



Roadside Crosses in Contemporary Memorial Culture

Holly Everett

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A fifteen-year-old high school cheerleader is killed while driving on a dangerous curve one afternoon. By that night, her classmates have erected a roadside cross decorated with silk flowers, not as a grim warning, but as a loving memorial.

In this study of roadside crosses, the first of its kind, Holly Everett presents the history of these unique commemoratives and their relationship to contemporary memorial culture. The meaning of these markers is presented in the words of grieving parents, high school students, public officials, and private individuals whom the author interviewed during her fieldwork in Texas.

Everett documents over thirty-five memorial sites with twenty-five photographs representing the wide range of creativity. Examining the complex interplay of politics, culture, and belief, she emphasizes the importance of religious expression in everyday life and analyzes responses to death that this tradition. Roadside crosses are a meeting place for communication, remembrance, and reflection, embodying on-going relationships between the living and the dead. They are a bridge between personal and communal pain—and one of the oldest forms of memorial culture.

Scholars in folklore, American studies, cultural geography, cultural/social history, and material culture studies will be especially interested in this study.

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