What is the true function of historical monuments? Are they meant to teach us vital lessons that can relate to our everyday lives? Or are they simply meant to awe and inspire? Do they depict an accurate representation of our history? Or do they simply romanticize it? If you are someone who lives in or near an urban area, you have most likely seen a plethora of diverse statues depicting different political figures and events from history. Or, you may have seen a few that are simply meant to be viewed as a work of art. Some sculptures reside in museums for the paying audience member to view through a pane of glass, while others are placed in public areas such as parks or along major roadways. Just in the small city of Utica, New York, there are at least twenty to thirty monuments built to remember specific people and events in American history. Regardless of where they are located, monuments are an extremely controversial topic in the world today. Now that we've gotten the introduction out of the way, we can begin to talk more about the multiple historic monuments in the city of Utica. We'll start our trip on the parkway, which is located at the south side of the city. Sculpted from bronze by Joseph Pollia, this monument was built to commemorate the Polish Revolutionary War general Casimir Pulaski. During his time in the war, Pulaski worked with major figures such as George Washington and was known as “the founder of the American cavalry.” On the back of the statue it reads “erected and presented to the city of Utica by the Polish and American residents of Utica, NY Mills, Herkimer, Middleville, and vicinity. Oct 11, 1930. Further along the parkway, we have this statue, built to honor the soldiers and sailors who fought in the Spanish-American War. The bronze soldier standing proudly on a 17-ton boulder gives the figure a sense of towering over the viewer. This statue is also in memoriam of the USS Maine which was destroyed in Havana Harbor in 1898. The two tablets on both sides of the boulder are cast from metal retrieved from the ship after the wreckage. Unfortunately, many of these bronze sculptures have turned green overtime due to oxidation. Like this statue for example, built to commemorate Thomas R Proctor, a wealthy and influential figure of Utica, NY during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. He was the president of the second national bank, President of the
Oneida County historical society, and the owner of Bags hotel. The land of the hotel later became known as Proctor Park, which was deeded to the city after his death. The next monument along the parkway is one that was built to commemorate three major wars in American history: World War I, World War II, and the Korean War. The statue itself is triangular in shape, giving one face for each War represented. At the top of the statue, there are three soldiers dressed in uniform, and each one is holding items such as a flag or combat weapon as though they are in preparation for a battle. On each face there is a small print to represent the branches of the military: the Army, Air Force, Navy, Marines, and Coast Guard. There are also quotes from prominent figures during each war written below these symbols. As an example, the quote written for World War II by General George S Patton states: “Wars may be fought with weapons, but they are won by men. It is the spirit of men who follow and of the man who leads that gains the victory.” At the very end of the parkway, this statue of Christopher Columbus was built to celebrate the man who founded the new world. Originally, it stood at what used to be known as Columbus Square, and was moved to its current location on Columbus Day 1966. On the back of the statue it reads: “The great Italian navigator. Challenged the dominant obscurantism of his time. Conquered the unknown. Gave humanity a new world. Was rewarded with chains and humiliation. Died in misery.”

The next area we'll take a look at is on the Northern side of Utica, at a traffic circle off of State Street. This monument, sculpted by Karl Gerhardt, was built in memoriam of the American Civil War. At the base of the sculpture, there are four figures facing north, south, east, and west. The two sculptures facing East and West are of a soldier and a sailor, representing the two types of combat during the Civil War. The female figures facing north and south are meant to represent the Union and the Confederacy after a conflict was resolved. The one facing the north is holding a flag to represent Victory, and the one facing south is holding an olive branch to represent peace between the two sides. Over the course of this video we've talked about a lot of different monuments, but how did they all connect? or in other words, what is the importance of these monuments and what is the reason
behind why they were built? We generally know statues to have the same overall purpose: to commemorate or honor a specific person or event. These works of art are important because they can be used to remind us of events in history like this statue of three major wars. Or they can be used to celebrate specific individuals who impacted the city in which they lived, like this one of Thomas R Proctor. Many of the statues in this city were constructed due to the influence of certain cultures. In the early 20th century many Polish and Italian immigrants planted their roots in Utica and eventually donated money for the construction of these works of art. Take the statue of General Pulaski for example, a Polish war figure during the American Revolution. A person who knows nothing of American history might look at the statue and wonder why it was built or what its purpose was. But the Polish citizens of Utica, who donated money to its construction, view it as a tribute to their culture and feel that it gives them a sense of pride in their family background. The same goes for the Statue of Christopher Columbus. Many Italian immigrants who came to the city contributed money to the construction of the statue. Even though Columbus is an extremely controversial figure in American history, he was Italian, and it gave the Italian community in Utica a sense of pride and helped them to feel connected to their culture. Overall, statues are a crucial part of history. Even though we know them to have a specific historical meaning, they can have an underlying cultural meaning as well.