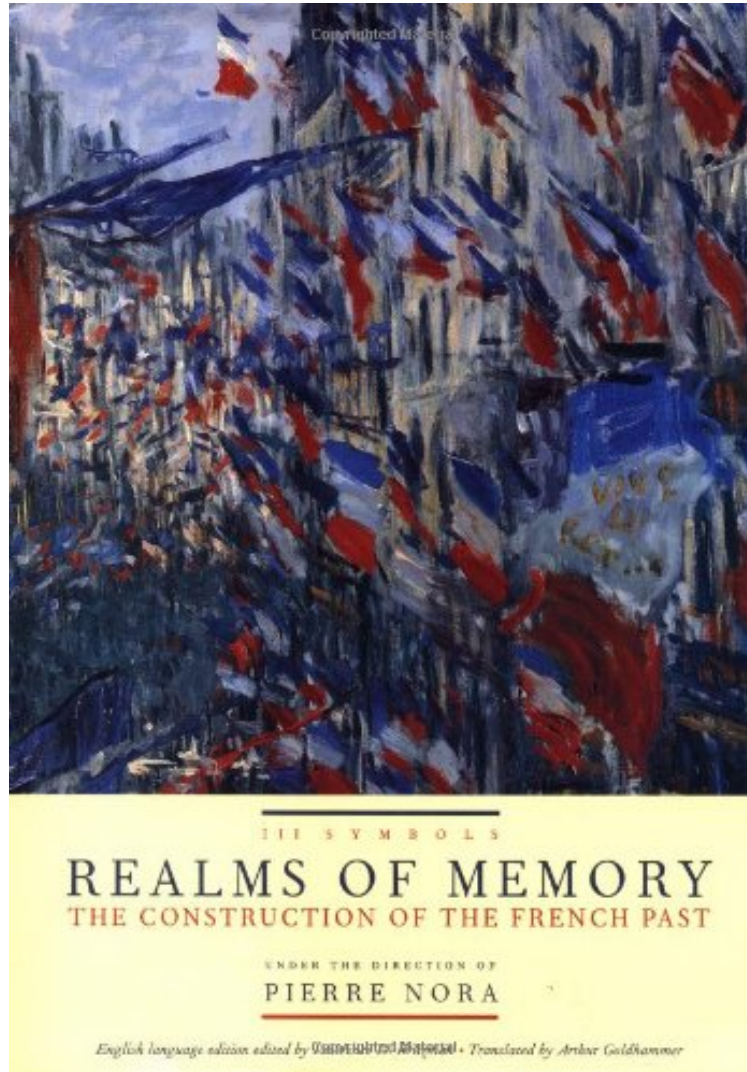


(Library ebook) Realms of Memory: The Construction of the French Past, Vol. 3, Symbols

## Realms of Memory: The Construction of the French Past, Vol. 3, Symbols

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**From Columbia University Press : Realms of Memory: The Construction of the French Past, Vol. 3, Symbols** before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Realms of Memory: The Construction of the French Past, Vol. 3, Symbols:

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. Learning the Meaning of "France," and what it means to be "French" By Ray This acclaimed work of the 1980's and 1990's, which took over a decade to assemble and is composed of contributions by scores of expert authors, sets out to describe how the French people have "constructed" their

history through symbols, allusions, and associations, and then have subsequently shifted that constructed memory into the modern public consciousness. The series, which took up seven volumes in the original French, has been routinely described as "monumental," and there can be little doubt that this description is completely correct due to its size, scope, and coverage. But it is not just its size and scope that make the work "monumental." This is a set that is also superbly written by authors who have uniquely and expert knowledge of the subject matter, and the choice of topics, and the depth into which each is examined, easily makes this a de-facto standard work for anyone today wishing to have a true understanding of how the French themselves define what it means to be "French." It is certainly Pierre Nora's magnum opus, and if you possess anything more than a passing interest in French history, "Frenchness," and French semiotics, you will not want to pass on this work. The current English translation here is, unfortunately, taken from a subset of the original seven volumes, reduced to three large volumes. Nora defends the reduction as maintaining the spirit of the original, in spite of the collection's selection list from the larger original. He may be right. But it is nevertheless unfortunate that the complete set was not translated into English. But, on the bright side--and indeed, it is bright--the translation here by Arthur Goldhammer is absolutely superb, with virtually no trace of the grammatical oddity that can occur when translating between French and English, and vice-versa. The text reads as smoothly, accurately, and clearly as though it was originally written in English (a characteristic of most of Goldhammer's acclaimed French to English translations). The content is absolutely superb. Volume 1 starts off on politics, minority religions, and divisions of time and space, which probably doesn't mean anything when you first hear it, but once you read the preface and get into the content, the rationale for these choices of topics and chapters is quintessentially French. (For example, why do the French overwhelmingly regard the Gauls as their ancestors, yet rarely have any historical landscape markers to the Gauls in a country replete with historical signposts in every village? And we thought it was not the Gauls, but the Franks, who were the progenitors of the French nation! So, is it Gauls, or Franks? And what about the belief that the political "left" and "right" originated in the French Revolution, yet earlier references in French works seem to identify this concept as previously existing in England? And what about the tension between Gaulists vs. Communists, Catholics vs. Seculars, French vs. Foreigners, the Ancient Regime vs. the Revolution?) Volume 3, the book reviewed here, is broken into three parts: "Emblems," "Major Sites," and "Identifications." "Emblems" focuses on patriotic representation of flag, music, and concepts. (How is the tricolor interpreted today? What does it represent? How has it been copied? What is the original and the current meaning of The Marseillaise?) The "Major Sites" section focuses on some of the key locations that are so famous: the Louvre, Versailles, the Pantheon, the Eiffel Tower, Verdun, Reims, and Lascaux 9 the Paleolithic cave dwellings in south west France). Finally, "Identifications" covers some key French representative emblems, such as Joan of Arc, Paris itself, the Gallic Cock, and the French language, and how each has been appropriated today to present a series of interpreted memories, constructed memories, as it were, by the French people. But this brief listing of topics should in no way lead you to believe that Nora's book is typical "fare" when it comes to books about France. This series is about the realms of memory, the manner in which memories, beliefs, conceptions, and views are constructed of France by the French themselves. Some of these--many of these--are CONSTRUCTED memories, and they have come to mean things today that might not have been apparent in their original contexts. This is a book as fascinating to read as it is beneficial to learning, and it really should be on your list if you wish to understand France as the French views it. And although the volumes can be quite expensive, you can occasionally find a few copies in the used marked in very good shape at a good price. I highly recommend this series as one that is fascinating, complex, evocative, and unusual. An easy five stars for what must be considered a monumental and influential work.

This volume, the third part of *Realms of Memory*, focuses on the emblems that signify Frenchness to people around the world. It includes 13 essays on cultural icons from Joan of Arc to Descartes; the national motto of Liberty, Equality, Fraternity; the tricolour flag; and the French language itself. The closing essay on commemoration provides an overview of the series.

"This unusual book deals fascinatingly with everything from the creation of the rousing anthem "La Marseillaise" to the changing role of Joan of Arc in France's collective memory. Even the Eiffel Tower shines forth in surprising new facets." -- "Chicago Tribune"  
"A magisterial attempt to define what it is to be French." -- "Times Literary Supplement"  
"A magnificent achievement.... [The essays included] are the high-carat jewels of the project." -- "The New Republic"  
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