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## Commemorative Activity in Twentieth-Century Indianapolis: The Invention of Civic Traditions

John Bodnar\*

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Millions of citizens throughout the world have taken part in anniversary celebrations, centennials, monument dedications, civic holidays, and other commemorative activities. Despite widespread public participation, however, such events have generated little serious historical analysis. Most participants and observers recognize that commemorative activities can involve traditional symbols and messages from the past, enormous crowds, and extravagant expenditures of funds; but beyond such general observations few are aware of the complex processes that generate and shape such functions.

Sociologist William Lloyd Warner pioneered the analysis of commemorative activity in the United States. In the final volume of his massive study of Newburyport, Massachusetts—or “Yankee City”—Warner devoted much attention to the uses of the past in the present. Entitled *The Living and the Dead: A Study of the Symbolic Life of Americans*, the volume dealt with the symbolic representation of the past in civic rituals such as the Newburyport tercentenary celebration that was held in 1930. Warner was actually able to examine the files of the local tercentenary planning group and to provide detailed descriptions of the floats and the tableaux that expressed historical themes in the tercentenary parade.

Although few historians have followed the thematic directions outlined in *The Living and the Dead*, the account did make an extremely important point. Warner demonstrated that events such as

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the tercentenary parade did not emerge naturally from a public perception of the past but were carefully planned by influential people who wanted to influence the rest of society in specific ways. The "traditional symbols" or historical representations that were prominent in the parade were not objective accounts of the past. Rather, they were symbolic representations that met the needs of powerful people in the community, people who wanted to preserve aspects of a past that reinforced and legitimated their own positions of prominence and fostered notions of loyalty to leaders and existing institutions in the present.<sup>1</sup>

Warner's study revealed the existence in Yankee City of a "central committee" that was dominated by the old stock, Protestant elite. It was this committee that selected the major themes expressed in some forty-three floats or, as historians Terence O. Ranger and Eric Hobsbawm put it, that "invented" the traditions and the memories that were meant to be shared by all. Ethnic groups whose origins were more recent than those of the old stock residents in Newburyport could sponsor floats only if they spoke to the theme of creating the American nation and made a "dignified and trustworthy" presentation of the city's past. Thus, the French Canadian float could depict not the story of the group's migration to New England but the ceremonial visit of the Marquis de Lafayette to Newburyport in 1824. Ultimately most of the floats in the parade focused on the Puritan origins of the town and the creation of the American nation. Only three floats represented any post-Civil War historical activity, and no floats depicted the migration experience that created most of the town's ethnic communities.<sup>2</sup>

Just how valid was Warner's argument? How frequently did commemorative activity reflect the celebration of a past that served only the interests of powerful individuals and groups in a community? An examination of commemoration in twentieth-century Indianapolis, Indiana, perhaps provides a partial answer. Not only does the Hoosier capital contain impressive collections of monuments it also preserves long-held traditions of civic holidays. Further, its newspapers offer a glimpse of the process of celebrating and honoring historic ideals and symbols in a region very different from New England.

Prior to World War I two major themes dominated commemorative activity in Indianapolis. One appeared to reflect a desire to reinforce citizens' sentiments of national loyalty and patriotism. By fostering loyalty to national institutions, civic leaders apparently hoped to foster loyalty to all institutions and to the men who

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<sup>1</sup> William Lloyd Warner, *The Living and the Dead: A Study of the Symbolic Life of Americans* (New Haven, Conn., 1959), 116-34, 157.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*; Terence O. Ranger and Eric Hobsbawm, eds., *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge, Eng., 1983), 1-13.

administered them. The second theme involved the grief and sorrow that ordinary people felt for friends and ancestors who had died in past wars. Ceremonies for the dead not only reinforced historical messages that celebrated the notion of citizen sacrifice but also represented a need to express a sense of loss and sorrow. Citizens of Indianapolis also often used commemorative time and civic holidays to enjoy leisure-time activities and did not discuss messages from the past at all. Thus, it appears that commemoration in Indianapolis was partially what Warner suggested it was in Newburyport, but it was also more complex.

Celebrations on the Fourth of July provide good examples of the various interests that were manifested during commemorative days. Prior to July, 1918, Indianapolis officials seldom organized large solemn ceremonies to honor the origins of the nation itself. Citizens often filled the streets of the city on the Fourth; but rather than marching in an orderly fashion, they were busily going to amusement parks, picnics, or fireworks displays. One observer in the city commented that he thought popular interest in horse racing and betting at the state fairgrounds “overshadowed any celebration of the day.” Another remarked that the planning for the programs of the day had apparently been “left to a committee of 208,000,” the approximate city population of the time.<sup>3</sup>

During the initial decades of the twentieth century the most discussed issue concerning Fourth of July celebrations was not the birth of the nation but the use of firecrackers in the streets. Many officials not only decried the potential for injury and fire but also worried that use of these explosives distracted citizens’ attention from the patriotic significance of the day. A local editor wrote that it was “barbarous” to celebrate a national birthday by giving the “riotously inclined full liberty to make all the noise they cared to.” The writer feared that the “high and holy significance of the day on which a whole people ventured life for liberty is lost in a senseless saturnalia of noise.”<sup>4</sup> City officials and some members of the professional classes such as ministers and businessmen did not object to large displays of fireworks that were properly organized. When they argued for a “safe and sane” celebration, they specifically directed their remarks against the unregulated use of fireworks, an activity that they perceived to be the special preserve of young boys and the foreign-born. In 1910 a local writer expressed his belief that boys were missing the meaning of the day by playing with fireworks and suggested that they take part in neighborhood historical pageants that would tell the story of Bunker Hill, Paul Revere, and George Rogers Clark at Vincennes. In

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<sup>3</sup> *Indianapolis Star*, July 3, 5, 1905.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, July 4, 1903, July 4, 1905.

the same year police charged that the chief offenders against restrictions placed on the use of fireworks in the downtown "fire limit" were not young boys but "Americans in the making." They cited the case of one immigrant, an Italian, who could not read English and did not know about the prohibitions. The newcomer, Joseph Coppoleno, did promise that next year, "I will know what the Fourth of July is in this country."<sup>5</sup>

Considerably less debate took place over the proper way to remember local citizens who had died in battle. This component of commemoration, usually expressed on Memorial Day, cut close to Indianapolis residents' personal feelings and recollections. Although they certainly had leisure-time activities on their minds, citizens exhibited a seriousness of purpose on May 30 that was often missing on the Fourth of July. By 1910 a Memorial Day automobile race was already attracting large crowds to the Hoosier capital, but, clearly, the commemoration of the dead was no small matter. Normal Memorial Day celebrations consisted of thousands of people walking through the streets carrying flowers to cemeteries, the strewing of flowers around public monuments to the Civil War dead and other figures from the past, and countless sermons and church services. Participants in these activities paid little direct attention to patriotic symbols and messages often associated with commemorative events and a great deal of attention to ordinary people of the community. In 1905 a sermon at Crown Hill Cemetery praised not only those city residents who went off to war but also the "unlisted heroes" who stayed at home. In the same year William Reagan, a Civil War veteran, spoke at another cemetery and called for all to respect the "private" and the "common man" who did his duty. Reports from graveside activities often noted the "tears and sobs" that were evident as roll calls of the dead were read and "memories of war times" recalled.<sup>6</sup>

The commemoration of the dead and the sacrifice of ordinary people in the Civil War, at once an expression of patriotism and local and personal sorrow and pride, became the nucleus of the largest commemorative activity in Indianapolis's history prior to World War I. In 1902 the city erected a towering landmark to the dead in the middle of the downtown. Standing over three hundred feet high, the central shaft of the Soldiers' and Sailors' Monument looked down on the entire city and created enormous interest and excitement. It certainly stood for the theme of citizen sacrifice for the nation, but contemporary observers were quick to argue that it also honored the "private soldier" who was missed by ordinary citizens in the Indianapolis area.

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<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, July 4, 1903, July 3, 1905, July 4, 3, 1910.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, May 30, 1905, May 30, 1910.

The idea for the monument had originated with Oliver P. Morton, Indiana's Civil War governor, and was furthered by a local Union veterans' association that was organized in 1876. As was the norm with nineteenth-century monuments, however, patriotism and local pride did not generate sufficient public contributions. Not until the 1880s was the Grand Army of the Republic (GAR) in Indiana able to persuade the state legislature to appropriate \$200,000 and get actual construction underway.<sup>7</sup>

In its final form the monument consisted of a tall central shaft with four bronze statues located at each corner. Dedicated to ordinary Hoosier soldiers who had fought for the nation, the shaft included on each side allegorical figures representing war and peace. A local writer thought the monument more beautiful than the "unsightly shaft" of the monuments dedicated to the Battle of Bunker Hill or George Washington. The bronze corner statues were memorials to four major eras in the history of Indiana and the Midwest as represented by leading figures. Commemorated were George Rogers Clark and the era of the Revolution; James Whitcomb, the governor of the state during the war with Mexico; William Henry Harrison and the Battle of Tippecanoe; and Oliver P. Morton. Apparently the power structure in Indianapolis was such that ordinary soldiers could not be commemorated without some attention to prominent leaders.<sup>8</sup>

Dedication ceremonies on May 14, 1902, included a parade of veterans from the Mexican, Civil, and Spanish-American wars. Over fifteen thousand visitors crowded into Indianapolis both to see the monument and to watch the parade. Many had visited the memorial several days before the dedication because of rumors that the crowds on dedication day would be prohibitive. During the parade reporters noted "tears and sobs in the eyes" of many spectators as the veterans passed by. Several of the marchers themselves broke into tears in part, as one former soldier described, because of the remembered deaths of the "fellows that bunked, messed, and fought with me for three years."<sup>9</sup>

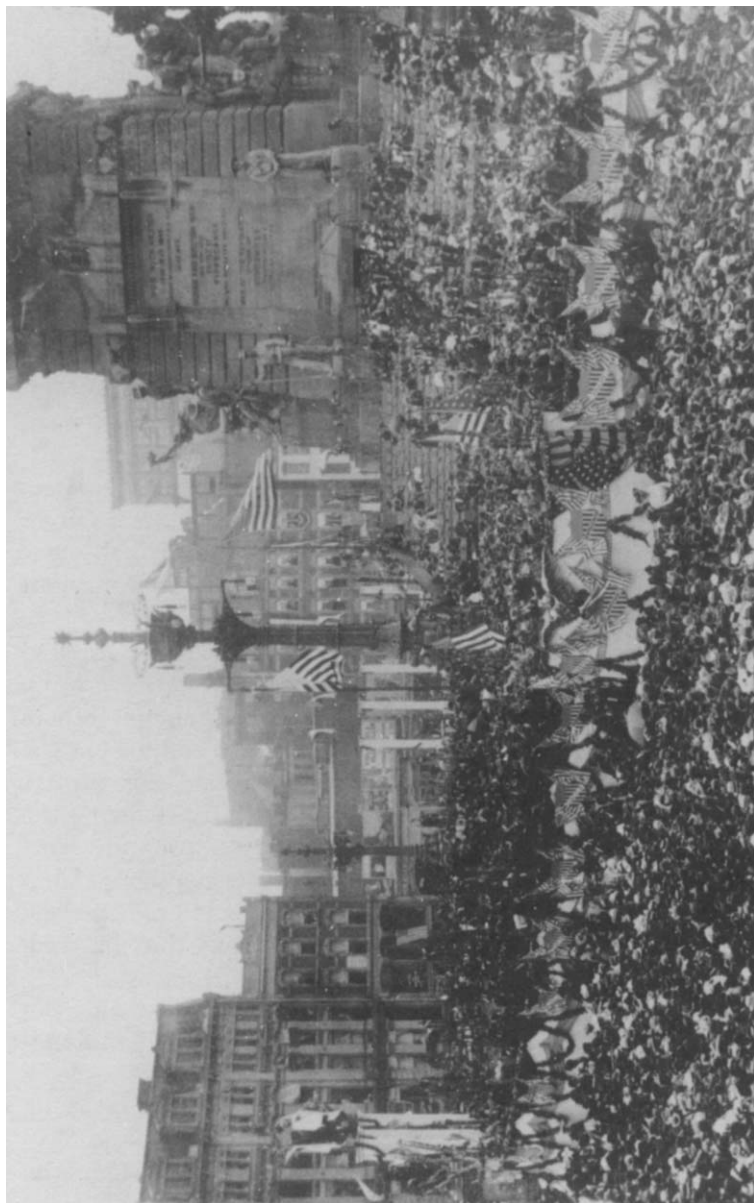
During American involvement in World War I wartime demands deflected the focus of commemorative activity in Indianapolis. Memorial Day remained a time to commemorate the dead, and city newspapers reported that the number of people carrying flowers to local cemeteries had not been so high since "the days when the Grand Army men were more numerous." Interestingly,

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<sup>7</sup> *Indianapolis News*, May 15, 1905.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, May 15, 14, 1902; the *News* also reported on May 15, 1902, that Indiana had received the largest amount of veterans' benefits in the nation. Max R. Hyman, ed., *Hyman's Handbook of Indianapolis: An Outline History . . .* (Indianapolis, 1909), 53-62, quotation, 54.

<sup>9</sup> *Indianapolis News*, May 15, 1902.



DEDICATION OF SOLDIERS' AND SAILORS' MONUMENT, JUNE 8, 1902

Photograph by Bass Photo Company; courtesy Indiana Historical Society  
Library, Indianapolis. Neg. no. 3209.



SOLDIERS' AND SAILORS' MONUMENT  
JANUARY 16, 1906

Photograph by Bass Photo Company; courtesy Indiana  
Historical Society Library, Indianapolis. Neg. No. 5792.

however, speakers on May 30, 1918, talked less about the sorrow and pride they felt for ordinary soldiers than about the “glorious incentives” provided by the soldiers of the Civil War for the youth who had to fight in the World War. Suddenly the past was being commemorated not so much as a means for expressing grief and sorrow for those who had died but as a means of instilling patriotism in the present. Indeed, a study of twentieth-century Memorial Day orations in Indianapolis indicates that the memory and example of the Civil War was used extensively during 1918 but was dramatically absent afterward, when it was replaced by memories of World War I itself. In 1918, however, most citizens could agree with the speaker at Butler College who exclaimed that Americans could truly appreciate as never before exactly what it meant to “preserve the union.”<sup>10</sup>

The most dramatic change in commemorative activity during World War I occurred in Fourth of July celebrations. In 1918, when the exercise of state power became so dramatic, leisure and frivolity temporarily gave way to more serious commemoration. In that year Indianapolis officials, at the behest of President Woodrow Wilson, organized a commemorative activity that was unique to the city. The event, which discussed issues previously absent from public commemorations, was the Americanization Day parade of July 4, 1918. As a public exhibition of unity and loyalty, the parade included many diverse sectors of the community’s social structure but featured immigrant newcomers who had seldom been heard in civic discourse. The one ethnic group that had been publicly audible was unable to assert ethnic identity and loyalty during the war. The Germans, who had celebrated German Day each October, marched in the parade not as an ethnic unit but as the “Friends of German Democracy” and carried only an American flag. Other ethnic aggregations carried flags from both their homelands and the United States to tell the rest of the city that ethnic identity and background were not incompatible with loyalty to the American nation.<sup>11</sup>

The Marion County Council of Defense organized the Americanization Day parade, allocated space in the line of march, and called upon “all loyal citizens, no matter of what extraction, to show their Americanism and patriotism.” As fashioned by governmental authorities, the parade’s line of march symbolically placed the immigrants within the recognized and accepted structure of American patriotism in Indianapolis. Following units of city police, military bands, boy scouts, and the Daughters of the American Revolution carrying American flags, immigrants marched in na-

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<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, May 30, 1918; *Indianapolis Star*, May 31, 1918.

<sup>11</sup> *Indianapolis News*, July 3, 4, 1918; *Indianapolis Star*, July 4, 5, 1918.



tive costumes, rode on floats, and presented themselves to the dominant society. Thus, the Italian float consisted of the "queen of Italy" surrounded by her American sisters. This float was followed by Italian-American school children carrying American flags. Slovenians, numbering over 350 in the line of march, presented a truck carrying Slovene-American children and farmers pledging loyalty to the United States and a second truck filled with women in folk costumes. The group carried a banner that read "Slovenians: We Are For America First, Last, and All the Time." Romanians created a float that showed a figure dressed as Uncle Sam triumphing over another figure that represented "autocracy." At the conclusion of the parade each ethnic group carried the flag of its homeland to a stage dominated by a large American flag. Wymond J. Beckett, an attorney active in planning local defense activities, apologized to the foreign-born on behalf of the rest of the city's and nation's prominent classes. He admitted that in the past the newcomer to the United States had been treated "as a mere economic unit, to be used, worn out, and cast aside . . ." He promised that this practice would not continue and insisted that the foreign-born were needed to maintain the foundations of the republic.<sup>12</sup>

Once the war's tribulations ended, however, Indianapolis leaders and officials quickly eliminated immigrant voices from public discourse and began once more an energetic quest to link local and personal feeling for the dead with the promotion of patriotism and even the progress of the city itself. Commemorative activities focused on veterans, both living and dead, because they, like all symbols, mediated several powerful but divergent interests in society. Ordinary people felt a strong need to understand what wartime sacrifices were all about and to express sorrow and grief. City leaders and boosters were eager to stimulate civic pride as a basis for continued prosperity and growth and to profit from the powerful patriotic currents engendered by the war and reinforced by the federal government during and after the conflict. Although there was a clear exercise of power on the part of dominant political and civic leaders, there was also a democratic thrust to the commemoration of patriotic veterans since they came from all social classes, ethnic and religious groups, and races.

This democratic component of the memory system and culture may actually have helped to contain the spread of the more intolerant strain of nationalism that was manifested by the rise of the Ku Klux Klan in Indiana and Indianapolis in the 1920s. Indianapolis, in fact, actually became a Klan stronghold in 1925 when the organization mounted a successful campaign to elect a mayor and an entire slate of school board candidates. But despite the fact that

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<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

the Klan became truly powerful in the city, it was continually opposed by all of the local newspapers, which were run by local elites, and by Catholic, Jewish, and Protestant bodies who had all participated actively in the winning and commemoration of the war. It was not uncommon, for instance, at commemorative events during the height of the Klan's power in the city to have representatives from all three faiths speak at services and ceremonies, a direct rebuttal of the Klan's anti-Catholic and anti-Jewish attitudes.<sup>13</sup>

The use of patriotic veterans as a commemorative symbol was not only democratic and linked somewhat to the needs of ordinary people it was intolerant and hegemonic as well. Institutional leaders, who tended to reside in the professional and business classes, aggressively sought to use memories of past wars and historical actors therein to stimulate loyalty to existing institutions and, therefore, to themselves. Patriotism was thus fostered in so uncompromising a manner that it nurtured the power of large governmental and economic structures in the city, the state, and the nation. This vested interest in maintaining existing power structures partially explains city leaders' attempts to promote the commemoration of soldiers rather than pioneers, who had been the dominant historical symbol of Indiana's centennial celebration in 1916.

After the war veterans were commemorated not on one day but on two. Memorial Day celebrations continued much as they had before. The placement of flowers at graves and monuments and increased attendance at the Indianapolis Speedway remained integral parts of the day's activities. Members of the professional classes, especially ministers, military officers, and lawyers always gave orations; and the past continued to serve as a device to educate citizens in the present. At the Soldiers' and Sailors' Monument in 1929, for example, the Reverend Warren Wiant told his listeners: the "glory of our history is that when the testing day came, our fathers were not afraid to sacrifice." He asserted that the same spirit of sacrifice for the nation must be manifested again in the future if "our priceless heritage is to be preserved."<sup>14</sup>

In the decades after World War I, however, Armistice Day was the major celebration honoring veterans. For years citizens who had experienced the jubilation and sense of relief at the termination of the war in 1918 held November 11 in high regard. Between the two world wars people in Indianapolis did not normally parade on the Fourth of July or Memorial Day, but they always did so on

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<sup>13</sup> On the Ku Klux Klan in Indianapolis see Kenneth T. Jackson, *The Ku Klux Klan in the City, 1915-30* (New York, 1967), 156-58; Judith E. Endelman, *The Jewish Community in Indianapolis, 1849 to the Present* (Indianapolis, 1984), 124.

<sup>14</sup> *Indianapolis News*, May 30, 1929, May 30, 1931, May 30, 1932, November 11, 1931.

November 11. Although the Ku Klux Klan parades during the 1920s consisted largely of middle- and lower-middle-class white Protestants, the Armistice Day parade affirmed the equality of all religious groups and consisted of clergy, veterans, and Gold Star mothers of all faiths. Parades of five thousand people were not uncommon, American Legion dances were inaugurated, and speakers used the occasion to “revive cherished memories” as well as to sustain the ideal of continued service to the nation.<sup>15</sup>

Patriotism thus became the dominant ideal for commemorative activities in Indianapolis in the 1920s not only because of memories of the dead and wartime sacrifices but also because of active efforts on the part of the city’s business and professional classes. In their classic investigations of Muncie, Indiana, in the 1920s sociologists Robert S. and Helen Merrell Lynd argued somewhat narrowly that Middletown’s business elite fostered patriotism and civic pride together to promote an orderly society that would assist leaders in their efforts to attract new business. The Lynds failed to realize that honoring soldiers’ sacrifices offered ordinary people a place within the construction of public memory. At the same time they were correct in seeing that city boosters’ willingness to commit large amounts of resources and energy to the building of patriotic sentiments and landmarks represented a central force in the construction of patriotism.<sup>16</sup>

In 1919 the Indianapolis delegation to the American Legion convention in Minneapolis, with the help of the Indianapolis Chamber of Commerce, succeeded in getting the Hoosier capital selected as the site of the legion’s national headquarters. Supporters for Indianapolis triumphed over those from Washington, D. C., by arguing that the headquarters should be located near the nation’s center of population and near the “center of the flag.” They also argued that the legion offices should be located where the “poorest man in the country can come to the headquarters” and that in Washington the legion would be overshadowed by federal institutions. Just six days after the convention’s decision a joint group of representatives from the chamber of commerce, the city’s real estate board, the board of trade, and the state legion met to discuss the need to build a facility for the national headquarters. Fearing that other cities might still lure the legion away, city leaders pressed for a \$10,000,000 memorial building and plaza that would house the legion and honor the war dead at the same time. Some veterans protested that the money would be better spent on bonuses, and residents near the downtown, where the plaza was to

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<sup>15</sup> Indianapolis *Star*, November 11, 1929.

<sup>16</sup> Robert S. Lynd and Helen Merrell Lynd, *Middletown: A Study of Contemporary American Culture* (New York, 1929), 222, 488-91.

be built, opposed the loss of their homes and the use of public funds for the project. But the initiative of economic and political leaders could not be overcome. In Marion County local leaders, along with local legion posts, conducted a massive publicity campaign to "educate" the voters.<sup>17</sup>

On July 4, 1927, Hoosier citizens dedicated the Indiana World War Memorial, which rose two hundred feet above its base, and a huge plaza that stretched for over one-half mile just north of the downtown area. In what was probably the greatest patriotic ceremony in twentieth-century Indianapolis, General John J. Pershing led a parade of citizens. The Indianapolis *Star* commented that thousands of young men whom Pershing had led to France, old warriors who had kept the Union intact in the "early sixties," and veterans of other wars passed through the streets proclaiming that Indianapolis did not forget its heroes. Only patriots marched behind Pershing in 1927. Immigrants who were visible in the Americanization Day parade in 1918 or "pioneers" who were noticeable in the city's centennial parade in 1920 were not to be found. The message here was clear: Indianapolis was united, and patriotism emanated from all its people and was not the private preserve of any segment. If the city could not be the capital of the nation, it could still be the capital of national sentiment.<sup>18</sup>

Post-parade ceremonies served and united interests associated with both high emotional patriotism and local and personal feeling and pride. Pershing spoke for the patriots and stressed the familiar association between visions of the past and the need for unity and loyalty in the present:

This is an experience of a lifetime . . . . It is an inspiration of a degree never exceeded in my experience. The thrill of seeing the people of Indiana and particularly of Indianapolis, rise as one to celebrate this day needs no comment. . . . It is a . . . distinct honor to . . . participate with the people of this state in the laying of the cornerstone of this monument, to be erected to the memory of their sons. These men of Indiana fought to sustain the eternal principles of liberty upon which our government is founded. . . . Like that of our forefathers, their valor and their sacrifices have become the heritages of the ages.<sup>19</sup>

When Pershing placed a wreath on a gold star flagstaff and spread mortar for the cornerstone, the crowd became extremely quiet and, according to one reporter, appeared to be "under a spell." All present acknowledged how complete the triumph of patriotic interests had become.<sup>20</sup>

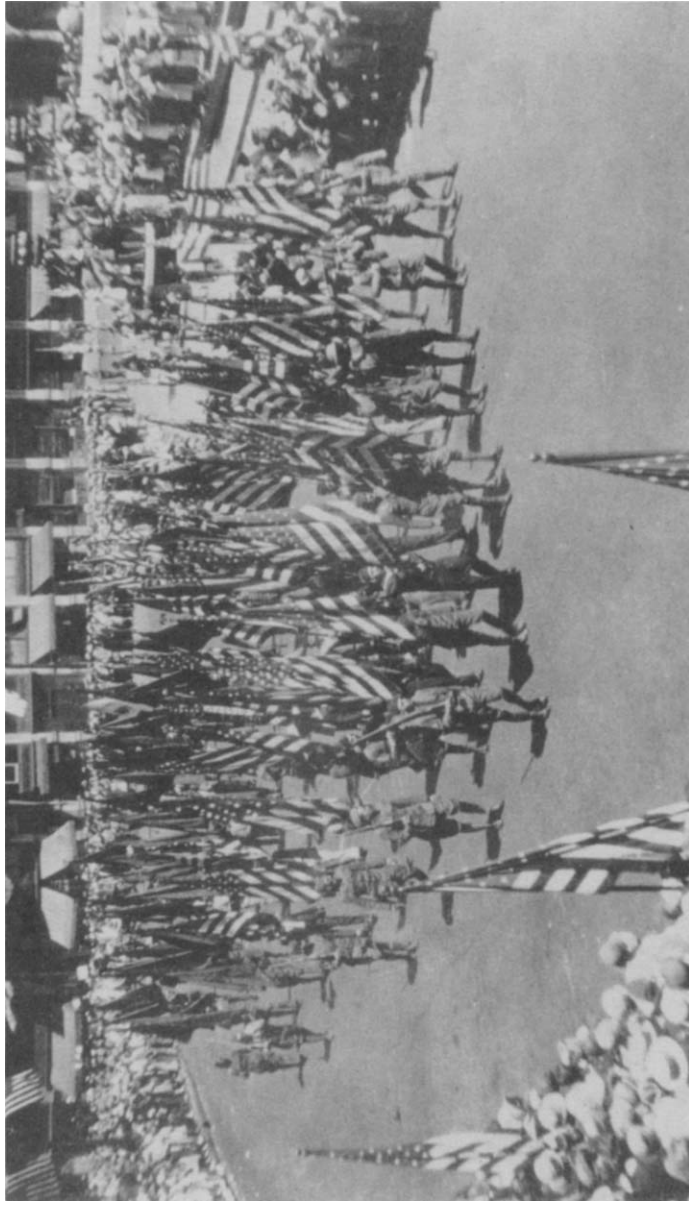
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<sup>17</sup> Indianapolis *Star*, November 12, 1919; Richard Morris Clutter, "The Indiana American Legion, 1919-1960" (Ph.D. dissertation, Department of History, Indiana University, Bloomington, 1974), 110-16.

<sup>18</sup> Indianapolis *Star*, July 4, 1927.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, July 5, 1927.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*



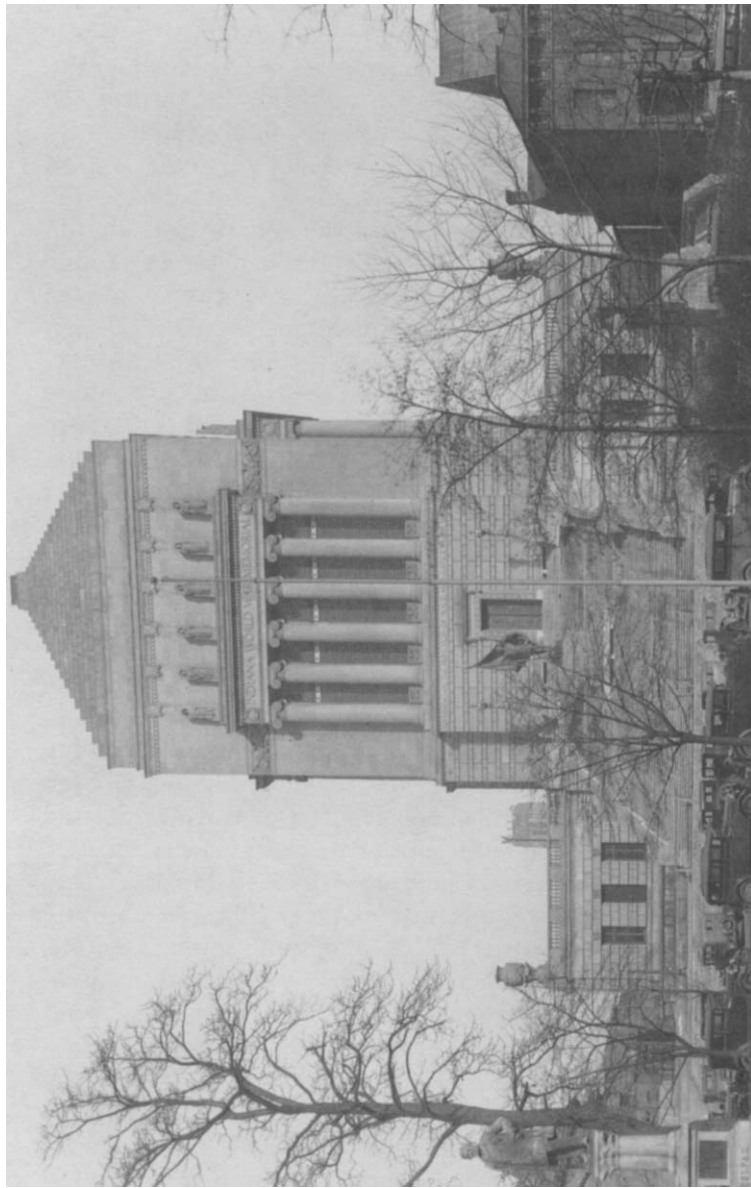
DEDICATION PARADE FOR INDIANA WORLD WAR MEMORIAL  
JULY 4, 1927  
FLAGS OF THE AMERICAN LEGION POSTS

Photograph by Bass Photo Company; courtesy Indiana Historical  
Society Library, Indianapolis.



LAYING THE INDIANA WORLD WAR MEMORIAL CORNERSTONE, WITH GENERAL JOHN J. PERSHING, 1927

Photograph by Bass Photo Company; courtesy Indiana Historical Society  
Library, Indianapolis. Neg. no. 203121-F.



INDIANA WORLD WAR MEMORIAL  
1931

Photograph by Bass Photo Company; courtesy Indiana  
Historical Society Library, Indianapolis. Neg. no. 215137-F.

Local pride and personal memories of the living and the dead were not by any means eliminated from the celebration, which only appeared to be devoted exclusively to the ideal of loyalty to the nation. Exactly what thoughts and feelings filled the consciousness of those in attendance cannot be known, but much that was important to local citizens and their memories of friends and relatives who had fought and died in the war went into the cornerstone of the new memorial. Included were the names of over 130,000 Indiana World War I veterans, the state's Gold Star honor roll, a report on the American Red Cross work in the state during the war, a list of the officers and members of the American Legion in Indiana, a history of the "colored men's" branch of the Young Men's Christian Association during the war, and a report of the Jewish Welfare Board's wartime activities.<sup>21</sup>

The intensity of the celebration of the war dead waned somewhat by the late 1930s. As the memories of the wartime experience receded and the attention of city leaders switched from boosterism to rectifying economic problems, the organized celebration of patriotism diminished. Leisure and enjoyment rather than patriotism and the commemoration of the dead dominated Armistice Day celebrations. In 1937 the Indianapolis *Star* noted that the downtown parade was larger than in the past but also that "gaiety was peculiarly more predominant." A military band played "Indiana, Our Indiana," instead of a military march, and a high school band gave a rendition of "Jingle Bells." A *Star* reporter explained that the drum major went through "capers revealing that he had no memory of the first Armistice Day and its surging emotions." A group of marching legionnaires, pausing for a temporary delay, even danced a jig and shouted at onlookers. The Butler University band played a "quick-step version of the Butler war song." Nevertheless, deep emotions and seriousness of purpose still existed in 1937. One observer revealed that a group of war mothers riding in an automobile caravan "brushed away" tears and that "aging veterans stood grim faced" during ceremonies. Both the *Star* and the local American Legion noted, however, that the "bright edges of what they believed were unforgettable memories" seemed "remote" to a new generation raised since the war. In fact, based on that perception, the legion mounted a display of posters from the era of World War I so that young people could read about how citizens were called to war, bought Liberty bonds, served in the Red Cross, and saved fuel.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, July 4, 1927; Indiana Historical Commission, pub., *Indiana War Memorial*, pamphlet ([Indianapolis], 1919).

<sup>22</sup> Indianapolis *Star*, November 11, 12, 1937; "The American Legion Exhibit," pamphlet (November, 1937).



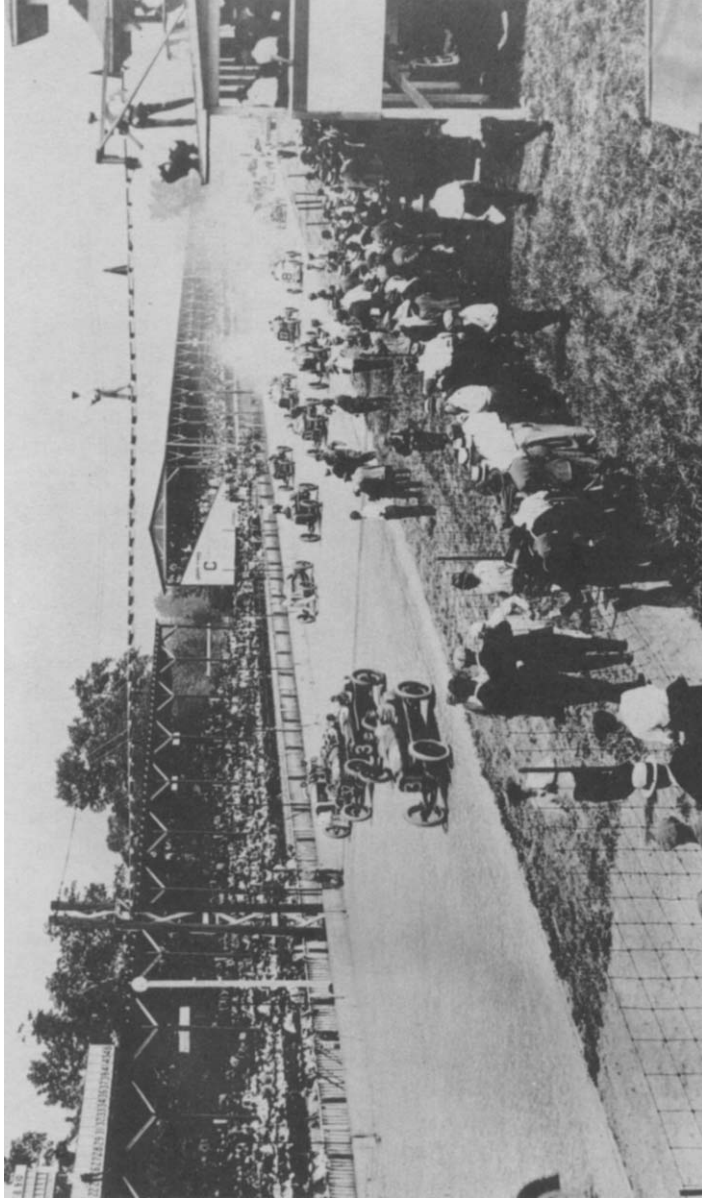
As might be expected, the emphasis on patriotism in commemorative activities reemerged during World War II. Once the war had ended, however, the patriotic interest appeared to wane much more quickly than it had in the 1920s. People in Indianapolis still paraded on Armistice Day and placed flowers on graves at Memorial Day; but leisure interests predominated as never before, and the effort to place memory in the service of the nation was considerably weaker than after World War I. Parades honoring veterans were smaller, and Memorial Day increasingly became associated with the Indianapolis 500 automobile race. On the Fourth of July, 1952, a pageant once again commemorated "Pioneer Days," a theme that had been neglected during the patriotic celebrations of the dead. A local editor observed that after World War II the "Fourth was not as grand and glorious."<sup>23</sup>

An effort to revive the emphasis on patriotism and civic loyalty in commemorative activities manifested itself in the late 1960s and early 1970s when the nation was attacked again, this time by dissidents within the country. In response to urban unrest and antiwar demonstrations in the nation at large and to incidents of "rowdy behavior" by youth during several public events in Indianapolis, the city's leaders attempted to use commemorative days to instill sentiments of patriotism and civic responsibility. On July 4, 1969, the *Indianapolis Star* featured a plan by which the city could celebrate the upcoming observance of its sesquicentennial and the nation's bicentennial. Conceived by Edward Pierce, a leading architect in the city, the proposal consisted of several projects designed to rejuvenate a sense of civic and patriotic obligation. Pierce called for frequent decorations of Monument Circle to promote a "community spirit," renewed attention to the creation of radial avenues emanating from the downtown and downtown parking areas in order to facilitate the flow of citizens to the center of the city, and the development of an Indiana Lincoln Memorial Center. Pierce argued specifically that historic landmarks could serve as an "inspiration for future generations." Although all of Pierce's ideas were not developed, the promotion of his plan did indicate an awareness on the part of the city's professional classes that public symbols and monuments could contribute to the promotion of community and civic loyalty. In 1970 political and civic authorities initiated Unigov, a plan that allowed Indianapolis to incorporate most of surrounding Marion County. In part, the plan reflected city leaders' desires to reinvigorate what was perceived to be a racially and geographically divided city. Richard Lugar, the city's mayor at the time, claimed that the annexation would "heal" the divisions between the suburbs and the city and make the city more livable.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> *Indianapolis Star*, July 4, November 12, 1947, July 4, 1952.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, July 4, 1969; *New York Times*, May 25, 31, 1971. Unigov did not completely merge the city and suburbs. Schools, law enforcement, and some taxing authorities were not joined.



INDIANAPOLIS 500  
1919

Photograph by Bass Photo Company, courtesy Indiana Historical Society  
Library, Indianapolis. Neg. no. 66756.

In 1970 Indianapolis's professional elite even made some effort to revitalize the patriotic component of Fourth of July celebrations, although the stimulus came from outside the city. Entertainer Bob Hope was prominent in the promotion of an "Honor America Day" celebration to be held in Washington, D. C., on July 4 of that year. The celebration's purpose was to tell the world, which had watched protests by American citizens against their government and political structure, that "the love of America by Americans is as real and vital as it ever was." This movement stirred some local organizations into action. The Indianapolis *Star* offered the local population inexpensive lapel pins in the shape of the American flag and completely sold its initial order of forty thousand in just a few days. The newspaper also cited reports that claimed that the sale of American flags had risen dramatically along with the sudden use of flag decals on automobile windshields. Although Fourth of July parades were seldom significant events in Indianapolis in the twentieth century, four were held on "Honor America Day" in various parts of the city; all ended together in the parking lot of a shopping center instead of near a monument for a patriotic ceremony.<sup>25</sup>

Organized attempts to stimulate patriotism did not last as long during the 1960s and 1970s as similar efforts had after 1918. By the late 1960s even Memorial Day was devoted less to veterans and dead patriots and much more to entertainment and leisure. A parade, held several days before the Indianapolis 500, emphasized not serious commemoration and civic duty but fantasy and escape. In fact, civic leaders and officials transferred most of their attention to the organization of the "500 Festival Parade" and left commemoration of the dead largely to individuals and small patriotic or veterans organizations. Unlike the 1920s, when city leaders and ordinary citizens jointly organized commemorative activities honoring the dead, the public in the 1960s was left to express its commemorative sentiments in its own way. Consequently, commemoration became less an expression of national loyalty and more an expression of sorrow and loss. Small ceremonies and personal visits still took place at cemeteries, but no centrally organized parades were held, and no monuments were dedicated. Newspapers carried personal statements from individuals who had lost loved ones both in wartime and peacetime. In a sense the revelation of personal feelings was more widespread than during earlier public commemorative events. At the same time this expression of feeling was in part diminished by the enormous scale of the 500 Festival celebration and parade, which was attended by several hundred thousand people each year just before Memorial Day.

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<sup>25</sup> Indianapolis *Star*, July 4, 5, 1970.

Although Memorial Day expressions of sorrow undoubtedly drew less public attention, they were nonetheless poignant. Not all involved an articulation of grief for military dead. In fact, any deceased friend or relative was likely to be remembered. Veterans, however, constituted a very large portion of the approximately one thousand messages that were printed in the local press each Memorial Day, and the sorrowful component of private memories was evident. The family of a man killed in Vietnam in 1966 mourned:

When the evening shades are falling  
And we are sitting all alone  
In our hearts their comes a longing  
If he only could come home.

The friends of Lance Corporal Larry James Pierson wrote:

Died in the service of his country in  
Vietnam, hill 512, Quang Tri Province,  
May 26, 1969. You gave us a wonderful  
memory of a friendship so dear. Our  
hearts ache with loneliness to hunt  
and fish with you near.  
But God chose to call you home to  
everlasting peace. And someday we  
will join you friend, to a life that  
will not cease.

And, finally, the family of a veteran killed in Korea in 1953 expressed their longing. They lamented:

Nothing can ever take away  
The love a heart holds dear.  
Fond memories linger everyday  
Remembrances keep him near.<sup>26</sup>

These expressions of personal grief and memory contrasted sharply with the celebration of the festival parade and the automobile race itself, events that dominated the Memorial Day weekend in Indianapolis. Each year in the late 1960s and early 1970s organizers devoted the parade to entertainment and eschewed the themes of loyalty, Americanization, progress, and the triumph of the pioneers, topics that had been featured in commemorations prior to World War II. Such a focus reduced the level of political discourse that had characterized commemorative activities in the prewar era and suggested that commercialized entertainment threatened to end or replace serious civic ceremony completely. In

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<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, May 31, 1968. About 20 percent of the statements were devoted to servicemen.

1969 the parade's major theme was that of an international fiesta. The grand marshal was a governmental official from Spain who was in charge of tourism and who was accompanied by riders on horseback in "traditional" Spanish dress. Floats were the central ingredient in the parade and treated the history of aviation, deep sea fishing, a "Good Guy cowboy preparing to lasso a steer," and "Polynesian Surfing." Although most floats were sponsored and produced by local companies and corporations, they in no way reflected local civic themes. Rather, the professional classes sought to promote the city and their own images not through patriotism but through pure forms of entertainment. In the same year, 1969, that several hundred thousand citizens came to see "Polynesian Surfing," a small ceremony was held at the Soldiers' and Sailors' Monument; and the flags in the city were flown at half-mast at the request of President Richard M. Nixon as a "mark of respect" for Americans who had died in Vietnam. But most people expressed sorrow in their own personal way rather than in public ceremonies, or they focused instead on the "fiesta parade" or the race. In 1971 the Indianapolis *Star* found the parade so entertaining that it claimed that thousands had cheered for bands, celebrities, and floats and that "for a while last night Vietnam and the dollar did not seem nearly so important."<sup>27</sup>

During the bicentennial celebration of 1976, the 500 Festival Parade temporarily returned to patriotic themes. The approach, however, was clearly one of entertainment, not of civic instruction. One award-winning float in 1976 honored the nation with a presentation entitled "You've Come a Long Way Baby." Sponsored by the Indiana National Bank, it featured an infant with an Uncle Sam hat and a birthday cake. Another float called "Marching Along Together" featured a colonial soldier playing a flute and a bear playing a guitar.<sup>28</sup>

By the 1970s entertainment and leisure increasingly dominated commemorative times in Indianapolis. Little emphasis was placed on honoring historical symbols such as soldiers and patriots. Public commemorations of the past, in fact, not only were less evident but also seemed more trivial and less tied to the interests and needs of both civic leaders and ordinary people. City leaders continued to promote the need to instill loyalty and celebrate patriots, but these traditional discussions took place on a much quieter level. Ordinary people also continued to remember loved ones who had died, primarily through newspaper messages and visits to cemeteries, but their interests, too, were less visible.

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<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, May 29, 30, 1969, May 29, 1971.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, May 29, July 5, 1976. A downtown festival on July 4, 1976, included a mixture of civic and entertainment features. Citizens could sign scrolls of reaffirmation to the Declaration of Independence and/or listen to presentations of various kinds of music.

Before World War II, when prominent leaders and ordinary citizens expressed their commemorative interests more strongly, civic concerns played a preponderant role in commemorative activities. Monuments to soldiers and leaders, who were both symbols of patriotism and lost loved ones, reconciled the diverse interests of the prominent and the average citizen. Warner's belief that commemorative activity primarily served the interests of the elite in a community was only partially true in Indianapolis prior to the 1940s. The erection of the Soldiers' and Sailors' Monument and the War Memorial certainly served the need of powerful citizens to stimulate citizen loyalty to existing institutions and to promote the city. But such monuments also provided a means for ordinary people to express sorrow and regret for other ordinary people who had died, not simply because they valued patriotism but also because they bemoaned the loss of lives for any reason whether it be political or otherwise.

After 1945 ordinary people still indicated that they regretted such sacrifice and loss of life, but the powerful presence of a culture of entertainment muted, in public at least, both the expression of sorrow and of patriotism on the part of citizens and leaders alike. Both groups, in fact, heavily supported this cultural expression of commemoration. For ordinary citizens it was part of the pursuit of leisure and consumption that had come to dominate their lives. For leaders entertainment offered a less politicized way to promote city growth and economic gain, something that was always important in their approach to the planning of commemorative events.

Did commemorative activity in twentieth-century Indianapolis simply reflect the interests of the city's most powerful political and economic leaders in a manner reminiscent of Warner's Newburyport? An examination of such activity suggests that it did not. Instead, commemorative events in the city and probably elsewhere in the state honored a past that was meaningful to various elements of the social structure. The intense focus on the war dead in the entire era prior to World War II satisfied several important concerns. Ordinary citizens were given an opportunity to express their grief, sorrow, and longing for dead relatives and friends; the past they honored was a local and personal one that many had often experienced directly. At the same time influential city leaders periodically altered the focus on a local and personal past by mobilizing patriotic sentiment—the notion of serving and loving the nation—for political and economic ends. Examples include the Americanization effort during World War I and the movement to construct the massive war memorial in the 1920s.

It is not clear why either honoring the war dead or promoting civic unity and progress through patriotism was not as pronounced in commemorations after World War II. Both the effort to honor a personal and local past by remembering the dead and the promo-

tion of patriotism did continue, although in somewhat episodic fashion, but entertainment and leisure interests consumed much of the energy invested in commemorative periods. Civic leaders who certainly saw entertainment as a more effective and possibly more profitable way to promote their traditional objectives of citizen unity and city progress must assume some responsibility for citizens spending more time in leisure activities and less in formal civic rituals. It was these leaders who invented new traditions, such as the festival parade, around which commemorative days could be centered. Citizens themselves, however, demonstrated an obvious interest in leisure and entertainment as well. Traditional commemorations of the past were not entirely eliminated, but they were surely weakened in a city populated by leaders and citizens who feverishly pursued new forms of relaxation, amusement, and economic gain.