When first invited to discuss Richard Longstreth’s paper, I had some doubts about the relevance of my own expertise for the subject at hand. Knowing little about issues of public space and the built environment, much less the architectural history of Washington, I wondered if my interests in memory and emotion would sufficiently tie in. But reaching across disciplines and regions can be a useful way to bring a somewhat different lens to otherwise familiar topics. In this essay, I focus on one aspect of the densely coded landscape discussed in the Longstreth paper—war memorials. Washington’s “mournful memorials” (as referenced by Mary Hancock) offer a particularly apt entrée into the emotional politics of the city’s architectural spaces.

For most citizen-visitors, the capital district is a special kind of place—a place with an aura. If not exactly “sacred,” it is a space defined by its obvious monumentality and historical depth. The issues raised in the Longstreth paper seem to me just the kind of issues that a public anthropology ought to engage to bring the apparatus of cultural analysis to bear on issues of contemporary significance. Furthermore, for a profession that regularly holds its annual conference in Washington D.C. there is every reason to reflect on the means through which the capital district constructs and projects state power.

The first and obvious question we might ask of the array of historic sites in the Washington landscape is what is remembered and what is not. Of course, the ground of public memory is always in motion, shifting with the tectonics of national identity. At any one
moment in time, what does it take to (re)produce public memory on the mall—a space where inclusion, by definition, implies a degree of significance for the national imaginary? Consider, for example, the invisibility of the episode discussed by Richard Longstreth in which British troops invaded Washington in 1814 and reduced most of the public buildings to ashes. Whereas some defeats end up as focal points for national remembrance (Pearl Harbor, for example), this incident seems to have disappeared, probably for lack of fit with larger narratives of the nation.

A second set of questions asks in what form historic events are recalled. Whereas some topics are developed in museum spaces and exhibitions others receive a more “religious” treatment in monuments and memorials used as sites of national ceremony and personal remembrance. The latter are often surrounded by a certain degree of emotionality that signifies something about connections between people, places, and the national imaginary. In this respect, the unruly emotions of fear and anxiety plotted by Richard Longstreth in connection with the new security measures of post 9/11 Washington seem intrusive and subversive of the dominant social order represented in Washington's iconic landscape.

Affecting national spaces

One of the aspects of Richard Longstreth’s paper that I would like to address is its linkage of space and emotion—a linkage that lurks in the background of the paper’s discussion of the particularities of security measures. The underlying problematic is the unwanted emergence of fear in a landscape that otherwise speaks of calm order, historic preservation, and national pageantry. Rather than take these anxious intrusions for granted, I prefer to read them as a kind of diagnostic—a sign of the breakdown of U.S. hegemony, now reflected in architectural responses to ever-present threats to the lives of ordinary citizens. Not surprisingly such threats often end up targeting monuments of national identity and will, redefined as icons of imperialism.

As the anthropology of emotion has broadened the scope of its investigations, it increasingly considers a broader ecology of affect that locates emotional experience in the scenes and practices of everyday life (White 2004a). This line of thinking seeks to find emotions as much in situated practices as in minds and bodies. Yet, few studies have taken seriously the role of space and place in the production of affect, much less the architectural environment (for an exception, see Setha Low’s contribution to this collection).
Here the focus on Washington D.C. is instructive. For it is not only a place with highly iconic landmarks, but also a site for ritual and ceremonial activities of all kinds that enact (or contest) visions of the nation. Interpretation of the affective meanings of memorials needs to consider the importance of institutionalized activities that variously create, validate, or challenge national(ized) sentiment.

If we want to read emotions in the highly manicured landscape of Washington D.C., it is necessary to reflect on the things that people actually do in this environment. The most public and obvious are ritual and ceremonial activities that work to affect visions of the nation. National ceremonies marking anniversaries, inaugurations, and the like, work to iconically link past and present and, in the process, reproduce dominant visions of the national imaginary. At the same time, a wide range of counter discursive activities such as protests, marches, and rallies, regularly challenge those same formations, thereby enacting a different vision of the ideals envisioned by early planners of Washington public space—a point made well by Richard Longstreth. There is however a difference. Whereas the former are usually sited at significant memorial or monument sites, the latter find few connections in the architecture of national memory.

An ethnography (or history) of public spaces is necessarily also a history of use, of enactments that do as much to define and configure spatial meaning as do features of the environment. This, of course, will not be news to anthropologists. Meaning, especially emotional meaning, is not given in the landscape; it emerges in the ways people interact with the landscape, especially in performative and imaginative acts that construct relations between people and places.

Memorials, like monuments and museums, accentuate the tensions created by the kinds of security tectonics discussed by Richard Longstreth because they define themselves as public in ways that, say, the White House or the Department of Commerce do not. They are public sites whose raison d’être is all about visitation, institutions whose purpose is as much about collective self-definition as anything else. They are sites of pilgrimage, protest, and, yes, tourism—places of and for national self-fashioning. As sites of pilgrimage, activities associated with memorials (and to some extent museums) produce embodied enactments of national narrative. Anthropological and historical work on memorial sites underlines their significance as sites of contestation, as foci for competing visions of the past (and future) (see, for example, Sturken on the Vietnam memorial; 1997) or James Young’s work on Holocaust memorials (e.g. 2000).
The activities that inhabit such public spaces span a broad range, from state ceremonies to oppositional practices that challenge official narratives. Just as these activities span a broad range, they are likely to be associated with diverse emotions. Consider for example the calm assurance and pageantry of ceremonial occasions held to mark memorial days or anniversaries, as opposed to the often chaotic and angry quality of popular protests. Whereas the former acquire an aura of officially sponsored dignity lamenting the sacrifices of citizen soldiers, the latter usually speak in discordant voices from the margins.

Furthermore, voices of opposition tend to disappear from the official histories and subjectivities marked in the architectural forms curated by the state. A good example is the evanescent quality of anti-war protests on the mall during the months leading up to the invasion of Iraq. One of the largest was an anti-war march held in October 2002, just six months before the invasion—an occasion that happenstance allowed me to join in. At that time the atmosphere of public fear was particularly acute. The nation had just marked the first anniversary of the September 11 attacks and the Bush regime was gearing up for its assault on Iraq. On Saturday October 26 the broad and eclectic range of organizations opposed to the war organized one of the largest anti-war demonstrations ever held in the city, with an estimated 100,000 people congregating on the mall and marching by the White House (Reel and Fernandez 2002).

With the crowd gathering to hear speeches at Constitution Gardens near the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, protesters ultimately marched along the streets bordering the White House and returned to the Mall. The demonstration proceeded with calm resignation, cordoned off with capital police on horseback in communication with police reserves kept out of sight. But in fact there was no trouble from this crowd of young and old. Reporting about the event made a point of noting the peaceful, controlled nature of the demonstration.

Less than five months later on March 19, 2003, after a carefully managed public relations campaign around Weapons of Mass Destruction (and exploitation of September 11 emotions), President Bush launched the American invasion of Iraq. Today, two and half years later with over 2,300 U.S. dead, and untold thousands of Iraqi civilians, the war continues to breed more violence and hostility towards the U.S. Yet neither the mainstream media nor the icons of national memory on the Mall provide any means of representing the scope of resistance. Even the return of coffins is kept politely out of view, with little attention to personal losses and suffering until they can be recontextualized in appropriate spaces of national memory.
A visit to Washington's national monuments and memorials is meant to be an experience of quiet contemplation; at least in the intention of designers. Given that we know little about the diversity and idiosyncrasy with which people actually experience Washington's panoply of historic sites, there is no doubt that for many these sites evoke a sense of emotional involvement in national history. This type of mood-setting is consistent with Richard Longstreth's characterization of the aesthetics of the Washington landscape as possessing a "kind of simplicity and dignity that makes them appropriate to the federal core"—sites that "send positive signals symbolically."

Activities at national sacred sites are always to some degree about the reproduction of power and the valorization of dominant historical narratives. As sites for the enactment of stories about the suffering and sacrifices of ordinary citizens, especially citizen soldiers, they are also a potent means of and for emotional involvement in the nation. What then are some of the emotions commonly associated with national memorial sites? Most obviously, one finds sentiments of loss focused on the figure of the 'fallen soldier'—the trope that focused renewed forms of national pride and militarism in between-the-wars Europe (Mosse 1979). One also hears echoes of pride and respect for the contributions of fellow citizens to the accomplishments and victories of the nation.

By the same token, what are some of the emotional absences in the state's memorial spaces? We might ask about the muted presence of anger in places that connect forcefully with the histories of warfare. And more relevant for this paper is the absence of fear. Why is it that fear is usually missing in the affective mnemonics of memorial sites which, after all, are signifiers of some of the most horrific violence in human history? I'd like to suggest that this is precisely the semiotic work of war memorials, especially those sponsored by the state to cultivate a sense of involved citizenship. Washington's war memorials and the activities associated with them work to displace fear and anxiety in part by displacing violence to the past where it may be framed and bracketed by ceremonial practices focused on sentiments of loss and sacrifice. Narratives of heroism, for example, are among the most common means of reframing the violence of war at sites of war memory. By recasting those who have made the ultimate sacrifice as national heroes war dead embody a kind of extreme patriotism that merges self and nation and works to dispel the specter of meaningless or futile death.
If we need reminders of the power of the state to police the representations that gain access to the manicured spaces of the national mall, we might recall the attempt of the National Air and Space Museum in 1995 to mount an exhibition of the atomic bombings that ended World War II (Wallace 1996). Whereas planners conceived that exhibition as an opportunity to present the perspective and experience of Japanese victims, it met with a wall of criticism that portrayed the exhibit as disrespectful of American veterans who should be the focus for anniversary events during 1995. In the end the exhibit was cancelled and the museum director forced to resign.

Although no one would wish for further deterioration in the emotional tenor of everyday life, in this context a modicum of fear might prove to be instructive. Disruption of the smooth, often majestic national ceremonies that reproduce national histories of war may have the effect of opening up opportunities for critical reflection that is often anathema to memorialization. Compare the rise of militant nationalism in 1930s Japan associated with an imperial project designed to spread social and political values to the East Asian and Pacific region. Then ponder the state of mind of the Japanese during the war years, right up to and through 1945 as hundreds of thousands of civilians were annihilated in fire bombings and nuclear bombing.

The World War II Memorial, situated on the mall between the Washington Monument and the Lincoln Memorial, was dedicated with grand ceremony in May 2004.

Given my own interests in representations of the war, primarily from the vantage point of the Pacific War and the memorialization
of Pearl Harbor, I had followed closely debates about construction of the memorial and so was glad for the opportunity for a little fieldwork when in Washington for this panel. The Memorial provided a useful destination for a stroll to experience some of the landscape that would be the subject of our panel the next day.

Despite redesign of security features around the Washington Monument and other visible barricading discussed by Richard Longstreth, I was taken with the generally open, relaxed feel of the mall, appearing much as it has in recent decades, before and after 9/11. The easy flow from Washington's metro system up its long tubular escalators to the open expanses above still conveys a sense of a well planned, open and accessible space cultivated for foot traffic, whether federal office workers or visitors on pilgrimage. The clustering of museums, memorials, and monuments works to define each of the sites in terms of its relations with the others, and to define the area as a whole as a cultural destination with broad national even global significance.

Approved by Congress after extended controversy over its location, the Memorial was finally dedicated on May 29, 2004. With oversight from the American Battle Monuments Commission that has responsibility for war cemeteries and memorials in 15 countries, the World War II Memorial is managed by the National Park Service, similar to other historic destinations in the District. The Memorial plaza is open to the public 24 hours a day seven days a week, with information available at a kiosk located adjacent to the Memorial.

There one may pick up a brochure that states the purpose of the Memorial is to honor those who served in World War II. Beginning, “Here we mark the price of freedom” with a picture of one of the blue star flags that used to be displayed at the homes of men and women serving in the war, the brochure states,

The United States entered the Second World War in 1941 not to conquer, but to liberate a world fast falling to the forces of tyranny. The World War II Memorial honors the
16 million who served in uniform, of whom more than 400,000 gave their lives. It also honors the many millions who supported the war effort on the home front...

The importance of the assertion that the U.S. was at war “not to conquer, but to liberate,” with obvious resonance for the contested meaning of the Iraq war, is evident in the Memorial’s design, where it can be found inscribed in large letters at the entrance to the plaza.

As is the case with all war memorials, the focal theme of the World War II Memorial is sacrifice and citizenship. Although the scale of World War II makes it impossible to individualize or personalize the memorial’s representations, the Park Service does offer visitors a means to find (or make) personal connections by offering computer access to the World War II Registry—an online database that allows individuals to find or add relatives to its computerized registry of “names of Americans in the war effort in uniform or on the home front.”

The iconography of the Memorial itself is replete with inscriptions of service and sacrifice in the pursuit of freedom and liberation. The focal point for these messages are those who died in the war, who “gave their lives” in the service of national ideals. When families were notified of a death, the blue star flag would be replaced by a gold star flag. On the west side of the plaza, a low-lying wall termed Freedom Wall displays more than 4,000 gold stars, each representing one hundred war dead.

Unlike the Vietnam or Pearl Harbor memorials, no names are given on this wall. The list would be overwhelming and endlessly incomplete. The inscription “Here we mark the price of freedom” featured on the Park Service brochure is engraved in a low stone panel in front of the wall.

There are no images of war at the World War II Memorial except some small, almost cartoon-like images in bronze plaques that portray a skeletal chronology of events in both the European and Pacific theaters. On each side of the main entrance to the plaza, twelve bronze plaques depict stereotypic scenes in bas
relief—images of families hearing the news of Pearl Harbor, troops going off to war, and a few battle scenes, much like a museum diorama.

In this regard, the Memorial struggles with its purpose as a burial place as opposed to a site for presenting a certain historical narrative of the war. Whereas the former is best left to abstraction, as in the wall of stars, the latter requires some degree of narrative realism. The brochure gives clues to the visitor about how to read (and feel) the Memorial’s architecture. Two photos accompany inspirational text, both of scenes of victory—General MacArthur signing the Japanese surrender documents and servicemen and women holding newspaper headlines on “Victory in Europe Day.”

During the contentious planning process for this memorial, more than a few critics worried that the monumental classicism called up the fascist style of Albert Speer. In one sense, all that was needed was an architecturally majestic symbol of victory, placed in an appropriate central location. As Paul Goldberger (2004) wrote in the *New Yorker*:

> The new National World War II Memorial on the Mall in Washington seems to want to be majestic, but its really an opulent, overbuilt civic plaza. The most important thing about it isn’t the design, which is a vaguely classical set of colonnades, [is the] the real estate it occupies.

As Goldberger notes, the World War II Memorial obtains much of its symbolic weight from its location between the Lincoln Memorial and the Washington Monument. The Memorial is the first architectural addition to the central axis of the Mall since those monuments were erected more than a century ago. Not surprisingly, then, placing the Memorial in this location evoked heated resistance when the site was originally proposed—culminating in a court case that ultimately was refused by the Supreme Court. In the end, construction of the Memorial was a demonstration of the influence of political leaders of the war generation and the symbolic capital of the “good war.”
There is however more than nostalgia at work here. Why a World War II memorial now, in the epicenter of national space, 60 years after the war? After many years of discussion, Congress enacted legislation authorizing construction of a World War II memorial in 1993. Authorization was accomplished during the period of 50th anniversaries of the war that brought memories of that conflict back into the American public sphere and generated the discourse of the “greatest generation” that continues to underwrite a certain vision of national subjectivity.

Whereas the wave of war nostalgia that swept through American media in the 1990s may have fit a certain post-Cold War need for renewal, World War II themes and images would turn out to be tailor-made for the purposes of the Bush administration looking to garner public support for its aggressive wars in the new millennium. From the first moments following the September 11 attacks, the administration has constantly invoked memory of World War II as a reference point (just as it discounts comparisons with Vietnam; Dower 2003; White 2004b).

To answer the question, ‘why World War II now?’ we might look to the moral(izing) narratives of national unity and sacrifice that characterize American remembrances of that conflict. The World War II themes of the ‘end of isolationism’ and the emergence of America as a dominant power with responsibilities for the democratization of Europe and Asia resonate strongly with the posture of post 9/11 United States foreign policy. As good ethnographers, however, we need not engage in speculation about the ways the Bush administration has deployed World War II memory in the service of today’s wars. All we need to do is look at some of the events staged at the Memorial.

Shortly after the elaborate ceremonial opening of the Memorial in May 2004 (an event which involved tens of thousands of war veterans and their families), the Department of Defense sponsored a ceremony at the Memorial to commemorate the 60th anniversary of the end of World War II on September 2, 2005. Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld hosted the military services for an event marked by wreath presentations, taps, and a parade of flags representing not only allies but also the former enemy nations—all accompanied with music from the U.S. Navy Band.

The keynote talk for this event was given by General John Vessey who spoke on the “greatest generation.” General Vessey, former chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, is himself a World War II veteran. In his remarks Donald Rumsfeld had less time for looking back. He focused his speech on the present, on the current war in which “civilization [is] again in peril.”:
...Once more, we stand together against another threat to our way of life.... With civilization again in peril, we pledge to remember those lessons forged amid the tumult and triumph of that World War.

And we pledge to ensure the survival of the freedoms entrusted to us; to reject appeasement or accommodation with evil; and to settle for nothing less than victory—unapologetic in our purpose, uncompromising in our mission, and unyielding in our quest for freedom and for peace.

If we use Donald Rumsfeld’s speech to gauge the emotional meaning of the World War II Memorial, it is clear that fear is nowhere to be seen. “Fearless” might be a good description—the kind of rhetoric that evokes some of the resolute anger otherwise muted in the architectural inscriptions of the Memorial. As an indication that this reading may extend beyond the narrow confines of a military ceremony, consider the example of a grade school workbook about the World War II Memorial published for use in Grades 4–8 (Hargrove 2002). The cover of that book is inscribed with a wartime quotation from Franklin Roosevelt: “We, too, born to freedom, and believing in freedom, are willing to fight to maintain freedom. We...would rather die on our feet than live on our knees.”

By citing this example of breathless fight-till-the-end patriotism etched on the cover of a grade school booklet I am drawing attention to the manner in which war memorials condense ways of seeing and feeling that already permeate popular culture. In fact the emotion work done by and at war memorials depends on such ideological framing. War memorials do not create emotional meaning out of granite and gold stars or barricades and security cameras. It is rather the activities that take place there—from personal reflection to grand state ceremony—that work to refashion and validate ways of feeling, especially ways of feeling that link self and nation (White 1999). And when the nation is at war, as it seems to be now (even that a contested question), we should not be surprised to find the juxtaposition of fearful realities of possible attack (the tectonics of fear discussed by Richard Longstreth) with somber national spaces of and for honoring citizen soldiers, living and dead.

While this juxtaposition might seem contradictory, in fact these narratives define and support one another—one indexing the nervous realities of immanent violence and the other embodying
the calm even triumphal assurance of past wars, recontextualized in acts of national remembrance. Set in opposition as sacred center to profane periphery, the mall’s carefully managed architectural center cultivates visions of national subjectivity embodied by dignified images of citizens at war—visions given contemporary relevance by the anxious life of office workers and city residents who now make their way through the barricades and monitoring devices discussed by Richard Longstreth.

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