than today’s mobile homes in terms of function, materials, and energy use.

Knerr’s extensive research provides valuable insights into public policy, business history, architecture, and even engineering, but fails to offer perspective on the impact that greater mass production would have made on the American landscape. Lustron’s houses were extraordinarily difficult to rebuild, expand, and personalize compared to more traditional homes. The houses in Levittown and other community-builder suburbs, which used traditional materials and site-based mass production, have since been transformed and expanded in ways that would be very difficult for steel Lustron structures. Levittown residents, according to historian Barbara Kelly, have put their personal stamp on their homes and enhanced their value, as have other suburbanites across the country.

In the long run, a nation of Lustron homes, in a limited variety of nationally marketed styles, would have undermined the do-it-yourself spirit of American postwar culture. Knerr overlooks the ways that the inflexible, mass-produced steel home restricted self-expression and sweat equity. While television and mass consumerism did define much of postwar middle-class American culture and society, Americans simultaneously sought out ways to personalize and improve their environments. Knerr works hard throughout to show that a big potential market existed for Lustron homes, but he never entirely eliminates the sense that the wider public rejected Lustron’s “machine for living.”


Patrick Hagopian’s long-awaited book, decades in the making, arrives at a time when the U.S. military intervention in Vietnam has become a hot topic in memory studies. A new generation of authors, too young to have experienced the war or its social upheavals, has begun to produce important studies on how the era has been remembered and commemorated, both here and in Vietnam.

At first sight, the subject of Hagopian’s book is the broad terrain of local and national monuments to Vietnam veterans erected in the U.S.: from the Angel Fire memorial chapel in New Mexico erected by a grieving father in 1971; to Maya Lin’s cele-
brated wall a decade later in Washington, D.C.; to the dozens of state and local memorials erected ever since. The book is not meant to be an exhaustive catalog of all such monuments; instead, the author classifies them into certain types and bores deeply into representative examples. Hagopian's real subject, however, is not simply the objects themselves, but the psychiatric and political discourses that at once spurred these memorial efforts and constrained their expressive potential.

In a nutshell, Hagopian argues that the “therapeutic discourse of wounds and healing” (p. 19), ostensibly a neutral platform for uniting left and right in mutual sympathy for the veteran as victim, was enormously powerful in generating support for memorial efforts across the U.S. But at the same time, the emphasis on healing was a political rhetoric that extended therapy to the nation itself, and by so doing prevented its people from engaging in a genuine moral accounting of the cause and the conduct of the U.S. military in Vietnam.

Thus, Hagopian begins the argument with a fascinating account of the psychiatric origins of the healing discourse and how it spread into the commemorative sphere. Jan Scruggs, the founder of the national Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund and himself a psychologist of war trauma, emerges as a key figure in this transition from treatment to commemoration. Hagopian's discussion of that seminal memorial, however, delves equally deeply into the complex micro-politics surrounding the monument campaign in the early days of the Reagan administration. The author seems to have gone through every scrap of paper in the relevant archives. His reconstruction of the political calculations going on behind the scenes in the White House, as Reagan's aides worried and argued about the controversy's impact on their Central America policy, is a tour de force. Of all of the scholarship on this one monument, Hagopian's is surely the most carefully researched and substantive piece of work produced to date; indeed, it is hard to imagine that any future scholar could ever surpass his account of the political controversy.

From here, the book expands outward to discuss the phenomenal success of the national memorial and its progeny, including the Vietnam Women's Memorial, the several travelling versions of the Wall, and the many state and local monuments that have helped to solidify the tropes of reconciliation, reunion, rescue, and succor. In the process the author shows how the antiwar movement, which had been crucial in generating the early psychiatric discourse, has been all but eclipsed. Hagopian suggests that the memorials themselves have enabled the once-pointed moral critique of the U.S. military to be superseded by a new discourse of patriotic support for the troops. Some memorials have left the pretense of neutrality behind, and, like Indiana's
Vietnam Veterans Memorial, assert that America’s objective in Southeast Asia was “noble” (p. 421).

Hagopian’s book is a powerful reflection on the healing power and moral equivocation of war memorials. If I have one objection, it is that he does not situate his subject in the longer history of war memorialization in the U.S., which laid much of the groundwork for the innovations of the Vietnam memorials. But that is a subject for another book and, perhaps, another time.

KIRK SAVAGE is Professor and Chair of the History of Art and Architecture Department at the University of Pittsburgh. He is the author of Monument Wars: Washington, D.C., the National Mall, and the Transformation of the Memorial Landscape (2009).