

Brooklyn's Monuments to the Civil War  
Kirk Savage  
University of Pittsburgh

Brooklyn's own Walt Whitman wrote a couple of decades after the Civil War had ended, "Future years will never know the seething hell and the black infernal background of countless minor scenes and interiors, (not the official surface courteousness of the Generals, not the few great battles) of the Secession war; and it is best they should not—the real war will never get in the books. In the mushy influences of current times, too, the fervid atmosphere and typical events of those years are in danger of being totally forgotten." The real war, he wrote, "was not a quadrille in a ball-room. Its interior history will not only never be written—its practicality, minutiae of deeds and passions, will never be even suggested. The actual soldier of 1862-'65, North and South, with all his ways, his incredible dauntlessness, habits, practices, tastes, language, his fierce friendship, his appetite, rankness, his superb strength and animality, lawless gait, and a hundred unnamed lights and shades of camp, I say, will never be written—perhaps must not and should not be." And yet for all the obvious reasons to forget the pain and trauma of that era – what he called "its interior history" – Whitman could not help lamenting the loss of that memory. "Think how much, and of importance, will be—how much, civic and military, has already been—buried in the grave, in eternal darkness."<sup>i</sup>

This brief passage from Whitman's book Specimen Days shows a great writer struggling to determine what role memory should play as the war becomes more and more remote from contemporary society, from what he called "the mushy influences of current times." Whitman worked as a nurse in field hospitals during the war, and he

could not possibly forget the intense suffering he witnessed there; he knew at a visceral level that at its core war was about pain and inflicting pain, dying and inflicting death. What the average soldier endured was also what ennobled him in Whitman's eyes, but at the same time this was what made war almost unbearable to hold in memory. Did society, collectively speaking, have a responsibility to bear this memory? This is the question that ultimately is unresolved in Whitman's brief musing.

Shortly after the war had ended William Dean Howells addressed this same issue in regard to the question of public monuments and their responsibilities to society. He made it clear that the reality of warfare itself had no place in a public monument. "The fighting, in itself horrible, and only sublime in its necessity and purpose, was but a minor part of the struggle," he argued.<sup>ii</sup> In this he echoed his friend Oliver Wendell Holmes, who wrote after seeing the photographs of battlefield corpses at Antietam "what a repulsive, brutal, sickening, hideous thing it is, this dashing together of two frantic mobs to which we give the name of armies. The end to be attained justifies the means, we are willing to believe; but the sight of these pictures is a commentary on civilization such as a savage might well triumph to show its missionaries."<sup>iii</sup> The only thing worth remembering, according to Howells, was "the idea of our war," which was "our immutable destiny, as God's agents, to give freedom to mankind." Now Howells had his own personal reasons for repressing the brutal memories of the conflict: he had spent the war years in Venice Italy, and if he had witnessed even a fraction of what Whitman saw he probably would have had a nervous breakdown. But he also believed that war was evil, and that the best way for society to return to its senses was to forget all things military and commemorate only the noble "ideas" that had justified society's descent into

violence and destruction. “We are not a military people,” Howells claimed, and “a standing-army in bronze and marble” he thought would be an inappropriate way of recalling what the war really meant to the nation. Thus he believed that John Quincy Adams Ward’s figure of the *Freedman* “would better celebrate the great deeds of our soldiers” than any military image ever could.<sup>iv</sup> Nowadays the idea that a seminude figure of a fugitive slave would ever be considered a legitimate image to honor ordinary soldiers is almost impossible to fathom. Steeped as we are in a culture that has erected literally tens of thousands of military monuments since 1865 for a succession of wars, we carry all sorts of spoken and unspoken assumptions about how the nation should commemorate its ongoing history of armed conflict.

In my brief talk this afternoon on Brooklyn’s Civil War memorials, I would like you to keep some of these thoughts in mind. Here in 2007 we take war memorials for granted. We assume that our wars will be commemorated in public monuments, and that the dead in particular deserve a lasting recognition of their sacrifice in public space. We have general expectations about what these memorials can and cannot show, what they can and cannot say. But in the aftermath of the Civil War none of these ideas and expectations were yet fixed. Even the very idea that ordinary soldiers and veterans deserved public monuments was not yet widely accepted: it was only in the aftermath of the Civil War that the common-soldier monument, with its sturdy imagery of anonymous soldiers, became a common type, vying with the more time-honored monument type that celebrated commanding officers.

The borough of Brooklyn – formerly the city of Brooklyn – has an outstanding collection of Civil War memorials that together form a cross-section of the monumental

types erected around the nation in the decades following the Civil War. On the one hand there is the monument to ordinary soldiers erected in Green-wood cemetery in the late 1860s, with its statues of standing soldiers in uniform, typical of a new breed of monument pioneered at that time. Monuments of this type are still being built even today, their soldiers wearing updated uniforms and carrying updated weapons. On the other hand there are several monuments to commanding officers – Grant, Slocum, Warren, and so on – which were enormously important in their day but are now almost completely ignored. Public monuments to commanding officers have become a dead form and are no longer built, with one important exception: monuments to the commander in chief, the President. Here again Brooklyn has its own example in the Prospect Park monument to Lincoln erected in 1869. Finally, Brooklyn has one monument that is unique in the nation – the Soldiers and Sailors Memorial Arch in Grand Army Plaza , an incredible conglomeration of all three previous monumental types into one grandiose pile – a work of great civic ambition befitting what was then the fourth largest city in the nation. By looking at this diverse collection of monuments erected over a period of almost forty years, we can begin to see how these various threads of memory made war an enduring theme not only in our physical landscape but in our civic identity – our sense of what it means to be a good citizen and patriot .

The first major monument erected in Brooklyn after the Civil War was Henry Kirke Brown’s standing figure of Lincoln, dedicated in 1869 at the entrance to Prospect Park, in what would later become Grand Army Plaza . Shortly after Lincoln’s assassination, cities across the country had announced plans to build monuments to the

martyred President. Brooklyn's was one of the first to be completed and dedicated, in October 1869, beating out both New York City and Philadelphia; this despite the fact that Brooklyn was a solidly Democratic town that had voted against Lincoln in the 1864 election and was by no means in support of the Radical Reconstruction program for black civil rights which was then at its high point. Henry Kirke Brown's rather conventional standing figure of Lincoln has the pose of a statesman, holding in his left hand the Emancipation Proclamation and with his right hand pointing to the words "shall be forever free" inscribed on the bronze sheet . As Brown explained, "the Southern interest in human slavery" was the foundation of the war, and Lincoln's proclamation "was the final blow to it."<sup>v</sup> The statue thus defines emancipation as Lincoln's crowning achievement and major legacy, while the pedestal supporting the statue connects that moral achievement to the soldiers and sailors who fought for the Union, represented by bronze wreaths marked USN (navy) and USA (army) on the front and back. The monument was sponsored, after all, by Brooklyn's War Fund Committee (with the money coming from private donations).<sup>vi</sup> As a war memorial, it held fast to the principles articulated by Howells: it contained no images of soldiers, and it elevated the ends over the means, the moral justification of the war over the mere display of military glory.

At the time, however, it was quite controversial. From the outset the monument project was identified with the Republican party; the War Fund Committee was run by Republicans and the men in charge of the memorial project (James Stranahan, James P. Wallace) were prominent Republican businessmen . When the monument was dedicated, the War Fund Committee presented the statue not to the Democratic-controlled city government but to the Republican-controlled Prospect Park Commission; the park

commission was an independent, state-chartered body strongly opposed by the local municipal authorities . Brooklyn’s major newspaper the *Eagle*, which was a Democratic organ, objected strenuously to the timing of the dedication ceremony, less than two weeks before the local mayoral election. “Considering the political complexion of the Commission on the one hand, and that of the city at large on the other,” the *Eagle* argued, “would not propriety and delicacy...indicate some other time as more appropriate for this celebration...when the minority who voted for Mr. Lincoln in this city and the majority who voted against him will be in the heat of a political campaign?”<sup>vii</sup> While the Democratic mayor who was running for reelection did show up at the dedication ceremony, the *Eagle* completely boycotted the event and did not report it all, even though a crowd of 15,000 people attended.<sup>viii</sup>

The next Civil War memorial erected in Brooklyn also had a peculiar relationship to the city. This was the soldiers monument in Greenwood cemetery, a tall decorated column put in place in 1869 on a stunning hilltop site with spectacular views of the New York skyline . Known as Battle Hill, reputedly a Revolutionary War battle site, the monument’s location made an obvious symbolic connection between the war that established the nation and the war that restored it [SLIDES]. All this seems clear enough, but it turns out that the monument was not sponsored by the city of Brooklyn at all but by the city of New York to commemorate “the brave exertions of the soldiers who died in the service of their country,” as the inscription proclaims . The cemetery was the favored resting place for New Yorkers of distinction, which explains why a major monument to New York’s heroic dead would end up across the river in Brooklyn. In the late 1860s many communities in the Northeast were beginning to erect soldier monuments, some in

town squares or commons – the example in Boston Common was probably the best known – but many in town cemeteries. This represented a decisive shift from memorial practices before the Civil War. Before the Civil War, the U.S. had very few public war memorials as such. No soldier monuments anywhere in the country included statues of ordinary soldiers, and the relatively few monuments erected that did honor ordinary soldiers were typically simple shafts erected at the site of a military engagement . (The Greenwood soldiers memorial gestured to this tradition by locating the monument on a Revolutionary War site.) The antebellum monuments marked the event first and foremost, rather than the patriotic contribution of the community. In a few cases, as in Concord Mass or Wyoming Pa, these markers were inscribed with names of the dead.

A number of factors help explain the dearth of war memorials in antebellum America. One was the common assumption that public monuments were supposed to honor exceptional men, men who had single-handedly changed the course of history. Another was the lingering uneasiness with the whole idea of a “standing army,” which in part accounts for Howells’ claim that the U.S. was not a military people. Americans were not yet united behind the military as a permanent, professionalized institution supported by a massive bureaucratic and industrial infrastructure. They still clung to the classic republican ideal of temporary, nonprofessional armies: ordinary citizens who would voluntarily rush to the national defense if needed, and would just as quickly put down their weapons when the emergency was over. The Civil War began in this spirit, with local communities mustering their own companies or regiments of volunteers often from local militias, such as the Brooklyn 14<sup>th</sup>, which would become famous particularly at Gettysburg. But as the war dragged on, it began to erode this ideal of patriotic

volunteerism; the incredible scale of the conflict and the casualties eventually necessitated not only a draft but more importantly an all-encompassing professionalized system of war mobilization.

When New York City decided to erect an elaborate cemetery monument honoring the 148,000 New Yorkers who had enlisted in the Union army, the city fathers were still in effect celebrating the old ideal of nonprofessional volunteerism . The monument does not recognize the men who served as draftees, or as paid substitutes for draftees, and instead is dedicated explicitly to the enlisted men who died in the conflict. At the same time, however, the monument was a bold new step: it publicly recognized ordinary men who were remarkable not for any particular heroic deed but simply because they had volunteered at the call of duty. At the base of the column were four full-length standing figures that stood for the various branches of army service – infantry, cavalry, artillery, and miners and sappers. Once again they were not posed in heroic action but in relaxed standing postures displaying the weapons or tools that defined their military role. Even though their figures are located at the base of the monument, the design does elevate them in stature by resorting to a few traditional heroic formulas – the tall column and sumptuously decorated base that included relief panels in bronze . The example here shows a conventionally heroic battle scene, with a gallant officer on a rearing horse in the center and the men on the ground engaged in close-range or hand-to-hand combat. Battle in the Civil War rarely if ever looked like this, since most soldiers were killed or wounded at long range by rifles or artillery shot. The imagery of battle, however, both in painting and in sculpture, tended to revert to old-fashioned formulas of glory in which men fought men face to face and the new technologies of weaponry seemed to have no



visible impact. (These panels by the way are modern reproductions based on photographs of the originals, which were stolen.)

When New York City commissioned the monument and paid for it with public funds, no doubt the city fathers expected that this would be their one great monument to the soldiers of the Union cause. They succeeded in getting the bulk of the funding from the New York State legislature, whose members probably made the same assumption. But the monument took years to complete and by the time it was formally dedicated in 1876, the whole phenomenon of the common-soldier monument was mushrooming to such a degree that the Greenwood memorial was beginning to look relatively modest for a city the size of New York, the largest in the nation.<sup>ix</sup> Increasingly, the new war memorials were no longer going in cemeteries but in prominent locations within the towns themselves, where they were proudly displayed as central to the town's civic identity. By the mid 1880s, the Greenwood memorial was looking almost irrelevant as many other cities of lesser size were now engaged in far more conspicuous and grandiose memorial projects.

Brooklyn was one of these cities. According to official sources, the city had sent about 32,000 of its male citizens into battle.<sup>x</sup> In 1880 it was the third largest city in the U.S. behind New York and Philadelphia, and in the early part of that decade city officials began to develop plans for a soldiers and sailors memorial that would cost more than ten times what the Greenwood memorial had – thereby outdoing their neighboring city across the East River by a very large margin. In the initial scheme the monument was to honor Brooklyn's soldiers in all America's wars from the Revolution to the Civil War. The project was championed and shepherded in the early 1880s by Brooklyn's mayor, Seth

Low, an independent-minded reform Republican who had dislodged a long-running Democratic machine government, and the project also had the hearty support of the *Eagle* which now saw the memorial as an important advertisement for the city's ambition and progress (like sports stadiums today!). Low turned to John Quincy Adams Ward, the sculptor of the *Freedman*, who was by this time one of the best known sculptors in the U.S. Ward and his architect partner Richard Morris Hunt came up with a scheme to outdo all possible rivals – a great wedding cake of a monument with three massive tiers of sculpture, the lowest representing the common soldiers from the four service branches in two groups, the next a series of four equestrian statues from Washington to Grant, and the crown an allegorical group representing peace. Interspersed between these three tiers would be cycles of relief sculpture that would cover subjects such as “woman's work” and the “emancipation of the slaves.”<sup>xi</sup> The proposal was nothing if not comprehensive, though now of course the one subject that Howells had thought should be the centerpiece – emancipation – was relegated to a strictly subordinate role in a grand display of military honors – a veritable standing army in bronze, all contained within one huge monument. Nothing like it, to my knowledge, had ever been proposed anywhere else in the U.S.

However, Brooklyn's board of aldermen balked at the eye-popping price tag, which was on the order of a half million dollars, a very big sum in those days. At the same time they were being asked to contribute funds to a battlefield monument at Gettysburg for Brooklyn's famous volunteer regiment, the 14<sup>th</sup>. Though the battlefield monument was much more modest, the city's Board of Estimate did refuse to contribute because, as the *Eagle* asserted, “the city will have done its duty in the matter of monuments when it provides a suitable memorial of all the soldiers and sailors of

Brooklyn who served in the war.”<sup>xii</sup> Reading through the news accounts, one senses the partisan conflict behind the scenes. Through the late 1880s the soldiers and sailors memorial remained the pet project of Seth Low; even after he stepped down as mayor he continued to head a volunteer committee to raise funds for the project. Like the Lincoln monument before it, this monument had a natural Republican constituency. Brooklyn’s Board of Aldermen, on the other hand, were mainly Democrats, and it isn’t surprising that they would try to scale down the ambitions of a monument project closely identified with Low’s successful reform administration. Moreover their own apathy was justified by the general lack of interest in donating to the project. As the *Eagle* later explained, “there was not such a popular response as the enthusiastic young Mayor had anticipated.”<sup>xiii</sup>

When Low’s project fizzled for want of funds, the Board of Aldermen succeeded in getting a state bailout and reviving the project. But they decided to change the design and the site of the monument. They moved the site from the entrance at Prospect Park to the front of City Hall downtown, perhaps in an effort to remove the project from the orbit of the Republican-dominated Park Commission and put it on the turf of the Democratic-controlled city. They also chose a little known sculptor who proposed a design somewhat similar to the Greenwood type, with a tall column and groups of soldier figures at the base. The *Eagle* complained about the “hackneyed” formula of shaft and figure, and about the City Hall site with its “gridironed environment of elevated roads and its curbstome frescoes of plug hat, smeared hair, and paste diamond politicians.” Mayor Chapin, a reform-minded politician in the mold of Seth Low, vetoed the proposal because, he said, it was too “funereal,” too much like the cemetery monument at

Greenwood. “It does not recall to the mind the patriotic pride, the consciousness of sufficient strength which animated and sustained the Nation in that supreme hour.”<sup>xiv</sup>

We can conclude from this episode that the reformers who had big ambitions for Brooklyn wanted this monument to make a much bolder statement than the memorial in Greenwood Cemetery did. As we have seen, it was no longer enough to honor the dead and recognize their sacrifice. But it was now clear that a proper monument for a large, thriving city such as Brooklyn had to distinguish itself more dramatically from the funereal, and to project instead a patriotic confidence and strength commensurate with the city’s own importance to the nation. Backed by the editorial efforts of the *Eagle*, momentum rose for a “heroic arch” – a monumental type originating in ancient Roman times that was used to commemorate the victorious processions of the Roman emperor and his army. It had nothing to do with the cemetery, and little to do with death: it was a celebration of military triumph with little or no reflection on the cost of that triumph.

Completing the heroic arch was a long and complicated process, which required the efforts of no less than two separate architects and four sculptors. A design competition was held, won by New York architect John Duncan of Grant’s tomb fame, and the enormous triumphal arch he designed was dedicated in 1892 at the plaza entrance to Prospect Park, near where the Lincoln statue still stood . At this point there was no bronze sculpture on the arch at all, though the original plans called for a battle group on top of the arch and figures of servicemen in the panels on the inside of the arch. The cost was already a staggering \$250,000, most of it borne by the New York State legislature. Even though the project had begun as a volunteer undertaking, as the Lincoln statue had been, but that effort failed and the city authorities were able to persuade the state to bail

them out.<sup>xv</sup> In this respect, as in many others, the Soldiers and Sailors Memorial was virtually the opposite of the Lincoln monument. Where Brown's statue of Lincoln made emancipation the central theme, in the arch there was no reference whatsoever to slavery or to the moral cause of the war; the central inscription simply read, "To the defenders of the Union, 1861-65." Where Brown's statue had included only simple insignia of the armed forces, the soldiers and sailors monument was an unabashed display of military glory in the most traditional form of the victor monument, the triumphal arch. The arch so overshadowed Brown's statue of Lincoln, which until then had been the centerpiece of the plaza, that the two monuments could not coexist within the same space. Within three years after the dedication of the arch, the Lincoln statue was moved out of the plaza and deep into Prospect Park, where it stands today mostly forgotten.<sup>xvi</sup>

As if to underline the exiling of Brown's Lincoln, the sculptural program for the arch changed to include an equestrian figure of Lincoln, along with one of Grant, on the interior of the arch where initially common soldier figures were to have appeared. Although these equestrian reliefs absorbed years of attention from two artists, one of them Thomas Eakins, who was perhaps the greatest American artist of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, the homespun realism of the two works did not win over the critics. Far more popular were the swashbuckling multi-figure groups that came to adorn the top and front of the arch, as it was retrofitted and redesigned by architect Stanford White and sculptor designed Frederick MacMonnies.<sup>xvii</sup> Put in place between 1899 and 1902, these sculptural additions self-consciously echoed the imperialist imagery of the Arc de Triomphe in Paris, the great ode to the Napoleonic era. MacMonnies did manage to slip in one reference to the subject of emancipation, in the kneeling figure of the black sailor

in front, who holds a pistol . Statues of black men holding weapons were exceedingly rare in public sculpture at this time, even though a couple of hundred thousand African Americans had served in the Union forces and substantial numbers continued to serve in the Indian wars and the Spanish-American conflict. Of the hundreds or thousands of soldier figures erected in monuments across the country in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, one could count on the fingers of one hand the number that included any figures of black soldiers. For this reason MacMonnies carefully modulated the impact of his figure: he kneels rather than stands as his white comrades do, and his gun does not point toward a target but off to the side . In the press of the time, far more attention was devoted to the nude allegorical figure above the sailors, which some critics thought crossed the line of decency. Nudity was one thing, if it was properly idealized, but MacMonnies had obviously used a live model and produced a figure that, in the words of a *New York Times* critic, was “most nastily real.”<sup>xviii</sup>

In the end Duncan’s original arch was made to serve a far more elaborate sculptural program than he had envisaged, a program that inflated the military pomp and splendor of the monument beyond just about anything that had been erected in the U.S. at that time. By the time the arch and its sculpture were complete, the U.S. had already embarked on a newly interventionist foreign policy, taking armed forces into Cuba and the Philippines. The lavish format and aggressive imagery of the arch not only anticipated the new military stance of the U.S. abroad, but also intervened dramatically in the local landscape. The plaza surrounding the monument had to be redesigned to accommodate this monumental behemoth and to frame the traffic approaches appropriately. We have already noted that the Lincoln monument had to be removed.

But larger changes were to come, as Stanford White and his firm McKim, Mead, and White took on the job and created a larger and more formal plaza, typical of the landscape design work that the firm would later do at Columbia University and on the national Mall in Washington, D.C. . In the 1920s the plaza was finally rechristened Grand Army Plaza, after the name of the major Union veterans organization the Grand Army of the Republic .

My remaining time permits only a brief discussion of the officer monuments that were such an important part of the commemorative landscape in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Brooklyn has several fine examples that raise some of the larger questions we have been discussing so far. I will close with a few remarks on two equestrian statues, to General Grant and General Slocum, erected in 1896 and 1905 respectively, the first in Grant Square in what is now Crown Heights and the second at the intersection of Eastern Parkway and Bedford Avenue (it has since been moved to the outskirts of Grand Army Plaza). These represent two highly contrasting approaches to one of the most venerable types of sculpture, the equestrian, here in its final flowering just before the automobile would make it hopelessly old-fashioned and irrelevant. The Grant equestrian was funded by the Union League Club, a staunchly Republican social club representing the local business elite, and located in the street outside their impressive building. Slocum by contrast was a local hero who died in Brooklyn and was interred at Greenwood; the city government paid for his monument.<sup>xix</sup>

The Grant equestrian is a sober, understated composition, the general slouching beneath a heavy overcoat and a rumpled hat pulled low, studying something in the

distance as his horse's alert ears prick up at the sound of battle. No brandishing of weapons, no display of gallantry, but a laconic, unruffled, calculating pose. For journalist Alfred Townsend he had an "introspective and shadowed look, like a Spanish beggar on horseback," but for the critic of the *Eagle* these same qualities were precisely those that made Grant the perfect commander for a modern kind of warfare. "He is surveying a presum[ed] battlefield, with the air of one who calculates chances and watches opportunities. Battles in the old days were gained or lost largely by personal prowess of the leaders, but that is no longer the case. It is brains, not muscle, that wins in these times."<sup>xx</sup> If we juxtapose this figure to the conventional battle image on the Greenwood soldiers memorial, we can surmise that the equestrian sculptor William Partridge was working to invent a new visual language of warfare embodied in the isolated, introspective commander, stern, technocratic, and pitiless. Now compare Partridge's psychological study to MacMonnies' figure of a nattily dressed Slocum on a prancing steed with his sword drawn straight up in the air, and we can see how the power of convention continued to hold. MacMonnies' statue looks in retrospect to be a desperate last gasp of military pomp and parade grounded in a technology that was soon to become utterly obsolete. The statue received a fair bit of criticism from men who had served under Slocum, who insisted that the general, like Grant, was a study in self-control, who gave orders quietly to his staff officers and never tried "to carve holes in the sky with his sword," if he even wore one.<sup>xxi</sup>

Strangely, though, the image hardly seemed to matter in the end. When the Slocum statue was dedicated in May 1905, President Theodore Roosevelt made the trip up to Brooklyn to give the oration, where he emphasized the importance of having a



strong navy (Brooklyn of course had a major federal shipyard, and only two days beforehand the issue of naval power had hit the front page when the Japanese destroyed a large part of the Russian navy). But in a more general sense, Roosevelt emphasized the importance of being ready to fight. No amount of good intention or sweetness in life counts for much, he argued, unless behind it “lies the power that makes a man a man.”<sup>xxii</sup> For Roosevelt, Slocum was such a man, as were all the veterans of the Civil War, an entire generation he idolized and tried his best to emulate. And though he said that the Union triumph was “a victory for righteousness,” he uttered not a word about emancipation. The greatest achievement of the war, he declared, was the reconciliation of North and South. He spoke of the “heritage of honor” on both sides, but not a word about the utterly dishonorable system of racial segregation that had become entrenched all over the South and in large parts of the North as well, including, it needs to be said, Brooklyn.

Roosevelt’s speech demonstrated once again that the ever increasing military power of the U.S. came at a price, the gradual but unmistakable transformation of the moral basis of the Union cause into empty platitudes, as empty in their own way as MacMonnies’ military rhetoric was in the Slocum statue. What we have witnessed over the course of my short paper is the transformation of the war memorial from a relatively small-scale enterprise into an increasingly competitive exercise, geared to the performance of rituals that tied local civic identity to the nation’s military and to the expansionist dreams that military could help make come true. Over time, the partisan differences that had plagued the monument projects in the first couple of decades after the war became less and less significant as the memorial rituals worked to create a

patriotic consensus. Every single one of the monuments I have discussed remained for years or even for decades a ritual site where patriotic speeches and ceremonies regularly took place. Now that these monuments have lost that ritual significance, and mostly stand as by-gones of a past era, we have to work hard to realize that they helped form the culture we live in today. They helped redefine patriotism. They made a whole constellation of beliefs, once controversial, seem natural and commonsensical, so much so that to question them today has become a risky business.

---

<sup>i</sup> Walt Whitman, *Specimen Days* (Philadelphia: David McKay, 1883), 80-81.

<sup>ii</sup> William Dean Howells, "Question of Monuments," *Atlantic Monthly* May 1866, 647.

<sup>iii</sup> Oliver Wendell Holmes, "Doings of the Sunbeam," *Atlantic Monthly* July 1863, 12.

<sup>iv</sup> Howells, "Question of Monuments," 647-48.

<sup>v</sup> Savage, *Standing Soldiers, Kneeling Slaves*, 67.

<sup>vi</sup> *Brooklyn Eagle*, March 12, 1868, 2; "Abraham Lincoln," *New York Times*, October 22, 1869, 2.

<sup>vii</sup> "The Fitness of Things," *Brooklyn Eagle*, September 15, 1869, 3. The Prospect Park Commission was an independent body appointed by the state legislature, which worked against considerable opposition from the local municipal government; eight of the commission's original twelve members were Republicans. See Harold Coffin Syrett, *The City of Brooklyn, 1865-1898: A Political History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1944), 50.

<sup>viii</sup> *New York Times*, October 22, 1869, 2. The mayor, Martin Kalbfleisch, had been a "Peace Democrat" during the Civil War with Confederate leanings; Syrett, *City of Brooklyn*, 27-29.

<sup>ix</sup> "The Soldiers Monument," *New York Times*, May 29, 1876, 5.

<sup>x</sup> Figure cited in Seth Low's oration at Gettysburg, reproduced in *Brooklyn Eagle*, October 19, 1887, 1.

<sup>xi</sup> Lewis I. Sharp, *John Quincy Adams Ward: Dean of American Sculpture*.

<sup>xii</sup> *Brooklyn Eagle*, May 10, 1887, 4; "Brooklyn at Gettysburg," *Brooklyn Eagle*, July 14, 1887, 2. For more on Low's administration see Syrett, *City of Brooklyn*, 102ff.

<sup>xiii</sup> "A Big Surprise," *Brooklyn Eagle*, January 31, 1888, X.

<sup>xiv</sup> "A Heroic Arch," *Brooklyn Eagle*, March 31, 1888, 6; "Chapin Vetoes," *Brooklyn Eagle*, April 7, 1888, 6; David M. Kahn, "The Grant Monument," *The Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, 41 (October 1982), 224.

<sup>xv</sup> "The Memorial Arch Dedicated," *New York Times*, October 22, 1892, 1.

<sup>xvi</sup> "Plaza Fountain Must Go," *Brooklyn Eagle*, May 13, 1895, 16.

<sup>xvii</sup> Richard Guy Wilson, *McKim, Mead, and White* (New York: Rizzoli, 1983), xxx.

<sup>xviii</sup> "Modern Sculpture," *New York Times*, July 16, 1899, 16.

<sup>xix</sup> "Statue of General Slocum," *Brooklyn Eagle*, November 12, 1896, 7.

---

<sup>xx</sup> “Equestrian Statues,” *Brooklyn Eagle*, December 7, 1897, 6; “The New Statue for the Union League,” *Brooklyn Eagle*, September 16, 1894, 21.

<sup>xxi</sup> *New York Times*, February 2, 1902, 14; February 7, 1902, 8; June 11, 1905, 8.

<sup>xxii</sup> “Hosts of the Living Honoring the Dead,” *Los Angeles Times*, May 31, 1905, 12.