

# To Trace the Shifting Sands: Community, Ritual, and the Memorial Landscape

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## Abstract

The memorial landscape is a landscape of tremendous cultural significance. It reinserts sacred stories into public open space: stories that reveal and heal. These stories can have a positive impact on a community and can teach the lessons of history and place. The memorial landscape serves intellectual, emotional, spiritual, and communal functions, including: a) a place for memory, b) a place for mourning, c) a place for reflection and healing, d) a place for ceremony, and e) a place for collective action. Furthermore, specific design elements, such as art, architecture, landscape, and text are typically used to further these functions. Through investigating the memorial typology and its cultural significance, a deeper understanding of the landscape architect's role in this important cultural landscape is defined and clarified.

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« Previous | Next Article »  
Table of Contents

### This Article

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Savage's lively and intelligent analysis traces the refocusing of the monuments themselves, from that of a single man, often on horseback, to commemorations of common soldiers or citizens; and from monuments that celebrate victory and heroism to memorials honoring victims. Typically it holds no relic or spiritual trace of a past presence. The site of the Lincoln Memorial, for instance, did not even exist in Lincoln's lifetime; it sits quite literally on mud dredged from the Potomac River bottom in the late nineteenth century by the Army Corps of Engineers. The memorial itself contains no actual relics of Lincoln. To write a history of the memorial landscape is to subvert it, to watch it emerge from the fog of "identity" and into the sharper light of human affairs.