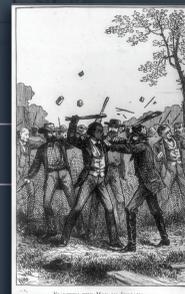


Creating Stories

We recall memories through monuments, learning environments, anniversaries, and rituals. As we recollect, we create interpretive frameworks. Social power dynamics and personal experiences influence that process. As we observe these commemorative efforts, we need to pay attention to who is in charge of the telling, who is included or left out, and the kinds of images used as we remember together.

Instruction

Instruction—whether in primary, secondary, or undergraduate settings—also shapes our memory of disasters. Publishers, instructors, and curriculum committees frame the past every time they edit books, lead discussions, and design curricula. Enslaved Africans appear either as passive victims or active resisters; wars over indigenous land as discoveries or invasions.



Detail from a mosaic in St. Sabotus Chapel in St. Andrews. | Fr. Lawrence Lew, O.P.



A commemorative ceremony in Warsaw, in front of the Monument to the Ghetto Heroes. | Rafal Zamborycki / agneta RZ from Pixabay

Monuments & Memorials

Monuments and memorials range from simple headstones to grand structures. They reference established narratives and suggest devotion to rather than critical analysis of people, events, or experiences. Far from static monoliths, their meaning evolves alongside the public's memory and understanding of the commemorated events.



The sacrificial bull for Eid-ul-Adha at the SOS Children Village. | Courtesy of the U.S. Embassy

Celebrations & Memorial Events

Celebrations and memorial events also maintain narratives. Some events celebrate a story of good overcoming evil like a country's independence day. Events like remembrance days help survivors process massive disasters or loss of life. Over time, commemorative events explain past traumas to the public and provide coping mechanisms.



Clash in Vietnam War, 1971. Near Quang Tri, on the DMZ border, North along the 17th parallel. | February 9, 2017. Bruce Barbery (Boston) St. Mary's Cathedral points out communist-led North Korean position to his machine gun crew. | November 20, 1969. AP. James Cox (Army)



Popular Culture

Popular culture also memorialized disasters. Filmmakers recall the trauma of the Vietnam War through movies like *Forrest Gump* or *Full Metal Jacket*. Documentarians make the battles of World War II intimate and intense. Songwriters bring us into the events like the "Wreck of the Edmond Fitzgerald" while TV shows like *M*A*S*H* prompt fresh engagement with memories of the Korean War. The point is not that popular culture gets every historical detail right; it is that these works make disasters of the past relevant and engaging.

Questions to keep in mind:

Whose voices are included/left out?

Who is the storyteller?
Who is the audience?

How have related images been chosen and framed?

Where is the story being told and how has it changed over time?

Cliff dwelling - Mesa Verde - Rowlesville - Navajo National Monument. | Al Hilesky



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