The nature of social research

- There are many ways of knowing about the world
- Personal experience and common sense knowledge enable us to get things done in everyday life
- Personal experience and common sense knowledge cannot be reliably generalized
- Social research is empirical & probabilistic
  - Empirical research: research that operates from the ideological position that questions about human behavior can be answered only through controlled, systematic observations of the real world (p. 82)
  - Probabilistic: capable of identifying only those forces that have a high likelihood, but not a certainty, of influencing human action (p. 82)

Material culture

- Culture: language, values, beliefs, rules, behaviors, and artifacts that characterize a society (p. 32)
- Material culture: artifacts of a society, which represent adaptations to the social and physical environment (p. 100)
  - Includes clothing, buildings, inventions, food, artwork, writings, music, etc.
- Material culture both reflects and shapes nonmaterial culture (e.g., norms, values, ideology)
- James Loewen’s Lies Across America (1999): a study of monuments as material culture
- Loewen distinguishes between “past” (things that happened) and “history” (what we say about them)
Indian Statue in Muscatine, Iowa

- Although presented in 1926 by “Muscatine Tribe” and dedicated to “Mascoutin Indians,” no such tribe existed in Muscatine then.
- Actually built by “Improved Order of Red Men,” white fraternal organization.
- White-built monuments to Indians tend to justify conquering Indians by:
  - Honoring Indians who helped whites
  - Honoring Indian tribes who are no longer there
  - Honoring Indians as “vanishing race” (as by Red Men)