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Lisa M. Budreau, *Bodies of War: World War I and the Politics of Commemoration in America, 1919-1933*. New York: NYU Press, 2009. Pp. xviii, 317. ISBN 978-0-8147-9990-1.

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Since the Vietnam War, no American conflict has resulted in more than a few thousand combat deaths. In cold quantitative terms, this compares favorably to the many more Americans who die each year in traffic accidents—over 32,000 in 2010. Yet only the occasional outcry is raised at the highway carnage, while the smaller number of war deaths always engenders strong national emotions.

The powerful symbolism of the death of even a single soldier is not an exclusively American phenomenon, of course. In 1910, Gen. Sir Henry Wilson asked Gen. Ferdinand Foch, “What would you say was the smallest British military force that would be of any practical assistance to you?” Foch answered, “One single private soldier—and we would take good care that he was killed.” Foch knew the compelling image of the death of that soldier in the nation’s consciousness would arouse Britain to France’s aid.

Lisa M. Budreau, Chief Historian of the National World War I Museum in Kansas City, Missouri, examines the memorialization of First World War American soldiers, shedding light on the emotional and cultural forces that shaped Americans’ views of war deaths and their remembrance. “This book explains why the United States commemorated the war as it did.... It re-creates the specific, grounded, textured, and complex political and cultural environment in which the corresponding policies were made, thereby illuminating the character of American politics and culture in the aftermath of the First World War in new ways” (1).

The book comprises three roughly equal parts. The first, “Repatriation,” deals with the disposition of the dead in the immediate aftermath of the war against the historical background of previous experiences of dealing with and commemorating American war dead. Part 2, “Remembrance,” discusses the formulation of collective memory and its bureaucratic aspects, specifically, the sometimes rancorous history of the American Battle Monuments Commission (ABMC). Finally, part 3, “Return,” tells the story of the pilgrimages of veterans, friends, and family members of the fallen to battlefields and cemeteries in Europe.

Gen. Douglas MacArthur famously said, “Old soldiers never die; they just fade away”; *Bodies of War* shows that such fading away was no simple process after World War I. It was marked in the beginning by a prolonged and emotional national dispute: “American collective remembrance of the First World War was largely a politically motivated exercise, driven primarily by factions” with separate agendas (241).

When, shortly before the end of the war, Secretary of War Newton D. Baker promised their families that the bodies of dead servicemen would be returned home, he was following a pattern for national mourning established in earlier wars: “national commemorative traditions evolved along a historical path rooted in the western frontier, the Mexican-American War, the Civil War, the Spanish-American War. Each conflict contributed to the establishment of exceptional practices that eventually influenced post-World War I remembrance” (5). Americans could reasonably expect the government to bring their dead sons home, “because of the enduring imagery of the Civil War dead.... Far from fading, post-Civil War practices resurfaced after the Spanish-American War, accompanied by newly improvised policies made to fit this major conflict fought outside national borders” (24-25).

Budreau argues that Woodrow Wilson’s administration felt compelled to make such a commitment in order to overcome the American public’s reluctance to defend the European democracies. The government cast the war as a crusade for democracy to

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1. Holger H. Herwig, *The Marne, 1914: The Opening of World War I and the Battle That Changed the World* (NY: Random House, 2009) 63.

justify military interference as something other than an imperialist action by a bellicose force. [Service] became a noble deed for a worthy cause. At the same time, the notion of heroic death was readily invoked to assuage the grief of the living.... Within this process, war death assumed a mythical, cultlike status in which each soldier was worthy of tribute. To meet this debt of honor, soldiers' remains had to be preserved.... In time, it seemed that the greater the need for solidarity, the more resources the government willingly invested in locating and recovering the dead. (25)

Returning the dead sparked a period of contentious national debate between various interest groups over the specific form the memory of wartime service and sacrifice should take. Should the dead, for example, be left where they fell or collected into large cemeteries? What type of stone marker should be placed on individual graves? Veterans, families, politicians, and others tried to draw the memorial blueprint, and even Congress's creation of the ABMC in 1923 to oversee the establishment of memorials, monuments, and cemeteries did not settle all the controversies. For example, it might be supposed that veterans would have a strong voice in the preservation of monuments they had placed on ground they had fought to win. But, despite the support of combat commanders like Gen. Charles P. Summerall, "the ABMC voted that all memorials erected in France by the 1st Division should be removed from the list of permanent memorials previously approved" (137–38).

Pilgrimages to European battlefields and cemeteries could also be fraught with controversy. Budreau's account of the journeys of Gold Star mothers to the overseas gravesites shows the good that a government can do. But the requirement that mothers of African-American soldiers travel separately caused bitterness and outrage. And, too, European memorial traditions often diverged from those of Americans. Thus, when the members of the American Legion paraded in Paris in 1927 to mark the tenth anniversary of the US entry into war, their activities "appeared to European observers as a mockery of war's memory." Our allies failed to see that "These events, dedicated to the celebration of victory rather than war's painful losses, bore a marked resemblance to the behavior of Civil War veterans during their annual encampments at Gettysburg" (8). It is hardly news that Europeans did not understand their American friends on occasion.

The Great War holds a prominence in British national history like that of the Civil War and Second World War in American consciousness. While British cultural historians of the First World War have often addressed the topic of war and remembrance, few American scholars have shown much interest until recently.<sup>2</sup> Budreau's thorough study of the creation of the American memory of the national sacrifice in World War I is a significant addition to a thinly populated sector of our historiography. A particular strength of the book is her ability, thanks to the extensive work she has done in British and French archives, to reveal telling contrasts between European and American habits of memorialization.

Distinctive aspects of national character justify the special effort to commemorate American war dead. As George Washington said, "When we assumed the Soldier, we did not lay aside the Citizen." Typical American soldiers, conforming to the militia ideal, have always been citizens (or proto-citizens), never mercenaries and only occasionally professionals, who consented to serve their nation in an emergency. This status justifies the demand for validation of their sacrifices by such means as repatriation of the dead, the erection of memorials, veneration of Gold Star mothers, war bonuses, and other government benefits. Dealing with the dead has been a part of this whole, not a thing apart. Budreau's history is a valuable addition to the study of this whole.

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2. See, e.g., Steven Trout, *On the Battlefield of Memory: The First World War and American Remembrance, 1919–1941* (Tuscaloosa: U Alabama Pr, 2010).