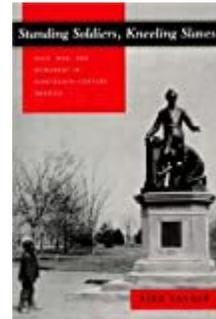


Kirk Savage. *Standing Soldiers, Kneeling Slaves: Race, War and Monument in 19th-Century America.* Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1997. xiv + 270 pp. \$35.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-691-01616-0.



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Published on H-Urban (April, 1998)

The Sculpture of Emancipation

Standing Soldiers, Kneeling Slaves by Kirk Savage, assistant professor of History of Art and Architecture at the University of Pittsburgh, presents an excellent analysis of America's quest to reconstruct and reunite after the Civil War through a study of post-war sculptural projects. Using art historical and material culture methods, Savage "investigate(s) who were the people represented in and by monumental space, and how they competed to construct a history in the language of sculpture and in the spotlight of the public sphere" (p. 8). Savage uses Civil War monuments as more than just representations of memories on the landscape. He believes that these works of art demonstrate the struggle Americans undertook to reassess race relations after slavery. As he writes, "The marginalization of African America went hand in hand with the reconstruction of white America...African Americans could not be included or excluded in the landscape of public sculpture without changing the fabric of commemoration itself, without ultimately changing the face of the nation" (p. 19).

The monuments themselves serve as sources, along with appropriate prints from the era, magazines and

novels, and the models and drawings for the sculptural projects. Photographs of most of the sculptures discussed accompany the text, nicely illustrating Savage's points. The use of the primary source material is particularly strong throughout the book. For example, although many of the plaster models constructed by sculptors for these projects have been lost over the years, Savage is able to use photographs of the models to advance his analysis.

The book is set up with an introduction, an epilogue and five chapters in between. After presenting his argument and analysis in the introduction, Savage discusses the imagery of slavery in chapter two. Using both abolitionist and anti-abolitionist prints, as well as an 1847 sculpture by Hiram Powers, *Greek Slave*, Savage explores the changing image of slavery and African Americans. For this chapter, he uses the case study of a model for the pediment of the South Carolina State House, an extremely pro-slavery state, by Northern sculptor, Henry Kirke Brown. Although the pediment was never actually sculpted, Savage uses photographs and manuscript documentation to explore how Brown chose to illustrate "the

civic importance of slave labor (p. 42),” a startling departure for the time and place. The seeming contradiction of a northern sculptor chosen to create a pediment for a slave state’s center of government provide a nice departure for Savage to examine the inherent contradictions of slavery as it existed in America.

Once Savage provides some background on the imagery of slavery and how sculptors attempted to represent slaves before emancipation, he moves to a discussion of the depiction of emancipation in chapter three. According to Savage, “several important sculptors” probed the “uncertain terrain of emancipation, (condensing) its complex struggle over human rights into the narrow sculptural language of human form” (p. 54). Again, printed sources, plaster models and sculptures themselves serve as rich source material to portray how Americans were thinking of slavery and freedom.

Throughout the book, Savage is careful not to let his analysis stretch too far from the evidence provided by the sculptures and photographs. His analysis of the works of art is easily seen in the book’s illustrations. By focusing on race, he is able to suggest a new way of interpreting the monuments and sculptures that have been around for a hundred years. For example, when looking at monuments of Abraham Lincoln as they portrayed emancipation, Savage focuses on the models presented in competition, many of which depict Lincoln with a slave. By discussing the slave figures in these proposals, including their poses and the figural arrangement, Savage advances his analysis of these artifacts as evidence of the struggle and change in American racial definitions. In the end, all of the local projects through the 1880s “resorted to the traditional single-figured portrait statue (p. 81),” but this does not mean that the author resorts to an analysis of the sculptures as homage to Lincoln.

Chapters four and five discuss two specific monuments and the Civil War-era issues they symbolize. Chapter four focuses on the Freedmen’s Memorial to Abraham Lincoln in Washington, D.C., which was financed entirely by contributions from free blacks. Chapter five focuses on the monument of Robert E. Lee, which was constructed in 1890 as the first statue on Richmond, Virginia’s Monument Avenue. The contrast of these two sculptures, in chapters titled “Freedom’s Memorial” and “Slavery’s Memorial” form the core of the book and of Savage’s argument, that as the nation redefined itself “in the most permanent form of self-reflection it had, the public monument,” the monuments “gradually mapped abstract notions of individual responsibility and collec-

tive purpose onto the material reality of the national landscape” (p. 209).

Finally, in chapter six, Savage turns his attention to the vast majority of Civil War memorials visible across the landscape. These are the simple, often mass-produced shaft monuments, which he calls “common soldier monuments.” Again, he moves beyond the traditional route of analysis of these monuments, as agents of memory and reconciliation, and instead focuses on racial issues, beginning with a comparison of military life to slavery.

Savage presents a unique way of interpreting the monuments that continue to dominate the landscape of the eastern seaboard. He is able to meld together a fascinating art-historical analysis of what the monuments represent through their body language and figural relationships with an insightful extension of how these monuments represented the political questions and debates of the Reconstruction period. Perhaps the only criticism is that he can only intend this study to be a beginning. There are so many monuments in little towns throughout the North and South, which could be given a fresh look based on the ideas Savage presents here. How would this change our perception of these monuments? How would these monuments then change our perception of the Civil War and its aftermath? Savage’s analysis of a few big sculptural projects is far too enlightening to continue to lump the multitude of “common soldier monuments” together. Rather, his study of the “high art” of Civil War sculptures begs a continuation of this line of inquiry into the more “vernacular” monuments. And the issues raised in this book, and by these monuments, are by no means resolved.

As a fitting epilogue to this study, Savage considers the recent monument to Arthur Ashe, the well-known, recently deceased African-American tennis player, which has been added to Richmond’s Monument Avenue (pp. 211-212). The racial issues of adding this sculpture of a black man to the pantheon of white Civil War heroes evoked debates startlingly similar to those described by Savage in earlier chapters of his book. As he writes, “Monuments remain powerful because they are built to last long after the particular voices of their makers have ceased, long after the events of their creation have been forgotten. It is only then that truly they come to represent a common voice, for better or for worse” (p. 211). As he shows through his book, these monuments are still speaking loudly and clearly, if only we pay attention to them.

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Citation: Aimee E. Newell. Review of Savage, Kirk, *Standing Soldiers, Kneeling Slaves: Race, War and Monument in 19th-Century America*. H-Urban, H-Net Reviews. April, 1998.

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