



We compare Vietnam with World War II, and we call the latter a "righteous cause" because the enemy was clearly diabolical. Vietnam didn't work as a war as well because the cause was not righteous so clearly nor the enemy so obviously diabolical....

But Vietnam is also about some other things:

It's about adventures that didn't materialize....  
 about pilgrimages that didn't live up to expectations....  
 about journeys into the unknown ~~that~~ for which there seemed to be no terminus or resolution....

The religious literature is full of examples of pilgrims who go off in search of enlightenment and wisdom.....  
 who, after finding it -- or pieces of it -- return home to share it with those who will listen....

Joseph Campbell describes it as the process of initiation, departure and return....

which we might paraphrase as induction, departure....  
 and homecoming....

But in the Vietnam instance....there was no return....  
 there was no homecoming....or if there was, it has been delayed....

John Wheeler writes in TOUCHED WITH FIRE:

"This is what happened. We kept our promise, as we had made it. The orders said Vietnam. We were trained. We went. No fighting force ever sent to war was better equipped or trained. But America makes a promise too. She promises to keep us in her heart, whether we live or die. She reneged on that promise. We woldiers were prepared for the war zone. We were not prepared for our return to America. We were locked out of her heart. It was a tragic abandonment... Whether we came back alive or dead, there was a grave waiting for our heartfelt inner self, in the attitudes of Americans we grew up with...."

Wheeler goes on to describe the returning Vietnam Veteran as an "immigrant from the combat zone."

Analysts of situations like this know what to write when the circle has been completed.....  
 that is, when the pilgrimage reaches its destination....  
 when the search for enlightenment ~~xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx~~  
 culminates in wisdom....

In fact, we have elaborate theories about how the actions of a society are motivated by that society's ideals...

We call these functional theories

They describe how things work....or, indeed, work together....

But it is more difficult to come up with compelling theories to explain why things do not work....

or why pilgrimages are disappointing....

or why journeys into enlightenment end in confusion...

or exhaustion....or cynicism or despair....

This is why there has been so much talk in this class about "the dark night of the soul...."

by which we refer to the absence of a presumed meaning....

to spiritual journeys that seem only to have discovered desert places....

wastelands....

regions from which God is absent....

spaces within the soul that are

populated by real and false accusers

Bill Mahedy said it well. Jesus' word from the Cross, "MY God, My God, why hast thou forsaken me....?"

is a cry that has been uttered by thousands of those who experienced the horror of Vietnam firsthand...

This is what Vietnam is about....

And it separated those who knew the experience firsthand from those who didn't.....

Even those who had objected to the war could not have known the depth of agony of the dark night of the soul....

The separation, <sup>d those</sup> who knew this experience from those who didn't lasted all the way through the dedication of the Memorial in Washington in November of 1982....

Jack Wheeler calls it "a horrible divorce" in which "America separated herself from us... America broke its emotional commitment to us." But Wheeler adds that that long prolonged period of isolation brought the veterans together....giving them a strong sense of unity...

The symbolism of the Memorial:

So we employ dysfunctional rather than functional theories...

We talk about the absence rather than the presence  
of meaning...

We refer to shattered ideals....  
to a broken myth....

We talk about contrariness...dissonance...inversions...  
correlations that don't correlate.....  
meanings that don't mean...

As Bill Mahedy said, "it don't mean nothin..."  
That's what it means!

ONE OF THE GREAT PROBLEMS IS THAT THIS NATION HAS ALWAYS  
RELIED UPON MILITARY LITURGIES FOR ITS COLLECTIVE  
CELEBRATIONS.....

Parades....banners.....flags....weapons....fighter planes....  
flying in formation....  
signs of strength as in bombers...missiles....  
uniforms.....  
flag waving.....

And yet, because this is what has gone awry, it is difficult  
to employ the same liturgies after Vietnam.....

After Vietnam, the flag didn't mean what it meant before....

After Vietnam, ~~xxxxxxx~~  
and in a world facing the possibility of nuclear  
catastrophe....  
military symbols are always going to be suspect...  
tarnished....  
not trusted....

SO THE PRIMARY SYMBOL BECOMES AN INVERTED SYMBOL, IN A WAY.....

It is a scar on the earth.....  
2,200 foot-long walls of polished black granite....  
not above ground...  
but below the ground.....  
containing the names of the war dead,

The names of the war dead are arranged chronologically  
in the order in which the servicemen fell.....  
the only dates etched in the granite are  
1959 and 1975, when the first serviceman fell...  
and when the last one died....

It was designed by Maya Lin, who was 13 years of age in  
1973, when the cease-fire took place....  
Born in Ohio, a senior at Yale, majoring in architecture...  
first try at the design got her a B in an architecture  
course.

Maya Lin had never taken a course on the Vietnam war....

Though of Chinese ancestry, she was born in Oberlin, Ohio...

And yet her design carries a strong Oriental influence....

Maya Lin described her design as a circle....

pointing out that in Oriental philosophy life and death are described as being part of a continuous circle....

A part of the circle are the two wings or arms of the wall...

the inverted V for Vietnam...

perhaps for Victory....

The final segment of the circle is the living person who visits, and through his or her presence fills in the part of the circle that has been omitted....

She also wanted the names to be listed in chronological (rather than alphabetical) order....

The chronological order would allow the wall to be read like a story....

she said, like an epic Greek poem....

Vets would come there, find their story told; and their friends remembered.....

And the only inscription on the wall is this simple one:

IN HONOR of the men and women of the Armed Forces of the United States who served in the Vietnam War. The names of those who gave their lives and of those who remain missing are inscribed here in the order that they were taken from us.

Then there is the Epilogue:

Our nation remembers the courage, sacrifice and devotion to duty of its Vietnam veterans. This memorial was built through private donations of the American people..."

And the designers made certain that none of these words would be larger or more noticeable than the names on the wall.....

It was a controversial undertaking... and there was much discouragement....

One night, I am told, Jan Scruggs, deeply discouraged about the controversy and political infighting over the design of the Memorial....

went by himself quietly to the Lincoln Memorial....

And he stood there in the presence of that great figure....

And he thought that this memorial was the symbol of America's greatest violence....

But nothing in the memorial favored either the North or the South...

And nothing said that slavery was morally wrong... or that the Civil War was right...

But people standing there could read the words  
of Lincoln's GETtysburg Address...or the  
words of his second Inaugural Address  
Then they would think about the words, stand  
quietly and let their feelings flow....  
And they would come away different than when  
they arrived...

Scruggs pledged that the same would be true of  
the Vietnam Memorial.....  
and the only words would be the names  
of those who had given their lives for  
the nation.....

I am told that Maya Lin visits the memorial frequently...  
And she has said, "The finished memorial is so  
close to what I had envisioned that it's scary...  
Now that it is completed, it's got a life of  
its own... I feel like just another visitor....

*mother*  
But I'd like to talk about something that is even scarier to  
me.....

When we were there, a few weeks ago....  
after we listened to Jan Scruggs and John Wheeler  
talk about the significance of the Memorial....  
and after Paul, Mario and Wilson saluted the  
statue and made their presentation....

We were just standing there.....

Wheeler said.... how quiet...

And Felicia Ferrari thought that we should  
offer a prayer....

WHAT WE DIDN'T KNOW....WHAT I CERTAINLY DID NOT KNOW...  
is that this is what the designer intended....  
THAT THOSE WHO COME THERE WOULD FORM A CIRCLE.....  
TO COMPLETE.....SO THAT WITH OUR PRESENCE  
WE WOULD FILL IN THE PART OF THE CIRCLE  
THAT HAD BEEN OMITTED....

That happened to me another time....  
(Mother's Day a year ago....

Every day is sacred.....

Every moment of life is sacred....



(Closing)

Scott Momaday ---

*unfired war  
the topic will  
remain unfired*

Coincidence of World WAR II Celebrations....  
and Vietnam Celebrations....

image of Shad sitting down at Thanksgiving Dinner  
with a World War II father....

grandsons and granddaughters....

CLASS AS AN INSTRUMENT OF HEALING.....

*Carpe  
Fugere  
Pariter*

Circle formed there in Washington.....

*Implicitly religi quality - Cair + Shad*

Finally, lot of talk about eyes....mirrors....reflections.....  
perceptions.....

watching Veterans in this classroom.....  
John Byer...sees his name on the wall and  
his face.....in the reflection....

Craig Taylor -- looking at me.....

Thomas Merton.....

they found out who they are.....

That's the goal of a class....

And this subject does it more than any

I want to pay tribute to you.....

I see my own ideals and dreams and prayers reflected  
in all of you.....

And I think you are the ones who help me most of  
all to see clearly.....

So, as the one who's privileged to have his name  
associated with this class....

I want to ~~thank you~~ pay my respects to all  
of you.....

And I want you to know how much I believe in you.....  
and How confident I am about what you will  
be doing with all of this..

THANK YOU...