Introduction

Our project examines how Grinnell remembered its Civil War veterans, specifically through the content and language of obituaries written in one of Poweshiek County’s most widely read newspapers, the Grinnell Herald. Through critical examination and content analysis of these obituaries, we can discern, through the public nature of this type of commemoration, the process of mourning in Grinnell, what kind of model life and values were conveyed and what about the war was deemed worthy of being remembered or forgotten. In short, we can determine what particular value was placed on each of these men’s lives.

Analysis

Although Grinnell’s memory upheld the Union cause, the obituaries create a normative conception of citizenship, identity, and value in society that tacitly upheld the racialized power structure in the town. The obituaries portrayed the lives of these men (typically white middle-class men heavily involved in business, politics, or their church) as ideal citizens, attuned to the small town and pioneer way of life and a formative experience in their lives. This process of commemoration serves to uplift the memory of these Grinnell citizens but of the Civil War as well. This process was especially important in the context of the 1930s (when these men died), an era beset by the crises of the Great Depression.

Obituaries in American Culture


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Bibliography

Drake Community Library Obituary Database.