of “separate but equal” facilities. After this decision, protests gained momentum. One of the most well-known stories is that of Rosa Parks’ arrest for refusing to give up her bus seat, leading to the year-long Montgomery Bus Boycotts and the ruling that segregated buses, like public schools in Kansas, were unconstitutional. Martin Luther King, Jr. emerged as a leader, a young minister preaching nonviolence, yet making huge advances in the fight for equality. Sit-ins were held at restaurants, where black patrons would wait to be served.

As the struggle for equal rights was gaining ground, the resistance against it likewise grew. White supremacist groups such as the KKK and the Citizens’ Council used threats and their social and political power to prevent integration as much as possible, including the use of lynching and bombings. In 1965, state troopers attacked a group of demonstrators on a march to the capitol building in Montgomery, Alabama, with clubs and tear gas.

News of these types of events became known and condemned outside of the south, and President John F. Kennedy gave a speech in 1963 asking that all Americans be granted equal rights to public facilities and voting rights. Despite attempts from southern Representatives and Senators, by 1964, President Lyndon B. Johnson had signed the Civil Rights Act introduced by President Kennedy before he was assassinated. This Act banned racial segregation in public accommodations such as schools and the workplace, as well as for voter registration.

### **Public Memory**

Unlike the Japanese internment camps or the Vietnam War, there are many ways in which the Civil Rights Movement is remembered and memorialized. Rather than the minimization of an entire event from our history, the Civil Rights Movement selectively removes particular details of the time. Easily the most visible and well-known figure from the Movement is that of Martin Luther King, Jr. We remember him in a variety of ways, from a federal holiday celebrated near or on his birthday, as well as his namesake being given to countless streets and schools across the country. The largest and most populous county in Washington State is named for Dr. King as well. Currently, there is ongoing fundraising for a memorial to King to be placed on the National Mall in Washington, D.C. (“About the Memorial”). Children in elementary schools

in every state learn about Dr. King, the importance of *Brown vs. Board of Education*, Rosa Parks' bravery in standing up against an unfair law, as well as the March to Montgomery. While these people and events during the Civil Rights Movement are not to be discounted at all, there are many other overlooked figures and events.

One such figure is young Emmett Louis Till, a fourteen year old black boy from Chicago, Illinois. Growing up in a northern state, Till was unprepared for his visit to Mississippi, with his cousin and uncle in 1955. On an average August afternoon, Till and his cousins drove into Money, Mississippi to buy treats from Bryant's Grocery. When they were leaving, Till allegedly whistled at Carolyn Bryant, Roy Bryant's wife. The factuality of this whistle has long been contested, from statements that he did whistle to his mother's fervent protests that a childhood medical problem would have prevented him from ever doing so. Whether or not Till did whistle at Carolyn Bryant, a few days later Roy Bryant and his half-brother J.W. Milam came to Till's uncle, Mose Wright's house, and took Till. Days later, his mutilated body was recovered from the Tallahatchie River with a cotton gin fan tied around his neck. His mother, Mamie Till-Mobley, allowed pictures to be taken of his horrific injuries, which were distributed around the country, notably in *Jet* magazine. These photographs exposed the nation to the horror of the true environment of the treatment of black people in the south. When the trial of Milam and Bryant took place, the rampant racism and inequality of the south was once again revealed, as an all-white jury

acquitted both men. Soon after, they gave an interview to *Look* magazine and admitted, nearly boasted, that they had killed Emmett Till, but double jeopardy laws prevented them from being retried.

The Selma to Montgomery marches of 1965 were another iconic point in Civil Rights Movement history. The first march ended with the Bloody Sunday attack on the Edmund Pettus Bridge, where police officers were waiting for the demonstrators with clubs and tear gas. The brutality of this attack was captured on camera, stunning the nation to see such violence perpetrated against Americans by Americans. After seeing such shocking images, more supporters came to Alabama to join the march. The idea to march to the capital did not come without a catalyst, however. The idea originated with James Bevel, a Civil Rights activist, in reaction to the death of Jimmie Lee Jackson in Marion, Alabama. Jackson was shot by an Alabama state trooper while participating in a protest against the arrest of James Orange, a prominent Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) member. When he died eight days later, Bevel had originally thought of bringing his body to the steps of Governor Wallace's home to demonstrate the severe animosity still in existence in Alabama. Although Jackson's body was buried, the idea to march to Montgomery was still fresh in people's minds, and it was decided that the march would still take place.

1955, the year of Till's death, was in the early years of the Civil Rights Movement. Schools were desegregated, but few people had accepted this yet. The national shock and outrage that came as a result of his death and the

photograph (below) showing his horrific injuries are often credited as being one of the earliest beginnings the Civil Rights Movement. The events of Bloody Sunday on the Edmund Pettus Bridge are some of the most notorious examples of police brutality during the Civil Rights movement.



Emmett Till's Body at his Funeral (*Jet* magazine)



Bloody Sunday, Edmund Pettus Bridge 1965 (Associated Press)

With all the national attention garnered at the time of Till's death, and the lasting impact of Jimmie Lee Jackson's death, why is it that today they are



remembered less than other essential figures of the Movement, such as Martin Luther King, Jr.? A stretch of highway in Mississippi is named for Till, while Jackson shares a highway in Alabama with another activist. Neither receives nearly the amount of attention or credit for their influence on the Civil Rights Movement as Dr. King or Rosa Parks. In the case of Emmett Till, it could well be a sense of shame that has prevented his memory from taking its rightful place at the forefront of memories of the Civil Rights Movement. Although unfair trials for lynchings were not uncommon, the speed with which Milam and Bryant were acquitted for such a brutal murder of a young boy followed by their confession in *Look* so soon after makes confronting that memory more painful. For Jackson, the incredible reaction to Bloody Sunday became such an overarching and nationally known event that the catalyst behind it was not forgotten, but a less prominent part of the memory of those days. Additionally, despite the fact that Jackson was somewhat involved in the fight for equal rights, neither victim was a major actor in the Civil Rights Movement until their deaths. Both of them had the most effect through their deaths, while Martin Luther King, Jr. and Rosa Parks had time to continue to bring about change.

Not only important figures but also other events are forgotten from the Civil Rights era. While black people in the south were fighting for equality, the United States was simultaneously fighting in Vietnam and in the Cold War with the Soviet Union. Frequently these events are seen as distinct from each other, compartmentalized so that the discussion is focused on just one, without placing

them into context with each other. This does not allow some of the underlying details surface. The United States was involved in two international conflicts while dealing with a domestic struggle at the same time. The international image of the country was surely influenced by the struggle for equality on our own soil; how can a country gain worldwide support if it is so divided within itself? The administration was justifiably concerned with the impact domestic policies might have on foreign relations. As Mary Dudziak noted, before the *Brown vs. Board* case, “the Truman Administration stressed to the Supreme Court the international implications of race discrimination and at times focused on the negative impact on U.S. foreign relations that a pro-segregation decision might have” (Grindy 7). This landmark decision still had an enormous impact, but it may have come less out of the desire of the Supreme Court to correct years of unfair treatment, and more from the need to present a forward-moving, united image to the international community. It was necessary that the United States at least appear to be united to present a strong front so as not to seem weak to either Vietnam or the USSR.

While dealing with the Red Scare, there was also the Vietnam War to contend with. There was a large number of black soldiers in Vietnam, and some activists believed that discriminatory practices in the draft sent more black soldiers to Vietnam than it did white soldiers. Martin Luther King, Jr. once described it as “a white man’s war, a black man’s fight” (Coffey), drawing attention to the fact that while it was Presidents Kennedy, Johnson, and Nixon

that making the decisions about Vietnam, there were many black troops fighting there.

Why are the Civil Rights Movement, the Vietnam War, and the Cold War so rarely seen in conjunction with one another? It is naïve to think that they could have actually occurred at the same time without affecting one another, yet this is rarely touched upon. The Vietnam War was and remains a painful memory for many, as previously covered. The Cold War similarly had a different affect on the country; it was a time of constant fear of nuclear attack. In contrast, the Civil Rights Movement is often seen as a triumph and celebrates the ideal of equality among all Americans. It is easier to maintain the positive memories of the Civil Rights Movement when viewed as its own, separate time, whether or not this is quite accurate. Likewise, it is easy to focus on figures such as Martin Luther King, Jr. and Rosa Parks because they both could be considered great successes of the Movement. They both brought about great changes and advances while fitting the principles of the United States. After all, it is effortless to be proud to support and lionize nonviolence and equality. Emmett Till and Jimmie Lee Jackson, while both had an incredible influence on the Civil Rights Movement, did so through tragedy. Remembering the most positive aspects of the Civil Rights Movement, even if it somewhat simplifies the past, is far easier and more comfortable than facing the realities of our not-too-distant past.

## CONCLUSION

The power of memory to affect the way a person and a society function is easily overlooked. Perhaps it is fitting that as the influence of memory itself is overlooked, the type of memory that has the highest implications for a society is also forgotten. Public memory has an incredible power to shape and create a society. While reminding us of the past, public memory also advises on how to react to similar situations or events in the future. It can be found in several instances in a society, from statues and monuments to media images and stories passed down through generations. Although it is often manipulated in subtle ways, it can be responsible for generating behaviors and beliefs. The subtlety of public memory is a large part of its power. What is proclaimed in public memory is rarely questioned as is taken to be true facts of a history, so if it is at all altered or edited, the new “factual history” is passively accepted. Time and again, it has been proven that public memory is not without motivation, and those with the authority to manipulate the public memory frequently do so to support their own agendas.

Throughout the years, the history of the United States has been modified to reflect a past that is in keeping with the ideals upon which the country was founded: freedom, equality, and democracy. As Lawrence Langer points out, our response to past events shifts from “what we know of the event (the province of historians) to how to remember it, which shifts the responsibility to our own

imaginations and what we are prepared to admit there” (192). We have relegated the memories of the United States’ treatment of Japanese-Americans, our own citizens, following the attack on Pearl Harbor, to the recesses of our shared memory. Although not nearly to the horrifying extent of the Nazi concentration and death camps, certain parallels can be drawn between them and the Japanese internment camps in the United States. The Vietnam War presented a slightly different problem in finding its place in the public memory of the nation. While it, like the internment camps, was not a time that we would like to remember, the amount of attention it drew at the time has prevented its disappearance from ever occurring. Rather, the Vietnam War has entered the public memory as a recognized controversial time, yet by concentrating on the soldiers themselves, it becomes possible to focus on the nobility and honor of serving one’s country rather than a military defeat. With the Civil Rights Movement, memory-makers have isolated the achievements of the Movement from its contemporary conflicts of the Vietnam War and Cold War. In treating these concurrent times as separate from each other, we can choose to celebrate prominent figures and successful integration without concerning possible other influences, such as protecting our national image to the international community. In no way are these three instances the only ones that have been revised throughout America’s history, they are simply examples. Returning to Langer’s assertion of how we respond to past events, it would appear that we as

a society are unwilling or unable yet to admit to all of the harsher realities of America's past.

How, then, can we truly know the details of our past? It is now necessary for us to become critical consumers of history to ensure we are gaining a full and equal account of the past. Often, public memory is understood to be pure history, implying that it is concrete and not up for interpretation or change. However, true, detailed knowledge of past events can only be found if they were individually experienced, otherwise we rely on the relay of information through other media. This is evident in the question of whether or not Emmett Till did or did not whistle at Carolyn Bryant, or grab her by the hand. Statements given by different witnesses disagree with one another, while his mother always maintained that Till was physically unable to whistle. Sadly, in this instance, the truth will likely never be known as Carolyn Bryant, the only one who could truly tell what happened, has long refused to discuss the events from that August.

In some cases, public memories are the only way to provide any sort of justice to a historical wrong. For Emmett Till and his family, double jeopardy laws prevented the re-trial of Milam and Bryant, while a grand jury refused to indict Carolyn Bryant, essentially guaranteeing no fair legal outcome for the Till family. The only way Emmett Till can receive even a small amount of recompense is by keeping his memory alive. In this instance as well as many others with similar circumstances, even the recognition of a past wrongdoing can help a family to accept a tragic past and move forward from it.

Newer methods of studying history include Critical Race Theory of historical revisionism and public memories, concerned with the missing, excluded, or suppressed interpretations of history (Grindy 11). These unofficial interpretations may well be more revealing and honest than the “official” histories, as they are less concerned with being diplomatic than they are with providing an actual truth. This is not to say that the official public memories should be entirely discounted, of course, they still provide a wealth of knowledge about the past. Rather, it is essential that we pay more attention to the less prominent memories and find ways to integrate them into the current public memories to find the most detailed account of our shared past as possible. It would be entirely too naïve to believe that those prevailing memories are the only ones available to us.

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## SUMMARY

### Description

My idea for this project originated in a course I took within the Communication and Rhetorical Studies program, CRS 400: Rhetoric of Civil Rights. In spending a full semester learning about unsolved, and to me personally, unknown murders that occurred during the Civil Rights Movement, I realized how little I actually knew about the Movement other than the generic information about Martin Luther King, Jr., Rosa Parks, the Montgomery bus boycotts and various marches, including the one from Selma to Montgomery. Conducting in-depth research for a semester about not only a particular murder case, but also the circumstances in which the murder occurred, gave me a much deeper understanding of the way life was lived in the south during the Civil Rights Movement. I was especially fascinated by my case, that of Jimmie Lee Jackson, for a few reasons. First, researching the social environment of the mid-1960s in Alabama gave me a much deeper understanding of what life was like for black people in the south. Also, discovering the impact Jackson's death had on the successes of the Civil Rights Movement was entirely unexpected; with the impact of the marches to Montgomery and the events of Bloody Sunday, the realization that I did not know any of the motivations behind it was quite surprising.

We also discussed the importance of public memory, as with the majority of these unsolved or unresolved Civil Rights era murders, the cases were unable to be tried so many years after the actual murders took place. Double jeopardy may have protected some of the killers, while other cases have lost key witnesses or even the killers themselves over the past forty-odd years. It eventually reaches a point where the only way to resolve these crimes is to ensure that they are remembered and these victims are not forgotten.

I really enjoyed working on this project and gaining a deeper understanding of historical events. I had originally planned to complete my Capstone on the formation of public memory, in using my research to create a public memory of an unresolved Civil Rights murder. However, as I began my research I realized how much power there is in public memory, and how it can be used to influence histories. I decided to focus on how public memory has been used by the United States to adapt our national history. Realizing how little was in the public memory of the Civil Rights Movement led me to question what other similar events I did not know about beyond a general surface knowledge, and how that may affect the way events are remembered.

The Japanese internment camps were chosen as a topic because I learned a little about them as I am from a west coast state that had a large Japanese population relocated to a more inland location. My father also had a teacher in high school who voluntarily interned himself in protest of the internments. I found the juxtaposition between the widely circulated memories of American

triumphs such as D-Day and the liberation of the Nazi concentration camps and the almost entire lack of common knowledge of the Japanese internment camps.

Finally, I chose to concentrate on the Vietnam War because it has always been an interesting time in our history for me, even though I did not understand many of the political details of the war. I knew of the Vietnam War in a more abstract sense of the controversy and protests surrounding it, both during and after the conflict. I wanted to study how the public memory of such a contentious time could be managed when it was still in the public's mind, and adjust it so that it could become a slightly more positive experience. Seeing as the Vietnam Veterans Memorial wall is one of the most visited memorials, and people still make personal connections with the names engraved on the wall.

## Methods

The majority of this paper came from reading and analyzing different sources, both theoretical articles and books about the nature of memory and public memory specifically, as well as those concerning the three specific topics within this paper. I wanted to find sources that highlighted the lesser-known aspects of these events, or demonstrated how public memories were formed of them. Having access to the New York Times and Associated Press Image archives through the Syracuse University Library was an incredible resource as they gave me information and images from the times of the events I was researching. I also

frequently used sources that one author used for their article to discover new sources.

## Significance

Public memory is a significant field of study in large part because it has not been extensively covered at this point. There are many open areas left to uncover in studying public memory. It remains in and of itself fairly undefined; many of the sources I found did not share one discrete definition of what exactly public memory is. They did not even share the same terminology of public memory; some used “collective memory” to signify the same concept. By highlighting the many ways in which public memory can occur, I hoped to draw attention to the fact that we are constantly in the presence of public memory, yet we do not always recognize it. While some forms of it are overtly obvious, such as monuments to a particular event or person, others work in subtle ways, influencing our beliefs and understandings without our recognition of this fact.

I also believe it is significant to recognize the fact that there are many areas in our national history that are not well known by the general population, yet should be. These few topics are barely scratching the surface of what remains hidden in our past. This is certainly not limited to the United States; conducting similar studies of events and their memories in other countries would surely reveal new details. In calling attention to these events, I hoped to



encourage readers to become more aware of what information they are presented with, and realize there may be other accounts available. Rather than passively accepting what is given as official public memories, researching deeper than the surface information shared across the general population provides for a far more informed and engaged citizen. In a time when it seems few people make the effort to truly understand, and our society is constantly changing and updating itself, this seems more important than ever.