
Introduction

Daniel M. Cobb and Helen Sheumaker

In his classic novel *Requiem for a Nun*, William Faulkner wrote, “The past is never dead. It’s not even past.”¹ This collection of papers explores how the process of memorialization keeps the past alive in the present and shapes the way we imagine our possible futures. The product of a one-day symposium entitled “Memory Matters” hosted by the Humanities Center at Miami University in Oxford, Ohio, on April 16, 2010, it features transcriptions of talks that focus on issues of commemoration in the contexts of United States history, Native America, and museums. The volume also includes a transcript based upon dialogue between the speakers and the audience that took place after the formal presentations.

Edward Linenthal, professor of history at Indiana University Bloomington and editor of the *Journal of American History*, offers a fresh perspective on creating national memorials based upon his many works, including *Sacred Ground: Americans and Their Battlefields* (1993), *Preserving Memory: The Struggle to Create America’s Holocaust Museum* (1995), and *The Unfinished Bombing: Oklahoma City in American Memory* (2001).

Daniel M. Cobb, associate professor of American Studies at the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill, co-editor of *Beyond Red Power: Indian Politics and Activism since 1900* (2007), and author of *Native Activism in Cold War America* (2008), draws upon Benedict Anderson’s notion of the “remembered/forgotten” to explore the work of memory at the sites of the Battle of the Little Big Horn, the Wounded Knee Massacre, and Miami removal.

Helen Sheumaker, visiting associate professor of American Studies at Miami University and author of *Love Entwined: The Curious History of Hair-work in America* (2007), and co-editor of *American Material Culture: Understanding Everyday Life* (2007), explores how museums function as repositories and creators of cultural memory. She argues that American museum practice, rooted in eighteenth- and early-nineteenth-century practices codified by Charles Willson Peale, configure cultural memory as representative even as exhibition practice is selective, and is evident in recent museum exhibitions such as the 1976–79 “King Tut” show.

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The “Memory Matters” symposium was the first public event associated with a two-year scholarly project funded by the Humanities Center at Miami University. In 2009, the Humanities Center Steering Committee selected Drs. Cobb and Sheumaker to serve as the inaugural John W. Altman Faculty Fellows. The larger project, devoted to the theme “Memory and Culture: Engaged Scholarship, Multidisciplinary Connections, and the Public Humanities,” included the formation of a group of seven Altman Faculty Scholars drawn from a variety of disciplines. Their shared exploration of memory and culture began with intensive readings and discussions during the 2009–10 academic year. It will continue during 2010–11 with public presentations by the Altman Faculty Scholars and a series of events featuring lectures by Simon Schama, Diana Taylor, James Cuno, Hans and Torrey Butzer, and James E. Young.²

Readers should note that the text has been edited. Bev Cornetet, to whom we are indebted, produced the initial verbatim transcription. The authors then made edits to improve readability, clarify meaning, and amplify aspects of their presentations. They did the same for the afternoon discussion. Questions from the audience are noted by “VOICE” in the text. As editors, we added endnotes and made textual insertions set off by brackets to provide readers with additional context.

We would like to thank the more than one hundred attendees who made Memory Matters such a tremendous success. The opportunity to engage with the forty students, faculty, and members of the public who stayed for the afternoon discussion made the symposium even more intellectually stimulating with their thought-provoking questions. A final special word of gratitude is owed to John W. Altman, Dean Karen Schilling, and Allan Winkler, whose generosity and dedication made the Humanities Center and this event a reality.

Welcoming Remarks

Allan M. Winkler

I'd like to welcome all of you to the Memory Matters Conference and to thank you for coming today. I'm Allan Winkler, and I'm director of the Humanities Center. We have been in existence for one year now. The dedication was just about this time a year ago. And in that time, we've done a variety of different things. We've gotten an Altman Fellows Program going that we'll be telling you more about very shortly. It's been exciting, and this is our first signature event; our first major public program dealing with a theme for a two-year period. We're delighted you're here. We're delighted to have Ed Linenthal as our guest, and I'd like to open things up by asking [Miami University President] David Hodge to start off with a welcome to everybody.

PRESIDENT HODGE: Good morning, everybody. It is a great morning, and to think that in the space of one year all of the things that have happened, it is just a marvelous, marvelous, marvelous thing. I want to congratulate everybody who has been involved in putting this event together. Certainly, a warm welcome for Professor Linenthal. We're delighted to have you here and sharing all of the things you'll have for us to hear and think about.

You know, one of the things that I get most excited about, the Humanities Center has many purposes. It is to raise, to elevate the awareness of the humanities, which I think is absolutely crucial. No question about that. But this particular event represents, I think, one of the very special things that universities ought to do and probably don't do nearly enough, which is to bring together people from across the university around a common theme and a common issue.

Too often, our disciplines and our departments are the things that define us. In fact, they structure us in ways that narrow some of our thinking and opportunities. And yet, to be alive and to be well means to be more organic in the ability to come together around a theme for a while, to really explore it to meaningful depths, and then let our curiosities take us in other directions afterward. It is a given, I think, that we need to do better at the University. So this is really not only important for the humanities. I believe

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we're establishing or reinforcing some core values that are important to the University as a whole.

I do want to particularly acknowledge the importance of the private giving that has made a lot of this possible. Particularly, John Altman and the gifts that he's given to the Humanities Center. He was a very successful businessman and entrepreneur who will in a heartbeat talk about the humanities as being some of the most influential parts of his life. So we are very fortunate to have two Altman Fellows this year who have been taking the lion's share of the responsibility for organizing, encouraging, maybe even cajoling at times, all of the efforts as we go forth; but there is also a group of Altman Scholars who work with them, and here comes the exciting part, where we brought this group together, creating a synergy and sense of energy, where we can explore with more depth and passion something that's meaningful and that matters to us for the future.

So I offer my welcome to all of you here today for this conference, especially to our guest. I offer our congratulations to the Humanities Center one year in. It's marvelous, I think, what we've accomplished, even in these difficult times; and I think it's so important to the University and so important to society to have this profile of the humanities raised and so provocatively executed. And a special thanks to our Altman Fellows and the Altman Scholars who played a critical role in that. So welcome to the conference. Let's have a great one. Thank you.

DR. WINKLER: Thank you, President Hodge. The whole purpose of the Humanities Center was summed up very nicely in David Hodge's comments. Our point was to try to promote interdisciplinary, collaborative conversations on the campus; to try to share with the broader community the kinds of things that we're doing; to showcase the humanities, which have frequently been under attack, particularly in an era where science and technology come in for the greatest emphasis and the stress. And the whole program today and the program on which it builds over this two-year period is really aimed at trying to indicate to all of us what the humanities can do. We've had a good deal of support from the president's office and from the provost's office. I'd like to ask John Skillings, who is the Interim Provost—or about to be again—to offer his comments to you. Thanks, John.

DR. SKILLINGS: Good morning, everybody. It is a delight to see you all here today. We have a wonderful day scheduled on this campus. We'll have a great conference. The weather is supposed to be great this morning. I hope you all attend the sessions, but when you have a break, get outside and enjoy the wonderful scenery we have here at Miami University. I'm delighted to say that the humanities are alive and well at Miami. They always have been, and I think they always will be.

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When you read the literature about the beginnings of curriculum in the humanities, you see names like the University of Chicago, Columbia University, but if you go back to the early foundings of Miami in the early 1800s, humanities is critically an important part of the curriculum that we had at this campus. Students in the early 1800s were required to take courses in humanities. Today at Miami University students are required to take courses in humanities. Every student at Miami must take courses in the humanities. In the College of Arts and Science, three courses in humanities. Two years of foreign language. Believe me, in our curriculum, humanities is alive and well. It is one of the very largest units that we have on our campus.

On the research side, we have a very active research group. If you look amongst our distinguished professors, which are individuals who have been recognized for their teaching and research, a third of the distinguished professors that we have on this campus are faculty members from the humanities. That's an important indication of how good the research is on this campus. We're delighted to have a conference like this that talks about the research of humanities, the curriculum of humanities. It is an appropriate thing for our campus, and we're delighted to have it happen. We wish you the very best for this conference. We hope it enhances the humanities. I think the Humanities Center will be a really big boost to what's going on our campus in this very important area. So have a great day here.

DR. WINKLER: Thank you, John. Now I'd like to call Dean Karen Schilling because the College of Arts and Science has been enormously supportive, and in a very real sense, the Humanities Center is Karen's doing. When she became dean four years ago, she spoke to a number of chairs and other people about the possibility of doing something like that, and that began a process that unfolded over the next couple of years and culminated in where we are today. So with thanks, Karen.

DR. SCHILLING: It's a real pleasure to be here today. I would like to reflect a little bit on the topic of the conversations today, and allow me to betray my discipline outside of the humanities as a psychologist. Memory matters may be interpreted in a number of different ways, I guess. We can talk about the matters of memory or memory as important. The whole plan for today's activities began a year ago, in a year when Miami was celebrating its bicentennial.

Two hundred years—opportunities for reflection on who we are as an institution; and in that reflection, I hope a critical perspective on the meaning of our enterprise and the shape of the University that we envision for the years to come. Certainly, the humanities have received within academic circles more critical examination in the recent past; a huge pullout in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* a couple of weeks ago. Lots of people questioning the role of the humanities; the importance of the humanities.

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If we look at Miami in its two hundredth year and reflect on what we have become, my own sense as Dean of the College is that some of the most distinctive elements of Miami's character and its reputation reside in the historic commitment to the humanities as the core of what we do here; the humanities is a central feature of the liberal arts education for all students. Not just as a selection of courses but as a commitment in the education of all students posing questions about meaning, about what it is that distinguishes the nature of the human experience from the experience of our animal brethren and sistren.

As I've read the many commentaries and statements of doom and gloom, I'm always struck with the disconnect between the importance of asking those fundamental questions of who we are and what we're doing versus the kind of statements of the demise of those courses, those intellectual pursuits, that will allow students to understand who we are and why we're doing what we're doing. Particularly, in the wake of major economic downturns that seem more than ever in our reflections on them to have been the products of peculiarities of our human nature. Peculiarities we can only understand with the kinds of perspectives offered by the humanities.

Why in this era we would be talking about gloom and doom for the future of those disciplines that have provided the important answers to those questions is really beyond me. So when I think of the future of the college, the Humanities Center, the humanities are going to play a critical part in determining who we are as an institution over the long term, and certainly in reflecting on that history, in looking at issues of memory and how they matter in the future of this institution, I think we have lots of guidance from the scholarship and the humanities and the kinds of questioning that the alums of this institution have engaged in over the long term. Among them John Altman.

I want to say as a psychologist, memory is one of the key issues in self-definition, in understanding the context in which you work, in making meaning of your life. I have to say from personal experience, every day I am reminded of how memory matters. My husband suffers with Alzheimer's disease. I've watched his decreasing ability to make sense of his world. Not because the cognitive faculties associated with putting things together are declining, but the ability to make sense of his life in the context of memory has declined.

So memory does matter—who we are as human beings—and I think that wicked disease steals away that sense of who you are and how you are important as a human being, how your history has shaped who you are. So when you read that history book and you try to make sense of why you are doing that, think of what's going on in your daily life and think of how reflection—reflection of generations of people, not just scholars, people just like you, can provide some guidance, some insights, some inspiration, some anchors, and some signposts to make some value in your life. That is what I think is what we're about as an institution of higher education.

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I'm excited about the day. I look forward to our speakers' remarks today. Not just our external speaker but our internal speakers. Let me say that one of the most exciting elements about conferences of this sort is that we not only get to celebrate achievements of remarkable scholars from outside the institution but also to celebrate equally the achievements of our remarkable scholars at Miami. Thanks. Thanks to Allan for his work in organizing all of this and also the work for all of the Altman Scholars, and I hope we have a great day together.