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The “Forgotten Man” of Washington: the Pershing Memorial and the Battle over Military Memorialization

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The “Forgotten Man” of Washington: the Pershing Memorial and the Battle
over Military Memorialization

by

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ABSTRACT

The current debates over the transformation of Pershing Park in Washington, D.C., into a national World War I memorial have reignited century-old concerns about how to properly memorialize military figures. The park, originally conceived as a memorial to General John Pershing and the men of the American Expeditionary Force in World War I, had fallen into disrepair, and many within the federal government wanted to redevelop the park in time for the World War I Centennial in 2018. Popular commentators have pointed to National Park Service budgets cuts and the decline of “great man” memorials as the primary culprits behind the park’s cultural irrelevancy. While those factors help to explain the park’s decline since its construction in 1981, they do not fully explain why it took thirty-three years to complete. Pershing Park’s legislative history reveals that the memorial project was plagued by both internal and external issues from its inception, which foreshadowed its eventual failure. Vietnam-era ideological shifts towards the military, commercial redevelopment within the capital, and national artistic reform movements all threatened Pershing Park’s existence during that period. These factors worked together to greatly reduce General Pershing’s imprint on what was originally intended to be his memorial.

Additionally, the Pershing Memorial project was a seminal moment in the programmatic development of the American Battle Monuments Commission (ABMC), which spearheaded the Pershing initiative. The ABMC was originally tasked with constructing overseas cemeteries and memorials for American soldiers who were either

missing or were never repatriated. The Pershing Memorial was the agency's first endeavor in domestic monument-making, and the ABMC's inexperience with Washington politics and private fundraising hindered its ability to construct an ideal memorial to its former chairman. The ABMC would go on to construct two more domestic memorials after Pershing Park, and these projects were sufficiently colored by the agency's experience with the Pershing Memorial. Although the Pershing Memorial was the last federally-sponsored monument to a military commander, it was not the last gasp of military memorials in general. Enlightened by its experience with the Pershing monument, the ABMC constructed two ambitious war memorials to the Korean War and World War II in the late 1990s and early 2000s, with resounding success. The Pershing Memorial's failure paradoxically helped propel military memorials into the new century.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In late January 2016, the U.S. World War I Centennial Commission approved a plan that would completely overhaul the design of Pershing Park in Washington, D.C. The park, located in the heart of the Pennsylvania Avenue Historic District (PAHD), had originally been completed in 1983 and had served as a memorial to General John J. Pershing, the commander of the American Expeditionary Force in World War I. The memorial had been deteriorating for years due to continued budget cuts within the National Park Service (NPS), and the park's location on the periphery of the National Mall complex exacerbated its neglect. Cracks had begun to form around the base of the Pershing statue, and the once-full reflecting pool lay as desiccated as the concrete that surrounded its edges. "What should be a delightful oasis for visitors has become an embarrassment," wrote a disgruntled managing partner of the Willard Hotel. Pershing Park, which sat across the street from the historic hotel, was damaging the beauty and reputation of the entire PAHD. Edwin M. Fountain, the vice chairman of the Centennial Commission, said that the memorial was little more than a "35-year-old failed park," implying that the old design was flawed from its inception. The new design, the brainchild of a precocious 25-year-old Chicago architect, would breathe fresh air into what had become a stale memorial. The park, according to Fountain, will be transformed into a "more holistic" and egalitarian space honoring all of America's World War I

veterans, and will do away with anachronistic “great man” monuments that belong firmly in the past (Figures 1.1 and 1.2).¹

Pershing Park’s planned transformation into a modern and “holistic” memorial space has not gone unchallenged, especially among art traditionalists and conservatives. The *Wall Street Journal* called the design competition a clash of “monumental egos” that was more concerned with furthering artistic careers than with respectfully commemorating America’s World War I veterans. The *Journal* opined that most of the finalists’ designs were “unabashedly modernist” and “pure expressions of their creators’ egos rather than reflections on the sacrifice of those who served” (even likening one particularly esoteric design to a set of molehills). Pershing Park’s original landscape architect, M. Paul Friedberg, exclaimed that he was “shocked” that new designs were being proposed. “You don’t destroy something that has value to build something and give it some other value,” Friedberg said. The memorial’s “value” was rooted in its didacticism, and to remove it would be a “destruction of culture akin to burning books.” Friedberg reserved his harshest criticism for the NPS, which he thought had utterly failed to maintain the park’s original beauty. Breitbart News, a right-wing news outlet, decried the fact that “great man” memorials were being specifically targeted for removal. Pershing, they argued, was “emblematic of a generation that witnessed...the birth of the United States as a world superpower,” and he served as an edifying example of civic

¹ Corbin Hiar, “National Parks: Years of Wrangling, \$1.7M Needed to Fix Crumbling Park in the Heart of D.C.,” *E & E Publishing*, April 13, 2015, accessed February 7, 2016, <http://www.eenews.net/stories/1060016646>; Michael E. Ruane, “World War I Memorial Might Not Put U.S. Commander Pershing at Center,” *Washington Post*, May 22, 2015, accessed February 7, 2016, https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/gen-pershing-may-not-be-the-center-of-a-new-war-memorial-at-pershing-park/2015/05/22/c83b8444-00ab-11e5-805c-c3f407e5a9e9_story.html.

responsibility and military heritage for future generations. Removing Pershing risked turning the memorial into a “sad, postmodern farce.”²

The one thing that both the supporters and the detractors of the National World War I Memorial could agree on was that funding for national memorials devoted to the Great War was unacceptably paltry. Budget cuts within the NPS had been one of the primary catalysts for Pershing Park’s marked deterioration during its thirty-five-year lifespan. The NPS could not afford the \$1.7 million needed to fix the park’s crumbling infrastructure. In fact, the NPS could not even afford to keep Pershing Park’s water running, and for many the barren reflecting pool symbolized America’s World War I amnesia. Even the new design, whose total projected budget ranges from \$40-\$50 million, is entirely reliant on private contributions (as of this writing, only \$3 million has been raised). Although Congress established a temporary commission to spearhead the project, the legislators did not appropriate any funds for it. One prominent military lobbyist said that he was “appalled” that the commission was not given any money, not even a small amount to field an administrative staff. It seemed as if the federal government wanted the project to fail. To remedy this, fundraisers centered their entreaties around the familiar binary of remembrance and forgetfulness. Some urged that the memorial would help remind Americans of the role their nation played in decisively ending the “disastrous war,” while others simply wanted to remember an uncommonly

² Aram Bakshian, Jr., “A War Memorial Design Competition for Monumental Egos,” *Wall Street Journal*, September 25, 2015, accessed February 8, 2016, <http://www.wsj.com/articles/a-war-memorial-design-competition-for-monumental-egos-1443218705>; Carlos Bongioanni, “Plans for WWI Memorial in Nation’s Capital Stir Ire,” *Stars and Stripes*, August 19, 2015, accessed February 8, 2016, <http://www.stripes.com/news/us/plans-for-wwi-memorial-in-nation-s-capital-stir-ire-1.363599>; Jarrett Stepman, “Pershing to be Diminished in New World War I Memorial Because America Has ‘Moved Away’ From ‘Great Man’ Memorials,” *Breitbart News*, May 24, 2015, accessed February 8, 2016, <http://www.breitbart.com/big-government/2015/05/24/pershing-to-be-diminished-in-new-wwi-monument-because-america-has-moved-away-from-great-man-memorials/>.

brave generation of young men. One Texas congressman summed up the commission's plea by noting that the "worst casualty of war is to be forgotten."³

The current debates surrounding Pershing Park have generally focused on the park's developments after its construction in 1983 – on its "35-year failed history." Commentators have pointed to NPS budget cuts and postmodern aesthetics as the primary culprits behind the park's demise. The nearly forty-year legislative battle (1948-1983) to get the Pershing memorial designed, funded, and constructed has been largely overlooked. Without that story, Pershing Park's failure appears deceptively simple: no money and little public interest. The memorial initiative had struggled to raise money from its inception, however, and the reasons for that shortfall reveal a great deal about why the park fell into irrelevancy after its completion. Unlike the majority of federally-sponsored monuments constructed during the mid-to-late twentieth century, the Pershing Memorial was almost entirely funded through public expenditures. In fact, the memorial's supervising body, the American Battle Monuments Commission (ABMC), was insistent that the project would only succeed with federal money. The ABMC had primarily concerned itself with constructing overseas cemeteries up until the end of the Second World War, and as a small federal agency it had largely been absolved from private fundraising efforts. The Pershing Memorial departed from both of these norms, and the ABMC vehemently protested the latter deviation.⁴

³ Hiar, "National Parks: Years of Wrangling, \$1.7M Needed to Fix Crumbling Park in the Heart of D.C."; Carlos Bongioanni, "WWI Memorials Needs Funding to Become a Reality," *Stars and Stripes*, July 22, 2015, accessed February 8, 2016, <http://www.stripes.com/wwi-memorial-needs-funding-to-become-reality-1.359208>.

⁴ For more on the ABMC's overseas cemeteries, see Elizabeth G. Grossman, "Architecture for a Public Client: The Monuments and Chapels of the American Battle Monuments Commission," *The Journal of Architectural Historians* 43:2 (1983): 119-143. The ABMC's official "Commemorative Sites Booklet" can be found at

The ABMC's reluctance – and some might argue unwillingness – to raise money through private subscription severely circumscribed its bargaining power vis-à-vis the federal government. When the Nixon administration began cutting Great Society programs – many of which were devoted to public works and city improvement – the Pershing Memorial's budget decreased dramatically. As a result, the memorial diminished in both scope and importance. Throughout its history, the Pershing Memorial was confronted by the paradox that its greatest supporters were oftentimes its gravest enemies. Both the ABMC and the American Legion had benefitted tremendously from right-wing militarism during the postwar years, but those same conservative agents were also the ones pushing for dramatic spending cuts to public works. This phenomenon peaked during the Vietnam era, as conservative (and sometimes liberal) policymakers sought to redirect federal expenditures away from domestic programs in order to fund the escalating conflict in Vietnam. When the Pershing Memorial was finally completed in 1983, supporters pointed to budget cuts as the primary culprit behind the memorial's downsizing.

Budgetary constraints provide an explanation for the memorial's eventual downsizing, but they do not fully explain the memorial's protracted completion or why the project had so much trouble garnering widespread support. After all, it took less than a decade for the ABMC to design and construct three publically-funded World War II memorials in New York, California, and Hawaii. By comparison, it took Congress eighteen years simply to approve a specific site for the Pershing Memorial. I argue that there were both pragmatic and ideological explanations for this discrepancy. The concrete

https://www.abmc.gov/sites/default/files/publications/Commemorative%20Sites%20Booklet%20Sept%202015_508.pdf.

explanation for the Pershing Memorial's delayed construction was its location. Pershing Park's location along the main thoroughfare of the nation's capital – Pennsylvania Avenue – was both a blessing and a curse. Located at the intersection of 15th Street and Pennsylvania Avenue, Pershing Park occupied prime real-estate opposite the historic Willard Hotel and adjacent to the White House. Although the lot had been abandoned for most of the early twentieth-century and was located on the periphery of the National Mall complex, the ABMC was understandably pleased to secure a site in the heart of Washington, D.C. It was assumed that the site's visibility would help spur the project along and secure public support. Perhaps most importantly, the site's centralized location would ensure that Pershing and the AEF were properly memorialized and appreciated by future generations.

Pershing Park's location on Pennsylvania Avenue also meant that the design would be subjected to competing claims, endless bureaucracy, and urban redevelopment. During the eighteen-year-period in which Congress deliberated possible sites for the Pershing Memorial, a wide variety of competing plans vied for Congressional attention (ranging from a botanical garden to a visitor's center). In addition, the ABMC had to answer to a phalanx of supervisory agencies tasked with regulating the capital's landscape, such as the Commission of Fine Arts, the Budget Bureau, the Board of Trade, the National Capital Planning Commission, the NPS, and the Department of the Interior. Naturally, these agencies never quite agreed on what the park should look like, where it should be located, and how much funding it should receive. One organization's darling was another's disaster. During its thirty-five-year legislative history, the Pershing

Memorial's supporters found themselves constantly changing design plans and adjusting their budgets to meet these agencies' varied demands.

The most serious threat posed to the Pershing Memorial, however, was urban redevelopment. The Pennsylvania Avenue Development Corporation (PADC) was created in 1972 to oversee the commercial development and structural reconfiguration of Pennsylvania Avenue. Originally called the Pennsylvania Avenue Advisory Commission (or sometimes the President's Temporary Council on Pennsylvania Avenue), the PADC was first established in 1962 by President John F. Kennedy in an effort to rehabilitate and revitalize Pennsylvania Avenue, which had been deteriorating for decades. The PADC would buy up commercial property using federal loans and appropriations, destroy the existing building (or greatly modify it), and distribute the rights to private developers in an effort to inject new economic life into Washington's main thoroughfare. In addition, the PADC wanted to transform Pennsylvania Avenue into a ceremonial boulevard that accurately reflected America's cultural vitality. This meant crafting a design aesthetic that highlighted the strength of the American people. The PADC envisioned expansive plazas, grand fountains, and scenic vistas that would connect the two great seats of American political power, the Capitol and the White House. Pershing supporters, in particular the American Legion, were enraged at this proposal. The Legion argued that the PADC's plan threatened both the design and the sanctity of the Pershing Memorial. Even if commercial interests did not entirely derail the memorial, it would nonetheless cheapen the sacrifices made by Pershing and the AEF. To a large degree, these fears were well-founded. Although Pershing Park's size grew as a result of PADC development, the memorial itself was pushed to the side. By the time of its completion, the park's main

draw was not the Pershing statue or the AEF granite wall, but the skating rink and the food vendors that dominated the park's center. The PADC plan ensured that Pershing Park's main role would be furthering Pennsylvania Avenue's commercial development. The ABMC's early vision of the memorial as an all-encompassing shrine to General Pershing and his men all but vanished.

The commercial and bureaucratic issues that plagued the Pershing Memorial were inextricably linked with ideological concerns that arose in the mid-twentieth century. The first of these concerns was related to Washington's memorial landscape. National memorials to singular men, most of whom were white military figures, had declined in both importance and production since the Second World War. Recent scholarship has explained why the memorial landscape around Washington, D.C., has tended to focus on military and political leaders, as well as why those traditions in memorial design ultimately faded during the second half of the twentieth century. The prevailing notion is that the early architects behind the construction of the capital's memorial landscape chose to commemorate military figures to convey a sense of monumental unity and American strength. Marginal figures such as physicians or scientists were discarded because they spoke to narrow sections of the American populace and detracted from the narrative cohesion of the memorial space. The proliferation of heroic monuments quickly became the victim of its own success, especially in the politically and socially tumultuous years of the mid-twentieth-century. These monuments conveyed a message of unambiguous moral uprightness and worthy sacrifice. In the wake of unpopular military campaigns in Korea and Vietnam, they appeared anachronistic to many. No longer could American military might promise success against increasingly ephemeral enemies, organizations,

and ideologies. The foremost current scholar on the history and development of Washington's monument landscape noted that the "decline of the public monument" in the National Mall during the twentieth century was especially pronounced in the lack of military memorials, which saw no new monuments erected from 1936 until the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in 1982. The Mall slowly transitioned from a space celebrating America's martial, masculine, and white citizenry into a more inclusive and celebratory landscape, which mirrored political and social changes in the nation at-large. The predominance of white males on America's most sacred public ground was no longer acceptable to a nation struggling to adapt to modernity.⁵

Attempts to rectify the whiteness and bellicosity of the National Mall took off in earnest after the 1960s. Statues commissioned to commemorate underrepresented groups, such as women, children, and African Americans, created a much-needed contrast to the imposing military memorials. The Mary McLeod Bethune Monument, erected in Lincoln Park in 1974, became first statue of both a woman and an African-American to find a home in the capital's memorial landscape. The most important innovation, however, came in the form of the victim monument. Scarred by the failure and divisiveness of the Vietnam War, the nation looked for a monumental form more conducive to healing than edification. Maya Lin's minimalistic design for the Vietnam Veterans Memorial (1982) fulfilled this need, etching only the names of the fallen on a

⁵ Margaret E. Farrar, *Building the Body Politic: Power and Urban Space in Washington, D.C.* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2008), 45-57; Kirk Savage, *Monument Wars*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), 169, 265. For more on how monuments can impact a nation's collective memory and identity, see Michael Kammen, *Mystic Chords of Memory: The Transformation of Tradition in American Culture* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1991), 4-7; Maurice Halbwachs, *The Collective Memory* (New York: Harper & Row Colophon Books, 1980), 51-81; Eric Hobsbawm, "Introduction: Inventing Traditions," in *The Invention of Tradition*, ed. Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 1-13; Kristin Ann Hass, *Sacrificing Soldiers on the National Mall* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013), 4-12.

slab of black marble, which turned the VVM into a subjective and emotional experience – a far cry from the didactic nature of the hero monuments. The victim monument has continued to dominate the memorial landscape of the Mall up to the present day, with little-to-no indication that another monumental form will displace it, especially since the federal government issued a moratorium on future projects in the Mall space in 2003.⁶

At the same time that the federal government was attempting to transform the Mall into a more inclusive space, city planners were also trying to relocate much of the statuary strewn throughout the capital. Washington’s mid-century urban planners expanded upon the critiques made by earlier artistic reformers. Soon after the conclusion of the First World War, national art critics worried that doughboy monuments might spread throughout the country. Critics did not protest the doughboy statues because they disagreed with the valor of the cause; rather, they were loath to see another generation of “grotesque,” poorly-executed statuary erected throughout the country. The American Civil War ushered in a “plague of war memorials” that insulted both the soldiers who fought and the viewers who looked upon them. These figurative statues, which oftentimes depicted standing soldiers, were predominantly funded by local communities and mass-produced by a burgeoning monument industry, which contributed to their “maddening monotony.” The First World War – the next major American conflict after the Civil War – threatened to produce the same monotony, and in many respects it did. Reformers like Adeline Adams wanted to see more cerebral and contemplative memorials, such as

⁶ Savage, *Monument Wars*, 261-75, 297-313; Patrick Hagopian, *The Vietnam War in American Memory: Veterans, Memorials, and the Politics of Healing* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2009); Laura Palmer, *Shrapnel in the Heart: Letters and Remembrances from the Vietnam Veterans Memorial* (New York: Vintage Books, 1988), 95. For a similar case study in Richmond, Virginia, around the same time period, see Jonathan Lieb, “The Witting Autobiography of Richmond, Virginia: Arthur Ashe, the Civil War, and Monument Avenue’s Racialized Landscape,” ed. Richard H. Schein, *Landscape and Race in the United States* (New York: Rutledge, 2006), 187-211.

flower gardens and decorative flagpoles, that would engage the viewer in a dialogue and allow artistic genius to flourish. This never came to fruition, however, as thousands of mass-produced doughboy statues were shipped to local communities throughout the country during the interwar years. The preponderance of military statues continued unabated up until the middle of the century.⁷

When Washington city planners attempted to reform the city's statuary a few decades later, they were less concerned with aesthetics than with the statues' rigidly militaristic overtones. To be sure, planners still decried the haphazard, "ill-fitted," and often downright-bizarre statuary that graced Washington's landscape. Statues like the Sherman Monument, which was located in the middle of a traffic circle on Pennsylvania Avenue, and the Grant Memorial, which towered above viewers on the National Mall, seemed out-of-place and out-of-touch. But what was truly disquieting about the proliferation of military statues was that it made America appear like a society that only valued the contributions of soldiers and generals. In fact, the capital was so inundated with military statues that to many commentators it appeared undemocratic and authoritarian. For these reformers, the Pershing Memorial was merely another addition to an outdated and unneeded genre.

The final ideological hurdle that the Pershing Memorial had to overcome was simply the fact that it dealt with the First World War. Unlike Europe, the United States did not place a great deal of importance on the Great War – at least in comparison with World War II and Vietnam. In fact, one historian of the Great War writes that the

⁷ Charles Moore, "War Memorials Bad and Good," *American Legion Weekly* 4 (September 8, 1922): 16; Adeline Adams, "War Memorials in Sculpture," *Scribner's* 65 (March 1919): 381-84; Kirk Savage, *Standing Soldiers, Kneeling Slaves: Race, War, and Monuments in Nineteenth-Century America* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1997), 32; Jennifer Wingate, "Over the Top: The Doughboy in World War I Memorials and Visual Culture," *American Art* 19, vol. 2 (2005): 26.

“problem with the American memory of World War I is that there seems to be none.” Historians have given manifold reasons for this phenomenon: America’s relatively short engagement in the war, the brevity and futility of the peace, and the United States’ failure to accept a world role and join the League of Nations. America’s cynicism towards the war became evident soon after the war’s conclusion, and alarmed veterans’ organizations quickly stepped in to “correct” the memory of the war. Foremost amongst these initiatives was the push to build monuments, memorials, and military cemeteries in France and across the country. Led by the American Legion, a veterans’ organization founded in 1919 to protect the heritage of the war, World War I monuments sprang up across the United States. The majority of these monuments depicted “doughboys,” the common man who selflessly charged into France and accomplished uncommon deeds. These doughboy statues were characterized by a wide variety of forms and an equally wide variety of purposes. As one art historian has written, the statues “served as an antidote to radicalism, a sign of vigilance and loyalty, and a reassuring vision of American fitness and masculinity.” The need for “reassuring” images of normative American values became even more urgent in the wake of violent upheavals following the First World War. In the face of radical movements such as socialism and anarchism, the doughboy was a potent reminder of “true” American values.⁸

⁸ For excellent synopses of this process, see Steven Trout, *On the Battlefield of Memory: the First World War and American Remembrance, 1919-1941* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2010), 118-141; John Bodnar, *Remaking America: Public Memory, Commemoration, and Tradition in American Culture* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992); Stephen Ortiz, “The ‘New Deal’ for Veterans: The Economy Act, the Veterans of Foreign Wars, and the Origins of New Deal Dissent,” *The Journal of Military History* 70:2 (2006): 415-438; G. Kurt Piehler, “Remembering the War to End All Wars,” in *Unknown Soldiers: The American Expeditionary Forces in Memory and Remembrance*, ed. Mark Snell (Ohio: Kent State University Press, 2008), 28-55; Wingate, “Over the Top,” 26-32; Jennifer D. Keene, *World War I* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2006), 190; James B. Mayo, *War Memorials as Political Landscape: The American Experience and Beyond* (New York: Praeger, 1988), 79; David Glassberg, *American Historical Pageantry: The Uses of Tradition in the Early Twentieth Century* (Chapel Hill: University of North

By the 1960s, however, the symbol-laden image of the doughboy – or any other military figure, for that matter – had lost its potency. The Second World War dwarfed World War I in most Americans’ minds, and the conflict in Vietnam only further pushed World War I to the periphery of America’s collective memory. Instead of serving as a “reassuring” vision of American values, the doughboy and other World War I figures now appeared as an anachronistic ideal of normativity that no longer applied to a nation becoming more diverse by the day. For many on the right, however, soldiers and generals still carried a great deal of meaning, and they would go to great lengths to preserve that image of American indomitability – especially as Americans began to question the legitimacy and worth of the Vietnam War. The vociferous and heated debates surrounding the Pershing Memorial reveal a substantial and powerful constituency that not only supported traditional military statues, but also saw them as a way to fight back against the impotent victimization that had swept into the national military narrative. Powerful conservative lobbyists fought against what they perceived to be a lack of appreciation for the martial sacrifices made by America’s veterans. It was a battle that, in the case of the Pershing Memorial, they would not win.

When the Pershing Memorial was first conceived in 1948, it seemed as if its passage was inevitable. The nation was still wrapped up in postwar militaristic fervor, and the recent death of General Pershing promised to keep interest in the project. As the memorial project stalled due to financial issues, however, it became subjected to forces that its original supporters could not have foreseen. The Pershing Memorial’s reliance on public funds meant that it was also subjected to the vicissitudes of the federal

Carolina Press, 1990); William Pencak, *For God and Country: The American Legion, 1919-1941* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1989), 79-105, 209-234.

government. Thus, expenditures on urban renewal, commercial development, and the Vietnam War cut into the memorial's budget during the 1960s and early 1970s, and by then there was no turning back. What was once a memorial project became an economic venture; what was once a civic shrine became a commercial. By the time the Pershing statue was completed in 1983, the park was his in name only. Edwin Fountain's statement that Pershing Park began to fail after its completion is thus inaccurate. In reality, the park had never been given a chance to succeed. Financial and commercial obstacles merged with ideological shifts in the nation at-large to create a toxic environment for the Pershing Memorial. It was a testament to the tenacity, doggedness, and clout of the ABMC and the American Legion that the memorial was erected at all. But the memorial was undoubtedly a failure, especially when comparing the content and intent of the original 1959 design with what was eventually constructed.

The Pershing Memorial was the last statue of a general erected in the city of Washington, D.C.⁹ Part of this was due to the capital's increasingly-scarce memorial real-estate, but the Pershing Memorial also played a key role. Pershing supporters originally thought that finding support for the general would be relatively easy, a "no-brainer"; he was, after all, the only man besides George Washington to be named "General of the Armies" – a refrain repeated *ad nauseum* throughout the campaign. But widespread support never came, even from supposed allies on the Right. The Pershing Memorial was the last stand for commander memorials, and the line did not hold.

⁹ A memorial to Dwight D. Eisenhower gained Congressional approval in 1999, but it has since been put on indefinite hold.



Figure 1.1: The Pershing Memorial at the present-day. (Courtesy of *The Washington Post*/John Kelly.)

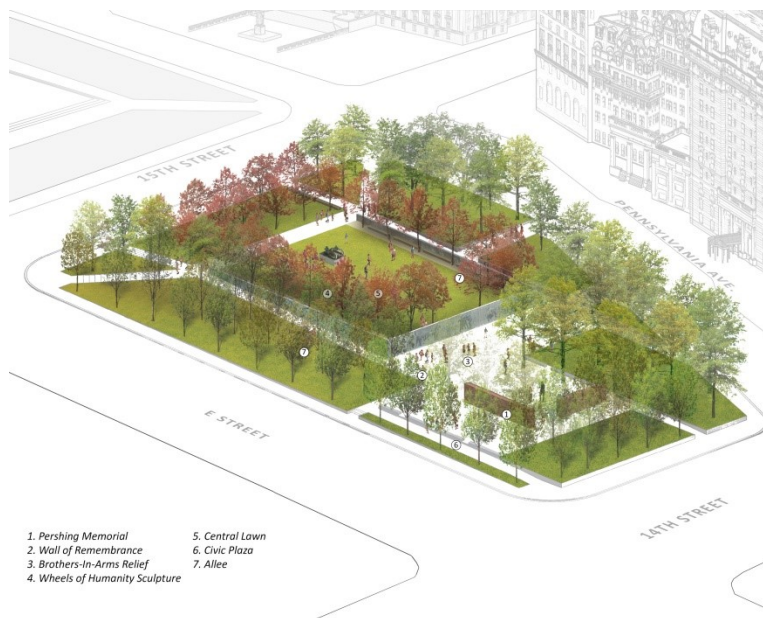


Figure 1.2: The winning design for the National World War I Memorial. The Pershing statue is located in the bottom right corner. (Courtesy of the U.S. World War I Centennial Commission.)

CHAPTER II

“A CAREFUL REGARD FOR THE PRINCIPLES FOR WHICH HE STOOD”: A DESIGN IS PROMISED, 1948-1956

John J. Pershing’s death on July 15, 1948, was met with almost universal mourning and, emblematic of the militaristic tenor that characterized the postwar years, a great deal of hyperbole. Editorials from across the nation sang the praises of the former general, opining that Pershing was so attuned to the nuances and exigencies of military life that it seemed as if he had been “born to khaki.” “America’s first soldier” was honored as both a soldier and a statesman, as a man who had preserved the integrity and independence of the American Expeditionary Force (AEF) in World War I against unyielding pressure from allies in Great Britain and France who wanted to use American soldiers to fill in the gaps of their ravaged armies. The *Washington Post* called Pershing “the prophet of a second world war” due to his wariness at the terms set by Treaty of Versailles, which imposed suffocating penalties on the defeated German empire. President Truman echoed this sentiment, extolling the former commander for his foresight. In addition, in the model of the professional soldier, commentators opined that Pershing’s dispassionate demeanor allowed him to stay above the corrupting influence of party politics during the interwar years, when he rejected three consecutive enjoiners to

run for the presidency in 1920, 1924, and 1928 (he did not shy away from the public spotlight entirely, however, as he spent three years as Chief of Staff from 1921-24).¹⁰

Accolades for Pershing also poured in from around the globe, and even reached across racial lines. French premier Robert Schuman and Filipino president Elpidio Quirino both lauded Pershing's ability to provide effective leadership in times of great peril, with Schuman referring to Pershing as the "American Lafayette" for his help in liberating the French people in 1918. Marshall Henri Philippe Pétain, the 92-year-old French World War I hero and the last remaining "great leader" of the Allied armies, was reported to have been despondent when he heard the news of Pershing's death from his prison cell. Pétain was serving out a life sentence for his role as head of the traitorous Vichy government, a Nazi puppet state that had also aided the Third Reich in deporting France's Jewish citizens to the extermination camps. He had allegedly been spared the death penalty only by Pershing's intercession on his behalf to Charles de Gaulle. Pershing's African American orderly of eighteen years reportedly sobbed upon hearing news of the general's death, calling Pershing "the greatest soldier" he had ever seen. The elderly man also credited Pershing for providing him with a life lived in the "flowers of ease."¹¹

Only a handful of newspaper editorials chose to discuss the controversies and failures that had taken place over the course of Pershing's life. Professionally, Pershing's campaign to apprehend Pancho Villa through 1916 to early 1917 – known colloquially as

¹⁰ "General Pershing," *New York Times*, July, 16, 1948, 18; "Charles Hurd, "Pershing of A.E.F. is Dead; On Service Rolls 62 Years," *New York Times*, July 16, 1948, 1; Robert Bruskin, "General Pershing to Lie in State at Capitol; Highest Tribute Planned at Arlington Rites," *Washington Post*, July 16, 1948, 1, 4.

¹¹ "Truman, Military Chiefs, and Foreign Leaders Join Warm Tribute to Pershing," *New York Times*, July 16, 1948, 12; "Nicaragua Mourns for Pershing," *New York Times*, July 17, 1948, 16; Bruskin, "General Pershing to Lie in State at Capitol," 4; "Pershing's Orderly for 18 Years Mourns Death," *The Pittsburgh Courier*, July 31, 1948, 12.

the “Punitive Expedition” – was marred by organizational, logistical, and disciplinary failures. In World War I, Pershing alienated his British and French allies with his stubborn refusal to integrate American soldiers into the Allied ranks. In addition, Pershing’s tactics were, at times, fatally antiquated, and only after several military disasters did he begin to modernize his approach. In personality, the American commander was notoriously severe and uncompromising. Pershing frequently sparred with both his subordinates and his superiors, and his outward coldness engendered few commendations from his troops. The *Post* only took Pershing to task on his interpersonal shortcomings, however, crediting Pershing with turning the tide of the First World War. Like many of the statements made in the immediate aftermath of Pershing’s death, calling the former AEF commander the main factor in turning the tide of the war was a tremendous overstatement. Undoubtedly, these unflattering details were glossed over in part due to the natural human tendency to whitewash the recently deceased’s failings in order to assuage the grieving and honor the dead. The expurgation of Pershing’s martial disappointments, however, also spoke to an incipient desire to place Pershing among the pantheon of transcendent American military leaders.¹²

If there was any doubt amongst contemporaries as to the impact General John J. Pershing had on the American polity, his historic funerary procession put those notions to rest. Three days before the procession commenced, President Truman ordered all flags throughout the country to fly at half-mast until Pershing’s body was interred. The day before the burial, Pershing’s body was laid in State at the Capitol Rotunda, placed atop a simple wooden catafalque. The aesthetic modesty of the catafalque belied its hallowed

¹² Marshall Andrews, “Pershing, a Trail Breaker, Always Stirred Controversy,” *Washington Post*, July 16, 1948, 4; “Leadership, Personal Courage, Devotion to Troops Won for Pershing Affection of the Nation,” *New York Times*, July 16, 1948, 13.

history, however, as only the “Nation’s great” had been allowed to grace its apex. “Lincoln’s body rested on top of it,” the *Post* noted, connecting Pershing’s funeral and, by extension, his importance to one of the most revered figures in American history (Figures 2.1 and 2.2).¹³

The procession itself was marred by torrential rainfall, but it was nonetheless attended by over 300,000 observers, including President Truman; generals Dwight D. Eisenhower, George C. Marshall, and Omar N. Bradley (all of whom had served under Pershing at one time or another during their careers); a 100-piece Army Band; and an honor guard of 3,500 servicemen representing all branches of the United States military. The four-mile procession to Arlington National Cemetery, set against the backdrop of the Lincoln Memorial and the Washington Monument, was utterly silent, save for the soft pattering of rainfall and the muted melodies of the Army Band. The experience bordered on the sublime; as one correspondent observed, the procession seemed to be a welding of religious severity and military officiousness. Once at Arlington, Pershing was laid to rest amongst the World War I dead, as per his wishes. “When the last bugle is sounded,” Pershing mused, several years before his death, “I want to stand up with my soldiers.” And so he did (Figure 2.3).¹⁴

The calls for a permanent national memorial to General Pershing came almost immediately after he had been interred at Arlington. Speaking a day after Pershing’s death, Secretary of State George C. Marshall hoped that the national attention given to a soldier who “served his country to a greater degree” than most citizens realized would not

¹³ Bruskin, “General Pershing to Lie in State Capitol,” 1, 4.

¹⁴ “300,000 Stand Silent in Rain as General Pershing is Borne to Rest,” *New York Times*, July 19, 1948, 1; Bruskin, “General Pershing to Lie in State Capitol,” 1, 4.

be fleeting. “May the people of this country honor his memory by a careful regard for the principles for which he stood,” Marshall concluded. Though he was most likely speaking in the abstract, veterans’ organizations and Congress quickly moved to make Marshall’s exhortation a concrete reality. The first proposals laid out in late 1948 by the American Legion were local in scope, recommending a monument be built in Pershing’s home state of Missouri. The Legion, a powerful veterans’ organization founded after World War I, would be one of the primary supporters of a national Pershing memorial up until its completion in 1983. Though the Legion was already spending over \$25,000 per year maintaining Pershing Hall in France (built before Pershing’s death), they pledged additional funding towards the construction of a local memorial at Pershing’s childhood home in Laclede, Missouri. American Legion Resolution 470 called for the transformation of the home into a “national shrine.” The language employed by the Legion in this resolution clearly implied that they intended the Laclede Memorial to function as a site of civic pilgrimage, echoing Marshall’s earlier sentiment that Pershing’s life should serve as an edifying example of civic responsibility. In keeping with the hallmarks of the traditional monument style, the memorial would project an unambiguous didactic message.¹⁵

At first it appeared as if Congress would quickly follow the American Legion and erect a memorial in Washington, D.C. In September 1949, Senator Burnet Maybank issued a joint resolution calling for the erection of a memorial to General Pershing. The joint resolution authorized the American Battle Monuments Commission, which Pershing had chaired for twenty-five years, to prepare a plan, implement a design, and erect a

¹⁵ “Proceedings of the 30th National Convention of the American Legion,” October 1948, 97, 443. The resolution was only one of sixteen to pass that year. Forty-five resolutions did not pass.

“suitable” memorial to the deceased general. The memorial would then be subject to review from the National Commission of Fine Arts before seeking final approval from Congress. The NCFA was founded in 1910 to oversee the construction of all civic buildings in Washington, including parks, squares, and zoos. Maybank’s resolution was vague on the deadline for a proposal, stipulating merely that it should be as “early a date as practicable.” Regardless of the deadline, the joint resolution failed to pass due to financial considerations, foreshadowing a problem that would plague the memorial throughout its history. Maybank introduced two more joint resolutions in 1951 and 1953, both of which failed to gain Congressional approval (both were left to die in committee).¹⁶

One of the only private attempts to raise funds for the Pershing Memorial was a proposed minting campaign in 1954. The bill, sponsored by Senators Hugh Alfred Butler and Dwight Palmer Griswold of Nebraska, authorized the minting of six million fifty-cent silver coins that would be issued solely by the John Pershing Memorial Foundation. The profits from the sale of these coins would go directly towards the establishment of a national memorial to General Pershing; the production costs would fall entirely on the nonprofit foundation, sparing Congress any expenses. The senators were perhaps inspired by the Marine Corps Memorial, which had struck ground several months earlier and had raised its entire \$850,000 budget through private donations (mostly from former Marines). Unfortunately, neither the bill nor the foundation would be successful. The foundation, which was founded in July 1953, was an ad hoc thirty-four-member committee that sought to “perpetuate the memory and preserve the ideals” of the

¹⁶ 81st Congress, 1st Session, S.J. Res. 130, September 22, 1949; 82nd Congress, 1st Session, S.J. Res. 61, April 13, 1951; 83rd Congress, 1st Session, S.J. Res. 5, January 7, 1953.

renowned AEF commander. The bill never made it past referral, however, and even if it had, the foundation apparently had other plans in mind for that money. A local Nebraska paper noted that the foundation intended to use the interest from the coin initiative to establish “scholarships in colleges” to help “point out the basic differences between communism and Democracy.” No mention is made of a Pershing memorial. The foundation disappeared from record after 1955, no doubt in part due to the failed coinage initiative. After this, no private organization would pledge funding to the Pershing Memorial except for the American Legion nearly twenty years later (Figure 2.4).¹⁷

After Maybank’s third resolution failed to pass in 1953, it appeared that a Washington, D.C, Pershing memorial was in serious jeopardy. The *New York Times* opined in July 1953 that Pershing had become the “‘forgotten man’ among the nation’s military figures” due to the dearth of Pershing memorials around the country. Though the article did note that two Pershing statues had been erected in Pennsylvania and California, it also reported that Senator Maybank was continuing to press for approval of a memorial in the nation’s capital. Even the former general’s grave at Arlington appeared to be unacceptably neglected. A 1955 letter to the editor captured this growing dissonance between Americans and General Pershing. The writer, a “war veteran,” was immensely impressed at the Memorial Day services conducted in the amphitheater of the Arlington National Cemetery. He was even more impressed that every grave he passed was decorated with flowers or wreaths. When the man came to Pershing’s grave, however, he found it barren. It seemed as if Americans had a greater appreciation for the

¹⁷ 83rd Congress, 2nd Session, S. 2619, January 7, 1954; “A.A. Dobson, Contractor, Heads Pershing Foundation,” *Lincoln Evening Journal* (Lincoln, NE), July 29, 1953, 4; “Pershing Coin Bill Will Be Introduced,” *Lincoln Evening Journal* (Lincoln, NE), January 8, 1954, 12. The total cost of the Marine Corps Memorial can be found at <http://www.nps.gov/gwmp/learn/historyculture/usmcwarmemorial.html>.

common soldier than for one of the greatest American military commanders in history.

“Whenever a people forgets its worthy past,” the author warned, “the day will come when it will not have a past worth remembering.”¹⁸

On the surface, these early failed joint resolutions appear inconsequential in the broader history of the Pershing Memorial. No concrete bills were passed, no specific sites were chosen, and no designs were put forward. But the choice to put the ABMC in charge of the memorial had important ramifications moving forward. The ABMC was established in 1923 to build and maintain overseas cemeteries and memorials for America’s fallen World War I soldiers. These cemeteries were entirely federally-funded and required little-to-no fundraising or political wrangling. In 1946, Congress expanded the ABMC’s jurisdiction to include both new World War II overseas cemeteries and domestic war memorials. Thus, the Pershing Memorial was one of the ABMC’s first ventures into domestic monument-making. It placed the small agency under a microscope that it was not accustomed to, nor was it entirely prepared to handle. The ABMC’s inexperience with public fundraising, city zoning, and urban development meant that it was entirely beholden to the federal government for aid. As a result, the ABMC had little leverage when negotiating designs, funds, or sites with competing agencies because it had no substantial private support. In other major cities that did not have an overabundance of memorial architecture, such as San Francisco, this did not pose a major problem. In Washington, however, this would pose serious complications, especially when Pennsylvania Avenue underwent a complete overhaul in the 1960s and 1970s. The capital’s land scarcity forced the ABMC – and by extension the Pershing Memorial – into

¹⁸ “Statues Honor Pershing,” *New York Times*, July 10, 1953, 17; “Pershing’s Grave,” *Washington Post*, June 9, 1955, 14.

competition with agencies that had far greater budgets and far broader popular appeal, often with negative results.¹⁹

The ABMC was granted permission to design and oversee the Pershing Memorial in large part because General Pershing had served as its first chairman. Congress often granted memorial commissions to organizations close to the proposed subject, and the ABMC had been Pershing's brainchild. During Pershing's twenty-five year tenure as ABMC chairman, he established a set of aesthetic principles that would guide the agency's later memorial commissions. In 1934, after the ABMC had finished constructing most of its overseas cemeteries, Pershing penned an article for *National Geographic* to explain the work that his agency had accomplished. The ABMC, Pershing wrote, had erected "stately" yet "utilitarian" monuments throughout France that gave permanence to America's sacrifice in the First World War. Utilitarian monuments were important to Pershing; he wanted visitors to be able to use the memorials and to immerse themselves in their tranquility. These memorials were characterized by open spaces, wide vistas, and clear walkways that facilitated continual usage. Pershing had little use for abstract memorials, which he felt often left viewers perplexed and frustrated. Because the ABMC's monuments were accessible, even French children "unborn" during the war knew of America's role in preserving their country's culture and democratic way of life. Pershing concluded the article by promising the American people that the United States

¹⁹ 79th Congress, 2nd Session, S. 2141, May 7, 1946. Congress extended the ABMC's jurisdiction over war memorials due to the "highly satisfactory manner in which [the ABMC] has discharged its responsibilities" during the interwar years.

government would never cease to maintain and perpetuate the memory of World War I veterans. The ABMC would never forget their service.²⁰

Ironically, the ABMC was struggling to concretize Pershing's memory scarcely eight years after his death. Resolution after resolution failed to pass both houses of Congress due to a wide variety of clerical and procedural mishaps. Additionally, Congressional leaders could not agree on a memorial site amidst Washington's cluttered landscape. Two Nebraska senators suggested that the memorial could be located at the University of Nebraska, as Pershing had taught at the school after the conclusion of his military career. Pershing supporters were beginning to display an elevated sense of urgency. In February 1956, Senator Charles E. Potter, another member of the ABMC, and Senator Stuart Symington of Missouri issued a joint report to the chairman of the Senate Rules and Administration Committee urging Congressional approval of a Pershing memorial. The report challenged the Rules and Administration Committee to endorse a monument to Pershing, stating that it would be superfluous to "delineate" all the "compelling reasons why we should honor this man – they are known to all." Potter and Symington stressed the urgency of their mission, writing that they were "deeply concerned that consideration be given soon" to the latest joint resolution that lay before the committee. In addition, the report revealed the initial flexibility of the ABMC's design proposals, noting that they were open to erecting a museum in lieu of a traditional statue (indeed, that was how Pershing himself wanted to be memorialized). The combination of persistence and persuasion finally paid off, and on March 20, 1956, Congress officially authorized the ABMC to prepare plans, estimates, designs, and site

²⁰ John J. Pershing, "Our War Memorials in Europe," *National Geographic Magazine* 65:1 (January 1934): 1-35.

choices for a national Pershing memorial. The ABMC's design would have to be approved by the NCFA before Congress would grant a site or provide funding. Pershing supporters had scored a tenuous victory. The memorial's fate was still questionable, and the ABMC's failure to secure outside funding ensured that official authorization would be difficult to achieve moving forward.²¹

²¹ "Site Open for Pershing Honor," *New York Times*, March 4, 1956, 52; 84th Congress, 2nd Session, "Memorial to John Pershing," Report No. 1475, February 8, 1956; 84th Congress, 2nd Session, S.J. Resolution 95, "Authorizing Erection of Memorial to John J. Pershing," March 20, 1956.



Figure 2.1: Pershing (far left) saluting the Unknown Soldier of World War I at the Capitol Rotunda, November 9, 1921. (Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division).



Figure 2.2: Pershing lies in State at the Capitol Rotunda, July 18, 1948. (Harry S. Truman Library and Museum).

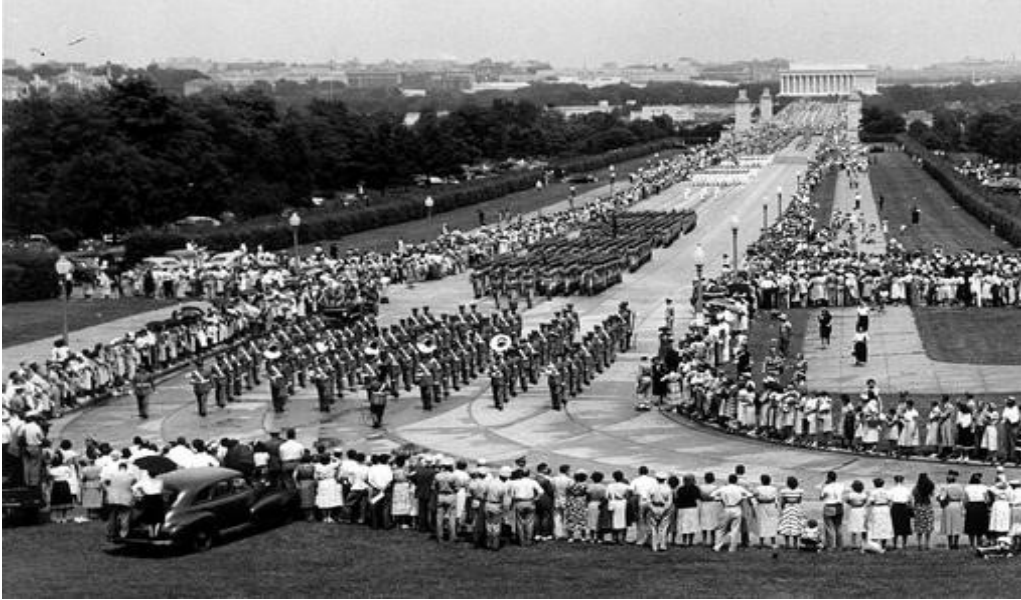


Figure 2.3: Funeral of General John J. Pershing, July 19, 1948. The presence of the Lincoln Memorial in the background of this photograph is especially prescient for General Pershing, as his likeness would adorn the National Mall 35 years later. (Courtesy of the Harry S. Truman Library and Museum.)



Figure 2.4: The short-lived John J. Pershing Memorial Foundation, January 1954. (Courtesy of the Durham Museum.)

CHAPTER III

“THE TRUE IMAGE OF OUR COUNTRY”: THE MEMORIAL SPUTTERS, STALLS, AND IMPROBABLY SUCCEEDS, 1957-1966

The second phase of the Pershing memorial project would prove to be its most consequential. Although Pershing supporters had crossed the first threshold, there was significant work left to do. The ABMC needed to secure a site, hire an architectural firm, and have it execute a design. In its prior commissions, the ABMC had little trouble fulfilling these requirements. Overseas cemeteries were often built on secluded battlefields with secured federal funding; there was little competition for land, and no one questioned the worthiness of constructing cemeteries for deceased soldiers who could not be brought home. The Pershing Memorial, however, was a monument to a deceased general in the heart of Washington, D.C. Planning agencies, Congressional committees, and artistic organizations all fought over where the memorial should be, how it look, and whether it should exist at all. The ABMC was unprepared for this, and its inexperience undoubtedly led to the stalemate that would follow the memorial’s initial approval.

A significant new obstacle would also arise during this period in the form of the Pennsylvania Avenue Advisory Committee (PAAC). Formed in 1962 at the behest of President Kennedy, the PAAC’s goal was to completely redesign and refurbish Pennsylvania Avenue, which had fallen into disrepair. Unrestricted commercial development along the avenue during the preceding decades had created an urban jungle of questionable businesses, abandoned plots, and incongruous facades. The PAAC hoped

to build new and presentable commercial enterprises along the avenue, while also transforming it into a proper ceremonial thoroughfare between the White House and the Capitol. The plan was hailed by most commentators, who felt that the current avenue was an embarrassment to the prestige of the nation's capital. For the ABMC, however, the PAAC's plan would severely hamstring their ability to quickly push through a Pershing memorial. In fact, as the PAAC's plan gained steam, the ABMC would eventually have to tailor their design around the planned renovations on Pennsylvania Avenue.

Finally, during these years new questions would arise that challenged intrinsic notions about how a monument should look, function, and engage the viewer. Congressional leaders, art critics, and the general public would all weigh-in on how the capital's memorial landscape could best capture the essence of the American people. In the midst of substantial challenges and upheavals in the socioeconomic fabric of the nation, particularly those posed by the Great Society and the Vietnam War, the Pershing Memorial became a public battleground between traditionalists and progressives that mirrored the country at-large. In addition to these challenges over aesthetic presentation and meaning, there also arose questions over the value of America's martial heritage. Many commentators would criticize the pervasiveness of military memorials in the nation's capital, arguing that they presented a distorted picture of America's true values. They advocated for monuments more indicative of a peace-loving, erudite, and inclusive society, including living monuments – such as parks – and memorials to scientists and educators. As the 1960s progressed, an increasingly war-weary generation of Americans began to question if military memorials projected an image of democracy or dictatorship.

After the National Capital Planning Commission authorized a site for the memorial in 1956, the ABMC immediately started fielding design proposals. The NCPC had set aside prime real estate for the Pershing Memorial at the intersection of 14th Street and Pennsylvania Avenue, across the street from the historic Willard Hotel and only a few steps away from the White House. The site had formerly been occupied by a dilapidated World War II temporary building, and Congress was eager to replace the abandoned plot. The NCPC included the crucial caveat, however, that the memorial design could not include any “view-obstructing monumental statuary.” The first design sketches that emerged in March 1957 reflected the ABMC’s commitment to utilitarian monuments. Brigadier General Thomas North, secretary of the ABMC, reported to the House Appropriations Committee that the ABMC envisioned a fountain as the centerpiece of the memorial, with a statue included if practicable. North’s ambivalence on the inclusion of a statue changed dramatically within just a month after that initial statement, however, due to the concerted efforts of the Board of Trade to establish a flower garden on the land designated for the Pershing Memorial. The Board of Trade oversaw Washington’s commercial development, and beautifying the Pershing Memorial would aid in attracting businesses to Pennsylvania Avenue. Ralph Becker, the chairman of the Cultural Development Committee of the Board of Trade, opined that the Washington was unacceptably devoid of public gardens and that the Pershing Memorial could function admirably as simply an exotic flower garden. North rejected this notion, retorting, somewhat exasperatedly, that a statue was imperative because “after all it’s a memorial to Pershing.”²²

²² “Memorial Site Set for Gen. Pershing,” *Washington Post*, March 9, 1957, B2; United States Senate, “Hearing before the Subcommittee on the Public Health, Education, Welfare, and Safety of the Committee

Despite the minor squabbles over public gardens and statuary, the ABMC, the National Park Service, and the Board of Trade unanimously agreed that an equestrian monument, which depicted a horse and rider, of Pershing was out of the question. Thomas C. Kincaid, Vice Chairman of the ABMC, wrote to Speaker of the House Sam Rayburn that an equestrian monument was simply inappropriate and uneconomical. The common refrain amongst the ABMC and the National Park Service was that an equestrian monument would block the view of the capital's memorial landscape. At the crux of this hesitancy towards the equestrian model, however, was not economic or landscape architectural concerns but one of "appropriateness." The ABMC was well-aware that no heroic horseback monuments had been erected in the nation's capital for almost forty years, due to a variety of reasons. Foremost among those reasons was that it did not fit the needs of the contemporary viewer. Equestrian monuments tended to be towering, halcyon, untouchable, and otherworldly constructions that were designed to remind the viewer of their hierarchical position in relation to the statue. The last equestrian monument erected on the National Mall was of General Ulysses S. Grant in 1924, and it befuddled viewers and remained a neglected monument despite its central placement of the east-west axis of the memorial landscape. General North seemed to support this notion when he wrote that the "day of the man on horseback memorial has passed." Despite the resounding criticism directed towards the equestrian model, some organizations defended the measure. *The Evening Star* opined that it would not be unreasonable to place Pershing on a horse; after all, many Washingtonians proudly recalled Pershing astride a horse as he lead the triumphant First Division down

on the District of Columbia, March 8, 1957, 19; Jean White, "Flower Garden Eyed Downtown," *Washington Post*, April 19, 1957, A8.

Pennsylvania Avenue in 1918. The *Dispatch* (Lexington, North Carolina) heatedly asked its readers if the ABMC was really going to “deprive the nation’s highest ranking cavalryman of his horse.” “The commission will be hearing from me again if they put [Pershing] in a jeep or tank or some tom fool thing like that,” the writer concluded. The American Legion also supported an equestrian statue, but they quickly backed down after Thomas Walker, an official for the ABMC, publicly worried that the Legion’s demands would lead to the irrevocable tabling of the Pershing Memorial project in Congress.²³

While the ABMC, veterans’ organizations, and city planning agencies continued to squabble over design plans, other commercial entities attempted to wrest control of the site away from the ABMC. Although the NCPC, the NCFA, and the NPS had all supported the Pershing Memorial site on Pennsylvania Avenue, Congress would not officially issue the ABMC exclusive property rights to the site until they had submitted an approved design. In a hearing before the Committee on the District of Columbia, a prominent local veteran warned Senate supporters that invidious commercial enterprises were attempting to exploit the ABMC’s continued inaction. Various groups, such as the Chamber of Commerce, had proposed plans for a parking lot, another temporary building, and an information center (complete with lunch counters and commissaries). Some city officials had even proposed to move the Pershing Memorial to Arlington Cemetery so that a parking lot could be built on the current site, a proposal which, the veteran noted, he had no intention to “stand by.” The committee agreed, noting that they

²³ Letter from Thomas C. Kincaid to Sam Rayburn, December 3, 1959; “Monuments Group Okays Memorial Site,” *The Evening Star*, April 13, 1956, 19; Lyle C. Wilson, “Battle Monuments Commission Gives Writer the Runaround,” *The Dispatch* (Lexington, N.C.), November 4, 1959, 27; James Carberry, “Legion Raises Monumental Question: Should General Pershing Have a Horse?,” *Washington Post*, July 19, 1959.

were loath to see yet another attempt at city beautification fall to the myopic interests of commercialism. The clock was ticking, and the ABMC knew it.²⁴

Spurred on by these developments, the ABMC finally secured a design approval from the National Commission of Fine Arts in November 1959. The final plan called for a heroic-scale bronze figure of Pershing (from nine-to-twelve feet high), elevated by a granite pedestal and backed by an imposing 56 x 94 granite wall of “slightly green hue” that would be inscribed with the achievements of the American Expeditionary Forces. The statue would be flanked by trees on the right and left sides – spaced far apart – which would provide patrons with clear views of Pennsylvania Avenue. “Monumental pools” would sweep through the middle of the park, leading up to the statue and commemorative wall. Although the design incorporated several elements of a “living monument,” the emphasis was clearly on the Pershing Memorial. The cascading waterfalls naturally led viewers’ eyes to the domineering wall and stately figurative sculpture. The commemorative wall would include a biography of General Pershing, a map of the AEF’s battles in France, and a short explanatory text that described the AEF’s military accomplishments. In short, this design was intended to put Pershing and the AEF front and center, and it would not change until the PADC forced the ABMC’s hand in the 1970s.²⁵

Despite the NCFA’s approval, Congress proved reluctant to grant the memorial any funding. The first Congressional resolutions brought up during the early 1960s explicitly restricted memorial funding to private organizations. The ABMC was

²⁴ The United States Senate, “Hearing before the Subcommittee on the Public Health, Education, Welfare, and Safety of the Committee on the District of Columbia,” March 7, 1958, 13-17.

²⁵ 86th Congress, 2nd Session, “Authorizing the Erection of a Memorial in the District of Columbia to Gen. John J. Pershing,” Report No. 1931, August 29, 1960, 2, 7-10; Jack Eisen, “Skyline Eyesore Fight Endorsed,” *Washington Post*, November 19, 1959, D1.

encouraged to work with “interested private organizations” for the completion of the memorial, and were given no federal funds – even for a design. In 1962, nearly three years after the NCFE had approved the memorial’s design, the ABMC went before the House of Representatives with a new budget to plead for public funding. The total cost, budgeted at around \$1,175,000, was not an unusual price for a national monument, but the ABMC’s insistence on complete public funding – which had not been federal policy for several decades – led to Congressional resistance. Part of the ABMC’s rationale for public funding was that it would function as a public monument that people could use, and thus should be “defrayed by public funds.” The more pressing issue, however, was that the ABMC simply could not afford – in either time or money – the dual responsibilities of maintaining overseas memorials and raising funds on its own. For that to happen, the ABMC would need to hire a private organization that raised money “as a profession.” Not only would this take away money from the memorial, but it would also place the design in the hands of private citizens whose loyalties might not lie with General Pershing or World War I veterans. “Under no circumstances do we think this [memorial] could be built with private funds,” the ABMC chairman bluntly concluded.²⁶

The House committee was wholly unmoved by the ABMC’s entreaties, noting that other recent national memorials had been completed without federal money. The Woodrow Wilson, Teddy Roosevelt, and William Taft memorials had all been funded entirely (or almost entirely) through private subscription. In addition, district land was becoming increasingly scarce. Some congressmen felt that they should be cautious when considering whether or not to grant the few remaining plots to memorials, especially

²⁶ 86th Congress, 2nd Session, H.R. 12808, June 24, 1960; U.S. House of Representatives, Subcommittee on Enrolled Bills and Library of the Committee on House Administration, “Hearing on H.R. 1780,” March 8, 1962, 7-19.

because Washington already contained a nimity of monuments. As a compromise, a few committee members proposed adding a bust of Pershing to Statuary Hall under the state of Missouri. Nonetheless, the committee members knew that if they refused to amend the current bill and appropriate public funds, then the memorial project would die. One congressman noted that it would be hard to raise money for a “dead general,” especially when many World War I veterans themselves balked at contributing money. The one and a half million World War I veterans still alive in 1962 would “rather have money appropriated for them” than for Pershing. This hearing is crucial to understanding why the Pershing memorial project stalled and why it was eventually diminished. As mentioned previously, the ABMC’s intransigence on the issue of public funding left it little bargaining power with the federal government. Perhaps just as importantly, there was little financial aid from what should have been the memorial’s most strident supporters. Unlike the Marine Corps Memorial or the later Navy Memorial, the Pershing Memorial could not attract widespread grassroots support. Part of this was due to the fact that it was merely a memorial for a “dead general,” for a man whose cultural relevancy had long since departed (even though he had only been deceased for fourteen years). Money would not come from the top, nor would it come from the bottom. In 1962, the Pershing Memorial was a dead project.²⁷

Congress’s refusal to grant the ABMC public funding raised the ire of the American Legion and the Department of Veteran Affairs. Joseph G. Weeda, the local commander of Washington’s Legion outpost, called the private initiative “trouble,” and worried that it would turn the ABMC into a “fund-raising commission.” The director of the DVA, Colonel Waldron E. Leonard, echoed Weeda’s concerns, saying he was

²⁷ Ibid, 14-24.

“skeptical” of the memorial’s continued progress. Leonard criticized the federal government’s wholesale failure to commemorate Pershing, noting that there had not been “five cents’ worth” of federal funding devoted to the general’s memory. The commander of the District’s local Veterans of World War I lodge wrote that it was embarrassing that Congress would not fund a Pershing memorial. Perhaps acknowledging the commercial interests that threatened to take hold of the Pershing site, the commander noted that a “monument seems more appropriate on this location” than a “twist arena.” In a move that was indicative of both the competing visions for the new monument and the concerns over the design’s implementation, the Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) – for the first time – publically pledged their support for the Pershing Memorial on the condition that a VFW representative was allowed to serve on the board of the design committee.²⁸

The concerns of the Legion and the DVA turned out to be well-founded. As the 1960s progressed, the Pershing Memorial, the ABMC, and the NCFA all came under fire from a variety of sources. The professional art community began to equate the proliferation of squares, parks, and plazas on Pennsylvania Avenue as reminiscent of a fascist and undemocratic landscape design. Commercial interests, especially from the Pennsylvania Avenue Advisory Committee, threatened to derail the Pershing Park idea entirely by turning Pennsylvania Avenue – including the plot of land designated for the park – into a “National Square” that would cater to a wide variety of citizens and would showcase the prestige of the capital. And, perhaps most ominously, congressmen, the

²⁸ “House Unit Approves Pershing Memorial,” *Washington Post*, August 24, 1960, C7; U.S. House of Representatives, Subcommittee on Enrolled Bills and Library of the Committee on House Administration, “To Authorize the Erection of a Memorial in the District of Columbia to General John Pershing,” H.R. 1780, March 8, 1962, 18; Charles B. Jennings, “Letters to the Editor: Red Tape,” *Washington Post*, June 14, 1962, A24; 86th Congress, 2nd Session, “Proceedings of the 60th Convention of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States,” House Document No. 317, January 25, 1960, 99.

media, and the general public began to view the hero monument as horribly out-of-touch with the nation's increasingly diverse and empowered demographic.

In 1962, the Pershing Memorial found itself languishing both in Congress and along Pennsylvania Avenue. A report in *The Washington Post* noted that the park had been overtaken by crabgrass, litter, and commercial refuse. The formerly “verdant” grass had been covered by mounds of dirt and cardboard, creating a number of craters. The detritus of failed commercial enterprises dotted the park's landscape. By day, the remnants of an old ticket dispensary maintained an ignominious vigil over the corner of 14th and Pennsylvania; by night, a duplicitous billboard promising a cure for multiple sclerosis covered the park in garish light. The view was so dystopian that the report sardonically likened Pershing Park to a World War I battlefield, noting that perhaps a park resembling the “plains of Verdun” was a fitting memorial for the former AEF commander. More than a year after the article was published the park still looked downtrodden, forcing workers to plant flowerbeds and conduct a much-needed trash pickup.²⁹

Although the Pershing Memorial was suffering, by 1963 the ABMC's other three memorial projects were nearing completion. The reasons for their success are crucial to understanding why the Pershing Memorial fared so poorly in comparison. The East Coast Memorial in New York City (1963), the Honolulu Memorial (1964), and the West Coast Memorial in San Francisco (1960) had all fallen under the original ABMC mission to commemorate soldiers who could not be returned home (similar to the overseas cemeteries). Each memorial was relatively expensive and each was funded entirely

²⁹ Willard Clopton, “Craters, Scrap, Crabgrass Distinguish Pershing Park,” *Washington Post*, June 3, 1962, A11; “Patching Up Pershing Square,” *Washington Post*, September 4, 1963, A2.

through public funds: the Honolulu Memorial cost \$2.5 million, the West Coast Memorial was \$105,000, and the East Coast Memorial was budgeted at \$629,000. They presented almost no issues with the federal government over funding, however, because the government had appropriated more than \$40 million in 1948 to cover the costs of thirty-one World War II cemeteries and memorials (fourteen cemeteries, seventeen memorials). The ABMC had generally managed to avoid controversy over the design, site, and funding of these memorials because they were part of the 1948 program. Of course, the Pershing Memorial had no such authorization, so in the ABMC's yearly fiscal reports they would have to list the project outside the ledger as an extra expenditure. Besides the Pershing Memorial, the ABMC would erect only two other memorials outside their normal jurisdiction: the National World War II Memorial and the Korean War Memorial (and these were much later). Thus, the Pershing Memorial was truly an experiment, and the ABMC's failure to adapt to new methods of fundraising help to explain the dissonance between the three World War II memorials and the AEF Memorial.³⁰

The early 1960s saw a renewed effort to establish artistic standards for future monument projects in Washington. The nation's capital was becoming rapidly cluttered with distasteful and anachronistic monuments, the majority of which held little value for the modern American. An editorial in the *New York Times* likened the ubiquitous marble statuary strewn throughout Washington, D.C., to an "unplanned cemetery." Arguing that monumental space within the capital was getting increasingly scarce, columnist Alvin Shuster bemoaned the ill-fitted, the horseback-riding, and the downright poorly-executed

³⁰ 86th Congress, 2nd Session, Subcommittee on General Government Matters, "General Government Matters Appropriations for 1961," March 1, 1960, 19-24.

statuary that threatened to “sink Washington into the Potomac River.” “The city’s majestic beauty is in jeopardy,” Shuster warned. Implicit in Shuster’s critique was the notion that heroic statuary was turning the city into a place weighed down by unnecessary history. Other commentators simply wanted to see city planners put more time and thought into selecting new memorial candidates. They argued that the process had become too lax and unrestricted. A consensus was beginning to develop that wanted to strictly guard Washington’s precious remaining land.³¹

In 1962, an attempt to rectify the slapdash layout of Washington’s memorial landscape came in the form of the National Capital Parks Memorial Board. The board’s function was to serve as an artistic filter for the secretary of the interior, who was inundated with hundreds of design proposals – most of which were of questionable taste. The board would judge the design proposals for Washington’s new public buildings, monuments, bridges, and parks, and then pass along their verdict to Congress. Unlike the NCFA, which had been founded at the turn-of-the-century and had earned a reputation for being aesthetically conservative, the board was noted for its progressivism. *The Post* welcomed the bill with open arms, opining that “some authority...to raise the aesthetic standards of memorials” was desperately needed. “Few areas have more bad statuary than Washington,” the paper fumed, even going as far as to term many of the city’s memorials as “atrocities.” The report concluded that a “monument to greatness ought not to be an aesthetic offense.” Other newspapers agreed with *The Post*’s assessment that a governing body was needed to regulate the memorials springing up around the capital. *The Times*

³¹ Alvin Shuster, “Lest Washington be an ‘Unplanned Cemetery’: The Plethora of Monuments Scattered About the Capital, Some Good and Some Not so Good, Has Given Rise to Demands for a Tightening Up of the Statutes Governing Statues,” *New York Times*, September 11, 1960, SM46; “Letters to the Editor,” *The Sunday Star*, January 28, 1962, 27.

Herald likened the proliferation of memorials in Washington to a rapidly-spreading fungal pest: “In this Capital City, where the monuments sprout like mushrooms, weeding out the toadstools is rapidly becoming a major task.” Like eradicating an infestation of vermin, curbing the spread of unpleasant memorials required swift and extensive action.³²

For the supporters of the Pershing Memorial, the National Capital Parks Memorial Board was not seen as a threat in and of itself to the future of the project. What was distressing, however, was the fact that some of its members believed that representations of generals and other prominent military figures were out-of-touch. Perhaps no one helped to fuel that concern more than Stewart Udall, the U.S. secretary of the interior. Udall, an appointee of President Kennedy’s who would later become known for his progressive environmental policies, was a key figure in the debates surrounding the design and layout of Washington’s memorial landscape during the early 1960s. Responding to the furor surrounding the proposed memorial to Franklin Delano Roosevelt in 1962, Udall wrote an editorial in the *New York Times* to clarify his views on appropriate monumental forms. Udall thought, as did Alvin Shuster, that Washington was stricken by “monumental chaos.” In a statement that foreshadowed the trajectory that debates over Washington’s memorials were to take in the 1970s and 1980s, Udall urged city planners to not only ask the “who” and “what” of memorials but also the “why.” “The time has come,” Udall wrote, “to establish rules which would bring true art to the rescue, and order to the process of selection.” Like many of his contemporaries, Udall bemoaned the ill-fitted statuary littered throughout the capital. Unlike most, however, Udall singled out the proliferation of military statues as the prime culprit in the

³² “To Improve Our Monuments,” *Washington Post*, February 14, 1962, A16; “Bill Proposes Help to Udall on Statues,” *Washington Post*, January 25, 1962, A2; Jack Eisen, “Memorials in Washington Pose Monumental Task,” *Washington Times Herald*, February 19, 1961, A7.

monumental mess. Visitors walking through Washington's parks would find thirty-nine statues to "random military heroes," yet "less than a dozen to scholars of the arts and sciences." "Does this selection reflect the true image of our country?" Udall asked.³³

To remedy the preponderance of martial statuary in the capital, Udall recommended that there should be more "living monuments" and urged for the creation of an artistic board that had broad authority over federal memorial projects. The idea of a "living monument" was quite modern; like Jackson Pollock's abstract expressionism or Marcel Duchamp's "fountains," the living monument did not predicate its meaning on the artist's intent but instead on the viewer's subjective experience. To put it more simply, the living monument's abstraction would make it impossible to discern the intrinsic meaning of the work. Instead of a rigid and static monument that would convey the same message to each visitor, the living monument would be explicitly incoherent. In doing so, the monument would engage each visitor on a subjective and personal level. The collaboration between the artist and the individual would, in essence, continuously create new meanings for the monument, making it ever-present and fresh. For Secretary Udall, the apotheosis of the living monument was the park, which he called the "most communicative memorial." "No pillar of stone receives more grateful enjoyment than the Tidal Pool with its arching limbs of cherry trees...visitors flock to this living monument to view the spring's pink blossoms or the winter's snow blossoms," Udall wrote. He lamented the fact that the amount of Washington's green space was dwindling, and found

³³ Stewart L. Udall, "Monumental Look at Washington: the Furor over a Memorial to F.D.R. Prompts Thoughts on the General 'Chaos' in Memorials," *New York Times*, April 1, 1962, 18.

it even more contemptible that the few remaining “choice sites” were being “pre-empted by statues to minor figures.”³⁴

In addition to more living monuments, Udall also advocated for the creation of a federal artistic commission – comprised of both bureaucrats and professional artists – that would provide final and binding adjudications on proposed memorial projects. The National Capital Parks Memorial Board would ultimately become created as a result of Udall’s proposal, but in the context of military memorialization the “how” behind the board’s formation is less important than they “why.” Udall thought that the root of Washington’s memorial problem lay in the unmatched power wielded by sponsoring societies. Dissenting voices who had “openly doubted the choice of lesser men for places of honor” were derided by special interest groups, who only had their eye on a particular project and not on the overall beautification of Washington. Because of this, Washington’s memorial landscape became a piecemeal, slapdash project that lacked any semblance of unity. Udall specifically singled out veterans’ organizations for their role in Washington’s commemorative logjam, writing that “well-meaning patriotic societies...have had their random way because there were no significant guideposts against which to measure the significance of their proposals.” To correct this issue Udall laid out his famous “sixty-year plan,” which mandated that memorial proposals would only be considered if the commemorative subject had been deceased for at least sixty years. Halting proposals for “immediate contemporaries” would allow history to make the final decision on who should be remembered in the nation’s most hallowed grounds.³⁵

³⁴ Udall, “Monumental Look at Washington,” 70, 72.

³⁵ Ibid, 72, 74.

Whether intentional or not, Udall’s editorial attacked the patrons, aesthetic style, and very worth of the Pershing Memorial. A wide variety of sponsoring societies had commissioned statues in Washington’s memorial landscape, yet Udall specifically chose to castigate “patriotic societies” – an explicit reference to veterans’ organizations – as the primary culprit in the “monumental chaos.” Stylistically, nothing could be further from a living monument than figurative statuary, which was inherently static and emphatically didactic. Even worse, the Pershing statue was to take up one of the few remaining green areas in Washington. The Pershing Memorial, situated along the nation’s main thoroughfare, was undoubtedly one of the “minor statues” taking up the few remaining “choice sites” in the capital. Finally, Udall’s lamentation that the nation’s memorial space was dominated by military figures rather than scientists or intellectuals directly attacked the worth of the Pershing Memorial. In his mind, the ubiquity of generals and soldiers – trappings of a martial society – were more emblematic of a dictatorial regime than a republican society. Was martial supremacy the ideal the United States wanted to present to visitors in the heart of democracy?

Around the same time that Washington’s artistic elites were attempting to standardize the city’s statuary, federal planning agencies were moving to revitalize Pennsylvania Avenue. The avenue, which had been included in architect Pierre L’Enfant’s original 1791 design of the city, had served as the nation’s parade grounds since 1809, when James Madison held the first presidential inaugural procession. Although the avenue served as the nation’s ceremonial epicenter, the infrastructure that grew around it was anything but officious. By the 1840s, Pennsylvania Avenue’s appearance belied its hallowed origins: slave markets, gambling establishments, seedy

hotels, and questionable commercial enterprises lined the street. Pennsylvania Avenue's "seamy" nature changed little until the Federal Triangle was erected on its south side in the 1930s. The north side, however, remained a ramshackle assortment of hotels, parking garages, and "shabby commercial housing." In short, much of Pennsylvania Avenue seemed "condemn[ed]...to perpetual mediocrity." In 1962, the *Washington Post* called the avenue's "shabby jumble" of businesses a "national disgrace" to the American people. "[Pennsylvania Avenue] is the setting of the inaugural parades, a symbol in the fore of American politics, a route for every visitor," the paper wrote. To have the seat of American power besmirched by commercial ugliness was unacceptable. It became increasingly clear that something drastic needed to be done in order to fulfill the avenue's great promise (Figure 3.1).³⁶

In response to these complaints, President John F. Kennedy formed an advisory council on Pennsylvania Avenue in August 1962. The council's plan attempted to address both economic and aesthetic concerns along the avenue. At the heart of the president's economic directive was the concern that the city's development was "running away from the capitol," especially as new federal buildings were nearing completion on further away from the capital. Daniel Patrick Moynihan, one of the designers behind the redevelopment plan, noted that movement away from the Capitol was particularly damaging for Washington because the city was designed around its center. If Pennsylvania Avenue's infrastructure continued to deteriorate, the rest of the capital would become blighted as well. Pennsylvania Avenue's traffic congestion, small sidewalks, and substandard commercial development ensured that the street was empty

³⁶ Ada Louise Huxtable, "Plan for Rebuilding Pennsylvania Avenue is Near Completion," *New York Times*, August 20, 1963, 1; "Remedy for an Eyesore," *Washington Post*, August 17, 1962, A14.

after nightfall, which impeded private investment and perpetuated the avenue's structural decline. In addition to federally-driven logistical improvements, such as widening the sidewalks and creating new under- and overpasses, the plan called for reputable private investors to set up new businesses along the refurbished avenue. These businesses, interspersed between new plazas and enlarged walkways, would create a vibrant atmosphere emblematic of America's cultural vitality. However, private buildings on Pennsylvania Avenue's north side, which had been afflicted by disreputable businesses for over a century, would be prohibited. Nathaniel Owings, the chairman of the temporary council, envisioned a "great plaza of fountains, walks, pavement, grass, and other plantings" from the Treasury building to 6th Street.³⁷

In addition to the economic goals of the council's design, there were more ambitious projects that sought to overhaul the presentation of Washington's main thoroughfare. Although the plan allowed for new federal buildings for the Federal Bureau of Investigation and the Department of Labor, the council mandated that new buildings constructed on the avenue were to be low to the ground. This building scheme would be friendlier to businesses and would also facilitate the avenue's "openness." Like L'Enfant, the council wanted the avenue to have open vistas that allowed visitors to see both the White House and the Capitol; they wanted to concretize the metaphorical "bridge" between the legislative and executive branches. In addition to lower buildings, the avenue's openness would be aided by the construction of plazas. The capstone of the

³⁷ 89th Congress, 2nd Session, House of Representatives, "Hearings before the Subcommittee on National Parks and Recreation of the Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs," March 21, 1966, 45; Huxtable, "Plan for Rebuilding Pennsylvania Avenue is Near Completion," 1, 30; Wolf von Eckardt, "It Could be a Grand, Glorious Avenue: Problem of Design," *Washington Post*, May 31, 1964, E4; "Avenue Plan is Seen Winning NCPC Favor," *Washington Post*, June 10, 1963, B9; Robert J. Lewis, "Kennedy Asks Rejuvenation for Avenue," *The Evening Star*, June 1, 1962, 1.

Pennsylvania Avenue renovation plan was the construction of an 800 x 900-foot “National Square” at the intersection of 15th Street and Pennsylvania Avenue. The square would create a natural terminus for Pennsylvania Avenue, functioning as a gateway into the heart of American power – the White House. The square’s centerpiece would be a large fountain, and it would be flanked by trees, federal buildings, and lively – but temporary – vendors. A glowing review in the *Washington Post* encapsulated the square’s mission to amalgamate ceremonial officiousness with commercial vibrancy:

Handsomely paved, free of automobiles, enhanced by a large fountain and flanked to the north by tree-shaded overlook terrace, this ‘National Square’ would be the foremost urban plaza in the country. Surrounded by high-class stores and a shopping arcade, a new National Press Club and communications center, a new National Theater and it is hoped, an opera or concert hall in a converted District Building, the square would be filled with people and meaning. It would be enlivened by temporary kiosks to accommodate tourists with refreshments and other needs. These would be removed when the square was needed for its primary purpose – significant rallies, parades.

Interestingly, the article makes no mention of the Pershing Memorial, whose proposed site lay within the National Square. There is also no discussion of the destruction that necessarily had to take place in order to make the square a reality. Businesses and buildings that had called Pennsylvania Avenue home for decades were blithely discarded in the council’s plan. Cloethiel Woodward Smith, one of the original ten members of Kennedy’s advisory council, dismissed the objections from historical preservationists about the Willard and other old buildings, saying that they were “basically obsolete” and would be torn down within twenty years anyway. Rhetoric like this naturally worried Pershing supporters, and for good reason: the ascendance of the Pennsylvania Avenue redevelopment plan coincided with the gradual declension of the Pershing Memorial.³⁸

³⁸ von Eckardt, “It Could be a Grand, Glorious Avenue: Problem of Design,” E4; “Strong Commission Seen as ‘Only Hope’ for Rebuilt Avenue,” *Washington Post*, July 9, 1964, B1.

For the advocates of the Pershing Memorial, it was unclear whether or not the memorial had a place in the future envisioned by the Pennsylvania Avenue Advisory Council. The “National Square” that was the centerpiece of the Pennsylvania Avenue renovation effort included the allotment of land set aside for the Pershing Memorial. Though the PAAC never indicated that it intended to scrap the memorial, its willingness to tear down other historical icons – namely the Willard Hotel – in the name of modernization put Pershing backers understandably on edge. General Ulysses S. Grant III, the grandson of the iconic Civil War general, wrote to President Johnson to intercede on the Pershing Memorial’s behalf. In a 1966 hearing before the House of Representatives, Grant called the PAAC rapacious and emblematic of the ills afflicting the capital. “We oldtimers...see in [the PAAC] a threat that Congress may be ready to surrender to individual fads and fancies its prerogatives and responsibilities to the public at-large to spend our taxes economically and judiciously,” Grant lamented. The “fads and fancies” of commercialism threatened the solemnity and sacredness of the capital’s memorial landscape. Implied in Grant’s language of fleeting desires was the notion that the American public should not forget what was worth remembering – martial honor and sacrifice. Representative W.R. Hull, Jr. of Missouri, Pershing’s home state, echoed Grant’s concerns, opining that he would rather see the memorial moved than subject it to “further delay and inevitable invidious considerations.”³⁹

The main sticking point between the PAAC and Pershing supporters was how the memorial would function within the proposed “National Square.” The PAAC was open to the idea of a Pershing Memorial within the square, but it envisioned the memorial as a

³⁹ 89th Congress, 2nd Session, U.S. House of Representatives, “Hearing Before the Subcommittee on Parks and Recreation of the Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs,” April 4, 1966, 35, 48-49.

peripheral attraction. The central draw would be the towering fountain and the surrounding gardens. The American Legion and the VFW, on the other hand, were adamant that the Pershing Memorial should be the focal point of the square. The ABMC reminded the NCFA and other planning agencies that the plot of land designated for the National Square was Congressionally-granted to the Pershing Memorial. One disgruntled Pershing supporter wrote that he was appalled that the PAAC wanted to incorporate the memorial into a “garish imitation of a French square.” “General Pershing deserves a dignified memorial, not just a monument stuck in the corner of a monstrosity,” the supporter wrote. As may be expected, the idea that commercialism was more important than memorialization was anathema to veterans. The only way to commemorate a man of Pershing’s stature was a complete memorial. The two sides could not come to an agreement, however, and by the summer of 1965 many veterans’ organizations were resigned to move the memorial to another site. Colonel Waldron Leonard, the former director of the Department of Veteran Affairs and the current president of the Veterans Council, noted only that he was “concerned” with the PAAC’s plan. The Veterans Council was a highly-publicized group of regional veterans’ association commanders, and by necessity had to be more diplomatic about the impasse with the PAAC. Private veterans’ organizations did not have to be as restrained. Colonel James Boyer of the Army-Navy Club, a powerful and wealthy private veteran’s society, said that his members were tired of waiting on the PAAC’s “esoteric plans” for Pennsylvania Avenue and were ready to move on to another site. By July 1965, an ad hoc committee under General Ulysses S. Grant III had convened with the goal of finding a new site for the Pershing Memorial. In the committee’s mind moving the site entirely was more desirable

than subjecting it to the caprices of the PAAC. “It is deplorable that the United States has let almost a half century pass without honoring the man who led the AEF to victory,” Boyer said a few days after the meeting (Figure 3.2).⁴⁰

The PAAC plan also came under heavy fire from professional artists and architects. One of the most damning appraisals came in 1965 from Vincent Scully, Jr., a professor of art history at Yale University. Scully detested the PAAC’s efforts to renovate Pennsylvania Avenue and turn it into an open-ended walkway dominated by squares, plazas, and heroic statuary. Scully opined that squares were “not normal,” and that the proposed National Square looked like the “Nazi parade grounds at Nuremburg.” In addition to the fascistic layout of the plazas, Scully also disdained the “hard” and “dark” federal buildings under construction along Pennsylvania Avenue. He likened the new Court of Claims building, which was located on the northern end of the square, to an “armory.” The PAAC’s impulse to raze everything and start anew was antithetical to what a city should look and feel like, according to Scully. A “good city” had conversations between old and new buildings, as they bridged the gap between generations. Scully felt that the PAAC’s design promoted a dangerous ideal of homogeneity and conformity. It was, simply put, a space that did not reflect what the symbolic core of a democratic society should look like.⁴¹

Other architects accused the PAAC of exacerbating the very processes they were trying mitigate. An architect who helped oversee the redevelopment of another

⁴⁰ “Planners Show Doubt About National Square,” *The Evening Star*, May 7, 1965, 34; “Letters to the Editor,” *The Evening Star*, August 21, 1966, 90; Edward T. Folliard, “Pershing Memorial and Grand Design Clash,” *Washington Post*, April 23, 1965, A31; “Veterans Council Will Discuss Pershing Plan,” *Washington Post*, August 4, 1965, E3; “Memorial to Pershing Must Wait,” *Washington Post*, July 21, 1965, C2; Folliard, “4 New Sites Offered for Pershing Memorial,” *Washington Post*, July 27, 1965, A7.

⁴¹ Wolf von Eckardt, “Leave the Avenue as is, Architect Asks,” *Washington Post*, March 2, 1965.

Washington enclave worried that the PAAC's plan to build office buildings would contribute towards Pennsylvania Avenue's depopulation. Instead of heeding President Kennedy's directive to avoid creating a "solid phalanx" of buildings that would be deserted at night, the PAAC was adding more of them. Washington's central core was becoming far too expensive to live in, which was expelling thousands of potential residents to the suburbs. The architect argued that the only way to rectify Pennsylvania Avenue's marked deterioration was to create thousands of residential homes along the street. New homes and apartments would bring thousands of consumers back into the city, which would enliven the downtown area and create new outlets for commercial enterprises. Beautiful plazas and monolithic government structures might create an imposing ceremonial avenue, but it was a "death warrant" for its future prosperity.⁴²

The outcry against the PAAC's renovation of Pennsylvania Avenue prompted PAAC chairman Nathaniel A. Owings to write an editorial in *The Washington Post* defending the actions of his commission. A former architect from San Francisco, Owings wanted to bring a modern touch to the cold monumentality of Washington. The PAAC's proposal, Owings wrote, was intended to "build the first completely modern, humanistic, sane central city in the world." Invoking the spirit of President Lyndon B. Johnson's ambitious Great Society programs, Owings urged his readers to make Washington the first case study in Johnson's experiment to rebuild American cities. "We must begin at the heart of the cities, at the center of their life and the source of their trouble," Owings added, connecting the aesthetic poverty of Pennsylvania Avenue to the socioeconomic poverty of the nation. Owings also rebuffed the notion that the PAAC's plan was undemocratic by calling the commission's work the completion of Pierre L'Enfant's

⁴² Richard Corrigan, "Avenue Plans Abets Blight, Architect Says," *Washington Post*, June 4, 1965, B1.

original 1791 city design. The plan brought together the “five great buildings that form [Pennsylvania Avenue’s] perimeter,” designed and erected during the earliest days of the nation’s history “in the classical style that was rightly thought to evoke the republican principles on which our democracy was founded.” Connecting L’Enfant’s idiosyncratic and unregulated layout to the PAAC’s highly centralized plan was factually inaccurate, yet the rhetoric nonetheless conjured up venerable images of the nation’s founding. Far from being overwrought or, as Vincent Scully implied, totalitarian, the PAAC’s design was the maturation of the democratic nation’s youthful ambitions. If the government failed to restore the “great ceremonial way of the Nation,” the “Avenue of the Presidents,” and the “Avenue of the People,” America would never fulfill its great promise.⁴³

Despite the protests from some professional artists and veterans’ organizations, the PAAC plan garnered widespread support within the executive and legislative branches. The PAAC’s three-fold plan to fulfill Pierre L’Enfant’s original open design, to bring back commerce to Washington’s inner core, and to create a ceremonial yet commercially-viable avenue appealed to city bureaucrats. The PAAC’s design enjoyed the broad support of the NCFE, President Lyndon Johnson, the NCPC, the NPS, and other various agencies. On March 25, 1965, President Johnson created a temporary commission on Pennsylvania Avenue to oversee the development of the America’s “ceremonial drive.” The commission did not have authority to personally spearhead projects, but they supervised all proposed constructions along the avenue. Instead of hundreds of individual agencies vying for land, the commission would streamline the

⁴³ Nathaniel A. Owings, “The Metropolis: Avenue Should Look its Part,” *Washington Post*, January 24, 1965, E2.

process by having all claims pass through their office. The new commission would be comprised of twenty-one members from various professional backgrounds to ensure a well-rounded and holistic approach to redevelopment. The executive order promised no appropriations to the commission until they could come up with a coherent and reasonable budget.⁴⁴

President Johnson's executive order coincided with the designation of Pennsylvania Avenue as a historic district. This was no accident: the historic site designation gave the new commission direct control over building standards, zoning, and condemning. It also allowed the commission to aggressively pursue its overall agenda. It no longer had to pause for Congressional input every time a dispute arose, and it could also protect or destroy certain landmarks at their discretion (even private property). This had consequences for the Pershing Memorial, because the commission planned on exerting this newfound power on the plot of land once designated as Pershing Square. The commission fully planned on condemning the buildings around the proposed National Square, and it did not specify what it intended to do with the Pershing Memorial. Regardless of the commission's specific idea about the memorial, it was clear that Pershing would no longer be the square's centerpiece. The historic site designation ironically relegated an important historical figure to the margins of the development project.⁴⁵

The official creation of the Pennsylvania Avenue development commission was both a blessing and a curse for the Pershing Memorial. If the memorial had not been

⁴⁴ "President Sets Up New Avenue Unit," *Washington Post*, March 26, 1965, B1; U.S. House of Representatives, "Hearing Before the Subcommittee on Parks and Recreation of the Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs," 14-15.

⁴⁵ *Ibid*, 16-17.

subsumed within the development project, it is unlikely that it would have received federal appropriations and thus would never have been built. The memorial project had seen eight years' worth of failed bills and resolutions, and the possibility of passage dwindled with each passing fiscal quarter. The commission's ambitious project and equally ambitious budget assured that the Pershing Memorial would be completed. How the memorial would look and function was another question entirely. Although Owings publically went on record to assure veterans that the commission fully supported the inclusion of a Pershing memorial in the National Square complex (something that the PAAC had refused to do prior to 1966), he was still reticent about what form that the memorial would take. Judging from the commission's earlier rhetoric, however, it was almost assured that the Pershing Memorial would be diminished in some respect. The AMBC accepted Owings's olive branch, and Congressional approval of the Pershing Memorial followed soon afterwards. On November 7, 1966, the Pershing Memorial project was officially granted federal appropriations, although the exact amount remained unspecified. The most important feature of the new authorization was that the ABMC had to conform to the Pennsylvania Avenue commission's overall redevelopment plans. The American Legion was incensed at this new development, decrying the fact that the new Pershing bill ceded substantial control over the memorial's design to the PAAC. Though the AMBC and other veterans' organizations criticized the Legion for their recalcitrance, the group did have a point. Veterans no longer had sole authority over the Pershing Memorial's future. In fact, they had little authority at all.⁴⁶

⁴⁶ Elsie Carper Washington, "Avenue Plan Cost Put at \$70 Million; Unit Urges Start on it Now," *Washington Post*, April 5, 1966, B1; "Pershing Memorial Plan to Get Modification," September 9, 1966, 44; "Legion's Resolution on Pershing Assailed," *Washington Post*, September 9, 1966, B9.



Figure 3.1: Pennsylvania Avenue’s north side as it appeared in 1958. The unused plot of land at the top of the photograph was the proposed location of the Pershing Memorial. (Courtesy of the District of Columbia Department of Transportation.)

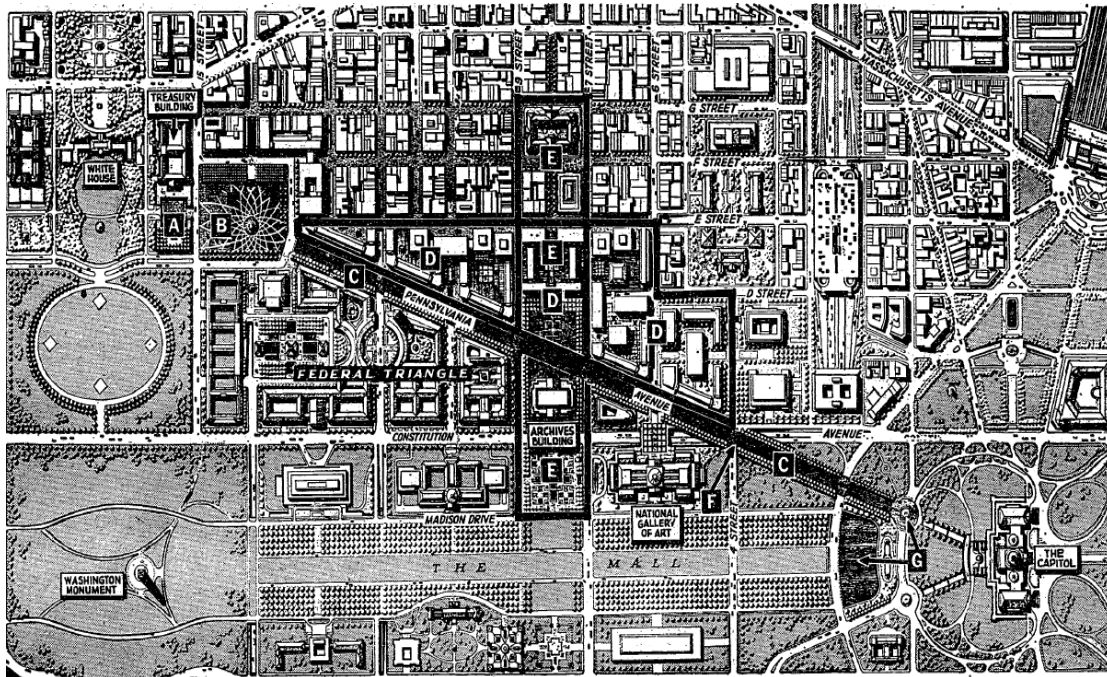


Figure 3.2: The PAPC’s plans for the renovation of Pennsylvania Avenue, 1964. Point B denotes the location of the proposed “National Square,” with a large fountain in the center. Note that there is no inclusion of either a Pershing statue or Pershing Memorial in this layout. (Courtesy of the Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division.)

CHAPTER IV

“THE GENERATION OF 1895”: THE MEMORIAL IN PUBLIC MEMORY, 1967-1983

As 1966 came to a close, the Pershing Memorial’s hardest days appeared to be far behind it. The PAAC, who had once threatened the memorial’s existence, now promised its construction. Although Congressional funding had yet to be officially granted, the memorial bill promised federal appropriations in the future. The AMBC and veterans’ organizations no longer had to fear bearing the memorial’s full financial burden. Most importantly, the Pershing Memorial had the legal backing of the federal government to ensure the project’s completion. Yet the 1966 memorial bill was in many respects a Pyrrhic victory: Pershing supporters gained a memorial, but it would likely be nothing like they envisioned.

In addition to the memorial’s assured diminishment, the Vietnam War ushered in an ideological transformation that would sap the Pershing Memorial’s evocative power. A dark cloud had begun to form over the nation, and the Vietnam War would irrevocably divide a generation of Americans. Nothing could escape its shadow, including the Pershing Memorial. As America drifted further from the triumphs of the Second World War and deeper into the nebulous depths of the Vietnam conflict, the relevancy of General Pershing to a new generation of soldiers and citizens became less clear. The acrimonious debate over the Vietnam Veterans Memorial revealed substantial fissures within the American polity, and traditional memorials such as Pershing Park quickly lost

their luster. World War II had clearly delineated heroes and villains, winners and losers. Vietnam blurred the line between good and evil, and left many Americans questioning if its soldiers were victims or murderers.

By the late 1960s, the nation's enthusiasm for the PAAC's vast overhaul of Pennsylvania Avenue had begun to wane. Congress had refused to throw its full support behind the plan, and the project's enormous price-tag ensured that federal funds were closely guarded. The temporary commission had asked for \$70 million to get the project off the ground, but Congress had yet to authorize any appropriations. The historic buildings the PAAC planned to tear down as part of its urban renewal project had obstinate and well-connected defenders. Even Washington's citizens were indifferent. Most importantly, the businesses that promised to inject new energy and investments into the heart of the nation's capital failed to materialize. Indicative of the public opinion surrounding the PAAC's plan in the early 1970s, a local planner opined that the project would be "very attractive" if the government had "unlimited money and unlimited federal control." Despite these setbacks, the plan remained one of Washington's "sacred cows," and no legislator dared to publicly harangue the PAAC.⁴⁷

Privately, however, city officials and private investors doubted the feasibility of the commission's plan. Despite the federal government's pledged support of the Pennsylvania Avenue plan, investors were slow to come, and those that had found little return. Development in Washington's downtown continued to stagnate, especially as federal support gradually receded during the Nixon administration. The commission's sometimes crass approach to historic landmarks also angered some of Washington's small businessmen, who regarded the commission as a classic example of government

⁴⁷ Eugene L. Meyer, "Hill Stirs on Pennsylvania Avenue Plan," *Washington Post*, August 20, 1970, B1, B3.

overreach. The plan's spirit still held considerable currency, however, and as the bicentennial approached it became increasingly imperative to find a solution to the avenue's decrepit state. Editorials urged the commission to give a greater voice to the small businessmen who understood the avenue best. The commission's wholly bureaucratic makeup made it an easy targets for businessmen, who felt it they had little experience in negotiation or subtlety. In order to succeed, the commission needed to work with people – not to bowl over them.⁴⁸

The main issue with the commission's plan, however, was funding. There was little agreement among congressmen and White House officials over how much or what kind of funding should be provided. The Nixon administration decided that a "quasi-public" corporation was the best option to implement the radical changes needed by 1976. The new corporation could buy property, destroy the existing structure, and then sell it to private developers, who would then tailor their design to the corporation's overall plan. The corporation would be funded through federal loans (the original plan allowed for up to \$50 million of borrowing) and private donations, which could be accepted without Congressional oversight. Naturally, this idea proved to be controversial, especially among the merchant class and the poor. One business owner accused the proposed corporation of caring more about monuments than actual people, especially African-Americans and the impoverished. The wanton leveling of old businesses disproportionately affected the black community, many of whom had made their living among the very same "decrepit" buildings the corporation sought to level. Others thought setting up a federally-backed corporation, which had no incentive to balance its budget, would lead to profligate spending (one civic activist called it a "billion-dollar

⁴⁸ "Pennsylvania Avenue," *Washington Post*, May 17, 1970, B6.

boondoggle”). Nonetheless, Congress passed the Pennsylvania Avenue Development Corporation Act in late 1972, establishing a much more powerful federal entity that had the power to create and destroy. More importantly, the PADC finally had the money to back it up.⁴⁹

Although the Pennsylvania Avenue plan eventually found financial support, the ABMC continued to struggle to convince Congress that the Pershing Memorial was worth funding on its own. Before the Pennsylvania commission became the PADC in 1972, the ABMC still felt that it could maintain their autonomy if they received federal appropriations. In 1968, General Thomas North, the secretary of the ABMC, informed the House Appropriations Committee that his agency would work within the framework set forth by the Pennsylvania Avenue commission if it did not interfere with the implementation of the Pershing Memorial. If not, however, the Pershing Memorial “must be so designed that it will stand alone.” North’s somewhat defiant tone was matched by the ABMC’s requested budget: \$1.5 million, which was a \$425,000 increase from the previous figure that Congress had denied for almost a decade. The ABMC also still insisted upon constructing its original 1959 design, which retained the Pershing Memorial as the centerpiece of the park complex. Unsurprisingly, the committee denied this request, and responded with a counteroffer of \$750,000. Congress would continue to deny federal appropriations for the Pershing Memorial well into the 1970s.⁵⁰

While the ABMC’s budget stalled, outside agencies whittled away at the Pershing Memorial’s original design. After the PADC received official government

⁴⁹ “A New Start for Pennsylvania Avenue,” *Washington Post*, October 11, 1969, A22; “Avenue Plan Dead for 1970,” *The Evening Star*, December 7, 1970, 19; “Avenue Board Named,” *Washington Post*, April 18, 1973, C1.

⁵⁰ U.S. House of Representatives, “Departments of State, Justice, and Commerce, the Judiciary, and Related Agency Appropriations for 1968,” February 20, 1967, 195-198.

sanction, the ABMC drafted a new design scheme that would comply with the PADC's renovation plans. The first designs were met with universal criticism. One design proposed erecting two twenty-five-foot marble walls, each around 100 feet long, that would detail the exploits of the AEF in lieu of the original 56-foot high wall. The NCFA "unanimously" rejected this proposal on the grounds that it would obstruct the view of Pennsylvania Avenue. The *Washington Evening Star* noted that architects had been instructed "come up with a new memorial that would not literally overshadow the park itself." The wording of this statement reflected the memorial's overall diminishment: Pershing and his men were now secondary to the park. Both the Pershing statue and the large granite walls detailing the AEF's accomplishments were deemed to be too traditional. The AMBC's 1974 fiscal report noted that despite the approval of both the AMBC and the PADC, the National Commission of Fine Arts "questioned the size...and relative height of the walls and the statue." Echoing the advice of Stewart Udall, the NCFA called for a complete "redefinition" of the memorial centered on a "total landscape solution." The House Appropriations Subcommittee for HUD, Space, Science, and Veterans reiterated the NCFA's critique. During the part of the hearing reserved for discussing the "Propriety of Design," the subcommittee members hounded the AMBC for their lack of creativity, particularly on the lifelessness of the granite wall: "There will be no sound? No lighting or anything of the sort? How about the floor, the walking surface, will there be something on there?" When the AMBC representative proved reluctant to provide the full details of the proposal, one subcommittee member accused the organization of seeing Congress as merely an open wallet. "I think we should be a little bit curious about what you're going to spend taxpayers' money for," the subcommittee

member concluded. It became clear that certain aspects of the AMBC's original design would have to drastically change.⁵¹

The change that Congress and the NCFA had in mind was a drastic reduction in the size of the memorial's commemorative walls and the removal of the monumental jet pools. The AMBC reluctantly agreed to downsize the walls to around ten feet in height. This development, combined with the elimination of the monumental pools, greatly reduced General Pershing's imprint on the park. No longer would the park's architectural elements facilitate viewing the Pershing Memorial. The Pershing Memorial's final budget was a natural product of its diminished size. In 1977, the ABMC asked Congress for a \$300,000 appropriation to build the memorial's granite walls, pedestal, and foundation, which was 1/6th of the ABMC's highest-documented appraisal (\$1.8 million in 1975). The American Legion agreed to pay \$125,000 for the Pershing statue, which further reduced the federal government's investment in the memorial. The ABMC credited the budgetary decreases to the "heavy cost of the Vietnam War and the difficulty in arriving at an approved plan for the overall development of Pennsylvania Avenue." The combined pressures of the war and the PADC greatly reduced the memorial's scope. It was a changed monument.⁵²

Although the original design of the Pershing Memorial was drastically altered, supporters of the memorial gained a small victory in 1978 when the PADC decided to

⁵¹ "Black Jack," *The Evening Star*, June 14, 1974, 16; 94th Congress, 1st Session, "Annual Report of the American Battle Monuments Commission," United States, Senate, Committee on Veterans' Affairs, April 14, 1975, vii; 93rd Congress, 2nd Session, "Hearings before a Subcommittee of the Committee on Appropriations," United States House of Representatives, Subcommittee on HUD, Space, Science, and Veterans, March 12, 1974, 550.

⁵² 95th Congress, 1st Session, Department of Housing and Urban Development – Independent Agencies Appropriations for 1978, "Hearings before a Subcommittee of the Committee on Appropriations," February 3, 1977, 2-7; 96th Congress, 1st Session, "Annual Report of the American Battle Monuments Commission, Fiscal Year 1977," July 26, 1979, 10.

forego the “National Square” concept. Willard Hotel advocates had effectively blocked the measure, arguing that the PADC would be destroying a national icon in the name of modernization. The proposed cost of the National Square also contributed to its demise. The *Washington Post* applauded this development, noting that the nation had been swept up in a “new public attitude” that favored “historic continuity rather than cataclysmic urban renewal.” In its place, the PADC constructed the “Western Plaza” (later renamed the “Freedom Plaza”), which was substantially smaller than the proposed National Square and was entirely separate from Pershing Park. This allowed the PADC to erect a substantially larger and more autonomous park on the plaza’s periphery. The PADC also received nearly \$38 million in federal appropriations in 1978, \$5 million of which was allotted for Pershing Park. This development, coupled with the hiring of sculptor Robert White in 1977, all but assured the final completion of the Pershing Memorial. White, a professor of art at SUNY-Stony Brook, was renowned for his bronze Neo-Classical figures. Neo-Classical figuration was well-suited for the Pershing statue’s didactic intent: emphatic contrappostos and communicative gesticulations helped to convey an edifying lesson. Securing the commission of Robert White, however, was but another minor victory. Neither the reduction of the “National Square” nor the hiring of a renowned Neo-Classical sculptor could mask the fact that the Pershing Memorial would look nothing like the original 1959 design, nor would it be nearly as prominent. The Pershing Park was Pershing’s in name only.⁵³

⁵³ Wolf von Eckardt, “Avenue of Choice: Commercial, Modified Modernistic or Exciting?” *Washington Post*, December 16, 1978, B1; Martin Well, “Rerouted Traffic Pattern Sure Sign of Avenue Development,” *Washington Post*, April 16, 1979; 97th Congress, 1st Session, House of Representatives, “Oversight Hearing before the Subcommittee on Government Operations and Metropolitan Affairs,” October 14, 1981, 3-5.

Though the Pershing Memorial's aesthetic alterations were significant, they could not rival the ideological changes occurring simultaneously in the nation at-large. The Vietnam War split the nation in half, and the proponents of the Pershing Memorial openly questioned whether veterans' sacrifices would be remembered in a positive light. On November 11, 1972, 118 World War I veterans gathered around General Pershing's grave in Arlington Cemetery to commemorate Armistice Day (the proud doughboys refused to call it "Veteran's Day," noting that they were there on the "Real Day"). The veterans were all over seventy-years-old by this point, and their numbers were dwindling every year. John McCrae's heart-wrenching World War I poem "In Flanders Field" was read by the grave of General Pershing's son, Richard Pershing, who had died in Vietnam in 1968. Like Richard Pershing and John McCrae, whole generations of young men had died in the poppy-strewn fields of Flanders and in the stifling swamps of Saigon. "Does anyone remember?" The *Post's* correspondent wrote. As the group proceeded to General Pershing's grave for the final benediction, many of the veterans stumbled upon the wet earth, their arms "quivering" as they strained to hold up the colors. Perhaps noting the doleful scene surrounding the proceedings, the chairman of the Veterans of World War I of the United States of America (VWWI), Louis F. Zaruba, ended the benediction on a defiant note: "Those whose conscience or cowardice caused them to desert (in Vietnam), let them stay where they are." Nothing, however, could mask the empty chairs in the audience. It seemed as if time had passed these men by.⁵⁴

In 1975, the Veterans of World War I convention sought to address concerns over how the American public would commemorate World War I veterans. The VWWI was

⁵⁴ Hank Burchard, "Dwindling Group Remembers Dead from World War I," *Washington Post*, November 12, 1972, D1.

founded in 1948 as a confraternal organization of World War I veterans, in the same mold as the American Legion and the VFW. Unlike those veterans' organizations, however, the VWWI would cease to exist after the last World War I veteran had died (similar to the model of the Union's Grand Army of the Republic). Due to the organization's inherent mortality, its members were deeply invested in memorial projects related to their service. The Pershing Memorial's continued delay troubled the VWWI, as did the widening division between the American people and returning Vietnam veterans. In a general resolution supporting the Pershing Memorial, the VWWI pledged to "place pressure" on Congress to assure its completion. The resolution also noted that it had been "56 years" since Pershing and the AEF had returned home, echoing the complaint lodged in 1965 by the Army-Navy Club's James Boyer. Why had it taken so long to commemorate a man of Pershing's stature? More telling of the time, however, was the VWWI's lamentation that the "remarkable spirit of the World War I soldier and sailor may soon be forgotten." Father Time was already taking the bodies of World War I veterans. The divisiveness of the Vietnam War now threatened to erase their memory.⁵⁵

The primary battle over military memorialization during the 1970s and 1980s centered around Maya Lin's design for the Vietnam Veterans Memorial (VVM). Lin, then a brilliant undergraduate art student at Yale University, created a minimalistic memorial that broke almost every convention of traditional military commemoration. Instead of extending triumphantly into the sky, the VVM was buried into the ground. The memorial was made with black granite, not white marble. Most evocatively, the memorial had the names of all 58,000 U.S. servicemen who had died in the war etched

⁵⁵ 94th Congress, 2nd Session, "Proceedings of the 23rd Convention of the Veterans of World War I of the United States, Inc.," House Document No. 94-349, January 26, 1976.

into the granite wall, yet no inspirational inscriptions or messages. The wall did not proclaim victory, honor, or heroism – only death (Figures 4.1 and 4.2).

Veterans across the country inveighed against the design, and their main issue was one of perspective. The committee that had chosen the design for the VVM contained no Vietnam servicemen. Due to this, many veterans thought that the “anti-heroic” design was chosen because none of the committee members had seen the military side of the conflict. Their lens was colored by the divisive political conflicts at home, which erased the heroism and sacrifice displayed in Vietnam. One veteran described the design as “pointedly insulting” to the sacrifices made by soldiers in Vietnam, a “black gash of shame and sorrow, hacked into the national visage.” Another veteran wrote that she found the memorial “personally repugnant.” One reader asked, “Why no American flag to pay tribute to those who died believing that they served America?” The outcry from veterans and conservatives became impossible to ignore, and by late 1982 the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund (VVMF) commissioned a traditional heroic statue of three Vietnam soldiers to assuage their angry constituents. The statue, sculpted by Frederick Hart, was placed several yards away from the wall to keep vigil over the dead consecrated in stone. Despite the objections from veterans, however, Lin’s memorial was a tremendous success. The VVM ushered in a completely new form of memorialization – the victim monument – that appealed to the postmodernist angst of late twentieth-century America. Due to the VVM, Americans would never interact with their monuments the same way again.⁵⁶

⁵⁶ Tom Carhart, “Insulting Vietnam Vets,” *New York Times*, October 24, 1981, 23; “The Vietnam Memorial: ‘Eloquent’ or ‘Repugnant?’” *Washington Post*, November 24, 1981, A16; Isabel Wilkerson, “‘Art War’ Erupts Over Vietnam Veterans Memorial,” *Washington Post*, July 8, 1982, D3; Benjamin Forgey, “Vietnam Memorial Changes Clear Last Major Hurdle,” *Washington Post*, October 14, 1982, A1.

When Pershing Park officially opened in May 1981, the memorial looked and functioned much differently than its creators had intended. The Pershing statue, the centerpiece of the 1959 proposal, had yet to be constructed. The memorial walls, now merely ten-feet high, stood off to the side of the park. The memorial was segregated from the main commercial attractions in the center of the park. Instead of the memorial, the epicenter of the site was now a tidal pool, fed by an artificial waterfall and lined on each side by pink geraniums. According to the park's landscape architect, M. Paul Friedberg, the PADC wanted the tidal pool to also function as a skating rink. Friedberg noted that because of this, there is more infrastructure under the park than above it. The rectangular fountain was constructed so that a Zamboni could fit within its walls, and a plastic pavilion was built off to the side so patrons could change, use the restroom, and buy food. The immense effort placed on constructing a commercially-friendly park revealed how the PADC felt the space should function. Patrons did not flock to the park to stand in awe at Pershing's and the AEF's accomplishments, but to enjoy a scenic spot to eat lunch, conduct impromptu business meetings, or watch their children play amongst the flowers. The few patrons who came to Pershing Park to remember the veterans of World War I did not come to bask in their heroism or to seek a moral guidepost. Decades of ambiguous military conflicts, ABMC budget cuts, and acrimonious public debates over the meaning of military memorials had sapped Pershing Park of its intended meaning (Figure 4.3).⁵⁷

Nothing better exemplified the new ways in which Americans began to conceive their military past than an anonymous letter published in the *Washington Post* entitled "In

⁵⁷ The Cultural Landscape Foundation, "M. Paul Friedberg Projects: Pershing Park and Freedom Plaza," filmed October 2006, YouTube video, 7:08, posted September 22, 2010, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=USKbvDuCy04&feature=youtu.be&list=PL11DE55C6FB6E1666>.

Pershing Park.” The piece, whose title alluded to John McCrae’s antiwar World War I poem “In Flanders Field,” evoked similar feelings of melancholy and introspection. The author begins the work by detailing the blossoming of spring in the park. Plants are in bloom, children are playing, and the reflections of young birch trees dance in the park’s reflective pool. Life is in season. Yet death lurks amongst the living. The author comes upon the AEF’s commemorative plaques detailing the Americans’ exploits in France during the last year of the First World War. There is something disquieting in the contrast between the blossoming of spring and the “description, in the desiccated prose of official history, of the final episode of the central deforming catastrophe of this century.” “10 million men were killed in that war,” the author thinks to himself. He looks around at the children blissfully playing in the park, and wonders if the “generation of children” born in 1895 – “a year of general peace and stability” – had any idea they were to be slaughtered in one of the greatest tragedies in human history. Would the carefree children in Pershing Park become the next “Lost Generation”?⁵⁸

“In Pershing Park” attested to the dramatic shift in Americans’ military sensibilities. Instead of being filled with pride at the AEF’s accomplishments in France, the author was struck by immense sadness. What was really accomplished in the “central deforming catastrophe” of the twentieth century? When the American Legion first conceived of the idea for a Pershing memorial they had wanted it to be a “national shrine,” a place where citizens would gain new appreciation for General Pershing’s accomplishments and seek to emulate his character. That same idea was enshrined in the “heroic statue” the Legion proposed for the National Square. The Pershing Memorial was to be a place that showcased America’s martial strength. Most importantly, it was to be a

⁵⁸ “In Pershing Park,” *Washington Post*, May 25, 1981, A18.

place that permanently etched General Pershing into the mythos of American exceptionalism. Yet Pershing Park ended up being none of these things. Most who came to Pershing Park took no heed of the general or his men, and those who did came away saddened, not exulted, by their accomplishments. It was, much like the VVM, a strikingly ambiguous experience. When the Pershing statue was finally erected in 1983, it was greeted “without fanfare.” General Pershing was no longer an icon to the American people.⁵⁹

⁵⁹ Jack Eisen, “‘Black Jack’ in Bronze,” *The Washington Post*, October 7, 1983, B2.



Figure 4.1: Detail, Vietnam Veterans Memorial Wall (Courtesy of Wikipedia.)



Figure 4.2: Detail, Pershing Park AEF inscription. Unlike the VVM, the AEF wall is explicitly heroic, detailing the exploits of the Marines at Belleau Wood and the heroism of the AEF in the Meuse-Argonne offensive. (Courtesy of D.C. Memorial.)



Figure 4.3: Pershing Park. The Pershing Memorial is on the bottom right. (Courtesy of the National Park Service.)

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

In 1977, the *Washington Post* profiled the ABMC as part of their series on small government agencies. Washington was in the midst of federal austerity measures, and the ABMC was one of the many seemingly insignificant agencies on the government chopping block. Earlier that year, a prominent congressman had called for the ABMC's eradication on national television, arguing that the commission's existence "was a good indication that something's out of whack with the federal bureaucracy." The paper asked the ABMC's secretary, General Andrew Adams, if he was concerned for the future of his agency. The answer was a prideful "no." In fact, the ABMC had produced a short, twenty-eight-minute film devoted to educating the public of its mission. The movie, entitled "The Price of Freedom," was made in 1969 and, according to Adams, had been shown to over seventy million people. The movie's main goal was to "counteract the belief of many young people...that their nation was worthless, and worse." In a time of rampant cynicism and disillusionment, it was important to remind the nation of their country's military valor. "The people who criticize us don't really know us," Adams said. "And all we have to do to get them to understand is to give them the facts."⁶⁰

Unfortunately, the Pershing Memorial appeared to do little to counteract Americans' growing ambivalence towards General Pershing or his soldiers. In 1987,

⁶⁰ Warren Brown, "Obscure Agency Gives Gentle Lesson in Bureaucratic Survival Techniques," *Washington Post*, February 4, 1977, A2.

scarcely four years after the Pershing statue was erected, the park was inadvertently damaged by teenagers, who had been using the memorial as a skate park. The granite walls flanking the Pershing statue had become defaced due to repeated contact, and cracks began forming on several of the marble slabs. More problematically, the young men who had been perpetrating these acts gave little thought to the man and the men whom they were defacing. “Memorials are...a waste of money,” one of the teenagers said. “These people are dead; they don’t have relatives; there is no use [for them].” It would be easy to dismiss statements like this as disrespectful, rude, or ignorant, but they speak to deep-seated ideological changes that took place in the United States during the twentieth century. Traditional, static monuments were no longer evocative to new generations of Americans who wanted to interact and use memorial space.⁶¹

In August 2014, Edwin L. Fountain of the U.S. World War One Centennial Commission, the planning organization for the capital’s centennial celebration of Armistice Day, laid out plans before the National Press Club outlining the commission’s proposal to turn Pershing Park into a national World War I memorial. The commission was responding to increased demands from family members of World War I veterans to build an all-encompassing memorial that would honor all of the American soldiers who fought in France in 1918. In the proposal, Fountain echoed the sentiments that the teenagers had made almost twenty years earlier (albeit with much more respect and only with regards to the Pershing statue). Washington already had two World War I memorials in the National Mall, but both honored individual divisions. Pershing Park was the perfect place to locate the new memorial, Fountain explained. It was presentable, accessible, and,

⁶¹ James Munoz, “Invasion of Skateboards Damaging Downtown Parks,” *Washington Post*, July 3, 1987, accessed March 10, 2016, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/local/1987/07/03/invasion-of-skateboards-damaging-downtown-parks/7f948de9-e2bc-42cb-ab16-ec15b329e557/>.

most importantly, expendable. “With all due respect to the designers of the memorial,” Fountain said, “it’s a very static, passive memorial that lacks any real pathos or humanity.” For those reasons Fountain thought that Pershing Park should not only be rededicated, but also entirely “reconceived and redeveloped.” Others vehemently disagreed, not because they cared for the Pershing Memorial but because they thought that any memorial that replaced it would fall into similar irrelevancy. David DeJonge, the president of the National World War I Foundation, warned that locating the new memorial at Pershing Park would “contribute to a systematic extinction to the memory of World War I.”⁶²

The idea that the Pershing statue lacked any “pathos” or “humanity” was not a novel observation. Commentators had been criticizing the Pershing Memorial for its static qualities ever since the first designs were produced. But it was not necessarily the form or the meaning of the memorial that was the problem, as many historians and art critics have posited. While military monuments had been declining during the middle of the twentieth century, they have actually undergone a renaissance after the completion of the VVM in 1982. New monuments to the Korean War, to the Navy, to the black soldiers of the American Revolution, and to World War II have all been erected in Washington within the Pershing Memorial’s thirty-five-year existence. The Pershing Memorial certainly did not quell the nation’s desire for military memorials. It did, however, set limits on what subjects should be memorialized in order for the monument to be

⁶² Nikki Schwab, “World War I Memorial Gets a Take Two,” *U.S. News and World Report*, August 13, 2014, accessed April 28, 2015, <http://www.usnews.com/news/blogs/washington-whispers/2014/08/13/world-war-i-memorial-gets-a-take-two>.

successful. The common soldier has reemerged as the vogue military commemorative subject, rising like a phoenix from its post-World War II ashes.⁶³

What has unquestionably declined, however, is the memorialization of military commanders. The Pershing Memorial convinced building authorities that commander monuments were no longer viable. From its earliest beginnings, it was clear that the Pershing Memorial would struggle to gain grassroots support, private funds, or federal appropriations. Private memorial fundraising initiatives petered out early in the memorial's campaign, and after their demise Pershing's survival hinged on the dogged determination of a small federal agency and a handful of veterans' organizations. The fact that Pershing Park retained even a semblance of the original memorial design is remarkable given the unyielding pressure it faced during the 1960s and 1970s. In a nation no longer enamored with "great man" narratives, linear stories of progress, or tales of American indomitability, the Pershing Memorial lacked the emotional energy to propel it to widespread renown or acclaim. No new military commander monuments have been erected in Washington's monumental landscape since the Pershing Memorial failure, and it would be impossible to explain that story without understanding the Pershing monument campaign.

⁶³ Hass, *Sacrificing Soldiers*, 1-21, 152-196.

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