Collective Memory in Contemporary Poland and Pre-Independence (1918) Warfare: An Early 21st Century Foreign Traveler's Observations concerning Polish Battlefield Memorials

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Abstract

This essay examines war memorials in contemporary Poland. The article also analyzes Polish historical memory through the prism of three theories of collective memory discussed by Nachman Ben-Yehuda. To the eye of a foreign observer, Polish memorialization of pre-1918 battle sites appears strange. Significant battlefields from the Seven Years War (1756-1763) and World War I are largely ignored in favor of emphasis on medieval battlefields. The author argues that this pattern reflects both Polish ethnocentric nationalism and a desire to forget the many years during which German-speaking peoples controlled portions of present-day Poland. The author maintains that Poland's early Cold War-era policy of de-Germanization of cultural sites is no longer appropriate for contemporary Poland - a member of the European Union.

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