

A Future from the Past: Perspectives from Memory Studies

Carolyn Kitch
Temple University
USA

Abstract: Like American Studies, the interdisciplinary field of memory studies seeks to understand symbolic expressions of social-group identity over time, the interplay of social behavior and cultural texts, and the emergence of counter-narratives within broader conversations about nationhood. This essay considers those parallels, and then surveys four recent thematic turns in memory studies—new focuses on social movements, cultural geography, ritual performance, and technology—that are strikingly similar to the original interests of American Studies. It further contends that the current resurgence of nationalism, across the globe as well as within the United States, presents important opportunities for interdisciplinary inquiry. Such developments highlight the usable past of American Studies, in service of not only other fields but also its own future.

Writing more than 15 years ago, American Studies scholar George Lipsitz proposed: “If we are to fashion an American Studies appropriate to our own era, we need to know what we want to retain from the past and what we want to discard” (2001, xvi). This essay considers his challenge in light of recent developments in another interdisciplinary area of scholarship, memory studies—an enterprise devoted to the question of what gets retained and discarded in cultural knowledge, beliefs, and identities over time. After decades of growth and diffusion, both fields are undergoing debate about definitions and directions, and their similarities may be instructive.

From their starts, the two fields have had much in common. Each seed initially was planted in particular disciplinary soil - American Studies grew out of English and history departments, while memory studies began in psychology and sociology - but then took root across the humanities, the social sciences, and the arts. Both fields focus on the articulation of social-group identity and emphasize national experience as the prism through which the passage of time is assessed. These concepts have expanded to include “imagined” communities and “invented” traditions, to honor vernacular as well as official expressions of nationhood, and to search for counter-narratives as well as grand ones (for example, Anderson 1983; Hobsbawm & Ranger 1983; Lipsitz 1990; Bodnar 1992; Zerubavel 2004).

Even though the groundswell of academic interest in memory studies did not occur until half a century later, its intellectual foundation was laid during the 1920s and 1930s, roughly the same time as the birth of American Studies. Both fields gained strength in universities in later decades of the 20th century, alongside the rise of cul-

tural studies and postmodernism, and amid assumptions that wars, globalization, and decolonization had shaken national identities in ways that required a reexamination of contemporary uses of the past.

Finally, both American Studies and memory studies have been simultaneously hailed as models for interdisciplinary inquiry and criticized as fields without centers. In the 2008 inaugural issue of the journal *Memory Studies*, Henry Roediger and James Wertsch described that field as “a huge tent in which scholars from many perspectives and fields can find a home” and yet an undertaking whose “bewildering diversity ... may lead to miscommunication and frustration” (12, 9). The theoretical and methodological clarity of both fields has been questioned as they have transitioned from broader and presumably unifying narratives to more specific concerns (see, for American Studies, Bronner 2017, and for memory studies, Olick 2008). Lipsitz contended in the title of his 2001 book that American Studies had reached “a moment of danger” by the start of the 21st century. The thematic turns of the 1990s—identity politics, racial and ethnic violence, global economics, and more—had widened the field’s purview while also unmooring its national orientation, Lipsitz explained, and holistic approaches had been abandoned in favor of “the situated knowledges of aggrieved racialized groups” (xvii). In order to move forward, he argued:

We need to appreciate the ways in which new social, cultural, economic, and political practices are rupturing traditional connections between culture and place, making local identities both less and more important at the same time. We need to learn from people and cultures that have been forced to make themselves as mobile, flexible, and fluid as transnational capital, yet still capable of draw-

ing upon separate histories, principles, and values (19-20).

Yet Lipsitz also acknowledged that each phase of American Studies scholarship, from “celebrations” of American exceptionalism in the 1940s and 1950s, to bottom-up social histories of the 1960s and 1970s, to the “condemnation” of 1980s and 1990s ideological critiques, has been analytically situated in the pressing issues of its own day. Thus, the field’s survival would lie in finding new perspectives “appropriate to our own era” (xvi, 20). In this last statement is the central premise of memory studies: our understandings and uses of the past are based on present-day circumstances. The same can be said about the evolution of memory-studies scholarship itself.

The Growth of Memory Studies

Like American Studies, memory studies emerged between the World Wars. The credit for its first articulation usually goes to either German art historian Aby Warburg or French sociologist Maurice Halbwachs. In his explanation of what he called “collective memory,” Halbwachs argued that “the past is not preserved but is reconstructed on the basis of the present” and that people understand both the past and the present through “collective frameworks” of shared symbols and narratives (1992, 40, 50). Although Halbwachs was writing prior to World War II, during which he died in Buchenwald, his essays on collective memory would not be published and translated until later decades.

During the middle decades of the 20th century, very similar ideas were expressed in new American literary scholarship, notably by Henry Nash Smith (1950) and Leo Marx (1964), who laid the foundations of the “myth and symbol” approach—an understanding of

national identity as a consensus on shared narratives about origins, ideals, and archetypal characters – that was central to early work in American Studies. Smith further contended that the nation was an imagined community constructed through popular communication, an idea that directly informs memory scholarship but more often is attributed to Benedict Anderson (1983). This new academic idea took shape within a broader public culture of American nation-building projects, ranging from the creations of artists, writers, and folklorists employed by the Works Progress Administration (WPA) during the Great Depression to the civic boosterism of Cold War-era business and tourism. Many of these expressions romanticized American history, but some of it cast new light on traumas of the past, such as the WPA's collection of slave narratives collected in the 1930s, a time when the direct experience of slavery was disappearing from living memory.

Somewhat similarly, widespread academic interest in social memory coincided with the rise of Holocaust studies in the 1970s and 1980s, when factors including the aging of survivors and the rise of neo-Nazism spurred organized testimony and public-memory projects (see, for instance, Zelizer 1998). Scholarship of the 1990s continued but expanded the focus on trauma, with attention to topics including the Vietnam War, AIDS, genocide, natural and technological disasters, and post-Communist identities. During the first decade of the 21st century, the field further broadened to address social identity amid diasporic communities, truth commissions and reparative narratives in post-conflict and post-atrocity societies, and memorialization as a response to mass murder and terrorism.

The trauma orientation of memory studies may be explained, firstly, by the disciplines in which such work has been done. Much of the first wave of scholarship grew out of the prob-

lem-focused disciplines of sociology and social psychology. The next discipline to embrace memory (while largely avoiding the word) was history, at a time when oral historians had become dedicated to recovering the silenced voices of minorities and other persecuted groups. A second explanation may be that memory studies has come of age academically in an era of widespread social displacement and the frequent occurrence of types of violence once considered unthinkable. A third explanation is that the field of memory studies has been criticized as a “soft” version of historical inquiry, an “undisciplined” enterprise whose validity still is disputed by many psychologists and historians; thus, it has held tight to serious themes.

The field itself always has been an international one, and the “memory boom” of the 1990s (Huysen 2003, 18) was attributed to multinational European conflicts and the cultural and economic effects of migration and globalization. Yet that scholarship focused on memory consequences within specific countries, continuing the field’s “methodological nationalism” (Erll 2011a, 62). As more American scholars embraced social memory, their interpretive frame, too, was the nation, and their studies became required reading in American Studies classes. Among these were books by American historians, including Michael Kammen’s *Mystic Chords of Memory* (1991), John Bodnar’s *Remaking America* (1992), Roy Rosenzweig and David Thelen’s *The Presence of the Past* (1998), and David Glassberg’s *Sense of History* (2001), and by American sociologists, including Michael Schudson’s *Watergate in American Memory* (1992) and Barry Schwartz’s *Abraham Lincoln and the Forge of National Memory* (2000).

While some researchers have turned their attention to the construction of memory within a “new transnational public sphere” (Volkmer & Lee 2014, 50; see also Volkmer 2006; Erll 2011b;

Sonnevend 2016), other new scholarship confirms that, across the world, nation remains a key construct in understanding memory and identity. To an extent, this is because the Holocaust still is a driving force in memory studies, albeit a theme that is now understood in light of 21st century developments. Oren Meyers, Motti Neiger, and Eyal Zandberg have analyzed the multimedia and multisensory nature of Israeli Holocaust commemoration in their 2014 book *Communicating Awe*. Jeffrey Olick's 2016 book on German national memory, *The Sins of the Fathers*, explores the need for forgetting as well as remembering, and considers the interaction of multiple past "sins" over time in shaping national identity--concerns that are now shared by other nations even while Germany remains the exemplar. Holocaust scholar Michael Rothberg (2009) uses the term "multidirectional memory" to explain the relationship between Holocaust memory in Germany and post-colonial memory in other countries.

The trauma focus of memory studies seems likely to continue, as the world provides a steady stream of horrible events for study. Some research reframes victimhood, however, focusing on the constructive and agentic phenomena of empathy, testimony, and social action. In other new work, memory has been taken up as a theoretical lens in disciplines such as geography, theater, and art, which bring broader cultural perspectives to the field. Across fields, researchers are paying more serious attention to the role of mediation and technology in memory construction and circulation, a factor that has made memory an important new subfield of communication studies.

Remarkably, these developments are reminiscent of some of the earliest interests and approaches of American Studies. The rest of this essay considers those similarities while surveying four

recent thematic growth areas of memory studies: the witnessing of social injustice, the communicative aspects of landscape, the embodied performance of social identities, and the “connective turn” (Hoskins 2011, 19) through which new technologies transform memory into a networked process involving myriad interests.

Social Movements, Witnessing, and Historical Justice

In Lipsitz’s 2001 assessment of the field, American Studies should renew its focus on social movements and citizen activism as the central contenders and shapers of American identity. In memory studies, a similar call has been made to move away from texts and toward processes, to understand memory construction as an outcome not only of social identity but also of social action. Today that action occurs through interpersonal communication on a local level and digitally networked communication on a global level. On both levels, people participate in active and unpredictable ways, a realization that has inspired some scholars to rethink some key tenets of communication theory.

One theory in question is the long-held assumption that media depictions of suffering tend to diminish or co-opt the experience of those affected by war, atrocity, disaster, or disease. Instead, a growing number of memory scholars now argue that mediation of traumatic events can inspire empathy and “ethical thinking,” enabling “an intellectual engagement with the plight of the other ... whose circumstances lie far outside of our own,” writes Alison Landsberg (2009, 223). This is in part because of technological affordances and in part because, presumably, now everyone has the power to tell the story. News and other docu-

mentary media have long provided proof of protest movements that spotlight injustices across the world, but now the act of mediation is in the hands of the protesters, and sometimes the victims themselves, and its transmission is no longer merely linear.

In her study of the viral distribution of images of the death of Neda Agha Soltan during the 2009 Iranian elections, Kari Andén-Papadopoulos (2014) analyzes the special properties of citizen videography that make its viewing a visceral experience; she also traces the way in which citizen video is amplified as it is incorporated centrally into mainstream news media while continuing to flow outward through social media. Digital media give individuals and social groups the means of “testifying to [their] own historical reality as it unfolds,” write Paul Frosh and Amit Pinchevski (2009, 12), an act that not only diversifies the reporting of events but also promotes “an awareness of ourselves as historical actors,” as noted by John Ellis (2009, 86). These processes recently have been illustrated by the online circulation of video showing police violence against black men and of the events of the resulting Black Lives Matter movement, which itself draws on rhetorical and visual memory of the 20th century American Civil Rights movement.

Writing about race and memory, Ron Eyerman argues that while “current social movements employ protest repertoires inherited from past movements,” they also need “carrier groups,” people “who refus[e] to let memory die” (2016, 80, 82). Such “memory is the conduit through which the normative force of obligation is transmitted to the present and future,” writes ethicist Jeffrey Blustein (2015, 76). He and others stress the power of testimonial narratives to effect reparative justice in post-conflict societies, a strategy that is drawing significant attention in the memory studies field. Andreas Huyssen

describes the social-justice orientation of recent work as “a new constellation” of human rights and memory scholarship, a confluence of streams from two fields that “both are fundamentally concerned with the violation and protection of basic human rights and draw on history to do so” (2015, 27, 28). One outcome was the 2011 creation of the Historical Dialogues, Justice and Memory Network, an online resource and annual conference affiliated with the Alliance for Historical Dialogue and Accountability Program at Columbia University; another result was the publication of two anthologies of scholarship, *Public Memory, Public Media and the Politics of Justice* (Lee & Thomas 2012) and *Historical Justice and Memory* (Neumann & Thompson 2015).

Such scholarship is meant to enhance the visibility of social justice movements and truth commissions, and it is explicitly activist in nature. Its goals have been aided by the rise of citizen-video websites such as witness.org, the Human Rights Channel on YouTube, and oral-history projects with survivors. The latter kind of projects can create repositories of what Jeffrey Olick terms “collected” memory, “the aggregated individual memories of members of a group” (2007, 23) that together can form a powerful historical record. Such media testimony “travels” across not only places but also types of mediation (Erl1 2011b). At the same time, social movement actors record their experiences in real time and real place in a way that is documentary and authentically local.

The Communicative Power of Place

Even while their actions are multi-mediated and globally communicated, social movements employ locality – place – in ways that construct and reshape memory. Erica Lehrer and Cynthia Milton note that protest landscapes highlight the “spatial, material, [and]

public dimensions” of memory, recasting the grounds of official history “not only as texts that visitors read, but also as sites of practice that are socially embodied and generative” (2011, 3; see also Sturken 2008). The cultural meaning of landscape, a mainstay of American Studies scholarship (for instance, Zelinsky 1973), also is of growing interest to memory scholars who echo public historian Robert Archibald’s proclamation that “place is the crucible of memory” (2002, 68).

In their 2012 collection titled *Geography and Memory*, Owain Jones and Joanne Garde-Hansen acknowledge that “memories of who we are, who we were ... are wrapped up in memories of where we are, where we were ... geography and memory [are] inseparable” (4). As cultural geographer Kenneth Foote explains, landscape is “a system of signs and symbols, capable of extending the temporal and spatial range of communication,” functioning as “a sort of ‘earth writing’ in the sense of the etymological roots of the word geography...” (1997, 33). Caitlin DeSilvey similarly stresses “the conductive properties of landscape,” the communicative power of land on which elements of the past are retained in community memory (2012, 49). In this view, landscapes are not just backdrops, but central and integrative social forces, “arenas where the differing memories of individuals, families, and larger social groups fold together in a range of ways,” write Jones and Garde-Hansen (2012, 86).

The past is an especially strong feature of local identity in places shaped by ethnicity and industry. Much concern has been expressed about the marketing of such identity through tourism that draws outsiders to physical sites branded as historically authentic (for instance, Barthel 1996 and Halter 2000). Yet more often such memory projects primarily serve the communities themselves, validating their local resilience and marking their landscape as cultur-

ally meaningful. In her study of Welsh coal-mining museums, Bella Dicks argues that such sites give local residents a means of “self-representation” on “a public platform for the past self” as well as for their present-day social identity (2003, 121, 139). Facing change, such communities reenact their pasts through symbolic and sometimes synchronized events such as holidays and festivals. When they are repeated in different places with similar “inheritances,” whether deindustrialized coal-mining communities or bustling Chinatowns, such gestures can create a feeling of connection among geographically separate places, constructing what Anthony Bak Buccitelli calls “translocal” memory (2016, 7) and extending a sense of place—of being “grounded”—even for diasporic communities. Such rituals inscribe present-day landscapes with historical meaning.

In other cases, landscapes matter because they already are inscribed with the traces of past events that must not be forgotten. Place-based memorialization is rapidly growing as generations of trauma survivors die and the sites of their suffering come to stand in for their personal testimony. A great deal of scholarship has analyzed museums, memorials, and tourism plans devoted to remembering the Holocaust and the two World Wars in Europe, but themes and locations are increasingly varied. Such memorialization encourages not only “sanctification” of sites of trauma (Foote 1997, 7-8) but also pilgrimage, through which large numbers of people seek to pay tribute to the magnitude of an event and the experiences of its victims by standing on the landscape of its occurrence. Such journeys confirm a public desire for a connection with the past that is both embodied and emotional.

Emotion, Embodiment, and Performance

Most heritage scholars today understand that historical site and museum visitors are not passive audiences but active participants in “a physical experience of performance” that inspires “emotional engagement” with both the place and the past itself (Smith 2006, 66-67; see also West & Bowman 2010 and Crouch 2015). The growing uses of interactive and immersive mediation at heritage sites heighten the participatory role of the visitor, inspiring reflexivity and engagement, sometimes in unanticipated forms.

Such phenomena have brought performance studies scholars into the memory studies tent. Their interest is in what the public does with the memory narratives that have been created for them and about them. In her 2014 book, *Performing Feeling in Cultures of Memory*, Bryoni Trezise examines unexpected tourist behavior at heritage sites ranging from a Holocaust memorial to an Aboriginal cultural park. In some situations, the local public’s continuing engagement with a traumatic experience may work against national attempts at closure. Writing about New Orleans community memory five years after Hurricane Katrina, performance studies scholars Michael S. Bowman and Ruth Laurion Bowman advocated “embodied” storytelling through which local residents can create an “anti-narrative” that “call[s] into question the established order of things” (2010, 459, 460).

Conversely, embodied performance of public memory also can reinforce participants’ faith in mainstream national narratives. Over the years, many scholars have made this case quite critically in their studies of events ranging from parades and holidays to battle reenactment and sports. Yet, as John Bodnar noted two decades ago, such “bonds of affection have always been sub-

jected to complex interpretations” (1996, 11), and national narratives can integrate protest and patriotism, especially as radicals of the past become incorporated into national ideas about freedom. Current social activists gain a sense of connection with their predecessors through reenactment of protest behavior and reiteration of “founding narratives, stories that tell who we are through recounting where we came from,” contends Ron Eyerman. “Such narratives form master frames and are passed on through traditions, in rituals and ceremonies, public performances that reconnect a group, and where membership is confirmed” (2016, 80).

Membership in a mnemonic community (Zerubavel 2004) is a matter of feeling as much as fact; it is, to use David Glassberg’s (2001) phrase, a “sense of history” rather than full historical knowledge of the past. Even so, our patterns of behavior—what we do about this feeling—are not random. As historians, anthropologists, and folklorists have long documented, our behavior toward the past is learned and reinforced through socialization within our own communities. Media extend this learning process, as they allow us to observe and have a sense of participation in other people’s rituals, on formal ceremonial occasions and in cases of unexpected tragedy.

While certainly not a new social phenomenon, commemoration has taken center stage in public communication today, as Erika Doss argues in her 2010 book *Memorial Mania*. Writing about the “spontaneous” memorial shrines that now routinely appear after tragedies of all sorts, Doss stresses the communicative properties of material culture, calling such tributes “the creative products of profound personal and public feelings” (69) that are part of “performative public space.”

People bring things to these memorials, not only making them but orchestrating their affective conditions. They walk through and around them; they read the cards and poems that are left at them; they kneel down to caress the other things that have been brought; they photograph and videotape what they see; they cry; they are physically and emotionally moved—affected—on multiple levels (75).

Commemorative practices are performances that further involve the other aspects of memory construction discussed above. They are public statements about justice, and they take place on landscapes with a literal or symbolic connection to the remembered event. As Jay Winter writes, “Commemoration at sites of memory is an act arising out of a conviction, shared by a broad community, that the moment recalled is both significant and informed by a moral message” (2010, 313). While he is writing about war memorial traditions that began more than a century ago, his point aptly describes very recent public responses to acts of terrorism. Such rituals—in which material tribute performed in a particular place is seen by billions of people—are compelling examples of the intersections of local grief and global empathy. Emanating from site-specific tribute, these connections are made on a previously unimaginable landscape of mediation.

New Connections in a Networked World

Communicating memory is no longer merely a matter of “passing down,” but also a matter of “passing around,” a networked process that plays out on a “new circulatory memory-scape” (Andén-Papadopoulos 2014, 150). Digital technologies effect a “connective turn” (Hoskins, 2011) that requires new theoretical models for understanding the dynamics of memory

construction—the interplay of texts and their users, of storytellers and their audiences, of private and public communication, and of physical and virtual encounters with the world.

One could argue that some mediation has always been necessary for the transmission of social memory, but in the 21st century memory construction is largely inseparable from mediation. This is true even in what we think of as interpersonal communication on the most local levels, such as friends and family. Digital photography has normalized the archiving of daily life, while the ritual components of personal milestone events, such as weddings or graduations, have been restructured to facilitate the production of keepsake media (van Dijck 2007; Garde-Hansen 2011).

Partly in response to widespread interest in genealogy, online archives have made historical information and images accessible to memory-makers of all sorts. Bettina Fabos (2014) argues that the free availability of digital images allows for a more nuanced kind of historical storytelling. Web platforms have created new meeting places for popular history fans such as battle reenactors and railroad enthusiasts. In many physical places, new media have revitalized historical tourism, as virtual and augmented reality mobile technology has made past eras newly visible, even audible, on present-day landscapes. A range of societal institutions, from journalism to education to art, employ digitized iconic imagery of the past to discuss present social problems.

New technologies have both threatened and reinvigorated museums. As a new kind of repository for artifacts as well as information, online and digital-storage media compete with the tra-

ditional function of museums. Yet in their quest for new relevance and new audiences, museums largely have benefited from digital technologies, which enhance their ability to inspire historical imagination and which can bolster their documentary authority (Arnold-de Siminie 2013). One common technique in current museum practice, for instance, is remediation (Bolter & Grusin 1999; van Dijck 2007), the repurposing of old media imagery within digital presentations of historic events. Remediation also blurs the origins of cultural narratives, as what used to be thought of as different kinds of media (television, advertising, film, music, etc.) are increasingly networked, interactive, and reiterative (Erlil & Rigney 2009, 2-3).

In his study of national identity in the early 21st century, Tim Edensor acknowledged the survival of “the tradition-bound ceremonies and other cultural ingredients which most analysts of national identity have concentrated on,” but noted that “their power is now largely sustained by their (re)distribution through popular culture, where they mingle with innumerable other iconic cultural elements which signify the nation in multiple and contested ways” (2002, 12). Edensor’s statement was made before the advent of social media, which have further complicated the “mingling” of “cultural ingredients” and the definitions and expressions of nationalism. On one hand, new technologies have disrupted “long-held ideas about what constitutes community,” which is no longer “limited by geographic, religious, or ethnic borders,” writes Janice Hume (2010, 192). On the other hand, technology has facilitated the creation of community among far-flung strangers who otherwise never would have “met” others with similar experiences and concerns; it also connects members of diasporic populations and promotes feelings (and activities) of “transnational nationalism” (De Cesari & Rigney 2014). Social media have created many paradoxes for community and memory: they

are conduits for both witnessing and worsening injustice, for both encouraging and inhibiting cross-cultural empathy, and for both empowering and abusing social groups. All these phenomena are historically informed and have consequences for ongoing uses of history.

Discussion: The Future of the Past in an Era of New Nationalism

The most optimistic of new scholarship embraces the broad nature of memory construction as a sign of the field's importance rather than its disintegration, noting its potential to bring new perspectives to current social problems. Astrid Erll, one of the most intellectually creative thinkers in this area, urges scholars to seek the connections among memory work being done in what may seem to be completely unrelated disciplines. In her view, memory scholarship "is developing steadily into a true convergence field" that can "[i]nspire new alliances between the humanities, social sciences, and natural sciences" (2011a, 175).

While forward-thinking, such a vision is not the first attempt to find parallel intellectual threads in different disciplines and to champion an academic culture that makes it possible to weave them together. Clearly one precedent is the "intellectual movement directed toward the creation of a distinct hybrid discipline" that became American Studies some 80 years ago (Bronner 2017, n.p.). Perhaps most importantly, the seemingly new turns in memory scholarship echo the initial spirit—the mission and the methods—of a broad, interdisciplinary approach such as American Studies, which was meant to be "not just a form of area studies" but "a special way of analyzing culture, especially at the grassroots," as Simon Bronner explains (2017, n.p.). Keeping that goal in mind, this conclusion considers some of the challenges and oppor-

tunities for interdisciplinary scholars studying nationhood today.

In recent decades, cultural scholars have resisted the national frame, instead contending that international flows of people and commerce have produced a world of cultural hybridity and global cosmopolitanism. That lens has since been adjusted to accommodate the notion of “transnational” culture, the existence of “national” conditions common across nations (Erll & Rigney 2009). At present, one such common condition seems to be nationalism itself, amid a rise of isolationism and political tribalism across the world, fueled by ideas about the past. Academic disavowal of the validity of nationhood – the insistence that there no longer can be such a thing as American or British (or other national) character – comes at a historical juncture when those concepts have been taken up and brandished like swords on a vernacular level. Surely now is a moment for scholars to re-embrace nationhood as a legitimate analytical frame, in ways that address the complexity of its articulations within as well as between nations.

That complexity is astounding in the case of Brexit, the United Kingdom’s impending departure from the European Union following a national referendum that revealed regional and class divisions within that country. During the opening ceremony of the 2012 London Olympics, the world saw a media image of the United Kingdom as a society whose past was a model for global industry and social welfare and whose multicultural present was embraced by a coalition of countries proud of their own intact traditions. Four years later, the postindustrial cities of the English midlands and north sent quite a different message, openly expressing their resentment of immigrants whose growing presence seemed to underscore their own loss of a prouder past. Meanwhile, Scotland, which voted strongly in favor of remaining European, may hold a

second national referendum on leaving the United Kingdom, and a major stumbling block has surfaced in Brexit negotiations: the possible reestablishment of a hard border around North Ireland. The latter prospect is widely opposed, in part because it threatens to undermine the peace process still unfolding after the Troubles—the long civil war between adjacent towns and neighborhoods espousing two different national identities within one small country.

Anti-immigrant rhetoric, economic loss, and living memory of past violence were driving forces behind not only the 2016 Brexit vote but also the U.S. Presidential election held five months later. That contest made regional and class divisions within the United States glaringly apparent, and its aftermath has prompted public outcry in many forms and from many sides. In several southern cities, protests led to the removal of Confederate monuments, which for nearly a century and a half had stood as tributes to white supremacy; in turn, their removal reinvigorated white supremacy itself, in the form of violent counter-protests by neo-Nazis and the Ku Klux Klan. This time, however, their images circulated globally and instantly on social media, as have images of right-wing political movements in France, Germany, and elsewhere.

While such sentiments are communicated in new ways, they should remind us that “grassroots” rituals and their public representations work toward destructive as well as progressive ends. We cannot assume that a social protest against mainstream culture, and the resulting creation of vernacular “counter-memory,” broadens the public conversation; it may narrow it. Indeed, many of today’s “counter” memories are reactive reiterations of previously mainstream values thought to be lost in a too-tolerant world.

Yet the global circulation of such images and ideals also prompts awareness and responses from people whose experiences have not been represented or taken seriously in mainstream media. These responses are made in both cyberspace and physical space, and often they are bolstered by references to history. One example is the groundswell of national support for the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe when they and other Native Americans opposed the construction of an oil pipeline that would run through their land, an issue that inspired not just a social media campaign but also the travel of many supporters to the North Dakota reservation itself. This event conjured public memory of the U.S. government's long appropriation of Native American lands and violence against resisters. Both the women's suffrage movement and the second wave of American feminism have been recalled in women's responses to the open misogyny of the Presidential campaign and the broader cultural tolerance of the abuse of women. These responses have been especially powerful because of the sheer number of women who had something to say, in public parks during the Women's Marches and online through social media hashtag campaigns such as #MeToo, which recounted women's experiences of sexual harassment and violence.

The variety of cultural forms used in current protest invites integrated approaches to the study of such discourse, while its online circulation encourages a historically contextualized and diverse consideration of national values, especially among younger generations. In his research and teaching about the history of the National Park Service, public history scholar Seth Bruggeman (2016) observed that young adults value historical authenticity and authority, but that they wish for an inclusive American narrative that is expressed with "a less brutal dose of nationalism" (205). That is a fruitful discovery for the future of the national conversation as well as for academic research.

Many present-day issues offer opportunities to once again tell “big” American stories that nevertheless are not monolithic – new narratives that, in the words of historian Peter Burke (2010) “reconstruct history or ‘re-collect’ or ‘re-member’ it in the sense of practicing bricolage, assembling fragments of the past into new patterns” (106). Such assemblages can acknowledge the popularity of narratives, symbols, and rituals of nationalism while also recognizing the real, material consequences for the people whom they represent and exclude. Current scholarship in this vein has the potential to align the goals of late-20th century ideological critiques with those of earlier social history projects and to resituate counter-narratives within (rather than against) concepts of American exceptionalism.

One last example serves to illustrate that possibility. The Tenement Museum in New York City is a historical site and cultural institution whose interpretation and activities have been informed by academics from a range of disciplines. Mainly, though, it is an extraordinarily popular tourism destination among Americans who want to physically stand inside a building where people like their own ancestors once lived. In its appeal and its interpretation, the Tenement Museum embraces every thematic trend in memory studies discussed in the sections above: historical justice, authenticity of place, emotional connection achieved through imagination, and connective remediation. This 19th and early 20th century tenement building remains largely free of furniture, so visitors are asked to imagine the lives, feelings, and fears of former occupants. There are facts as well, gleaned from census data and other historical records: certain occupants did live in these particular apartments, and visitors learn their names and nationalities. Their backgrounds were German, Italian, Irish, and Jewish, ethnicities that correspond with those of many visitors and prompt a sense

of direct connection with their struggles. But because imaginative feeling is necessary to connect with this place, visitors are primed for the guides' narrative emphasis on similar struggles of the nation's current immigrants, stories the museum also tells through social media. This interpretive strategy employs national, and sometimes regional, pride in service of transnational empathy, responses that visitors may discover are not antithetical after all.

The Tenement Museum publicizes itself as a new kind of public memory, and its coupling of digital storytelling and physical place does work to "reimagine the role that museums can play in our lives" (Tenement 2017, n.p.). Even so, its mission restates the ideal of an interpretive "shared authority" that public history scholar Michael Frisch (1990) envisioned more than a quarter-century ago, and its uses of memory thematically coincide with the interests of American Studies scholarship since its beginning. It most certainly tells an American Studies kind of narrative, a big, national story we recognize: Out of many, one, a very traditional motto that in 2018 seems like a counter-narrative.

That old phrase also could describe a renewed commitment to interdisciplinary ventures, of all sorts, as they struggle to survive within the corporate university. While this essay has sought to examine parallels between two interdisciplinary academic fields, its main argument is that both have fruitful futures, albeit ones that are likely to play out in dialogue with other scholarly interests and historical circumstances that we may not be able to predict. With specific regard to American Studies, this essay offers one answer to George Lipsitz's question about its lasting value: that it offers an intellectual model whose vision and concerns are profoundly relevant in the present moment, as well as in other academic

fields. The future of American Studies lies in its usable and resilient past, which offers a blueprint for 21st century cultural inquiry.

Works Cited

- Andén-Papadopoulos, Kari. 2014. "Journalism, Memory and the 'Crowd-Sourced Video Revolution.'" In *Journalism and Memory*, edited by Barbie Zelizer and Keren Tenenboim-Weinblatt, 148-163. Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Anderson, Benedict R. O'Gorman. 1983. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. London: Verso.
- Archibald, Robert R. 2002. "A Personal History of Memory." In *Social Memory and History: Anthropological Perspectives*, edited by Jacob J. Climo and Maria G. Cattell, 65-80. Walnut Creek CA: Alta Mira Press.
- Arnold-de Simone, Silke. 2013. *Mediating Memory in the Museum: Trauma, Empathy, Nostalgia*. Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Barthel, Diane. 1996. *Historic Preservation: Collective Memory and Historical Identity*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.
- Bodnar, John. 1996. "Introduction: The Attractions of Patriotism." In *Bonds of Affection: Americans Define their Patriotism*, edited by John Bodnar, 3-17. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- — — . 1992. *Remaking America: Public Memory, Commemoration, and Patriotism in the Twentieth Century*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

- Bolter, Jay David and Richard Grusin. 1999. *Remediation: Understanding New Media*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Bowman, Michael S. and Ruth Laurion Bowman. 2010. "Telling Katrina Stories: Problems and Opportunities in Engaging Disaster." *Quarterly Journal of Speech* no. 96 (4): 455-461.
- Bronner, Simon. 2017. "The Death of American Studies." Lecture, Society of Americanists, Harrisburg, PA, March 31.
- Bruggeman, Seth C. 2016. "NPS History 101: Toward Training a New Generation of Advocates." *The Public Historian* no. 38 (4): 190-205.
- Buccitelli, Anthony Bak. 2016. *City of Neighborhoods: Memory, Folklore, and Ethnic Place in Boston*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press.
- Burke, Peter. 2010. "Co-Memorations: Performing the Past." In *Performing the Past: Memory, History, and Identity in Modern Europe*, edited by Karin Tilmans, Frank van Vree, and Jay Winter, 105-118. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press.
- Crouch, David. 2015. "Affect, Heritage, Feeling." In *The Palgrave Handbook of Contemporary Heritage Research*, edited by Emma Waterton and Steve Watson, 177-190. Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan.
- De Cesari, Chiarra and Ann Rigney. 2014. *Transnational Memory: Circulation, Articulation, Scales*. Berlin, Germany: De Gruyter.

- DeSilvey, Caitlin (2012). "Copper Places: Affective Circuitries. In *Geography and Memory: Explorations in Identity, Place and Becoming*, edited by Owen Jones and Joanne Garde-Hansen, 45-57. Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Dicks, Bella. 2003. *Culture on Display: The Production of Contemporary Visitability*. Maidenhead: Open University Press.
- Doss, Erika. 2010. *Memorial Mania: Public Feeling in America*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Edensor, Tim. 2002. *National Identity, Popular Culture, and Everyday Life*. Oxford, UK: Berg.
- Ellis, John. 2009. "Mundane Witness." In *Media Witnessing: Testimony in the Age of Mass Communication*, edited by Paul Frosh and Amit Pinchevski, 73-88. Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Erll, Astrid. 2011a. *Memory in Culture*. Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan.
- — —. 2011b. "Travelling Memory." *Parallax* no. 17 (4): 4-18.
- — — and Ann Rigney. 2009. "Introduction: Cultural Memory and its Dynamics." In *Mediation, Remediation, and the Dynamics of Cultural Memory*, edited by Astrid Erll and Ann Rigney, 1-11. Berlin: deGruyter.
- Eyerman, Ron. 2016. "Social Movements and Memory." In *The Routledge International Handbook of Memory Studies*, edited by Anna Lisa Tota and Trever Hagen, 79-83. Oxon, UK: Routledge.

- Fabos, Bettina. 2014. "The Trouble with Iconic Images: Historical Timelines and Public Memory." *Visual Communication Quarterly* no. 21 (4): 223-235.
- Foote, Kenneth E. 1997. *Shadowed Ground: America's Landscapes of Violence and Tragedy*. Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Frisch, Michael. 1990. *A Shared Authority: Essays on the Craft and Meaning of Oral and Public History*. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Frosh, Paul and Amit Pinchevski. 2009. "Introduction: Why Media Witnessing? Why Now?" In *Media Witnessing: Testimony in the Age of Mass Communication*, edited by Paul Frosh and Amit Pinchevski, 1-19. Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Garde-Hansen, Joanne. 2011. *Media and Memory*: Edinburgh, UK Edinburgh University Press.
- Glassberg, David. 2001. *Sense of History: The Place of the Past in American Life*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press.
- Halbwachs, Maurice. 1992. *On Collective Memory*, edited and translated by Lewis A. Coser. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Halter, Marilyn. 2000. *Shopping for Identity: The Marketing of Ethnicity*. New York: Schocken Books.
- Hobsbawm, Eric and Terence Ranger. 1983. *The Invention of Tradition*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

- Hoskins, Andrew. 2011. "Media, Memory, Metaphor: Remembering and the Connective Turn." *Parallax*, no. 17 (4): 19-31.
- Hume, Janice. 2010. "Memory Matters: The Evolution of Scholarship in Collective Memory and Mass Communication." *The Review of Communication* no. 10 (3): 181-196.
- Huysen, Andreas. 2015. "Memory Culture and Human Rights: A New Constellation." In *Historical Justice and Memory*, edited by Klaus Neumann and Janna Thompson, 27-44. Madison. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press.
- — —. 2003. *Present Pasts: Urban Palimpsests and the Politics of Memory*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Jones, Owain and Joanne Garde-Hansen. 2012. "Place." In *Geography and Memory: Explorations in Identity, Place and Becoming*, edited by Owain Jones and Joanne Garde-Hansen, 85-90. Basingstoke UK: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Kammen, Michael. 1991. *Mystic Chords of Memory: The Transformation of Tradition in American Culture*. New York: Knopf.
- Landsberg, Alison. 2009. "Memory, Empathy, and the Politics of Identification." *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society*, Special Issue: Memory and Media Space no. 22 (2): 221-229.
- Lee, Philip and Pradip Ninan Thomas., 2012. *Public Memory, Public Media and the Politics of Justice*. Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan.

- Lehrer, Erica and Cynthia E. Milton. 2011. "Introduction: Witnesses to Witnessing." In *Curating Difficult Knowledge: Violent Pasts in Public Places*, edited by Erica Lehrer, Cynthia E. Milton, nd Monica Eileen Patterson, 1-19. Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Lipsitz, George. 2001. *American Studies in a Moment of Danger*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- — —. 1990. *Time Passages: Collective Memory and American Popular Culture*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Marx, Leo. 1964. *The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Meyers, Oren, Motti Neiger and Eyal Zandberg. 2014. *Communicating Awe: Media Memory and Holocaust Commemoration*. Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Neumann, Klaus and Janna Thompson, eds. 2015. *Historical Justice and Memory*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press.
- Olick, Jeffrey K. 2016. *The Sins of the Fathers: Germany, Memory, Method*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- — —. 2008. "'Collective Memory': A Memoir and Prospect." *Memory Studies* no. 1 (1): 23-29.
- — —. 2007. *The Politics of Regret: On Collective Memory and Historical Responsibility*. New York: Routledge.

- Roediger, Henry L. III and James V. Wertsch. 2008. "Creating a New Discipline of Memory Studies." *Memory Studies* no. 1 (1): 9-22.
- Rosenzweig, Roy and David Thelen. 1998. *The Presence of the Past: Popular Uses of History in American Life*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Rothberg, Michael. 2009. *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Schudson, Michael. 1992. *Watergate in American Memory: How We Remember, Forget, and Reconstruct the Past*. New York: Basic Books.
- Schwartz, Barry. 2000. *Abraham Lincoln and the Forge of National Memory*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Smith, Henry Nash. 1950. *Virgin Land: The American West as Symbol and Myth*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Smith, Laurajane. 2006. *Uses of Heritage*. Oxon, UK: Routledge.
- Sonnevend, Julia. 2016. *Stories without Borders: The Berlin Wall and the Making of a Global Iconic Event*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Sturken, Marita. 2008. "Memory, Consumerism and Media: Reflections on the Emergence of the Field." *Memory Studies* no. 1 (1): 73-78.

- Tenement Museum. 2017. "About Us: A Landmark Building, A Groundbreaking Museum." <http://www.tenement.org/about.html>. Accessed on Dec. 6, 2017.
- Trezise, Bryoni. 2014. *Performing Feeling in Cultures of Memory*. Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan.
- van Dijck, José. 2007. *Mediated Memories in the Digital Age*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Volkmer, Ingrid. 2006. *News in Public Memory: An International Study of Media Memories across Generations*. New York: Peter Lang.
- — — and Carolyne Lee. 2014. "Shifting the Politics of Memory: Mnemonic Trajectories in a Global Public Terrain." In *Journalism and Memory*, edited by Barbie Zelizer and Keren Tenenboim-Weinblatt, 50-65. Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan.
- West, Susie and Marion Bowman. 2010. "Heritage as Performance." In *Understanding Heritage in Practice*, edited by Susie West, 277-312. Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press.
- Winter, Jay. 2010. "Sites of Memory." In *Memory: Histories, Theories, Debates*, edited by Susannah Radstone and Bill Schwartz, 312-324. New York: Fordham University Press.
- Zelinsky, Wilbur. 1973. *The Cultural Geography of the United States*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.

Zelizer, Barbie. 1998. *Remembering to Forget: Holocaust Memory through the Camera's Eye*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Zerubavel, Eviatar. 2004. *Time Maps: Collective Memory and the Social Shape of the Past*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.