

Commemorating and Forgetting: Challenges for the New South Africa

Martin J. Murray

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When the past is painful, as riddled with violence and injustice as it is in postapartheid South Africa, remembrance presents a problem at once practical and ethical: how much of the past to preserve and recollect and how much to erase and forget if the new nation is to ever unify and move forward? The new South Africa's confrontation of this dilemma is Martin J. Murray's subject in *Commemorating and Forgetting*. More broadly, this book explores how collective memory works—how framing events, persons, and places worthy of recognition and honor entails a selective appropriation of the past, not a mastery of history.

How is the historical past made to appear in the present? In addressing these questions, Murray reveals how collective memory is stored and disseminated in architecture, statuary, monuments and memorials, literature, and art—"landscapes of remembrance" that selectively recall and even fabricate history in the service of nation-building. He examines such vehicles of memory in postapartheid South Africa and parses the stories they tell—stories by turn sanitized, distorted, embellished, and compressed. In this analysis, *Commemorating and Forgetting* marks a critical move toward recognizing how the legacies and impositions of white minority rule, far from being truly past, remain embedded in, intertwined with, and imprinted on the new nation's here and now.



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Stan Smith:

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