MEMORY AS A CULTURAL SYSTEM: ABRAHAM LINCOLN IN WORLD WAR II*

Barry Schwartz
University of Georgia

Studies of how societies preserve the past have focused on the "social frames of memory." This study of Abraham Lincoln during World War II extends a semiotic interpretation of culture as it focuses on "memory as a social frame." Memories invoked in the context of a present crisis are rooted in generational experience. One-third of all Americans living in 1940 were born during the late nineteenth century, when Civil War resentments were fading and remembrances of Lincoln were more positive and vivid than ever. This generation understood the meaning of World War II by "keying" it to the Civil War. Patterned arrays of images of Lincoln were invoked by local and federal agencies to clarify the purpose of World War II, legitimate the preparations for it, and then to orient, inspire, and console the people who fought it. As a model for the present and of the present, images of Lincoln comprised a cultural system that rationalized the experience of war. I compare and contrast memory as a cultural system with constructionist theories of collective memory and discuss it in light of the erosion of American society's grand narratives.

The 50th anniversary of World War II has awakened many memories and provided new lessons on how we learn about and distort the past. In television, radio, magazine, and newspaper accounts of the war and its aftermath, we observe memory as commemoration and history, social networks as repositories of memory, the partial or complete forgetting of events, official memories and counter memories, successful and failed interpretations of the past, and the meanings and functions of commemorative symbolism. This list testifies to widespread interest in World War II as an object of memory.

In this paper I refer to World War II as a *site* of memory. My objective is not to understand memory *of* crisis, but memory *in a time of* crisis. As I have studied Abraham Lincoln in the American mind, from 1865 to the present, images of Lincoln in the early 1940s emerged as distinctive, not because they differed greatly in substance from earlier images but because they were unusually pervasive and engaging. Since crisis provides nations with strong incentives for invoking the past (Bellah 1975:141), the function of images of Lincoln during World War II warrants close examination. Halbwachs ([1925] 1952) and his successors throw little light on this matter: They have discovered much about "the social frames of memory"; I wish to know more about memory as a social frame.

Concentration on the images of Lincoln in World War II extends Geertz's semiotic interpretation of culture to the realm of collective memory. Geertz's inquiries into selected articulations of culture—"Religion as a Cultural System" (1973b:87–125), "Ideology as a Cultural System" (1973c:193–233), "Common Sense as a Cultural System" (1983a:73–94), and "Art as a Cultural System" (1983b:

94–120)—define culture as an organization of symbolic patterns on which people rely to make sense of their experience. Articulating a symbolic pattern of commemoration, I define "memory as a cultural system." But while Geertz insists on generalizing within cases rather than across cases, I locate images of Lincoln as they appear across cases, moving from World War II to subsequent wars and other national emergencies, bringing together resemblances and differences under a single analytic framework. The result of this effort is an expansion of the way collective memory is presently conceived.

THE SOCIAL FRAMES OF MEMORY

Recent research on collective memory conceives the past as a social construction that reflects the problems and concerns of the present. Most of this research falls into two overlapping categories. In the first category, eras and generations appear as ever-changing communities of memory. The Holy Land's changing sacred sites (Halbwachs 1941), the recovery of the past in early and late twentieth-century Israel (Zerubavel 1995), the ebb and flow of Holocaust memories in Germany, France, and Poland (Friedlander 1992; Koonz 1994), age cohort differences in the perception of critical events in recent American history (Schuman and Scott 1987), the changing images of Christ (Pelikan 1985), Thomas Jefferson (Peterson 1960), George Washington (Schwartz 1991), the American Revolution (Kammen 1978)—these analyses are representative of current efforts to understand the history of memory by connecting it to its social and experiential roots (also see Connelly 1977; Kammen 1991; Peterson 1994; Ducharme and Fine 1995.)

The second body of research includes generational comparisons but focuses on memory as a contested object of differently empowered communities. One strand of this "politics of memory" literature traces conceptions of the past to an alleged dominant ideology supported by the privileged to maintain their hegemony. Representative statements include Hobsbawm (1983) on the invention of tradition as a mode of social control during Europe's democratic revolutions, Alonso (1988) on state histories and counter histories in Mexico, and Bodnar

(1992) on "official" and "vernacular" memory" in the United States (also see Tuchman and Fortin 1989; Ames 1993; Baigell 1993; Boyarim 1994; Gillis 1994). A second strand of the politics of memory literature assumes that power is diffused rather than concentrated and that collective memories emerge out of a context of cross-cutting coalitions, networks, and enterprises. Writings on the fate of artistic (Lang and Lang 1990) and presidential (Fine 1996) reputations, Holocaust memories (Irwin-Zarecka 1994), place-naming and monument-making (Gregory and Lewis 1988; Zelinsky 1988; Wagner-Pacifici and Schwartz 1991), and the organization of museums (Barthel 1996) all represent efforts to link memory to pluralistic networks of interest and power.

Whether focusing on generational world views, the politics of memory, or both, research on collective memory offers important insights. It shows how beliefs about the past are shaped by the circumstances and problems of current society and how different elements of the past become more or less relevant as these circumstances and problems change. Memory thus becomes a social fact as it is made and remade to serve changing societal interests and needs. That collective memory is socially rooted is critical to the sociology of culture, but this insight alone exaggerates the malleability of the past and fails to capture the full significance of collective memory. True, some writers take pains to show that reality limits what communities of memory can construct (Schwartz 1982; Schudson 1989a; Irwin-Zarecka 1994) and that memories supposedly rooted in the needs of the present have been remarkably stable across generations (Schwartz 1990, 1991). Their qualifications, however, are made within the same theoretical framework as the excesses they criticize. These writers assert that the past is less malleable and changeable than conventionally believed, yet they continue to portray it in conventional ways—as a product of institutionally based pools of interests, resources, and experiences. The past simply appears as a different kind of dependent variable—a result of societal continuities rather than discontinuities, a manifestation of bygone realities rather than a construction based on present realities. These authors have made no theoretical

progress beyond the distortions they have sought to avoid.

TWO FACES OF MEMORY

Collective memory, like all cultural systems, is a pattern of "inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which . . . [people] communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about and attitudes toward life" (Geertz 1973b:89). Collective memory enables us to engage social life in at least two ways. First, collective memory is a model *of* society—a reflection of its needs, problems, fears, mentality, and aspirations. Second, collective memory is a model *for* society—a program that defines its experience, articulates its values and goals, and provides cognitive, affective, and moral orientation for realizing them. Collective memory affects social reality by reflecting it and shaping it.

The distinction between memory as a "model of" and "model for" society is an analytic, not empirical, distinction; both aspects of it are realized in every act of remembrance. Memories must express current problems before they can program ways to deal with them. We cannot be oriented by a past in which we fail to see ourselves. On the other hand, it is memory's programmatic relevance that makes its expressive function significant: We have no reason to look for ourselves in a past that does not already orient our lives. Still, the analytic distinction is important because it underscores memory's intrinsic dualism. In its reflective (model *of*) aspect, memory is an expressive symbol—a language, as it were, for articulating present predicaments; in its second (model *for*) aspect, memory is an orienting symbol—a map that gets us through these predicaments by relating where we are to where we have been.

Memory is at once a language and a map, a reflector of and guide for the present; yet, this dualism is incidental to our knowledge. Sociological literature is filled with rich accounts of how collective memory symbolically encodes and reproduces class conflicts, interest structures, and mentalities, but it contains little information about (and few concepts to describe) memory as an entity in itself—an ordered system of symbols that makes experience meaningful. Humanistic literature, by contrast, is filled with artistic, musical, poetic, and biographical works that sustain the past as an object of reverence and emulation; however, an analytical account of these materials—one that provides reference points for description, comparison, and generalization—does not exist. My concern is not to renounce these traditional approaches, but to incorporate them into a broader and more powerful analytic framework.

I do not start from scratch. References to the orientational power of collective memory have appeared in Mannheim's ([1928] 1952: 29–30) commentary on vivid historical events persisting as points of contemporary reference, Cooley's analysis of emulation of past heroes ([1902] 1964:293–316), and Mead's assertion that the "present can only be known and interpreted in the past which it involves" (1938:94; also see Maines, Sugrue, and Katovich 1983:163–64). More recent references to this idea appear in Shils's (1981) conception of tradition as a constituent of present actions and Heilman's (1982:62–63) ethnography of faithful Jews invoking the past as a means of reforming and completing ("traditionalizing") the present (also see Nisbet 1975). The most current statements include Bellah et al. (1985) on "communities of memory," Lowenthal (1985:41–49) on the past as a source of identity, guidance, and enrichment, Rusen (1989:44) on traditional memories as "indispensable elements of orientation" in historical consciousness, Schuman and Rieger (1992) on the uses of past wars (Vietnam and World War II) as historical analogies to sustain support for or opposition to the Persian Gulf War, and Olick (1994) on the past as a "durable resource" for underwriting tradition and identity.

Each of these writings recognizes, but does not demonstrate, the past as a program for the present. None shows precisely how depth in time, tradition, and memory affects the way people interpret what is happening to them. None offers a conception of the symbolic structures that connect the social roots of collective memory to its social functions. I offer a tentative model of this connection. The primary aspect of this model, derived from Geertz's "thick description" (1973a:3–32), shows how individuals locate the symbolic structures of memory and use them to construe their experience. The secondary as-

pect of the model is derived from Parson's AGIL paradigm (Parsons and Smelser 1956). Parsons stipulates that all social systems face four problems: *adaptation*—securing resources from the environment and distributing them throughout the system; *goal attainment*—mobilizing resources to achieve system goals; *integration*—coordinating relationships among the system's units and actors; and *latent pattern maintenance-tension management*—supporting cultural value patterns by motivating actors to play their roles in the system while controlling individual and system tensions. Collective memory is located in society's "latent pattern maintenance" subsystem, whose agents, representing both the state and civil society, sustain cultural values by invoking the past and recounting its grand narratives.

MEMORY AS A SOCIAL FRAME

My model of collective memory is meant to be suggestive, not definitive; but it rests on a strong premise: "Every conscious perception is . . . an act of recognition, a pairing in which an object (or an event, an act, an emotion) is identified by placing it against the background of an appropriate symbol" (Geertz 1973c:215). Two concepts, "framing" and "keying," explicate collective memory as a "recognizing" and "pairing" accomplishment.

The cardinal concept is *framing*. Shared memories become appropriate symbols— backgrounds for the perception and comprehension of current events—when organized into what Goffman (1974) called a "primary framework": *primary* because ". . . application of such a framework or perspective is seen by those who apply it as not depending on or harking back to some prior or 'original' interpretation; indeed a primary framework is one that is seen as rendering what would otherwise be a meaningless aspect of the scene into something that is meaningful" (p. 21). A framework is primary if its existence and meaning precede the event it interprets. Thus, Lincoln's assassination (primary frame) can later be "transcribed" into a stage play or film (copies), but the relation is nonreciprocal. Only radical constructionists would consider the assassination to be a transcription of the play or film. My modifica-

tion of Goffman's conception is less extreme. A primary event, as I narrowly define it, is not any event that is real, originating, and influential. Rather, a primary event is one that unifies and animates a society, orients or reorients it in fundamental ways. Instead of comparing primary events to copies, then, I consider how participants in one primary event, the Second World War, interpret their experience by aligning it to another primary event, the Civil War.

Keying is the mechanism of this interpretive process. Keying transforms the meaning of activities understood in terms of one primary framework by comparing them with activities understood in terms of another. Franklin Roosevelt's death in April 1945, for example, assumes new meaning when keyed to Lincoln's death in April 1865. Keying is more than a new word for analogical thinking, more than a way individuals mentally organize their social experiences (Goffman 1974:40–82). Keying transforms memory into a cultural system, not because it consists of invisible mental operations, but because it matches publicly accessible (i.e., symbolic) models of the past (written narratives, pictorial images, statues, motion pictures, music, and songs) to the experiences of the present. Keying arranges cultural symbols into a publicly visible discourse that flows through the organizations and institutions of the social world. Keying is communicative movement—talk, writing, image- and music-making—that connects otherwise separate realms of history.

As models *of* society, past events are *keyed to the present*; as models *for* society, past events are *keyed by the present*. The distinction raises four questions: What are we referring to behaviorally when we define collective memory as a model *for* rather than a model *of* society? Under what conditions and for what purposes is the past invoked as a frame for understanding the present? What agencies conduct memory work, and what is their relation to society at large? And what must memory work accomplish before it can be said to have been effective?

IMAGE MAKING

I proceed without knowing what individuals thought and felt about Abraham Lincoln during World War II; I only know how artists,

writers, musicians, poets, propagandists, politicians, presidents, movie-makers, editors, and local leaders depicted him. Since these image-makers were socialized by the communities they endeavored to reach, however, their depictions reflected as well as shaped their audience's conception of Lincoln. Their depictions are at once parts of the public conception and vehicles for coming into contact with it. But it is not enough to know the content of this conception, for Lincoln image-making in the early 1940s was never an end in itself. Lincoln mattered to his interpreters and their audiences in the context of war. Lincoln's images revealed his role in the way Americans interpreted wartime events. That this role can be studied objectively, outside the mind, is evident, since it was common access to a collective symbol structure that allowed agents to produce, and audiences to understand, the iconic, verbal, ritual, and musical objects on which this study is based. These objects were not randomly sampled, but they have been seen, read, and heard by a large percentage of the American population. I wish to know what these objects meant—what it was in the repetitive display of commemorative words and pictures that was communicated in the heat of war.

I wish to know, not to exaggerate, Lincoln's symbolic role. It is not bias in my sampling of Lincoln images, however, that makes significant exaggeration a concern; it is the absence of comparative reference to other eras and other historical figures. Considered alone, Lincoln's shadow seems longer and wider than it was in reality. As my goal is to explore the framing mechanisms at play in the general case, however, I attend to Abraham Lincoln as one instance among others. Lincoln's image would be of limited use if it differed fundamentally from others invoked during the war. The unique aspects of Lincoln's case, on the other hand, must be appreciated. Lincoln was not the sole object of wartime invocation, but he was the most common—the one in which the dynamics of memory work were most visible.

Pictorial imagery, including cartoons and posters, played an important role in the wartime representation of Lincoln and my analysis of memory work makes frequent use of them. I obtained these materials from news-

paper archives and microfilms, the U.S. National Archives and Records Administration, Still Picture Branch, and the Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Department. I will cite these sources as I refer to the images I drew from them. I obtained most of the images from the Abraham Lincoln Museum, Harrogate, Tennessee. When contextualized, these pictorial data help us to see Lincoln through the eyes of the World War II generation and to understand this generation's values, attitudes, and emotional concerns.

MATCHING CRISES

In 1940, the eve of the war, almost 44 million Americans—one third of the population—had been born in the late nineteenth century (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1975: 15), when Lincoln was still fresh in the minds of their parents and teachers. At this time, memories of Lincoln had a particularly positive cast. Since most of the people alive during the Civil War had died, animosities against Lincoln had diminished and his reputation abruptly increased (Schwartz 1990).

The World War II generation grew up amid stories that not only idealized Lincoln but also made him relevant to the understanding and solving of their problems. At the beginning of the century these problems included excessive concentration of wealth resulting from the industrial revolution. Legislation against privilege and monopoly and a progressive (redistributive) income tax amendment were designed to diffuse economic power. Anti-corruption legislation and Constitutional amendments providing for universal suffrage and the direct election of U.S. Senators were designed to diffuse political power. These reforms were crucial to the Progressive Era's "moral movement of democracy" (Hofstadter 1963:15), which would expand and mature during the New Deal. Over this 40-year (1900–1940) period, an era in which the economic welfare of the individual became a concern of the state, Lincoln remained a symbol of the people's dignity while also becoming a symbol of the people's rights. Correspondingly, his renown grew and peaked.

Lincoln's symbolic role in the early 1940s was shaped not only by the early twentieth-century's political and economic environ-

ment but also by the cultural environment in which the World War II generation was socialized. At the turn of the twentieth century, historical figures were still revered and held up as models for instructing the young. Charles Horton Cooley ([1902] 1964), then one of the country's distinguished social psychologists, wrote extensively about the "emulation" of great men, freely identified his own heroes (which included Abraham Lincoln), considered them essential to his achievements and moral character, and generalized his feelings about them: "As hero-worship becomes more imaginative, it merges insensibly into that devotion to ideal persons that is called religious" (p. 314). Devotion to Abraham Lincoln as an ideal person cut across class, ethnic, racial, and religious lines and was one of the sentiments that members of an otherwise fractious society shared. The 1943 tune, "Here We Come, Mr. President," for example, depicts Franklin Roosevelt as "Father Franklin D" (the recollection of "Father Abraham" obscuring Roosevelt's patrician roots) and links three generations through three wars—World War II, World War I, and the Civil War: "Our fathers wore the khaki/our grandfathers wore the gray or blue/and gladly we will do the things/that they once had to do." Roosevelt's supporters also described the New Deal as the Second Emancipation and claimed that Lincoln was the first New Deal president (Sandburg 1934; Jones 1974).

That Lincoln was "good for thinking" about World War II is also suggested in newspaper, magazine, and oratorical topics. Between 1940 and 1944, *The New York Times* printed 215 articles about Lincoln; between 1990 and 1994, for comparison, it printed 36 articles. During these same periods the *Readers Guide* lists 128 and 61 articles respectively. Likewise, the *Congressional Record* lists 131 entries on Lincoln during the early 1940s and 26 entries in the early 1990s.[1]

---

[1] Between 1915 and 1919 the *New York Times* published 164 articles about Lincoln. The *Readers Guide* listed 92 articles; the *Congressional Record*, 61 entries. Thus, the number of items published during World War II was considerably greater than the number published during World War I. The reasons for this difference are complex, but include the elevation of Lincoln's prestige during the Great Depression.

Before the war, Lincoln's prominence was manifest in visual as well as printed media. Two screenplays, *Young Man Lincoln* (1937) and *Abe Lincoln in Illinois* (1940) (Lincoln was played by Henry Fonda and Raymond Massey respectively), had appeared prior to the war. Another (1939) film, *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* (featuring James Stewart) contains pivotal references to Lincoln and dramatic scenes at the Lincoln Memorial. On stage, too, the Lincoln theme was prominent. The (1938) stageplay version of *Abe Lincoln in Illinois* had won the Pulitzer Prize, while *Prelude to Glory* (1941), a play about Lincoln's youth (written with Works Progress Administration support), became a great Broadway success.

Lincoln's symbolic power was greatest in the northern United States, but his stature in the South should not be underestimated. Southern communities lacked the ritual apparatuses and occasions that had institutionalized the memory of Lincoln in the North, but Southerners were not isolated from the rest of the nation. Southerners and Northerners saw the same movies, heard the same radio broadcasts, and taught history to their children from the same textbooks. Thus, in NORC's July 1945 survey, Lincoln was named one of the "two or three greatest men in American history" by 61 percent of Northern Whites and 44 percent of Southern Whites respectively. Southern Whites, however, named Lincoln as often as they named George Washington (43 percent).

Similarity between World War II and the Civil War cannot explain what made Lincoln so memorable in the early 1940s. World War I furnished much better logistical and technical examples (including air power) than did the Civil War. Also, most Americans had lived through World War I as children or adults and thought about it constantly throughout the four years of the next war. On the other hand, a Gallup survey (1937) showed that 70 percent of Americans believed that United States participation in World War I was a mistake (Gallup 1972:54). The NORC (1945) survey showed Woodrow Wilson, the president during World War I, being named as one of the two or three greatest Americans by only 8 percent of the population. Thus, World War I was a living memory, not a self-defining frame memory. It was the American

Civil War (the "Second American Revolution," as McPherson [1991] calls it), not World War I, that established the democracy for which the World War II generation fought. Historical distinction, in turn, rests on moral significance. Morality is the "cultural code" to which a historical event must fit rhetorically if it is to become a model for current events (Smith 1991:191). Civil War memories include the clearest examples of moral virtue, like endurance in the face of great loss; moral goals, like emancipation and the preservation of the union; and moral examplars, like Abraham Lincoln. This is why the Civil War rather than World War I has furnished American civil religion with its themes of death, sacrifice, and rebirth (Bellah 1970:177–78). This is why Lincoln's image, not Wilson's, legitimated, oriented, clarified, inspired, and consoled throughout World War II.

To legitimate unpopular wartime measures, orient the people to prolonged sacrifice, clarify the purpose of war, inspire men to fight it in the face of defeat, and console the bereaved—these functions were essential to war mobilization. It was not enough for the state to declare war, train an armed force, and orient the economy toward war priorities; there also had to be "pattern maintenance" machinery (Parsons and Smelser 1956; also see Alexander 1982; Munch 1985) to ensure that individual citizens were sufficiently motivated to play their parts, even in the face of hardship and loss. As American society mobilized, the state, the mass media, schools, and other institutions whose function it is to maintain cultural values, scanned the past and transmitted images that framed the war's purpose and sustained the will to achieve it. At some times and in some places this function was insignificant, but everywhere it was evident—even before the shooting war began.

HISTORICAL DISCOURSES

Legitimation

Franklin Roosevelt and his spokesmen justified preparations for global war by clothing them in reminders of Lincoln and the Civil War. In May 1941, six months before Pearl Harbor was attacked, Roosevelt declared an unlimited national emergency and assumed extraordinary executive powers. The U.S. Constitution vests such powers in the presidency, but Edward Foley, counsel for the Treasury Department, used no legal arguments to defend Roosevelt against charges of dictatorship. Recognizing that legal authority is rooted in tradition, "the sanctity of the order and the attendant powers of control as they have been handed down from the past and always existed" (Weber 1947:341), Foley invoked historical, not legal, precedent: "Our great presidents never hesitated to do whatever was necessary for the preservation of the union," and he supported his claim with a detailed list of the powers Abraham Lincoln assumed during the Civil War. On his own authority Lincoln called out state militias, incorporated them into the regular army, recruited volunteers, built ships, imposed blockades, obtained credit, restricted freedom of speech and suspended legal protections against arbitrary arrest and imprisonment (New York Times, June 28, 1941, p. 11). Lincoln had provided a model for presidential conduct during national danger. "Lincoln, the greatest of our democrats, was also our first dictator" (New York Times Magazine, March 2, 1941, Section 7, p. 23). Three years later Lincoln was re-elected president in a fair and open contest.

Why should Lincoln's presidency be invoked to begin with? Roosevelt's supporters could have justified his actions simply by arguing that they were in the national interest. Invoking Lincoln could have complicated the matter, for it raised the question of whether the present situation warranted the extreme measures Roosevelt took. But everyone knew the difference between the Civil War and the fighting then going on in Europe and Asia. Roosevelt's supporters were not trying to perform a technical analysis, but to connect his measures to the sacred narrative of the nation. Keying preparations for a second World War to the history of the Civil War was an ideological exercise, not to be assessed in terms of historical evidence but by its ability to grasp and communicate realities that the language of history cannot express.

Orientation

There would be no reason to invoke the past, Mead believed (1929, 1932), if some signifi-

cant problem were not disrupting normal patterns of life or effective action. Franklin Roosevelt's problem was the public's initial reluctance to go to war and its ignorance of what was needed to win the war once it began. Justifying war mobilization, then, was only Roosevelt's first task; his second was to explain war strategy and costs. Before war was declared, the military had decided that attrition (making the best possible use of superior manpower to wear down more skillful enemies) would be the most reasonable strategy. It would also be the strategy most difficult to implement because it required prolonged fighting.[2]

Roosevelt's administration prepared the public for protracted war in many ways, including the keying of present to past military situations. On August 16, 1941, two days after meeting with British Prime Minister Churchill in the mid-Atlantic and several days after the Senate narrowly approved conscription (even as German and Japanese victories threatened American security), Roosevelt (1950) chose a point in a press conference to go back 80 years and quote Abraham Lincoln's assessment of the Union army's progress. After a year of preparations and skirmishes, Lincoln said, the army's officers

". . . have not buckled down to the determination to fight this war through; for they have got the idea into their heads that we are going to get out of this fix somehow by strategy! That's the word—*strategy*! General McClellan thinks he is going to whip the Rebels by strategy; and the army has got the same notion. They have no idea that the war is to be carried on and put through by hard, tough fighting, that it will hurt somebody; and no headway is going to be made while this delusion lasts." (Lincoln as quoted by Roosevelt 1950:329)

"That is rather an interesting parallel," Roosevelt remarked as he looked up from his text: "Lincoln's belief that this country hadn't yet waked up to the fact that they had a war to win, and Lincoln saw what had been going on. Well, there are quite a lot of things

---

[2] Americans chronically and grossly underestimated the war's duration. Three weeks after the attack on Pearl Harbor, exactly 50 percent of Gallup's respondents believed the war would be over in two years or less. Six months later, 61 percent anticipated the war's lasting for no more than two years (Gallup 1972:318, 336).

for us to think about in this day and age" (Roosevelt 1950:329).

Days later, a *New York Times* editorial titled "The President's Warning" reproduced part of Lincoln's statement. When Roosevelt read that statement, the editor explained, he did not quote from memory. He had the passage ready for the reporters, read it grimly, and made clear he wanted to see it in the headlines. Roosevelt relied on Lincoln's words about an 1862 situation to articulate a 1941 danger, and "the significance of this reminder will not be lost on anybody" (*New York Times*, August 20, 1941, p. 16). Three and a half months later, Pearl Harbor was attacked.

Fifteen months after Pearl Harbor, in the midst of intense fighting, War Secretary Henry Stimson quoted the same Lincoln passage in a radio address justifying plans to increase the size of the armed forces. He said that "the attitude which Lincoln described manifests itself when we say things which at bottom represent merely wishful thinking or the dread of personal sacrifices and the desire to find a better way out" (*New York Times*, March 10, 1943, p. 4). Stimson believed that Americans did not understand what it meant to be at war and that no words could give them a better explanation than Lincoln's.

Lincoln's conception of what it would take to win the Civil War was seen by Roosevelt's and Stimson's audiences for what it was: a model *for* the present—not a "high resolution" model to be mimicked or literally applied to the current situation, but a "low resolution" model to be used as a guideline for the molding of attitude and motivation (Schudson 1989b:171–72).

Clarification

Invoking Lincoln's memory helped to legitimate Roosevelt's assumption of emergency powers and to provide orientation on how to fight the war. Both *legitimation* and *orientation* key present to past situations through discourse. Legitimation discourse is about presidential powers in a national emergency; orientation discourse is about mobilization for war and strategies for fighting it. And both discourses concern action. Clarification discourse, on the other hand, is a hybrid that concerns action and values. It is a pattern

maintenance discourse that dramatizes the values on which the political, economic, and integrative subsystems of society rest, but bringing these values to bear on public understanding of the war was problematic. Asked by the December 1942 Gallup Poll whether they "have a clear idea of what the war is all about—that is, what we are fighting for," 32 percent of the respondents, a significant minority, said they did not (Gallup 1972:359). Clarification of the meaning of the war was therefore imperative, and no other homefront task was assumed by as many different media.

Seven months after the United States entered the war, the Office of War Information distributed posters picturing a resolute Lincoln above the last line of his Gettysburg Address: ". . . that government of the people, by the people, for the people shall not perish from the earth." To save democracy—that is what the war is about. Lincoln, with dark shading around his face to emphasize the solemnity of the hour, implores the viewer: "Back the Attack!"

To visualize democracy, printmakers and cartoonists have always exploited images of slavery. These images are central to America's sense of its own being because slavery constitutes the negative term that gives freedom and equality their positive sense. Newspapers made this evident. In the cartoon, "Lincoln and Lebensraum," a giant-size Abraham Lincoln (Daniel Chester French's statue) looks down on a sword-wielding yet puny Adolph Hitler. The inset compares Hitler's demand for territorial concessions to American slaveholders' demands for the extension of slavery. World War II is thus construed as a continuation of the Civil War. This key was used time and again. In an editorial cartoon, Lincoln stands behind Roosevelt and rests his hand on Roosevelt's shoulder above the caption, "You have a greater task than I had. Slavery must be removed from the whole earth." In a train station, an Office of War Information poster shows Lincoln's countenance below the famous line from his "House Divided" speech: "This World Cannot Exist Half Slave and Half Free" (National Archives, Box 5, PM 5-16-555). In a factory cafeteria, another poster uses the same words to interpret a vivid scene of Nazi brutality (National Archives, Box 5, PM 5-15-554). A

Figure 1.

Let Freedom Ring: Distributed as Posters and Reprinted in Newspapers and Magazines, Interprets World War II by Inserting It into the Grand Narrative of American History
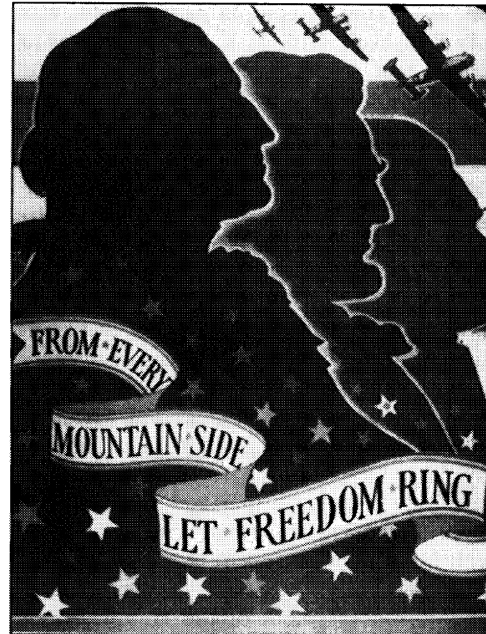
Source: U.S. Office of War Information, *Let Freedom Ring*, 1944. Poster. The Abraham Lincoln Museum, Harrogate, Tennessee. Photo courtesy of the Abraham Lincoln Museum.

front page cartoon in the *Philadelphia Record* (February 12, 1943, p. 1) on Lincoln Day keys fascism to slaveholding: Lincoln's emblem, the ax, splits a swastika above the great summons (taken from Lincoln's Second Inaugural Address): "Let Us Strive to Finish the Work We Are In." The caption: "As in 1865— So in 1943."

As a frame for interpreting World War II, Civil War images were reinforced by images from the American Revolution. In one poster, Lincoln's countenance is associated with two revolutionary war scenes: George Washington crossing the Delaware and George Washington at the Battle of Monmouth. The written message, "Adolph, Have You Ever Read American History?" refers (through time-phased pictures of Lincoln and Washington) to a traditional will to fight. In another illustration, a war bond advertisement, silhouetted profiles of George Washington, Abraham Lincoln, and Thomas Jefferson are

set against a background of bombers flying off on a mission (see Figure 1). The illustration's title, "From Every Mountain Side Let Freedom Ring," formulates the bombing mission's ultimate purpose.

State and media iconography in an ethnically divided society were designed to remind everyone of the values they shared. Recurrently, the word "liberty" appeared. Liberty did not need to be defined, as its power lay in its ambiguity—its ability to move different people in different ways and its easy alignment with different symbolic structures. Polish immigrants and their children, for example, contributed readily to the war, but traditional American symbols made sense to them only when joined to traditional symbols of their own. Thus, a 1943 Lincoln's Birthday cartoon in the Polish-American press (see Figure 2), titled "My Defenders" (*Moi Obroncy*) portrays Liberty (*Wolnocz*) showing pictures of Abraham Lincoln and Thaddeus Kosciusko (the Polish patriot who fought for the United States in the Revolutionary War) to a young U.S. soldier (*Zolnierz U.S.*) in battle dress. One year later a similar portrait appeared, with a young child (symbolizing the community's next generation) taking the soldier's place. Clearly, Lincoln was to America what Kosciusko was to Poland. Drawn in two successive years, the illustrated connection made Lincoln a mediator joining the Polish community to the American state and its war.

Inspiration

Invocations of the past are ideologial assertions whose function, as Geertz (1973) put it, is to formulate the mood of a people, then to "mobilize it by making it a public possession rather than a set of disconnected, unrealized private emotions" (p. 232). Lincoln formulated this mood and mobilized these emotions. This is why his image appeared so often during the bleak days of the war. Unlike *clarification* discourse, which used images of Lincoln to explain the war's purpose, *inspiration* discourse drew on Lincoln images to justify the war's costs. Inspiration discourse was a discourse of encouragement, and to propagate it effectively the pattern maintenance machinery—comprised of agencies whose function is to articulate cul-

tural values and sustain the motivation to defend them—had to work to the upper limits of its capacity.

On December 9, 1941, Franklin Roosevelt declared: "We must share together the bad news and the good news, the defeats and the victories" (National Archives, Box 5, PM 5-56-582). But there was no news of victory, only of disaster. Federal information offices worked around the clock to put Pearl Harbor into perspective, and one of their first measures was to ask composers to write patriotic songs to boost morale. To know what must be done, concretely, to inspire a listener is to know which symbols best formulate the purposes and emotions of war. Some composers knew this better than others. Neither Jerome Kern and Oscar Hammerstein's "Abe Lincoln Had Just One Country" nor Irving Berlin's "Abraham" had much impact on the public mood. Aaron Copland's "Lincoln Portrait," on the other hand, was one of the most popular wartime musical productions. Inspired by "Requiem Suggested by the Gettysburg Address," written by his teacher Rubin Goldmark during

Figure 2.

My Defenders: A Cartoon Appearing in a Polish-American Newspaper, Frames World War II by Connecting Traditional Symbols and Representative Heroes of America and Poland
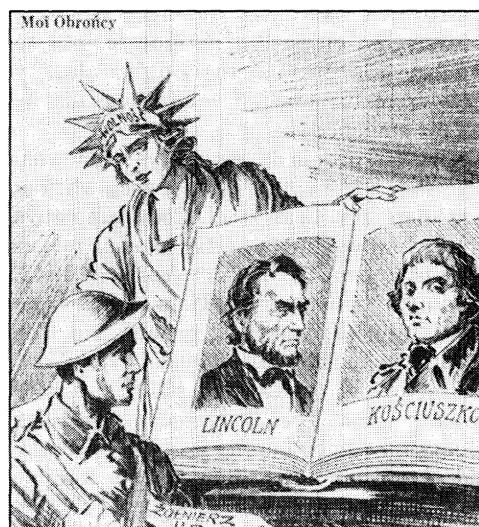
Source: Personal Scrapbook, *My Defenders*, c.1943. Newspaper cartoon. The Abraham Lincoln Museum, Harrogate, Tennessee. Photo courtesy of the Abraham Lincoln Museum.

World War I, Copland's 13-minute orchestral piece includes a speaker reciting various passages from Lincoln's speeches. From Cincinnati, where it was first performed, a journalist reported, "I have not seen so excited an audience as this Cinncinati one upon the completion of Copland's Lincoln . . . "(Copland and Perlis 1984:342). From several other cities came reports that "audiences get all excited by it"(p. 344). "Lincoln Portrait" aroused audiences because it placed the early 1942 battle losses in a perspective that made them seem manageable and comprehensible.

In July 1942, amid still discouraging news from the war front, conductor Andre Kostelanetz performed "Lincoln Portrait" (with Carl Sandburg as reader) before a crowd gathered near the Lincoln Memorial. "After the concert," Copland recalled, "Andre told me that he felt Lincoln's words 'with a terrible new clarity,' and we both knew the audience felt it also" (Copland and Perlis 1984:344). Copland's comment on Lincoln's words having the same effect on Kostelanetz as on the people who heard them reflects the familiarity of the symbols his music communicated. Copland composed his piece to invoke these symbols, not to exploit them. An exploited audience must, by definition, hold values that differ from those which its manipulator wishes to impose. Copland's task (like Roosevelt's and the Office of War Information's) was to invigorate, not to change, conceptions the public already held—to reaffirm beliefs and feelings that he and his audience shared.

However, people do not always know what ideas they share with others, or even whether they share any ideas at all. Commemorative ritual, like commemorative music, makes consensus explicit. In New York, in 1942, amid news of astonishing German and Japanese victories, veterans' groups and Boy Scouts conducted their annual Lincoln Day ceremonies at the Lincoln statue in Union Square. Fred Lee, a Chinese-American youngster, climbed to the top of the pedestal and placed upon it a floral wreath forming "V" for victory (New York Times, February 13, 1942, p. 14). Throughout the city different organizations, from the Grand Army of the Republic to the American Civil Liberties Union, held Lincoln Day programs—most

were in English, but many were in other languages. In Philadelphia, the Sons of Union Veterans placed a wreath on the spot where President-elect Lincoln, under threat of assassination, delivered his 1861 Washington's Birthday speech. The Daughters of Union Veterans, joined by Boy Scouts, held their ceremony at the giant Lincoln statue in Fairmount Park. At the Union League, young women were formally inducted into the Women's Army Corps (WACS) in front of Lincoln's statue.

Rituals, Shils (1975) observed, are "part of [society's] systematic response to crisis" (p. 158). As Lincoln Day rituals keyed the present crisis to crises of the past, they performed two functions: They visualized and enhanced the public solidarity needed to wage war effectively, and they defined the war's purpose by invoking, through references to Lincoln, the values of the nation. That these rituals conducted at the nadir of American military fortunes were so moving to so many people was not accidental, for one of the important functions of shared values is to unify and inspire in the face of failure. The Office of War Information knew this. In one of its early posters (National Archives, Box 1, PM 1-20-118), contemporary soldiers in battle dress and armed with modern weapons parade at Valley Forge (the low point of the Revolution) before the ranks of George Washington's bedraggled soldiers. The scene gave meaning to early World War II losses by defining them as early and momentary episodes in a long, transcendent narrative. The slogan accompanying this scene, "Americans Will Always Defend Liberty," reiterates the point, emphasizing the continuity of present and past.

Lincoln's response to defeat on the battlefield was an important part of this narrative. In the winter of 1942, the Philadelphia Inquirer shows him placing an encouraging hand on the shoulder of a despondent Uncle Sam, who cringes at the latest war news (February 12, 1942, p. 9). In the summer of 1942, as German and Japanese forces continued to advance, The New York Times Magazine (June 28, 1942, Section 7, p. 5) published "He, Too, Had Dark Days," a story by one of Lincoln's secretaries, William Stoddard, as retold by his son. The story follows Lincoln after the disastrous defeat of

his army at Chancellorsville and shows how he looked beyond it: On the very night of the calamity he wrote out military orders that set the stage for victory at Gettysburg. The reprinting of Stoddard's article expresses a powerful theme in the culture of war. Armies that win battles effortlessly require no memories to sustain their morale while spectacular victories of the past are useless models in a hard-fought war marked by costly and discouraging defeats.

Talcott Parsons (1951), a consistent and ardent war hawk, probably never read Stoddard's article. But the imperative to which the article refers—continued effort in the face of defeat and loss—was central to Parsons's postwar formulation of society in *The Social System*: consensus in a social system is problematic and requires the functional capacity to "motivate actors adequately to performances which may be necessary if the social system in question is to persist" (p. 29). In the early 1940s, a good way to inspire "adequate motivation" for the struggles of World War II was to connect it to the legacy of the early 1860s.

Consolation

People who live through a war costing 300,000 lives and 1 million injuries need more than inspiration. They need a theodicy. The discourses of theodicy and inspiration are comparable: Both enable people to work together continuously and effectively despite great losses. *Consolation discourse* is formulated to make the ultimate loss, death, understandable and bearable. Two sacred documents of the Civil War performed these functions. Lincoln wrote the first document, the Gettysburg Address (part of the "New Testament" of "civil scripture" [Bellah, 1970:177–78]), for the dedication of a new military cemetery, but its substance was generalizable. "In this tremendous war, whose every day adds to the number of our dead, Mr. Lincoln's words of eighty years ago are as strong, inspiring and immediate as if they were heard today for the first time" (*New York Times*, April 14, 1943, p. 10). War bond advertisements made this point tangible. The back of the *Philadelphia Inquirer's* Sunday supplement, to take one example, shows a soldier in full battle gear lying dead (Figure 3). He ap-

Figure 3.

That These Dead Shall Not Have Died in Vain: **Distributed as Posters and Reprinted in Newspapers and Magazines, invokes Lincoln to Legitimate the Suffering of War and to Promote the Sharing of Its Burden**

Source: U.S. Treasury Department, *That These Dead Shall Not Have Died in Vain*, 1943. Poster. The Abraham Lincoln Museum, Harrogate Tennessee. Photo courtesy of the Abraham Lincoln Museum.

pears in the picture's foreground and, in the background, elevated above the fallen soldier is Daniel Chester French's statue of Lincoln. Both Lincoln and the soldier whom Lincoln beholds are illuminated by the same mysterious light. An extract from the Gettysburg Address completes the image: "That We Here Highly Resolve That These Dead Shall Not Have Died in Vain." In a related poster titled "Remember Dec. 7th!" (the date of the attack on Pearl Harbor), the same line appears above a battle-torn flag flying at halfmast to consecrate the dead (National Archives, Box 4, PM 180-44-PA-178).

The second document of Lincoln's secular theodicy was his letter to Mrs. Lydia Bixby, a Massachusetts mother believed to have lost five sons during the Civil War. The letter was first cited in 1942, when Mr. and Mrs. Thomas Sullivan of Waterloo, Iowa lost their

five sons in the Pacific campaign. There was a remarkable similarity between the combat deaths of five Massachusetts brothers in 1862 and of five Iowa brothers in 1942. Newspapers formatted the story as a triad in which Lincoln's picture, a photograph of the Sullivan boys, and the Bixby letter, sometimes printed in Lincoln's handwriting, appeared together.

A free replica of the Bixby letter was offered to all bereaved parents by the Weatherhead Company of Cleveland, Ohio. The letter omits Lincoln's first sentence, which refers specifically to the Bixby boys, and begins at the second sentence where it refers to any boy. The Weatherhead Company profited by war contracts, but its gift was nonetheless a gift of meaning because it matched a familiar and powerful sign—an image of Lincoln—with the catastrophic effects of World War II in such a way as to make the latter morally comprehensible. To place a soldier's name on some casualty list is to make his death a mere point of information. To connect that name with Lincoln's is to sanctify it. Lincoln's Bixby letter communicated an identity of purpose between nation and family better than could any other document.

THE ETERNAL PAST

Lincoln's presidency, with its setbacks and prolonged struggle, was the perfect symbolic code for World War II. The appropriateness of the "code/event match" (Smith 1991; Wagner-Pacifici forthcoming), however, was provisional. Abraham Lincoln's image waxed and waned as the political consensus on World War II broke down. Since the Korean conflict was a new kind of military experience, one with understandable but not compelling purpose, it was rarely keyed to the Civil War or to any other part of the American past. Lacking a symbolic frame, this "police action," as it was officially called, became "The Forgotten War" as soon as it ended.

Lincoln's memory was invoked once again during the Vietnam War, but it was used to articulate division rather than unity. To justify their cause, antiwar constituencies recalled Lincoln's opposition to the Mexican War. They asserted that he had remained firm in his conviction, even though it cost him the

nomination for a second term in the U.S. House of Representatives (Mitgang 1967). War resisters inscribed Lincoln's words on their posters: "It is a sin to be silent when it is your duty to protest" (U.S. Library of Congress, Yankel Collection, 6-U.S., 1119). War supporters, on the other hand, saw nothing in common between Lincoln and the current Vietnam critics. Once men were in the field, they said, Lincoln voted for whatever was necessary to defeat Mexico (Collier 1966: 1982). Hawks also noted that Lincoln, like Lyndon Johnson and Richard Nixon, endured frequent criticism over war policies. As the Vietnam War wound down, liberals continued to use Lincoln to articulate their views. They found in his call for "malice toward none" and "charity for all" a guiding vision for postwar reconciliation. Because President Lincoln forgave the "sincerely penitent" deserters and draft evaders, President Nixon should be equally generous (New York Times, February 12, 1973, p. 26). Instead, Nixon's second inauguration committee dropped a specially prepared concert based on Lincoln's second inaugural address. The Committee offered no reason for its decision but was reported to have found Lincoln's comments on Union military success and his call for clemency to be "not in spirit" with President Nixon's situation and aims (New York Times, January 14, 1973, p. 1).

Why were some events and not others keyed to Lincoln's presidency? Memorable and heroic moments, according to Wagner-Pacifici (1996), are always "fraught with conflict and contradiction [and always] leave casualties and sacrifices in their paths" (p. 306). If we add the phrase "consequential conflict and contradiction" to Wagner-Pacifici's statement, we understand why Lincoln's power as a consensual symbol, latent during the painful but nonthreatening Korean and Vietnam wars, became manifest during the four days following President John F. Kennedy's assassination.

Presidential assassinations, like world wars, threaten the institutional foundations of national existence (Shils 1965). Since these threats prove more intelligible when assimilated to familiar narratives, clergymen hastened to compare Kennedy's death with Lincoln's. Cardinal Cushing, concluding his nationally televised message from Boston,

could think of no comfort to extend to the president's mother and father "beyond the knowledge that they have given history a youthful Lincoln"(*New York Times*, November 25, 1963, p. 1). On the same day, television cameras showed a succession of dignitaries converging on the White House as actor Van Heflin, off-camera, read the poem Walt Whitman composed on the occasion of Lincoln's death, *O Captain! My Captain!*: "Oh the bleeding drops of red,/ Where on the deck my Captain lies,/ Fallen cold and dead."

Next day, the president's coffin was carried by horse-drawn caisson to the Capitol and placed on the same catafalque that had borne Abraham Lincoln's remains. Common ritual paraphernalia revealed continuity and common fate: two presidents, two martyrs. Ritual symbols constituted the link, transformed external parallels involving bullets, fleeing assailants, and hurried oath-takings into mystical bonds that unite generations.

Millions of television viewers saw Kennedy's funeral pageant approach the Lincoln Memorial, wind around its southern side, move across Memorial Bridge into the cemetery, and arrive at the graveside. They would never forget what they had seen. Halbwachs ([1950] 1980:128–57) often noticed how events occurring over time are fixed in collective memory by the arrangement of objects in space. So it was on the day of Kennedy's funeral. Television cameras scanning downhill, past the gravesite and across the Potomac River, revealed the direct line from Kennedy's grave across the Memorial Bridge to the Lincoln Memorial.

CONCLUSION

In his conclusion to *Watergate in American Memory*, Schudson (1994) observed: "People are not invariably seeking to legitimate their present interests [by invoking the past]. . . . They seek to know what is right, what is true. They seek some kind of direction when they are aimless. They seek in the past some kind of anchor when they are adrift. They seek a source of inspiration when they despair" (p. 213). Memory, in other words, is a cultural program that orients our intentions, sets our moods, and enables us to act. Studying memory during a national emergency has given us a grasp of how this program works.

Between December 1941 and September 1945, Abraham Lincoln framed and articulated a nation's experience of war. His memory did not glorify the war or conceal its horror, as have other commemorations (Mosse 1990); it formulated the war's meaning. His memory helped to legitimate the president's assumption of dictatorial powers, prepare the population for war, clarify the ideals and values at stake in the war, inspire men and women to carry it out in the face of many defeats, and justify more than 1 million American deaths and injuries. The American people, however, legitimated and oriented their actions, affirmed their values, and inspired and consoled one another in many ways. Representations of Lincoln were only one part of the cultural template that made the war comprehensible. Knowledge of Lincoln's symbolic role, however, provides answers to the questions posed at the beginning of this paper: What do we mean behaviorally when we refer to memory work as a model *for* society? Under what conditions and for what purpose is the past invoked as a frame for understanding the present? What agents conduct memory work, and what is their relation to society at large? What must memory work accomplish if it is to be considered effective?

My first step in answering these questions has been to consider memory work's social function. Memory work has at best a minimal instrumental function. It does not create and mobilize resources or make armies more effective. Its function is semiotic: to make tangible the values for which resources and armies are mobilized in the first place. Keying, the mechanism of memory work, realizes this function by a literal crossing of ideational wires—a forced juxtaposition of actors and events in two separate wars, such that the narratives of one war are appropriated as means to interpret the events of the other.

The World War II generation exploited the memory of Abraham Lincoln through a six-part keying process: (1) *selection*: a specific historical event, the Civil War, was invoked as a primary framework; (2) *scanning*: Civil War episodes were perused with a view to locating actions relevant to World War II predicaments; (3) *event alignment*: emphasis on relevant similarities rather than contrasts

helped render World War II a "repetition" of the Civil War—"the same thing all over again"; (4) *identification*: World War II participants expressly "identified" with the Civil War generation, looked upon its members as predecessors and themselves as descendants; (5) *values alignment*: World War II participants saw themselves and their Civil War ancestors struggling toward the same moral ends; (6) *idealization*: complex Civil War images were summarized in the familiar image of Abraham Lincoln, and because they were summarized in him, they enlarged him and elevated him and made him bigger than life.[3]

Americans at war could choose any one of a number of events from history to invoke. They chose the Civil War most often because it was the defining moment of the American nation—the moment that shaped and fixed the identity of generations. In the mid-twentieth century, makers of images of the Civil War and of Lincoln could thus count on their audiences' capacity to understand and appreciate their work. The machinery of invocation (keying) presupposes rather than creates the affinity of the events it brings together, and only when this affinity is commonly felt can the invocation of a nineteenth-century president highlight and reinforce twentieth century values.

That the World War II generation found it so easy to embrace Lincoln is the very condition that defines the power of his image. If Lincoln's image were hollow, a merely symbolic residue left over from former generations, then the popularity of Lincoln biographies, songs, dramas, films, and the great volume of newspaper and magazine articles about Lincoln that appeared immediately before and during the war would have no explanation, and if his image had lost its power to orient and motivate, then at the end of the war Americans would not have rated Lincoln

---

[3] This six-phase keying process is often related to frames for collective action. *Action frames*, as Gamson (1992, 1995) defines them, are beliefs that promote reform and stimulate participation in social movements. They define present injustices and induce victims or indignant observers to see themselves as remedial agents and to construe their conduct as self-defining. Analysis of the keying of problematic present events to past events shows contemporary action frames to be deeply embedded in collective memory.

the greatest American president besides Roosevelt.

Although Americans earnestly keyed problematic states of World War II to Lincoln's experience in the Civil War, the fit was not perfect—and this was necessarily so, for the past is both an idealization and a critique of the present world. Invoking Lincoln and the Civil War would have been pointless if they resembled Roosevelt and World War II too closely, for a past that merely reproduces the present suggests no answers to its dilemmas. Ideal models, not realistic ones, inspire and energize. On the other hand, ideals may become so abstract as to bear no relationship to life's realities. Simplistically idealized visions of the past are not credible enough to serve as a model for a present that is complex and imperfect. Tension, not easy compatibility, defines the relation between memory and experience.

In the present case, tension is sustained in two ways. Since Lincoln's life is made up of more facets than can be applied in a given situation, its emulation requires selective remembrance. During the Great Depression, for example, Lincoln's youth and struggles in Illinois were the main objects of popular reflection; during the war, his presidency; during Kennedy's funeral, his death. This does not mean that we ourselves create the object that instructs and inspires us. The question, "What *part* of Lincoln's life is a model *for* society?" is simply answered differently, evokes different sentiments, and appears with different relevance from one social context to another.

Tension between memory and experience is also sustained by the dynamics of distortion. If memory work does not create the past, it does exaggerate it. This is because invocation is rhetorically stylized. Invoking Lincoln through the discourses of legitimation, orientation, clarification, inspiration, and consolation makes him more dictatorial, decisive, relentless, clear-minded, democratic, and sympathetic than he could have been in his time. This exaggeration, induced by twentieth-century problems, idealized Lincoln and made him more credible as a model *for* a twentieth-century society. But the exaggeration of Lincoln's virtues does not explain why he had become a model in the first place. Lincoln, in fact, was not a

model because he was idealized; rather he was idealized because he was already a model. And he was already a model because of real, not imaginary (constructed), accomplishments and traits.

Models can be used in different ways. To understand the keying of any World War II situation to the Civil War, therefore, the role of "fabrication"—the intentional effort of one or more individuals to manipulate or even falsify meaning—must be discounted (see Goffman 1974:83–123). What motives, then, should we attribute to President Roosevelt and his administrators for so often resorting to Lincoln? What should we make of the work of cartoonists, editors, corporation heads, advertising departments, publicists, and the Office of War Information? Should we treat their appeals as keyings or fabrications? Was Lincoln's image invoked by the state and the media as Christ's image was invoked by the church? Or was his image used to manipulate the masses into supporting a cause toward which they might have otherwise been indifferent?

Influential people do not always consciously manipulate; they often believe their efforts to affect others' opinions are in the general interest. The fabrication concept is useful, however, because it helps distinguish influencing agents who share their audience's values from agents who induce their audience to adopt values to which it is not committed or of which the agents alone approve. Conflict theories of memory are referring to this kind of fabrication when they assert that any image of the past is "a product of elite manipulation" (Bodnar 1992:20). Since the dominant class's images celebrate the dominant ideology, Baigell (1993:201, 204) observes, they "can be seen as a form of oppression" or, at best, baneful influence. The photograph of the raising of the American flag at Iwo Jima provides a clear example: It was deliberately posed and, according to Kenneth Ames (1993:223), "used to manipulate the American public to support the war."

Whether elites are sincere or deceptive, assertions about their hegemony leave two essential and interrelated questions unanswered. First, of the infinite number of devices that could have been used to inspire and console the American masses, why was Lincoln's memory invoked more often than anyone else's? What is problematic is not only the *function* of memory—for example, to console by making death meaningful—but also the *vehicle* of memory—to make death meaningful by invoking Lincoln. Second, conflict theory assumes dissensus to be the natural state of society, dismissing the possibility that image-makers might embrace the same values and goals as their audience and invoke shared symbols to articulate, rather than to manipulate, its sentiment. This second point is the most fundamental. To focus exclusively on the use of Lincoln's image by a dominant class or dominant institution is to offer a supply-side theory that attends to the production of images but ignores how the images are received. Reception, however, is always problematic. The state's success or failure in generating support for war by sustaining discourse on Lincoln is determined by the public's endorsement of the values Lincoln symbolized, its belief that those values are worth struggling to preserve, and its perception that the state is their custodian rather than their exploiter. Between the remembrance of Lincoln and the immediate imperatives of war exists a relation that neither the concepts of manipulation and propaganda, nor the related concepts of dominant ideology and false consciousness, can formulate.

Theories focusing solely on divergent memories rooted in competing interests cannot credibly depict American memory during the war years. Throughout the war, it is true, Republicans regarded Lincoln as the antithesis of centralized New Deal power politics while Democrats saw him as the epitome of welfare-state compassion. The politics of memory, however, can produce consensus as well as conflict, and by 1945 consensus dominated. Memories of Abraham Lincoln embodied a universal cultural presence that constituted common models for acting, common ideals for judging, common categories of understanding, common sources of inspiration, and common interpretations of suffering and death.

As a model *for* society, however, Abraham Lincoln was more than an image of the moment. He was part of something deeper and more permanent—part of a collective consciousness. Just as different sentences enact the unseen reality of a language (Saussure

[1915] 1956), so different depictions of Lincoln enacted a common image of a man. This deep, common image gave different transformations of Lincoln their recognizable unity. Thus, the cultural power of Lincoln's memory, as Emile Durkheim ([1893] 1964) would say, is "independent of the particular conditions in which individuals are placed; they pass on and it remains. . . . [I]t does not change with each but, on the contrary, it connects successive generations with one another" (p. 80).

Durkheim ([1915] 1965:475) also believed, however, that generations change as they move alternately from eras of "collective effervescence," in which the nation's myths and symbols are reaffirmed, to eras of "moral mediocrity" in which the transcendence of the nation and its ideals recedes. In the moral mediocrity of America's postwar era, Lincoln's standing in polls of presidential greatness fell sharply.[4] His status fell further after the 1968 Monday Holiday Bill subordinated the anniversary of his birth, observed officially in many states on February 12, to an anonymous and undated Presidents Day. By the 1976 Bicentennial, journalist Sean O'Gara bitterly recalled: "In 1941, when our nation was endangered, we reached down into our well of national heroes and resurrected them selfishly and possessively, because we needed them, and we used them shamelessly to buoy our hopes in that time of travail; now, with danger apparently passed, we are discarding them by relegating them to secondary memory" (*Congressional Record*, House of Representatives, March 30, 1976:8715).

Might these old memories—or, more precisely, this culture of memory—someday reappear? If a war erupted or a president were assassinated, would Lincoln be invoked again to frame the national mood and purpose? Would that event be framed by memories of the more recent war president, Franklin Roosevelt, or the more recently assassinated

---

[4] In 1956, 62 percent of a nationwide Gallup sample included Lincoln among America's three greatest presidents. By 1991, a comparable Gallup survey showed the percentage naming Lincoln in response to the same question had declined to 45. Most of the decline was registered in the 1975 poll, which showed John Kennedy at the peak of his posthumous prestige (see Schwartz 1996a).

president, John Kennedy? Or would that event remain unframed by the past? Catastrophic events like the Kennedy assassination or even World War II may recur, yet many believe that we live in a "post-national" age wherein national memories are losing the capacity to mobilize and heal (Gillis 1994:20). Postmodernists have gone even further, declaring that all grand narratives and their heroes, whether political or religious, have lost credibility (Lyotard [1979] 1984:14,37). Gillis and the postmodernists are raising the fundamental question of whether collective memory can retain its traditional capacity to organize experience and endow it with human values. The World War II generation was notable in this regard, not because it deemed Lincoln a hero, but because it considered heroism itself a valid moral category. That category is less credible now than ever before; but if it has receded as much as postmodernists suggest, America's ongoing "culture wars" (Hunter 1991:108–15) would not be so hotly contested.[5]

The present culture wars include debates over commemoration as well as the content of history curricula. Progressives believe that the uncritical commemoration of traditional heroes promotes uncritical acceptance of the status quo. Yet collective memory, as a model *for* society, has inspired resistance and reform as well as consensus and conformity. Through decades of struggle for racial justice in America, for example, African American leaders have held up Lincoln as a model of justice for Black society and White society alike. For America's immigrant as well as African American communities, Abraham Lincoln's public life has been a model for universal rights and civic compassion rather than White Anglo-Saxon Protestant dominance (see, for example, Schwartz 1995:48–50; 1996b). Nevertheless, Americans now look less often to the past as a model *for* the present than ever before. They realize more clearly than before that their nation's history can be seen as a source of shame rather than

---

[5] For recent comparative perspectives on the Civil War and World War II, see *War Comes Again* (Boritt 1995), a book of scholarly essays marking the 50th anniversary of World War II. Fort Sumpter is compared with Pearl Harbor, Eisenhower with Grant, Roosevelt with Lincoln.

direction and inspiration. Cruelty toward In-
dian populations, slavery, racial segregation,
and the demeaning of women and immigrant
minorities are deemed by many Americans to
be integral facets of their nation's history. To
evaluate these perceptions is difficult. Rob-
ert Bellah believes that negative memories
are necessary because "they call the commu-
nity to alter ancient evils" (1985:153). But
what of the memories in which collective es-
teem is rooted? Is the nation not weakened
when its grand narratives are discredited,
when its citizens conceive the past as some-
thing to be repented rather than embraced?
These important matters remain open.
Whether the American people will remain
conscious of themselves as a nation and what
memories might symbolize that conscious-
ness are questions only history will answer.

*Barry Schwartz is Professor of Sociology at the
University of Georgia. His most recent work in-
cludes "Rereading the Gettysburg Address: So-
cial Change and Collective Memory," part of a
special issue on collective memory in* Qualitative
Sociology *(vol. 19, fall 1996) for which he served
as guest editor. His other recent work includes
"Collective Memory and Commemoration: How
Abraham Lincoln Became a Symbol of Racial
Equality" (Sociological* Quarterly *forthcoming)
and "France Images: Towards a Semiotics of
Collective Memory" (*Semiotica *forthcoming). His
main research project concerns Abraham Lincoln
and representations of the American past.*

REFERENCES

Alexander, Jeffrey. 1982. *Theoretical Logic in
    Sociology.* Berkeley, CA: University of Cali-
    fornia Press.
Alonso, Ana Maria. 1988. "The Effects of Truth:
    Re-Presentations of the Past and the Imagining
    of Community." *Journal of Historical Sociol-
    ogy* 1:33–57.
Ames, Kenneth L. 1993. "Afterword: History Pic-
    tures Past, Present, and Future. Pp. 221–31 in
    *Picturing History: American Painting, 1770–
    1930,* edited by W. Ayres. New York: Rizzoli.
Baigell, Matthew. 1993. "On the Margins of
    American History." Pp. 201–20 in *Picturing
    History: American Painting, 1770–1930,* ed-
    ited by W. Ayres. New York: Rizzoli.
Barthel, Diane. 1996. *Historic Preservation: Col-
    lective Memory and Historical Identity.* New
    Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.
Bellah, Robert N. 1970. "Civil Religion in Amer-
    ica." Pp. 168–92 in *Beyond Belief.* New York:

Harper and Row.
————. 1975. *The Broken Covenant.* Chicago, IL:
    University of Chicago Press.
Bellah, Robert N., Richard Madsen, William M.
    Sullivan, Ann Swidler, and Steven M. Tipton.
    1985. *Habits of the Heart.* New York: Harper
    and Row.
Bodnar, John. 1992. *Remaking America: Public
    Memory, Commemoration, and Patriotism in
    the Twentieth Century.* Princeton, NJ: Prince-
    ton University Press.
Boritt, Gabor, ed. 1995. *War Comes Again: Com-
    parative Vistas on the Civil War and World
    War II.* New York: Oxford University Press.
Boyarin, Jonathan, ed. 1994. *Remapping Mem-
    ory: The Politics of Time Space.* Minneapolis,
    MN: University of Minnesota Press.
Connelly, Thomas L. 1977. *The Marble Man:
    Robert E. Lee and His Image in American So-
    ciety.* New York: Knopf.
Collier, Hon. Harold R. 1966. "Lincoln and the
    War with Mexico." *Congressional Record,*
    89th Cong., 2d sess., Vol. 112, pt. 2:1982–83.
Cooley, Charles Horton. [1902] 1964. *Human
    Nature and the Social Order.* New York:
    Schocken.
Copland, Aaron and Vivian Perlis. 1984. *Cop-
    land: 1900 through 1942.* New York: St.
    Martin's Press.
Ducharme, Lori J. and Gary A. Fine. 1995. "The
    Construction of Demonization and Nonperson-
    hood: Constructing the 'Traitorous' Reputation
    of Benedict Arnold." *Social Forces* 73:1309–
    31.
Durkheim, Emile. [1893] 1964. *The Division of
    Labor in Society.* New York: Free Press.
————. [1915] 1965. *The Elementary Forms of
    the Religious Life.* New York: The Free Press.
Fine, Gary Alan. 1996. "Reputational Entrepre-
    neurs and the Memory of Incompetence: Melt-
    ing Supporters, Partisan Warriors, and Images
    of President Harding." *American Journal of
    Sociology* 101:1159–93.
Friedlander, Saul. 1992. *Probing the Limits of
    Representation: Nazism and the "Final Solu-
    tion."* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University
    Press.
Gallup, George H. 1972. *The Gallup Poll: Public
    Opinion 1935–1971.* New York: Random
    House.
Gamson, William A. 1992. *Talking Politics.*
    Cambridge, England: Cambridge University
    Press.
————. 1995. "Hiroshima, the Holocaust, and the
    Politics of Exclusion." *American Sociological
    Review* 60:5–20.
Geertz, Clifford. 1973a. "Thick Description." Pp.
    3–32 in *The Interpretation of Cultures.* New
    York: Basic Books.
————. 1973b. "Religion as a Cultural System."

Pp. 87–125 in *The Interpretation of Cultures*. New York: Basic Books.

———. 1973c. "Ideology as a Cultural System." Pp. 193–233 in *The Interpretation of Cultures*. New York: Basic Books.

———. 1983a. "Common Sense as a Cultural System." Pp. 72–94 in *Local Knowledge*. New York: Basic Books.

———. 1983b. "Art as a Cultural System." Pp. 94–120 in *Local Knowledge*. New York: Basic Books.

Gillis, John R., ed. 1994. *Commemorations: The Politics of National Identity*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Goffman, Erving. 1974. *Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of Experience*. New York: Harper and Row.

Gregory, Stanford W. and Jerry M. Lewis. 1988. "Symbols of Collective Memory: The Social Process of Memorializing May 4, 1970 at Kent State University." *Symbolic Interaction* 11: 213–33.

Halbwachs, Maurice. [1925] 1952. *Les Cadres Sociaux de la Memoire*. Paris, France: Presses Universitaires de France.

———. 1941. *La Topographie Legendaire des Evangiles en Sainte Terre*. Paris, France: Presses Universitaires de France.

———. [1950] 1980. *Collective Memory*. New York: Harper and Row.

Heilman, Samuel. 1982. *People of the Book*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Hobsbawm, Eric. 1983. "Mass-Producing Traditions, 1870–1914." Pp. 263–308 in *The Invention of Tradition*, edited by E. Hobsbawm and T. Ranger. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.

Hofstadter, Richard, ed. 1963. *The Progressive Movement*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.

Hunter, James. 1991. *Culture Wars: The Struggle to Define America*. New York: Basic Books.

Irwin- Zarecka, Iwona. 1994. *Frames of Remembrance*. New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction.

Jones, Alfred Haworth. 1974. *Roosevelt's Image Brokers*. Port Washington, NY: Kennikat Press.

Kammen, Michael. 1978. *A Season of Youth*. New York: Knopf.

———. 1991. *Mystic Chords of Memory*. New York: Knopf.

Koonz, Claudia. 1994. "Between Memory and Oblivion: Concentration Camps in German Memory." Pp. 258–80 in *Commemorations: The Politics of National Identity*, edited by J. R. Gillis. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Lang, Gladys and Kurt Lang. 1990. *Etched in Memory: The Building and Survival of Artistic Reputation*. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press.

Lowenthal, David. 1985. *The Past Is a Foreign Country*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.

Lyotard, Jean-Francois. [1979] 1984. *The Postmodern Condition*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.

Maines, David R., Noreen M. Sugrue, and Michael A. Katovich. 1983. "G. H. Mead's Theory of the Past." *American Sociological Review* 48:161–73.

Mannheim, Karl. [1928] 1952. *Essays on the Sociology of Knowledge*. London, England: Routledge and Kegan Paul.

McPherson, James M. 1991. *Abraham Lincoln and the Second American Revolution*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Mead, George Herbert. 1929. "The Nature of the Past." Pp. 235–42 in *Essays in Honor of John Dewey*, edited by J. Coss. New York: Henry Holt.

———. 1932. *The Philosophy of the Present*. LaSalle, IL: Open Court.

———. 1938. *The Philosophy of the Act*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Mitgang, Herbert. 1967. "The Mexican War Dove." *New Republic*. February 11:23–4.

Mosse, George L. 1990. *Fallen Soldiers: Shaping the Memory of the World Wars*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Munch, Richard. 1985. "Commentary." Pp. 225–37 in *Neofunctionalism*, edited by J. C. Alexander. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.

National Archives and Records Administration. Still Picture Branch. Record Group 208-PM. Washington, DC.

Nisbet, Robert. 1975. *The Twilight of Authority*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Olick, Jeffrey K. 1994. "Collective Memory as Discursive Process: The Nazi Past in West German Politics, 1949–1989." Presented at the annual meeting of the American Sociological Association, August 12, Los Angeles, CA.

Parsons, Talcott. 1951. *The Social System*. New York: Free Press.

Parsons, Talcott and Neil Smelser. 1956. *Economy and Society*. London, England: Routledge and Kegan Paul.

Pelikan, Jaroslav. 1985. *Jesus Through the Centuries*. New York: Harper and Row.

Peterson, Merrill D. 1960. *The Jefferson Image in the American Mind*. New York: Oxford University Press.

———. 1994. *Abraham Lincoln in American Memory*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Roosevelt, Franklin. 1950. *The Public Papers of Franklin D. Roosevelt*. Vol. 10. New York: Random House.

Rusen, Jorn. 1989. "The Development of Narrative Competence in Historical Learning." *His-*

tory and Memory 1:35–59.

Sandburg, Carl. 1934. "Lincoln–Roosevelt." *Today* 10(February):5.

Saussure, Ferdinand de. [1915] 1956. *Course in General Linguistics*. New York: McGraw-Hill.

Schudson, Michael. 1989a. "The Present in the Past Versus the Past in the Present." *Communication* 11:105–13.

———. 1989b. "How Culture Works." *Theory and Society* 18:153–80.

———. 1994. *Watergate in American Memory*. New York: Basic Books.

Schuman, Howard and Cheryl Rieger. 1992. "Historical Analogies, Generational Effects, and Attitudes toward War." *American Sociological Review* 57:315–26.

Schuman, Howard and Jacqueline Scott. 1987. "Generations and Collective Memories." *American Sociological Review* 54:359–81.

Schwartz, Barry. 1982. "The Social Context of Commemoration: A Study in Collective Memory." *Social Forces* 61:374–402.

———. 1990. "The Reconstruction of Abraham Lincoln." Pp. 81–107 in *Collective Remembering*, edited by D. Middleton and D. Edwards. London, England: Sage.

———. 1991. "Social Change and Collective Memory: The Democratization of George Washington." *American Sociological Review* 56:221–36.

———.1995. "Newark's Seated Lincoln." *New Jersey History* 113:23–59.

———. 1996a. "Postmodernity and the Erosion of the Past: Lincoln's Fall." Department of Sociology, University of Georgia, Athens, GA. Unpublished Manuscript.

———. Forthcoming. "Collective Memory and Commemoration: How Abraham Lincoln Became a Symbol of Racial Equality." *Sociological Quarterly*.

Shils, Edward. 1965. "Charisma, Order, and Status." *American Sociological Review* 30:199–213.

———. 1975. "Ritual and Crisis." Pp. 153–63 in *Center and Periphery: Essays in Macrosociology*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

———. 1981. *Tradition*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Smith, Philip. 1991. "Codes and Conflict: Toward a Theory of War as Ritual." *Theory and Society* 20:103–38.

Tuchman, Gaye and Nina Fortin. 1989. *Edging Women Out: Victorian Novelists, Publishers, and Social Change*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

U.S. Bureau of the Census. 1975. *Historical Statistics of the United States, Colonial Times to 1970*. Part 1. Washington, DC: United States Department of Commerce.

Wagner-Pacifici, Robin. 1996. "Memories in the Making: The Shapes of Things That Went." *Qualitative Sociology* 19:301–21.

Wagner-Pacifici, Robin and Barry Schwartz. 1991. "The Vietnam Veterans Memorial: Commemorating a Difficult Past." *American Journal of Sociology* 97:376–420.

Weber, Max. 1947. "Traditional Authority." Pp. 341–57 in *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization*, edited by T. Parsons. New York: Oxford University Press.

Zelinsky, Wilbur. 1988. *Nation into State: The Shifting Symbolic Foundations of American Nationalism*. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press.

Zerubavel, Yael. 1995. *Recovered Roots*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.