

***Roadside Crosses in Contemporary Memorial Culture.* By Holly Everett. (Denton, TX: University of North Texas Press, 2002. Pp. 160, photos, appendixes, notes, bibliography, index, ISBN 1-57441-150-0)**

**Karen Baldwin**

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## REVIEWS / COMPTES RENDUS

***Roadside Crosses in Contemporary Memorial Culture.*** By Holly Everett. (Denton, TX: University of North Texas Press, 2002. Pp. 160, photos, appendixes, notes, bibliography, index, ISBN 1-57441-150-0)

Spontaneous roadside memorials in the form of crosses placed at the sites of fatal vehicle accidents are perceived both as accessible symbols of grief and as cryptic private expressions in contemporary memorial culture, according to Holly Everett, whose study examines the cross-cultural history and negotiated meanings of such markers. Everett's slim volume holds close focus on forty-four roadside crosses around Austin, Texas, her home country, illustrated with photographs and described in copious, affecting detail, from fieldwork done in spring 1997 and winter 1997-1998. Everett's subjective involvement is clearly and usefully motivating; the energy and complexity of her analysis is thought provoking, although readers may find her assumptions variously unexamined and her conclusions arguable.

Initially, Everett journeys through the recent timeline of memorialized assassinations, accidental, untimely deaths, attack mass killings, and war fatalities to establish a broad arena, the "contemporary memorial culture" of her title, within which to explore interchanges of meanings for the Austin roadside crosses. Everett draws on the work of historians of religion and sociologists as well as numerous folklorists. Her primary analytical frame comes from cultural geographer Kenneth Foote, whose work in *America's Landscapes of Violence and Tragedy* proposes a scheme of choices made in the commemoration of site-specific events.

Unlike roadside accident markings in other regions of the country, roadside markers are almost always crosses in Everett's study area, regardless of the religious tradition of the memorial-makers or the dead person commemorated. She indicates that cross markers raised by and

for Protestants as well as Catholics are all culturally informed by the region's historic Hispanic and Catholic traditions: wayfarers' shrines and the *descansos*, "resting places," where travelers who died along the way were buried, or where the coffin being borne to its grave in a neighboring town was set down while the bearers rested. Everett indirectly references Charles Saunders Peirce for a semiotic discussion, "The Sign of the Cross." Here she considers cross-cultural aspects of roadside cruciform memorials incorporating crosses erected by Mothers Against Drunk Driving, crosses as symbols in the continuing political debate about abortion rights, and crosses outside the Catholic realm of religious reference, as well as the wooden and sheet metal or wrought iron constructions at the center of her study.

At the heart of Everett's book are two chapters based in her fieldwork, including detailed descriptions of each of her selected memorial sites and direct quotations from persons who built or maintain them. Fine descriptive work provides excellent comparative material for those working with roadside markers in other regions of the country. Plainly spoken responses from bereaved parents, siblings, and friends effectively reveal attitudes among the living toward the creation and function of memorials to beloved dead. With the addition of questionnaire responses circulated among school students, Everett extends her ethnography to include folks who experience the roadside crosses during their ordinary travel routes, but who never knew the persons memorialized. The questionnaire instrument is never presented, however, and readers' questions are left unanswered regarding this data collection method.

In these core chapters Everett establishes deeply descriptive case studies of her selected cross memorials, illustrated with photographs and located on a map of the Travis County/ Austin area. In her ethnographic discourse are suggested several lines of further inquiry and connection for those working elsewhere with roadside memorials. Orientation of the memorials to the roadway, presence and use of floral items, cryptic/personal icons (stuffed animals, jewelry, sports symbols, team mascots and school colors), and apparent incorporation of debris from the wrecked vehicle are among the details noted about each documented site. The immediately affecting presence of the memorials is coded by these and other features of the memorials, but these "sites of tragedy" are reclaimed, Everett asserts, through the "centuries of

tradition and innovation in cultural expression...embodied in the signs and symbols" (80) of the assemblages.

The penultimate chapter, "Bereavement Made Manifest," essentially incorporates Everett's interview and questionnaire materials in a useful discussion of the personal and social processes by which these Austin sites are created, transformed, and consumed, giving the reader access to some of the most affecting results of Everett's inquiry — personal expressions of meaning for the memorials from parents, friends, and other creators/caretakers. Here Everett considers these memorials as extensions of domestic activities involved in customary complexes such as Day of the Dead celebrations in the U.S. and Latin America, and St. Joseph's Day altars prepared by Italian-American women. Because roadside memorials negotiate private meanings in public space, because their assembly and maintenance invite participation, and because they are ultimately consumed, Everett views the memorials as similar in content, intent, and impermanence to "ritual altars, yard art, shrines" (85) and other examples of essentially ephemeral material culture in public settings.

Everett's final functional analysis amends and extends William Bascom's ideas of integration, validation, education, compensation, and entertainment in traditional culture to suggest that roadside crosses also serve economic integration and social leveling functions, and that they incite non-integrative or "counter-hegemonic" expression through which mourners find voice for social commentary. This voice can speak through such as roadside memorials, the AIDS quilt, the white crosses erected by MADD mothers, and folksongs of social protest, with intent to effect social change and to express "desire to prevent any further loss and suffering" (116). MADD crosses, and roadside crosses are, according to Everett, "a counter-hegemonic grassroots cry for greater attention to safe roadway travel and harsher penalties for vehicular carelessness and crime" (115).

*Roadside Crosses* importantly extends the scholarly conversation about the aesthetics, the cultural/historical significance, and the psychological/social functions of roadside memorials. Everett renders a thoughtfully evocative, if sometimes exasperatingly offhanded, interpretation of her fieldwork materials. Whether or not all her cultural/social assumptions are well enough examined, her book will impress a spectrum of general and specialist readers with the deep significance

she sees in the humble, ephemeral memorials that sprout like mushrooms after a summer rain along the roadsides of regions throughout this and other countries.

Karen Baldwin  
East Carolina University  
Greenville, North Carolina

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***Retro Ball Parks: Instant History, Baseball, and the New American City***. By Daniel Rosensweig. (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 2005. Pp. 214, ISBN 1-57233-351-0)

Daniel Rosensweig's *Retro Ball Parks* analyzes the impact of Jacob's Field — a “new old” baseball park that combines elements of rare “classic” parks like Boston's Fenway and Chicago's Wrigley Field — in downtown Cleveland's revitalized Gateway tourist district, as well as the park's meaning in twenty-first century American culture. Since 1990, an unequal alliance between Cleveland's municipal government and the mercenary Indians franchise led local officials to pay for the construction of the new diamond, a professional basketball arena, related infrastructure, and employees' wages to the tune of over \$1 billion. Astronomical public subsidies helped “augment the profit of two sports clubs that... might be profitable without” them (13). Similar municipal-corporate alliances have occurred across the United States in the last two decades. The reconstitution of downtowns from commerce to tourism (xi) continues unabated, and, according to Rosensweig, Cleveland leads the pack in scale and depth of public subsidy and planning.

Yet *Retro Ball Parks* is mainly a study of popular culture and socio-cultural theory, not economics or sports and leisure history. It focuses on the cultural, not the financial or political, significance of new old fields (11). To Rosensweig, retro parks offer wealthy residents and tourists vicarious, non-threatening encounters with the carnivalesque marginality of urban life through carefully commodified team histories,