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A Theory of Brand WW2 / Jonathan M. Bullinger and Andrew J. Salvati

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Abstract: Myths about the Second World War, grounded within stores of knowledge, often act as narrative templates to be drawn upon by collective memory. These myths and memories are transformed and commodified in a reductive manner into a brand encompassing simplistic narratives, easily recognized visual signifiers (including logo, colors, and associated symbols), and emotional cues that connect with the audience. This posits a theory that what most individuals today interact with is not a fragment of memory related to World War Two but rather a reductive representation sold as *BrandWW2*.

Keywords: culture studies, media, visual culture, World War 2, popular memory, branding

The glow of 1945 persists as a kind of beacon, a moment in which Americans' attitudes towards themselves and their relation to the rest of the world at least once seem to have been filled with a clarity and purpose—and perhaps even more important, a generosity of purpose—no longer available, and exactly for all those reasons so worthy therefore of attempting to locate and possibly recapture. (Beidler 1998: 3)

<1> Scholars have specified the myths that surround U.S. involvement in the historical event popularly referred to as World War Two. These myths operate as a system of communication that often includes ideology expressed through various texts. These myths are grounded in stores of knowledge and often act as narrative templates to be drawn upon by collective memory, as accomplished by individuals living, remembering, and communicating in a specific culture. Often those in positions of power within the culture can influence and guide collective and cultural memory. These memories can thereby be transformed and commodified in a reductive manner into a brand encompassing simplistic narratives, easily recognized visual signifiers, and emotional cues that connect with an audience. Brands today are nearly ubiquitous elements of our culture, whose inherent reputational economic logic allows them to colonize societal institutions previously assumed to be immune or unrelated to branding. Brands possess a dynamism that allows for co-optation of consumers' immaterial labor that can both challenge and reinforce the core brand message. This results in a cultural memory reduced, packaged, and sold back to the audience as a branded representation left to stand in for historical complexity. As certain brands signify quality, this brand—*BrandWW2*—stands for a just and honorable war that is continually invoked in contemporary conflicts.

Of Myth and Memory

<2> Ruminating about the way twenty-first century American culture and political rhetoric have taken hold of his war (World War Two), Edward Wood wrote: "the thing I find most puzzling about the United States today is how little real debate there has been over the almost unanimous acceptance of the idea that the only way to defeat terrorism is through policies of war and violence and that 'Good' will always come from armed conflict" (Wood 2006: 1). Seeking to counter these axiological undercurrents in American popular culture and foreign policy, Wood devotes himself to exploring the "unstudied and forgotten reality" that has formed the organizing narrative structuring U.S. foreign policy since 1945 and that has been "exacerbated following 9/11" (2006: 2).

Taking the cultural nostalgia for World War Two as his cue, Wood argues that the calamity, anguish and uncertainty of war is slowly giving way to a set of received myths; myths which are themselves becoming natural, common-sense and sacrosanct. That is to say, the gulf between World War Two as actual and as mediated experience will only widen as the "greatest generation" passes away. The slow progression of time and the passing of the inevitable, Wood fears, will only further transform World War Two into a totem stripped of its historical and moral complexities.

<3> Roland Barthes's (1972: 11) work on contemporary social value systems and the creation of myth is the key to understanding this husking of historical complexities and the "'naturalness' with which newspapers, art and common sense constantly dress up a reality which...is undoubtedly determined by history" (Barthes 1972: 11). Social and cultural meaning, Barthes argues, is encoded within media texts. While its province is generally that of popular culture, media and other public utterances, mythology is not merely a speech act. Rather, myth is a "system of communication"—a formal mode of signification that is defined not by the object of its message, but by the manner of its conveyance (1972: 109). Taking mass culture as the object of his study, Barthes examined the mythologies that envelop everyday life, to be found in newspaper photographs, advertisements, movies, and even wrestling matches. For Barthes, the threading of myth through discursive arrangements indicates that ideology is always already present in the production of cultural texts.

<4> Barthes's argument is that it is possible to construct interpretations of ideology at work within texts. Dominant groups construct mythologies to substantiate their conception of society. So, in his classic example of the *Paris Match* magazine cover, the image the African soldier saluting the French flag suggests French imperialism masquerading as an expression of patriotism by a docile colonial subject. The image is thus revealed as a construction of a then-contemporary myth suited to national exigencies. Modern myths are created for a reason; for our argument, such reasons include a justification for or explanation of contemporary international conflicts, and the continual reproduction of a cultural genre (Weber 2008). As is often the case for myths, history is enveloped into nature, or made to appear natural, while the myth itself is largely depoliticized.

<5> In terms of the stories that we tell each other about our history and about ourselves, myths such as the "Good War" are organizational devices that function as what James V. Wertsch (2008) calls *narrative templates*. Explaining these organizational devices in terms of his study on the collective memories of Russians describing their own country's experience of World War Two, Wertsch argues that a narrative template "may be instantiated using a range of concrete characters, events, dates, and circumstances, but its basic plot remains relatively constant" (Wertsch 2008: 131). The U.S. narrative template regarding World War Two usually includes additional myths to those outlined by Wood. These myths, established throughout the post-war period, include the priority of saving the Jewish people, a strong father/son motif, and a developed blind spot in the national memory towards the dropping of atomic bombs—to name but a few. Media help in propelling and even at times re-envisioning existing myths.[1] When producers defend the existing myths against charges of tarnishing the "true" story, it often reveals the existing appeal of the original myth decades later.

<6> In other words, in what form or store of knowledge is myth epistemologically grounded? If, in Barthes' formulation, the history of the signified (i.e., the whole narrative and value-system from which meaning emerges) recedes against the power of the pictorial or grammatical form, from where does this history originate? What institutions or dispositions of power lend their complicity? "The meaning," Barthes writes, "will be for the form like an instantaneous reserve of history, a tamed richness, which it is possible to call and dismiss in a sort of rapid alternation: the form must constantly be rooted again in the meaning and get there what nature it needs for its nutriment..." (1972: 118). The immediate and apparent logic of the myth as form should thus be derived from a particular store of meaning: the history of the signified so beguiled by mythical speech.

<7> Myth, as Barthes notes, only works when it is at once obvious and obscured. It is this reserve or store of historical material and meaning, presumed to be held by both the myth reader and myth producer, that makes the power of myths culturally possible. Myth, in other words is a linguistic and pictorial organization of historicocultural knowledge. The power of myth is not exercised in a vacuum, but calls upon a generalized interpretation of historical knowledge that, while it may be situated in the terms of the dominant groups and cultures within a society, is generally recognizable to most members of that society. Myth thus normalizes history within a particular value-structure and packages it in such a way as to obliterate a concerted ideological framework; the very process it uses to call the signification into being.

<8> As Philip Biedler (1998) notes, the emergence of World War Two films and books in the late 1940s was rooted in a wartime production system organized around the propaganda needs of the war effort. The continuation of war-themed culture constituted an "ongoing technology of remembering" (Biedler 1998: 6). This effort was mostly successful: the large and lasting archive of images from this war remained long after the conflict ended. As time passed and new conflicts began, those in positions of power drew upon this stockpile of imagery both to construct a collective national identity and to justify their involvement in new wars. Those creating new film and television portrayals of the war likewise drew on this same pool of available media. As this pattern is replicated, the mythology is further embedded in public consciousness, or for our purposes, in cultural memory.

Collective/Cultural Memory

<9> The idea of collective memory represents a type of memory that is shared among members of a society, passed down generation-to-generation, and socially constructed through various mnemonic devices. These devices can take the shape of explicit and concrete forms, such as memorials, and of media texts (e.g. television programs, films, podcasts, videogames). National collective memories or even public memories are often made literally concrete in the form of statues, plaques, and institutionally protected heritage sites, buildings and parks. What a nation chooses to honor through concrete collective memory versus what it chooses not to, reveals its cultural beliefs and priorities as directed/shaped by the group in power.

<10> As Wertsch (2008: 120) has succinctly stated, collective memory is generally defined as "a representation of the past shared by members of a group such as a generation or nation-state." The concept of collective memory first explored by Emile Durkheim, and perhaps more famously by his student Maurice Halbwachs, has over the past several decades become an important concept in the disciplines of sociology, history and cultural studies. Halbwachs asserts that memories in the subjective mind are ordered through the individual's participation in social arrangements and her apprehension of a shared, structured social reality; the collection of symbols, mores and group relationships that form the tapestry of daily social life. To make sense either at the collective, social level or at that of the individual, memory is only rendered intelligible through group participation. "Group memberships," Jefferey K. Olick (1999: 335) argues, "provide the materials for memory and prod the individual into recalling particular events and into forgetting others. Groups can even produce memories in individuals of events that they never 'experienced' in any direct sense."

<11> In a departure from the Durkheimian notion of Society (with a capital "S"), Halbwachs is careful to maintain that it is individuals who remember, not collective entities. "One may say that the individual remembers by placing himself in the perspective of the group, but one may also affirm that the memory of the group realizes and manifests itself in individual memories" (Halbwachs 1992: 40). As Wulf Kansteiner has added: Although collective memories have no organic basis and do not exist in any literal sense, and though they involve individual agency, the term "collective memory" is not simply a metaphorical expression. Collective memories originate from shared communications about the meaning of the past that are anchored in the life-worlds of individuals who partake in the communal life of the respective collective. As such, collective memories are based in a society and its inventory of signs

and symbols. (Kansteiner 2002: 188) In his reformulation of "collective" memory into the more carefully conceived "cultural" memory, Jan Assmann bridges the divide between living communication and objectivized culture left open by Halbwachs. Taking his cue from Nietzsche's ideas on genetic programs and survival of species, Assmann asserts that cultural memory is the means by which human beings transmit and preserve their sense of identity, value-systems and accumulated knowledge through the generations. That is, cultural memory is "a collective concept for all knowledge that directs behavior and experience in the interactive framework of a society and one that obtains through generations in repeated social practice and initiation" (Assmann 1995: 126).

<12> In other words, it is through our own participation in social interaction and exposure to media culture that we know that president Bush's 2002 invocation of an "Axis of Evil" corresponds historically to the Rome-Berlin-Tokyo "Axis" of 1940-1945, and that his references to Saddam Hussein as a "dangerous dictator" resonate through our experiences with Fascism and other totalitarian regimes through the Cold War. How this particular cultural memory has been mobilized, and what it signifies however, is the domain of myth. It is at this point, on the functioning of collective memory as dependent on signs and symbols, that the Barthesian idea of myth makes its intervention. These myths may then be operationalized through political rhetoric or as commercialized signifiers of branding.

The Play of Cultural Memory and Myth

<13> If collective memory is the clay from which myth is molded, each of Wood's four myths of World War Two has its basis in a particular cultural rendering, or interpretation of facets of American collective memory of World War Two. Beidler (1998: 6) frames the cultural construction of World War Two myths as "an ongoing technology of remembering." For Beidler, the myths of World War Two are the continuation of a wartime schema of production, in which the Hollywood studios that contributed to the media-war effort, continued to replicate that ideology in "one last victory drive" (1998: 6) extending down through the postwar era. Tracing many of the very same themes outlined by Wood, Beidler presents a case study of several of the more well-known postwar media productions (both in text and film formats), showing "how such attitudes were set in place, in the decades after the war, and continue even now to be perpetuated and reinforced by a set of remarkably complex and durable popular-culture representations of the war" (1998: 3, italics in original). Similar to the pluralist notion of public spheres, where there exists a dominant sphere and many alternatives, the collective memory of World War Two discussed in this article is the dominant one. Individual memories of both the war or even the branding of the war can exist on their own, though each individual connection with the conflict often needs to reconcile with this dominant construction or memory as it attempts to legitimize itself. [2]

<14> As noted above, the myths of World War Two are focused through the lens of collective memory. National collective memories or even public memories are often made literally concrete in the form of memorials. What a nation chooses to honor through concrete collective memory—as opposed to what it chooses not to—reveals its cultural beliefs and priorities as directed/shaped by the group in power. Each individual connection with the conflict needs to deal with this dominant construction or memory as it attempts to legitimize itself, despite the fact that individual memories of both the war or even the branding of the war can exist on their own.

<15> There are various levels of construction at play in this framework. First, the idea of nation itself is a construction or an imagined community (Anderson 2006). Within this construction, a U.S. national history is embodied by a collective memory that is formed both in material creations (monuments, ceremonies, etc.), but also in the modern, continuous production of representational forms or—simply put—media images. One must be careful when discussing mass media in this context. At first reading one might assume that these representational images work in a similar way to the concrete monuments. At times they do, but they differ slightly for several reasons. First, the audience is allowed a certain amount of agency when interpreting content. Second, while it is possible for multiple generations to encounter identical

media (e.g. via TV reruns), for most individuals their particular combination of media content and resulting interpretation will be unique. Third, the context of a specific historical era within which content is produced may be lost or re-interpreted during different eras. However, those points having been addressed, certain events, through the creation of myth and at times ultimately the *branding* of the episode, are built upon a relatively homogeneous (though at times shallow) collective memory. George Lipsitz (1990) writes about the intersection of popular culture and collective memory in the U.S. since 1945. He states it is the infinitely renewable attribute of the electronic mass media that constructs a crisis for collective memory; yet collective memory itself frames popular culture's reception and production. While this essay agrees with the bulk of Lipsitz's argument, branding is seen as the potential lynchpin that connects collective memory and electronic forms of mass media. The brand or logo is reductive already; and this efficiency can endure the seemingly endless reinvention of the electronic and persist to continue to construct the collective identity.

<16> It is at this point that we argue that "memory" begins to acquire the characteristics of Barthesian myth. It is the usability and reusability of these myths by certain dispositions of political and cultural power (e.g. the culture industries) that allows them to be harnessed and transformed into brands. This is achieved through repetition, both of symbolic representations of memory, and the reproductive capabilities of industrial cultural production: "These repetitive representations form the backbone of collective memories. They represent the common denominator in questions of historical taste that are widely and frequently enough disseminated to create and maintain group identities" (Kansteiner 2002: 190). In effect, cultural production reifies memory much more efficiently and pervasively than do commemorations, festivals or monuments.

<17> The legacy of World War Two appears objectively before us not only in movies, television shows, theatrical performances, and textbooks, but also paradigmatically as a value-structure that has been inculcated by victory, and is continually shaped by postwar social and political experience. On a much more subtle level, we also often implicitly encode interpretations of collective memory into our everyday historicized discourses, such as when we begin a narrative by saying "After World War 2..." Though these conversations may not necessarily deal with specific battles or directly transmit any of the several "myths" of World War Two explained earlier, they nevertheless orient our discourse to a social, structured narrative of the past that sees 1945 as the beginning (and ipso facto an end) of an era.

<18> Discursively, World War Two is ubiquitously set as a convenient bookend in the modern world (as in the frequent appellations "post-1945," "postwar," etc.), a mnemonic construction epitomizing Eviatar Zerubavel's (2003: 83) concept of historical discontinuity, or the process by which we socially adumbrate or "edit" blocks of time into freestanding, non-contiguous units. It is through the social process of remembering a historical narrative as having a distinct beginning that the collective memory of World War Two, as the fracturing point between an old epoch and a new, is enforced. In other words, even though we may not be avid about the latest war flick, or become engrossed in the History Channel's latest series on the war, we may nevertheless encounter World War Two through historical narrative; it is the common starting point for discussions about a diversity of topics and phenomena from nuclear weapons to architecture, postcolonialism to rock and roll.

<19> Collective memory is itself an expression of that which Gramsci captured in the notion of cultural hegemony. Hegemony is the mechanism by which collective memory can be born. Hoping to understand the absence of a successful socialist movement, as envisioned by Marx, Gramsci proposed that the bourgeoisie maintained control through ideology as much as by physical force. Hegemony is the ideological power exerted by the dominant group over subordinate groups, resulting in the dominant group's ideas being perceived as natural, obvious, or without an alternative. The idea of a "good" or "just" war is taken by the larger populace as natural or a universal ideology, solidifying national pride while sustaining the contemporary military-industrial complex. At its best, this particular form of national ideology is supported so that good jobs are not lost in the industries supporting the military; at its

worst, it is simply taken for granted that maintaining a large military and adopting aggressive tactics toward other nation states is the correct course of action.

Branding

<20> Brands today can be considered "an omnipresent tool by means of which identity, social relations and shared experiences [can] be constructed. They were spun into the social fabric as a ubiquitous medium for the construction of a common social world" (Arvidsson 2006: 6). Scholars such as Adam Arvidsson believe brands to be institutionalized embodiments of new forms of informational capital's logic. When one manages the brand, one is in essence valorizing consumers' capacity to construct common social worlds through communicative and interactive processes. The co-optation of consumers' immaterial labor is well documented and is used to reinforce and maintain brand identity (Banks and Humphreys 2008; Cote and Pybus 2007; Deuze 2008; Lazzarato 2006; Terranova 2000). Brands represent a new configuration of production and consumption; brands shape the audience and the audience shapes the brand, for brands are a "non-verbal medium for thinking" (Kornberger 2010: xi). The power of such brands is recognized financially, as companies switched from investing resources to produce material goods and instead invested in maintaining brand labels (Klein 2002).

<21> Brands represent both material and immaterial elements whose meaning is only successfully conveyed when we understand the broader cultural context surrounding them (Danesi 2006). Many practitioners of branding point to such immaterial elements as "brand personality" (Aaker 2011; Mazzearella 2003) comprised of human characteristics derived, in part, from a brand's consumer base. The utility of branding has moved past its original purpose to distinguish and commoditize generic goods in the late nineteenth century. In common parlance the terms "brand," "trademark," and even "logo" are often used interchangeably even though each term is unique. Trademarks have existed longer than brands, referring to a distinctive sign or indicator representing a unique source from which the craftwork originated. The brand is a much broader interpretation of this unique indicator, encompassing names, terms, symbols, designs, logos (graphical elements) and other attributes which can be dynamic yet still point to a singular entity.

<22> Brands are equal to more than a single symbol—they express a visual context, a narrative, and ultimately an emotional connection with their audience (Healey 2008). Branding as logic has a strong foothold within capitalistic structures, a process grounded in that which Weber observed to be an iron cage within Western capitalist societies, constructed upon efficiency, rationalization, and control. It is difficult today to envision consumption without an affiliated brand name denoting the type, quality, and price-range of a product. What results is a "reputational economy" in which consumers efficiently and rationally make consumption choices in a controlled and patterned manner, though one in which consumer feedback (particularly as pertains to their lifestyle) is harvested and assimilated on a continual basis (Gobé 2010). At the same time, brands as a concept are dynamic and fluid enough to withstand changes in trademark and brand message and eventually incorporate changes in audience interpretation and labor into the product. This dynamism is also apparent in the way that *BrandWW2* is constructed and perpetuated across multiple commercial producers, an attribute shared by many other societal constructs that undergo branding.

<23> Recent scholarship has examined the explosion of branding strategies around traditionally non-commodified concepts such as statehood (Clemons 2008), nationhood (Anholt and Hildreth 2005), museum exhibits, education, and religion (Twitchell 2004). For instance, "Texas" as a distinct brand is accomplished through a continued construction of distinct performed cultural identities and mythologies harkening back to the nine-year period in the early nineteenth century when Texas was an independent republic (Clemons 2008). This U.S. state is too demographically and geographically complex to exist materially as a homogeneous product yet, by drawing upon these symbols, behaviors, and cues from its past, the brand "Texas" can be packaged, recognized, and sold globally. The United States as imagined community also acts on the world stage as a brand whose core messages are freedom and liberty.

<24> Representations of U.S. nationalism can be understood in terms of what Nicholas Ind (2007) calls "living the brand." Countries' contemporary branding strategies include a hexagonal model of communication channels (Anholt and Hildreth 2005) including individual behavior, cultural traditions, financial actions, and legal policies. In order to distinguish their services from a competitive field, institutions traditionally associated with high culture (Gans 1999) now employ branding strategies and management. In what James Twitchell (2004) refers to as Museumworld, Megachurch, and College, Inc., each institution is in a persistent strategy of self-marketing and branding through electronic channels, corporate sponsorship, and the construction of brand narratives. When religion, education, and museum space are colonized, the memory of a bloody war now existing as a brand seems more conceivable.

BrandWW2

<25> Today consumers can find on both the virtual and physical sales floor a brand that is recognizable, dependable, and satisfying—it is called *BrandWW2*. Similar to its global brand brethren, it has been around for a long time, has endured variations in its brand messages and perceived audiences, possesses unique visual identifiers, adapts its product for different markets, and connects its narrative with the audience in a visceral way. Many successful brands share a long and storied history which is occasionally incorporated into its brand message to evoke dependability, or else is downplayed to forget less successful product variations. These brands attain a heritage by successfully staying in the marketplace long enough after their initial product launch. World War Two began as a military engagement between national governments and is remembered as a historical fact for multiple societies. The promotion of U.S. involvement in World War Two, however, was itself much closer to a successful product launch—in this case successful selling of U.S. intervention in an international conflict. This propaganda included a selection of mass media (e.g. radio, newspapers, still photography, film, and so forth) which were broadly unavailable when President Wilson enlisted the rudimentary forms of U.S. public relations to change course and enter World War One. The availability and cooperation of such mediated representations made it much easier to sell the first prototypical offerings of *BrandWW2*.

<26> The first individuals interacting with the post-war history written by a lone superpower, the victorious United States, were the sons and daughters growing up amid the spoils of G.I. Bill-funded suburban prosperity. They watched representations of this history, both at home on their new television sets or, to a lesser extent, during their (dwindling number of regular) visits to movie houses. The power of Wood's (2006) "greatest generation" myth is further augmented when those helping to construct the myth are its children. Asserting for now that one motif inherent in *BrandWW2* is the relationship between fathers, sons, and war, it is important to note that this mythologizing only increases as the children grow up into adults. Finding themselves in a rapidly changing United States near the beginning of the twenty-first century, they desire dependable, venerable, simplistic narratives about proud generations that in part fuel the recent acceleration of *BrandWW2*, allowing it to sit comfortably on the shelves next to its branded brethren. The more famous of the children have used their influence and creative talents to celebrate the generation across a multitude of media (e.g. Tom Brokaw, Steven Spielberg, Tom Hanks), reinforcing the original myths, inserting new images into the culture memory, and providing new messages for *BrandWW2* to work from across various representations.

<27> Returning to the process of branding, consider Coca-Cola ("Coke"): an easily recognized global brand whose products are available in 200 countries. Coke's full name is printed in the same original hand-written style, while its color scheme always includes the red usually associated with this script, the green tint from the original glass bottles the beverage was sold in, the caramel coloring of the beverage itself, and a swoosh-like design on cans informed by the original script style. While additional colors have been introduced with varying degrees of success, the Coca-Cola brand is always moored by these aesthetic anchors. The same is true for *BrandWW2*: it relies upon a set of colors, logo, and associated symbols to invoke its presence. The logo for the brand utilizes block letters traditionally found as stencils used on actual

military equipment and vehicles painted to denote ownership, pilot, or camp designation. These block letters may be simulated to represent such spray-painted stenciling but more often than not simulate a brushed-steel or iron finish to signify the materials most military vehicles are constructed from and also the strength inherent within the machine and the cause fought for alike.

<28> The color palette available to the brand campaign includes five colors in all: two for the protagonists and three for the antagonists. The good guys are allowed a darker green associated historically with U.S. ground troops fighting in Western Europe or a desert sand color connected with soldiers stationed in the North African campaigns. The enemy and their associated visual cues rely upon grey, black, and red. Symbols often employed by the brand include rank insignia, helmets of the period, M1-Garand rifles, white five-pointed stars associated again with spray-paint stencil work on U.S. military equipment, scenes of chaos, and confident, determined protagonists in the middle of it all. The stars represent excellence, the rank insignia often represent not just military hierarchies but entire nations, and the rifles, chaos, and determination represent the duality of a greatest generation composed of proud, average men who rose to the challenge.

<29> When we think of the brand McDonald's, we may envision affordable food, happiness, and positive childhood memories, among other associations. Brands embody meanings for users of the brand, and consumers help to modify and at times supply this meaning. *BrandWW2* provides a host of associations and narratives to its potential consumers. The most simplistic U.S. narrative is a variation of the following:

Even though America had been hurting in the Depression, when Hitler began invading Europe and torturing the Jews, the American workforce mobilized and single-handily stopped the ultimate evil. In order to save even more lives, we had to bomb Japan. Much of the success we enjoyed afterwards can be attributed to all those remarkable young men who stood up and fought for what's right. That's something that is missing today in America.

Contained within this simplistic narrative are many of Wood's (2006) myths that help create a very endearing product without any contradictory complexities about young men in a hellish war. There is nobility and sureness of national purpose; a reductive "white hats" versus "black hats" conflict with the U.S. firmly fitted in white; a "peace from war" paradox; reliance on and belief in youth to carry a cause; and rose-tinged nostalgia for a past that was always better. Each of these elements was present in the first rudimentary forms of propaganda in the 1940s, but new product attributes have accelerated these qualities to coalesce into a brand.

<30> As the turn of the twenty-first century approached, the children of the "greatest generation" faced their own aging and began to commemorate their parents' accomplishments in the context of a changing United States. At the same time, new technologies allowed consumers greater interactivity, via video gaming, email and the Internet. This interactivity forming around both information and entertainment was occurring as media consolidation and brand management matured into strategies to take advantage of economies of scale, cross-promotion, and licensed properties. This resulted in *BrandWW2* and its associated narratives and imagery accelerating and solidifying across multiple products and media. Tom Brokaw's *The Greatest Generation* (1998) was a television special, coffee table book, and segment on various early morning programs all at the same time. Steven Spielberg's *Saving Private Ryan* (1998) helped to inspire the interactive game *Medal of Honor* (1999), made by the Spielberg-owned DreamWorks; and later his television epic *Band of Brothers* (2001) helped to inspire other video game releases.

<31> The final component that helps fuel the desire for *BrandWW2* occurs with the reaction to the events of September 11, 2001 in the United States. Coming off such remembrances as those initiated by Hanks, Spielberg, and Brokaw, the brand acts as a venerable guide upon which to judge and justify contemporary involvement in international conflict. At the same time, the financial success and widespread use of video games

as entertainment allows for a "wash, rinse, repeat" (Dyer-Witheford and De Peuter 2009) business-model, whereby annual releases of *BrandWW2*-based video games can be consumed incorporating visual elements from other media. Recent releases seem to shift the action back and forth from World War Two to present-day conflicts, reinforcing the idea that the reasons for engagement are similar and the causes equally just, or that military conflict is a natural component of the American experience. This experience includes the experience of war in the maturation of young men into adults, as a necessary testing and teaching moment about themselves and the human condition. While unfortunate, participation in conflict is seen as an ultimate test of character and courage: an opportunity for personal growth as well as a chance to right wrongs. In the reductive narrative, very little room is afforded the choice of declining participation (with the exception of Vietnam-infused experiences), since avoidance of war equates to an evasion of maturity and masculinity. This brand takes on more salience during times of active warfare and participation from the young ensconced within a military-entertainment complex involving collaboration between government military interests and private entertainment profit lines.

Conclusion

<32> It is through these representations of World War Two that collective memory has been shaped, and upon which, in turn, ideology—and especially the ideology of current U.S. wars—is predicated. The point is not necessarily that the "branding" of World War Two announces an "End of History" in terms of interpretations of World War Two as a genre (the glory of the *Longest Day*, for instance, can of course be subverted by *Catch 22*, or the Conradesque psychodrama of HBO's recent miniseries *The Pacific*), but that *BrandWW2* constitutes a set of culturally and economically defined extra-narrative strictures (myths), in which a diverse set of themes and actions are routinely being situated. The cultural situated-ness of the collective memory of World War Two and the continued reliance on a set of "myths" of World War Two in the context of the post-9/11 world and the War on Terror constitute what Martin Davies (2010) has called the "prison" of historicized thinking. The themes and visuals associated with *BrandWW2* include a reductive set of myths, accounts, and visuals used to sell a version of World War Two in the form of films, paperback novels, video games, television mini-series, and military recruitment propaganda. All of these elements come together to form an essential product line in the twenty-first century U.S. version of "militainment."

Notes

[1] Space does not permit the discussion of such modifications here, but see Chapman (2007) for an example of a British TV docudrama about World War Two debunking previously agreed-upon myths and narratives.

[2] In terms of the temporal limits of remembering, however, Kansteiner argues: "Methodologically speaking, memories are at their most collective when they transcend the time and space of the events' original occurrence. As such, they take on a powerful life of their own, 'unencumbered' by actual individual memory, and become the basis of all collective remembering as disembodied, omnipresent, low-intensity memory" (2002: 189). That said, World War Two is not low-intensity. The standard Kansteiner uses for this is the Holocaust, which he argues everyone shares ideas about, but the events themselves only directly touched the lives of relatively few people. In contrast, World War Two was the individual experience of tens of millions of Americans and touched the lives of an entire generation. Moreover, the political and social impact of the war years and the period immediately after paradigmatically changed the American experience.

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