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"The Great Crusade": D-Day in American Culture c.1944-2001

"You are about to embark upon the Great Crusade", declared General Dwight D. Eisenhower's 6 June 1944 "Order of the Day". "The eyes of the world are upon you", continued the Supreme Commander, with the ultimate objective – the "elimination of Nazi tyranny over the oppressed peoples of Europe" – nothing less than a "noble undertaking". Such was the language used to motivate those 'free men of the world' just then headed into battle, their task the invasion of Normandy and, ultimately, the liberation of occupied Europe from Nazi rule.[1] To be sure, the extent to which these "free men" fully appreciated the use of such lofty language to describe their forthcoming ordeal might be questioned. Regardless, these were the words employed by the officer in overall charge; this was the frame of reference deployed. Such language made a key assumption: the Allied invasion was not merely a military operation of a type – an amphibious landing – oft repeated between 1943 and 1945. This particular operation was different. This was "D-Day", and its size, scale, and significance ensured that for Eisenhower (and, as we shall see, many others) appropriate meaning could only be found in the rhetoric of righteousness and in the vocabulary of Christian mission. After all, this was the operation which saw 3,000 ships deliver 130,000 Allied soldiers to the Normandy beaches whilst overhead roared 7,000 Allied aircraft.[2] By August 1944 this (by then, much increased) Allied army had broken out of Normandy and was pushing to the German border; by spring 1945 it was all over and, with the Soviet Red Army advancing from the East, German forces were defeated, and Victory in Europe declared on 8 May.[3]

That Eisenhower – or Ike, as he was often called – turned to such phraseology to describe this momentous event in the conflict was perhaps to be expected given the pervasive political discourse of the previous decades. As Graham Cross makes clear elsewhere in this special issue, crusading metaphors had long been popular in American politics, especially in the early twentieth century, the age of an often-evangelical Progressive movement. Little wonder that in 1917 the government of Woodrow Wilson employed the very same language to explain the point and purpose of the belated American military intervention in Europe. For

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[1] D-Day statement to soldiers, sailor, and airmen of the Allied Expeditionary Force, 6/44, Collection DDE-EPRE: Eisenhower, Dwight D: Papers, Pre-Presidential, 1916-1952; Dwight D. Eisenhower Library; National Archives and Records Administration: https://www.archives.gov/historical-docs/todays-doc/?dod-date=606 (accessed 2/2/20).
[2] See "Overlord", in *The Oxford Companion to the Second World War* ed. Ian Dear (Oxford, 1995), 853.
[3] For details of the Allied invasion, see Carlo D'Este, *Decision in Normandy* (Old Saybrook, 1994); Olivier Wieviorka, *Normandy: The Landings to the Liberation of Paris*, trans. by M.B. DeBevoise (Cambridge, 2008); Max Hastings, *Overlord: From D-Day to the Liberation of Paris* (London, 1999); John Keegan, *Six Armies in Normandy: From D-Day to the Liberation of Paris* (London, 2004).

Wilson, the "Priestly" President, this too was nothing less than a "crusade" to make the world safe for democracy and, taking the name of their General, the Doughboys duly despatched across the Atlantic were known as "Pershing's Crusaders". Eisenhower (born in 1890) was a man of this moment, and he was entirely comfortable with such ideas and phrasing. But his connection to this Progressive-era sensibility was still closer, for he was himself one of Pershing's Crusaders. In the late 1920s, moreover, Ike had also played an important role in overseeing the establishment in France of a uniquely American commemorative landscape, a landscape that was often replete with medieval iconography and crusading imagery: he served on the staff of the newly formed American Battle Monuments Commission, the organisation responsible for the cemeteries and memorials constructed in Europe in memory of the American dead. Twenty years later, as the United States became embroiled in another global war, such details of experience, biography, and of worldview surely predisposed Ike to make sense of the moment with reference to a similar rhetorical and ideological framework.

At the same time, keying D-Day as a "Crusade" was not the exclusive preserve of Ike. Others similarly turned to such phrasing and ideas – both at the time and subsequently. Notable here is Paul Fussell, a veteran of the European war and later a renowned analyst of twentieth century culture and conflict.[4] When, in the early noughties, Fussell attempted to contest the 'military romanticism' he worried was then intensifying in the United States, he still could not escape Ike's rhetorical framing: his 2003 book – part history, part autobiography, part polemic – was titled *The Boy's Crusade*.[5] Fussell took care to explain that he intended "no disrespect to Eisenhower by examining his term *crusade*"; indeed, although keen to reassert the trauma and tragedy of the conflict, Fussell was nonetheless happy to admit that "refracted in narrative, the war in Europe can be shown to possess a vivid moral structure."[6] This is of course the issue at the centre of D-Day's persistent presence and popularity in postwar American culture: it possess what one scholar has called an appealing "singularity" comparable to the "unities" of narrative bequeathed by the Classics, an idea that has been revisited and reasserted in postwar historiography, monuments, movies, literature (as this article will discuss).[7]

Over the last two decades these issues of cultural appropriation and of commemorative construction – especially linked to the events of the Second World War – have been the subject

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[4] Fussell is best known for his scholarship on literature and the First World War. See Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory* (Oxford, 1975).
[5] Paul Fussell, *The Boy's Crusade* (London, 2004), xv. The book was first published in the US, in 2003.
[6] Ibid, 6, xi.
[7] Marianna Torgovnik, *The War Complex: World War II in our Time* (London, 2005), 42. For a connected discussion of "signal events" see Sonya Rose, *Which People's War? National Identity and Citizenship in Wartime Britain 1939-1945* (Oxford, 2003).

of engaged scholarly analysis.[8] Yet despite this extensive body of work, and despite, too, D-Day's widely recognised historiographical status as a key event of the war in the west, the Allied invasion of Normandy – as story, myth and memory – has not received the sort of sustained attention one might expect. It was not until 2014 that this relative neglect was first fully addressed, in the edited collection *D-Day in History and Memory*.[9] With contributions from various international experts, this well-received volume explored the ways in which D-Day has been commemorated in different national cultures, including Britain, the United States, Canada, France, Germany and Russia. Still more recently, one of the editors of this volume – Michael Dolski – published a revealing monograph further developing his insights on the place of D-Day in American memory, specifically looking at how its meaning has shifted according to contemporary political context.[10] Another of the volume's contributors – Kate Lemay – has similarly revisited the subject of D-Day's commemorative presence in her book *Triumph of the Dead* (2018), this time with a focus on the activities in France of the post-1945 American Battle Monuments Commission.[11] In all these works, the issue of how D-Day has been culturally 'framed' received close attention, with both Dolski and Lemay skilfully showing how the event often has been commemorated as an expression and example of American moral courage. Such analysis has also rightly involved some examination of the idea of D-Day as a 'crusade'. Nonetheless, this very particular historical keying – its precise origins, form, purpose and politics – is still worthy of further attention. Focusing on political speech, commemorative ceremonies, and various cultural media (especially historiography, memorials and films) this article thus explores the discursive construction by American cultural and political leaders of D-Day as "crusade", that is, as an example of a righteous and redemptive mission undertaken in the name of God in order to deliver the oppressed peoples of Europe from the darkness and evil of Nazi rule. In doing so, I trace the fortunes of this rhetorical framing from the war era

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[8] See, for example, Mark Connelly, *We Can Take It! Britain and the Memory of the Second World War* (London, 2004); Lucy Noakes, Juliette Pattinson, eds. *British Cultural Memory and the Second World War* (London, 2013); John Bodnar, *The "Good War" in American Memory* (Baltimore, 2010); Philip D. Biedler, *The Good War's Greatest Hits: World War II and American Remembering* (Athens, GA, 1998); Richard Ned Lebow, Wulf Kansteiner, Claudio Fogu, eds. *The Politics of Memory in Postwar Europe* (Durham, NC, 2006); Jay Winter, *Remembering War: The Great War Between History and Memory in the Twentieth Century* (New Haven, 2006).

[9] A notable exception is John Buckley, *The Normandy Campaign 1944: Sixty Years On* (Abingdon, 2006). Michael Dolski, Sam Edwards, John Buckley, eds. *D-Day in History and Memory: The Normandy Landings in International Remembrance and Commemoration* (Denton, TX, 2014).

[10] Michael Dolski, *D-Day Remembered: The Normandy Landings in American Collective Memory* (Knoxville, 2016).

[11] Kate C. Lemay, *Triumph of the Dead: American World War II Cemeteries, Monuments, and Diplomacy in France* (Tuscaloosa, 2018). There is also now a growing literature connected to the ways in which the story of D-Day has been curated in museums and heritage sites. See Geoffrey Bird, Sean Claxton and Keir Reeves, *Managing and Interpreting D-Day's Sites of Memory* (Abingdon, 2016).

through to the end of the twentieth century, examining its presence and purpose but also its lines and limits.

First, I identify the origins of crusading language in early twentieth-century Progressivism and, especially, in the experience of the Great War (with the latter catalysing the militarisation of a Progressive-era language previously used to describe domestic social and economic reforms). Second, I show how Eisenhower's description of the Allied invasion of Normandy as a crusade was part of a broader pattern of wartime activity intended to impart to the Allied cause a sense of quasi-religious purpose. Third, I examine how this 1940s era idea – deployed in speeches and mediated via popular culture – waxed and waned in the postwar period, with specific references to D-Day as 'crusade' at times displaced by a more general invocation of the Allied invasion as religious and righteous mission. Such sentiment was apparent, for instance, in the recurrent references to American veterans making *pilgrimages* to Europe; for many commentators these were emotional and solemn acts of return to a land reclaimed by the sacrifices of the crusaders. At its broadest, therefore, this article furthers our understanding of exactly how D-Day has been framed and represented in American culture; it teases out what might be termed a chronology of cultural traction. And it identifies those moments in which the linkage between D-Day and 'crusading' has been firmly expressed as well as those other moments in which this linkage became rather more subterranean and subsumed, often remaining detectable only via inference or through careful attention to some of the images, ideas and narrative themes deployed in speech and ceremony.

Progressive Politics and the "First Crusade", c.1890-1918

In *Promised Land, Crusader State*, Walter McDougall persuasively traces the crusader dynamic within US foreign policy to the turn of the twentieth century and, in particular, to the age of Progressivism.[12] This was the expansive and at times conflicted (and even contradictory) reforming movement which so characterised early twentieth century American politics. Its well-spring was diverse, but it was in part a reaction and response to the perceived corruption, inadequacies and inefficiencies of the age which Mark Twain had famously called "Gilded", that is, the period from around the 1870s through to the 1890s. This was the post-Civil War era in which industrial expansion also brought corruption and fraud, and in which economic growth brought exploitation, class strife, and the emergence of increasingly large monopolies or, in the

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[12] Walter McDougall, *Promised Land, Crusader State: The American Encounter with the World Since 1776* (New York, 1997).

language of the age, "Trusts". By the end of the nineteenth century such developments had produced a backlash energised by contemporary fears that the United States was in the process of becoming the very sort of entity against which for so long it had been defined: an unequal and fragmented society dominated by a self-perpetuating, out of touch, and moneyed elite and overwhelmed by newly arrived alien peoples and cultures. For Eugenicists likes Madison Grant, indeed, the very "racial" vigour of the American people was at risk of "passing" into oblivion.[13] Enter, therefore, a new generation of reformers, many of whom were inspired by the Christian revivalism of the latter nineteenth century. Such "Progressives" – as they became known – were never a singular movement or organisation, and included amongst their numbers those from opposite ends of the political spectrum. But they nonetheless shared some common assumptions and attitudes, including a moral compass firmly set by contemporary Anglo-Saxonist Protestant evangelism. As a result of the latter, the many reforms these Progressives pursued – from outlawing child labour, to Trust-busting, to prohibiting alcohol – were often articulated with the rhetoric of righteousness. Put differently, they become not merely reformers; rather, in the eyes of many contemporaries they were *Crusaders* engaged in struggles which were worthy, necessary, moral and redemptive.

For a while this crusading zeal was largely inward looking. But the idea always contained the potential to be turned outward, especially given the fact that a very similar evangelical zeal had long informed the Euro-American "conquest" of the West, a conquest given a sense of Protestant purpose by those such as John O'Sullivan who would famously call it an expression of American "Manifest Destiny".[14] By the end of the nineteenth century, therefore, the "Winning of the West" combined with contemporary Progressive idealism bequeathed an inescapable logic: if American society – now absent, said Frederick Jackson Turner in 1893, of the Frontier – was in need of reform and salvation, could not the same be said of the world more generally?[15] And so, having busily cleaned up American society, Progressive reformers turned attention to realms and regions beyond their borders, including – in 1898 – the Philippines, then a colony of a "decadent" and crumbling European power, Spain. After all, and as McDougall again explains: "at bottom, the belief that American power, guided by a secular and religious spirit of service, could remake foreign societies came as easily to the

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[13] See Madison Grant, *The Passing of the Great Race Or the Racial Basis for European History* (New York, 1916)

[14] John L. O'Sullivan, "Annexation", *Democratic Review,*17 (1) (1845): 5-10.

[15] For the role of Providence in the Frontier Myth see Richard Slotkin, *Gunfighter Nation: The Myth of the Frontier in Twentieth Century America* (Norman, OK, 1998). For Frederick Jackson Turner and the "end" of the Frontier, see "The Significance of the Frontier in American History" in *Annual Report of the American Historical Association* (1893), 197-227.

Progressives as trust-busting, prohibition of child labor, and regulation of interstate commerce, meatpacking, and drugs."[16]

For the United States, therefore, the defeat of Spain in 1898 was the first occasion in which the crusading zeal was allied to State-sponsored foreign policy and then turned outward onto the global stage. But this turn towards what William Leuchtenberg identified as a form of "Progressive-Imperialism" did not necessarily imply an eager American readiness to muster in the interests of *European* redemption.[17] Indeed, as war broke out in in Europe in 1914, and as stalemate followed in 1915 and 1916, the Priest-like Woodrow Wilson – himself a committed Progressive – kept his country firmly on the path of neutrality. In time though, and following a combination of propaganda pressures, German outrages (unrestricted submarine warfare), and after sustained critical assault from other Progressives Wilson was turned, and the United States duly entered the conflict in April 1917. This American intervention had significant implications for how the conflict was understood, for the zeal that had so long motivated the Priest to stay neutral was now turned with equal fervour on the objectives of victory and peace. Here emerged the Wilsonian moralism which has remained such a powerful force in American politics ever since, a moralism which drew on that long-established Progressive reforming spirit to give US foreign policy *in Europe* a new energy.[18]

The first and most immediate effect of this energised "War-Progressivism" was to imbue the American – and indeed Allied – cause of 1917 with a sense of purpose previously absent.[19] This was now nothing less than a "crusade" to "make the world safe for democracy", and those Americans conscripted to the colours were thus, by implication, "crusaders". In fact, taking the name of their commanding General, they were "Pershing's Crusaders". As Graham Cross explains elsewhere in this issue, this was the title given to a US Government documentary film celebrating American mobilisation, and released in May 1918 just as the Doughboys started arriving at the Front.[20] By 1918, therefore, a Progressive-era rhetoric of moral crusading was militarised in order to justify armed intervention overseas. As a result, the targets of American crusaders now shifted from domestic corruption and social reform to "alien" and undemocratic political entities and ideologies. Or, rather, the idea of a crusade,

[16] McDougall, *Promised Land, Crusader State*, 120.
[17] See William Leuchtenberg, "Progressivism and Imperialism: The Progressive Movement and American Foreign Policy, 1898–1916", *Journal of American History* 39 (3) (1952): 483–504
[18] For Wilsonian moralism see, for example, Thomas J. Knock, *To End All Wars: Woodrow Wilson and the Quest for a New World Order* (Princeton, 1992); John M. Blum, *Woodrow Wilson and the Politics of Morality* (New York, 1956).
[19] For "War-Progressivism" see Richard Slotkin, *Lost Battalions: The Great War and the Crisis of American Nationality* (New York, 2005), 523-526.
[20] *Pershing's Crusader's* (United States Committee on Public Information, 1918).

recently appropriated by Progressive reformers, was now returned to its origins in war. For by framing the mission of the American Expeditionary Force in Europe as they did, American cultural and political leaders were of course also invoking a deeper understanding of "crusade", one with origins long before the era of twentieth century Progressivism and one which had a specific resonance in Europe (whether they themselves were aware of this is another matter). This was "crusade" as religious war, and in this specific instance as a battle between Western Christianity and an infidel barbarism represented by the "Hun" – a European enemy now othered and orientalised by Allied propaganda. This rhetorical framing clearly implied that "saving" Europe for "Democracy" was a mission as noble and worthy as "reclaiming" the Holy-Land for Christendom. Such was the language used by American press and politicians to describe the task of those Doughboys called into service, and such too was the language and meaning to which a young Dwight D. Eisenhower, an officer in this newly created Crusading Army of American Democracy, was exposed.

Eisenhower – the child of devout Lutheran parents and a man descended, so he thought, from a line of medieval German warriors – had graduated from West Point Military Academy in 1915, and when the United States entered the Great War in April 1917, he hoped to secure an overseas posting. Instead, however, and in large part due to his already proven administrative skills, he was given command of a United States based Tank training unit, and the war finished before he saw any active service.[21] But a decade later Eisenhower did finally see the European battlefields in his role on the staff of the newly formed American Battle Monuments Commission (ABMC), established under the Chairmanship of the old Crusading General himself, Pershing. By all accounts, this was a posting Eisenhower neither seems to have wanted or enjoyed. Nonetheless, he was good at it, and it would serve him well, first in making him familiar with the landscape and geography of France (an invaluable experience when he later commanded Allied forces in Europe) and, second, in terms of developing what his biographer, Carlo D'Este, has called his "sense of history".[22] For his job with the ABMC was to map the main American battlefields for a specially produced publication. The result was *A Guide to the American Battlefields in Europe* (1927), a carefully written and well-illustrated record of the American campaign through France and Flanders.[23] It was followed, in 1938, with an updated volume that also included details of the ABMC's main work during the

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[21] For Eisenhower's biography, see Carlo D'Este, *Eisenhower: A Soldier's Life* (New York, 2002); Stephen Ambrose, *Eisenhower: Soldier and President* (New York, 1990).
[22] D'Este, *Eisenhower*, 194
[23] American Battle Monuments Commission, *A Guide to the American Battlefields in Europe* (Washington, 1927).

twenties and thirties – the construction of a commemorative "Holy Land" consisting of eight permanent cemeteries, eleven memorials, and two bronze tablets memorialising the AEF's contribution to the conflict.[24] The style and form chosen by the Commission's architects no doubt appealed to Eisenhower's "sense of history". Thus, in addition to Classical funerary architecture, the Medieval and Romanesque proved popular, an understandable decision given the very language used to describe the Doughboys and their endeavours. As the historian of this overseas American architecture, Ron Robin, has explained, the use in the European cemeteries of "medieval-style artifacts…consecrated the war effort by evoking comparisons between the Great War and the Crusades of a distant medieval age".[25] The result was striking: "[s]culptures of soldiers of the Great War were juxtaposed with representations of Knights, symbols of a personal style of warfare never again to be waged."[26] Such juxtapositions ensured that the early-twentieth century Progressive idea of 'crusading' now acquired new meaning. Originally a metaphor applied to an often-domestic reforming zeal, it was now a knightly and chivalric mission undertaken overseas in the name of "democracy".

Notably, the American use of such medievalism made sense not only due to the rhetorical terms upon which American intervention had been defined, but also because of what the British counterpart – and inspiration – to the ABMC was likewise doing. For the Imperial War Graves Commission (IWGC), formed in 1917, similarly chose to invoke the medieval to make sense of the modern. To be sure, such framing was by no means ubiquitous and the discussion and decisions within the IWGC around exactly how best to commemorate British and Imperial war dead ultimately resulted in a pairing back of substantive religious symbolism and imagery (to the chagrin of the Church of England). But in one important instance a nod towards a godly medievalism was indeed deployed: a key element in all Commission cemeteries (of a certain size) is a "Cross of Sacrifice", purposely inlaid with a bronze "Crusader" sword, a sculptural expression of the sort of muscular Christianity popular among Edwardian elites. Elsewhere in post-1918 British commemorative culture there were still further invocations of the medieval. As Stefan Goebel has explained, this was a popular symbolic conceit of post-war commemoration, found in some of those many war memorials built back home in Blighty depicting St. George vanquishing the dragon of Teutonic tyranny,

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[24] American Battle Monuments Commission, *A Guide to the American Battlefields in Europe* (Washington, D.C, 1938).
[25] Ron Robin, *Enclaves of America: The Rhetoric of American Political Architecture Abroad* (Princeton, 1992), 55.
[26] Ibid.

not to mention in the decision of the Imperial War Cabinet to bury an "unknown warrior" (note the phrasing) in Westminster Abbey amongst the knights of yore.[27]

Such were some of the commemorative responses to the first great "crusade" of the twentieth century. And such, therefore, were some of the precedents of vocabulary, aesthetic and meaning offered by that experience, particularly to the likes of Dwight D. Eisenhower, career soldier, Pershing aide, and a man well-schooled in the history and traditions of American military missions. In short, Progressive era reform politics (informed by Evangelical Protestantism), Wilsonian moralism, wartime propaganda, and postwar commemoration had all combined to create an American *idea* of crusading by the 1930s. The idea of crusading in – and for – Allies in Europe had also secured a peculiar currency for some of those who fought the First World War. But it took another war and a rather different American president to re-articulate this idea and, in doing so, secure it still greater power and influence.

"Our Righteous Might": The "Second Crusade", 1941-45

On 8th December 1941, following the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, President Franklin D. Roosevelt took to the podium in the Senate to give one of the most important speeches of his political career. He had two objectives. First and foremost was to secure from Congress a Declaration of War. Second, but no less important, was to shape the *meaning* of the recent attack in Hawaii. And for this latter objective, FDR used a rhetorical dualism which had origins deep in American mythology. To harness popular outrage, Roosevelt solemnly recounted the death and destruction the attack had caused, an approach which found sustenance in a familiar narrative pattern previously used to make sense of earlier setbacks and defeats, such as the last stand at The Alamo (1845), the disaster at the Little Big Horn (1876), and the sinking of the USS Maine (1898). Pearl Harbor, implied FDR, was now part of this lineage of "infamy".[28] But such a lineage did more than just provide a reassuring context; it also suggested what would – what must – follow. For the sacrifices made by those Americans killed – like those of their predecessors in the storied defeats of American myth – clearly demanded *vengeance*. As FDR explained:

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[27] See Stefan Goebel, *The Great War and Medieval Memory: War, Remembrance and Medievalism in Britain and Germany, 1914-1940* (Cambridge, 2007). For details of the approach to commemoration adopted after 1918 by the newly formed IWGC, see Philip Longworth, *Unending Vigil: A History of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission, 1917-1967* (London, 1967). See also Edwin Gibson and G. Kingsley Ward, *Courage Remembered* (London, 1989).

[28] For details of how Pearl Harbor was framed with reference to other events in American history, see Emily Rosenberg, *A Date Which Will Live: Pearl Harbor in American Memory* (London, 2003).

The attack yesterday on the Hawaiian islands has caused severe damage to American naval and military forces. I regret to tell you that very many American lives have been lost. In addition, American ships have been reported torpedoed on the high seas between San Francisco and Honolulu…No matter how long it may take us to overcome this premeditated invasion, the American people in their *righteous might* will win through to absolute victory […] With confidence in our armed forces, with the unbounding determination of our people, we will gain the inevitable triumph—so help us God.[29]

This was skilful rhetoric indicative of a president steeped in the American historical experience but also one who had already been waging war for quite some time. Indeed, if the hostilities of December 1941 finally took a once "isolated" United States into the cataclysm of global war, the administration of FDR had nonetheless been rousing the public for battle since 1933. This was the year when Roosevelt first secured the Presidency by promising to rally the nation and defeat the scourge that was the Depression. Such language marked the "militarisation" of American political discourse, with the Depression providing the very "moral equivalent of war" for which the original Progressives had so long "yearned".[30] By 1941, with FDR now launching a righteous battle for "Four Freedoms", his use of what Michael Sherry has called "war as metaphor" was well-practiced, and powerfully effective.[31]

If an American crusading rhetoric of righteousness had found an influential new advocate in the President, and if the New Deal campaign this President led during the thirties essentially represented a recrudescence of Progressive reforming zeal, there was also one key institution in the United States where a very similar religiosity now became uniquely well-established: the American military. For the United States military – rather unusually for a Federal institution – had long been devoutly religious.[32] In part this was because like any army it was a reflection of the society that it served (and from which it drew its ranks), and American society itself was often similarly devout. As G.K. Chesterton famously put it in his 1922 book *What I Saw in America*, the United States was a "nation with the soul of a church".[33] This latent religiosity – this "soul" – was in turn the product of two inter-linked characteristics. One was the sheer ubiquity of religion in daily American life, the result of the popularity of church attendance (and indeed the enormous number of churches and temples in existence, serving

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[29] President Franklin D. Roosevelt, Speech to Joint Session of Congress, 8 December 1941: https://www.archives.gov/publications/prologue/2001/winter/crafting-day-of-infamy-speech.html (accessed: 2/2/20).
[30] Slotkin, *Lost Battalions*, 524.
[31] For FDR and the "militarisation" of American political discourse, see Michael Sherry, *In the Shadow of War: The United States since the 1930s* (London, 1995) esp. 15, 17.
[32] For a detailed history of the United States military as religious institution, see Michael Snape, *God and Uncle Sam: Religion and America's Armed Forces in World War II* (Woodbridge, 2015).
[33] G.K. Chesterton, *What I Saw in America* (London, 1922).

every conceivable Judeo-Christian denomination). The second concerned how religiously inclined Americans understood their political culture. As Robert Bellah described in an influential 1967 essay, the United States in fact possessed a highly-developed "civil religion" complete with sacred texts (the Constitution), Saints and Martyrs (Washington and Lincoln), rituals (Presidential inaugurations), and even feasts (Thanksgiving, supported and popularised in the modern age by none other than FDR).[34] As a federal institution, therefore, the US military was in certain respects a "church" for just this civil religion. But, as an organisation equally keen to maintain "morals" in the interests of morale, it also devoted significant resources during the Second World War intended to ensure its soldiers had the succour for the soul which would enable them both to resist temptation *and* also steel them with the courage to sally forth and vanquish evil. Thus, American soldiers went into battle with the full support of an extensive and well-developed Chaplaincy service providing everything from sermons, to counselling, to death rites. For the Commander-in-Chief – FDR – this was no doubt right and proper. After all, this was a man of "profound personal faith" who one contemporary even called a "frustrated clergyman at heart".[35] All this meant that when, in December 1943, FDR ordered (now) General Eisenhower to assume command of the forces being readied in Britain for a cross-channel attack, his past military experience, religious upbringing, sense of history, and familiarity with the Rooseveltian rhetoric of righteousness ensured that he was already susceptible to seeing the planned endeavour – a massive amphibious assault – in a certain light, and similarly susceptible to narrating the occasion in a particular way.

Hence the message Ike ordered be despatched to all those Allied troops bobbing up and down in landing craft in the Solent, or otherwise readying themselves on airfields across the east and midlands of England; his aim was to prepare them for the battle – and the sacrifices – that would surely follow. Parts of the text are now well-known (and already quoted at the start of this article), but it nonetheless deserves quoting at length here. Speaking to the "Soldiers, Sailors and Airmen of the Allied Expeditionary Force", Eisenhower explained that:

> You are about to embark upon the Great Crusade, toward which we have striven these many months. The eyes of the world are upon you. The hope and prayers of liberty-loving people everywhere march with you. In company with our brave Allies and brothers-in-arms on other Fronts, you will bring about the destruction of the German war machine, the elimination of Nazi tyranny over the oppressed peoples of Europe, and security for

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[34] Robert Bellah, "Civil Religion in America", *Dædalus, Journal of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences* 96 (1) (1967): 1-21.
[35] Quoted in Snape, *God and Uncle Sam*, 19.

ourselves in a free world. […] Good luck! And let us beseech the blessing of Almighty God upon this great and noble undertaking.[36]

Whether the young conscripts ordered into battle found such lofty language helpful might certainly be questioned. But if Eisenhower's message to the troops tells us relatively little about exactly what motivated the Allied army as it went into battle, it nonetheless exposes how those in charge attempted to shape the meaning of the ordeal their subordinates would encounter on the beaches. In doing, the message also helps us to identify an important point of origin for one of the key means through which the Normandy invasion has been narrated and commemorated over the last seventy-five years.

The Great Crusade in Culture and Commemoration, c. 1945-2001

As Supreme Commander, Eisenhower's message to the troops had a unique visibility which gave it broader cultural traction, duly ensuring that the themes he invoked – especially of a righteous undertaking to defeat evil and so free the world from tyranny – were available to others seeking to shape the meaning of D-Day. At the same time, Eisenhower's message also had currency because – as noted above – he was articulating an idea already present in both contemporary political discourse and popular propaganda. In short, the power and prestige of the author together with the sheer *familiarity* of the underlying message made for a potent cocktail. In quick order Eisenhower's words "received widespread distribution", soon emerging as the key "paradigm" through which D-Day would be "characterized" in the United States.[37] In Central Park, New York, his message to the troops was even read to a crowd 50,000 strong, gathered in prayer for those just embarked upon the "crusade".[38] Other, equally influential figures similarly affirmed the sense that a Holy mission was underway. In Washington, President Roosevelt also prayed that evening, beseeching the Almighty (via radio) to watch over:

> Our sons, pride of our Nation, this day have set upon a mighty endeavor, a struggle to preserve our Republic, our religion, and our civilization, and to set free a suffering humanity.
>
> Lead them straight and true; give strength to their arms, stoutness to their hearts, steadfastness in their faith.

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[36] Dwight D. Eisenhower, Message to the Soldiers, Sailors and Airmen of the Allied Expeditionary Force, 6 June 1944: https://www.archives.gov/historical-docs/todays-doc/?dod-date=606 (accessed: 2/2/20).
[37] Dolski, *D-Day Remembered,* 30.
[38] Ibid.

They will need Thy blessings. Their road will be long and hard. For the enemy is strong. He may hurl back our forces. Success may not come with rushing speed, but we shall return again and again; and we know that by Thy grace, and by the righteousness of our cause, our sons will triumph […][39]

For Prime Minister Winston Churchill – whose words were widely disseminated in wartime America and whose ideas and speeches continued to have currency long into the postwar period – D-Day was likewise to be the great moment of vindication in which the forces of good would commence the final battle with the very army of darkness against which Churchill had been railing since the 1930s.[40] This was an idea and a way of thinking he had been developing for some time. In May 1940, for instance, Churchill had called on the British people "to wage war, by sea, land and air, with all our might and with all the strength that God can give us; to wage war against a monstrous tyranny, never surpassed in the dark, lamentable catalogue of human crime".[41] Days later he revisited the idea (and language) in another speech, this time broadcast on radio. Reassuring his audience that "the British and French peoples have advanced to rescue not only Europe but mankind from the foulest and most soul-destroying tyranny which has ever darkened and stained the pages of history", he concluded by invoking the crusaders of old:

> Centuries ago, words were written to be a call and a spur to the faithful servants of truth and justice, "Arm yourselves, and be ye men of valour, and be in readiness for the conflict; for it is better for us to perish in battle than to look upon the outrage of our nation and our altar. As the Will of God is in Heaven, even so let it be".[42]

By June 1940, with France fallen and with the Battle of Britain about to commence, Churchill again rallied the faithful, declaring that "if we fail, then the whole world, including the United States, including all that we have known and cared for, will sink into the abyss of a new Dark Age made more sinister, and perhaps more protracted, by the lights of perverted science."[43] This sense of historical significance, developed, explored and articulated since at least 1940, ensured that when the D-Day operation was at last underway, Churchill was able to deploy all his rhetorical gifts to lend the occasion the sense of "greatness" he felt it demanded. Speaking in Parliament on 6th June, he told the House that:

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[39] President Franklin D. Roosevelt, D-Day Prayer, 6 June 1944: https://www.fdrlibrary.org/d-day (accessed: 2/2/20).

[40] For Churchill's tendency to celebrate "chosen people", see Jonathan Rose, *The Literary Churchill: Author, Reader, Actor* (London, 2015), 178.

[41] Full transcripts of all Churchill's speeches can be found here: https://www.nationalchurchillmuseum.org/winston-churchills-speeches.html (accessed: 20/2/20)

[42] Ibid.

[43] Ibid.

during the night and the early hours of this morning the first of the series of landings in force upon the European Continent has taken place. In this case the liberating assault fell upon the coast of France. An immense armada of upwards of 4,000 ships, together with several thousand smaller craft, crossed the Channel. Massed airborne landings have been successfully effected behind the enemy lines, and landings on the beaches are proceeding at various points at the present time […] So far the Commanders who are engaged report that everything is proceeding according to plan. And what a plan![44]

Later that day, Churchill followed up with some additional details, closing this latter statement with a declaration of hope and faith: "Thank God, we enter upon it [D-Day] with our great Allies all in good heart and all in good friendship".[45] Thus, before the sun had set on 6th June 1944, the military purpose and, equally important, *cultural meaning* of D-Day had already been carefully established by Ike and FDR in particular it was a "Great Crusade" undertaken by an "immense armada" in order to "set free a suffering humanity". For Churchill, meanwhile, who shied away from a *specific* call to crusade, the Allied invasion was nonetheless a religiously inspired "liberating assault" which, like the crusades of old, was destined to free Europe from the infidels of a new "Dark Age".

In the years afterwards some of those who had landed with the troops in this "great liberating assault" further developed the idea of a heroic battle to redeem a fallen continent. Chester Wilmot, for example, an Australian war correspondent who landed in Normandy with the British 6th Airborne, was amongst the first to write the history of D-Day and of the subsequent liberation of Europe. Clearly taking his cue from Eisenhower, Wilmot framed the war as a heroic and righteous "struggle" for the very soul of the European continent. Note, for instance, how he opens the story:

> In the summer of 1942 four million people in Europe lay under the yoke of German rule. The empire of Adolf Hitler, then at its greatest extent, stretched from the Mediterranean to the Arctic, from the English Channel to the Black Sea and almost to the Caspian…In the ancient capitals of Europe – in Athens, Rome and Vienna, in Paris and Prague, Oslo and Warsaw – all other voices were drowned by the voice of Nazi Germany.[46]

What follows is a story of heroism, fortitude, valour and victory almost Biblical in scope (Chapter II is in fact titled "David and Goliath"), a narrative appropriately prefaced by lines from Samson Agonistes:

Oh, how comely it is and how reviving,

[44] Winston Churchill, Message to Parliament, 6 June 1944: https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/commons/1944/jun/06/liberation-of-rome-landings-in-france#S5CV0400P0_19440606_HOC_230 (accessed: 2/2/20).
[45] Ibid.
[46] Chester Wilmot, *The Struggle for Europe* (London, 1952), 17.

> To the Spirits of just me long opprest,
> When God into the hands of their deliverer
> Puts invincible might.[47]

Other historians of D-Day – most either British or American – followed suit. In *Invasion 44* (1959), John Frayn tells a powerful story of the "greatest invasion the world has known", a story of ordinary heroes in the midst of epic events, of hells overcome and of biblical storms endured.[48] In *Dawn of D-Day* (1959), meanwhile, David Howarth, skilfully invokes the awed anticipation that preceded the landings, feelings which then gave way to trepidation, faith and hope. Thus, describing the eve of D-Day, as Allied planes mass in the skies of the south of England, Howarth has one local turn to his wife and remark – not unlike FDR in Washington – that "A lot of men are going to die tonight. We should pray for them".[49]

It was Eisenhower himself though who reasserted the connection between D-Day and crusading with the most force. His history of the conflict even deploys the very same terminology as was present in his pre-D-Day message to the troops; it is memorably titled *Crusade in Europe* (1948), and, like Wilmot before him (though in rather less energetic prose) Eisenhower tells the story of liberation – and of redemption – which he had envisaged back in June 1944:

> All of Europe west of the Rhine had, with minor exceptions, lived for more than four years under the domination of an occupying army. Free institutions and free speech had disappeared. Economic were broken and industry prostrated.[50]

But, due to massive American mobilisation and the support of "staunch allies", Good (and God) won through and secured the ultimate victory.[51] Of course, for Eisenhower, ever the diplomat, this was indeed a victory secured by a 'crusading' army of friends and partners:

> The true history of the war, and more especially the history of the operations TORCH and OVERLORD […] is the story of unity produced on the basis of […] voluntary co-operation. Differences there were, differences among strong men representing strong and proud peoples, but these paled into insignificance alongside the miracle of achievement represented in the shoulder-to-shoulder march of the Allies to complete victory in the West.[52]

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[47] Ibid, v.
[48] John Frayn Turner, *Invasion 44* (London, 1959), esp. 5, 191-214, 237-243.
[49] David Howarth, *Dawn of D-Day,* (London, 1959), 38.
[50] Dwight Eisenhower, *Crusade in Europe* (London: William Heinemann, 1948), 3.
[51] Ibid, 6.
[52] Ibid.

Like the narrative offered by Wilmot, the rest of the book delivers a story of trials, tribulations, valour and ultimate victory. The darkness which had engulfed Europe is swept away and the light of liberty returns, a "religious allusion [which has] stuck to the battle during the war and ever since".[53] Indeed, Eisenhower's was such a powerful and – for many Cold War contemporaries – reassuring narrative, that it was subsequently turned into a twenty-six episode television series in the US, which aired in 1949.[54]

In later years, with the "free world" engaged in a new global ideological confrontation with what many in the United States understood to be an "ungodly" and "un-American" enemy (Soviet Communism), commemorations of the landings further developed the implication of Eisenhower's rhetorical framing by now asserting the sanctity of the landscapes through which the crusaders had fought. In June 1951, for example, a small group of US veterans visited Bloody Omaha and there, in homage to the heroism of those who fell, bowed their "heads in silent prayer" (Ike himself also returned to Normandy that same year and was heard to declare that the "integrity of the whole of western Europe must be defended against tyranny"[55]).[56] In 1954, the tenth anniversary was marked with solemn ceremonies of remembrance amidst the memorials now popping up along the beaches and among the bocage, whilst in Arromanches (in the British invasion sector) a new museum – filled with relics drawn from the sacred ground itself – was unveiled.[57] Similar scenes followed again in 1959.[58] Meanwhile, although the postwar commemorative endeavours of both the British and American governments largely eschewed the medievalism popular after 1918, in Normandy a few monuments nonetheless did find inspiration in this distant past. On the outskirts of Bayeux, for example, the Imperial War Graves Commission established their largest cemetery in the region (interring the remains of 4,144 British and Commonwealth service-personnel) with commemorative architecture celebrating the Anglo-French bonds of the medieval past. Thus the cemetery's monument – completed in 1952 – carries the inscription 'We who were conquered by William have liberated the fatherland of the Conqueror' whilst elsewhere, and in line with a decision originally made after 1918, the cemetery also includes a Cross of Sacrifice into which is laid a bronze Crusader

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[53] Dolski, *D-Day Remembered*, 44.
[54] Eisenhower, *Crusade in Europe* (1949).
[55] *The Times*, 7 June 1951.
[56] *The Bridgehead Sentinel* (June 1951), 32.
[57] For details, see FO 371/112815, FO 371/112818 and FO 371/112819, Celebration of Tenth Anniversary of D-Day Landings in Normandy and CAB 21/3250, French Establishment of a Museum to Commemorate D-Day Landings, The National Archives (TNA).
[58] See, for instance, *The Times*, 7 June 1954; *Ouest France*, 7 June 1954 and 7 June 1959.

sword.[59] The medieval past – and the very idea of D-Day as Holy War – was similarly implied in the 1968 decision of Lord Dulverton of Batsford to memorialise the Allied invasion by commissioning the creation of a D-Day tapestry (in homage of course to the Bayeux Tapestry, which commemorated the Norman invasion of England in 1066, an act which itself had been seen – by William at least – as a Holy War). The Tapestry was completed in 1973 and since 1984 has been on display at Britain's national D-Day museum in Portsmouth.[60]

Commemorations of chivalric sacrifice – long central to western war memory – together with the associated idea that the blood of fallen warriors had in some way *sanctified* the sand and soil of Normandy featured in various other memorial projects.[61] Between 1945 and 1947, for example, several communities in Normandy marked out the route taken by the crusaders. Called the *Voie de la Liberté* (the Road of Liberty) the very idea was inspired by what in France was a well-known commemorative response to the Great War – the *Voie Sacrée* (the Road of Sacrifice), a post-1918 memorial project which recorded the path taken by those Allied soldiers who had spilt their blood for French freedom. When complete, the *Voie de la Liberté* marked the progress of the liberating Allied army through Normandy (and beyond) with commemorative "borne" (kilometre markers) emblazoned with the torch of liberty. Here was Ike's 'Great Crusade' and Willmot's heroic 'struggle' recorded for prosperity and marked on the very landscape.[62]

The idea of soldierly sacrifice for a noble cause – liberty – was further explored in various other postwar memorials. In Ste. Mère Église, for example, one of the first community's liberated on the morning of June 6th (and a town later central to realising the *Voie de la Liberté*), a new stained-glass window was dedicated in 1969. It depicts the descent from the heavens of an army of American paratroopers, liberators of the town on 6th June 1944. The window also features a striking image of the patron saint of paratroopers, St. Michael, complete with sword and shield.[63] Indeed, in Ste. Mère Église the image of Angelic warriors falling from

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[59] The use of such forms and iconography – which represented a repetition of post-1918 practices – had already been decided whilst the war still raged. See Minutes of the IWGC, Meeting 234, 10 April 1940, 6.

[60] For details, see Stephen Brooks and Eve Eckstein, *Operation Overlord: The History of D-Day and the Overlord Embroidery* (Southampton, 1989).

[61] For a discussion of the role played by "sacrifice" in the language of remembrance, see Bob Bushaway, "Name Upon Name: The Great War and Remembrance" in *Myths of the English* ed. Roy Porter (Cambridge, 1992), 136-167.

[62] See various correspondence in 1004 W 'Voie de la Liberté, 1947-1957' and 1004 W 917 (I12), Érection de Monuments (divers), 1947-1957. Archives Départemantals de la Manche (ADM). See also: Sam Edwards, *Allies in Memory: World War II and the Politics of Transatlantic Commemoration, c.1941-2001* (Cambridge, 2015), 106-110.

[63] For some details of the various memorials established in the late sixties, see 1004 W 919 (I12), Érection de Monuments (divers), 1968-1972, ADM.

the sky in a holy mission to restore freedom had peculiar purchase due to two important facts. First was the symbolism found in a particular episode in the town's liberation, centred around one American soldier – John Steele. Steele had famously (and unfortunately) landed on the Church steeple, where his parachute got snagged, forcing him to watch from on high the bloody sacrifices made by his comrades below (Steele survived and was later rescued). His Christ-like ordeal was subsequently commemorated in the town by the placing of a manikin – in full combat kit – atop the church, where it can still be seen today. But the incident secured still further fame in 1962 when Steele's heavenly vantage on the valour of his comrades was again commemorated – this time on celluloid – in the film *The Longest Day,* produced by Daryl Zanuck.

Zanuck's film was not the first to examine D-Day – that honour belonged to the documentary *True Glory* (1945), whilst the invasion had also featured in *Breakthrough* (1951) and *D-Day: Sixth of June* (1956). But *The Longest Day* (1962) – based upon the best-selling history of the invasion (of the same name), published by Cornelius Ryan in 1959 – was the first film to explore the full dramatic potential of what remains the largest amphibious assault in military history.[64] In a sweeping narrative which, like Chester Wilmot, is almost biblical in scope (and delivered over three hours), Zanuck tells a story of an army of heroes battling to reclaim a fallen land and an oppressed people. With scenes at Ste. Mère Église of dead GIs hanging from telegraph poles (like the crucified at Golgotha), warrior Chaplains doing 'God's work', and pleas to the Almighty for His favour and support, the film draws out the religiosity of the Allied mission implied by Ike's original framing. Indeed, towards the end the film frequently returns to the (ultimately successful) attempts to break the Jericho-like fortifications of Hitler's Atlantic Wall. Here, the Allies at last batter through the German defences, and the film duly concludes with the victorious army advancing up the cliffs. A few years later, no doubt buoyed by the film's success, the small village of Vierville-sur-mer (where this breech in Hitler's defences actually occurred) happily supported the commemorative endeavours of their liberators, and the resulting memorial, dedicated to the National Guard units who landed at Omaha Beach, even drew explicit connections between the valiant heroes of D-Day and that of their fathers – that is, Pershing's Crusaders – who had likewise "shed their blood in Europe in the cause of freedom".[65]

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[64] Cornelius Ryan, *The Longest Day: June 6, 1944* (New York, 1959).
[65] See "File: The National Guard Monument at Vierville-sur-Mer in Normandy", National Guard Library, Washington, D.C.

Crucially, though, whilst Zanuck's plot and cinematography certainly depicted D-Day as an event of biblical scale and significance he nonetheless eschewed what might have been the obvious decision regarding title. For this film might, surely, have been called "The Great Crusade", especially given the on-going events of the Cold War (which pitted the Christian West against 'Godless' Communism), the clear and present subtext throughout. But by the 1960s there were two problems to such explicit coding. The first concerned the distance travelled since the war and the fact that the German enemy of 1944 had, by 1962, become a firm NATO ally. Keying D-Day explicitly as crusade was thus perhaps a generalisation too far, one which risked homogenising the wartime enemy as irredeemable infidel, as opposed to post-war American policy which was of course to "denazify" and then rehabilitate West Germany as crucial ally. The second issue concerned contemporary shifts in the language and rhetoric of US foreign policy. To be sure, this was still an era of idealism – see, for instance, the still developing events in South East Asia, events for which the "Court" of President John F. Kennedy's Camelot bore not a little responsibility. But, after the frustrations and confusions of the Korean War a decade earlier, this was nonetheless not an era as given as predecessors to the sort of moralising vision with which Woodrow Wilson, forty years previous, had been so comfortable.

It was not until later in the twentieth century, as Cold War tensions again ramped up, and with yet another World War II veteran in the Oval Office, that the D-Day symbolism and connections first advanced by Eisenhower back in 1944 found renewed prominence. This was the era in which the war became firmly established in American culture as the "Good War". As John Bodnar has shown, the origins of this discursive formulation went back to the war itself.[66] But it was in the 1980s and 1990s that it secured new visibility as well as high-profile political investment. During the fortieth anniversary of D-Day in 1984, for example, President Ronald Reagan, speaking from the clifftops at Pointe du Hoc, Normandy, turned public attention back to the now aging soldiers who had given their all for European liberty in 1944. As Reagan explained it:

> For 4 long years, much of Europe had been under a terrible shadow. Free nations had fallen, Jews cried out in the camps, millions cried out for liberation. Europe was enslaved, and the world prayed for its rescue. Here in Normandy the rescue began. Here the Allies stood and fought against tyranny in a giant undertaking unparalleled in human history […] The men of Normandy had faith that what they were doing was right, faith that they fought for all humanity, faith that a just God would grant them mercy on this beachhead or on the next. It was the deep knowledge -- and pray God we have not lost it -- that there is a profound, moral difference between the use of force for liberation and the use of

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[66] Bodnar, *The "Good War"*.

force for conquest […] Something else helped the men of D-day: their rock-hard belief that Providence would have a great hand in the events that would unfold here; that God was an ally in this great cause […] These are the things that impelled them; these are the things that shaped the unity of the Allies.[67]

Rescue. Faith. Providence. A battle between light and dark. This was Eisenhower's Great Crusade and Roosevelt's D-Day prayer merged and then updated for a new, Cold War, moment.

Reagan was not alone in expressing such sentiment. In *Time Magazine*, for example, one commentator – Lance Murrow, son of legendary war correspondent Ed – offered a remarkably similar take on the significance of D-Day. As Murrow explained:

> If there has been a messianic note to American foreign policy in postwar years, it derives in part from the Normandy configuration. America gave its begotten sons for the redemption of a fallen Europe, a Europe in the grip of a real Satan with a small mustache.[68]

Indeed, the idea that D-Day bequeathed to American political culture a "messianic note" was noted by many contemporaries. As another commentator, this time in the *Washington Post*, explained: there was a reassuring "black-and-white simplicity about D-Day absent from today's more complicated world".[69] Elsewhere, Studs Terkel invoked (but also critiqued) the very same idea in his landmark oral history, actually titled *The Good War* (1984),[70] whilst in 1998, after a spate of fiftieth anniversary commemorations, influential American journalist Tom Brokhaw developed the theme still further, bestowing on the warriors of yore a new honour, that of the "Greatest Generation". As Brokhaw explains in his rather celebratory history of this generation:

> Faith in God was not a casual part of the lives of the World War II generation […] The very nature of war prompted many who participated in it to think more deeply about God and their relationship to a higher being once they returned home.[71]

Meanwhile, perhaps the key figure responsible in the 1990s for elevating the soldiers of 1944 to a still higher pedestal was the historian (and biographer of Eisenhower) Stephen Ambrose. Ambrose's many bestselling histories of World War II – including one simply titled *D-Day*

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[67] President Ronald Reagan, Pointe du Hoc, 6 June 1984: https://www.reaganlibrary.gov/research/speeches/60684b (accessed: 2/2/20). For a detailed discussion of this speech and its reception, see Jonathan Bullinger, *Reagan's "Boys" and the Children of the Greatest Generation: US World War II Memory, 1984 and Beyond* (Abingdon, 2019).
[68] Lance Murrow, *Time Magazine,* June 1984.
[69] *The Washington Post*, 3 June 1984.
[70] Studs Terkel, *The "Good War": An Oral History of World War II* (London, 1984).
[71] Tom Brokhaw, *The Greatest Generation* (New York, 1998).

(1994), which cited Ike's 1944 message as epigraph – celebrated the "men of D-Day" as the "soldiers of democracy", and in doing so he provided an account of the European campaign from the perspective of the sainted as they battled through the bocage.[72]

Hardly surprising that when, towards the end of the 1990s, Hollywood director Steven Spielberg turned his attention to D-Day he skilfully deployed all the narrative possibilities afforded by the cultural and commemorative activities of the previous decades (significantly, Ambrose was the historical consultant). The film – *Saving Private Ryan* (1998) – opens with scenes shot at almost the exact same location as *The Longest Day* ends – the cliff-tops overlooking Omaha Beach. But the war is now a distant memory, and we see an old man walking, family in tow, through a carefully cultivated landscape. The camera then pans out to reveal that he is a Normandy veteran wandering through a place – a cemetery – made sacred by the warrior dead, each of whom is interred beneath a white Latin Cross or Star of David. Purposefully he seeks out a grave and then, on finding it, drops to his knees in grief and supplication. Later the camera closes in on his eyes, and through this conceit Spielberg takes us back to the violence and heroics of 6th June 1944, to the very moment when landing craft power across the waters of the English Channel, delivering their frightened human cargo into the bullets, bombs and shrapnel that constitute a veritable storm of steel. What follows is a story of sacrifice and salvation, whilst at the film's end Spielberg returns us to the 1990s present where we finally learn that the grave before which that aging veteran had kneeled belongs to the man who saved his life in the dark days of 1944. As such, whilst there are no scenes in *Saving Private Ryan* of Ike and company rallying the troops for the Great Crusade, Spielberg's framing of the invasion nonetheless still affirms its essential status as a righteous and redemptive undertaking. Indeed, the essential nobility of the operation is carefully asserted via long and lingering shots of the soil made sacred by the blood of the fallen: the American Military Cemetery in Normandy. It is a landscape well-suited to such framing, for it is indeed replete with art and architecture designed to extoll the valour of those who waded ashore that grey June morning. Overlooking the graves of 10,000 American soldiers is a bronze statue titled the Spirit of American Youth: it depicts a muscular youth rising from the waves after having made the supreme sacrifice. Nearby is the following inscription, carved in the early 1950s, (and which again hints at the influence exerted by Eisenhower's 1944 message):

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[72] Stephen Ambrose, *D-Day* (London, 2002), 26. First published in 1994. The 1990s and early 2000s saw the publication of various other D-Day histories. See: Robert Kershaw, *D-Day: Piercing the Atlantic Wall* (Annapolis, MD, 1994); Alex Kershaw, *The Bedford Boys: One American Town's Ultimate D-Day Sacrifice* (Cambridge, MA, 2003); Adrian Lewis, *Omaha Beach: A Flawed Victory* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2001).

This embattled shore, portal of liberation, is forever hallowed by the ideals, the valor, and the sacrifice of our fellow countrymen.

By using *this* landscape for the opening and closing scenes of *Saving Private Ryan* Spielberg offered his own powerful take on the righteousness of D-Day. At the same time, and via poignant shots of an aging veteran returning to the past, Spielberg also further developed the story originally authored by Ike back in 1944; indeed, he develops this story to its logical conclusion. For in Spielberg's hands the knights of the past were now the *pilgrims* of the present. The message and meaning was clear: the "crusade" was long since complete, but the warriors of yesterday still had a sacred journey to undertake, a journey understood by many contemporary commentators as nothing less than a *pilgrimage*. This was an old idea, previously applied to the solemn journeys made by Civil War veterans to Gettysburg as well as to those Doughboy Crusaders who travelled back to France in the 1920s.[73] Perfectly understandable that by the 1950s the very same language emerged in media coverage of Allied veterans returning to Normandy. In 1959, for example, the regional press in Normandy drew attention to the "emotional pilgrimages" which had recently accompanied the fifteenth anniversary of D-Day, and similar language later recurred in a plea for American support made by the mayor of a small Norman town located near one of the invasion beaches (he wanted help with a memorial project, and to do so he drew attention to the recent "impressive pilgrimages" connected to the annual commemorations).[74] When, in 1964, Ike himself made a return to Normandy – during the twentieth anniversary – his trip (undertaken with a CBS film crew) was likewise reported as an emotional pilgrimage,[75] and the same phrasing was used to describe the return of large numbers of Allied veterans to the region in 1984. By 1994, the fiftieth anniversary of D-Day, the language was entirely familiar. Reflecting on the forthcoming anniversary, *Le Figaro* anticipated scenes of Allied veterans wandering the landscapes of their youth, lost in the solemn contemplation that comes with such "emotional pilgrimages".[76]

By the end of the 1990s, therefore, and after over fifty years of rhetorical investment and commemorative endeavour, D-Day was firmly established in American culture as an expression of all that was right and redemptive, moral and just. Of course, the *specific* language

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[73] For "battlefield pilgrimage" see Tony Walter, "War Grave Pilgrimage" in *Pilgrimage in Popular Culture* eds. Ian Reader and Tony Walter (London, 1993), 63-91. See also Jim Weeks, *Gettysburg: Memory, Market and American Shrine* (Princeton, 2003).
[74] See *Ouest France*, 7 June 1959; M.M. de Vallavieille to General North (ABMC), 14 July 1962, National Archives and Records Administration II, RG 117, entry 45, box 7, file: Privately sponsored, Foreign and Other Governmental Mons and Mems 1964 Facilities Maintenance (FAM) 5-7.
[75] See *D-Day: Eisenhower's Return to Normandy* (CBS, 1964).
[76] *Le Figaro*, 16-17 April 1994.

of "crusading" was now largely absent. But the ideas, assumptions and meanings of the invasion's original coding nonetheless lingered, emerging most clearly when reporters wrote moving stories about veterans' "pilgrimages", when presidents extolled their heroic sacrifices, when Hollywood directors told stories of their faith and fidelity, and when the old soldiers themselves were placed on a pedestal and made into the "Greatest Generation". These were the clear and audible echoes of that first exercise in the construction of meaning begun by Eisenhower in June 1944, an exercise which had seen the Progressive zeal of Wilsonian moralism militarised, and the enemy of American crusaders shift from domestic ills to an ideology identified as uniquely "evil": Nazism.

Little wonder then that when, a few years later, President George W. Bush called on Americans to brace themselves for a "war on terror", he turned to such long established ideas whilst also purposefully invoking the very word which, for so long, had been implied but rarely articulated. Thus, as he rallied Americans following the attack on the World Trade Center Bush declared that the up-going battle was nothing more nor less than a "crusade".[77] It was a passing and spontaneous comment and was quickly criticised as such (much like Bush's counterpart in these post 9/11 military missions – Prime Minister Tony Blair – was similarly criticised for what some commentators felt was a foreign policy rather too consumed by a "crusading" neo-liberal zeal). But whilst Bush's choice of descriptive phrasing was clearly impromptu, 'offhand',[78] and not directly traceable to the decades long investment in D-Day as a "Great Crusade", nor was such investment without significance or consequence. For Bush's comment was a powerful expression of an idea with a much deeper history (in the rhetoric of US political culture), and it was inextricably connected to an event which, by the end of the twentieth-century, occupied a similarly powerful position in American cultural memory, thereby ensuring that it shaped thought and action in ways not always readily or instantly identifiable. Indeed, as Mariana Torgovnick has argued, in the aftermath of 9/11 "the Bush Administration sanctioned and enacted in photo ops comparisons to World War II".[79] With this in mind, it is surely significant that just three months *before* 9/11, at the small Virginian town of Bedford, Bush had dedicated a new National D-Day Memorial. His speech, given before a crowd of veterans, dignitaries and diplomats closed with the following lines:

> Fifty-seven years ago today, America and the nations of Europe formed a bond that has never been broken. And all of us incurred a debt that can never be repaid. Today, as

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[77] For a contemporary response to Bush's use of "crusade" see *The Nation*, 2 September 2004: https://www.thenation.com/article/archive/bush-crusade/ (accessed: 2/2/20).
[78] Ibid.
[79] Torgovnick, *War Complex*, 36.

America dedicates our D-Day Memorial, we pray that our country will always be worthy of the courage that delivered us from evil, and saved the free world.[80]

It is not too fanciful to suggest that as the very same president searched – a mere three months later – for a phrase with which to make sense of the moment, it was Ike's "Great Crusade", carved into stone, written into history, and eulogised by Reagan, Ambrose and Spielberg that came to mind.

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[80] President G.W. Bush, speech at the dedication of the National D-Day Memorial, Bedford, Virginia, 6 June 2001: https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2001/06/20010606-2.html (accessed: 2/2/20).

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