Sociology of Monuments

Feb. 2, 2005

http://www.iastate.edu/~soc.134
Material culture

✓ Culture: language, values, beliefs, rules, behaviors, and artifacts that characterize a society (p. 31)
✓ Material culture: artifacts of a society, which represent adaptations to the social and physical environment (p. 96)
✓ 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 American (1999): a study of monuments as material culture
✓ Loewen distinguishes between “past” (things that happened) and “history” (what we say about them)
Nathan Forrest statue in Memphis, TN

- Confederate cavalry leader
- Forrest has more statues in TN than any other state honors a single person
- Historic sites are always the tales of two eras
  - Era of person or event honored
  - Era when monument was erected
- Forrest monuments erected between Reconstruction and Civil Rights movement
- Forest is symbol of white supremacy
  - First national leader of KKK
  - Slave trader before war, hired black convict labor after war
  - Led massacres of black soldiers during war

Faithful slaves of Fort Mill, S.C.

- Monuments throughout the South honor slaves who were loyal to the Confederacy.
- In fact, most slaves stopped working, fled, joined the Union Army and/or engaged in espionage.
- No monuments in South honor local blacks in Union Army.
- Intent of monuments is to present slavery as benign institution that had support of slaves.

Indian Statue in Muscatine, Iowa

- Although presented in 1926 by "Muscuitine 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)

Massacre monument in Almo, Idaho

Monuments are usually proposed by local organizations and present favorable picture of community
  • Often leave out unpleasant history
  • May commemorate things that never happened

Almo, Idaho, monument commemorates Indian massacre of 296 whites that never happened

Another example: Pittsburg, Tx, has monument to airplane inventor Rev. Burrell Cannon

Target for snowplow revisionism?

Loewen gives as example of case where “reasonable people” disagree

Carrie Chapman Catt was national leader in women’s suffrage movement

Claimed “white supremacy will be strengthened, not weakened, by woman suffrage”

Opponents (Sept. 29 Movement) argued her racist statements made her an inappropriate person to name a building after

Proponents argued she was “product of her times”
Ball of twine of Cawker City, KS

- Local production of monuments leads to competing claims: two towns claim to have world’s largest ball of twine
- Even bizarre attractions may reflect norms & values—twine ball’s motto is “Thrift + Patience = Success”
Some key points about monuments

✓ Monuments (as material culture) both reflect nonmaterial culture (e.g., ideology) and shape it
✓ Monuments tell the tale of two eras
✓ The “past” (things that happened) is often quite different than “history” (what we say about them)
Culture and everyday experience

✓ Nonmaterial culture: knowledge, beliefs, customs, values, morals, and symbols that are shaped by members of a society and that distinguish the society from others (p. 80)

✓ Nonmaterial culture shapes how we experience everyday life including:
  • What diseases we experience (p. 111)
  • The sick role (p. 111-112)
  • How many sexes are there (p. 112)
  • What emotions we experience (p. 105-107)

The sociology of emotion

- Common-sense belief: Our emotions represent our “true” self, not social rules
- Sociology of emotions studies how culture shapes the way we feel
- Arlie Hochschild: pioneered sociology of emotions
- People do “emotion work”: attempting to make feelings correspond to feeling rules
  - Emotion evocation: bringing about desired feeling
  - Emotion suppression: stifling undesired feeling
- Organizations may demand emotion work from workers