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Commemoration and the Politics of Recognition

The Korean War Veterans Memorial

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The struggle for recognition, Axel Honneth and Charles Taylor observe, can fragment social structures and undermine common culture or can promote solidarity and consensus. Nowhere is the integrative function of recognition more evident than in the Korean War Veterans Memorial. This inclusive monument to the Korean War's veterans and fallen soldiers symbolizes the erosion of social boundaries that had previously deprived ethnic, racial, gender, and service groupings of official regard. As it reflects the determination of military boards to acknowledge all wartime sacrifice, the Korean War Veterans Memorial articulates solidarity, but it is not solidarity based on mutual appreciation, as formulated in the recent philosophies of recognition and multiculturalism; the object of struggle is official recognition of all sacrifices, however mundane, made on behalf of a transcendent state. The dignity of the veteran is affirmed by representing his identification with this state, not the separate communities composing it.

Since common culture occupies a central place in contemporary discourse, the question of whether multiculturalist perspectives adequately represent the integration of American society provokes intense debate. Prominent among the arenas in which this debate occurs are schools and universities, foundations, the media, museums, and monuments. This article focuses on the Korean War Veterans Memorial and shows how the progression of its design embodies the unity and dissensus of American society.

COMMEMORATING WAR IN THE LATE 20TH CENTURY

Finding the right combination of symbols to mark a war is difficult. The Korean War Veterans Memorial, situated in front of the Lincoln Memorial and

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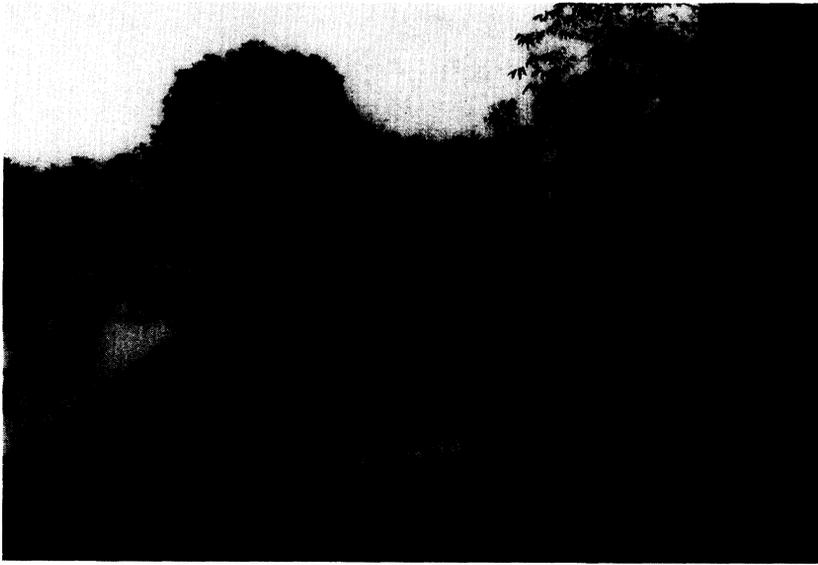


Figure 1: Platoon in Steel

opposite the Vietnam Veterans and Vietnam Women's Memorials, has accomplished this task through symbolic excess. The most elaborate of the Washington Mall's post-World War II monuments, it is more original than either the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, which duplicates the walls of the dead found in military cemeteries, or the Vietnam Women's Memorial, which elaborates Michelangelo's *Pieta*. The Korean Memorial resembles nothing ever erected to commemorate an American war. A triangular field includes a patrol of 19 larger-than-life statues of combat troops moving toward an American flag and pool of remembrance (see Figure 1). Along one side of the triangle is a wall on which more than 2,400 photographs of other combat and support personnel are engraved. At the edge of the site, bordering the Lincoln Memorial, stands a kiosk containing computerized military records and photographs of 37,000 killed and missing in action. At the apex of the 19-statue triangular formation, just in front of its lead soldier, a polished white stone carries the memorial's dedication message: "Our Nation Honors Her Sons and Daughters/Who Answered the Call to Defend a Country/They Never Knew and a People They Never Met."¹ The message is peculiar. Critics of the Vietnam War argued that the United States had no vital interests in Indo-China, but the Korean War Memorial's slogan reasserts idealism by leaving vital interests undefined.

The statue field itself, portraying men on patrol, is dynamic: One gestures toward a comrade, another points forward, and another looks back over his shoulder. And the contorted mien of the figures, viewed from near or far, conveys



Figure 2: Moment of Danger

the uncertainty of frontline action (see Figure 2). The men are unified yet self-absorbed: They are moving together in v-formation but fear is apparent as each man, anticipating fatal surprise, peers awkwardly in a different direction (the disjointedness of the head movements exaggerated by large helmets). The sculptor has made the presence of death palpable, captured the simultaneous potential of victory and disorder, and shown the inextricable selflessness and selfishness of war. The theme of sacrifice is explicit. On one marble slab is inscribed: "Wounded: U.S.A.: 103,284; U.N.: 1,064,455." On another: "Dead: U.S. 54,246; U.N.: 638,832." Commemoration of sacrifice culminates at the Pool of Remembrance, where a black wall bears the slogan "Freedom Is Not Free."

To understand how the memorial assumed its present form, what it says about the war it commemorates, and what societal contexts render this interpretation plausible, is the purpose of our project. This project is important not only for what it tells us about war commemoration but also because it addresses the broader problem of how political unity and cultural pluralism can be simultaneously, yet powerfully, recognized. As American society becomes more

diversified, demands for recognition, including commemorative recognition of military sacrifice, have increased in volume and emotional intensity.

The relationship between recognition and democracy is an enduring aspect of western social thought. Hegel, writing in the early 19th century, asserted that the desire for recognition (*Anerkennung*) is the core of institutionalized power relations (Roth, 1983, 1988; S. B. Smith, 1989). Drawing on Rousseau's observation that human beings see themselves mirrored in the opinions of others (Bloom, 1993), Hegel argued that the individual is naturally self-centered, wishing to be recognized and esteemed by others but reluctant to bestow recognition in turn. History begins with a great struggle, leading the conquered and enslaved to recognize the superiority of their masters, but in the course of time the slaves, resenting their invisibility and regarding their own recognition worth dying for, rebel violently.² History culminates in a society of autonomous communities reciprocally recognizing one another.

Rousseau and Hegel discussed recognition as a natural law whose enforcement would eliminate human degradation; it remained for Mead (1937) to transform their philosophies of the self into a systematic theory. According to Mead, self-conception is a process in which the individual is recognized by an expanding social circle. In predemocratic eras, self-conceptions were unproblematic because they were embedded in rigid hierarchies, but as hierarchical structures eroded, identities became problematic. Accordingly, Meadian theory is more than a narrow theory of the self; it articulates a cultural ideal, shifting recognition from transcendent persons and events to ordinary persons and ordinary life. The distinctive part of Honneth's (1995b) reading of Mead, therefore, is his interpretation of the "I" as a driving force in historical transformation leading to egalitarian communities of "Me's" (pp. 71-91). The shift away from the principle of hierarchy and honor to equality and dignity, realized in the dialog of mutual recognition, secures bodily safety, civil rights, and dignity. Because "morality inherently contains an interest in the cultivation of those principles that provide a structural basis for the various forms of recognition . . . it supports the egalitarianism of solidarity" (Honneth, 1992, p. 196; also see Honneth, 1995a).³ Solidarity, for Honneth (1995b), is the overarching concept subsuming both Hegel's and Mead's conceptions of recognition (pp. 92-130).

Recognition is politically imperative because social inclusion and self-esteem are political needs (Taylor, 1992, 1994). The expression of these needs, in democratic societies, is evident in many spheres, including busing and admission policies at public schools and universities, and in curriculum and textbook contents from elementary to higher education. These needs are especially evident in the media—from inclusive ethnic-racial-gender composition of advertisements and film characters to the politically correct makeup of television news teams. In every instance, different communities are recognized by inclusion of their members in visible institutional roles. Nowhere is this convention crystallized more effectively than in the Korean War Veterans Memorial.

COMMEMORATION AND POSTMODERNITY

For Americans who had lived through World War II, the struggle in Korea—a limited war fought to contain rather than destroy an enemy—seemed uncanny. It was not a matter of disagreeing on how to manage the war but of how to think about it. Even its official definition—“police action”—was unfamiliar. The Korean War Memorial frames ideas and feelings about this first ambiguous war in American history by organizing them, making them intelligible and communicable.⁴ The Korean War Memorial resolves in stone the contradictions and confusions of the nation that erected it.

The Korean War Memorial was conceived during the late 1970s—a time when America’s foundational principles (values, beliefs, and norms assumed true beyond mere demonstration) had begun to erode. Erosion was manifest in the widespread conviction that America’s “metanarrative” (Lyotard, 1979/1984) of equality and progress was untrue, in diminished admiration for elected officials including presidents whose popularity invariably waned as time in office passed (T. W. Smith, 1986, p. 575), in dramatically weakened trust of national institutions (Lipset & Schneider, 1983, 1987), and in weakened attachment to the nation itself. “Our case is astounding,” wrote Goodman (1969). “For the first time in recorded history, the mention of country, community, place has lost its power to animate” (p. 97).

The same conditions that disenchanting American society blurred social boundaries separating men and women, Whites and Blacks, natives and foreigners, powerful and weak, leaders and followers. Deteriorating boundaries expressed the “pluralization” of the “life world”—the fading of lines that once distinguished people in terms of status and ordered them in terms of achievement and rank (Berger, Berger, & Kellner, 1973, pp. 63-82). Pluralism gained prominence as traditional criteria of merit and social honor lost legitimacy.

Cultural changes of the 1960s and 1970s have redefined the meaning of war commemoration. Glazer (1996) observed that public monuments were once so replete with meaning that casual visitors needed guidebooks to understand their symbolism. But “today, in the wake of Marxism, deconstruction, postmodernism, and other contemporary critical movements . . . these monuments are sitting ducks before modern critics” (p. 25). In their place stand “mute monuments” that assert nothing. The best example, in Glazer’s view, is the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, the original form of which consisted of a mere wall adorned with names: “It does not tell us that these men died for their country, or for liberty, or for democracy, or even that they died in vain. It says nothing except that they died” (p. 27; also see Blair, Jepperson, & Puzzi, 1991; Ehrenhaus, 1988).⁵ Beside this nihilistic and brooding sarcophagus, as Krauthammer (1995) describes it, stands the Korean War monument symbolizing moral strength, “struggle faithfully rendered,” and victory. So it seems to many Americans who have seen this monument.

DEDICATION

Intensely fought, the Korean War was much shorter than the Vietnam War (38 months), but the cost was almost as great. Total war casualties, including Korean and other UN forces and civilians, reached almost 2 million. The war was unique, however, because the American public deemed it neither necessary and just nor unnecessary and unjust, and it ended in neither victory nor defeat. The Korean War was, in this sense, not America's forgotten war but its marginal war par excellence.

Forty-two years after the armistice, veterans gathered in Washington, D.C., to commemorate their struggle.⁶ President Clinton highlighted the occasion by asserting that years of Cold War had prevented the veterans' accomplishments from being fully understood. "Now we know that those of you who served, and the families who stood behind you, laid the foundations for one of the greatest triumphs in the history of human freedom." Turning to the monument, the president declared, "In steel and granite, in water and earth, the creators of this memorial have brought to life the courage and sacrifice of those who served in all branches of the armed forces, from every racial and ethnic group and background in America" (United States, 1995c).

President Clinton's words are notable for two reasons. First, his reference to "one of the greatest triumphs in the history of human freedom" expresses a new conception of the war: a 3-year struggle that seemed to end in stalemate becomes, in hindsight, a historic victory. Second, Clinton's phrase, "from every racial and ethnic group and background in America," defines his commitment to the late-20th-century culture of commemoration.

COMMEMORATIVE ENTERPRISE

The making of the Korean War Veterans Memorial accompanies America's transformation from an industrial into a postindustrial society with expanding multinational commerce, growing mass media influence, and increasingly pluralistic institutions broadening political rights. Greater inclusion and equality, however, induces more, not less, criticism of America's past—including criticism of historians writing the powerless out of the historical record and contributing to the inequalities that contemporary reformers seek to abolish. The Korean monument appears during an era in which the past, once a source of inspiration, comes under scrutiny, an era of complaint about "monument glut" (Reston, 1995) and "memorial frenzy" (Greenfield, 1997), not to mention waves of criticism of monument designs and locations.

Although the Korean War's commemoration occurs in the context of post-modernity, globalization, and multiculturalism, these forces must not be reified. Instead of assuming their influence, one must determine how their meanings are

mediated by agencies, commissions, and officials and their understandings of the war.⁷ The 1981 formation of the National Committee for the Korean War Memorial, in particular, was motivated not only by the desire to erect a proper monument to the Korean war dead and veterans but also by resentment over the Vietnam War being commemorated before the Korean War even though it was fought later and less effectively. Whatever the National Committee's inspiration, however, the Korean War Memorial's advocates would have failed without the support of the Reagan administration and without a sympathetic Congress consisting of many men and women who believed in the Korean veterans' cause. In October 1986, the U.S. House of Representatives authorized \$1 million for the preparation, design, planning, and construction of a Korean War memorial. The Senate charged a willing President Reagan to appoint 12 Korean War veterans to a Korean War Veterans Memorial Advisory Board (KWVMAB) to oversee site and design selection (United States, 1986a, p. 29896; United States, 1986b, pp. 80734-5).⁸

The decision to create a veterans advisory board was crucial. A jury of artists approved by the U.S. Commission of Fine Arts had selected the winning design for the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, dedicated 4 years earlier during President Reagan's first term. The new legislation, by placing design selection squarely in the hands of the veterans, had established an agency willing to challenge the Fine Arts Commission's commemorative aesthetic. Appointing a panel of former veterans was not merely a way of asserting a definition of war that differed from the commission's; it was a determination of who had the right to impose that definition.⁹

ORIGINAL DESIGN

In its instructions to artists entering the design competition, the KWVMAB included definite stylistic criteria. The memorial had to be "reflective," "uplifting," and suggestive of "respect" and "pride." Although prominent inclusion of the nation's flag was expressly required, any design "which has inherent in it an essence of grief is not acceptable" (United States, 1988b, pp. 1-2). Time and again, the board referred negatively to the Vietnam War and its memorial. "Unlike Vietnam, the end result [of the Korean War] was victory"; for this reason, the Korean War memorial must honor all who contributed to the "mission accomplishment"—the living as well as the dead. And if the absence of names and passage of time "militate against the emotional reaction characteristic of the Vietnam Wall," the Korean veterans "have deep feelings which they wish their memorial to convey to all veterans now and forever." To this end, the winning design must radiate "hope, honor, and service" and encourage "solemnity and unspoken gratitude." It must be a proud memorial, with all uniforms and weapons portrayed in "exquisite detail." Wounded soldiers must be shown walking unassisted (United States, 1989a, 1989b, 1989c, 1990). If the Vietnam Veterans

Memorial, as Cohen (1998) admiringly put it, is a monument to everything wrong with America, the Korean War Veterans Memorial must be a monument to everything right about it.

Professional jurors assessed the design proposals, but their expert opinion carried no weight until approved by the board itself. In June 1989, the jury had recommended, and the board approved, one winner and two runners-up from among 543 entries.

Inspired by history texts, photographs, and private interviews with veterans, Penn State University's winning designers, Burns-Lucas, Leon, Lucas, and Pennypacker Oberholzer, captured the common soldier's experience of the war. "We knew the war through our feet," explained one of their respondents: "We walked every inch of the country." From the artists' interest in the war as experienced through walking emerged a memorial consisting of 38 statues of combat-equipped soldiers in a line stretching 350 feet, west to east. The figures were wrought impressionistically, their ethnic and racial identities undefined; but each 7- to 8-foot-high granite image was clearly recognizable as a combat soldier. The 38 statues, symbolizing the 38th Parallel armistice line and the war's 38-month duration, were oriented toward an American flag mounted on a plaza bounded by a 7-foot-high wall with inscriptions detailing the war's history (Burns-Lucas, Leon, Lucas, & Pennypacker Oberholzer, n.d.).

However, the winning entry had to be modified. None of the agencies actively concerned with planning other monuments for the mall could accept a gigantic monument consisting of 38 statues spread over an area greater than the size of a football field. Also, the KWVMAB members that had approved the winning design were not entirely satisfied with it. They wanted an inclusive monument that identified race and ethnicity and recognized all servicemen and women contributing to the war's outcome.¹⁰ Comprehensive recognition, although never specified in the instructions submitted to the contesting artists, was critical to the board and its supervising agencies and constituents.

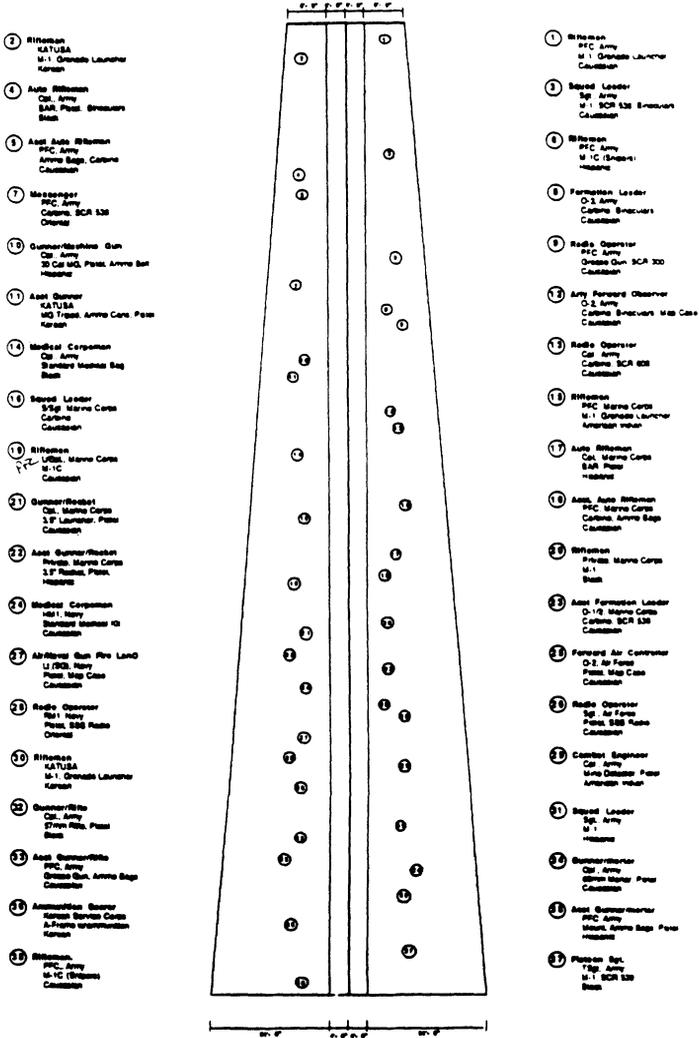
REVISIONS

The first revision gave the statues racial and ethnic identities. Four statues represented "KATUSAs"—Korean Augment to the United States Army; the remaining 34 statues' ethnic and racial distributions (at the battalion level) include 19 Caucasians, 6 Hispanics, 5 Blacks, 2 American Indians, and 2 Asian Americans (see Figure 3). The distribution seemed less than perfectly fair. Designers noted that African Americans made up 10% of the troops, mainly in the "non-technical skills areas," which implies that their service was less valuable than the service of the more technically qualified. Because many Hispanic soldiers were Puerto Rican rather than American citizens, and because the recognition of Black soldiers was politically important, the board decided to reduce the number of Hispanics from 6 to 5 so as not to exceed the number of African Americans.

PROPOSED COLUMN FORMATION OF 38 STATUES FOR THE KOREAN WAR VETERANS MEMORIAL

ANNEX A
to Enclosure #1

21 January 1994



- ② Rifleman
KATUSA
M-1 Grenade Launcher
Korean
- ④ Auto Rifleman
Cpl. Army
5.56, Pistol, Grenades
Black
- ⑥ Asst. Auto Rifleman
PFC Army
Arms Bag, Carbine
Caucasian
- ⑦ Messenger
PFC Army
Carbine, SCR 538
Oriental
- ⑨ Gunner/Releaser
Cpl. Army
30 Cal M2, Pistol, Arms Bag
Hispanic
- ⑪ Asst. Gunner
KATUSA
M2 Tripod, Arms Care, Pistol
Korean
- ⑬ Medical Corporal
Cpl. Army
Bandaged Medical Bag
Black
- ⑮ Squad Leader
Sgt. Marine Corps
Carbine
Caucasian
- ⑰ Rifleman
Pvt. Marine Corps
M-1C
Caucasian
- ⑲ Gunner/Releaser
Cpl. Marine Corps
3.5" Launcher, Pistol
Caucasian
- ⑳ Asst. Gunner/Releaser
Private Marine Corps
3.5" Pistol, Pistol
Hispanic
- ㉑ Medical Corporal
Maj. Navy
Bandaged Medical Kit
Caucasian
- ㉓ Airborne Gun Fire Lead
Lt (Pfc), Navy
Pistol, M20 Case
Caucasian
- ㉕ Radio Operator
Sgt. Navy
Pistol, M20 Radio
Oriental
- ㉗ Rifleman
KATUSA
M-1 Grenade Launcher
Korean
- ㉙ Gunner/Releaser
Cpl. Army
5.56mm Rifle, Pistol
Black
- ㉛ Asst. Gunner/Releaser
PFC Army
Grenade Gun, Arms Bag
Caucasian
- ㉝ Ammunition Sapper
Korean Marine Corps
A-Frog, Grenades
Korean
- ㉟ Rifleman
PFC Army
M-1C (Rifle)
Caucasian

- ① Rifleman
PFC Army
M-1 Grenade Launcher
Caucasian
- ③ Squad Leader
Sgt. Army
M-1 SCR 538 Grenades
Caucasian
- ⑤ Rifleman
PFC Army
M-1C (Rifle)
Hispanic
- ⑧ Formation Leader
O-3 Army
Carbine, Binoculars
Caucasian
- ⑩ Radio Operator
PFC Army
Grenade Gun, SCR 300
Caucasian
- ⑫ Army Forward Observer
O-2 Army
Carbine, Binoculars, M20 Case
Caucasian
- ⑭ Radio Operator
Cpl. Army
Carbine, SCR 628
Caucasian
- ⑯ Rifleman
PFC Marine Corps
M-1 Grenade Launcher
American Indian
- ⑰ Auto Rifleman
Cpl. Marine Corps
5.56, Pistol
Hispanic
- ⑱ Asst. Auto Rifleman
PFC Marine Corps
Carbine, Arms Bag
Caucasian
- ㉑ Rifleman
Private Marine Corps
M-1
Black
- ㉓ Asst. Formation Leader
O-10 Marine Corps
Carbine, SCR 538
Caucasian
- ㉕ Forward Air Controller
O-2, Air Force
Pistol, M20 Case
Caucasian
- ㉗ Radio Operator
Sgt. Air Force
Pistol, M20 Radio
Caucasian
- ㉙ Combat Engineer
Cpl. Army
M20 Grenade Pistol
American Indian
- ㉛ Squad Leader
Sgt. Army
M-1
Hispanic
- ㉝ Grenade Launcher
Cpl. Army
Grenade Pistol
Caucasian
- ㉟ Asst. Gunner/Releaser
PFC Army
M20, Arms Bag, Pistol
Hispanic
- ㉟ Platoon Sgt.
7th Army
M-1 SCR 538
Black

SERVICE DISTRIBUTION	ETHNIC DISTRIBUTION	COLOR LEGEND																														
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Figure 3: Commemorative Quotas

Much discussion, too, concerned the Marines: Their small numbers in the field bore no relationship to their great combat achievements, but they seemed nevertheless to be overrepresented in the statuary.¹¹

The advisory board had administered this revision through Cooper-Lecky, Inc., the architectural firm that fabricated the Vietnam Veterans Memorial. On the advice of its consultant, historian C. L. Beardsley, Cooper-Lecky contracted with sculptor Frank C. Gaylord II, a World War II combat veteran, to redesign Penn State's statues realistically enough to make evident their branches of service, ranks, races, ethnicities, and military functions and to give the impression of an enemy's presence. The Penn State artists, realizing that their original concept had been rejected, and feeling themselves increasingly excluded from the design process, withdrew from the project and tried but failed to convince a federal court to intervene on their behalf. The Korean War Veterans Memorial had evolved from a production by four artists to a collective representation reflecting and combining the preferences of scores of people.

FINAL DESIGN

The Korean and Vietnam War memorials have followed opposing developmental paths. The latter, conforming to progressive tastes, was originally too abstract and had to be enlarged and embellished; the former, conforming to traditional tastes, was too massive and realistic and had to be diminished and formalized. Kent Cooper (of the Cooper-Lecky firm) insisted that he had dutifully incorporated concerns raised by the various review panels (Gamarekian, 1990). William Lecky added that his firm felt particularly obligated to the veterans and tried to give them a monument they could not have given the Vietnam War veterans—one designed to honor service rather than suffering for the country (personal communication, October 17, 1997). The veterans' entitlements, however, could not prevail independently of spatial and artistic constraints.

In June 1991, the Commission of Fine Arts, partly reconstituted by new commissioners, announced after 2 years that the entire memorial had to be redesigned. J. C. Brown, director of the commission, recommended that the statues be replaced by a frieze. In July 1991, the board instead revised the original statue-based concept; the commission formally rejected it. In August 1991, the American Battle Monument Commission, "stunned and perplexed" by the Fine Arts Commission's sudden decision, announced in a letter to Brown that it would support 19 free-standing statues "as a last compromise solution." A 19-image column, although small, would "still permit representation of the multi-racial composition of our armed forces during the Korean War"—a powerful statement because it made realism a necessary vehicle of service, ethnic, and racial recognition. The Battle Monuments Commission's angry letter, drafted with the assistance of attorneys, challenged the Fine Arts Commission's authority as well as judgment (United States, 1991a, 1991b, 1991c, 1991d).

A turning point in the monument-making process, the Battle Monument Commission's letter recapitulated the critical moment when backers of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial threatened withdrawal of financial support and demanded that the Fine Arts Commission agree to what one of its own members described as "corny, patriotic claptrap"—an American flag and statue of three fighting men to represent veterans who took pride in their sacrifice to the nation (Wagner-Pacifici & Schwartz, 1991, p. 410). In the case of the Korean Memorial, the struggle involved a Fine Arts Commission still resistant to nationalistic display and concerned chiefly with the beautification of the Capital Mall, opposed by a military commission concerned with the dignity of the veterans and the war dead.

Through the month of September 1991, the design team made further revisions, all within the parameters of the statue-based design. "We can't change now," said General Raymond Davis (Congressional Medal of Honor winner) at a meeting with Cooper-Lecky. "We need the veterans' support to get Congress to help us bypass the Commission of Fine Arts" (United States, 1991e, p. 8). In October 1991, Cooper-Lecky sent to the Commission of Fine Arts a proposal pared down to 19 soldiers and a 164-foot-long wall of black granite, designed by muralist Louis Nelson, that included photo engravings of support personnel and terminated in a circular pool at the apex of the triangular field. In March 1992, the National Capital Planning Commission approved the design, noting how well it conveyed "the emotions generated by exposure to danger and the ethnic diversity of the era" (United States, 1992). Final content for the wall, however, had not yet been selected. The board was concerned that the wall represent more precisely the racial/ethnic diversity of the soldiers (United States, 1993a, p. 2). More images, including an aircraft carrier and pilots, had to be added to the panels in response to Navy and Air Force demands. The cemetery image needed more Stars of David (United States, 1993b). "We have been working hard with the client [KWVMA] to make sure that we are politically correct and that all the necessary people are being shown on the wall," William Lecky assured everyone (United States, 1993c).¹²

DIVERSITY ON PATROL

The final design of the Memorial reconciled political correctness and aesthetic tastes. Images of 19 infantrymen and attaches from the Navy and Air Force made of stainless steel, wrought slightly larger than life-size, and, through scraping technique, crafted more figuratively than the earlier version, received the Commission of Fine Arts' begrudging approval. The commission, however, exacted a measure of compromise. As the statue metal has been washed in acid, the look of the figures is gray and weathered. Ponchos and helmets reduce further the statues' realism because they give the figures a shapeless appearance and conceal most of the military hardware. Ethnic and racial identification is

also more ambiguous. Neither the Commission of Fine Arts nor Cooper-Lecky wanted ultrarealistic statues, and the impressionistic revisions, in Lecky's words, left "traces" of race and ethnicity in the statues—"a side benefit," as he put it, revealing again his aversion to recognition politics (personal communication, April 13, 1998). Service affiliations of the 19 men—14 soldiers, 3 Marines, 1 Air Force spotter, and 1 Naval attache—were also muted, evident only to the trained eye.

Computerized commemoration. The individual soldier, subordinated to the war's cause but not negated by it, was recognized not only by statues but also by the computer kiosk presenting an Honor Roll of service records, photos, and messages of the missing- and killed-in-action.¹³ This feature of the memorial site was inspired by veterans wanting the names of the war's fatalities engraved on a memorial wall—a kind of twin to the Vietnam Veterans Memorial. Korean veterans, however, wished to see sacrifice positively recognized. Names of the dead would express not the cost of a political error, as the Vietnam Memorial's designer intended, but sacrifice for a noble cause. The board was adamantly opposed to anything resembling the Vietnam Memorial, and the commemorative wall it approved differed dramatically from the Vietnam Memorial wall of the dead.

THE NATION'S MANTELPIECE

The Korean War Memorial's granite wall rises from 4-1/2 to 11 feet and contains more than 2,400 photographic images of Blacks and Whites, men and women, in every single branch of the armed forces and representing hundreds of military specialties. The wall also doubles the 19 statues in its reflection, thus restoring the original portrayal of 38 combat troops. Visitors, too, see their own reflections among the 19 statues and thus join them symbolically (see Figures 4 and 5).¹⁴ Images have been electronically altered so that all are illuminated from the direction of the flag, but weapons have been backgrounded in deference to the Fine Arts Commissioners' concern about excessive realism.

The mural's faces, taken from the Still Pictures Branch of the National Archives, are anonymous but living faces representing all Americans serving in Korea. And because the mural portrays the support troops, it appears as "a fanfare to the common soldier"—not only infantrymen heroically facing the enemy close-up but also "the cooks, truck drivers, nurses, the bomber pilots, the tank drivers, the cannoneers" (*Buffalo News*, August 1, 1995). Many veterans appreciated the display: "I like that salute to the guys in the trenches. And I like the wall that shows how many people it takes to win a war." Moreover, many of the images are vague, allowing viewers to project on them the likeness of relatives and acquaintances who had served in Korea. Impressions of the soldiers being commemorated individually are thus enhanced. "Every face . . . looks like



Figure 4: Recognition I

someone you know” (Omikinski, 1995). Citing as his inspiration the custom of displaying photos of loved ones on the living room mantelpiece, muralist Louis Nelson said of the wall: “This is the nation’s mantelpiece.”¹⁵

COMMEMORATIVE DIVERSITY

To symbolize the Korean War with a monument to pluralism is historically valid because, despite bitter racial conflicts, that war marked the beginning of the integration of the American armed forces. By the year of this monument’s dedication, the military had not merely accommodated American diversity more effectively than any other federal institution but also had organized that diversity into a cohesive fighting force. On this point President Clinton’s dedication remarks were emphatic: The statues and wall “represent, once more, the enduring American truth: From many we are one” (United States, 1995c).

Recognition of the living and the dead also was central to the monument’s inclusive mission. For the advisory board, the representation of living veterans symbolized victory and distinguished the Korean War Memorial from the Vietnam War Memorial. During the Senate’s consideration of the Memorial bill, Senator Armstrong’s comments reflected a different kind of understanding. He emphasized that an inclusive memorial would express gratitude “for all who took part in the conflict, those who survived no less than those who gave their



Figure 5: Recognition II

lives" (United States, 1988a, p. S1549). Highsmith and Landphair (1995), too, argue that commemoration of the dead alone would be "neglectful of others who served" (p. 74). Even the Senate bill, which recognizes veterans "still listed as missing in action," or "held as prisoners of war" "alongside those killed in action," proposes no distinguishing honor for the dead. Monuments to the tens of thousands of dead cannot affirm America's diversity as well as monuments to the hundreds of thousands of living can.

A war memorial cannot depict everyone equally, however, without blurring the moral distinction its genre is intended to uphold. Combat and noncombat personnel alike make laudable sacrifices, but their assignments involve incomparable risks. Even among combat soldiers, minor wounds differ from life-ruining injuries and death. The Korean Memorial, after all was said and done, affirmed this distinction in the way all traditional memorials have done: by making the men most likely to die in war—infantrymen—its focal point. Doing so detracts nothing from the contribution of noninfantry fighters and noncombat servicemen but rather identifies the ultimate purpose of their support.

CONCLUSION

Remembrance of common suffering is the stuff of which national unity is made. As Abraham Lincoln pleaded with the South for reconciliation in his first

inaugural address, he hoped “the mystic chords of memory, stretching from every battle-field and patriot grave, to every living heart and hearthstone, all over this broad land” would “swell the chorus of union.” How battlefields and patriot graves promote union is problematic. If we are to make progress in the semiotics of cultural integration, we must know how war memorials, as vehicles of meaning, enter into the self-conception of society and how society, in turn, gives those memorials life. Our article addresses this problem by placing the Korean War Veterans Memorial in “the common world in which men look, name, listen, and make” (Geertz, 1983, pp. 118-119). Over the meaning of this “common world,” however, arise uncommonly bitter disagreements.

The making of the Korean War Veterans Memorial is part of a democratizing trend that powerfully affects the way war sacrifices are conceived. Before the Civil War, ordinary soldiers received no commemorative recognition; they were buried together in unmarked graves near the field on which they fell. Field graves are sufficient where the dignity of the common man is incompletely realized. Of the 3,000 men who died at Valley Forge during the winter of 1777-1778, for example, not one was placed in a marked grave. During the Civil War, state governments built military cemeteries to provide the dead with “decent” (individual) resting places, but only one of these cemeteries, Gettysburg’s, became a prominent memorial site during the war; most, including 13 federal cemeteries, were established too late to accommodate the great number killed. Not until World War I did field graves become the exception rather than the rule. Seventy percent of the World War I dead were, in fact, returned directly to their families for private burial (Schwartz, in press).

Moving through World Wars I and II, new burial practices have been accompanied by national memorials commemorating the common soldier as well as the officers. The new memorial structures embodied new political circumstances. Debates over the Vietnam War Veterans Memorial centered on the problem of commemorating an unpopular war, and its designer resolved this debate by emphasizing the sacrifice of the soldier and de-emphasizing the dignity of the state and its cause. Debates over the Korean War Veterans Memorial, in contrast, centered on the problem of how best to recognize different kinds of sacrifice in the service of the state.

Equal acknowledgment of sacrifice is essential to democratic cultures of commemoration. The Korean War Veterans Memorial recognizes every class of participants emphatically; yet, nothing in the congressional legislation or monument competition instructions specified recognition of service, race, ethnic, or gender identity; this emerged through the monument-making process itself (after a winning design had been chosen). So rapidly and decisively was the ideal of recognition imposed on the memorial’s design that a leading member of the production team believed it had actually been mandated in the congressional resolution, and he continues to believe so to this day.¹⁶ As that resolution

specified nothing about support troops or any other category of servicemen, the memorial is a product of designers acting together to represent unwittingly a core facet of their culture. Like Emile Durkheim's (1915/1965) totemic emblems of Australian tribal gods, the Korean War Veterans Memorial, transcending while expressing the sentiments of its creators, was literally a collective representation unexplainable in terms of formal mandate, let alone the intention of any one designer.

Human beings are so vulnerable to injury through insult and disregard that they depend for their well-being on the respect and approval of others (Taylor, 1992, 1994), whereas society depends for its solidarity on the mutual satisfaction of this need. As a form of monumental recognition, however, the Korean War Veterans Memorial taps a source of solidarity based not on mutual recognition among individuals but recognition of individuals by the state. The egalitarian culture out of which this ideal of recognition arises has, in truth, moved many toward narcissism and self-indulgence (Lasch, 1978), but it has also promoted loyalty and self-sacrifice. Demands to be recognized on the Korean War Memorial hardly subtract, therefore, from the dignity of the state; they affirm it because constituencies (veterans, their descendants and comrades) wish their sacrifice to the nation to be known and appreciated.¹⁷ To dramatize commitment to the state, not resentment at having to serve it, is the purpose of the Korean War Memorial's designers.

At its deepest level, disagreement between the KWVMAB and the organizations with which it had to contend—especially the U.S. Commission of Fine Arts and the professional art community—reflected the contrasting “progressive” and “orthodox” (traditional) visions (Hunter, 1991) of what American society stands for. During the past quarter century, American history has become a theater for the playing out of these tensions. The use of atomic weapons against the Japanese, the settlement of the American West, the maltreatment of women and minorities, the content of the history curriculum—these issues reflect profound disagreements about America's moral heritage. The commemoration of war assumes meaning in the context of such disagreements. Tension between monumental meaning and meaninglessness, between traditional war memorials (including Korea's) that answer ultimate questions and antiwar memorials (Vietnam's) that do no more than ask them, manifests deep divisions in American culture—divisions that go to the heart of America's culture wars.

When we ask why realism, human representation, and grandness of physical scale reflect traditional commemorative tastes and why abstraction and modesty of scale reflect progressive tastes, we get into the problem of why monuments are “good to think with” in the first place. As all thinking consists of a matching of symbol systems to reality, a difference exists between apprehension of the facts of the Korean War and the grasping of these facts in the context of war memorials and other “vehicles of conception” (Geertz, 1973, pp. 214-215). The

Korean War Memorial is a vehicle of conception because its components convey judgments about the character and significance of the struggle it commemorates. The 19 statues, the wall with thousands of images of military men and women, the flag, the inscriptions detailing the nature and purpose of the war, and the very shape and texture of the memorial site restore the connections among nationalism, sacrifice, and the nobility of the citizen soldier.

In many ways, the culture war turns on whether the sacredness of national symbols is independent of governmental policies. Conceiving nationalism a hegemonic “construction,” progressive culture defines the war dead as the state’s victims rather than protectors—symbols of suffering rather than defenders of a cause that makes suffering meaningful. Traditional culture, in contrast, defines the war dead in terms of what they have contributed as citizens, not what they have lost as individuals. To die in the name of something greater than oneself—something that precedes and survives one’s own existence—is a traditional idea, one that the Korean War Veterans Memorial affirms and the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, as originally conceived—a bare wall void of national emblems—denies.

Erected in front of the Lincoln Memorial, then, are two monuments materializing not only two wars but also two ways of seeing war, two ways of knowing life, two cultures. The contrast must not be overdrawn. The Korean War Memorial is a product of the late 20th, not 19th, century—at once a return to the early genre of war memorials and a departure, a symbol of both the nation’s traditional and progressive strains. On one hand, the Korean War Memorial’s realism, size, and stock of national emblems embody traditional belief in the transcendence of the nation; on the other hand, its commemoration of all the war’s participants, regardless of whether they survived it, regardless of race, gender, or ethnicity, and regardless of the duty they performed, expresses progressive ideals of pluralism and inclusiveness.¹⁸

Recognition, without regard to rank, race, ethnicity, or gender, is a characteristic the Korean Memorial shares with the Vietnam Memorial. But “can it be that in its desire to make room for everyone, for every particularism” as Edward Tiryakian (1997) puts it, “the postwelfare national state has set aside the idea of the nation?” (p. 163). Only in the context of the nation, however, is recognition an issue to begin with. If the nation was irrelevant it would make no difference who was recognized on its war memorials, while national dignity and unity would be unaffected by monumental efforts, like the first version of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, to withhold recognition of the state itself.

Designers’ consciousness of the difference between the Korean and Vietnam War memorials never flagged. In January 1995, 6 months before the Korean War Memorial’s dedication, a Cooper-Lecky status report (United States, 1995a) announced: The Vietnam Veterans Memorial conveys “the enormous human loss of war”; the Korean War Veterans Memorial conveys “the willingness to serve in a citizens army which lies at the heart of our democracy.” In this

memorial, we see the “critical importance of Patriotism and Duty in defense of freedom. It is a message for all time” (p. 3). At question is whether patriotism and duty are to be represented as alternatives to racial, ethnic, gender, and religious claims for recognition or whether the honoring of these claims affirms patriotism, duty, and the dignity of the state. The Korean War Veterans Memorial embodies forcefully the latter conception.

NOTES

1. The words have been misquoted on more than one occasion to read “fight for a nation they did not know and people they had never known.” Transforming the past tense into the past perfect tense undermines the image of pure duty by implying the soldiers may have learned about the country and the people later (and realize the fight was in their interests after all).

2. For a literal application of Hegel’s ideas, see Logue and Miller (1998).

3. Denial of recognition, according to Axel Honneth (1992), manifests itself at three different levels: (a) denial of the integrity of the body, manifesting itself in torture, injury, and rape; (b) denial of rights, which in turn limits moral accountability; and (c) denigration of individual lifestyles and collective patterns of self-realization.

4. The way events are conceived is affected by the way they are named. Korean veterans took exception to being told they were engaged in a “police action” and not entitled to the dignity of considering themselves real soldiers fighting a real war. “A police action, Harry Truman called it,” recalled E. Layton, 69, who had traveled from Hernando, Florida, to attend the dedication. He was still bitter. “Why should this guy tell me I’m a policeman?” (*Newsday*, July 28, 1995, p. A7). See also Linenthal (1982) on the “impotent hero” (p. 137) of the early Cold War era.

5. Blair, Jepperson, and Puzzi admire the memorial because it is a prototype of postmodern commemoration. Referring to Lyotard’s (1979/1984) inclusion of “incredulity toward metanarratives” in his definition of postmodernity (p. xxiv), they declare it “difficult to imagine a language . . . that can completely divest itself of recourse to the legitimating capacity of metanarrative. That the Vietnam Veterans Memorial approaches this state, however, is almost undeniable” (Blair, Jepperson, & Puzzi, 1991, p. 279; see also Ehrenhaus, 1988, p. 55). In Winter’s (1995) words, however,

The cutting edge of ‘modern memory,’ its multi-faceted sense of dislocation, paradox, and the ironic, could express anger and despair, and did so in enduring ways; it was melancholic but it could not heal. Traditional modes of seeing the war, while at times less challenging intellectually or philosophically, provided a way of remembering which enabled the bereaved to live with their losses, and perhaps to leave them behind. (p. 5)

6. There are fewer American memorials to the Korean War than to any other 20th-century war (Mayo, 1988, p. 92), but it has never been totally ignored. Its principal memorial was dedicated in 1958 at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier in Arlington National Cemetery. The Korean War is marked impressively elsewhere in Arlington Cemetery and in the Memorial National Cemetery in Honolulu, Hawaii. However, the original stimulus to the creation of a national Korean Veterans Memorial was the 1982 erection in Washington of a memorial to the Vietnam War. Afterward, local monuments to the two wars arose together. The latest edition of Donovan’s (1990) *The Forgotten Warriors: A Directory of Korea and Vietnam Memorials and Museums* shows that before the decade of the 1980s, 40 memorials had been dedicated to the Vietnam War; during the 1980s, the number of new memorials rose to 170; and in 1990, the number fell to 3. The number of corresponding

dedications of Korean War Memorials—2 dedicated before 1980, 5 during the 1980s, and 1 in 1990—is remarkably lower than the number for the Vietnam War, but this number also peaks during the 1980s, as does the number of joint Vietnam-Korean War memorials, of which 2 were dedicated before 1980, 24 during the 1980s, and none afterward. In contrast, the American Battle Monument Commission's (United States, 1995b) report on Korean War commemoration runs to present and registers much activity in the early 1990s. One memorial to the Korean War, according to this source, was erected during the 1960s, 1 during the 1970s, 16 during the 1980s, and 30 completed and 14 planned or in construction between 1990 and 1995. At the present time, there are 45 memorials dedicated exclusively to the Korean War, 5 jointly to the Korean and Vietnam wars, and 9 to all 20th-century wars.

7. The structure of the commemorative enterprise, however, differed. Ideas for the Vietnam Veterans Memorial sprang from the imagination of particular individuals (such as J. Scruggs and M. Y. Lin). The making of the Korean War Veterans Memorial was diffuse. Originators' names are mentioned in the press and on veterans' Web sites (C. Kim, Colonel J. Kenney, W. Temple, T. Zdanavage, and H. Barker), but no one can say for certain who had the idea first. The memorial's very design, as will soon be clear, is a collective rather than individual achievement.

8. The total cost of the memorial was estimated at \$6 million. The House authorized (but could not appropriate) \$1 million; Hyundai Motor American donated \$1 million.

9. The words "no less than" are used to emphasize the need to honor both the living and the dead. "The Memorial will honor members of the Armed Forces . . . particularly those who were killed in action, are listed as missing in action, or were prisoners of war" (United States, 1988a, p. S1549).

10. More than 90% of the total who served in Korea were noncombat personnel.

11. Twelve percent of the total Americans killed in action and 35% of Congressional Medal of Honor winners were Marines.

12. In October 1994, the commission again rejected the revision. "It was all too much," complained one commissioner. "It does not add up to a work of art," said another. The commission had created an impasse. Major General Davis spoke for the entire Korean War Veterans Memorial Advisory Board when he announced indignantly that the latest design "represents the limits of modifications possible without total abandonment of the basic concept." He added that the board could not compromise without dishonoring the veterans it represents (*Washington Post*, October 25, 1991). Veterans' supporters in Congress were impatient with the Fine Arts Commission's complaints, and the commission soon backed down.

13. At the time of the dedication, this database contained records for 35,000 individuals, and up to 17,000 more were expected to be added thereafter.

14. The original Penn State design provided for visitors to walk among the soldiers toward their destination.

15. Louis Nelson, the wall's designer, reports this to be one of its most moving aspects (personal communication, May 21, 1998).

16. "One of the requirements from Congress," Lecky declared, "was that the memorial would honor all of the support forces involved in the conflict" (personal communication, April 13, 1998).

17. It is important to recognize in this regard that the strong desire on the part of many veterans to have the names of the war dead inscribed on the other side of the illustrated wall was motivated by the desire to see sacrifice recognized. This helps explain why many veterans of all wars are impressed by the Vietnam Veterans Memorial. It is not that they share the intent of the wall's creator or accept the views of the war's critics. For veterans, the names of the dead express not the cost of a political error but the virtue of sacrifice for a transcendent cause. States may legitimate themselves by creating memorials and other components of "death cults," as Koselleck (1994) and Mosse (1990) suggest, but the meaning of these cults cannot be reduced to political legitimation.

18. This dualism embodies Sturken's (1997) and Olick's (in press) important observation that commemoration of history has its own history, which acts back on the way we understand the past.

The Korean War preceded the Vietnam War, but because the latter was erected first, it affected the interpretation of the Korean War indirectly by its effect on that war's monument.

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