



D-Day in History and Memory: The Normandy Landings in International Remembrance and Commemoration

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Over the past seventy years, the Allied invasion of Northwestern France in June 1944 has come to stand as something more than a major battle in an increasingly distant war. The assault itself formed a vital component of Allied victory in the Second World War. D-Day, as the initial landing is traditionally termed, has developed into a sign and symbol; as a word it carries with it a series of ideas and associations that have come to symbolize different things to different people and nations. As such, the commemorative activities linked to the battle offer a window for viewing the various belligerents in their postwar years. From high statesmen down to everyday individuals, people have spent the post-war period interpreting and drawing upon D-Day for a variety of reasons. As with all instances of collective memory, there is a politics at play, for the past serves to help make sense of the ever-changing present.

This book examines the commonalities and differences in national collective memories of D-Day. Chapters cover the main forces on the day of battle, including the United States, Great Britain, Canada, France and Germany. In addition, a chapter on Russian memory of the invasion explores other views of the battle. The overall thrust of the book shows that memories of the past vary over time, link to present-day needs, and, despite the impact of transnational globalization, such memories also still have a clear national and cultural specificity. Simply put, memories of D-Day have diverged according to time, place, and national culture.

These memories arise in a multitude of locations such as film, books, monuments, anniversary celebrations, and news media representations. Rather than simply drawing on a series of “facts” about the past, the attribution of specific meanings and themes to this battle show how individuals, groups, and even nations draw on the past to validate the present and chart a course for the future. As with most expressions of cultural power, though, contests over these meanings abound, and the struggles, changes, and even continuities in memory over time all offer profound insights into these various societies in the decades since the battle itself concluded.

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