

# The Social Context of Commemoration: A Study in Collective Memory\*

BARRY SCHWARTZ, *University of Georgia*

---

## ABSTRACT

*Using as data the events and persons commemorated in the United States Capitol, this inquiry demonstrates how the significance of historical events changes from one generation to the next according to a changing infrastructure of societal problems and needs. Before the Civil War, two historical periods, colonization and revolution, produced the only events and heroes on whose commemoration a deeply divided Congress could agree. Once the unity of the nation was brought about by force of arms, the pattern of commemoration changed. Belated recognition was given to the events and heroes of the postrevolutionary period and to outstanding regional, as opposed to national, figures. The commemoration of office incumbency was superimposed on that of extraordinary military and political achievement, thus celebrating the stable institutional structures into which the charisma of the nation's founders finally became routinized. These and other changes in the Capitol's commemorative symbolism reflect the Civil War's solution to the antebellum problems of integration and pattern maintenance. The bearing of these findings on different theories of collective memory is discussed.*

Recollection of the past is an active, constructive process, not a simple matter of retrieving information. To remember is to place a part of the past in the service of conceptions and needs of the present. Thanks to a number of scholars, including Frederic Bartlett, Peter Berger, and Fred Davis, this insight has become a permanent feature of our understanding of individual memory. Still, we do not fully understand the mechanisms which determine and sustain mnemonic consensus. Few contemporary sociologists have systematically studied how the past, as a "collective representation," is affected by the organization and needs of social groups. This is not to say that the problem has been neglected in other disciplines or in the work of

\*An earlier version of this paper was presented at the fourth conference of the International Society for the Study of Time. The initial and revised drafts benefitted from the comments of Charles Bosk, J. T. Fraser, Allen Grimshaw, Martha Myers, Michael Schudson, and Eviatar Zerubavel. John Hice assisted in coding the data. The entire project was supported by the Institute for Behavioral Research of the University of Georgia.

© 1982 The University of North Carolina Press. 0037-7732/82/020374-02\$02.90

our predecessors in sociology. During the past twenty years, historians like Merrill Peterson, Bernard Lewis, and Thomas Connelly have tried to show how society's conception of great men (Jefferson, Cyrus, and Robert E. Lee respectively) change from one generation to the next. Sociologists' interest in the collective interpretation of the past emerged much earlier, and the man who did most to stimulate this interest was Maurice Halbwachs.

In his first work, *Les Cadres Sociaux de la Mémoire*, Halbwachs analyzed the social context of individual remembering and forgetting. In *La Mémoire Collective*, his sociological perspective is expressed in a more radical way. Halbwachs examines the mental life unique to different social groups, pointing out that if part of the past is forgotten, it is because of the disappearance of the groups which sponsored the corresponding memories. As one group succeeds another, it brings with it new memories which build on or replace the old. Halbwachs' last work, *La Topographie Légendaire des Évangiles*, gives empirical substance to these ideas by a detailed survey of sacred sites in the Holy Land. The inquiry reveals that the location of events connected with the life of Christ and the origin of Christianity is not fixed once and for all but rather shifts from one era to another according to significant doctrinal and political developments. Halbwachs concludes that changes in our knowledge of the past correspond to changing organization needs and to transformations in the structure of society.<sup>1</sup> I propose to evaluate this conclusion in the light of more recent theories which place less emphasis on the social context than does Halbwachs'. The issues thus generated will be considered in the light of new data.

#### ISSUES IN COLLECTIVE MEMORY

According to Claude Lévi-Strauss, a variable quantity of dates applied to periods of equal duration represent the "pressure" of history. "There are 'hot' chronologies which are those of periods where in the eyes of the historian numerous events appear as differential elements; others, on the contrary, where for him (although not of course for the men who lived through them) very little or nothing took place" (b, 259). Hot moments in history are identified by studying differential densities in the distribution of events to which society attributes significance. The problem with this approach to collective memory is that it begs the question of how significance itself is ascertained.

Mircea Eliade confronts this problem in his theory of the sanctification of origins. The most significant (hottest) part of any society's past, he says, is its beginning. Formative periods are marked by the magic, attraction, and prestige of origins. They incarnate the golden age, the "perfection of beginnings," and give rise to the notion that "it is the first manifestation of a thing that is significant and valid" (b, 34). The time of origin, continues Eliade, is considered to be a "strong time" precisely because it

was in some way the "receptacle" for a new creation. Eliade developed these ideas in his study of primitive myth; however, the same notion has been advanced by students of modern society. For example, Edward Shils describes the past as an object of sacred attachment: "Why does the past," he asks, "sometimes arouse the *temendum numinosum* which is aroused by the contemplation of the holy? It probably has to do with origins, with decisive events, with 'great moments' which shaped what came later" (198). Eliade's and Shils' statements are merely among the latest in a venerable tradition of theorizing about social origins. In *The Laws*, Plato pointed out that the beginning is godlike because it exceeds in significance any other moment in the historical process. Cicero's *Republic* traces the character of the Roman people to the deeds of the men who founded the society. There are many variations on this theme (see, e.g., Tudor).<sup>2</sup>

The celebration of beginnings is one of the ways we impose discontinuities (Zerubavel) on history and so interpret the past. However, to show that the past is made meaningful by a process of categorization is not to explain why it is differentiated the way it is. By relating historical knowledge to a process of coding and date-distributing, Lévi-Strauss rearticulates this problem but does not solve it. Eliade, on the other hand, answers a question that he has not fully articulated. Along with his predecessors and followers, he points out that origins are important because they are prototypical events, because they set a pattern which affects subsequent developments. Taking for granted the process through which originating events are retained in the collective memory, this formulation (which may or may not be generally valid) skirts the issue of how the pattern itself is sustained.

Maurice Halbwachs supplies the kind of perspective that helps us get around this difficulty. He declares that our understanding of the past is always instrumental to the solution of present problems: "If, as we believe, collective memory is essentially a reconstruction of the past, if it adapts the image of ancient facts to the beliefs and spiritual needs of the present, then a knowledge of the origin of these facts must be secondary, if not altogether useless, for the reality of the past is no longer *in the past*" (b, 7): Halbwachs' statement suggests that states of origin are conceived as extraordinary only when someone is motivated to point them out and define them as such. The sanctification of social beginnings must be induced and sustained by society's subsequent problems and needs.

Unfortunately, this perspective has problems of its own. It promotes the idea that our conception of the past is entirely at the mercy of current conditions, that there is no objectivity in events, nothing in history which transcends the peculiarities of the present. Thus we seem to be faced with the choice of adopting either an absolutist theory, which locates the significance of events in the nature of the events themselves, or a relativistic theory, which locates the significance of events in the standpoint of the observer. (For extensive philosophical discussion of these points of view,

see Meyerhoff.) Thus formulated, the first theory tells us that there is nothing contingent about our historical understandings; the second, that there is nothing constant. I propose to find a way to steer between these two extremes.

### Method

Basic to this undertaking is the distinction between two aspects of historical remembering. Our memory of the past is preserved mainly by means of chronicling, the direct recording of events and their sequence. However, the events selected for chronicling are not all evaluated in the same way. To some of these events we remain morally indifferent; other events are commemorated, i.e., invested with an extraordinary significance and assigned a qualitatively distinct place in our conception of the past. Put differently, chronicling allows for the marking and preservation of the historically real; commemoration, which is the evaluative aspect of chronicling, celebrates and safeguards the ideal. Commemoration lifts from an ordinary historical sequence those extraordinary events which embody our deepest and most fundamental values. Commemoration, the main concern of this paper, is in this sense a register of sacred history.

#### A MEASURE OF COMMEMORATION

Iconography is one of the means by which society commemorates extraordinary people and events. According to Raymond Firth, an icon is a sign for which "a sensory likeness relation is intended or interpreted" (75). However, the word icon also has a narrower, social, referent, namely, a pictorial representation of a sacred figure to whom veneration is offered. Conventionally, this definition of icon has been reserved for the paintings of Christ, the Virgin Mary, and saints which are found in the Eastern Orthodox Church. (For detail, see Ouspensky and Lossky; Uspensky). Logically, however, and in the same spirit, the second and stricter definition may pertain to any graven image of an event or human being society deems worthy of commemoration.

In *The Living and the Dead*, Lloyd Warner used commemorative images to probe the deep structure of Yankee City's collective memory. Just as dreams enable us to study the individual unconscious, he said, so iconic commemoration may be treated as the *via regia* to the collective unconscious.<sup>3</sup> Warner analyzed figures and events portrayed on floats during Yankee City's tricentennial procession. A variant of his method will be used in the present study. (See also Kammen's "Revolutionary Iconography in National Tradition".)

#### RESEARCH SITE

Symbols which celebrate a social origin, says Eliade (a), are often concentrated at a Center, that place in society where one gains access to knowledge of the Beginning of Time. Dumézil gives more precision to Eliade's statement when he describes churches, shrines, and other sacred sites as "the visible landmarks associated with the decisive acts of the Creators" (cited in Callois, 107). As both a commemorative archive and seat of governmental authority, the United States Capitol Building in Washington represents a secular variant of such a site.<sup>4</sup>

At present, the Capitol Building consists of three main sections: a central rotunda, A Senate Wing, and a House of Representatives Wing. Linking these two wings to the Rotunda are the original Senate and House Chambers. The icons on which this study is based are displayed in each of these areas, and have been catalogued by the Committee on the Library, which is responsible for their selection, maintenance, and custody. My information is drawn from the most recent inventory (U.S. Congress). (For a useful commentary on much of this collection, see Fairman.)

#### DATA

The Capitol's iconography is a suitable measure of the commemorative disposition because it was meant to be interpreted as an expression of the virtue of the nation's past. F. C. Adams, for example, observed:

Paintings illustrating the important events in the early history of a great nation . . . belong to the valuable legacies it leaves to posterity for its good. The same may be said of statues of the great men who, by their wisdom, courage, and foresight, gave us the form of government under which we have enjoyed freedom and prosperity equalled only by our greatness as a nation. The people always find in these subjects matters to interest and instruct them; and in selecting works of art to decorate the Capitol and other public buildings our efforts should not only be directed to their entertainment and improvement, but to giving them what they can readily understand and appreciate (U.S. House of Representatives, e, 725).

Another commentator, C. E. Lester, declared that there is no better way to sustain the national spirit among America's leaders than by filling the Capitol with paintings and statues of illustrious men. Lester imagined "senators strolling through rows of patriotic statues as they went to vote, the rotunda of the Capitol bursting with the images of American presidents" (cited in Harris, 195-6). Thus an "eternal (and objective) commemoration" represents "the cement of patriotism, holding individual elements and succeeding generations together in a grip of virtuous emotion" (Harris, 196; see also Durkheim, b, 251).

The media of the Capitol's art collection include not only paintings

and statues but also murals, frescoes, reliefs, and busts. The subjects of the collection include the following:

1. Representations of important events in the nation's history
2. Images of United States Presidents
3. Images of Vice Presidents
4. Images of United States Senators and Representatives
5. Images of individuals, other than elected representatives, who played a prominent part in American history
6. Images of Chief Justices of the Supreme Court
7. Statues of local significance contributed by most of the 50 states and placed in the National Statuary Hall and immediate vicinity.

These seven classes of iconography supply the data for the present inquiry. Excluded from this set of materials are: (1) works of art which were destroyed by the fire set by the British in 1814 (The Committee on the Library has a record of only three of these objects.);<sup>5</sup> (2) works which are or were stored in the Capitol but not accepted as part of its official collection; (3) paintings and decorative objects which bear no reference to particular persons or events, and human forms whose significance is purely allegorical; (4) reliefs carved into the outside wall of the Capitol Building and objects located on the immediate Capitol grounds (all but two of these works in the present collection are decorative or have an allegorical subject); (5) images of artists whose work is displayed inside the Capitol and images of Architects of the Capitol.

Every work of art in the Capitol has a social history, much of which can be condensed into the pushes and pulls of congressional politics and the connections within Congress which the artists used to obtain commissions. This competitive process has been described elsewhere (Miller). I will take up that part of the process which affected the substance of the Capitol's main artwork, not the particular artists chosen to produce it.<sup>6</sup> At the same time, it should be noted that the significance of the present data set is defined by these underlying negotiations.<sup>7</sup> Precisely because it embodies an accommodation of conflicting interests and values, the Capitol's iconography reflects (perhaps better than any other form of commemoration) the changing unities and divisions within the nation. If this condition limits our right to generalize beyond the Capitol, it also makes the Capitol itself a good place to learn how commemoration is pressed into the service of social needs.

The works of art selected for study were first coded,<sup>8</sup> then analyzed. The analysis was guided by three objectives: to identify, by a simple dating procedure, the most commemorated interval in the course of American history; to determine the specific pattern of events to which this duration owes its distinctiveness, and to identify the social conditions and processes which sustain and generate changes in that pattern.<sup>9</sup>

## Results

To determine which period in American history has been most often commemorated in the Capitol, I constructed a frequency distribution of event, tenure, and death dates.<sup>10</sup> Initial results were somewhat ambiguous.

As Table 1 shows, two periods—colonization and revolution—exhaust most of the historical context for the commemoration of events and prominent individuals. Moreover, the first five presidents of the United States—all participants in the Revolution—account for most of the presidential iconography. The post-Revolutionary decades, however, are well represented in the Capitol's Statuary Hall and among the many images of vice-presidents and leading senators and representatives. The information summarized in Table 1, then, is neither fully consistent nor fully inconsistent with the conviction that states of social origin admit of an intrinsic sanctity which make them more commemorable than subsequent historical periods.

Two possibilities immediately present themselves: (1) images which commemorate the cultural and political origins of the United States are not characteristic of the Capitol iconography as a whole; or (2) the commemoration of origins is an expression of a determinate condition of social existence and is therefore confined to one historical period. It is this last possibility that I wish to explore.

### CHARACTERISTICS OF ANTEBELLUM AND POSTBELLUM ICONOGRAPHY

By grouping the various images according to acquisition date and inspecting them at successive intervals, we can in effect visit the Capitol Building and view its iconography at different points in time. Following this procedure, I discovered that there was indeed one rather long period in America's history when the men and events commemorated in its Capitol were related almost exclusively to national origins. This period began with the completion of the North Wing of the Capitol Building<sup>11</sup> in 1800 and ended with the conclusion of the Civil War. Soon after the war, the Capitol Building erupted with post-Revolutionary themes and figures. Thus the notion of a golden age of beginnings is for the most part an antebellum conception. This conclusion is documented in the frequency distribution of commemoration dates in Table 2.

Every comparison in Table 2 must be made with the expectation that colonization and revolution will constitute a higher proportion of all themes during the pre-Civil War period.<sup>12</sup> This is because antebellum society had only 60 years to commemorate its own history. On the other hand, we would not expect colonization and revolution to monopolize the antebellum iconography, for the years which elapsed between the beginning of the nineteenth century and the Civil War contained significant turning

**Table 1.** DISTRIBUTION OF HISTORICAL, TENURE, AND DEATH DATES ASSOCIATED WITH EVENTS AND INDIVIDUALS COMMEMORATED IN THE UNITED STATES CAPITOL

Year	Type of Subject*									
	Events	Prominent Individuals	Presidents	Chief Justices	Senators	Vice- Presidents	Speakers of the House	Chairmen, House Appropriations Committee	National Statuary Hall	Total
-1599	11	23								34
1600-09	3									3
1610-19	1	2								3
1620-29	3									3
1630-39	1									1
1640-49		2						1		3
1650-59										
1660-69										
1670-79									1	1
1680-89	2	2						1		5
1690-99										
1700-09										
1710-19								1		1
1720-29										
1730-39	1									1
1740-49										
1750-59								1		1
1760-69										
1770-79	13	6								19
1780-89	10	4						7		21
1790-99	3	16	22	2	1	1	3	2		50
1800-09	1	7	7	1	2	2	2	2		24
1810-19	3	7	2			2	2	5		21
1820-29	1	4	3			1	3	1		13
1830-39		7	1	1		3	3	3		18
1840-49	4	2	1		2	3	5	4		21
1850-59	1	1	2		12	2	4	7		29
1860-69	6	2	4	1	2	3	4	5		29
1870-79	1	1	1	1	4	2	2	8		22
1880-89		2	2	1	1	3	3	3	5	20
1890-99	1	1			1	3	2	2	10	20
1900-09	1	2	1		2	2	1	2	8	19
1910-19				1		1	2	3	5	12
1920-29	1	1		1	1	3	1	3	6	17
1930-39				1	3	1	5	3	3	16
1940-49					2	4		1	1	8
1950-59					1	1	1	1	2	6
1960-69						2	1	1	2	6
1970- Date							2	1		3
Unknown		3							1	4
Total	68	95	46	10	34	39	46	24	92	454

\*Distribution of death dates for Prominent Individuals and figures commemorated in National Statuary Hall; last year of tenure in office for all other individuals.



**Table 2.** DISTRIBUTION OF HISTORICAL, TENURE, AND DEATH DATES ASSOCIATED WITH EVENTS AND INDIVIDUALS COMMEMORATED IN THE UNITED STATES CAPITOL BEFORE AND AFTER THE CIVIL WAR

Year	Type of Subject													
	Antebellum Period					Postbellum Period								
	Events	Prominent Individuals	Presidents	Chief Justices	Senators	Events	Prominent Individuals	Presidents	Chief Justices	Senators	Vice-Presidents	Speakers of the House	Chairmen, House Appropriations Committee	National Statuary Hall
-1599	4	7				7	16							
1600-09	1	1				2								
1610-19	1	1				1	1							
1620-29	2					1								
1630-39						1								
1640-49		1				1	1							1
1650-59														
1660-69														
1670-79														
1680-89	1	1				1	1							1
1690-99														
1700-09														
1710-19														
1720-29														1
1730-39						1								
1740-49														
1750-59														1
1760-69														
1770-79	5	1				8	5							7
1780-89	4	2				6	2							2
1790-99		1				3	14			1				2
1800-09		1				1	6			2				2
1810-19		1				3	6							5
1820-29						1	4							1
1830-39		4				3	3							3
1840-49	1	1				3	1			2				4
1850-59		1				1	1			11				4

1860-69	6	2	4	1	1	1	2	3	4	2	3	5		
1870-79	1	1	1	1	1	1	4	2	2	2	2	8		
1880-89	1	1	2	1	1	1	1	3	3	3	3	5		
1890-99	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	3	2	2	2	10		
1900-09	1	1	2	1	2	2	1	2	1	2	2	8		
1910-19	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	2	3	5		
1920-29	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	3	1	3	3	6		
1930-39							1	1	5	3	3	3		
1940-49							2	4	1	1	1	3		
1950-59							2	4	1	1	1	1		
1960-69							1	1	1	1	1	2		
1970-								2		1	1	2		
Date		2		1	49	70	27	6	33	39	46	24		
Unknown						1						1		
Total	19	25	19	4	1	49	70	27	6	33	39	46	24	92

\*Distribution of death dates for Prominent Individuals and figures commemorated in National Statuary Hall; last year of tenure in office for all other individuals.

points in the nation's history. Many well-known events and heroes were associated with the massive westward migration, which led to the addition of 17 states and the annexation of large territories. In addition, this was a period of growth in population from 4 to 32 million, great economic expansion, the beginnings of an urban and industrial revolution, and further democratization of the political process. During this same period, the nation fought two wars: the War of 1812, which was designated as "The Second War of Independence" and followed by a tremendous wave of nationalistic feeling and pride, and the Mexican War, in which a number of men distinguished themselves. Comparing the achievements of the last 30 years of the eighteenth century with the first 60 years of the nineteenth, an objective observer might actually designate the latter, not the former, as the true golden age of nation building, prosperity, and democracy. Nevertheless, two major themes—colonization and revolution—almost totally monopolized the commemorative artwork of the pre-Civil War Capitol.

#### *The Nature of the Antebellum Pattern*

The first column in Table 2 displays dates of the events commemorated in the antebellum years. During this time, 16 paintings and 3 large engraved doors (the Rotunda Bronze Doors and the House and Senate Doors) were acquired. Of the 16 paintings, 9 commemorated the nation's period of colonization; 7 commemorated its revolution. If the scenes engraved on the 3 doors are added, the above figures convert to 17 and 20 respectively. (In the tabular presentation, however, each door is coded conservatively as one event. See Note 8.) Likewise, in the 25 images which celebrate 19 historically prominent individuals, the same story repeats itself. Almost all death dates mark the end of the lives of men who took part in either colonization or revolutionary activities. (Several revolutionary figures died as late as the 1830s.)

Of course, the mere dating of events and individuals depicted in commemorative artwork tells us little about what is being commemorated. For this, a number of cases must be selected for direct examination.<sup>13</sup>

Three motifs celebrate the nation's colonization period. *Discovery* is exemplified by the giant "Landing of Columbus," which hangs in the Rotunda, by scenes from Columbus' life on the massive Bronze Doors which lead into the Rotunda, and by reliefs and paintings of Cabot, Raleigh, and Vespuccius. *Exploration* is illustrated by "Discovery of the Mississippi by DeSoto"—another giant Rotunda painting—and by a painting of LaSalle. *Settlement*, by far the richest of the colonization motifs, is represented by another Rotunda painting, "Embarkation of the Pilgrims" and a portrait of the Puritan divine William Brewster.

Settler-Indian relations—the most recurrent feature of the settlement motif—have been depicted in a series whose dualistic conception is rooted in the experience of the frontier.<sup>14</sup> The negative image of the savage

is displayed in one of the four Rotunda reliefs: an Indian in combat with Daniel Boone. (Outside the antebellum Capitol building [and therefore not listed in Table 2] was placed "The Rescue," a statue of an Indian warrior prevented by an allegorical caucasian hero from tomahawking a white mother and child.) The contrasting image of the cooperative, "Noble Savage" is found in the other three Rotunda reliefs: an Indian, bearing an ear of corn, awaits the landing of the Pilgrims; a group of Indians makes a treaty with William Penn;<sup>15</sup> Pocahontas intervenes to prevent the cruel execution of John Smith—this last being a counterpoint to "The Rescue." These contradictory images of the American Indian are both articulated and resolved in the impressive "Baptism of Pocahontas," which, by its reference to religious conversion of the uncivilized, depicts the archetypal "transition from nature to culture" (Lévi-Strauss, c). The painting hangs prominently on the Rotunda wall.

Incidentally, commemoration of settlement is mainly confined to events which took place prior to the mid-seventeenth century. The 140 years which elapsed between 1630 and 1770 are rarely acknowledged.

Commemoration of the American Revolution produces two motifs, *military* and *political*. The military is most conspicuous in the heroic-sized Rotunda paintings of "Surrender of General Burgoyne," and "Surrender of Lord Cornwallis." Depicted on the Senate and House Bronze Doors are 13 scenes ranging from "Battle of Bunker Hill and the Death of General Warren" to "The Battle of Lexington" and "Presentation of the Flag and Medal to General Greene." Separately commemorated are individuals who played a leading part in the war, e.g., LaFayette, Kosciuszko, von Steuben. The political aspects of the Revolution are expressed in two other Rotunda paintings: "The Declaration of Independence" and "General George Washington Resigning His Commission." The Senate and House Doors include "Washington's Farewell to His Officers," "Treaty of Peace at Paris," "Ovation for George Washington at Trenton," and "Inauguration of George Washington." The political side of the Revolution is also represented by most of the presidential iconography. Out of a total of 19 images, 15 represent 5 Revolutionary fathers who became the nation's first 5 Presidents: 8 images represent Washington; 1, Adams; 3, Jefferson; 2, Madison; and 1, Monroe. Related to this same motif are the paintings of statesmen: Benjamin Franklin, John Hanson, Peyton and Edmund Randolph, as well as the busts of the first four Chief Justices.

The commemorative iconography of the antebellum Capitol had a simple structure. Its content was for the most part limited to the celebration of colonization and revolution. To be precise, of the 69 images placed in the Capitol before the Civil War, 60 represented men and events of the revolutionary and prerevolutionary periods.<sup>16</sup> We must now try to understand the reason for this emphasis. At least one explanation—that which appeals to a scarcity of opportunity—can be ruled out. The antebellum republic

had plenty of time to recognize the important men and events of the seventeenth and early to middle eighteenth centuries. It had ample opportunity to recognize itself. Many heroes of the Revolution, the Civil War and the late nineteenth century were consecrated in the Capitol shortly after their deaths. To interpret the pattern, then, we need to follow a different track: we must know something about the social conditions which prevailed at the time that pattern was construed.

*Antebellum Memory as a Generational Product*

Characteristic of the antebellum mind was the tendency to divide history into two stages: an extraordinary period of creation by the Founding Fathers and an ordinary era of preservation and consolidation. Thus in 1821 Daniel Webster declared:

We can win no laurels in a war for independence. Earlier and worthier hands have gathered them all. Nor are there places for us by the side of Solon, and Alfred, and other founders of states. Our fathers have filled them. But there remains to us a great duty of defence and preservation (253-4; See also Webster's 1843 speech 262).

The era of which Webster speaks, a time of relative peace, expansion, and prosperity, was characterized by its more negative spokesmen as an age of "ennui" (Emerson, 120), the "prosaic epoch," a "prosperous forcing-house of mediocrity" (Lowell, 763). By no means could this state of "microscopic realities" be dismissed as a natural, if not desirable, phase in the nation's cultural development. To many of the ideologues of the day it represented the clearest possible evidence of spiritual deterioration, "a lamentable degeneration from that sublime political morality which characterized our ancestors" (Anonymous, 283). The favored remedy was to restore heroic morality by recreating the spirit of the Revolution.

To historian George Forgie both the problem and its solution were the inevitable products of powerful structural realities:

[A] stable democracy dedicated to impersonal social progress, a society that counted among its most pressing concerns the question of the provenience of bank charters or the funding of internal improvements, did not demand a 'race of GODLIKE WASHINGTONS' or even another generation of heroes. Among men of genius and ambition, the endless eulogies on the revolutionary fathers succeeded not so much in demonstrating the need for heroic virtues as in calling attention to a society so arranged and so destined that it did not require those virtues, did not inspire them, and, indeed, could find no place for them at all (69).

The main problem with Forgie's argument is that its outcome is prefigured by the very terms in which it is stated. Forgie denies the commemorability of the antebellum age by stressing its banalities (as if the Revolutionary period did not have its own share) and ignoring its heroism. At the root of the problem is an implicit commitment to an Eliade-type

theory of historical memory and a failure to qualify that theory by recognizing the functions which historical memory performs.

### *Establishing Consensus*

According to Paul Nagel, the internal cleavages which existed before the Constitutional Convention, in addition to those which developed after (especially between 1790 and 1815), seemed to be on the verge of threatening the existence of the republic. As time passed things got worse. In 1832, as the Nullification crisis reached its climax, ominous sounds were heard in Congress. Wiley Thompson (U.S. House of Representatives, b) of Georgia declared, "There is scarcely an individual within this Hall, or within the United States at all conversant with passing events and political aspects who does not feel compelled to look to the possibility of a severance of this Union." Upon this regional conflict was superimposed a mosaic of vivid political controversy over tariffs, public lands, and appointments. Opinions (cited in Warren, a) were often couched in personal invective. Pro-Jackson newspapers condemned Henry Clay as "a wretched demagogue, broken down in body and mind by vice and profligacy." Anti-Jackson papers referred to the president as "the ignorant, imbecile, and inefficient man who now unfortunately occupies the chair of Chief Magistrate." The overall political climate, whose bitterness extended several years into the past decade, is captured in John Quincy Adams' 1830 memoirs: "Personalities, malignities and hatreds seem to take the place of all enlarged discussions of public concerns." In hindsight, Charles Warren tells us that "No period could have been less auspicious for obtaining any united or harmonious congressional action on any subject" (a, 40). Congress was to be thus divided for the next 30 years.

The peculiarities of the antebellum memory were shaped by these disunities and struggles. If, as Eisenstadt has suggested, every society uses some past event as a focus point of collective identity, then the early American republic could not depend on its recent past. Only the Revolution would do. The reason for this choice is that the Revolution was the only event which expressed the unity of the new nation and which could serve as a basis of national tradition. "The Revolution," says Kammen, "is the one component of our past that we have not, at some point or other, explicitly repudiated" (15). Such could not be claimed for the War of 1812, the great expansion of democracy under Jackson, the Mexican War, or other important events which produced or aggravated national divisions between 1800 and 1861.

Debates over the merits of different candidates for commemoration gave loud voice to these divisions. For example, a proposal to commission a painting of Andrew Jackson in the Battle of New Orleans during Jackson's second run for the presidency was viewed by political opponents in the House of Representatives as "vulgar electioneering" and rejected. A

counter-proposal to commission a painting to acknowledge the contribution of the Navy in the War of 1812 was rejected by Jackson's supporters. A series of other recommendations met a similar fate. This controversy, which covers 24 columns in *Debates in Congress* (U.S. House of Representatives, a, 929-53; see also Warren, b, 177-91), had to do with the decoration of the Rotunda. Of the eight giant niches reserved for historical paintings, four had been filled by John Trumbull. There were four niches left before the Jackson controversy, and four left after.

Six years later (1834), Henry Wise of Virginia commented on the subject of paintings that might be acceptable to Congress. He declared, "I for one will agree to it that the selection of subjects shall be confined to a date antecedent to the treaty of '83" [official end of hostilities with Great Britain]. In stating his preference for events "magnified and mystified by antiquity," Wise explicitly recognized the intensity of anti-Jackson sentiment (U.S. House of Representatives, c, 791-95). Representative Verplank of New York (cited in Miller, 51) was of a similar mind. "Does our anterevolutionary history present no subject?" he asked. He himself could and did propose the landing of the Pilgrims and scenes from the Columbus voyage. In the end (1836), Congress commissioned four paintings, each illustrating some event "civil or military, of sufficient importance to be the subject of a national picture, in the history of the discovery or settlement of the Colonies . . . or the separation of the Colonies from the mother country, or of the United States prior to the adoption of the federal constitution" (cited in Miller, 56).

Seventeen years later, when national cleavages were even wider, Congress faced the problem of decorating the new House and Senate Wings. Representative Brown of Mississippi responded by introducing a resolution (U.S. House of Representatives, d, 656) which called for marble busts of all Presidents. That never got to the floor for a vote. (An identical proposal had gotten nowhere 36 years earlier [Fairman, 225]. More favorably received was Ohio Senator Cooper's (U.S. Senate, a, 514) resolution: to consider commissioning native artists to represent "scenes in our revolutionary and anterevolutionary history." The last three major pieces of antebellum artwork—the Bronze Doors designed for the House and Senate Wings and the Bronze Doors designed for the Rotunda, as well as most of the subsequent prewar acquisitions, adhered to this formula.

Controversies over the decoration of the Capitol suggest that the preoccupation with revolutionary themes during the antebellum age was occasioned not by that age's anti-heroic self-conception (as George Forge would undoubtedly assert) but by a failure to achieve consensus on what was heroic about it. During this time, political sensibilities kept the Capitol iconography homogeneous in theme and content. If there could be no agreement about the recent past, an otherwise contentious congress could find a basis for unity in its attitude toward the nation's origin. The decision

to formally venerate this origin, and to ignore subsequent events, was a compromise that served two purposes: it not only reduced the level of political conflict in congress but also showed that below its surface of seething dissension there was a solid base of unity. Expressing this consensus in a rich commemoration of origins, congress produced a body of symbols that was to be stripped of its uniqueness though nonetheless cultivated throughout the post-Civil War period.

#### *Searching for the Origins of National Culture*

What are we to make of the conception of origin itself? If the antebellum generation was so preoccupied with the Revolution, we need to know why it so often chose to exploit anterevolutionary topics, and why subsequent generations were determined to maintain the practice. To deal with this problem, we must recognize that America's conception of its own beginning was shaped by its search for symbols of nationhood as well as statehood, by its desire to find unique cultural traditions to stand beside its newfound political unity.

If, from the period of the first settlements to the late nineteenth century, there was anything unique about American culture, it was the experience of the frontier. The one most compelling symbol of that experience was the Indian. As long as the frontier was expanding, the dualism of civilization and savagery was essential to the American's self-conception (Marienstras; Pearce). Americans defined their civility in terms of its opposite, savagery. This dualism promoted a sense of unity among politically disparate colonists by highlighting their differences from the native; it contributed to a national consciousness by differentiating the American experience from that of Europe (see note 14) and, most importantly, it legitimated the overcoming of native resistance to settlement.

If the process of settlement involved the displacement of the Indian, it also meant the overcoming of savagery by civilization, the transition from nature to culture. This theme is by no means exhausted by the antebellum iconography; it finds continued expression in the postbellum acquisitions, which include "The Entry of Cortez in the Halls of Montezuma" and "Pizarro's Conquest of Peru." I take paintings such as these to be transformations of the most salient Biblical prototype of the eighteenth and nineteenth century: the conquest of Canaan (Albanese). If Americans, convinced of their Manifest Destiny, were hesitant to commemorate forthrightly the violent treatment of their own Indians, they could at least give indirect expression to their ideals by the celebration of foreign conquerors. (For more detail on this matter, see Bode.)

America's use of colonization as a mine for symbols of nationhood was affected by political concerns as well as the experience of the frontier. The role of Christopher Columbus—another foreign presence in the American pantheon—is a case in point. Of the many figures who partici-



pated in the colonization of the New World, Columbus is the one whom Americans have most frequently commemorated. Of course, like most of the great explorers, Columbus represented a nation against which England competed in the struggle for control over North America. The early colonists, so far as they looked back at all, confined their attention to John Cabot. A good political choice. A good logical choice, too. Cabot, after all, was first among the post-Columbus explorers to land on the North American continent. By the time of the Revolution, however, anti-British sentiment transformed Cabot into "the shadowy agent of the British King" (Stewart, 12).<sup>17</sup> Simultaneously, Columbus—the agent of a Spanish king (whose successors no longer threatened the colonies)—emerged suddenly as America's ultimate founding hero.<sup>18</sup>

Events of America's early settlement, like those in which Columbus was involved, were rediscovered for definite reasons. "The symbol of the Pilgrim Fathers," explains Wector, "did not become important, for the country at large, until storm clouds of the American Revolution began to gather. Then the flight of the Pilgrims from English tyranny to the New World, was seen to have patriotic meaning" (43).<sup>19</sup> Patriotic connections are illustrated in John Adams's 1802 oration on the Pilgrims' landing. "No bastard Norman tyrant landed on the Rock," said he. "On the contrary, the first settlers endeavored to found a perfect Republic" (cited in Van Alstyne, 113). This same linkage was expressed during the 1820 Bicentenary of the landing. An official design represented the Pilgrims enveloped by two scrolls which read "American Independence, 1776" and "Washington, born 1732, died 1799."

"Rediscovered history," says Bernard Lewis "is the history of events and movements of persons and ideas, that have been forgotten . . . and then, after a longer or shorter interval, rediscovered" (12). In the antebellum Capitol, recovered history was part of a support system which amplified remembered history. Discovery and settlement were thus brought to the service of commemorating the Revolution.<sup>20</sup>

#### *The Postbellum Pattern as a Generational Product*

As has been shown, a charismatic epoch is not a fixed entity which imposes itself on the present; it is a continuously evolving product of social definition. In the present case, this definitional process is produced and sustained by a need for social consensus rather than by characteristics embodied in the charismatic epoch itself. If this is so, then a reduction in the urgency of this need should bring about a transformation of the commemorative pattern. This is precisely what happened.

When the federal union was finally secured in 1865 by force of arms, the content of its symbolism changed, and the National Statuary Hall gives this change its first iconic expression. The legislative act which provided for the Hall invites the contribution of bronze or marble statues, "not

exceeding two in number for each state, of deceased persons who have been citizens thereof and illustrious for their heroic renown or for distinguished civic services." The legislation itself was a deliberate act of reconciliation passed in 1864, just before the termination of the Civil War. Although the legislative architects of this new shrine were mindful of the regional biases<sup>21</sup> that might undermine their purpose, they nevertheless took the chance, assuming with Senator Morrell that "the suffrages of no State will fail to be honestly and fairly bestowed, for no local shams will be intruded where the judgement of the world is sure to be challenged, and where partisanship loses its current value" (U.S. Senate, b, 1936).

The idea of a National Statuary Hall would have been inconceivable during the antebellum years because the figures commemorated symbolize the political integrity of the states. This kind of acknowledgment would have been too awkward when the integrity of the nation was problematic. When national union was no longer an issue, however, regional diversity could be safely cultivated. In consequence, few of the images sent by the states to the National Statuary Hall have a common significance. (For the most part, Georgians alone recognize the statue of Alexander Stevens. Likewise, John Stark's fame is more or less confined to New Hampshire.) Representing as they do different "stocks of historical knowledge" (Schutz, 236-42), these images remind us of the depth of our differences. They celebrate the diversity, not the unity, of the nation. For a list of the figures commemorated in the National Statuary Hall, see U.S. Congress, 222-24.)

A second feature of the post-Civil War iconography may be discerned from Table 2. Although events related to colonization and revolution are marked by 27 images, these no longer monopolize the Capitol's visual history. Twenty-two images, or 45 percent of the total of 49, commemorate events of the post-Revolution years. The discovery of heroism in the antebellum age—an age that George Forgie defined as "post-heroic" (50)—is embodied in paintings of "The Battle of Lake Erie"<sup>22</sup> and "The Death of Tecumseh," both from the War of 1812; and "General Scott Entering Monterey" and "General Scott in Mexico City" from the Mexican War. The great transcontinental migration is depicted in "Westward the Course of Empire Takes Its Way" and "Discovery of Gold in California." These events were commemorated shortly after the end of the Civil War, by which time New England had reconciled itself to them. In the twentieth century the "Inauguration of Jackson" and "The Burning of the Capitol" in the War of 1812 are memorialized. Turning to the Presidents, we see that 60 percent of the 27 images in the postwar collection represent men of the revolutionary generation; among those remaining, however, two antebellum Presidents—Jackson (a hero of the War of 1812) and Taylor (a hero of the Mexican War)—are commemorated. In the late nineteenth and the twentieth centuries, with the issue of secession no longer dividing Congress, three antebellum Senators—Clay, Webster, and Sumner (all

champions of union) were recognized in no less than 13 images. By the mid-twentieth century, John Calhoun was remembered.

Besides the disposition to acknowledge regional diversity and to recognize antebellum events and figures that were infrequently honored by the generation that produced them, the post Civil War Capitol exhibited another characteristic: the tendency to substitute for "personal charisma" the "charisma of office" (Weber). An indication of this tendency is the commissioning of busts and portraits according to incumbency rather than achievement; that is to say, the reserving of images for any man who occupies an office, no matter what he does while he is in it. The criterion of commemoration thus shifts from individual to structure, from personal exploits to impersonal functions. Correspondingly, there emerges a new attitude to time: the present and future as well as the past become objects of commemoration. Something like this happened in 1885, when the Senate decided to commission marble busts of all previous Vice Presidents. The practice has since become routine. By 1910, the House of Representatives had acquired or commissioned portraits of all its previous Speakers. Since then, every Speaker of the House has sat for a portrait and seen that portrait displayed.<sup>23</sup> In 1940, the House Committee on Appropriations acquired the portraits of all its chairmen, beginning with Thaddeus Stevens in 1865. All chairmen since 1940 have been thus commemorated. And so it goes. Heroic men of the past are replaced by the present and future occupants of powerful offices.<sup>24</sup>

This same spirit of impersonality helped shape Congress's perception of America's past. When John Trumbull was asked by President Madison to name the proposed military subjects of his historical paintings, he replied that there were two paramount to all others. "We had in the course of the Revolution, made prisoners of two entire armies, a circumstance almost without parallel. [Therefore], the surrender of General Burgoyne at Saratoga and that of Lord Cornwallis at Yorktown seemed to me indispensable" (Trumbull, 258). As the nineteenth century drew to a close, the artistic tastes of Congress changed in favor of lower-scale depictions of the Revolution. What Congress wanted for the Capitol was not new versions of the great victory of General Gates but "General Marion Inviting a British Officer to Share a Meal."; not the reinterpretation of Washington at Yorktown but "Mrs. Motte Directing Generals to Burn Her Mansion to Dislodge the British" and "Sergeants Jasper and Newton Rescuing American Prisoners from the British." Ignoring the epic proportion in favor of the mundane, these paintings express another aspect of the postbellum Capitol's reinterpretation of the past. Not only were the old heroes and their exploits upstaged by the commemoration of institutions and their technicians, a new agent of history appeared in the Capitol's pantheon, and his presence reflected a new understanding of America's golden age of origin. The Revolution became democratized as the mundane actions of obscure men

were superimposed on the established epic. Anonymity assumed its place beside charisma in the iconic conception of the beginning of history. (For further discussion of this tendency, as articulated in commemorative postage stamps, see Skaggs.)

#### MAINTENANCE AND GROWTH AS INFRASTRUCTURES OF SYMBOLIC EXPRESSION

Emphasizing the themes of colonization and revolution, on whose sanctity all in congress could agree, the content of antebellum iconography represented a common denominator of collective memory. Amassing its own imagery of the beginning, the postbellum Capitol made further contributions to this program (see Table 2), and so gave depth and continuity to the symbolic life of the nation. At the same time, new elements were superimposed: a celebration of figures and events ignored by the antebellum generation; a recognition of local and regional, as opposed to national, heroes; the commemoration of structures, as opposed to individuals, incumbency as opposed to exploits. According to a survey of relevant congressional documents, these elements were added without the kind of rancorous bickering that accompanied the commemorative process in the antebellum years. The thematically simple, affect-laden structure of the antebellum iconography thus evolved into the thematically complex but affectively simplified structure of the post-Civil War period.

To better articulate the social context of this transformation, we may adopt a model from Talcott Parsons. According to Parsons, society can be differentiated into four activity sectors: goal attainment (polity), adaptation (economy), integration, and pattern maintenance. No two societies assign the same priorities to these four social functions. Antebellum America, for example, can be credited with extraordinary political and economic achievements; however, its most urgent tasks were those of integration and maintenance. In the postbellum years, the nation's ability to hold itself together was no longer problematic; therefore, new energies could be made available for adaptation and goal attainment. The energies were used productively. As Nevins and Commager (223) observed, "no other generation in American history witnessed changes as swift and revolutionary as those which transformed the rural republic of Lincoln and Lee into the urban industrial empire of McKinley and Roosevelt" (223).<sup>25</sup> In this new context, the old commemorative paradigm seemed to be a little out of place. It was not that the celebration of the nation's beginnings ceased to be *appropriate*; rather, in a society that had solved the integrative problem and had undergone massive political and economic change, the old paradigm was no longer *sufficient*.

To the loosely integrated political structure of the antebellum era corresponded an iconography which sanctified individual exploits and social unity. To the more tightly integrated political structure of the postbel-

lum era corresponded an iconography which celebrated the weight of institutional structures and acknowledged social diversity. Thus, while the expanding rural republic of antebellum times never forgot that it was a new and revolutionary society and expressed this conviction in its perception of history and choice of heroes, the postbellum period, with its expanding cities, industries, and bureaucracies, recalled its origins but expressed through its other commemorative choices the conviction that the newness had worn off, that the revolution was over.<sup>26</sup>

#### A QUALIFICATION

From what has so far been said, it would appear that the interesting phase of American history ended with the Civil War. From then on, there is little more to be seen of momentous events and individual heroism. Of the 49 events commemorated during the years which elapsed between 1865 (the end of the Civil War) and 1978, only five actually took place during this 113-year period. And of these five, only two—the signing of the Civil Rights Bill and the Spanish American War—were of conspicuous political significance. The other events include the meeting of the Florida Electoral Commission and the flights of the Wright Brothers and Lindbergh. Furthermore, only 5 of the 70 prominent individuals commemorated after the Civil War made their mark on history during this period. These include the three feminine activists, Mott, Stanton, and Anthony, whose separate representations happen to be part of the same sculpture. And after we exclude the four images of Abraham Lincoln, we find that only 3 post-Civil War Presidents have been commemorated, the last 2 of these being the martyred Garfield and McKinley. Even the five niches set aside by Brumidi in 1870 for illustrious men of the future were eventually used to commemorate 3 men of the antebellum period (Fairman).

It would be absurd, however, to claim that the Capitol's iconography is a *unique* reflection of the nation's historical consciousness, and that an event or figure unrepresented in the Capitol has no significant claim on the collective imagination. Post-Civil War developments, including the momentous events and great figures of the twentieth century, have been excluded from the Capitol for other reasons. They remain uncommemorated in the Capitol because of the limited commemorative functions which the Capitol itself can serve.

Limited space is one reason why the Capitol recognizes so little of post-Civil War history. There is only so much room in this building for commemorative art. And while there are many ways to deal with the problem, few are feasible. The history of the post-Stalin period, for example, shows how easy it was to replace the images of previous Soviet leaders. But this procedure would be inconsistent with the American political tradition, which places great value on the orderly transfer of power and the

continuity of government. Thus once an image is placed in the American Capitol, it is very likely to remain there. To replace old events and heroes periodically with new ones would keep the commemorative process *au courant*, but at the cost of rupturing continuity with the past. In face of this dilemma, the Capitol iconography has become specialized: by *selectively* commemorating historical events and heroic figures up to the Civil War, it celebrates the origin of the nation. By *indiscriminately* commemorating the offices and functions which are important for the routine operation of government, it affirms the nation's stability and permanence in the post-Civil War period. To represent the late nineteenth and twentieth century by its administrators rather than its more dramatic historical agents is to imply that the ultimate salvation of the republic resides in its institutional order, not in the vicissitudes of events and their men.

### Conclusions

The iconography of the Capitol embodies a collective interpretation of time. By deciphering its code, we determine "what is to be remembered of things past, and which of past beginnings, endings, and continuities are marked with significance" (Warner, 96). I have tried to carry out this project by joining the historian's interest in describing changing attitudes towards the past to the sociologist's more general interest in articulating the linkage between collective memory and social structure. Focusing on the manner in which the past is exploited by the present, this study reemphasizes the importance of what Thomas Cottle calls the spatial, as opposed to linear, conception of time. In the spatial conception, time is atomic and divisible. "It is spatial because it suggests that instead of conceiving time as an unbreakable chain of events, we can use our imagination to lift a past instant out of its place on the continuum of time and drop it into another place" (Cottle, 12-13). Far from being simply the first of a series of irretrievable events, then, social beginnings can infuse the present and occupy space within it; but the amount of space they occupy varies from one historical period to the next. Sociologically, this would mean that every phase of social organization "has a tendency to operate in a time proper to itself" (Gurvitch, 174). In this regard, I have shown that the magnetism of social origins resides not simply in their priority and ordering power but in the *meaning* of this priority and ordering power, as defined by later generations and in light of their own experiences, problems, and needs. While the object of commemoration is usually to be found in the past, the issue which motivates its selection and shaping is always to be found among the concerns of the present.

When unity was in question, America's political representatives fell back on the common denominator of founding heroes and celebrated their

memory. Once unity was attained, these representatives began to commemorate their past and present bureaucratic leaders. That is to say, they began to focus on the stable structures into which the activities of the founders became routinized (Weber).<sup>27</sup> The result is an iconography that became more present-oriented, less heroic, and less charismatic, a pattern that attested to the fact that America, at last, had become an unrevolutionary culture.

While the results of this study come down on the side of a theory which attributes the importance of social origins to the context in which they are recalled, they do not permit us to go as far as Maurice Halbwachs in denying the objectivity of history. Halbwachs' empirical work (b) is confined to a part of history that has not been well chronicled and whose recollection is especially sensitive to extraneous social and political developments. To apply his conclusions to instances where ample historical documentation exists would therefore be improper. Given the constraints of a recorded history, the past cannot be literally constructed; it can only be selectively exploited. Moreover, the basis of the exploitation cannot be arbitrary. The events selected for commemoration must have some factual significance to begin with in order to qualify for this purpose. This same internal significance is presupposed by their perpetuation. Despite the abrupt change in the Capitol's iconography after the Civil War, therefore, America's founding events and heroes—those objects which symbolize the unity of the nation—were never completely forgotten. In the last 120 years, the commemoration of America's origins has been enriched by the addition of many works of art. These acquisitions mean that the transformation in commemorative practice inheres not in the displacement of early figures but in the superimposition of more recent, and in many cases less heroic, men and events. The pattern conforms to Durkheim's (a) observations that organic solidarity does not negate the mechanical kind but rather presupposes it and is welded on to it. On the other hand, we make a mistake when we assume that the historical significance of a social origin is a sufficient condition for its commemoration. America's originating events and early leaders are not symbols of national unity because of their priority and factual importance but because this priority and this importance have become and remained convenient objects of consensus among later generations.

### Notes

1. Although Halbwachs alone conducted systematic, empirical research on this question, the question itself seemed to be in the air during the later part of his career. Bartlett's classic studies on the social psychology of remembering were published in 1932, shortly after the appearance of Halbwachs' *Les Cadres Sociaux de la Mémoire*. Bartlett devoted a chapter in his book to Halbwachs' argument. Developing a point of view which parallels that presented in Halbwachs' *La Mémoire Collective*, Ferdinand Schevill demonstrated in 1938 how successive histories of the city of Florence reflected the unique concerns of the different generations for

which they were written. In the same year, but on a more philosophical level, George Herbert Mead declared not only that "history is uniformly determined by the problem before the community," but also that the present "can only be known and interpreted in the past which it involves" (81, 94). At the time Halbwachs, Schevill, and Mead were carrying out their work, the American historian Carl Becker was distinguishing himself by a series of major articles on the social roots of historiography. (For a summary of Becker's work, see Smith.)

2. Running through these variations is Max Weber's distinction between the extraordinary or explosively novel and the recurrent processes through which social institutions subsist. The propensity to divide history into these two epochs is identical to the propensity to attribute different amounts of charisma to different parts of the past.

3. In Warner's own words: "The condensation of collective experience expressed in the forty-two tableaux was much greater than the condensation of an individual's dream, for the latter at best reflects only one lifetime, whereas the images of this procession dealt with a span of time which covered the total meaning of the lives of tens of thousands of individuals who had lived, died, and passed on their collective and individual significance to those now living. . . . For the investigator these symbols of things past provide a long shaft sunk deep into the dark interior of the mental life of Yankee City, and in this symbolic 'stocktaking' the non-rational levels were tapped and brought into view. . . . [B]eyond this, they are evocations and present products of the past emotional life of the group as presently felt" (109-10).

4. The United States Capitol Building was designed to be the seat of Congress and the place in which it assembles for all its mundane business. But it was not designed for this purpose alone. One of the primary tasks facing the new government in 1789 was to find symbols that could effectively represent the political integrity and legitimacy of the nation (Commager). In this connection, the function of the public building was "to present to a new people visible reassurance of unity and harmony" (Harris, 17; see also 195). To that end, the Capitol Building was to make an important contribution. The Capitol was conceived before any other permanent government structure, including the presidential mansion. George Washington, the first president, realized the symbolic importance of a national capitol. "It is the progress of that building," he wrote, "that is to inspire and deepen public confidence" (cited in Brown, xiv). The Capitol, then, was expressly meant to serve as a symbol of nationhood as well as a place of business. And if today it is a destination of continuous pilgrimage and the location of the most solemn state ceremonies, it is not because of the secular importance of the affairs undertaken there but because society has attributed to it a sacred character.

5. These objects include an eagle, and representations of Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette. The royal portraits were requested out of courtesy by the Continental Congress in connection with an application to France for military aid (for detail, see Warren, b).

6. In this study, I will be concerned not with icons taken individually but with the properties of an iconic system. Starting with this conception, Lévi-Strauss's observation on totemism can be exploited. It is the conviction of Lévi-Strauss that certain natural objects, like plants and animals, become totems not because they are *bonne à manger* (good to eat), but because they are *bonne à penser* (good to think with). In other words, totemism is a special case of the use of natural contrasts for the purpose of expressing social contrasts (Lévi-Strauss, a). My use of iconography derives from this principle. I will try to show that the significance of icons is not that they are good to look at but rather good to think with, or, more precisely, good to remember with. In this connection, the relation between icon and iconography is seen to correspond to the relation between the parts and whole of any symbolic structure. The meaning of one symbol is determined not by its inherent significance (e.g., the interest of the individual artist) but by its relationship to all other symbols that make up the whole. Thus while no single icon taken by itself is good to remember with, a large number of icons aggregated in one spatially bounded setting must be viewed as a meaningful expression of an underlying image of the past.

7. The reasons for an artist's choice of subject always involve an agreement between his own dispositions and the desires of the congressmen who commission, purchase, or accept his work. However, as soon as we discover that works of art done by different artists and sponsored by different congressmen display common themes, we realize that individual attitudes and preferences are themselves problematic. If different artists seem to be doing the same thing, then we assume that their activities are oriented to the same standards of preference (which may or may not be their own).



8. The works of art selected for analysis were coded according to the following rules. Individuals are categorized in terms of the highest office or status attained. For example, all portraits and busts of George Washington are grouped in the presidential iconography rather than that of "prominent individuals." However, if an individual is expressly commemorated as a member of some group, then he will be coded accordingly. Thus Jefferson is coded as both lawyer and president; Carroll, as both revolutionary (prominent individual) and senator, according to the intention of the artist. (There are only a few such cases among the 454 studied.) Likewise, if an individual is represented as a participant in an identifiable event, the event, not the individual or individuals, is coded. When events depicted in a work of art span many historical eras, such as those included in the 500-year span covered by the great Rotunda mural, they are coded separately. In some cases a series of events is used to commemorate a particular era. Thus on the Senate and House Bronze Doors are engraved 14 scenes from the revolutionary period; the Rotunda Bronze doors depict 9 events associated with Columbus's voyage, along with 16 images of other early explorers. Since the number of figures and events that could be represented on a door was partly determined by technical rather than commemorative considerations, each door was coded equal to one event. In order to avoid mistaking an artist's compositional requirements with society's commemorative needs, the 16 individuals engraved on the Rotunda Doors were ignored. For this same reason, the Amateis Doors, which contains 8 allegorical scenes from as many institutional spheres (e.g., agriculture, mining, arts and sciences, industry) and 34 reliefs of institutional leaders, will not be counted in the tabular presentation. This presentation does include 5 images which were originally placed inside the Capitol but subsequently moved to other locations, and 31 images destroyed by the accidental fire of 1851. These rules diminish, rather than add, support for the main hypothesis of this study. They represent conservative coding decisions.

9. The corresponding theoretical advantage is this: by matching the iconic "superstructure" and the social "infrastructure," we transcend the dichotomy between structural analysis, which seeks to articulate the internal order of a set of objects (Barthes), and sociological analysis, which attempts to understand this same entity by relating it, causally, functionally, or meaningfully, to a social and historical setting. (For a detailed statement on this distinction, see Leach, 48-50.)

10. The use of death dates, as opposed to birth dates, assumes that any individual's contribution to the nation is made in later life.

11. Although the original two wings of the Capitol were decorated with works of art, these were destroyed by a fire set by the British in 1814. Of only three of these works is there documentation (see note 5). Most of the artwork discussed in this report was acquired after the Rotunda was fully completed in 1829, though much of it was produced before then.

12. The cutting point is 1864, which permits incorporation into the antebellum period all works of art commissioned and/or executed before the war but placed in the Capitol during the war itself.

13. A breakdown by acquisition date of all events, presidents, and prominent individuals considered in this study is available from the author. Lists for the remaining four classes of data can be found in the official inventory (U.S. Congress).

14. The Indian has always been a fixed part of the American social landscape. His presence was felt not only in the many practices which the colonists and later settlers adopted from his culture but also in the very names they applied to the physical environment and to the states, counties, and towns in which they organized themselves. But this diffuse presence does not explain why a group which was and remains excluded from the nation's civil affairs has been given such an important place in its heroic pantheon. The answer to this question is that the American Indian is not himself commemorated. He is the predicate of commemoration. He provides that indispensable element by which the deeper structure of the new republic's consciousness pictorially betrayed itself. Elise Marienstras points out that the presence of the Indian consolidated a sense of national consciousness by differentiating the American experience from that of Europe, which was free of autochthonous influence. Satisfying the nation's need to convince itself of its experiential and cultural independence, the Indian was the difference which made a difference.

15. A mid-nineteenth century transformation of this scene includes the representation of the Chippewa chief Atch-ke-ka-ke-zhay, who posed during his (1855) visit to Washington as part of a treaty delegation (Fairman). Also represented is the Chippewa chief, Beeshekee, who

may have been part of that same delegation. (These images are not included among the prominent individuals arrayed in Table 2. The rationale for this decision is embodied in note 14. Also excluded are Catlin's Indian Scenes.)

16. The exceptions include one event: "The Battle of Chapultepec" (Mexican War, 1847) and eight images of 7 different people, namely, one senator: Henry Clay; three prominent individuals: William Johnson and Lewis Woodbury (both Associate Justices of the United States Supreme Court), and Ferdinand Hassler (an engineer); and three men who became United States President: John Quincy Adams (two images), Andrew Jackson, and Zachary Taylor. (Since the Jackson and Taylor busts [destroyed along with those of Johnson, Woodbury, and Hassler, by the 1851 fire] have neither been reproduced nor assigned specific acquisition dates, it is not possible to determine whether Jackson and Taylor were honored as generals or presidents. The coding rules specify that they be classified as presidents. John Quincy Adams would have been thus classified according to these same rules; however, Fairman reports that the records of artwork destroyed in the 1851 fire make no reference to the marble bust listed in the pre-1927 and the most recent [1978] inventories.) I am familiar with the social context of only two of these exceptions. Clay's portrait was acquired the same year he died (1851). Having recognized the interests of both slave states and free states during his senatorial career, "The Great Compromiser" was generally viewed as a champion of national unity and his body was among the first to be placed in state in the Capitol Rotunda. By contrast, the Chapultepec painting may have involved some political wrangling. Although General Zachary Taylor had already achieved victories in the early phases of the war against Mexico, President Polk, a Democrat, did not want Taylor, a political opponent, to secure credit for winning the war. Polk therefore assigned Winfield Scott to command the final campaigns, which included the Chapultepec operation. The acquisition of the Chapultepec painting was made under the administration of James Buchanan, also a Democrat.

17. Against the many representations of Columbus in the United States Capitol, there is only one of John Cabot.

18. In 1775, a ship was named after the Italian explorer. A few years later, Philip Freneau, the Poet of the Revolution, designated the new nation "Columbia," taking care to trace the term back to the name of Columbus. In the 1780s, *Columbia Magazine* appeared, and Kings College became Columbia College. The nation's capital city was likewise named. In 1792, while the first Columbus Day celebration was held in New York City, a statue of Columbus was erected in Baltimore (Myers). Shortly afterward, Mason Weems, the great mythographer of George Washington, wrote a life of Columbus. (Washington Irving's three volume life came thirty years later.) By the turn of the century, two states (South Carolina and Ohio) named their capital cities after Columbus, a precedent which many small towns would soon follow.

19. This same "logic of liberation" gave significance to the exploits of two other foreign heroes, Garibaldi and Bolivar, whose images were to be displayed in the postbellum Capitol (but not included in the tabular analysis).

20. Within the framework of this consensus there was plenty of room for political jostling. For example, William Powell's "Discovery of the Mississippi by DeSoto" was commissioned in order to appease the nation's "western" interests (Gerdt, 14). Southern interests were served by "The Baptism of Pocahontas." The story of Pocahontas was taken very seriously in the antebellum south, and Virginia, especially, staked her pride in its authenticity (Wector). The artist, John Chapman, was himself a southerner (Gerdt).

21. The spirit which inspired the National Statuary Hall was not a totally forgiving one. The lawmakers mentioned that the sanctity of the Capitol which was to house the statues had been denied by "a war waged by rebels for the destruction of the government." Thus the integrative gesture was not unqualified. No surprise that 40 years passed before one Confederate state would respond to it. By then, the bronzed advocates of slavery, Confederate war heroes, and segregationists created little stir. By 1941, the last southern contribution would be in place and the celebration of the defeat of Reconstruction would be complete. It was no less surprising that the very first states (all Northwestern) which responded to the congressional invitation in the 1870s and 1880s were represented by the new Hall's 15 noncontroversial revolutionary heroes (U.S. Congress, b). The wounds of Civil War were then still fresh.

22. Well before the Civil War, William Powell tried to sell the original version of this painting to Congress. He was "not encouraged" and eventually made the sale to the state of Ohio for display in its own Capitol Building (Fairman).

23. The distributions in Tables 1 and 2 do not include 7 portraits of early (pre-Civil War) Speakers of the House for which acquisition dates are unknown.

24. Eight (1970) paintings of the history of the edifice in which these offices are located—the Capitol Building itself—give another layer of expression to this commemorative inturning.

25. While the faceless, black-suited men projected onto the House and Senate walls of the postbellum Capitol were vehicles for the display of America's newly stabilized political institutions, the corresponding growth and rationalization of its economic life were made manifest in a special commemorative artifact: the great Amateis Doors. These were completed in 1910 and depict American accomplishments in areas like agriculture, iron and electricity, engineering, mining, and science. In this work of art, the sacred acts of the Fathers of the American Revolution give way to the profane achievements of the Industrial Revolution and its participants. The latter group, like its congressional counterpart, is, for most Americans, anonymous.

26. The shift from commemoration of exploits to commemoration of structures is reminiscent of Simmel's observations on the "objectification" of modern society. No longer dependent on the activities of outstanding individuals, the integration of society in the post-Civil War period was sustained by its own institutional weight.

27. These two commemorative themes—the heroic and the anti-heroic—are presently marked by a continuous ecological distribution. The heroic age of origin dominates the iconography of the central Rotunda. As we move out from this center, we pass the less celebrated local heroes of the Statuary Hall and its adjacent areas and move into the surrounding House and Senate corridors, chambers, and rooms. Exhibited here are not only the images of early heroes and events but also the many bureaucratic "successors" who consolidated the achievements of the founders. In no sector of the Capitol, then, do we find a commemoration of one historical epoch. Every sector commemorates the colonial, revolutionary, antebellum, and postbellum ages, thus dramatizing the link between present and past. However, the distribution of heroic origins becomes less dense, its message less clear, as we move from the center to the periphery of the Capitol. This spatial movement is calibrated to a profound historical change. To walk from the Rotunda to the House and Senate Wings is to move from a period of precarious union and ideological dissensus, during which time the Rotunda was decorated, to a period of secure political integration, during which time the present House and Senate Wings were decorated. (Events commemorated in the Rotunda took place, on the average, 85 years earlier than those commemorated in the two Wings. Individuals commemorated in the Rotunda died an average of 32 years earlier than their counterparts in the Wings. [These figures will vary somewhat from year to year as a statue or bust is occasionally switched from the Rotunda to its adjoining chambers, or vice-versa.]) Thus the ecological distribution of icons is itself an information system which marks successive phases of the nation's political structure and self conception. This distribution is the spatial coordinate of collective memory.

## References

Albanese, Catherine L. 1976. *Sons of the Fathers: The Civil Religion of the American Revolution*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

Anonymous. 1831. "The Perilous Condition of the Republic." *New England Magazine* 1:281-89.

Barthes, Roland. 1967. *Elements of Semiology*. New York: Hill & Wang.

Bartlett, F. C. 1932. *Remembering: A Study in Experimental and Social Psychology*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Berger, Peter. 1963. *Invitation to Sociology*. New York: Doubleday.

Bode, Carl. 1959. *The Anatomy of Popular Culture, 1840-1861*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Brown, G. 1970. *History of the United States Capitol*. New York: De Capo Press.

Callois, Roger. 1959. *Man and the Sacred*. New York: Free Press.

Commager, H. S. 1965. "The Search for a Usable Past." *American Heritage* (February):4-9;90-96.

Connelly, Thomas L. 1977. *The Marble Man: Robert E. Lee and His Image in American Society*. New York: Knopf.

- Cottle, Thomas. 1976. *Perceiving Time*. New York: Wiley.
- Davis, Fred. 1979. *Yearning for Yesterday: A Sociology of Nostalgia*. New York: Free Press.
- Durkheim, Émile. a:1893. *The Division of Labor in Society*. New York: Free Press, 1964.
- . b:1912. *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*. New York: Free Press, 1965.
- Eisenstadt, S. N. 1961. "Some Observations on the Dynamics of Traditions." *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 6:451–75.
- Eliade, Mircea. a:1961. *Images and Symbols*. New York: Sheed & Ward.
- . b:1963. *Myth and Reality*. New York: Harper & Row.
- Emerson, Ralph Waldo. 1939. *The Letters of Ralph Waldo Emerson. Volume I*. Edited by Ralph L. Rusk. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Fairman, Charles. 1927. *Art and Artists of the Capitol of the United States of America*. Senate Document No. 95. Washington: GPO.
- Firth, Raymond. 1973. *Symbols: Public and Private*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Forgie, George B. 1979. *Patricide in the House Divided*. New York: Norton.
- Gerdts, William H. 1976. *Robert Weir: Artist and Teacher of West Point*. West Point: Cadets Fine Arts Forum.
- Gurvitch, G. 1963. "Social Structure and the Multiplicity of Times." In Edward Tiryakian (ed.), *Sociological Theory, Values, and Socio-Cultural Change*. New York: Harper & Row.
- Halbwachs, Maurice. a:1925. *Les Cadres Sociaux de la Mémoire*. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1952.
- . b:1941. *La Topographie Légendaire des Évangiles*. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1971.
- . c:1951. *The Collective Memory*. New York: Harper & Row, 1980.
- Harris, Neil. 1966. *The Artist in American Society*. New York: Braziller.
- Kammen, Michael. 1978. *A Season of Youth*. New York: Knopf.
- Leach, E. 1970. "Lévi-Strauss in the Garden of Eden." In E. N. Hayes and T. Hayes (eds.), *Claude Lévi-Strauss: The Anthropologist as Hero*. Cambridge: M.I.T. Press.
- Lévi-Strauss, Claude. a:1963. *Totemism*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- . b:1966. *The Savage Mind*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- . c:1969. *The Raw and the Cooked*. New York: Harper & Row.
- Lewis, Bernard. 1975. *History—Remembered, Recovered, Invented*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Lowell, J. R. 1861. "Self-Possession vs. Prepossession." *Atlantic Monthly* 8:761–69.
- Marienstras, Elise. 1976. *Les Mythes Fondateurs de la Nation Américaine*. Paris: François Maspero.
- Mead, George Herbert. 1938. *The Philosophy of the Act*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Meyerhoff, Hans (ed.). 1959. *The Philosophy of History in Our Time*. New York: Doubleday.
- Miller, Dorothy. 1966. *Patrons and Patriotism*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Myers, Robert J. 1972. *Celebrations*. New York: Doubleday.
- Nagel, Paul C. 1971. *This Sacred Trust: American Nationality, 1798–1898*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Nevins, Allan, and Henry Steele Commager. 1942. *America*. London: Oxford University Press.
- Ouspensky, Leonid, and Vladimir Lossky. 1952. *The Meaning of Icons*. Basel: Walter.
- Parsons, T. 1961. "An Outline of the Social System." In Talcott Parsons et al (eds.), *Theories of Society. Volume 1*. Glencoe: Free Press.
- Pearce, Roy H. 1963. *The Savages of America: A Study of the Indian and the Ideas of Civilization*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.

- Peterson, Merrill D. 1962. *The Jefferson Image in the American Mind*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Schutz, Alfred. 1970. *Alfred Schutz on Phenomenology and Social Relations*. Edited by Helmut Wagner. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Shevill, Ferdinand. 1936. *History of Florence*. New York: Harcourt, Brace.
- Shils, Edward. 1975. *Center and Periphery: Essays in Macrosociology*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Skaggs, D. C. 1978. "Postage Stamps as Icons." In Ray B. Browne and Marsh Fishwick (eds.), *Icons of America*. Bowling Green: Bowling Green State University.
- Smith, Charlotte W. 1956. *Carl Becker: On History and the Climate of Opinion*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Stewart, George R. 1967. *Names on the Land*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.
- Trumbull, John. 1970. *The Autobiography of John Trumbull*. Edited by Theodore Sizemore. New York: De Capo Press.
- Tudor, Henry. 1972. *Political Myth*. London: Pall Mall.
- United States Congress. 1978. *Art in the United States Capitol*. Washington: GPO.
- U.S. House of Representatives. a:1828. *Debates in Congress*. January 8. Washington: Gales & Seaton.
- \_\_\_\_\_. b:1832. *Debates in Congress*. February 13. Washington: Gales & Seaton.
- \_\_\_\_\_. c:1834. *Debates in Congress*. December 15. Washington: Gales & Seaton.
- \_\_\_\_\_. d:1853. *The Congressional Globe*. February 16. Washington: John C. Rives.
- \_\_\_\_\_. e:1870. "Special Report to the Commissioner of Education." *Executive Document No. 315*. June 13. Washington: GPO.
- United States Senate. a:1853. *The Congressional Globe*. February 5. Washington: John C. Rives.
- \_\_\_\_\_. b:1864. *The Congressional Globe*. April 19. Washington: John C. Rives.
- Uspensky, Boris. 1976. *The Semiotics of the Russian Icon*. Belgium: Peter de Ridder Press.
- Van Alstyne, Richard W. 1970. *Genesis of American Nationalism*. Waltham, Ma.: Blaisdell.
- Warner, W. Lloyd. 1959. *The Living and the Dead*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Warren, Charles. a:1932. "How Politics Intruded into the Washington Centenary 1832." *Massachusetts Historical Society Proceedings* 20:37-62.
- \_\_\_\_\_. b:1942. *Odd Byways in American History*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Weber, Max. 1922. *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization*. New York: Free Press, 1947.
- Webster, Daniel. 1903. *The Writings and Speeches of Daniel Webster. Volume I*. Boston: Little, Brown.
- Wector, Dixon. 1941. *The Hero in America: A Chronicle of Hero-Worship*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1966.
- Zerubavel, Eviatar. 1981. *Hidden Rhythms: Schedules and Calendars in Social Life*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

- Peterson, Merrill D. 1962. *The Jefferson Image in the American Mind*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Schutz, Alfred. 1970. *Alfred Schutz on Phenomenology and Social Relations*. Edited by Helmut Wagner. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Shevill, Ferdinand. 1936. *History of Florence*. New York: Harcourt, Brace.
- Shils, Edward. 1975. *Center and Periphery: Essays in Macrosociology*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Skaggs, D. C. 1978. "Postage Stamps as Icons." In Ray B. Browne and Marshall Fishwick (eds.), *Icons of America*. Bowling Green: Bowling Green State University.
- Smith, Charlotte W. 1956. *Carl Becker: On History and the Climate of Opinion*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Stewart, George R. 1967. *Names on the Land*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.
- Trumbull, John. 1970. *The Autobiography of John Trumbull*. Edited by Theodore Sizer. New York: De Capo Press.
- Tudor, Henry. 1972. *Political Myth*. London: Pall Mall.
- United States Congress. 1978. *Art in the United States Capitol*. Washington: GPO.
- U.S. House of Representatives. a:1828. *Debates in Congress*. January 8. Washington: Gales & Seaton.
- \_\_\_\_\_. b:1832. *Debates in Congress*. February 13. Washington: Gales & Seaton.
- \_\_\_\_\_. c:1834. *Debates in Congress*. December 15. Washington: Gales & Seaton.
- \_\_\_\_\_. d:1853. *The Congressional Globe*. February 16. Washington: John C. Rives.
- \_\_\_\_\_. e:1870. "Special Report to the Commissioner of Education." *Executive Document No. 315*. June 13. Washington: GPO.
- United States Senate. a:1853. *The Congressional Globe*. February 5. Washington: John C. Rives.
- \_\_\_\_\_. b:1864. *The Congressional Globe*. April 19. Washington: John C. Rives.
- Uspensky, Boris. 1976. *The Semiotics of the Russian Icon*. Belgium: Peter de Ridder Press.
- Van Alstyne, Richard W. 1970. *Genesis of American Nationalism*. Waltham, Ma.: Blaisdell.
- Warner, W. Lloyd. 1959. *The Living and the Dead*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Warren, Charles. a:1932. "How Politics Intruded into the Washington Centenary of 1832." *Massachusetts Historical Society Proceedings* 20:37-62.
- \_\_\_\_\_. b:1942. *Odd Byways in American History*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Weber, Max. 1922. *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization*. New York: Free Press, 1947.
- Webster, Daniel. 1903. *The Writings and Speeches of Daniel Webster. Volume I*. Boston: Little, Brown.
- Wector, Dixon. 1941. *The Hero in America: A Chronicle of Hero-Worship*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1966.
- Zerubavel, Eviatar. 1981. *Hidden Rhythms: Schedules and Calendars in Social Life*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.