

Memorial Essay

Topic: argue for a memorial

History is acknowledged and shaped through memorialization. Think of the graveyard to Union soldiers erected on Robert E Lee's lawn; or the violent rallies after the Charlottesville, Virginia city council decided to take down a statue of Lee.

For the writing assignment in this course, you will **make an argument in the style¹ of a local newspaper op-ed for a memorial or statue that you think should exist because it tells an important story in American history that deserves more thought.** The memorial may be as simple as a statue of an individual person, or could be more complicated (a description of a memorial to soldiers in a war, for example; a parallel monument erected opposite something that already exists.)

This is an open-ended assignment designed for you to find some connection to American history; but there are two major restrictions:

1. The figure must be a *historical person or group*, and the argument for their inclusion must be grounded in their *historical significance* along the themes of the course.
2. The monument (if not the person) must be at least controversial; their placement must be making some kind of that reasonable people could disagree with. It's better to err on the side of an outrageous suggestion (e.g., there should be a statue of Alexander Berkman with a gun in front of the headquarters of some leftist group to remind them that violence makes problems worse) than a milquetoast one (Abraham Lincoln should have a statue in Cambridge because he's important, but the nearest statue is in Boston).

The precise thing memorialized need not be in the textbook, but the general themes should be ones we've discussed in this course.

Points to touch on

Some points you *must* touch on, though not necessarily in this order:

1. Who or what do you want a statue of?
2. What is that person or event? Describe them for a general audience.
3. Where, exactly? (Be descriptive. "Suspended in the middle of the ISEC building's atrium" is better than "on the Northeastern campus.")
4. What vision of America or American history would the monument summon?
5. What message would putting the statue up in this particular location send?
6. Who would potentially be upset by this? Why is it controversial?
7. What are the most important counter-arguments to putting up this memorial as you describe?
8. How does your monuments subject fit into the broader scope of American history as we've read it in this course?

¹By the "in the style of" I mean: actually think of this as a draft of an op-ed you could send into a newspaper. But there are a couple places you may need to depart. If there are things you absolutely need to say that don't fit into this style, put them into a footnote.

Some points you *might* touch on, if you have good reason.

1. In what style, medium, or format should the monument be executed?
2. You can, if you really want, include a sketch, map, or photograph which you want to base the memorial on. You could even draw it yourself.

Other fine points (this list may be updated online in response to questions):

- Assume that cost is no object.

Citing sources

You must cite at least one primary source about the event you describe, and one contemporary source (either about the event you describe, or about the counterarguments or points of view that you want your memorial to contest.) You must also provide citations for any statements you make that are not general knowledge.

Formatting

Your essay should be between 1000 and 1200 words. Please indicate the word count at the bottom of the document. If you are unfamiliar with the genre, read a few from a local paper.

Format as double-sided and export as a pdf from your word-processing platform of choice.

This is an extremely short essay; make each word useful, and edit carefully.

Cite any evidence you use through footnotes. Cite documents consistently; an online guide to one style is [here: https://www.library.georgetown.edu/tutorials/research-guides/turabian-footnote-guide](https://www.library.georgetown.edu/tutorials/research-guides/turabian-footnote-guide). But you can use another method as long as all citations are in footnotes, not in running text.

Submission and due date.

It should be turned in online over Blackboard. Final copies are due Friday, December 1 by 5pm.

If you wish to have an initial draft read and fully commented on, you may turn one in by Friday, November 17.

Some additional notes and guidelines

1. You must turn in your paper as a PDF. Seriously, no word documents. It must be a PDF. Unless you expect other people to edit your documents later, this is the way to send them to people; learn if you haven't.
2. You must provide citations in footnotes. Do this as you write—it's not something to go through and do more fully later.
3. The quality of the sources you cite matters; some random web page you don't know the author for is not a strong source, and reflects poorly on your whole argument. A good citation is: someone well known whose views carry weight; an academic article in a peer-reviewed journal; an article in a reputable national publication or one of the leading newspapers for a region. A bad citation is: some random website. A mediocre citation is: an encyclopedia.

4. You must make a positive argument *for* the statue you want to see. It's OK if you're not entirely convinced the statue should exist; but if you secretly think what you're arguing for is a *terrible* idea, there's a very strong chance those reservations are well grounded. *In particular*, I really strongly recommend that you not write something that you wouldn't at least *consider* posting as your own opinion online and not make any statements about what other people think that you wouldn't feel guilty saying to them in person.
5. It's a requirement that the statue be controversial; but you don't get more points for being more controversial, and being offensive is straightforwardly bad. As a rule of thumb; if you can't imagine half your classmates saying, "sure, let's try it" to your proposal at the end, you're probably on the wrong track of writing a persuasive essay. Remember, this country is undergoing a massive controversy right now about kneeling during the national anthem; it takes extremely little to make something controversial.
6. Saying "a statue" with no more description than that is boring. Boring is bad. What will it look like?
7. Subtlety is good. If other people think person A is bad, don't just say person A is good and those other people are wrong. Acknowledge that person A had bad parts as well as good ones. Find a way to incorporate the bad parts of A into your memorial, rather than making it just a celebration. Remember, this is not a legal brief where you're trying to just make a case; instead, you should be trying to persuade *as many* people with different views as possible.