

**David Blight** discusses 9/11, memorialization, and the American identity.

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## The Speaker

David Blight is a professor of American History and director of the Gilder Lehrman Center for the Study of Slavery, Resistance, and Abolition, at Yale University.

## Review Questions

**CHAPTER 1:** *Blight discusses memorialization in American culture as an old impulse with a new urgency.*

1. How does Blight distinguish between history and memory?
2. Describe the effect the “screen of memory” has on recorded history.

**CHAPTER 2:** *Blight outlines the evolution of public memory in regard to the Civil War.*

1. Explain how the changing of generations can influence how an event is remembered.
2. What do the type and number of Civil War memorials tell us about how the War, and the soldiers who fought in it, are remembered?

**CHAPTER 3:** *Blight talks about the need in the immediate aftermath of 9/11 to find parallels in other historical events.*

1. What does New York State Governor Pataki’s recitation of the Gettysburg Address at the first anniversary of 9/11 suggest about how the event was being understood at the time?

**CHAPTER 4:** *Blight discusses the need to understand 9/11 in the context of American history, and the role of individual sacrifice.*

1. How did the concept of sacrifice transform collective reaction to, and remembrance of, 9/11?
2. Why does Blight refer to the obligation to memorialize individual sacrifice as a “civic duty”?

**CHAPTER 5:** *Blight talks about nationalism, collective response, and the evolution of the American Republic.*

1. What does Blight mean when he talks about “universals”?
2. Describe briefly how we have arrived at what Blight theorizes is the third American Republic.

**CHAPTER 6:** *Blight discusses the impacts of 9/11 and the event’s effect on how Americans perceive themselves.*

1. Describe Blight’s arguments for and against considering 9/11 as a pivotal moment in American history.
2. How does Blight suggest 9/11 challenged the concept of American innocence?

## Key References

### Civil War References

#### **Battle of Fort Sumter**

(April 12 - 13, 1861) The first engagement of the American Civil War. Fort Sumter is a Federal fort in Charleston Harbor, South Carolina, which was bombarded by Confederate forces.

#### **Battle of Antietam**

(Sept. 17, 1862) The first major battle on Northern territory in the American Civil War, and the bloodiest single-day battle in American history.

#### **The Battle of Gettysburg**

(July 1 - 3, 1863) One of the bloodiest battles in American history, and arguably a turning point in the Civil War, in which the Confederate thrust into Northern territory was turned back. Over 50,000 soldiers were killed, wounded, or captured.

#### **Gettysburg Address**

Delivered by Abraham Lincoln on November 19, 1863 at a dedication ceremony transforming the site of the Battle of Gettysburg into a national war cemetery.

#### **14th Amendment**

Adopted after the American Civil War as part of the Reconstruction Amendments (along with the 13th and 15th Amendments). The 14th Amendment includes the Equal Protection Clause, making all people equal under the law. This Amendment was later used during the Civil Rights Movement to end state-sanctioned racial segregation.

## Webcast: Exploring 9/11 – The World Before and After Supplementary Materials

CHAPTER 7: *Blight discusses national narrative and tragedy.*

1. How does Blight characterize the American national historical narrative?
2. How does it differ from other national narratives?
3. How does the American national narrative incorporate a sense of tragedy?

CHAPTER 8: *Blight discusses how America has come to be the oldest republic, and the larger scope of 9/11 in a modern, global world.*

1. What does Blight theorize is at stake for America in the face of globalization?
2. Explain how 9/11 figures into the “world’s story,” as well as America’s story.

### Questions for Further Discussion

1. Historians “ignore this kind of collective public memory at our own peril,” according to Blight. What does he mean by this? Do you agree?
2. What effect can political and cultural leaders have on memory and history? Describe a few examples.
3. Blight suggests that the obligation to memorialize individual sacrifice has become more prevalent and more immediate in modern history. Why does he think this has happened?
4. Do you think 9/11 will be considered by future historians to have been a pivotal point in American history?
5. Blight says that wars are the hinges of most national narratives. How do you think war, battles, and struggles have figured into America’s national narrative?
6. Two photographs and one political cartoon are referred to in this webcast. What roles do images and icons play in the creation and evolution of public memory?

### Recommended Resources

#### Books

Blight, David W. *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American History*. (Belknap Press, 2001)

#### Web

<http://www.yale.edu/glc/index.htm> - The Gilder Lehrman Center for the Study of Slavery, Resistance, and Abolition

### Key References (continued)

#### “Lost Cause” Tradition

A narrative adopted after the Civil War by both southerners and northerners, which resulted in selective reinterpretations of the war’s causes and the Reconstruction. Lost Cause advocates argued that the nation should reconcile by equally honoring both southern and northern sacrifice. In so doing, they avoided focusing on the causes of the war and minimized the racial revolution and constitutional transformations of Reconstruction that followed the war.

#### Other Historical References

#### The Enlightenment

A philosophical movement in the 18th Century which stressed human reasoning and a rejection of blind faith and previously accepted doctrines.

#### Attack on Pearl Harbor

(December 7, 1941) Attack by the Japanese navy on an American naval base at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, which resulted in America entering World War II.

#### American Exceptionalism

The theory that America is an exceptional historical case among nations, in terms of its national values, historical evolution, and unique origins.