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Introduction

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Introduction

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The papers that make up this volume were presented initially at the 2008 Annual Meeting of the Southern Anthropological Society in Staunton, Virginia, and all reflect its theme. A call to discuss “Memory and Museums” reflected the recent intense interest in the celebration of the 400th anniversary of the founding of Jamestown, Virginia; and Staunton itself, a living museum of nineteenth-century industrial Virginia enhanced by the American Shakespeare Center/Blackfriars Playhouse and the Museum of Frontier Culture.¹ Although most of the papers focus on Southern memories, history, and museums, papers relating to other parts of the world are included as well. They also represent the different subdisciplines of anthropology—archaeology, cultural anthropology, linguistics, ethnohistory—as well as different modes of inquiry—oral history, artifact analysis, analysis of documents from various sources and periods.

In the diverse matters addressed in these papers, some common themes emerge. It is clear that a knowledge of the past is important to the people anthropology works with. This value is commonly expressed in terms of memory, whether a personal memory or the awareness of past figures and events. The importance of a knowledge of the past is great enough to suggest that responsible persons have an obligation to be aware of, to “remember,” the past. These papers display also a distinction between a more official, centered “memory”

(e.g., Jamestown) and an informal, local, peripheral one (e.g., the papers by Coggeshall and Probasco). A tension between the center and the periphery, and between the collective and the individual, is apparent in much writing about history, memory, and museums. The paper by Gable and Handler, which was presented as the keynote speech, addressed these issues, among many others.

The first two papers in this collection, by Jennifer Clinton and Tanya Peres and by Lynne Sullivan, Bobby Braly, Michaelyn Harle, and Shannon Koerner, focus on the archaeological and archival collections housed in museums—institutional memories, as it were. Although the papers deal with a different topic—Clinton and Peres test an hypothesis about hunting strategies among small-scale horticulturalists, Sullivan et al. discuss archives from the Depression-era excavations in Tennessee—both agree that the extensive but underused collections in museums are a rich resource for archaeologists, especially when rising costs severely limit the possibilities for new excavations or curating the artifacts once recovered.

The paper by Laura Galke and Bernard Means demonstrates the uses to which a modern institution can put archaeological and historical investigation. They describe how Washington and Lee University benefits from the results of recent and continuing archaeology and of ancillary archival research to confirm and project the sense of a long tradition of nourishing eager minds. As with the papers by Coggeshall and Probasco, we find that a venerable history adds both authority and authenticity to the institution. Washington and Lee, then, may be seen as a kind of museum, in that it presents to itself and to visitors ideas of what education should be and of what the university itself has been in the past.

Vincent Melomo offers a similar assessment of the Jamestown museums. Noting that the current exhibits go a long way toward recognizing the part Virginia Indians had in shaping the events of

colonization and the success of Jamestown, he concludes that these museums, too, valorize modern middle-class Euro-America. He argues that since Jamestown is less about the past per se than a symbol of modern America, it should incorporate all modern ethnicities.

Making memories, as we know and as these papers demonstrate, is a primary function of museums. The paper by Avi Brisman provides a fresh perspective on this commonplace. He wonders what people remember, who view objects of art that have been stolen or have been subjected to vandalism such as graffiti, physical attack, erasure, even a kiss. Surely, he argues, anyone who now sees these pieces must include in their memories of the pieces the fact that they have been disfigured or stolen, which has to change how the pieces are appreciated. Objectively, if we regard the museum experience entirely in terms of memory, we cannot object to vandals or thieves since they but add to the collection of memories we have about particular works of art.

With Brisman's paper we move away from what museums want us to remember to consider what anyone remembers as an individual and how that affects one's perceptions of herself and her surroundings. The papers by John Coggeshall and Susan Probasco, respectively, address the latter questions. Instead of institutionally-sanctioned, official "memory," they give us the thoughts and memories of local people—in mountainous North Carolina, in a small Arkansas town—about the area they live in and how such memories reflect and influence their perceptions of those spaces, their affection for them, and their pride in living there. As with the paper by Galke and Means, we find that memories are bound up with places, and that a sense of things having endured adds luster and gravity to the things remembered.

Jennifer Nourse's paper gives us yet another angle on personal memory. She discusses photographs from her several field trips to

Indonesia over the past twenty years. The old pictures not only bring back memories, as one would expect; they also provoke reflection on her successes and failings as a neophyte, and then a more seasoned, anthropologist. The images span a period of time during which her personal life changed significantly, and so they recall earlier versions of Jennifer, even as they tell a story of an evolving ethnographic sophistication.

No collection of anthropological papers about memory would be complete without cross-cultural examples for comparison. Samantha Krause's paper about indigenous celebrations in San Miguel de Allende describes three annual festival processions that emphasize the idea of being Mexican. All focus on Mexico's indigenous past as well as its connection to Spain. These rituals are meant for the native people of the town, who organize and produce them, rather than to expatriate sensibilities or interests. Another important finding is that the Mexicans' ideas about authenticity differ from those of Americans. For the people of San Miguel, it is enough that a troupe of musicians looks something like Aztecs for them to be sufficient reminders of that part of Mexican history. Her paper reminds us that ideas about memory, history, and "truth" are not shared universally.

The final paper in this collection, by Heidi Altman and Tom Belt, makes this point even more forcefully. Using primarily linguistic material from the Cherokee, they show that Cherokee ideas of memory, even after centuries of contact with European culture, differ considerably from Euro-American ones, not least in the fact that memory can have a real effect on the well-being of the physical body.

The first paper in this collection, that of Eric Gable, of the University of Mary Washington, and Richard Handler, of the University of Virginia, makes challenging points regarding the anthropology of memory and of museums. Chief among these is an examination of the use of the term "memory." Strictly speaking, they point out, the

phrase “collective memory” is an oxymoron, since neither a society nor a culture has the capacity for thought or memory. They argue that even if it is proper to talk of a collective memory, neither museums nor histories can give us memories of what they celebrate. Only those who have experienced the events can truly be said to remember them, and even then what is remembered is one’s own immediate involvement. Rather, museums and monuments inform each of us of the past in some particular way and insist that we add it to our consciousness—that we remember it. In that regard, they suggest persuasively that “memory” as it is presently studied is little different from culture.

The first question Gable and Handler ask, though, is why memory should now be so “trendy” in anthropology and allied disciplines. The answer to that question can tell us much about modern American culture. As they observe, studying memory is also to study what is forgotten, and modernity—also known as progress—is accompanied by forgetting as new, “improved” things replace what has been. Nostalgia and the fear that the past will entirely disappear motivate, however paradoxically, much of modern culture. But it is demonstrable that these ideas have their own history in our discipline, albeit in a different form. In the remainder of this essay I review our involvement with these themes and suggest additional reasons for our concern, as anthropologists and as a nation, with the remembrance of things past.

II

Cultural anthropology in the United States began with memory. This took two forms: the intensive recording of indigenous custom and, as a part of that, the collection of indigenous memories of their own past.

The nineteenth-century certainty that the native cultures—indeed, the peoples—of the Americas were doomed to extinction, victims of modernity, moved anthropology to set as a primary goal the rescue and recording of as much of those cultures as possible while there was still time. Natives themselves shared this pessimistic view. The collaboration between Eli Parker and Lewis Henry Morgan came about because Parker, convinced of the impending obliteration of his people's culture, seized the opportunity to have Morgan record it in order to prevent its complete disappearance. The same bleak anticipation shows in Benedict's reported comments from her Digger informant Ramon: "In the beginning...God gave to every people a cup, a cup of clay, and from this cup they drank their life...They all dipped in the water...but their cups were different. Our cup is broken now. It has passed away" (Benedict 1934, 21-22). Convinced that time was running out, and likewise of the virtue of preserving in the memory customs and concepts that might never again appear in the world, early American anthropologists and their informants together created a great treasury of information about indigenous cultures.

But even then, anthropologists were certain that these same cultures had been distressingly changed by the European presence. Here, memory played a different role in the conservation of North American native custom. Because they were less interested in what they saw as a diminished, inauthentic version of the "true" native culture than in its "pristine" antecedents, our early ethnographers asked their oldest informants to remember what they could about life during their youth, and to mine their memories for what their parents and grandparents might have said about *their* younger days. By means of memory, supplemented by archaeology and linguistics, they hoped to discover what life was really like before Europeans arrived. Only later did we come to realize that these memories, like the cultures themselves, might be influenced by changed circumstances,

and so might be more about the present than about the past. This is a critical point in the study of memory, and of history, and I return to it below.

If the main purpose of early American ethnography was the preservation of the minutiae of the past, another was to figure out the broad sweep of prehistory in this continent. A careful amassing of authentic, pre-contact details from all over would allow the determination of culture areas; to identify the points of origin of cultural inventions such as the Sun Dance, and to find the centers of cultural climax. What later were called “the people without history” would be given a history, one that stretched back in time as far as archaeology would let us go. True, that history could not tell us what the people who created and developed it thought about what they were doing, but it might give us some idea of the impersonal forces that affected independent invention and cultural diffusion, resistance or accommodation to cultural change. If we knew the past, we could understand the present, specifically the present state of North American Indian cultures.

The themes of memory, authenticity, and history, then, have been with us from the beginning. We may add to these concerns that of the individual. Just as anthropology was emerging as its own discipline, so too was psychology, a subject that deeply interested American anthropologists. Their wish to merge the two approaches to studying human beings evolved into the personality-and-culture school of anthropology and then into the current concern with identity.

The study of memory, at once intensely personal and ultimately social, should give us a means of identifying and understanding the interplay between the collective and the personal, the social and the psychological. It is crucial in the concurrently emerging study of identity as well. We are concerned with memory because we want to know the basis for identity. The philosophical postulate that a person

knows who she is by what she remembers (e.g., Heath 1974, 24; cf Sturken 1997, 1) has been metaphorically applied to social groups, who likewise refer to their “collective memories” as a basis for distinguishing themselves from other groups. Halbwachs’s (1980 [1950]) argument that memory is social lies at the center of this way of thinking. According to him, we remember things, we remember them as we do, and we rely on our memories in particular ways all because the process of socialization teaches us to do so. Sociality gives coherence, and therefore meaning, to our memories, otherwise a jumble of sensory impressions; meaning is essential to remembering. Perhaps it was unwise of Halbwachs to call this a collective memory, since it can be taken to imply that somehow the congeries of people in a society have linked mental functions, like the alien children in John Wyndham’s *The Midwich Cuckoos*. But he may be guilty only of elision. A human being is a person, not just a biological entity, because she belongs to a society; the way she thinks, including the nature and function of her memory, is due to her being a part of that society; therefore, in a sense, it is a collective memory even though no two people’s memories are exactly the same, as Halbwachs himself points out. Or, as Dumont (1970, 39) says more generally, “[a person is not] a particular incarnation of abstract humanity, but...a more or less autonomous point of emergence of a particular collective humanity, of a *society*.” Autonomy implies choice; collectivity, the bases for choice. Likewise, Halbwachs’s collective memory, from a certain point of view, allows both idiosyncratic recollection and an explanation for the general similarities of memories “shared” by members of a society.

Tracking the history of thinking about the past, memory, and the individual (or, preferably, the person) and society in American anthropology is beyond the scope of this essay and is, anyway, unnecessary. The matter is important here only because of its influence

on the modern anthropological interest in memory. We think of the focus on memory, and on history, as a comparatively recent phenomenon, one which appeared either in tandem with an equally recent American obsession with commemoration (Sturken 1997, 11), or as a result of it. Either way, though, what we think of as a new focus of study turns out to be but the most recent manifestation of perennial American anthropological questions.

Putting the recent resurgence of interest in these matters into a context to help us understand that it is an old problem justifies this summary history of American anthropology. The allied topics of individual and collective memory, history, authenticity, and the relation of the individual and society turn out to be perennial issues for us. Because it constrains our questions and the way we interpret the answers we get, it reproduces itself in the practice of our discipline.

This may be the answer to the question why is there the overwhelming interest in these topics in anthropology today. That is, there is interest because these are not new concerns; rather, they are old issues in American anthropology, as old as the discipline, and we are still trying to arrive at a satisfactory understanding of them. But there is more to the matter than simply a structure of the *longue durée*. Long, after all, does not mean eternal.

History alone can explain neither persistence nor present meaning. Trying to do so amounts to a tautology. No one denies that knowing the history of a people or a custom is interesting and may be informative. What we need to ask is, of what are we being informed? The fact that a thing has a past—which is always true and is therefore not informative—cannot explain why it has persisted or why the people in the present find it worthwhile to do. One has only to look at the numerous vanished cultural forms to realize that persistence is not automatic. On the contrary, we might suppose, given the current rate of cultural impoverishment in the world, that disappearance is

more likely than persistence. What we want to understand are the *reasons* for the continuities, alterations, or extinctions of cultural ideas and forms.

There is another reason to delve further into the importance of memory in modern anthropology. To say that these issues have salience because of the nature of American anthropology is too one-sided a view of the situation. American anthropology did not develop an interest in memory and the rest in a vacuum. Almost every people we know—the BaMbuti of the Ituri Forest may be an exception (Turnbull 1961, 1965)—has a history (sometimes called myth) and insists on its importance, meaning that at least some of the people have to remember it. They share with modern Americans not just a value for history but also for the authority of the person who knows that history, and all that that implies about becoming someone of note and resource and maintaining that status once achieved. As ethnography has found repeatedly, authority depends on a superb memory and skill in imparting one's knowledge to others.

And we have found that knowing history is important because history everywhere is perceived to have explanatory power. At its simplest, this conviction takes the form of that notorious answer to the anthropologist's "why": "We've always done it that way." But more specific historical explanations—including Malinowski's character myths—justify locations, economies, rituals, names, marriages, murders, affinities, antipathies, conversions, rejections—in short, everything people do. That culture and history are one and the same appears to be a logical conclusion. Thus the celebration of history—including the insistence that historical events be part of our "collective memory"—seems not only reasonable but necessary in order for a people to maintain their sense of themselves and their values. The current anthropological interest in memory, which is to say history,

is justified both logically and because of the interests of the people we want to understand.

Some problems with this argument still remain, however. What does it mean to say that history and culture are the same thing? There is no generally satisfactory answer to this, but the question must be asked if only in a cautionary way. If the two are the same thing, then the proposition should be reversible. Our sense, though, is that they are complementary rather than mutually replaceable. History is the past, and culture is its latest manifestation, the most recent chamber on the shell of the nautilus. Culture is contingent, not just on history, but on what we remember of our history; but the reverse is not true. Only in fantasy is it possible to go back and change history; and even there the author often arranges things so that the time-traveler is not really changing anything at all but rather doing something necessary for her or his present to be as it should.

But as many recent students of memory, including some of the authors in this collection, have observed, there is in fact something like a reciprocating relationship between culture and history. On the one hand, we may say that we know, as a necessary thing, that whatever modern culture or cultural form we study has a past, a history; and that its present form is contingent on that history. But we also realize that the history that our informants tell us is “about” the present day, their current concerns and convictions and categorical relations; and we recognize that our own history, too, is about ourselves in the present. Vincent Melomo’s paper in this collection argues that Jamestown, as a symbol of the United States, should find some way to celebrate all the constituent sub-populations of the modern United States even though there were not, strictly speaking, Latinos or South Asians in North America in 1607. His point is that since we use the past as a way to represent to ourselves our own present, we

should do a thorough job of it, and not leave bits of the present out. Such an argument is itself a reflection of the present, with its attentive concern over the people history forgot because they “had no history.” The paper by Lynne Sullivan et al. likewise expresses a modern sensibility in its critique of the photographic documentation of WPA and CCC archaeological workers during the Depression. The photographers concentrated on the white males and virtually ignored the considerable number of African Americans—women and men—and white women who contributed their labor and knowledge to these projects. The fact that today we would not be so blind, or not in that way, makes us aware of the blindness of our predecessors. The story we tell of the past is conditioned by our own concerns about how stories should be told. We conclude that all people do the same thing with their histories because the great weight of ethnographic evidence persuades us that way.

But, as we can see from these papers, American attitudes to history—and, thus, to memory—present a paradox. Even as we acknowledge that the interests of historians at any given time reflect their contemporary concerns about what is important and how to understand society, we also insist that the history we Americans tell be authentic. If we contemplate the material remains of the past, they must either be real remains or else re-create the original faithfully and be clearly labeled “reconstruction.” If we focus on events, they must be real events, and we must know how they really happened. “Real” in this case means “verifiable,” and the only way to prove that an event happened is with material evidence: documents and photographs, artifacts, and soil stains; and by an exhaustive recovery of such proof. It also means that the only acceptable point of view is that one has none; or, rather, it means that as anthropologists we want to bring to the study of history the same objectivity that we try to bring to ethnography. Anachronism is temporal ethnocentrism.

Our history must be authentic in terms of appearance and detail, and it must represent correctly the world view of the people whose culture we study.

Can these two understandings of history—that it is about the present, that it must only represent the past—co-exist? The logical answer is no. And in many cases they obviously do not. History whose purpose is to explain the present ignores anything that seems irrelevant to the production of that present. For example, the Renaissance is presented as the beginning of the modern world, especially modern science. Such histories treat Renaissance excursions into alchemy—when they discuss it at all—as regrettable, because conceived in error, but necessary because they led to the invention of chemistry. As Dame Frances Yates has shown repeatedly, however, treating Renaissance thought in this way leaves us ignorant of its true nature (Yates 1964, 1969, 1972, 1979, 1996). There was at that time no separate category of “science” as it is understood today. The point was to understand God’s creation; to that end, anything could provide insight, both in itself and in how it was related to other things. Their way of classifying things was not that of the present: they saw connections among phenomena (the planets, stars, colors, precious stones, periods of time, body parts and substances) that today we regard as so disparate as to call superstition any attempt to relate them. To dismiss this way of thinking, though, leaves the Renaissance essentially a closed book; and that means, in turn, that we cannot explain what they thought they were doing.

And that was to be themselves, not to be the midwives for modern life (Trouillot 1995; Sahlins 2000, 9-10 et passim). So to regard the events of the past as *merely* the prologue to the present is a futile undertaking. It leaves us in the dark about what we want to explain because it refuses to accept as valid any contemporary customs or ways of thinking that do not lead happily to the present day. In short,

history would appear to be an impossible discipline, since if it is really about the present it cannot be about the past, and since we cannot escape the constraints of our modern culture we can never write about the past in any other terms.

The burden of this paradox is evident in many of the papers in this collection. As they write about memory, museums, and the representation of history, the contributors understand the attention to detail and to the participation and concerns of all the actors in the event countering the inherent ethnocentrism of much history. Such scrupulous reporting, they argue, should, and does, come ever closer to revealing the truth, which is to say, the whole objective truth.

In the insistence on authenticity and detail, however, modern Western history betrays modern Western concerns. As Krause's paper, for instance, shows, for modern Mexicans "authenticity" does not depend on factually correct detail. Likewise the paper by Altman and Belt reminds us that ideas about memory and history vary considerably from culture to culture. There are many ethnographic reports that counter the idea that there can be only one history, too. Lest we forget, we raise monuments everywhere, and we take extraordinary pains to make finely detailed representations. We commemorate the horrific in our history in order, as many have concluded, to make comprehensible the apparently random and meaningless (Linenthal 2001a, 16, 228; 2001b, 7; Sturken 1997, 2); we also celebrate the quotidian for something like the same reason (Sturken 1997, 1; Ernst 2000, 28). The past must be remembered in order to give meaning to the present—to show, perhaps, that it is better, or that it could be—but also because we have come to see forgetting the past as a moral failing analogous to massacre, even genocide.

To put the matter thus is not to explain it but to pose in different terms the original question of why have we become so driven to remember our past(s). The restatement may nevertheless provide some

insight into the problem. A concern with the welfare of oppressed minorities and marginal peoples characterizes much of modern life. These groups are hardly novel in human history; but we may fairly say that feeling obliged to take them into account and, if possible, reverse their fortunes is something new, or uncommon anyway. The same concern extends to the non-human world, too, where species and habitats appear to be threatened or eradicated with increasing frequency. So we are called upon to remember the victims of colonial and capitalist indifference and to join in concerted attempts to halt atrocities in Darfur, wage-slaves in Mexico, political suppression in Tibet, racist covenants in the United States.

Implicit in these appeals is the notion—touched on earlier—that what is central is of less moral value than the peripheral. Before dismissing this suggestion as an overgeneralization, consider the widespread American distrust of government (resulting, in one famous case, in the bombing of a Federal office building), including the conviction that while a candidate for office may be fairly honest she or he will inevitably become corrupt once elected; the dismissal of “dead white males” from many curricula in favor of “native,” minority, and women’s voices, and the corollary refusal to acknowledge that a colonial voice is as valid as a native one; the increased attention to the marginal, voiceless peoples of history. Examples could be multiplied, but these should be enough to justify the assertion that virtue is nowadays found mainly in the margins.

That the modern American conscience about the world’s unfortunate people finds expression also in concerns about how to think about and remember the past is hardly surprising. To forget—to ignore—the contributions of the humble, whether Native Americans or Africans or European peasantry—to modern American life and culture has become as unprincipled as refusing to intervene in Rwanda or Zimbabwe. Even less acceptable is indifference—forgetting—about

victims of violence in America—those killed in 9/11 or in Oklahoma City or even in automobile accidents. As forgetting becomes tantamount to indifference, memory becomes evidence of engagement.

III

There is another important aspect to the current stress on remembering the past, distinct from, but allied to, concerns about restoring the displaced to the pages of history and to our memories. This is Gable and Handler's suggestion that it is a reaction to modernity, which blatantly and aggressively replaces the old with the new in the name of progress, leaving people feeling rudderless in the face of change. I suggest that the will to progress is not modernity's only threat. The progress, if we should call it that, has certainly happened. Since the end of the Second World War our daily activities have altered almost out of recognition, from the electronic explosion and the resulting ubiquity of computers and the Internet to a cuisine in which hummus, tacos, and pad thai are ordinary foods. The material conditions of life are, for many people, much better than they were seventy years ago. Society has made some progress as well. Gender and racial barriers have been eroded, if not yet done away with, and the general expectations about minority groups radically changed as well.

These are, no doubt, changes for which to be thankful; certainly they are goals for which many have struggled and some have died. Why then should there be so profound a mistrust, indeed a dislike, of modern life as seems to be prevalent in America today? This may, of course, be a pointless question. Trouillot observes that "history is messy for the people who must live in it" (1995, 110); the corollary would appear to be that the past will always be more appealing because we know how it comes out. But this is not necessarily so. Ambiguous situations, uncertainty about the future, and recognition of change occur in every culture, but the obsessive recording

and preserving of the past do not; nor is the past always perceived as preferable to the present.² It might be argued that what matters is the degree of change and, therefore, of ambiguity and uncertainty. But that argument founders on the fact that right now we are not, in fact, progressing very much. Change there is, but it is what Goldenweiser (1936, 102-3) called involution and Kroeber (1948, 329) called the exhaustion of the pattern. All the possibilities of the old pattern have been explored, so that now it constrains rather than provokes innovation; and no new pattern has emerged to replace it. Our only option is to rework what we already know. Whether borrowing from previous style in the design of a new automobile or a building or zealously guarding the evidence of the past, we affirm that we do not, in fact, have any new ideas. Distressingly, the reworking of the old ideas rarely yields anything as pleasing as the originals. Thus we have come to expect that the next new thing must certainly be worse than what it replaces. The materials will be shoddier, the workmanship cruder, the appearance more appalling. In such an atmosphere, conservation becomes a moral obligation if we are to have anything of value in our environment.

It is hard not to see this distrust in terms of capitalism. The speed with which jerry-built developments, malls, convention centers, and hotels rise amongst us suggests inevitably the greed of the developers, who appear to have no respect for the past, for the environment, or for the sensibilities of the public. Their only interest is in the maximum quick return on their investments. Popular culture frequently casts these people as the bad guys. Conservation, on the contrary, is perceived as a selfless undertaking, since the investment of time and money is intended for the general well-being of the public, not the swelling of a private bank account. Such philanthropy is itself considered an antique virtue, consonant with its object of preserving the things of the past as well as its ethos.

An important aspect of that ethos is the perception that in the past America experienced more social solidarity than now. If alienation is a consequence of capitalism, then we may suppose that the country today is in fact less a commonwealth than at any time in the past, and this perception has some validity. Tocqueville, for instance, argued that the democratic principle fostered alienation; but he also admired the contemporary American determination to counter that by forming associations—sporting clubs, literary societies, charitable organizations, lodges. But the facts, in this case, are less important than the general certitude that in the past we had communities, but nowadays we have the individual.

Alienation, which is to say capitalism, may be to blame for much of this pessimism. But there is another contributing factor as well. Fussell argues persuasively that modern memory is heavily charged with irony because of the disastrous course of the First World War: a string of ill-judged policies, broken promises, failed assaults, betrayed troops, wasted resources. The *normal* situation was “all fucked up.” Everyone came to expect that nothing would go right and that those in charge could not be trusted. Fussell does not deny that irony formed a part of literature long before the Great War. What he does say is that it was never pervasive. On the contrary, the tone of earlier literature was generally buoyant; trust and optimism were not considered naive. The unprecedented calamities of the War, however, made it impossible for people any longer to sustain that attitude; and the cynicism that replaced it has continued, even increased, to the present day, fuelled by such events as the Vietnam war, Watergate, the Iran-Contra affair, and the first and second Iraqi wars. In such an atmosphere, the past assumes the mantle of Truth as well as of Order. This conviction itself contributes to the current insistence that history not only be true but be the whole truth. If, ironically, that means revealing the failings of past leaders, nevertheless, the

knowledge can be a source of hope for the present: that modern historians are honest and that a good many of the wrongs they report have been made right.

In its devotion to a cult of the past, American culture bears a startling resemblance to that of the Renaissance, which was also a period of pessimism and of glorification of the past. Deeply disturbed by the schisms in the Church, and especially by the violence attending them, many sought to re-create the Roman empire, which they perceived to be a period of wide-ranging and long-lasting peace. To this end they focused intensively on the correct use of the Latin language on the premise that if it were again in constant use, the culture that produced it would in some sense be resurrected. Americans have not adopted the speech of their forebears, but we do seem to be persuaded at some level that a return to the built and the natural environments of the past will bring about a welcome restoration of our former society.

Kroeber observed a century ago that any important cultural form had many motivations, implying that the more important the form, the more complex its origins. The great importance we place on remembering—whether one's own ancestors or the nation's history—springs from a number of sources, some of which I have tried to identify in this essay. That all these influences have converged in this way leads one to think that this is a cultural concern that will not soon disappear, neither from popular culture nor from anthropological enquiry.

NOTES

1. Carrie Douglass was in charge of local arrangements. She proposed the theme and suggested many of the papers included in this volume.

2. In a fascinating study of Victorian domestic life, for example, Judith Flanders demonstrates that the Victorian reaction to social and cultural change was an intensive definition and segregation of social and cultural categories: public and private, male and female, master or mistress and servant, work and play, inside and outside, and degrees of cleanliness (Flanders 2003).

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