



May 17, 2021

# Commemorative Works in the District of Columbia: Categorization of Proposed and Enacted Memorials, 1973-2020

In 1783, the Continental Congress authorized the nation’s first memorial, an equestrian statue to honor General George Washington. Since that time, Members of Congress have introduced hundreds of measures to authorize new commemorative works, and Congress has authorized more than 100 new memorials in Washington, DC, and its vicinity.

University on the introduction and consideration of commemorative legislation, including commemorative works. Overall, CRS and the Bush School students identified 384 measures, honoring 108 subjects, introduced between 1973 and 2020 to authorize commemorative works in the District of Columbia. Of the 108 subjects of introduced bills, 59 (54%) were eventually authorized for commemoration in bills enacted into law.

The design of Washington, D.C. has created outstanding areas which have been or may yet be used to honor those who have made lasting contributions to the history of our Nation. During the last century, 111 memorials, monuments and plaques have been erected on Federal land in the District of Columbia and its environs. These commemorative works honor U.S. Presidents, military units, those who served in the Vietnam War, heroes of the Revolutionary, Civil and World Wars, U.S. citizens, individuals from foreign countries and various significant events.

Proposed and enacted commemorative works can be categorized based on their major themes. Using past categorization efforts including the NPS’s thematic framework and the National Capital Planning Commission’s (NCPC’s) Commemorative Works Catalog as a guide, CRS developed seven categories for memorials introduced since 1973. While some memorials might fit into more than one category, CRS placed them into the predominant category, so that the categories are mutually exclusive. **Figure 1** lists these category themes and their definitions.

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**Figure 1. Commemorative Work Category Themes**

## Congressional Role in Memorialization

In 1986, Congress enacted the Commemorative Works Act (CWA; 40 U.S.C. §§8901-8909) to govern the consideration, siting, design, and building of memorials in areas administrated by the National Park Service (NPS) and the General Services Administration (GSA) in the District of Columbia and its environs.

Prior to the CWA, Congress approved memorials, but a dedicated process for planning and approval of site locations and designs did not exist. Between 1973, when the Congress.gov database’s coverage begins, and the enactment of the CWA in 1986, Congress authorized 17 memorials. Since the enactment of the CWA, Congress has authorized an additional 42 memorials on federal lands in the District of Columbia or its environs.

Congress continues to be an arbiter of what subjects are worthy of a national commemoration in Washington, DC, through the introduction, consideration, and enactment of legislation.

## Categorizing Commemorative Works

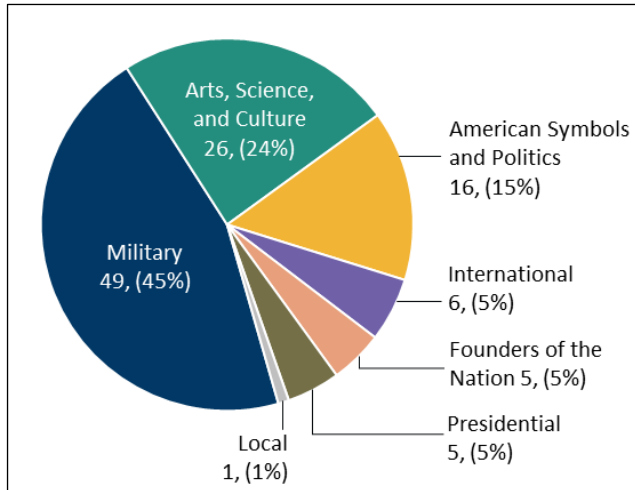
To understand the individuals, groups, and events that Congress has considered honoring with a memorial in the District of Columbia, the Congressional Research Service (CRS) collected data in cooperation with the Bush School of Government and Public Service at Texas A&M

<b>Military</b>	Works which primarily depict military leaders, battles, units, or wars
<b>Arts, Science, and Culture</b>	Works depicting leaders, events, and professions important to societal, cultural, artistic, and scientific achievements in America
<b>American Symbols and Politics</b>	Works depicting leaders, symbols, and achievements related to American life and politics
<b>International</b>	Works depicting an international figure or event. Often paid for by a foreign government
<b>Founders of the Nation</b>	Works depicting prominent figures of America’s Revolutionary period responsible for drafting the Constitution and founding the United States
<b>Presidential</b>	Works depicting American Presidents
<b>Local</b>	Works depicting an event or individual important to Washington, DC or the National Capitol Region

Source: CRS.

To categorize each measure to establish a commemorative work, CRS examined the bill title and text to determine its primary type of memorialization and then coded them by theme. Each theme is represented once in **Figure 2**, which also includes the number and percentage in each category.

**Figure 2. Categorization by Theme of Introduced Legislation, 1973-2020**



**Source:** CRS analysis of commemorative works legislation.

**Note:** A total of 108 different subjects for proposed commemorative works legislation, and though some subjects were proposed in multiple measures, each subject is counted only once for this figure.

Overall, a plurality (45%) of the subjects of introduced memorials honored some aspect of the military. The next most common theme was arts, science, and culture (24%); followed by American symbols and politics (15%); international (5%); founders of the nation (5%), Presidents (5%); and local (1%).

Of the introduced themes, nearly two-thirds (64%) proposed to depict groups, including military service units (e.g., the 2<sup>nd</sup> Armored Division). Approximately 6% proposed to honor women (e.g., Gold Star Mothers; Women in Military Service) and 19% proposed to honor minority groups (e.g., Black Revolutionary War Veterans; Native American Veterans).

Overall, 54% of proposed memorial themes were enacted into law. For enacted memorials, on average 4.13 measures were introduced before a commemorative work was enacted, with a minimum of 1 bill (5 measures: Adams Family Memorial, Eisenhower Memorial, Joseph Rosenthal Memorial, Providence Hospital marker, Senator Robert Dole Plaque, and Union Soldiers Memorial) and a maximum of 14 (Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial). For memorial themes that were not enacted, the average number of bills introduced was 2.9, with a minimum of 1 (21 proposed memorials) and a maximum of 34 (General Draza Mihailovich of Yugoslavia).

### Military

Military memorials have been the most frequent subjects of introduced bills for commemorative works. Since 1973, military-themed memorials represent 45% of the subjects of proposed commemorative works. The proposed military themes included the memorialization of individual military

figures (e.g., Francis Marion and George C. Marshall), military groups (e.g., Disabled Veterans and Native American Veterans), military units (e.g., 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne and the 1<sup>st</sup> Infantry Division), military branches (e.g., Air Force and Navy), and wars (e.g., World War I and World War II).

### Arts, Science, and Culture

Arts, Science, and Culture are the second-most-popular memorial theme, representing 24% of the subjects of proposed commemorative works. Memorials in this category included the Albert Einstein Memorial, Justice William O. Douglas Memorial, and the Emergency Medical Services (EMS) Memorial.

### American Symbols and Politics

American symbols and politics are the third-most-popular proposed theme of the subjects of commemorative works (15%) These included commemorations such as those for Francis Scott Key; Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.; Senator Robert Dole; and the Peace Corps.

### International

Memorials to honor international themes represented 6% of the subjects of proposed commemorative works, making it the fourth-most-popular category. Proposed international memorials include memorials to Mahatma Gandhi, Moroccan-American Friendship, Thomas Masaryk, and the Ukrainian Famine.

### Founders of the Nation

Founders of the Nation represent 5% of the subjects of proposed commemorative works, making this the fifth-most-popular category. Proposed memorials to the founders include those for George Mason, Thomas Paine, James Madison, and John Adams and his family.

### Presidential

Presidential memorials represented 5% of the subjects of proposed commemorative works. This category includes memorials to honor Franklin D. Roosevelt, Lyndon B. Johnson, Dwight D. Eisenhower, and Ronald Reagan.

### Local

One local memorial was proposed between 1973 and 2020. This was a marker placed at the spot of the former Providence Hospital, which was located on Capitol Hill at D Street and 2<sup>nd</sup> Street, SE, in Providence Park.

For more information on memorials in the District of Columbia, see CRS Report R41658, *Commemorative Works in the District of Columbia: Background and Practice*; CRS Report R43743, *Monuments and Memorials Authorized and Completed Under the Commemorative Works Act in the District of Columbia*; CRS Report R43744, *Monuments and Memorials Authorized Under the Commemorative Works Act in the District of Columbia: Current Development of In-Progress and Lapsed Works*; and CRS Report R43241, *Monuments and Memorials in the District of Columbia: Analysis and Options for Proposed Exemptions to the Commemorative Works Act*.

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