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Souvenir Battlefields: How Presidents Use Rhetoric of Place to Shape the American Ethos

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ABSTRACT: This study discusses how perceptions of national ethos change over time, examining presidential rhetoric at World War II commemoration ceremonies at Normandy. In each situation, presidents employed the *unities* of time, place, and action to construct collective memory and national ethos. Through the unity of time, presidents employ political myths to artfully compress past and present in a specific location; through the unity of place, presidents characterize battlefields as souvenirs, giving their audiences a sense of continuity, purpose, and ownership; through the unity of action, presidents demonstrate that present actions are consistent with a historical national ethos.

KEYWORDS: national ethos, presidential rhetoric, unities, World War II, place attachment

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In times of war, Commanders-in-Chief employ rhetorical tactics to shape the American national character in ways that they hope will unify political will. In times of peace, however, without a clear enemy to help define the national character by contrast or negation, presidents often attempt to “re-collect” (Aden et al., 2009) their audience rhetorically around sites of war to reinvigorate a collective national ethos, or the disposition or attitude peculiar to the people of a specific nation that distinguishes them as a social unit with a collective sense of identity (Campbell, 1996, p. 120), the whole of which is more than the sum of its parts (see McGee, 1975, p. 247; Anderson, 1991, p. 4). This identity is not a fixed quality but a political culture that develops over time as members recognize shared interests and substance (Burke, 1950, pp. 23-25). Its boundaries, political and conceptual, envelop an “imagined community” in which “the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship” (Anderson, 1991, pp. 6-7).

In the latter part of the twentieth century and into the twenty-first, presidents often have used World War II battlefields as souvenirs, anchoring public memory on a tangible, material embodiment of “memory, identity, and place” that unifies “individual and group experiences” (Aden et al., 2009, p. 321) into a collective identity (see Donofrio, 2010). Presidential commemoration speeches in these locations use language to give presence to the places themselves, and then use those places as levers to move the audience of those speeches (Perelman, 1982, p. 19) and to inspire the audience to embody the national ethos those places represent. For seventy years, presidential rhetors have made the pilgrimage to Normandy to commemorate the D-Day invasion of 1944 on the actual battlefields, calling upon the American people to re-collect at those places. The present study explores how four modern presidents have used the Normandy coast as a souvenir battlefield that defined the American national ethos with respect to World War II.

Place Attachment and Souvenir Battlefields

Each of the presidents who spoke at Normandy deemed it important to commemorate American participation in the D-Day invasion from one of two specific places in France—Reagan and Clinton at Pointe du Hoc; Clinton, Bush, and Obama at the American Cemetery at Colleville-sur-Mer. Both locations have been carefully preserved, the former as a memorial park, the latter as a cemetery, to prevent development from changing the physical terrain. Thus, each president was able to anchor his audience’s memories in material things, and each attempted to re-recreate the scenes of the battle with vivid language that invoked sounds, smells, and sights from the past. Most of the presidential rhetors worked to attach that vivid imagery to the landscape, drawing on individuals’ memories to create a public memory of the invasion. The memories to which each President spoke are tied to the location: nowhere in America could “st[r]essing references to physical realities to move an audience” (Perelman, 1982, p. 35) be as effective on the anniversary of D-Day as Normandy’s “lonely, windswept point” (Reagan, 1984a, p. 43). To understand why each speaker could use place to give presence to his words and then shape the contemporary American ethos, one must understand the sociological concept of place and of place attachment, or the investment of geographical locations with cultural or social significance.

The term *place* refers to a specific geographic location that has a material form—that is, physical dimensions—and that has been invested with meaning and value by a

person or people (Gieryn, 2000). Some social geographers argue against the notion that “an immutable link between cultures, peoples, or identities and specific places are intertwined,” but others argue that communities use discourse to explicitly associate cultural values with places, thus giving those places symbolic importance (Keith & Pile, 2004; Lutwack, 1984; Radhakrishnan, 1996). A sense of place can be a sense of connection with one’s surroundings (Stedman, 2003). or an awareness of the way places are positioned in time (Leach, 1999); a sense of place affects identity and behavior, limiting discourse and defining propriety (Philipsen, 1992, p. 22).

Researchers in the last two decades have conducted extensive exploration into the psychological phenomenon of place attachment (Giuliani, 2003), the processes by which place attachment occurs (Donofrio, 2010; Riley, 2010) the ways that public memory becomes associated with place (Aden *et al.*, 2009; Cimprich, 2011), and the ways that memorials are used to build collective identity (Dickinson, Blair, & Ott, 2010; Doss, 2012; Gurler & Ozer, 2013; Low, Oliver, & Rhodes, 2015). In much of this research, the places in question are close in proximity to the people who are attached to them; people find meaning in a memorial, for example, by being there and experiencing the place (Doss, 2012), or people create an identity that is embedded in the geography of the region where they live (Hummon, 2012). However, recent research in human geography and sociology shows that people develop place attachment to distant, imaginary, or remembered places, as well as those in close proximity to them (Barcus & Brunn, 2010; Easthope, 2009). In response to the substantial body of research on place attachment, researchers have also begun to explore how places of public memory are used to forget, minimize, or reframe unpleasant elements of a collective identity (Grunebaum-Ralph, 2001; Ricoeur, 2004; Segall 2014).

Scholarly discourse about the *rhetorical* use of place is more limited, though it is becoming a topic of increasing interest (Aden, 1999; Dickinson, Blair, & Ott, 2010; Endres & Senda-Cook, 2011; Jorgensen-Earp and Lanzilloti, 1998; Prash, 2016). National ethos or identity, for example, is constructed rhetorically and represents an “imagined community” that may be associated with specific places (de Cillia, Reisigl, and Wodak, 1999). To integrate events, ideals, and attitudes from and about the past to influence a community’s perceptions of its history, its present meaning, and its destiny (Lowenthal, 1975; Schwartz, 1982), rhetors often attempt to unify present and past through a sense of nostalgia evoked by specific geographical places (Dickinson, 1997), though doing so becomes more difficult when such rhetoric must transform into “shared” experience that which is not literally shared at all (Hamilton, 1994; Kammen, 1991). Thus, rhetors may also construct collective identity by locating collective memory in metaphorical “places” of discourse (Shotter, 1986) which invite members of the group to cultivate loyalty to the ideals embodied there (Bodnar, 1992, pp. 14-15).

A significant body of literature investigates rhetorical aspects of memorials and of popular culture texts influenced by or functioning as war memorials, but until recently the memorials themselves were the focus, as an elements of visual rhetoric or as emblems of collective memory (Dickinson, Blair, & Ott, 2010). As additional research in this area would add substantially to our understanding of collective memory and national ethos, the present study expands Weaver’s (1995) claim that in the right time, place, and circumstance, rhetors can also build collective memory *in* and *about* places where defining events occurred. Rhetors reinforce the significance of those events by

negotiating a complete account of them, by supplying missing information, or by changing unacceptable characteristics, and then by making the physical place an anchor and cue for the memory (Halbwachs, 1980). By singling out specific objects, people, or locations in discourse, the rhetor links the physical place with a conceptual one and imparts to those events “a *presence* that prevents them from being neglected” (Perelman, 1982, p. 35). Such locations become *souvenir places* that effectively anchor memory to time and action, giving presence to events long past, and “selecting a single moment as representative of the entire conflict” (Burke, 1950, pp. 328-329). In the speeches of this study, presidential rhetors use Normandy as a souvenir to anchor collective memory of World War II to specific locations in order to shape the American ethos.

The Unities: Time, Place, and Action in Presidential Commemoration Rhetoric

To effectively study how rhetors use souvenir places to shape national character, scholars need a rhetorical-critical heuristic that can provide insight into how rhetors anchor national ethos to places. The unities of time, place, and action, derived from Aristotle’s *Poetics*, refer to the three elements of dramatic action that may be manipulated to provide an emotional focus to which audiences respond strongly (Holman and Harmon, 1992, pp. 488-489). Perelman (1982) argues that “what is present for us is foremost in our minds and important to us. What loses in importance becomes abstract, almost nonexistent” (p. 36). Because collective memory and national ethos are both abstract concepts, they have minimal influence on the audience unless the rhetor creates presence, using language to move “realities that are distant in time and space” (p. 35), to a place that is not only foremost in the audience’s minds (a metaphorical place), but that is also geographically present (a literal place), and making those actions seem to be here and now. In this way, the rhetor unifies time, place, and action, giving listeners “the illusion that the convictions and feelings [the rhetor] arouses within them have come not from him but from...their innermost consciousness” (Halbwachs, 1980, p. 45). Epideictic speeches about battles delivered on the very battlefield the speeches commemorate exhibit dramatic elements of timing, location, and both symbolic and historical action (Burke, 1950). They so frequently rely on a rhetorical re-creation of past action in the present that it is worth employing the unities as a heuristic for criticism.

To achieve the unity of action the presidential rhetor must create “the *perception* of dramatic sequence and structure” in his or her speech by giving an account of the historical events that is “intelligib[le] as a sequence of human actions” (Halliwell, 1986, pp. 100-101). In war commemoration, the presidential rhetor identifies the audience with the characters in the narrative; when the audience can see themselves in the historical action, the events become intelligible. A number of rhetorical devices indicate the unity of action, including emphasis on the parallelism between historical and symbolic action and claims that the action is consistent with elements of a collective character. Even if the rhetor takes minor liberties with the historical facts, firmly uniting action with place and time gives presence to the rhetoric.

To achieve the unity of time, the rhetor often tells a story or a series of stories in which the audience can experience past, present, and future simultaneously (Frentz, 1985, p.7). The rhetor may allude to political myths that emphasize the continuity of American character across generations (Bass and Cherwitz, 1978, p. 214). He or she may also employ ideographs, metaphors, stories, and vivid description that collapse past into

present or that re-situate real action in another time, focusing less on the historicity of events than on the significance of past events to present or future identity. Commemorative epideictic rhetoric often relies on creating an eternal present through the vivid reconstruction of memory—sometimes, even, of borrowed memory.

To achieve unity of place, the presidential rhetor must fuse a location's past importance with its present significance, turning a place into a souvenir for the audience—a material thing that provides the audience direct, physical contact with something that may keep memories from dimming. Because a geographic place tends to be both concrete and stable over time, it anchors memories of an event for the collective as well as the individual, for those who have not experienced the event directly as well as for those who have (Halbwachs, 1980, p. 157). It also becomes the cue for entire “categor[ies] of remembrances...to reappear.” (Halbwachs, 1980, p. 140). To unify place with time and action, rhetors often use vivid sensory descriptions of surroundings, repeated references to landmarks or monuments, and repeated use of metaphors about ground, earth, water, and other geographical features.

Together, the unities of time, place, and action bear particular significance upon the formation of national character through commemorative rhetoric at battle sites. Commemorations tend to be held on anniversaries, liminal times in which boundaries between past and present grow thin, unifying time. By commemorating the great battles of a war on the battlefields themselves, presidents figuratively contain the collective memory and national character where they stand, giving the stories they tell coherence, credibility, and verisimilitude to the historical events (Fisher, 1984). As the audience experiences the commemoration, the group develops a collective memory of the event as portrayed by the president, who represents all Americans. The various memories, stories, representations, and imaginings of the audience converge and are unified by a single understanding of the experience and a single interpretation of the national ethos. A nation does not go to war just because it has the guns, but because doing so is an expression of something essential to the national character (Black, 1970). So when presidents call upon normative values of courage, loyalty, and self-sacrifice and then use those values to justify the historical events of war and to commemorate those events in the present, they reinforce the political myth in which Americans fight good wars well, contributing to the collective memory of the war and to the national character they represent. A fitting speech will persuade the audience to see the place as the presidents describe it and to believe in the political myth the presidents reinforce; the president, thus unifying time, place, and action in his rhetoric, gives *presence* to the political myths of America.

Place in Commemoration Speeches of the D-Day Invasion

The Allied invasion of Normandy on June 6, 1944, was a turning point in the war in Europe. However, Presidents did not travel to Normandy to commemorate the event on its decade anniversaries until Reagan spoke at Pointe-du-Hoc in 1984. Eisenhower, remembering the carnage of the invasion, issued a brief written statement in 1954 before retreating to Camp David, and Johnson remained stateside for a year after Kennedy's assassination (Beschloss, 2014). Nixon, busy with Arab-Israeli diplomacy (U.S. Department of State, 2013), would resign two months after the 1974 anniversary of the invasion, and did not speak at the battlefield, either. Thus, this study considers five presidential commemoration speeches: the address delivered by Ronald Reagan in 1984,

two addresses delivered by Bill Clinton in 1994, an address co-delivered by George W. Bush and French President Jacques Chirac in 2004, and an address delivered by Barack Obama in 2014.

D-Day + 40 Years: Ronald Reagan at Pointe du Hoc

At the fortieth anniversary of D-Day, Ronald Reagan, a World War II airman himself, spoke to veterans and their families at Pointe du Hoc (Montgomery, 1984, p. 17). In the role of head of state, Reagan focused the first part of his commemoration on building in his 1984 audience a national ethos that mirrored the soldiers' ethos of 1944. He began his address by using Pointe du Hoc as a souvenir to guide the audience through a rhetorical recreation of the battle: "We stand on a lonely, windswept point on the northern shore of France. The air is soft; but 40 years ago at this moment, the air was dense with smoke and the cries of men and the air was filled with the crack of rifle fire and the roar of cannon..." Reagan further used the souvenir to symbolize other battlefields and other individuals who fought for the freedom he praised. In doing so, he used inductive arguments to motivate his audience to act using discourse that is "concerned with the future," but for which the rhetor finds it "necessary to draw examples from the past" (Aristotle, 1991, p.274).

By comparing Pointe du Hoc to American Revolutionary War sites, the president unified time in the speech. He declared that the purpose of the battle was "to reclaim this continent to liberty," for "free nations had fallen...millions cried out for liberation. Europe was enslaved" by the "terrible shadow" of Nazi "tyranny," a term that echoes American origin myths. Because the president so explicitly compared the two conflicts, he established that Americans by nature fight against tyranny, regardless of historical era; if this element of the American ethos had remained consistent between the 1770s and the 1940s, how much more so in the 40 short years between 1944 and 1984?

In addition to unifying time, Reagan also unified action and place by singling out the American Ranger monument, which "symbolizes the Ranger daggers that were thrust into the top of these cliffs" above Omaha beach where the Allies began to "seize back the Continent of Europe" through courage, persistence, and progress. Reagan then remarked, "And before me are the men who put them there." The president thus located his rhetoric between the past, the cliffs, and the events of the battle—all behind him—and the present, the audience, and the memorial of the battle—all before him.

Reagan frequently used the metaphor of standing in this speech, further emphasizing the degree to which American ethos was grounded in place. He declared that Americans "stood and fought" in response to European prayers for rescue. He exhorted them to "make a vow to ou[r] dead...borne by their memory, let us continue to stand for the ideals for which they lived and died." In this instance, the familiar metaphor unifies Normandy with deliberate action—declaring one's beliefs publicly, defending them boldly, and not retreating from *this* place—associated with the Allies' invasion. While Reagan attributed victory to the *Allies*, the only Allies he described were American, implying that American values exemplified all the Allies' consistency of purpose. Furthermore, the president Reagan metonymically portrayed the veterans in the audience as the Allies as a whole: "These are the boys of Pointe du Hoc. These are the men who took the cliffs. These are the champions who helped free a continent. These are the heroes who helped end a war." Such a depiction of the American ethos secured Pointe du

Hoc's status as a representative place in American political culture and collective memory.

With a sense of the American ethos established, Reagan shifted his rhetorical focus, contrasting American character at Pointe du Hoc in 1944 against the character of the Soviet Union in 1984, claiming that because of the ominous Soviet presence, "Allied forces still stand on this continent. Today, as 40 years ago, our armies are here for only one purpose—to protect and defend democracy." In his next sentences, however, the Commander-in-Chief claims that a measure of reconciliation with the Soviet Union, rather than outright war, is America's new goal: that "we are ready to seize that beachhead" of peace. The cliffs again function as souvenirs; furthermore, commemoration reinforces the continuity of American identity through forty years of Cold War—as Reagan says, "we are bound today by what bound us 40 years ago, the same loyalties, traditions, and beliefs." In Reagan's words, however, the Cold War enemy is substituted for the World War II enemy, whose "uninvited, unwanted, unyielding" character he contrasts against that of the heroic American. By again unifying place and action over a span of time, Reagan clearly defined "American" in the context of U.S.-Soviet relations; later he supported this definition by asserting that "democracy is worth dying for, because it's the most deeply honorable form of government ever devised by man. All of you loved liberty; all of you were willing to fight tyranny; and you knew the people of your countries were behind you." The D-Day invasion, supported by noncombatants, demonstrated this sense of purpose; Reagan called for noncombatant Americans in 1984 to actively support his Cold War foreign policy agenda—essentially "standing" behind him.

Having established the historical significance of Pointe du Hoc and using that significance to define the American ethos, the president called his audience to action, arguing that those who sacrificed in 1944 did so for "faith, and belief...loyalty and love...the deep knowledge... that there is a profound, moral difference between the use of force for liberation and the use of force for conquest." In honoring the memory of the invasion at Pointe du Hoc, Reagan suggested that his 1984 audience echoed the soldiers' own constancy and loyalty to America. If the audience accepted Reagan's construction of the national ethos through the rhetorical unification of action, place, and time, perhaps they might have been more likely to accept his conclusion that action, rather than inaction, was the appropriate method of honoring the veterans and the nation for which they fought.

D-Day + 50 Years: William J. Clinton at Pointe du Hoc and Colleville-sur-Mer

Ten years later, Bill Clinton addressed some of the same veterans in a very different world. Unlike Reagan, who had served in World War II, Clinton's alleged evasion of military service in Vietnam complicated his credibility in claiming to represent the American ethos he described. More importantly, though, Clinton was not a member of the World War II generation, and much of his American audience at home thought of the war as history, not as remembered experience. The morning of June 6, 1994, Clinton spoke at a battlefield; that evening, he spoke at the U. S. National Cemetery at Colleville-sur-Mer, above Omaha Beach (Clinton, 1994a). While in his earlier speech Clinton used his setting to make real the events and mission of fifty years before, the speech at Colleville-sur-Mer served to make real the people of the invasion and their sacrifices.

Both speeches were scheduled to begin at or soon after the corresponding time the battle had begun on D-Day. In 1944, soldiers disembarked at Omaha Beach around 7:00 AM and Rangers scaled Pointe du Hoc just before 9:00 AM; in 1994, Clinton began his speech at Colleville-sur-Mer less than an hour after 7:00 AM and at Pointe du Hoc just before 9:00 AM. The planned schedule thus unified past and present time in two specific places.

Speechwriter Eric Liu later explained that he considered the commemoration events at Normandy to be “Clinton’s biggest moment on the world stage” to that point, and one of the biggest global convocations since the end of the Cold War” (Liu, 2014). Liu and his staff took pains to anchor Clinton’s rhetoric in the location, taking cues from Peggy Noonan’s work on Reagan’s 1984 Pointe du Hoc speech, crafting an address that allowed Clinton to make “an emotional connection at Colleville that will be hard ever to match” (Liu, 2014) by first using various features of the Normandy countryside as souvenirs to stir his audience’s collective memory, then illustrating those souvenirs with anecdotes of individual soldiers.

At the cemetery at Colleville-sur-Mer, above Omaha Beach, for example, Clinton directed his audience to experience in the present “this hallowed place that speaks, more than anything else, in silence.” The silence of the cemetery had a memorial quality in 1994, broken only by “the simple sounds of freedom barely breaking the silence—peaceful silence, ordinary silence.” With his audience attuned to its surroundings, Clinton moved them into the battle with vivid description of “these beaches echo[ing] with the sounds of staccato gunfire, the roar of aircraft, the thunder of bombardment.” At the end of the speech, Clinton asserted, “those simple sounds of freedom we hear today are [the soldiers’] voices speaking to us across the years” (Clinton, 1994a)

As he had done at Colleville-sur-Mer, Clinton overtly worked to shape the national ethos using the location as souvenir from his first sentence at Pointe du Hoc, declaring, “We stand on sacred soil. Fifty years ago at this place a miracle of liberation began. On that morning, democracy’s forces landed to end the enslavement of Europe.” Clinton also used vivid language to give his message presence, declaring, for example, that “here, you, the Army Rangers...waded to shore and you began to climb—up on ropes slick with sea and sand—up, as the Germans shot down and tried to cut your lines. Up, sometimes holding to the cliffs with nothing but the knives you had and your own bare hands...” Repeatedly, the president grounded the long-term significance of the battle in the immediate location with phrases like, “here, exactly here, the first Ranger stood” (Clinton, 1994b).

Unlike Reagan, who associated D-Day with the political myth of the American Revolution, Clinton reached further into European history, characterizing the invasion as “the greatest crusade” (Clinton, 1994a) of a war between good and evil in which “lion-hearted” warriors embarked on a quest to free Europe. Clinton spends a substantial part of each speech developing the crusade metaphor and giving presence to the story through epic and poetic language, as at Pointe du Hoc, when he characterized the invading armies as “the tip of a spear the free world had spent sharpening; a spear they began on this morning in 1944 to plunge into the heart of the Nazi empire.” In Clinton’s epic, the soldiers “fought for the very survival of democracy” against Hitler and his regime, who “didn’t understand what happens when the free unite behind a great and worthy cause.” These united people are driven by a supernatural power derived from the American ethos,

particularly “the ingenuity of free citizens and the confidence that they fought for a good cause under the gaze of a loving God.” This power is expressed in the “personal choices” of those who exemplify the American character, “millions of them gathered together as one, like the stars of a majestic galaxy” (Clinton, 1994b).

Clinton re-collected his American audience not by simply engaging them in general statements about the invasion, but by compressing the drama of Normandy into the experiences of individual soldiers. In both speeches, he gave the characters of his narrative real faces by asking the “American heroes to stand” and be recognized before the assembly at Pointe du Hoc. There, Clinton rhetorically re-created the landscape of 1944, bringing presence to the story of two Rangers who scaled the cliffs, a specific story representative of the hundreds of others that could be told about that day. At Colleville-sur-Mer he did the same to illustrate the human cost of the battle by naming specific people and quantifying some of the relationships between the fallen.

To unify time in discourse, a rhetor must connect past, present, and future; Clinton used his crusade epic to give his audience a sense of the past, and he connected it to present and future using the debarkation as a metaphor for progress; the characters in his epic move across the beaches even as Americans move forward through time. At Colleville-sur-Mer, Clinton recounted how the troops rallied to resume the attack, and proclaims that “[a]t that exact moment on these beaches, the forces of freedom turned the tide of the 20th century” almost literally by making *progress* “out of their landing craft and into the water, away from their youth and toward a savage place many of them would sadly never leave.” According to Clinton, the “survivors of the first wave [of attack] huddled behind a seawall” that protected them from the dangers on land until it became clear that “staying put meant certain death”; the only alternative, he noted, was to move forward and “up this bluff” to “[secure] a foothold for freedom.” Beyond simply recounting the soldiers’ struggles as dramatic action, Clinton reveals that the battle is emblematic of the American ethos *through* time, fulfilling its “mission” to embrace a changing world even in the face of hardship: “Like the soldiers of Omaha Beach, we cannot stand still...For just as freedom has a price, it also has a purpose, and it’s [*sic*] name is progress” (Clinton, 1994a). As head of state, Clinton counseled his audience that the past should direct the present towards future progress and positive change. To accomplish this purpose, he rhetorically unifies time and action by using the cliffs as souvenirs—visual cues that enhance the emotional presence of the message and crystallize lessons to be applied to collective American life.

The President closed his speech at Pointe du Hoc by calling Americans to commit themselves to “the mission of freedom” and the commitment Normandy symbolized; rededicating the souvenir, he declares, “if we should ever falter, we need only remember you at his spot 50 years ago, and you, again, at this spot today.” The unities of time, place, and action in this speech revealed how the president refocused the American ethos on the values and motives of its political myth by casting the ideology of American democracy as an element of a greater cosmological plan (Bass & Cherwitz, 1978, p. 217). When Clinton used Pointe du Hoc to illustrate normative values of courage, loyalty, and self-sacrifice exhibited on D-Day, he reinforced its mythological significance in Americans’ collective memory of the war and shaped the national ethos he represented.

D-Day + 60 Years: George W. Bush and Jacques Chirac at Colleville-sur-Mer

In 2004, George W. Bush's speechwriter, Michael Gerson, knew that unifying time, action, and the materiality of Colleville-sur-Mer remained key to re-collecting an American ethos around the D-Day invasion. At Gerson's direction "a researcher with a White House advance team [went] to the American cemetery at Colleville-sur-Mer, France, to soak in the setting" before Gerson and his team drafted the speech ("Changing world," 2004), but by the time George W. Bush actually spoke at the American Cemetery on June 6, the rhetorical situation had already changed.

Bush spoke at a particularly volatile time in his administration. The 2004 G-8 Summit convened days after the D-Day commemoration, and the war in Iraq continued to present rhetorical and political challenges. The event with the most immediate impact on Bush's speech, however, was the death of Ronald Reagan on June 5, 2004 (Bush, 2004a), the evening before Bush spoke. Reagan's Pointe du Hoc speech (written by Peggy Noonan) was considered a "masterpiece" by later presidential speechwriters (Liu, 2014). The death of the former President was particularly significant because Reagan had ten years before been diagnosed with Alzheimer's syndrome (Reagan, 1994), a debilitating brain condition that robs sufferers of their cognitive functions, their memories, and thus their very identities. Bush spoke under the shadow of not only Reagan the Orator, but also under the shadow of memory loss. Many people mourned the loss of World War II veterans to age and illnesses; those who could remember their parts in the invasion were becoming harder to find, and Reagan's death highlighted the tenuous nature of memory.

Jacques Chirac, then President of France, offered a brief address before ceding the podium to Bush. Chirac's speech is of note in this situation, as well, because it employed the style of American commemoration speeches. Like Abraham Lincoln in the Gettysburg Address, Chirac calls the American Cemetery at Colleville-sur-Mer "hallowed ground"; echoing Reagan's 1986 speech following the Space Shuttle Challenger disaster, Chirac "salute[d] that flight of the human soul" by which American fighters, "[o]vercoming their fear, all fears...raised the human consciousness onto a higher plane." Also, given the imminent G-8 Summit, Chirac used location to draw parallels between French and American interests, declaring, "the same humanist values have shaped the destinies of France and America...rooted in the very depths of our cultures and civilization...From the plains of Yorktown to the beaches of Normandy..." (Chirac, 2004). Chirac's use of these rhetorical devices effectively removed them from Bush's speech.

When Bush took his place at the podium, he faced multiple imperatives to unify the country and to build a sense of global community, and was constrained by the style and content of Chirac's address. In this situation, the need to re-collect the audience through the unity of time, place, and action was all the more pressing. The speech adhered to the basic rhetorical strategy of used by Reagan and Clinton, but is somewhat less persistent in making place the unifying element of the speech. For example, Bush spent nearly ten minutes on a series of vignettes about the invasion and its impact on the war, but nearly all of the story is told in past tense, punctuated only by two reminders that he and the audience were standing (or sitting) on that same battlefield: once he refers to "this side of the Channel" and once to a soldier who "died on the beach below us" (Bush, 2004b). After he concluded the story of the battle, however, he made more references to the place, noting, "History will always record where that road [to V-E Day] began. It began here, with the first footprints on the beaches of Normandy."

As did the speeches of Reagan and Clinton, Bush's speech made numerous references to the actions of the veterans in his immediate audience. However, a number of those references emphasized the differences between those fighters and Americans of 2004. Bush noted near the beginning, "With us today are Americans who first saw this place at a distance... Time and providence have brought them back to see once more the beaches and the cliffs, the crosses and the Stars of David"—note that in his words, time and providence have brought *them* back, rather than *us*. Later in the speech, Bush observes, "Generations to come will know what happened here, but these men heard the guns" and "Visitors will always pay respects at this cemetery, but these veterans come looking for a name, and remembering faces and voices from a lifetime ago," both of which distance the veterans from the rest of the audience, rather than "re-collecting" them. In a statement that was quite evidently intended to be respectful, Bush says, "Only the ones who made that crossing can know what it was like." While certainly true, the statement does not unify the audience, instead driving yet another wedge between the veterans and the rest of the audience. After that statement, Bush's attempts to re-create selected sights and sounds of the battlefield from the point of view of a soldier in the amphibious landing on Omaha Beach seemed hollow: "the pitching deck...the whistles of shells...the white jets of water from enemy fire...the sound of bullets hitting the steel ramp that was about to fall." Other attempts at visual imagery were too gruesome or too heartrending to inspire the audience to want to experience past and present together.

Bush's attempts to unify time and place are uneven in the speech, following the emerging genre of commemoration speeches but striking dissonant notes. Whereas Reagan and Clinton compressed time from two eras (1944 and the speaker's day), Bush compressed time memory from three different eras: 1944, the commemorations of 1984 and 1994, and the speaker's present (2004). Bush's words seem effective in condensing all these eras into one: he began his speech by acknowledging the heroes: "Today," he says, "we honor all the veterans...and all their comrades who never left." Here and elsewhere in the speech, he framed the American Cemetery at Colleville-sur-Mer as a significant place through layers of time and through layers of action: not only *was* the American Cemetery a battlefield, but it *has been* the resting place of fallen fighters and *continues to be* a place for remembering. The many references to memory, though, are more ambivalent than one would expect to see in a commemorative address that could re-collect the audience. The memories to which Bush referred are noble, but they are also painful ("images they would spend a lifetime preferring to forget"), mournful ("we think of men in the promise years of life, loved and mourned and missed, to this day"), and lonely ("If I could see this daughter of mine, I wouldn't mind dying."). Though realistic and honest, such memories are not especially effective for unifying the audience.

Perhaps the most poignant statement Bush made in the speech was one that most surely unified past, present, and future with the geographical place—but even so missed the mark. At the end of the speech, Bush says to the veterans who worked to conquer fascism, "That difficult summit was reached, then passed, in 60 years of living. Now has come a time of reflection, with thoughts of another horizon, and the hope of reunion with the boys you knew. I want each of you to understand, you will be honored ever and always by the country you served and by the nations you freed." Past, present, and future come together where the Rangers reached the summit of the Normandy cliffs, but the

words seemed to move the audience too quickly into a future *without* the very people the speech was to honor.

D-Day + 70 Years: Barack Obama at Colleville-sur-Mer

Eric Liu, President Clinton's speechwriter, wrote before the D-Day ceremonies held in 2014, that "When President Obama speaks ... the occasion will be, in a wholly different way, complex. There will be fewer surviving heroes there. Vladimir Putin's presence will be awkward. No one speaks hopefully about Russia now, or of the irresistibility of liberal democracy worldwide." Despite these very real challenges of Obama's rhetorical situation—notably having Putin, German Chancellor Angela Merkel, and Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko conversing mere months after Russia's "incursion into Ukraine" (Smith, 2014)—Obama's speech adeptly unified time, place, and action and re-collected his American audience at Normandy.

The style of the speech was vividly cinematic, evoking an opening montage of a film about the invasion. Around two minutes into the speech, the President made the first unifying reference to time, place, and action, noting, "I'm honored to return here today to pay tribute to the men and women of a generation who defied every danger—among them, our veterans of D-Day" (Obama, 2014). He thanked the commemoration's French hosts for "the generosity that you've shown the Americans who've come here over the generations," of which the gathering of that day was part. Like his predecessors, Obama re-told the story of the invasion; in almost every part of the story, though, he mentioned what happened "...here, at Omaha" or inserted his personal connections, remembering his own family's part in the events of June, 1944. The history in this speech is *living* history.

Unlike Reagan, who spoke to veterans of his own generation, and unlike both Clinton and Bush, who spoke to veterans of their parents' generation, Obama spoke to veterans of his grandparents' generation. Unifying time and place, then, became increasingly significant for Obama because most of his audience would have had no direct recollection of World War II. They could not remember what happened, except through the stories they had heard, so Obama makes explicit the reason for commemorating D-Day *there*, on the cliffs above Omaha Beach at Colleville-sur-Mer: "Here, we don't just commemorate victory, as proud of that victory as we are. We don't just honor sacrifice, as grateful as the world is. We come to remember why...we come to tell the story of the men and women who did it so that it remains seared into the memory of a future world." *We*, the people of 2014, were to take it upon ourselves to "bear what witness we can to what happened when the boys from America reached Omaha Beach," even though we did not experience it ourselves.

Obama also explicitly ties the actions of the invading Americans to contemporary American national ethos, remarking, "But it was here, on these shores, that the tide was turned in that common struggle for freedom...We say it now as if it couldn't be any other way," and noting that America did not stay in Europe to add to its own territory (perhaps making a subtle dig at Putin here and defining the American ethos in contrast to Russia). Most importantly, the President states, "...America's claim—our commitment—to liberty, our claim to equality, our claim to freedom and to the inherent dignity of every human being—that claim is written in the blood on these beaches, and it will endure for eternity." Past action, indicative of a timeless American character, is indelibly linked to place; in Obama's speech, remembering that link is paramount because those memories of

their fallen comrades "drove [the GIs] to live their lives each day as best they possibly could."

Like each of the presidents who spoke at Normandy on the anniversaries of D-Day, Obama acknowledged individual veterans who sat in the audience. Unlike the other speakers, though, Obama paired three of these vignettes with the vignettes of contemporary service members whose story echoed the veteran's. He spoke of Wilson Colwell, a 16-year-old paratrooper with the 101st Airborne, and then assured him that another young service member, Specialist Jannise Rodriguez of the same unit, "just last month earned the title of the 101st Airborne Division Air Assault Soldier of the Year. And that's inspiring but not surprising..." because the service members of today are continuing the work that the veterans began. Obama repeats the pattern twice before telling more stories about contemporary service members and their choice "to serve a cause that's greater than self"—that represents the American ethos.

The end of the speech carries the American ethos into the future by condensing past, present, and future and by re-shaping the need for place as a souvenir. Obama said, "We are on this Earth for only a moment in time. And fewer of us have parents and grandparents to tell us about what the veterans of D-Day did here 70 years ago....So we have to tell their stories for them." He is thus calling for Americans to convert their private memories of World War II, which are finite, to a public memory that endures. Moreover, those memories are not to be dissociated from the places where they occurred, but abstracted from them. He says, "And someday, future generations, whether 70 or 700 years hence, will gather at places like this to honor" this generation of service members "and to say that these were generations of men and women who proved once again that the United States of America is and will remain the greatest force for freedom the world has ever known."

Completing the Work of the Guns

"On some rare occasions," Eric Liu observed, "when a president speaks (or chooses not to, as Dwight Eisenhower did on June 6, 1954), the political and geopolitical noise recedes. What we're left with is one person embodying for one moment the memory of a nation that, for all its amnesia, remembers that it is still indispensable. That's the power of the American presidency. And it's the message of D-Day + forever" (Liu, 2014). The addresses by Reagan, Bush, and Clinton reveal a great deal, not about war itself, but about how Americans remember war and use those memories to define our nation. When the nation chooses to take part in a violent conflict, we must make sense of it somehow and prove that we participated for a purpose; lose this internal battle and we are left unsettled. Because rhetorical presidents occupy a uniquely powerful position in American society, the words they use when they talk about a war can shape how the nation remembers it. Thus, as Garry Wills explains, presidential rhetoric commemorating a war completes the work of the guns by depicting the fighting in a way that justifies war *and* demonstrates and embodies national ethos (Wills, 1992).

The possibilities for research about the rhetorical use of places as souvenirs are far from exhausted, and the unities form a new set of critical tools that researchers can use to understand how such use works. The unities form the most salient aspects of the presidential commemoration addresses at Normandy, where we fulfilled elements of national ethos through offensive military action, rather than passivity and defense. By

actively leading the attack on foreign soil, the presidents argued, America demonstrated a national ethos of heroism; remembering those actions in that place forty, fifty, sixty, and seventy years later marked both the battle and the commemoration as demonstrations of character. The emphasis on progress demonstrated America's active pursuit of success and self-actualization. Thus, through rhetoric, Normandy becomes the American epic, the American political myth.

This study examined how rhetors use place attachment; however, as time strains the connection between “the good war” and the present, the rhetorical value of those souvenir battlefields diminishes as memories and stories of those who directly experienced it fade from public memory. Places change, and they accumulate new associations over time; developments are built, trees cut down, and people who remember special places as they once were do eventually leave. Thus, presidential rhetors must decide what to do with the souvenir battlefields. They can continue to invest rhetorical effort in re-collecting the American people in such places, actively reinvesting those places with presence; they can allow the public's attachment to those souvenir battlefields to recede into the background of public memory by not reinvesting them with presence; they can actively detach or dissociate the place from the national ethos by investing the places with undesirable presence; or they can attempt to transfer the public's attachment to a place that can more easily be invested with presence. Future research on the role of place as souvenir should also investigate occasions when rhetors attempt to detach or dissociate places from the national ethos, occasions when rhetors allow place attachment to fade, and occasions when rhetors try to transfer attachment to a different place (for example, by the establishment of the National D-Day Memorial in Virginia, in addition to the American memorials in Normandy). Understanding how distance, lack of access to important places, and lack of presence in public memory might affect the American ethos would help researchers better understand the life cycle of public memory.

We cannot understand the depth of our nation's collective memories—why we hold to them so fast, how they come to be so strong, how they change over time—until we consider how they are employed in the discourse of opinion leaders. When presidents make the conscious choice to speak in places like Pointe du Hoc, their discourse calls attention to the characteristics Americans collectively acknowledge as part of our national ethos. In remembering what we were, they reaffirm what we are and what we want to be.

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