

Introduction

You don't have to buy into Freud's account of hidden guilt to recognize the force in the real world of the unconscious dreams of nations.

—Jacqueline Rose

Following the release in 1970 of Franklin J. Schaffner's *Patton* and Richard Fleischer, Toshio Masuda, and Kinfu Fukasaku's *Tora! Tora! Tora!* WWII all but disappeared from US public culture.¹ For reasons at once common and complex, by the early 1970s Americans had lost their appetite for WWII.² It seems to have mattered little whether the enemy was the Germans or the Japanese, whether the battle was staged on land, on sea, or in the air, whether it was fact or fiction, tragedy or romance, or whether it was pitched in a complimentary or critical key: WWII's moment had passed. By the end of the American century, however, all of that changed, the "Good War" gaining a new lease on our collective life. Indeed, during the mid-eighties WWII returned with a vengeance and by the 1990s it was ubiquitous for a second time across US public and political culture. WWII appeared on the big screen and our flat screens; it stuffed our bookshelves and stocked our coffee tables; Carnival, Princess, and Viking cruise lines booked excursions centered around it, exhibition halls across the country curated it, the D-Day Museum in New Orleans was built on it, and Congress took the extraordinary step of reversing the law in order to break the once-sacred ground between the Washington Monument and the Lincoln Memorial in order to memorialize it.

Already I have begun to suggest that on the eve of the new millennium WWII redux was much more than a collective curiosity or national pastime. In fact, one of the primary tasks of this book is to explain why its return was one of the most significant events to have taken place in the United States between 1985

and 2005. I argue that this is true not merely because WWII was what happened and what kept happening day after day for twenty years but also because the return of WWII played a major role in restructuring the people's common sense and its sense of the common. This book might best be summed up, then, as an effort to take measure of the reintroduction and dramatic uptake of WWII in the United States. How exactly, I ask, was WWII being given back to us, and with what consequences for collective life? The short answer to that question and, hence, the central argument of the book is this: WWII popular remembrance was a primary means by which a distinctly ethnonational neoliberalism achieved not only intelligibility but also currency and legitimacy within and across the spheres that constitute civil society today.

In aiming to specify WWII *redux's* part in the transformation of ethnonational neoliberalism into the *lingua franca*, I spend the first section of this introduction describing in some detail the political, social, and economic conditions subtending WWII's reemergence in US public and political culture. Along the way—and taking several of my cues from American Studies scholar Donald Pease and psychoanalytic theorist and cultural critic Jacqueline Rose—I suggest that the late twentieth-century crisis of American identity is largely attributable to the radical decline in the symbolic efficiency of the national Cold War state fantasy. WWII remembrance, I then argue, filled that ideological gap, fashioning a “new” equilibrium in the United States whose authority and power will be shown to be owed to the rhetorical restoration of a certain *kind* of ethical state that I call ethnonationalist. I spend the second section of this introduction on preliminary remarks about the uses to which the archives of history may be put; I am intent on bringing into sharp focus the implications of deciphering WWII *redux* as an extended exercise in the reconstruction of *popular* memory. In the third section I address the always vexing question of method. In addition to offering an account of why and how I toggle methodologically between Derridean-, Foucaultian-, and Lacanian-inflected rhetorical readings of a rather wide range of (con)texts, I also provide a synopsis of the different ways I use the term “rhetoric” over the course of the book. I bring this introduction to a close by previewing very briefly the chapters that follow.

Crisis and National State Fantasies

From the beginning of President Ronald Reagan's second term in office until George W. Bush declared the War on Terror in 2001,³ the US nation-state faced

one challenge that outflanked all others: the potentially catastrophic crisis of national identity. According to almost everyone at the time, the “We” of “We the People” was splintering from within and our nation-ness was in free fall. Wracked by the question of what, if anything, makes this multiracial, multiethnic, and multicultural many a one, ours was an imagined community at loose ends.⁴

Given education’s role in preparing young people for civic life, it is hardly surprising that America’s collective identity crisis first surfaced as a protracted and impassioned curriculum debate, focused largely on history, social studies, and literary instruction. Beginning in the mid-eighties and throughout the nineties public school boards across the country wrestled fiercely over the virtues and vices of a common core and the textbooks that would be used to teach it. About which historical events, for example, would all students be required to learn? By what criteria would the decision be made? And should there be agreement on the inclusion of any given event, what exactly would students learn about it? Whose history would serve as ground for our collective sense of self? In 1991 the New York State system’s review of its guidelines for teaching American history and social studies, with an eye to rewriting them in less orthodox terms, caught the public’s collective attention and triggered rancorous debate. Even *Time* magazine weighed in with its 1991 Independence Day issue, the visual and verbal rhetoric of its cover depicting the relation between the received wisdom and those challenging it in unmistakably ruinous terms. The cover presented a multicultural fife-and-drum corps (led, not incidentally and quite literally, by an old white guy) over the heads of which was printed in large type the question “Who are we?” tagged with the byline “American kids are getting a new—and divisive—view of Thomas Jefferson, Thanksgiving and the Fourth of July.” In response to this as well as other ongoing curricular contests, the George H. W. Bush administration launched its hotly contested and ultimately failed attempt to institutionalize a “culturally unifying set of U.S. history standards” under the leadership of Lynne Cheney, then chair of the National Endowment for the Humanities. As the end of the decade approached, the struggle intensified. The holding of public hearings in 1997 to air differences of opinion over the California State Board of Education’s effort to adopt a new textbook series was like throwing gasoline on an already raging fire.

College and university curriculum committees and faculty went to battle as well. Most famously, perhaps, in 1988 the Stanford University faculty voted to diversify the course offerings from which undergraduate students would choose in order to satisfy the institution’s long-standing “Western Culture” general education requirement. But Stanford was hardly alone. Across the country, at both

public and private, elite and not, scores of faculty and administrators asked, about what should we, must we, feel a sense of national pride? Others asked, have we no shame? Conservatives decried the meltdown of the great melting pot, insisting on the irreducible necessity of “a unifying American identity” that trumps all other affiliations and refuses to cower, as Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr. put it at the time, at “the hullabaloo over ‘multiculturalism’ and ‘political correctness,’ over the notion that history and literature should be taught not as intellectual disciplines but as therapies whose function is to raise minority self-esteem.”⁵ Out of the cauldron of blistering debate emerged hundreds of essays and books, many of them pitched to the general public but all of them addressing the promise and perils of orthodox national allegiance. In 1987 literature professor E. D. Hirsch published his bestseller *Cultural Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know*. With the support of the Exxon Education Foundation, Hirsch turned a scholarly article into a manifesto for “functional literacy and effective national communication” whose appendix, as boldly noted on the front cover, comprised a list of five thousand essential names, phrases, dates, and concepts all Americans should know. As he explained in the preface, such shared knowledge “enables grandparents to communicate with grandchildren, southerners with Midwesterners, whites with blacks, Asians with Hispanics, and Republicans with Democrats—no matter where they were educated.”⁶ Other bestsellers fanned the flames, their authors keenly interested in inflating the stakes of our collective crisis of identity by insisting on the outcome’s metaphysical rather than politico-cultural consequences. Most famously, Alan Bloom’s 1986 book *The Closing of the American Mind* indicted an ostensibly overliberalized system of higher education in America for turning its back on the Western tradition and reason, mourning not only our “failed democracy” but the very “impoverish[ment of] the souls of today’s students.”⁷ Such spirited prose, however, did not drip from the pens of conservatives alone. Following nearly ten more years of deep discontent and divisiveness, left-leaning activist and public intellectual Todd Gitlin published his book-length polemic on the fragmentation of the American polity, attributing “the twilight of [our] common dreams” to the demise of the New Left’s “messianic faith” in “the universal destiny of human kind.”⁸ Metaphysical indeed!

The crisis of national identity was not, however, only a curricular, academic, or cultural affair. Although the mid to late eighties and nineties most often evoke the curriculum and canon wars, the history and monument wars, the NEA Four, Robert Mapplethorpe, and Andre Serrano, the destabilization of

American identity was keenly felt across all domains of civic life. Indeed, at the same time that battles over free speech and hate speech erupted on college and university campuses, clashes over immigration, affirmative action, gay rights, adoption rights, abortion rights, and fetal rights flared up on the streets and in the courts—all challenges to the “We” of “the People.” Presidents, politicians, and political pundits from both parties spoke breathlessly about the dire need for reunification, the contested terms of which fueled season after season of fiery funding debates and policy disputes within and beyond their chambers’ walls. The question of who is and who is not American functioned, too, as the pivot point of a host of hotly contested initiatives, from state laws declaring English their official language (House Speaker Newt Gingrich insisting that “without English as a common language, there is no [American] civilization”)⁹ to the Clinton administration’s Department of Defense Directive “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell.” The imminent collapse of American identity and society was the topic du jour of local and national talk radio shows as well as regular fare on network and cable news shows. As we slouched toward the new century, we were dogged by one question above all others: what will keep America from breaking apart?¹⁰ I use the words “WWII redux” as shorthand for that sizeable assemblage of *popular* memory practices, texts, places, and events that, over those twenty years, helped cultivate the “new” hegemonic response.

There exists an impressive literature explaining why the burning question of American identity emerged in the mid-eighties. Scholars tend to agree that the warming of relations between the United States and the Soviet Union and, ultimately, the termination of the Cold War are the key. Of course, conventional wisdom has long recommended that there is no force greater than war to inspire and sustain robust national allegiance. As Kenneth Burke put it, under the shadow of WWII, fierce conflict between groups strengthens the sense of belonging within each. Because the Cold War was a war unlike all that had preceded it—for the simple reason that a nuclear exchange between the United States and the Soviet Union truly would be the war-to-end-all-wars by ending all worlds—it unified Americans like none before. One way, then, to begin to explain the emergence of America’s identity crisis is to notice that this national emergency gets its start at precisely the same time that the Cold War is winding down. It is during the early eighties that hostilities between the United States and the Soviet Union begin to ease and by 1989 the Cold War is declared over. As has often been remarked, absent that forty-six-year rivalry whose mythic proportions and potentially apocalyptic outcome had taken firm hold of the

citizenry's attention, Americans across the political spectrum began to examine the state of their own union.

Although the dissolution of the Soviet Empire and the termination of the Cold War was formative, it is important to recall a number of other geopolitical events of the time. Since had it been only a matter of the demise of a single scapegoat, another nuclear-armed enemy Other could have been chosen or fabricated to serve in its place. (This was, of course, the second Bush administration's approach, about which I say more below). But as Francis Fukuyama was (too) quick to point out in the *National Interest* to great fanfare, 1989 did not only see the end of the Cold War between the United States and Russia, it also bore witness to what he famously dubbed "the end of history": in that single calendar year Poland embraced Solidarity, thousands of pro-democracy protesters marched in Tiananmen Square, Communist rule in Hungary, East Germany, Czechoslovakia, and Bulgaria collapsed, and the Berlin Wall was felled. Although it later would become clear that 1989 did not mark, as Fukuyama had wagered, "the end point of mankind's ideological evolution and the universalization of Western liberal democracy as the final form of human government" around the world, that impressive chain of political events nevertheless punctually drained from the Cold War rhetoric much of its persuasive force.¹¹

At this point a perplexing question imposes itself: why did these "wins" for democracy and for capitalism (however provisional they later would prove to be) fuel a crisis of American identity rather than fortify the citizenry's positive self-image? American Studies scholar Donald E. Pease delivers a compelling answer: the crisis of American identity was caused not by the end of the Cold War, but by the collapse of the Cold War state fantasy that had structured and lent consistency to the citizenry's collective belonging for nearly half a century. In view of my interest in taking rhetorical stock and political measure of the return of WWII in this historical conjuncture, I briefly call attention to the theoretical scaffolding that bears most of the weight of Pease's claim and the persuasive case made on its behalf.

State fantasy is, of course, a technical term for Pease, but what may be less evident is that embedded in it is a triptych of analytics—state, fantasy, and state fantasy. In the Lacanian lexicon the most basic understanding of fantasy is a manufactured scenario that stages desire.¹² Contrary to its everyday use, then, fantasy does not signify a scene in which desire is fulfilled; rather, it is the stage on which desire is set to work by putting the subject in its place within a symbolic structure and giving that subject its desired objects. As Slavoj Žižek deftly

put it, "Through fantasy, we learn 'how to desire,' which is to say, fantasy is the frame co-ordinating our desire."¹³ Moreover, fantasy's function is to protect the subject from the fundamental disjointedness of its situated existence. Fantasy thus "constitutes the frame through which [the subject] experience[s] the world as consistent and meaningful."¹⁴

Fantasy in its psychoanalytic sense operates at the level not only of individuals but also of collectivities. That may seem obvious now, but it was Žižek who, with the publication of *The Sublime Object of Ideology* in 1989, renovated a long tradition of ideological analysis whose fortunes had declined precipitously with the ascendancy of the various post-structuralisms. And he did it by turning ideology critique inside out. "The fundamental level of ideology," he skillfully wrote, "is not of an illusion masking the real state of things but that of an (unconscious) fantasy structuring our social reality itself."¹⁵ Because Pease's argument draws heavily on four additional Lacanian insights popularized by Žižek and his comrades, I identify them here. One, it is only by way of reference to a pure or empty signifier, what Lacanians dub a nodal or quilting point, that reality is retroactively configured as coherent and meaningful. Two, every (ideological) fantasy is structured around a fundamental antagonism, impossibility, or lack that is disavowed by the (collective) subject but which resurfaces as symptom. Three, the fundamental antagonism, impossibility, or lack is displaced inevitably onto an Other whose function within the (ideological) fantasy is to keep desiring subjects from achieving their aim. And four, fantasy therefore obliges an accounting of enjoyment as a political factor.

Now in the matter of ideological analysis, historicization has been a persistent problem. Psychoanalytic supplementation, critics have argued, only confounds it: to Class or History, add Unconscious or Symbolic. In every case a transcendental leads the way. As Jacqueline Rose has demonstrated, however, that need not be the case. In fact, it can be the radical contingency of history that bids us to leverage psychoanalysis for nuanced ideological critique. That is what I take to be the implicit argument of the very brief but powerful introduction to her *States of Fantasy* wherein Rose audaciously confronts what is perhaps the key question vexing the modern state: on what might its authority depend given that it can no longer trade on the transcendental or metaphysical guarantees that, heretofore, were embodied in the king or prince? The modern state, Rose reminds us by cunningly calling on the work of sociologists rather than psychoanalysts, marks a "decisive shift" in governance: "It is the point where the ruler, instead of 'maintaining his state,' serves a separate constitutional and legal state

which it is his duty 'to maintain.' Once real authority is no longer invested in the prince and his trappings, it loses its face and disembodies itself: 'With this analysis of the state as an omnipotent yet impersonal power,' Quentin Skinner concludes his study of the foundations of modern political thought, 'we may be said to enter the modern world.'¹⁶

It is precisely this splitting of the constitutional principles of governance and law from the executive charged with their upkeep that throws modern state authority radically into question. With the institution of this irreducibly discursive caesura, the modern state's authority, as Rose put it, "passes straight off the edge of the graspable, immediately knowable world."¹⁷ This leaves the leadership to rely, to use Pease's words, on a ghostly, phantasmatic power or state fantasy for which standard modes of reason cannot account. State fantasies, however, do not directly infuse the state with authority (whatever that might mean). Authority is less an objective quality than a kind of subjective relation. Hence, state fantasies suture individuals to the state in a particular way, rendering them at once subjects of and subject to the state or actively governable. Simply put, state fantasy positions a bounded democratic polity as a certain kind of citizen-subject in relation to a certain kind of state. The mechanism of their governance is, as pointed out above, their own staged desire such that what the citizenry always gets from the state is what it already wants. Put in the terms with which this introduction began, state fantasies imaginatively lend the modern state its nation-ness and transform citizens into a consenting and patriotic people.

To return to Pease's account of American's identity crisis, by the time the United States entered the Cold War, American Exceptionalism already had enjoyed a long and storied history (the details of which Pease recounts but are not necessary to chronicle here). Suffice it for my purposes to say that not despite but thanks to American Exceptionalism's elasticity, the Cold War state fantasy of it was an iteration in the Derridean sense of the term: a repetition with a difference.¹⁸ What remained the same was America as exemplar or model, the "Nation of Nations" (what Pease singles out as the keystone of Cold War foreign policy). What changed, however, was the primal event, understood as that which organizes lived reality (and, more specifically, the relations of the state and the polity) but must itself remain objectively impossible within it.¹⁹ In this iteration of American Exceptionalism, global nuclear annihilation was the primal event, the "cause" to which every available state resource was expended to efface—and with more than just the blessing of the people. Indeed, because a decisively national Cold War state fantasy of American Exceptionalism positioned

the citizenry, along with the entire planet, in mortal danger, it became possible for them to imagine themselves not just as beneficiaries of but also “enactors of the state’s will” during an indefinite state of exception.²⁰

Apart from the citizenry itself, the National Security State, a para-national military and security network declared exempt from the rules and norms of the legally constituted national and international orders, was the Cold War nation-state’s most formidable apparatus. The warrant for that exemption was folded into its charge: to protect *our* exemplary democratic order from *their* evil empire whose aspirations for revolutionary socialism everywhere justified US intervention, covert or otherwise, constitutional or not, at home or abroad. Although a good bit already has been and remains to be said about the National Security State, I am most interested in making sense of the citizenry’s (imaginary) relation to it. US public support for its expansive and extralegal charge defied reason then but may best be understood now by way of state fantasy. The Cold War iteration of American Exceptionalism positioned the citizenry not merely to look favorably on the National Security State but to collaborate with it, to also be its enactors. Pease explains how this relation was formed:

Under Truman, the National Security State took existing social relations, reconstituted them in terms of its geopolitical imperatives, and then gave them back to the U.S. citizens as if these imperatives were the enactments of their own will. U.S. citizens embraced the state’s exceptions by taking up liberal anticommunism as a homogenizing political ethos. Indeed, the energy for domestic politics was parasitic upon the state’s projection of its irreconcilable internal political conflicts onto the arena of international conflict. Proponents of liberal (and conservative) anticommunism fostered a consensus about matters of political belief by actively soliciting the state to project fundamental antagonisms that emerged within the domestic political sphere onto the alien imperial state with whom the United States was engaged in an international war.²¹

This, then, was the frame coordinating the citizenry’s internally contradictory desire: on the one hand, to continue to view the nation *as exceptional*, on the other hand, by willfully regarding even blatant violations of the nation’s creed and laws as warranted exceptions.

It is now possible to explain not only the emergence but also the affective intensity of America’s identity crisis. This, again, is Pease: “When the Soviet

Empire came apart and the United States lost its enemy Other, the entire overdetermined structure of the state fantasy was dismantled. When the cold war stopped justifying the state's production of exceptions [at home and around the globe], Carl Schmitt's diagnosis of the instability of the liberal political sphere proved all too accurate. Unable to project the antagonisms that plagued the exponents of the incompatible political positions within the U.S. political sphere onto an external enemy, the state was confronted with the irreconcilable differences internal to the liberal political realm."²²

In other words, without the fabulous Cold War imperative,²³ the hyphen between the nation and the state lost its hold, the suture securing the phantasmatic identification frayed, and what had heretofore been seen by so many citizens as benevolent exceptions (to the rule of custom or ethics as well as to the rule of US constitutional and international law) suddenly became visible to them as violent inconsistencies. Indeed, a citizenry well rehearsed in seeing *as* and *for* the state found itself confronted by a legacy of contradictions enacted by the state that, at best, would be understood as a dumb bureaucratic apparatus and, at worst, as a cunning imperial capitalist machine. Where there was to have been equality, there was prejudice based on ethnicity, gender, race, and class. Where there was to have been rule of law, there was illegal search and seizure, false imprisonment, and forced confessions. Where there was to have been popular sovereignty, there was territorial expansion beyond the US borders and voter suppression and gerrymandering within them. And where there was to have been freedom, there was slavery, internment, and occupation. Summarily put, the demise of the symbolic efficiency of the Cold War national state fantasy made it increasingly difficult, and ultimately impossible, for many Americans to ignore the gap between America's democratic principles of equality, liberty, and freedom and what had been happening on the ground. The crisis of national identity that rattled the country from the mid-eighties until 2001 (and the culture wars that were its most conspicuous effect) is to be attributed, then, not to the precipitous positive presence of ethnic, sexual, racial, class, and cultural differences but to the absence of a state fantasy that had trained the citizenry to sublimate those differences to the national.

By the end of his book Pease will have made the case that it took the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon on September 11, 2001, and the George W. Bush administration's Global Homeland state fantasy to suture the ideological gap. In the aftermath of 9/11 and under the auspices of a new state of emergency, the Bush administration quickly established a new security

state, declared its global War on Terror, and retooled American Exceptionalism yet again. Like the earlier Cold War state fantasy, the Global Homeland state fantasy was an imaginary scenario in which the American way of life was at stake. This time, however, the American people had already been exiled from that way of life, and the possibility of its return hinged on acts of “defensive aggression” by the state at home and abroad. Accordingly, the American people were positioned in/by the Global Homeland state fantasy both as denizens of the domestic emergency state and as mere spectators of the state’s retributive violence in Iraq and Afghanistan (their enjoyment of the latter derived from their imaginatively bearing witness to the unfolding of America’s Manifest Destiny in the Middle East). Importantly, for Pease, this national state fantasy owed its authority not to the subjective relation between the state and the people but to its special relation to God: Christian scripture read through a fundamentalist lens “instituted a version of American exceptionalism that was voided of the need for American exceptionalists.”²⁴ Effectively denationalized (for they no longer had their “homeland”), the Global Homeland state fantasy repositioned the people as “naked biological life under the state’s protection.” As a newly biopoliticized population, the people “could play no active political role in the Homeland Security State’s reordering of things.”²⁵

It is a mistake, on the one hand, to credit the Bush administration’s discourse with so much hegemonic force and, on the other, to let the American people so easily off the hook. I want to suggest instead that the country had been primed for the kind of response to 9/11 the Bush administration issued, and that the people had long been positioned not simply to receive it but to act in concert on its behalf. Over the chapters that follow I argue that between 1985 and 2005 recuperations of WWII fueled a rebirth of American Exceptionalism, shaping both the public and the “ideal citizen” to fit the needs of the late neoliberal state and its endless War on Terror. I therefore want to insist on the necessity of attending to other material and social realities that, albeit less punctual than the passing of the Cold War national state fantasy, played a measurable role in the crisis of national identity and, similarly, affected its restructuring.²⁶

The national Cold War state fantasy was not all that had gone missing in the United States by the mid to late eighties. The once-robust Fordist regime of production—characterized by mass production and standardization, monopoly capitalism and “Taylorism”—also had gone the way of the dodo, and by 1985 Post-Fordism was hitting its stride.²⁷ As Lisa Duggan usefully recalls, the ground for this economic mutation, whose pattern of upward redistribution continues into

the present day, had long been in the making. During the 1950s and 1960s, for example, the New Deal coalition and progressive unionism came under increasingly hostile fire; during the 1960s and 1970s, downwardly redistributive social movements—such as civil rights, Black Power, feminism, as well as lesbian and gay liberation—were assailed by an increasingly vocal and organized right-wing opposition; it was also during the 1970s that the United States saw a surge in pro-business activism as big and small companies joined forces to face global competition and tilt the economic playing field in their favor.²⁸

To most Americans, however, the new Post-Fordism felt less like an anticipated mutation in productive relations and more like a sudden shift—for better or worse, depending on one's station. Gone was the US manufacturing base and with it the prosperity in the Rust Belt states; this would be a day for computer-based, high-tech industries and regions like Silicon Valley and Seattle. Gone was the "in-house" corporate accountant, human resources staff, and help-line team; these services and others would be outsourced, often to offshore sites. Gone, too, were once-common skilled jobs for white middle-class men, and full-time white-collar jobs with benefits became increasingly scarce. The once-standard employee pension programs secured by fixed annuities were displaced by individual retirement accounts tethered to the fortunes of the stock market, and flex-time, part-time, and what we now call "gig work" would become the name of the game. For the so-called average American, these were the felt consequences of a productive regime that traded largely in finance capital, was dominated by multinational corporations, and extorted unprecedented profits from a new international division of labor.

By the 1980s, the prized principle US economists exploited to account for and rationalize Post-Fordism's impacts on everyday life was "the wisdom and efficiency of markets."²⁹ Neo-Keynesian macroeconomic theory had lost all favor in highly influential academic and political circles, their ranks turning as if on a dime to champion microeconomic theory and rational-actor models. Gone, too, then, were the once-powerful apologists for thinking about the economy in terms of aggregate demand and investment functions, and for conceiving economic stability as an informed exercise in conscientious social and institutional compromise. Indeed, by the time Reagan took office in 1981, a new neoliberal consensus—built by working up from the microeconomic foundations of individual choice—boldly rejected any measure that would attempt to steer the economy by intervening on the side of aggregate demand. As historian Daniel T. Rogers recounts, political economists' rediscovery of the naturalness and wisdom

of the market, coupled with their confidence that the unencumbered “play of private interests might better promote maximum social well-being than could the active management of regulators,”³⁰ set the stage for Reaganomics, otherwise called supply-side economics. The Reagan administration moved aggressively to remove any and all perceived barriers to market efficiency, from cutting the marginal personal income tax rate, reducing government spending, and deregulating major industries to advocating flexible labor pools, free trade, and free-floating capitalism.

Neoliberalism—shorthand for a mode of rationality whose core principle is the wisdom and efficiency of free markets and whose twined values are calculation, competition, and enterprise—did not rule the economic domain alone. It also came to govern activity in the social, legal, and political spheres. As Foucault explained in his 1979 lectures published under the title *The Birth of Biopolitics*, twentieth-century American neoliberalism as a rationality materializes as the effort “to use the market economy and the typical analyses of the market economy to decipher non-market relationships and phenomena which are not strictly and specifically economic but what we call social phenomena.”³¹ The application of market analysis to government was, of course, the opening for the incessant demand that the social safety net be unraveled and departments and agencies—from the Department of Education to the Department of Energy, from the CDC to the NEA and NEH—be downsized or eliminated altogether. It also is the rationality by which the privatization of prisons, the paramilitary, and primary health care can make (good) sense. In *Undoing the Demos*, Wendy Brown examines additional entailments of the neoliberal recalibration of the state at length, calling out the regularity with which it offloads the responsibility and, of course, cost of human well-being and development onto individuals and private institutions. But in order to do this kind of “political” work in the United States, the neoliberal democratic state needs a political, public, and popular culture that more than nominally endorses it as well as a citizenry that subsidizes it. Enter WWII redux: it is my argument that between 1985 and 2005 WWII memory practices, texts, places, and events together provided the ethnonationalist state fantasy that transformed the neoliberal common sense into a new American creed that recalibrated accordingly the citizenry’s desires.

Of course, another word for that common sense is “hegemony,” which Antonio Gramsci used in the place of “ideology” in order to underscore the always already provisional and contested character of the collective status quo and, thus, the persistent effort that must be expended in every domain of life to sustain it.

What is less well-known is Gramsci's use of hegemony also to call attention to the complex processes by which any state formation procures and secures its provisional authority. Stuart Hall, a singularly committed and nuanced reader of Gramsci, insists on this dimension of hegemony, however daunting a challenge it poses for concrete analysis. Quoting directly from Gramsci's *Prison Notebooks*, Hall writes, "[Hegemony] is neither a functional condition of ruling-class power, nor a matter, exclusively, of 'ideological consent' or 'cultural influence.' What is in question, is the issue of the 'ethical state': the ceaseless work required to construct a social authority, throughout all the levels of social activity, such that a 'moment of economic, political, intellectual and moral unity' may be secured, sufficient to 'raise the level of the state to a more general plane.'" ³²

Although, so far as I am able to tell, he did not ever use the term, Gramsci helps us to understand that modern state authority is predicated on a certain *kind* of fantasy that, for all its other historically contingent and singular features, always infuses every social relation with an overriding, dare I say transcendent, ethical imperative or desire. Hence, not "we will" (consent or influence) but "we must" (imperative) or "we cannot not want" (desire). Put a bit differently, in staging the "ethicalization" of everyday life, national state fantasies habituate their subjects to a process of abstraction that, I argue, is irreducibly rhetorical. More to the point, in this book I carefully track work that took place between 1985 and 2005 under the obfuscating rubric of WWII remembrance to fashion a "new" equilibrium in the United States whose authority and power is shown to be owed to the restoration of a certain *kind* of ethical state that I call ethnonationalist. Indeed, as I intend to demonstrate, the rhetorical evisceration of the historical and the political in the name of the ethical vis-à-vis the cultural has been one of the new hegemony's signature gestures. It is, then, a fundamental mistake to regard the memory practices, texts, places, and events to which I attend in detail—including but not limited to the controversy over the National Air and Space Museum's *Enola Gay* exhibit to Steven Spielberg's blockbuster film *Saving Private Ryan* and Tom Brokaw's best-selling book *The Greatest Generation* to the Women in Military Services for America Memorial—as "merely" cultural. In its articulation with a post-Fordist economy whose neoliberal rationality had already migrated into the private and civic spheres of life in the United States, WWII redux—with one important exception, the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, that I discuss at length in the fourth chapter—delivered the ethnonational ethos requisite to the ethical elevation of the neoliberal state.

Archives and Popular Memory

Of the many presuppositions (which will, I hope, become clear as the analysis unfolds) grounding my effort to take political measure of WWII's return, two demand discussion at the outset. First, I take the archive to be a site of inscription from which ensues rhetorical inventions that have a distinct relation to power. This is, of course, a loaded sentence, the words "inscription," "rhetorical inventions," and "power" laden with theoretical and methodological implications. I use the word "inscription" to call attention to the archive's irreducible textuality. By that I mean simply to say that the archive, any archive, is a weave or tapestry of conspicuous or durable marks that, for better or worse, must be understood or read as traces—neither simply present nor simply absent, but both. For me the archive is not, then, a space of referential plentitude or presence whose stability, materiality or "givenness" positions it in advance to serve as arbiter of Truth. To put it otherwise, as trace structure, the archive alone cannot guarantee or anchor any Truth absolutely.³³ But I also use the word "inscription" to signal a principled interest in guarding the question of intention, of always keeping it open. To be sure, there is intention and there are intended marks and scripts. But just as surely, something may be inscribed without the intention to do so. And just as surely, a surface may be marked in such a way that it "says" something more or less than what was intended. In other words, to guard the question of intention is not to dispense with it altogether. Quite to the contrary, it is to vigilantly remain open to the possibility that in addition to whatever may be intended something else may (also) (have) take(n) place. The archive, then, as a site of inscription.

Now it is precisely because traces are what reside in the archive that archives can serve as resources of an indeterminate but not wholly undetermined number of rhetorical inventions. I use the word "rhetorical" at this point in a relatively simple sense, which is to say as a name for situated symbolic acts that, aggressively or subtly, by design or default, seek to move their audiences to action or to attitude. Hence, the range of rhetorical inventions that archives can subsidize include not only explicit attempts at persuasion but also everyday practices of identification. I also use the word "inventions" in the relatively simple sense of a new fabrication or forming of the symbolic resources at hand.

Of course, rhetorical invention is never free in the strong sense of the term since it always takes place within a field of constraints that is also its surface of emergence. Of the many constraints on rhetorical invention, one deserves special

mention here: power. I suggested above that we understand the archive as a site of inscription from which ensue rhetorical inventions that have a distinct relation to power. My point in marking the relationship between those rhetorical inventions and power is to insist emphatically that the deconstruction of the sign (or, as the case may be in the archive, object) does not mean that out of the archive any fabrication whatsoever may emerge. Nor does the deconstruction of the sign imply that the effects or consequences of the rhetorical inventions the archive subsidizes are anyone's guess. That is because what is sayable—like what is seeable and doable—must abide by the rules of formation of discourse (or objects and practice) of the field in which the enunciation takes place.³⁴ That speech, to turn the phrase, is never free, is one of the lessons to be taken from Michel Foucault who, as early as *The Archaeology of Knowledge* and as late as *Fearless Speech*, implored us to attend carefully to the relations between different elements that together configure an enunciative field and the enunciative modalities proper to it.

That enunciative modalities are not to be confused with speaking beings is a point Foucault made time and again but, perhaps, never so clearly as in the important middle section of *The Archaeology* titled “The Formation of Enunciative Modalities”: “I do not refer the various enunciative modalities to the unity of the subject—whether it concerns the subject regarded as the pure founding authority of rationality, or the subject regarded as an empirical function of synthesis. Neither the ‘knowing’ (*le ‘connaître’*), nor the ‘knowledge’ (*les ‘connaissances’*). In the proposed analysis, instead of referring back to *the* synthesis or *the* unifying function of *a* subject, the various enunciative modalities manifest his dispersion. To the various statuses, the various sites, the various positions that he can occupy or be given when making a discourse.”³⁵ For these reasons, we are obliged to think not about Truth or “Truths” but, rather, about the “‘general politics’ of truth” or the “‘political economy’ of truth” operative at a given time. Again, Foucault: “Each society has its regime of truth . . . that is, the types of discourse it accepts and makes function as true; the mechanisms and instances that enable one to distinguish true and false statements; the means by which each is sanctioned; the techniques and procedures accorded value in the acquisition of truth; the status of those who are charged with saying what counts as true.”³⁶ As I have put it in so many words elsewhere, from the historicity of the archive, rhetorics; wrought from the traces of the past are discourses that the archive cannot *authenticate* absolutely but can be made to *authorize* nonetheless.

As noted above, the return of WWII took many forms, from Senate hearings and presidential speeches to television talk shows, series, and prime time specials; from one blockbuster movie and a lot of lackluster films (several that were remakes) to best-selling print, audio, coffee-table, and pop-up books; and from video games for kids and cruises for adults to countless museum exhibits and one mammoth WWII memorial on the National Mall. Although the list could go on, the point is that WWII redux took aim at *popular* memory. Hence, the second presupposition meriting discussion at the relative start: popular memory is absolutely central to modern state authority and, more specifically, to the establishment of any fantasy whose primary purpose is to install and maintain a particular form of social equilibrium.³⁷ To begin unpacking this presupposition I first call attention to the two distinct senses in which, taking my cues from Foucault, I am using the word “popular.”

One, recuperations of WWII are popular by virtue of their working to diminish people’s historical knowledge about the war, putting a popularized version of that history in its place. For example, it was a well-known fact during the war and in its immediate aftermath that the United States did not put its soldiers on the ground, in the air, and onto the seas until December 1941, although the British and the French had been fighting the Germans since September 1939. The fact that the United States was not “all in” for a very, very long time simply is lost to WWII redux, an assemblage whose near singular focus on a retooled heroism that is at once ethnonationalist and neoliberal renders that fact unrepresentable in advance. To put it simply, war heroes keyed to the neoliberal state need battle scenes, and years of deliberations over getting in or staying out, of going in before or after the Russians, simply do not fall “naturally” within that frame.

Two, WWII redux also was an exercise in reshaping *popular* memory in the sense that it worked to abate the people’s historical knowledge of themselves, glossing over struggles related to class, race, religion, gender, and sexuality before, during, and after the war. It did so not by willfully erasing them, but by deftly sublating them into an ethnonational fantasy keyed to a neoliberal state beleaguered by “multicultural” difference and division. Hence, a movie like *Windtalkers*, directed by Jon Woo and released in theaters in 2002. Based on “real events,” the movie follows the heroic triumphs and travails of US marine corporal Joe Enders (played by Nicolas Cage) who is charged to protect Ben Yahzee (played by Adam Beach), a Navajo private trained in directing US artillery fire via coded messages. In order that the code not ever fall into enemy

hands, Enders has been ordered to kill Yahzee if or when his capture is imminent. Following the invasion of Saipan, during which Yahzee engages in lethal combat for the first time and Enders kills another code talker to protect the code, the unit is again mobilized and ambushed. Sparing the mediocre details, it will suffice for my purpose here to note that, as the enemy closes in on the few surviving marines and a wounded Yahzee, Enders (who also has been hit by enemy fire) must decide whether he will protect the code by killing him. Enders refuses to do so; instead, he carries the code talker on his back to safety, dying just as friendly forces, having received Yahzee's earlier call for an airstrike, arrive on the scene. The movie ends with Yahzee, his wife, and his son George Washington Yahzee paying their respects to Enders atop Point Mesa in Arizona. The movie's epilogue is a brief ode to the Navajo soldiers whose code, never broken, was key to America's success in the Pacific theater. Overall, then, the movie rhetorically sublates the particular into the universal (ethnonational), a negation of the negation that preserves and protects on one level what it destroys at another: a shared vision of the greater good that overcomes by negation a still unresolved, protracted, and violent history of difference between white colonial settlers and the native North American peoples.³⁸

These two senses of the popular also make it possible to newly appreciate the doubled significance of the National World War II Memorial that opened to the public in April 2004. Situated between memorials to Washington and Lincoln, the new World War II memorial functions rhetorically as the symbolic center of the national memorial landscape, retroactively reshaping collective national memory by peripheralizing all the other events recalled there. So, popular in the first sense. But it is not only the nation-state's history that is being recalibrated there. It is also the peoples' histories of themselves. Widely applauded for being the first war memorial or monument to break from the convention of honoring only those who served in the armed forces, the National World War II Memorial also pays homage to those on the home front: "Above all, the memorial stands as an important symbol of American national unity, a timeless reminder of the moral strength and awesome power that can flow when a free people are at once united and bonded together in a common and just cause." Sublation without remainder: WWII as new nodal point of an ethnonational neoliberal state fantasy.

But why, we might justifiably ask, is *popular* memory so central to the establishment of any modern state fantasy whose primary purpose is to install and maintain a particular form of social equilibrium? In an interview conducted in

1974 and published under the title “Film and Popular Memory,” Foucault tends an answer that is as provocative as it is enigmatic in response to a question about how history was at that time being rewritten by French cinema and television. I quote him at some length:

There’s a real fight going on. Over what? Over what we can roughly describe as *popular memory*. It’s an actual fact that people—I’m talking about those who are barred from writing, from producing their books themselves, from drawing up their own historical accounts—that these people nevertheless do have a way of [living that] history and using it [*de la vivre et de l’utiliser*]. . . .

Now, a whole number of apparatuses have been set up (“popular literature,” cheap books and the stuff that’s taught in school as well) to obstruct the flow of this popular memory. . . .

Today, cheap books aren’t enough. There are much more effective means like television and the cinema. And I believe this was one way of reprogramming popular memory, which existed but had no way of expressing itself. So people are shown not what they were, but what they must remember having been.

Since memory is actually a very important factor in struggle (indeed, it is [in a kind of dynamic conscious of history] that struggles develop), if one controls [*tenir*: keep, convene, hold on to, put down] people’s [the people’s] memory, one controls their dynamism [*dynamisme*]. And one also controls their experience [experiment, expertise, practice, taste], their knowledge [*savoir*: awareness] of/about previous struggles.³⁹

Allow me a restatement: if one controls the people’s memory or popular memory, one controls the people’s dynamism. For me it is significant that the French word *dynamisme* is left untranslated or barely translated in the English edition, since a number of alternatives present themselves: energy, vitality, drive, pulsion, enthusiasm, force. So what is this dynamism that the people have that is linked to a memory of themselves and that also has a relation to struggle?

I propose we read *dynamisme* as Foucault’s name for the generic potentiality or incipient power (*pouvoir*, as in can-do-ness) of the governed or of the demos to lend form (*bíos*) to life (*zoë*). In other words, I am suggesting that *dynamisme* signifies power’s collective mode of politicized existence as potentiality. As potentiality and not (yet) actuality, *dynamisme* is that which has collective existence but

not substance. *Dynamisme*, in other words, is subject to a judgment of existence but not subject to a predicative judgment; it is an existence whose character or quality cannot be described. Much like Foucault has said that “the ‘pleb, undoubtedly, does not exist; but there is ‘plebness,’” there, too, is *dynamisme*.⁴⁰ Furthermore, in taking my interpretive clues from Giorgio Agamben’s exegesis of Aristotle’s metaphysics and physics, I noted above that *dynamisme* is a generic rather than an existing potentiality. By that I mean to say that the governed, the people, or the demos “must suffer an alteration (a becoming other) through learning,” the last word taken in the broadest of possible senses and not only as formal instruction (for Foucault, *savoir* as well as *connaissance*, popular memory as well as the lessons handed down by the state).

Following Agamben a bit further, it is consequential for our thinking about hegemony, state fantasy, or the installation and maintenance of a particular form of social equilibrium to notice that *dynamisme*, like any other potentiality, also is impotentiality. If, according to Aristotle via Agamben, potentiality (*dynamis*) is to be rigorously distinguished from actuality (*energeia*), potentiality must be understood as that which “maintains itself in relation to its own privation, its own *sterēsis*, its own nonbeing.” If it were otherwise, if potentiality were to be conceptualized as a pure and positive presence, it would quite simply be an actuality. Hence, Agamben writes, “To be potential means: to be one’s own lack, to be in relation to one’s own incapacity.” Even more to the point, Agamben finds in Aristotle’s fundamentally passive sense of potentiality—the human being’s capacity to suffer its own non-being or impotentiality—what he identifies as the “origin of human power” and the “root of [human] freedom” that, because the human being is capable of its own impotentiality, may be for good or for evil.⁴¹ In considerably less hyperbolic terms we might say, the potentiality or not for struggle or the status quo. All the above is intended to suggest that I take WWII redux as a decentralized and many-pronged effort to domesticate the *dynamisme* of the demos at a critical conjuncture in US history. It is in this way, then, that WWII redux is also a biopolitical enterprise whose object is the people, whose modality is the popular, and whose specific aims take cover under the rubric of the general welfare.

Strategy of Reading, Rhetoric, and Form

My use of the words “strategy of reading” rather than “method” is deliberate in the extreme and not, perhaps for all readers, for only the most obvious reasons.

First, I use “strategy of reading” to call attention to the irreducibly rhetorical character of my engagement with each element, primary or secondary, visual or linguistic, over the course of these pages. Much like before, here I use the word “rhetoric” to indicate that my readings are self-consciously situated, interested, and deliberately designed to persuade the reader of the ethico-political and pedagogical usefulness of critically engaging the popular in a particular way, at and for a particular time. This book operates, then, in a different key and at a measured distance from various modes of literary interpretation, aesthetic appreciation, and philosophical exegesis whose aspirations are self-consciously transversal maybe even transcendental. Again, situated, interested, and designed to persuade.⁴²

Second, I use “strategy of reading” because the questions I ask about my archive and the theoretical and critical resources I recruit on the way toward answering them changes over the course of the book. Indeed, by this point the reader will have already discovered that I toggle among Derridean, Foucaultian, and psychoanalytic/Lacanian rhetorical readings, not only between but also within individual chapters. The question, of course, is why? I employ all three modes of inquiry because they radically question foundationalist premises, like reason, sovereignty, and self-presence, each one of them because the singular foci of their conceptual labor remind me that no question can be answered simply. To recall a metaphor from the great structural anthropologist Lévi-Strauss that Derrida puts under erasure in order to mark (without being able to nullify) its propensities toward presence (anthropology’s empiricism) and sovereignty (method as clean start), I read critically like a *bricoleur*, aspiring always to adhere to a double intention: “to preserve as an instrument something whose truth-value [I] criticize.”⁴³ The challenge is to put them to use but with “a readiness to abandon them, if necessary, should other instruments appear more useful”—and not only to put them to use, one by one, or one after one, but also “several of them at once, even if their form and their origin are heterogeneous.”⁴⁴ No one of them is the ticket to truth, and even their intellects combined will not stand in as a transcendental key. Given the lack of an overarching method or morphology of interpretation, I track the development of one of the book’s leitmotifs to give the reader a sense of how things will move.

As noted at the outset, my primary aim is to take measure of the ethico-political entailments of the renovation and reintroduction of WWII at a particular moment in US history. That objective demands, it seems to me, that I carefully consider context, a task noticeably easier said than done. Indeed, for all kinds of scholars and all sorts of reasons, “context” has long been a fraught term,

a bit like the word “infrastructure” in political policy talk today: What is included and what is excluded by it? According to whom and why? Rhetorical scholars have long focused on the context of symbolic acts. However, defining context has been a challenging problem, leading to different and sometimes conflicting theories of rhetoric.⁴⁵ While it is neither desirable nor necessary to detail the history of that conversation here, I do wish to recall my own attempt thirty-odd years ago to guard the question of context,⁴⁶ reissuing the caution in less-nuanced terms now: the lexical shift from, say, context to scene (Kenneth Burke’s recording), or from scene to situation (be it determined as rhetoric is situational or situations are rhetorical), or from situation to circulation, or from circulation to ecology, brooks no gain on the irreducible indeterminability of context as such. And *because* of that irreducible indeterminability whose condition of possibility is what Derrida dubbed the graphematics of iterability, no determination of context can be justified absolutely. Every determination of context is a violent inscription.⁴⁷

As Derrida explained in *Limited Inc*, the entailments of understanding context as always already an exercise of force that cannot be attributed fully to the speaking, writing, working, or designing subject are highly consequential, and not only for the so-called human sciences:

There is always something political “in the very project of attempting to fix the contexts of utterances.” This is inevitable; one cannot do anything, least of all speak, without determining (in a matter that is not only theoretical, but practical and performative) a context. . . . Once this generality and this a priori structure have been recognized, the question can be raised, not whether a politics is implied (it always is), but which politics is implied in such practice of contextualization. This you can then go on to analyze, but you cannot suspect it, much less denounce it except on the basis of another contextual determination every bit as political.⁴⁸

There is no meta-discourse or meta-position that will get us out of the fundamental fix that is contextualization.

With Foucault’s help I begin to stake my ground in the next chapter, identifying in the *Enola Gay* controversy an important shift in US political and public discourse. That is to say, considered within the broader frame of the demise of the national Cold War state fantasy and ascendent neoliberalism, I decipher in the *Enola Gay* exhibition debate a disturbing change in how we talk about

and tell the truth that transforms what it means to be a good citizen and to do things the so-called American Way. By the end of the book, I circle back to the complexities of context via a critique of the new ethnonationalism's political economy of sacrifice. I tap psychoanalysis to propose an alternative conceptualization of patriotism or "love of country" that sutures Foucault's enigmatic notion of *dynamisme* to a psychoanalytic notion of (the) drive(s) for an affirmative biopolitics that confounds the neoliberal ethnonational state fantasy.

Finally, some thoughts about rhetoric and form, beginning with a declaration. I have yet to change my mind that everything to do with signification and value gets its start in *différance*. As I put it some years ago, but rephrase ever so slightly now in the interest of clarity, *différance* is the name Derrida cautiously assigned to the condition of possibility for signification as such, "the non-full, non-simple, structured and differentiating origin of differences": presence-absence, active-passive, true-false, inside-outside, literal-figural, et cetera.⁴⁹ "Rhetoric," then, is the term I use to designate the requisite finessing (condensation and displacement) of *différance* that inaugurates every textualization—a production that must be understood as an effect-structure, albeit one without a simple cause in either the casual or metaphysical senses of the term. I understand all signification, including communication, as rhetorical in this general sense; therefore, like the determination of context discussed above, I operate on the presumption that no textualization can be justified absolutely. Rhetoric in the general sense, then, is the inexorable opening onto the ethico-political.⁵⁰

If rhetoric in this general sense is theoretically and practically irreducible, rhetoric in its narrower senses is critically indispensable, and not only because it covers so much ground. From the study of figures and tropes to the analysis of modes of persuasion and forms of argument; from the Derridean deconstruction of Western metaphysics to the Foucaultian interrogation of the discursive operations by which a signifier is gelled into a referent to the psychoanalytic exploration of economies of enjoyment, rhetoric in one or more of its narrow senses will always have its place there and in these pages.

What must be emphasized, however, is that across all the chapters I pay particular attention to the ethico-political affordances, witting or not, of *rhetorical forms* in public and popular culture. With this emphasis, I add my voice to a growing chorus of scholars challenging the fetishization of formlessness and the consequent attenuation of formal analysis in the literary, critical, and theoretical humanities.⁵¹ Unabashedly pointing the proverbial finger directly at the likes of Bruno Latour, Giorgio Agamben, and Jacques Rancière—while also calling out

by association with key terms entire “schools” of contemporary thought, from the neo-Deleuzians and neo-Spinozians to affect theorists, object-oriented ontologists and new materialists—Anna Kornbluh challenges the now highly orthodox investment in formlessness: “Formlessness becomes the ideal uniting a variety of theories, from the mosh of the multitude to the localization of microstruggle and microaggression, from the voluntarist assembly of actors and networks to the flow of affects untethered from constructs, from the deification of irony and incompletion to the culminating conviction that life springs forth without form and thrives in form’s absence. Noting its characteristic horizon of *an-arche*, the ‘without of order,’ we might deem this beatific fantasy of formless life ‘anarcho-vitalism.’”⁵² In direct opposition to all who embrace formlessness as a political virtue, Kornbluh advocates a new aesthetic, literary, and political formalism that productively supplements the old by grasping “collective social life not as an empirical referent, but as [an] ever-evolving, provisionally stable, improvised form.”⁵³ Obviously, then, this is not our grandmother’s formalism; indeed, it is not even the formalism my generation of English majors was schooled in. It is a formalism that is self-consciously (to the extent that is possible) made to function on the other side of the deconstruction of form and structure—a formalism, that is to say, that submits all formalization to what Derrida dubbed in his inaugural lecture in the United States the critique of “the structurality of structure.”⁵⁴

As readers are likely to surmise at this point, I not only enthusiastically support but wish to supplement the new formalism by positioning rhetorical forms front and center, taking them seriously even when, especially when, they appear to inhabit the margins. I do so by identifying numerous rhetorical forms that play a meaningful role in the formation of an ethnonationalist state fantasy keyed to the neoliberal state at the end of the twentieth century. For example, I emphasized earlier my keen interest in *popular forms* of memory—blockbuster films, best-selling books, beloved museums and memorials—whose function in the (re)formation of a national state fantasy was both distinct and profound. But I also have a keen interest in an array of rhetorical forms whose impact is ignored altogether by the trivialization of textuality and the concomitant inflation of “reading-as-paraphrase” or “summary” into a critical art.⁵⁵ Those additional rhetorical forms include but are not limited to repetition, serialization, sequentialization, and amplification; metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche, and part-object (a psychoanalytic name for what I later suggest is a distinct rhetorical function); antithesis, synthesis, and hierarchy. Importantly, however,

because mine is a rhetorical analysis of rhetorical forms, I take their political affordances to be irreducibly situated, which is to say, articulatory effects. Again, without guarantees: what any form, say a monument or memorial, “means” or “does” now may differ from what it “meant” or “did” in the past and what it “will mean” or “will do” in the future.

I bring this already extended introduction to a close with a highly schematic summary of the chapters to follow. As noted above, chapter 1, “The *Enola Gay* Controversy: The Politics of Experience and Truth Telling at the Turn of the Twenty-First Century,” focuses on the successful assault on “The Last Act,” the planned fiftieth-anniversary exhibit at the National Air and Space Museum documenting the historic flight of the *Enola Gay*, the dropping of atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and the end of the war in the Pacific. I argue that this controversy’s legacy is to have inaugurated a process by which WWII was discursively transformed from an event in the past about which we try to make sense into a mode of sense making or matrix of popular reasoning in the present.

Chapter 2, “Popular Memory and Civic Belonging at the End of the American Century,” analyzes the monumental World War II Memorial on the National Mall, Steven Spielberg’s blockbuster film *Saving Private Ryan*, Tom Brokaw’s best-selling book *The Greatest Generation*, and the Women in Military Service for America Memorial, as well as the discourses circulating about them in the popular press and mass media. This chapter tracks the popular emergence of a powerful new “truth teller” who burst onto the national scene in 1998 with the release of *Saving Private Ryan*. This figure would speak with unassailable authority not only about the Good War but also, and more importantly, about what it means to be an American and to do things the American Way. In short, for a generation beset by fractious disagreements about the viability of US culture and identity, these reconstructions of WWII function rhetorically as civic lessons in ethnonational neoliberal fantasy.

The third chapter, “Remembering the ‘Good War’ / Refiguring Democracy: Ethico-Political Resubjection at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum,” explores the dangerous consequences of WWII redux. I argue that at the end of the twentieth century and the beginning of the next, the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum is a uniquely commendable commemorative text whose singular rhetorical virtue is that it, unlike all the others examined thus far, contests the premature ossification of WWII memory, its translation into a truth and a program of prudential conduct, and instead promotes the

responsibilization of history. To recall what has already been foreshadowed above, in this chapter I return to the question of patriotism, tapping psychoanalysis for an alternative conceptualization of “love of country” that confounds rather than collaborates with the ethnonational neoliberal biopolitical order.

In chapter 4, “The Culture and History Wars of the Twenty-First Century, or, Can You Be WHITE and Look at This?” I examine today’s US culture and history wars, paying warranted close rhetorical attention to *The 1619 Project* and *The 1776 Report*. Reading both as pedagogies of citizenship for the twenty-first century, I argue that the substantive and stylistic differences between them, as well as those between them and WWII redux, signify a potentially explosive mutation in political and public culture. Respectfully recalling Elizabeth Alexander’s seminal essay written at the height of the early nineties culture and history wars, “The Culture and History Wars of the Twenty-First Century, or, Can You Be WHITE and Look at This?” uses several of the book’s dominant analytics and motifs (e.g., popular memory, *dynamisme*, and desubjectivation) to soberly assess where our politics are currently headed.⁵⁶