Keeping Time with the Good War

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This essay suggests several ways to think about changing modes of commemoration of World War II in light of the arbitrary nature of calendars, the reasons we give to justify war, the role of bodies, and, the way we frame memory and history. It proposes an exceptionalist reading of the war and links its singular attributes to the unusual trajectory of its memorialization and commemoration. Finally, it turns to Mircea Eliade's theory of "eternal return" as a conceptual framework to reconsider the relationship between the uses of history and memory in modern commemorative practices.

Arbitrary Anniversaries

Anniversaries present some vexing problems. They are some of the most potent memory triggers, yet they set arbitrary dates for remembrance—cycles of 25, 50, and 100 years. Round numbers may be reassuring, but they have little to do with intrinsic reasons to remember events. Americans last obsessed over the memory of the war in the 1990s, with the string of 50th anniversaries that unfolded from 1990 to 1995 or so and a series of films related to the war. All of this was instigated by little more than a turn of the calendar. And yet, arbitrary anniversaries have surprising utility. They correspond roughly to generations (25 years) or lifetimes (75 years). A fiftieth anniversary of a war comes at the propitious moment just before the generation that fought it is gone. At the same time, the artifice of anniversaries—their arbitrary yet predictable nature—is equally provocative.

Are anniversaries a modern survival of the cyclical conception of time that Mircea Eliade found traditional societies maintained expressly to resist historical or linear time? According to Eliade, mythic events placed in a hazy golden age provide enduring archetypes that stabilize society in the face of inexplicable and catastrophic events, which over time become assimilated to the mythic past. The new is thus disarmed, folded into eternal cycles of events. Anniversaries and the social technology that helps them along, the calendar, can block out unwanted associations. The meaning of specific calendric conventions is well studied (Zerubavel, Young). But the fundamental nature of setting commemorative anniversaries remains less examined. What if Americans reached for highly charged periods of remembrance? For instance, what if memory of war were understood in terms of bodies and the natural or social cycles that govern them? Eighteen-year cycles might suggest themselves as the number of years it takes to grow a body eligible to fight without parental consent—or, put differently, the number of years it takes to grow a new generation.

The idea of presenting a war in terms of dead bodies is less absurd than it seems. How to convince free citizens to give up their bodies in time of war has been a dilemma for the state for centuries. In fact, Michelangelo's "David" has been seen roughly in these terms: the male citizen's body ripened just enough to defend the city in time of war (Levine 98–99). David, an Old Testament war hero, embodies some of the propagandistic potential of modern memorials (Levine 91–120). That he was commissioned in a time of imminent threat of war shows the Florentines addressing one of the fundamental issues with which modern states continue to labor: how to inspire citizens to the political obligation to sacrifice their bodies for the state.

The issue looms large for the commemoration of World War II because the terms of war—the reasons we fight—color remembrance. At its core is a political problem. Citizens rely on the state to protect them from harm. In essence, the state is charged with maintaining peace. War is a radical failure on the part of the government, a subversion of the relationship in which citizens are asked "to protect their protection" (Westbrook 201). The state thus tends to argue for war in terms that obscure its own failure. Historian Robert B. Westbrook observed this relationship on the American home front. Pearl Harbor made the *casus*

belli clear. In this literal sense, the war needed no further justification. But to encourage the ordinary citizen to give up his body did. Proponents of the war in the early 1940s went to great lengths to "exploit private obligations in order to convince Americans to serve the cause of national defense" (Westbrook 201–02). Propaganda turned relentlessly to abstractions (freedom, democracy), cultural chauvinism (the "American Way of Life"), and above all to familial obligations, especially to material abundance, in order to overcome the murky political obligations citizens owe the nation (Westbook 202). The quandary Americans faced about what shape memorials should take after the war surely derived from the ambiguities of why they fought. How to memorialize the American Way of Life, the Four Freedoms, or a house in Levittown? Or, more seriously, how to memorialize the bodies that died in service to a state that justified the war in these terms? Round numbers derived from a disinterested technology like the calendar avoid this morbid way of thinking. Anniversaries provide moments of reflection and reassessment, but they can also be a convenient escape from the same.

Now is a good time for Americans to take stock of the "Good War," sitting as we are in between major anniversaries. By the 75th anniversary of V-Day, in 2020, only a handful of combatants will be alive and few people who experienced the home front as adults will be around to serve as living bridges to the event. As the last anniversary of the war with living participants, nearly all of the bodies will be gone. This will inevitably change the character of the 75th.

This brings up a second idea, namely, who remembers what for whom? In the 1990s advocates for the National Memorial to World War II trotted out veterans in full regalia. Some ten thousand veterans were dying each month. Dying bodies became a political fulcrum, one used both with sincerity and cynicism. They gave urgency to the mission of erecting a national memorial quickly. One impetus for the memorial was the 50th anniversary of the war. An arbitrary date had acquired social context and emotional meaning because of the natural lifecycle, through dying bodies. After the 75th anniversary, this connection will vanish: the inescapable reality of time's linearity will be fed into a cyclical practice of remembrance.

Commemorative anniversaries impose cyclical forms of remembrance on events that modern historiography typically fits into chronological or linear chains of cause and effect. Put differently, events are linear while commemorations are cyclical. This essay explores the meaning of the dual "time signatures" of commemoration in light of the arbitrary nature of calendars, the reasons we give to justify war, the role of bodies, and, through a reading of Mircea Eliade, the way we frame memory and history.

Good War, Bad Memorials

Americans were quick to memorialize the war, but, not surprisingly, they did so in very different ways than all previous wars. They turned to two previously unconventional memorial strategies: the living memorial and the additive memorial. The first aimed to subvert many of the associations of traditional memorials into civic contributions in the present: memorial parks and civic centers, groves and memorial highways became commonplace in the built environment (Shanken). At the same time, smaller towns often added plaques to pre-existing memorials, many going back to the Civil War.

Fig. 1: Memorial to All Wars, Oberlin, Ohio. Photograph courtesy Erik Inglis.

A memorial in Oberlin, Ohio, for example, appropriated fragments from the town's destroyed Civil War memorial. The marble tablets drawn from a the nineteenth-century Gothic Revival spire now stretch along a brick wall with the names of fallen Oberlin citizens from all wars—the most recent died in Kandahar, Afghanistan. Additive memorials like Oberlin's stitch the memory of World War II into the memory of all wars, forging continuities where, perhaps, none previously existed. At many commemorative sites, World War II is now suspended in a solution of wars that begins with the Civil War and ends (tentatively) with current "conflicts."

Both the living memorial and the additive memorial resisted traditional commemorative strategies. The first could be used to deny the possibility of an iconic monument, folding the memorial into everyday life and sometimes self-consciously nullifying its commemorative potential. Memorial parks, stadiums, community halls, forests, and highways scarcely afforded people opportunities to gather collectively in memory of the war. Many did so purposefully, with open antagonism to remembering (Shanken 141–42). The plaque is also evidence of what observers in the 1940s thought of as a kind of memorial exhaustion (Hudnut). A new plaque allowed communities to skip the trouble of waging a campaign for a new memorial, raising funds, and finding appropriate ground. Amid the hotly contested wartime debate about whether or not new memorials should be built at all, the plaque was innocuous, a non-obtrusive solution to a relatively new problem. More on these additive memorials later: suffice it to say here that inserting World War II in a lineup of earlier and later wars significantly altered the nature of commemoration.

The turn away from traditional memorials in the immediate postwar period is all the more interesting in light of their return in recent decades. Friedrich St. Florian's National World War II Memorial is the most obvious example, but hundreds of lesser-known examples abound.

Fig. 2: “America,” Midway Airport, Chicago, Illinois, 1993. Gary Weisman, sculptor. Photograph by author.

One example is the ostentatiously emotional, figurative statue called “America” (Gary Weisman, sculptor) erected in Midway Airport in Chicago in 1993. Statues like this were very rare in the years following the war. What are we to make of the proliferation of memorials to a war that Americans commemorated for decades obliquely and with reticence? World War II may have prevented a similar proliferation of memorials at a similar distance from World War I. Only the Civil War is comparable as an event with mythic potential enough to inspire waves of commemorative renewal generations later. These latter day memorials, including the case studies in this issue, are surely a way of renewing and altering our relationship to the war. And, of course, they cannot be entirely separated from the general memorial mania of the recent past (Doss). New memorials to the wars in Korea and Vietnam likewise have appeared in capital complexes, courthouse grounds, and parks. Yet World War II remains a singular event in American history, one that demands its own form of commemoration.

A New Exceptionalism

Indeed, in order to be understood, World War II commemoration has to be disentangled from the additive knot. What makes World War II distinct? A litany comes easily: changes in technology, the military-industrial complex, the atomic bomb, the Holocaust, the migration of intellectuals, the internal migration of workers, the highway, the Baby Boom, or, as these essays attest, the ethnic and racial tremors that it set in motion and that continue to rumble through American culture today. It also altered the place of America in the world and ushered in what Henry Luce called the “American Century.” Notice that none of these ideas have anything to do with battles, victory, sacrifice, or mourning, the traditional subjects of war memorials. Nearly all of the memorials discussed in this issue belong to a recent genre that looks beyond battles to social issues. War has been shunted aside, relegated to being a pretext to raise other issues. This is no surprise. It extends the way that propaganda for the war effort turned to personal, social, or cultural ideas. Yet, if the tactic is similar, the intention is not: the newer memorials attempt to question this apolitical, homogenizing vision.

Many recent memorials address the singularity of World War II. They acknowledge, for instance, the importance of the home front as something that separates World War II from other wars. Total war lasting many years enlisted a home front that drew sharp distinctions between wartime and peacetime. There has never been a comparable return to “normalcy” because the nation has never again gone to war (or returned to peace) in the same way as it did in the 1940s. And this violent swing in economics, demographics, and cultural orientation from (as one wartime advertisement put it) “total war to total living” made for an unusual path of commemoration, if not historiography.

Fig. 3: Advertisement for Revere Copper and Brass, Architectural Forum (October 1942).

As social figures, war and postwar life were intimately connected, especially by admen who took on the burden of propaganda by contributing as much as a billion dollars to promoting the war (Frank W. Fox). Living memorials came out of this sort of rhetoric.

The co-existence of total war and crass consumerism, where war took over the productive capacity of the economy, surely has something to do with the twisted path of postwar commemoration. The Rosie the Riveter World War II Home Front National Historic Park in Richmond, California, is one attempt to turn toward social issues on the home front. Inserted into a Bay Area industrial landscape where warships were once built, the memorial honors the contribution of women and minorities, the labor movement, recycling and rationing, and advances in childcare. The home front might signify Rosie's biceps to one group, but it recalls internment camps, racial exclusion, and housing crises to others. All of these experiences have found commemorative expression recently and are part of a reconsideration of the war.

In fact, the inclination to discuss the World War II at all is relatively new. The generation that fought the war was famously loath to talk about it in the decades that followed. This laconic response is another characteristic that separates World War II from the rest. As Paul Fussell observed, World War I produced a library of memorable literature about the war experience and little anticipatory rhetoric about postwar life. World War II reversed the terms, creating a library of anticipation and less about the war experience itself—

at least at first (Fussell). If, in fact, the Second World War merely finished the first one, as is sometimes claimed, then the exhaustion of what Fussell calls high narrative is understandable.

By contrast, an abundance of “low narrative” issued from a home front eager with consumerist anticipation. Indeed, Fussell saw a relationship between the two. On the silence of World War II, he offered that the “more verbally confident poetry of the Great War emerged from a proud verbal culture, where language was trusted to convey and retain profound, permanent meaning, while the latter world from which these laconic notations arise is one so doubtful of language that the responsible feel that only the fewest words, debased as they have been by advertising, publicity, politics, and the rhetoric of nationalism, should be hazarded” (Fussell 135). Fussell called the war the first “Publicity War” (Fussell 153). Given these associations, it is easier to understand the aversion to traditional commemorative practices, which tended to glorify heroes and events. The resistance to traditional memorials may also be seen as a means of remaining quiet about the war. Thus there were tacit interdictions against representing the war with bodies (i.e. with figurative memorials) or words!

The silence has also been understood to issue, at least in part, from what some historians have called “limit events:” the Holocaust, the destruction of Hiroshima and Nagasaki by atomic bombs, if not the fire bombings of European and Japanese cities. These events “of such magnitude and profound violence” have been understood as permanent ruptures in the “normative foundations of legitimacy and so-called civilizing tendencies that underlie the constitution of political and moral community” (Gigliotti, Friedländer 134). We need not accept the idea of the limit event to see how profoundly it has affected the way people think about this period. The war’s association with such extreme historical events offers still another reason for the difficulties surrounding its commemoration.

The same war that produced the idea of the limit event came to be called the “Good War” by Studs Terkel in the mid-1980s (Terkel). Of course, “good war” is a latter-day description bestowed upon it from a distance of more than a generation and, tellingly, looking backward through the lens of the Vietnam War. In fact, the phrases “good war” and “limit event” arose within a few years of one another and are both part of the intense reckoning with the war that took place beginning in that 1980s. If anything, Terkel’s “good war” was chatty, filled with over 600 pages of interviews. The title, which by turns could be read as celebratory, quotidian, and ironic, ran against the understated forms of post-war memorialization. Its very nature was revisionist.

Paul Fussell also played a part in the historiographical reconsideration of the war. Brushing aside accounts like Terkel’s, Fussell wrote: “It was a savage, insensate affair, barely conceivable to the well-conducted imagination (the main reason there’s so little good writing about it) and hardly approachable without some currently unfashionable theory of human mass insanity” (Fussell 132). The war, he wrote, came with an

> unromantic and demoralizing sense that it had all been gone through before. For all its danger, the Second War often came close to being boring, with a sigh, not a scream, its typical sound. If loquacity was one of the signs of the Great War—think of all those trench poets and memoirists—something close to silence was the byproduct of experience in the Second War (Fussell 132).

How could such a war be actively commemorated without fundamental changes to how people thought about it?

Eternal Returns

It almost goes without saying that commemoration is a vital part of the dialogue about war. People often try to frame the memory of a war before it is finished, in part because the dead bodies arrive long before the fighting is done. The catastrophe of war comes on scales both personal and national, and both need to be reconciled. In this light, the turn towards reticent memorials after World War II looks increasingly like a willful attempt at avoidance. And the return to more active commemoration associated with the fiftieth anniversaries becomes more than an arbitrary cue of the calendar. What restrained and later stimulated commemoration of World War II? Why the shift in mood or mentality about World War II, a change unlike what has happened to commemorative practices after other wars? First, a general response before addressing World War II in specific.

Returning to the beginning of this essay, commemorations are anniversaries. In the literal sense embedded in the etymology, anniversaries are returns (from *annus*, Latin for "year" plus *vertere* from Latin for "to turn"). As a species of anniversary, commemorations are repetitions. They return us annually and at major anniversaries to a place or time set apart from everyday life in order to draw attention back to a particular event or hero from the past. And here a paradox emerges: commemorations are repetitions that honor unrepeatable events or singular heroes. Working with the unforgiving rigor of the calendar, they bring our attention back to historical events that are irreversible in nature. Commemorations thus embody two types of time—cyclical and linear—that are often seen as irreconcilable.

As Mircea Eliade argues in his classic book, *The Eternal Return*, these two time signatures divide traditional from modern society. While modern people tend to treat time as linear and unending, traditional society has been cyclical and repetitive in outlook. Although people in what Eliade called "archaic society" are conscious of history, "they make every effort to disregard it." Traditional cyclical time rejects the "profane, continuous time" embraced by modern history (Eliade xi). This "revolt against concrete, historical time" takes the form of a "periodical return to the mythical time of the beginning of things, to a 'Great Time'" (Eliade xi). Such myths explain the world and in so doing they reassure people that nothing is arbitrary. A natural disaster rapidly becomes "the flood," a loss in battle turns into a new incarnation of an archaic battle fought time out of mind. People then follow well-worn cultural scripts in order to calm the gods and themselves. As new wars and singular events become manifestations of eternal events, they lose their uniqueness as singular events. They lose, in other words, their potential to knock time off its orbit. Such myths prepare cultures for misfortune. They give people collective conventions of behavior, modes of release from anxiety, and the means to begin anew.

This periodic renewal goes beyond mere faith in a particular cosmology, however useful. Eliade sees it as a way that traditional society has kept history in abeyance, quite literally a way of annulling history (Eliade 157). In his account, history itself threatens traditional cultures because it presents events as autonomous, irreversible phenomena. With the development of rational history, the prayers and obligations people have used time immemorial to placate the gods become ineffectual. Moreover, with the suppression of cyclical time, the events that constitute time's passage come to seem arbitrary, without external logic. History explains individual events, but it provides no cosmic or transcendent order into which they fit, much less conventions for dealing with the aftermath of cataclysm. Pre-modern people engaged in an eternal return to mythical history in order to annul this sort of linear history and periodically create a clean slate. Traditional cultures have assimilated new events into mythical ones, thereby turning calamities like disastrous battles, to take an example relevant to the topic at hand, into repetitions of mythic battles. Violence is thus never arbitrary, but rather fits into authoritative narratives available to everyone.

Eliade's text is nothing short of a warning about modern, secular society's incapacity to manage catastrophe:

> …how can man tolerate the catastrophes and horrors of history—from collective deportations

> and massacres to atomic bombings—if beyond them he can glimpse no sign of transhistorical meaning; if they are only the blind play of economic, social, or political forces, or, even worse, only the result of 'liberties' that a minority takes and exercises daily on the stage of universal history? (Eliade 151)

Put another way, modern people lack the universally understood and practiced rituals and archetypes that would serve the purpose of giving disaster deeper meaning. Modernity's vulnerability to the vagaries of history helps explain modern reactions to disasters. Without archetypes that help cultures put things in their place, so to speak, people cast about in times of trouble. Might commemorative practices be one way that modern society has tried to compensate—one way it explains why young bodies have to be sacrificed for Fussell's unimaginably "savage, insensate affair." In this view, memorials are attempts to create permanent fixtures around which new archetypes might be founded and commemorations are attempts to impose cyclical practices around linear events. Commemorations bend time's arrow (Gould).

Where history retrieves events for its own purposes, in order to make a coherent narrative, commemorations take us back and back again to the same events at the appointed hour. They are a form of eternal return. They propose a different sort of "time," but do they keep history at bay? We can only speculate. They may be one way that the modern world, in the absence of standard myths, seeks an eternal return through other means, a return to the comforts of explanation once offered by the archaic past.

Eliade's insights shed light on modern commemoration in general, but World War II is exceptional, and Eliade knew it—in fact, he treated it like a limit event. An unlikely protagonist for an essay on modern commemoration, the scholar of ancient religion rooted his account in the catastrophe of the war. In fact, *The Eternal Return* is the academic equivalent of a war novel. Eliade wrote it in Paris after World War II as a political refugee from war-torn Romania. First published in French in 1949, its core concerns issue from ruptures he experienced firsthand. He finds in traditional society's devotion to repetition—it's cyclical view of time—a remedy for modernity's ills, a way to compensate for its fragility in the face of momentous change. But how can a cyclical and linear view of time be reconciled, especially in a secular society? Historical consciousness is not going to disappear.

History is a moving target. The war might be seen as functioning at the present moment as an historical pivot. The most distant war with living participants, it lies somewhere between event and myth. Earlier wars recede into the increasingly distant past, while later ones are too recent to provide archetypes for the cycles of eternal return. "The Good War's" temporal place, in other words, is the vanishing present, a moment ripe with creative potential. One wonders if this makes it simultaneously more open to the sorts of revision offered in this issue, if not also to mythification? It may be increasingly open to cyclical narrative.

Eliade himself believed that modern society retained its penchant for thinking in terms of mythic cycles. He found it in the traditional agricultural society of his own day, but more to the point, he thought he saw the "rehabilitation of cycle, fluctuation, periodic oscillation" in modern political economy and literature, citing in particular Nietzsche and Spengler, T.S. Eliot and James Joyce (Eliade 153). He just as easily could have looked at theories of the business *cycle*, which gained popularity among economists in the 1920s and 1930s to account for the cataclysmic economic shifts of the period. Keynesian economics would not be possible without an accepted theory of economic cycles. The Great Depression, a cataclysm often likened to war, required transhistorical explanations. All the better if they came girded in impressive calculations, mathematics being another universal, transhistorical phenomenon.

Do the repetitions of commemoration resist modern history's insistence on irreversibility? Countering history's "corrosive action," commemorative anniversaries may introduce salubrious feedback cycles that nourish the sorts of archetypes (of heroes, great events, etc.) through which future events might be understood or assimilated (Eliade 74). To elaborate on a case study in this issue, the Tuskegee Airmen

National Historic Site is instructive. The contribution of the Airmen is rightly taken as an historical precedent for the later Civil Rights Movement based on the shared struggle for racial integration. They are heroes, outstanding exemplars, and forerunners in the struggle for racial equality. In this role, they begin to take on a golden aura that blurs time's directionality.

Evidence comes from the response to the Tuskegee Airmen being honored invitees to Barack Obama's 2008 inauguration. William Broadwater, a Lieutenant in the "Tuskegee Experiment," inserted a circle into the arrow of this singular and irreversible event—the inauguration of the first African-American President—when he declared: "The culmination of our efforts and others' was this great prize we were given on Nov. 4. Now we feel like we've completed our mission. This inauguration will be the ultimate result" (Thomas-Lester and Ruane). Such historical appropriation is commonplace. What distinguishes Broadwater's sentiment, which was repeated by other Tuskegee Airmen, is that it offers a new *cri de guerre* to add to Westbrook's list: the war was fought to put an African-American in the White House. The Civil Rights Movement becomes "The Great Battle" and the Tuskegee Airmen were the shock troops, the soon-to-be mythic knights who fought it.

It is not just that history is put to creative use, or that a present event is understood through a past event. This happens all the time. Rather, it is the way the rhetoric collapses culmination and inauguration, forges one battle of many, and pivots rapidly from the past tense of a mission completed to the future tense of a new beginning. These are Elidian markers of eternal return. Such temporal slippage laminates Tuskegee and Obama's election into the many strata that in a distant future could serve as a golden age for civil rights. The preservation of Moton Field and the creation of a permanent memorial landscape there give place to these ideas and further generate commemorative cycles that reinforce these associations (Tuskegee).

Invocation, in other words, could be seen as part of the construction of archetypes. In Eliade's terms, this archetype-in-the-works projects the celebrants "into a mythical time" (Eliade 76). The invocation of Tuskegee, Obama (or Martin Luther King, Jr., Rosa Parks, and other luminaries in the Civil Rights Movement) constitutes nothing less than the birth through incantatory repetition of a new primordial past. Giving it a concrete place in the universe in the form of the Tuskegee Airmen National Historic Site makes permanent something that could have been ephemeral—in fact, one that sat neglected for decades. It is a rebirth. Memory is used to annul history, a move not uncommon in memory discourse (Nora, Klein).

The theory of eternal return leaves much to quibble with. It is colored with existential angst, an understandable tint given the period in which Eliade wrote. It overstates the clichéd rupture between pre-modern and modern. And it is streaked with Eurocentrism—Eliade frequently defines the West's conception of time against an Eastern other. Still, the central thesis offers a fresh way of understanding the cyclical nature of commemoration. Concepts of time surely presume psychologies about change.

The shape of time has everything to do with memory, understood as how people conceptually rearrange and make sense of what has happened in everyday life, including the so-called great events of history. Scholarship on memory, in particular, has introduced arrow-bending conceptions of time. In the last generation or so scholars have used the term memory to reintroduce mystical content back into rational historical discourse (Klein). Yet the roots of mystical conceptions of memory go back to foundational moments in American history. Abraham Lincoln penned the evocative phrase "mystic chords of memory" in his inaugural address, delivered just as modern historicism beat back traditional archetypes of managing change. The suprahistorical "mystic chords" transcend secular events without directly invoking religion, and they deliver the solution in the form of the people, who will be united through "the better angels of our nature." Memory, abstracted and free from specific events in history, seems to be the magic glue. Lincoln thus diffused the great rupture of the war by reference to eternal processes impenetrable by rational means.

The Civil War is important to understanding commemoration of World War II because it serves as the

originating moment of a trajectory or arrow shot annually in circles. This happens in two ways. First, by commemorating all wars at a single moment (i.e., Memorial Day or Veterans Day) and often at solitary points in space (e.g. at additive memorials or groups of memorials that share common ground) all wars are collapsed in time and space. Second, the succession of wars—the arrow—is carefully obscured by repetitions. The singular identity of each war surrenders to the whole. The original event is overtaken by commemorative repetition. And it is often displaced in time and space from the event, a removal from the rational bearings history often demands. Commemorative practice thus holds historical precision, plot, and periodicity at arm's length, even as it depends on them.

The usefulness of this arrow shot in circles is Eliadian, an eternal return that preserves elements of timelessness amid changefulness. Going back to the Civil War as a touchstone, this first modern American war—the one that broke all of the rules of warfare and altered the course of American history—is thus couched in terms of universals and repetitions rather than the radical rupture of modernity. Memorials that commemorate multiple wars thus suppress time's arrow and shunt the singularity of events. A limit event melts into an archetype.

These transformations are enacted or embodied through commemoration—through people coming together at special sites on special days. It almost goes without saying that the main reason to insert cycles into modern linear time is to invite people to participate rather than merely observe. Such commemoration enfolds older wars with waning public interest into commemorations of more recent wars with still active commemorative communities. If commemoration were somehow reduced to the rote act of paying respect to a singular event from the past, it would be a cold, static cultural practice, and soon wither. But there are few set scripts or settled conventions for modern commemoration. We scarcely have terms for what goes on in front of modern memorials.

What compels conventions of commemoration to change or to remain the same? In the case of World War II, a close reading of how commemoration has changed at several memorials would be welcome. It should reveal changing attitudes toward the war and commemoration itself within specific communities. Commemorations surely can provoke historical reconsideration. But, as Eliade should remind us, commemorative acts also allow us to transcend time's arrow and encounter the remoteness of a past event with immediacy—in short, they may allow us to escape history.

Notes

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