For my field guide I am proposing to focus on the subject of controversial monuments in the United States. Because I have background with such areas of study on an international platform, I would like to delve deeper into the US version of war memorials and monuments and how they are perceived by the public.

As of right now, there is no specific time period or war era that I am focusing on. What I do wish to take from this research though is how death, destruction and decay of trust played a major role into the psyche of the public when it comes to interpreting certain monuments personally. Because no piece of art is seen the same way or through the same lenses, neither should the outcome of war. What I believe memorials and monuments aim to do in these circumstances is shed a light on the realities of war. What one might not understand though, is that the general public is often perversely against those realities (not without exceptions I might add).

The feelings that drum up these memorials, monuments and statues are not the only feelings involved though. There are those who critique, those who use the memorial to remember and then there are those who might visit it to cope. All of these actions are part of a larger circle of participatory art, but there is also what one might ironically call “participatory art through vandalism”. Not necessarily a positive form of art, but still an expression of how parts of the public feel about certain interpretation of a person, time period, or event.

What I aim to do in this field guide is analyze three things. The first of which is the history of the monument and what led to it being erected. I believe that this analysis will give deeper meaning into aspects of the memorial or monument that one might not understand if they did not have previous knowledge. The second piece of information that I want to present and analyze is the actual make up and model of the memorial. I will talk about the artist and their motivations behind creating the piece. By understanding what they were thinking and feeling while creating the memorial, it will help in analyzing and interpreting what is going on through the eyes of the person who created it. This is not to say that once one understands the message the artist is trying to convey that they cannot disagree with it, but rather to supply the background to fuel an informative discussion.

The third and final thing that I want to analyze through the use of this field guide is the response of the public to these war memorials or monuments. By researching and finding out what the communities and people around these symbols of remembrance think and feel about them, the artwork and sculptures form a whole other meaning or layer. In essence, the public or group of people for whom the monument is erected are the ones that make the art come alive and give it that extra meaning. But it is not only the audience that has this impact, but those who are the reason that the memorial was made for in the first place. Those whose lives were impacted, destroyed or lost to war are the most obvious forms of participatory art in this instance. I believe that by bringing forward this element of the artwork, the people for whom the memorial was intended will get a better grasp at the depth that not only the artist or sculpture went through in creating the monument, but what the selection committee went through in choosing the artist, what certain councils had to do to get the project commissioned and what the people who were involved in these events had to go through to be remembered in such a way.

Information and sources that I ultimately plan to use for the research of this field guide project include websites, books and articles pertaining to the background of certain wars and events that took place during them. I also plan to largely utilize that of current and archived newspaper articles on the monuments that I choose to write about. I believe that this form of research will give me a deeper look into the thoughts and feelings of the public on this particular subject. Not only will using the newspaper articles help, but the comment section in several online articles tends to show the conflicting opinions of society on certain aspects of culture.