FOREWORD REVIEWS THE INDIE WE LOVE.

Obituaries in American Culture
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Possessing duality by design throughout their 200-year history, American obituaries have successfully transcended their commemorative roles to reinforce social symbols with subtle certainty. Poised as obelisks, the social ideals which lace obituaries survive the literal memorial of the deceased—they tower above sunken earth, which shelters the forgotten faces and long-clasped hands that once gave life to each fading word.

Hume, assistant professor at Kansas State University's A.Q. Miller School of Journalism, has anatomized over 8,000 obituaries, bridging the years from 1818 to 1930 and researching three distinct eras. Hume contrasts obituaries from the years preceding and following a trio of pivotal events in American history—the election of Andrew Jackson (1818-1828), the Civil War (1855-870), and the turn of the century, with a special focus on women's suffrage (1910-1930). The book contains obituaries culled from two precursors to national newspapers, The National Intelligencer and The Niles' Weekly Register, as well as gathered from regional papers representing both east and west coasts, including New Orleans and Chicago.

As America moved from embracing the egalitarianism of the Jacksonian era into the twentieth century, men, once linked with icons of patriotism such as George Washington, became noted for their loyalty and success in a profession. Women evolved most dramatically, having escaped adjectives such as "pious, obedient, and useful," as post-suffrage obituaries recognized their individual identities as non-traditional jobholders, and their political voices. Additionally, the "media framing" of obituaries is explored, describing death metaphorically as the "Omnipotent Author," and dying as being "scathed by the wing of the destroying angel."

Maintaining that "a society requires a shared memory," Hume explores the role of the obituary as an instrument with which American society sculpted its own icons and mores, constantly reshaping the profile of its model with the ushering hand of time. Tangibly weighted with its academic content and tone, Obituaries is densely laden with research, and is well suited for history or cultural studies enthusiasts. Denying the audience a sense of immersion into the

curious waters of history, this book may have benefited by additional obituaries included verbatim.

With Obituaries' systematic study of death notices, insights into the living of each period simultaneously emerge, both through the reinforcing celebration of those characteristics valued by society, and equally by the telling nature of omissions and exclusions. Digging deep into the geology of cultural cemeteries, Obituaries unearths the delicate stratification of virtues, morals, and icons of American culture—and reveals the fault lines of change.

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