

## *Contemporary Issues in Historical Perspective*

### A Looming Crash or a Soft Landing? Forecasting the Future of the Memory “Industry”\*

Gavriel D. Rosenfeld  
*Fairfield University*

Back in the late 1990s, as I was just entering the job market as a newly minted PhD, I arranged a lunch meeting with the editor of a major university press to pitch my first book manuscript on architecture and the memory of Nazism in postwar Munich. After listening to me for several minutes, the editor, fidgeting somewhat, flatly asked, “Don’t you think the current infatuation with memory has already played itself out?” Taken aback, I replied that I thought the subject was only beginning to come into its own and had years of growth ahead of it. The editor, I must confess, did not look very convinced by my answer. He proceeded to shift our conversation onto a different track, and before long our exchange about the future of memory studies had come to a close. For my part, I continued to pursue my interest in the subject without a second thought. Not too long after our meeting, I published my first book on memory and have since published a second.<sup>1</sup> By all indications, the editor’s skepticism about the prospects of memory studies failed to influence the subsequent course of my scholarly career.

Of late, however, I have begun to think back on my conversation with the editor and revisit his skeptical thoughts about the future of memory studies. I have done so not because I have developed a sneaking suspicion that he was right—it is much too late for him to be vindicated—but rather because I have begun to wonder how much longer memory studies will be able to maintain its position as one of the more influential fields of interdisciplinary scholarship in contemporary academia. As is well known, the topic of memory has risen to an extremely prominent position within the humanities and social sciences over the course of the last two decades. So influential has the study of memory

\* I would like to thank Saul Friedländer, Peter Baldwin, David Myers, Eugene Sheppard, Josh Goode, and Alvin H. Rosenfeld for reading early drafts of this article. I am also grateful to the *Journal of Modern History*’s anonymous readers for their editorial suggestions.

<sup>1</sup> Gavriel D. Rosenfeld, *Munich and Memory: Architecture, Monuments, and the Legacy of the Third Reich* (Berkeley, 2000), and *The World Hitler Never Made: Alternate History and the Memory of Nazism* (Cambridge, 2005).

become that scholars now routinely refer to the emergence of a "memory boom" and even to the rise of a "memory industry."<sup>2</sup> These phrases are somewhat glib, of course. But they may end up being portentous. For as any casual observer of economics knows, all booms are temporary. Following periods of rapid growth, emerging industries inevitably crest. Some settle into stable periods of prolonged, if modest, growth. And others crash.

This article seeks to determine which fate awaits the memory "industry." In thinking about this topic, I have become convinced that however much memory studies has established itself as a thriving field in academia, its current status eventually will be diminished by major changes afoot in the world today. I have been tempted, therefore, to paraphrase Francis Fukuyama's provocative thesis about the "end of history" and boldly prophesy the "end of memory."<sup>3</sup> Yet, in light of Fukuyama's failure to anticipate the subsequent course of historical events—and in light of the overabundance of books heralding "the end" of all kinds of other things—I have chosen to refrain from such a reckless prediction.<sup>4</sup> At the same time, however, I contend that there are numerous signs that the recent memory boom may have peaked and may soon be abating. As I hope to show, the factors that initially helped elevate memory to unprecedented prominence have begun to fade in the last several years and will likely continue to do so.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>2</sup> See, e.g., Charles Maier, "A Surfeit of Memory? Reflections on History, Melancholy, and Denial," *History and Memory*, Fall/Winter 1993, 143; Andreas Huyssen, *Twilight Memories: Marking Time in a Culture of Amnesia* (New York, 1995), 8; Kerwin Lee Klein, "On the Emergence of Memory in Historical Discourse," *Representations*, Winter 2000, 127–50; Jay Winter, "The Generation of Memory: Reflections on the 'Memory Boom' in Contemporary Historical Studies," *Bulletin of the German Historical Institute* 27, no. 3 (Fall 2000): 69–92. See also Jay Winter, *Remembering War: The Great War between Memory and History in the Twentieth Century* (New Haven, CT, 2006). Elazar Barkan refers to an "industry of memory" in *The Guilt of Nations: Restitution and Negotiating Historical Injustices* (Baltimore, 2000), 24. See also Emily Rosenberg, *A Date Which Will Live: Pearl Harbor in American Memory* (Durham, NC, 2003), esp. chap. 6.

<sup>3</sup> Francis Fukuyama, "The End of History?" *National Interest*, Summer 1989, 3–18.

<sup>4</sup> See Walter Truett Anderson, "Let's Put an End to 'The End of' Books," *Pacific News Service*, March 4, 1996, [http://news.pacificnews.org/news/view\\_article.html?article\\_id=446f3e3382a85b949e4f574c3391a22f](http://news.pacificnews.org/news/view_article.html?article_id=446f3e3382a85b949e4f574c3391a22f).

<sup>5</sup> In making this assertion, I do not wish to be misunderstood as a proponent of this development, let alone an enabler of it. Indeed, I hope to preempt any suspicion that I am somehow aiming to undermine the study of memory by emphasizing that all of my current research and much of my projected research remains focused on the subject of memory in one way or another. See Gavriel D. Rosenfeld and Paul Jaskot, eds., *Beyond Berlin: Twelve German Cities Confront the Nazi Past* (Ann Arbor, MI, 2008). I am also currently at work on a new project tentatively entitled *Building after Auschwitz: Jewish Architecture and Jewish Memory since the Holocaust*.

## THE RISE OF MEMORY

Affirmations of the surging significance of memory have abounded in recent years. While some trend spotters have matter-of-factly pointed to memory's emergence as a "cultural buzz word" and declared it to be "decidedly in fashion," others have more dramatically referred to the growing "obsession with memory," the eruption of a "memory craze," the spread of a "memory fever," and even the outbreak of a "memory epidemic."<sup>6</sup> Such colorful descriptions are evocative, but the most influential terms that have emerged for conceptualizing the phenomenon have been the "memory boom" and the "memory industry." The use of these appellations dates back to the early 1990s, and in recent years they have caught on with a good number of scholars.<sup>7</sup> No matter how popular the "memory boom" and "memory industry" have become as terms of reference, however, their precise meaning has been somewhat clouded by the fact that they have frequently been used interchangeably to refer to two separate, albeit related, phenomena: first, the worldwide proliferation during the last two decades of public controversies over divisive historical legacies and, second, the emergence of scholarly interest in studying memory as a broader social and cultural phenomenon.<sup>8</sup> Anyone hoping to understand either of these trends, of course, must examine them as distinct, if related, phenomena. And so for reasons of analytical

<sup>6</sup> Jan-Werner Müller, "Introduction: The Power of Memory, the Memory of Power, and the Power over Memory," in *Memory and Power in Postwar Europe: Studies in the Presence of the Past*, ed. Jan-Werner Müller (Cambridge, 2002), 18; Nancy Wood, *Vectors of Memory: Legacies of Trauma in Postwar Europe* (Oxford, 1999); Natalie Zemon Davis and Randolph Starn, introduction to the special issue on memory in *Representations* 26 (Spring 1989): 1; David Berliner, "The Abuses of Memory: Reflections on the Memory Boom in Anthropology," *Anthropological Quarterly* 78, no. 1 (2005): 203; Andreas Huyssen, *Present Pasts: Urban Palimpsests and the Politics of Memory* (Stanford, CA, 2003), 27.

<sup>7</sup> The first use of the "memory industry" that I have been able to locate is Michael Kammen's 1991 reference to the "memory industry" surrounding the commemoration of the Holocaust in Israel. Michael Kammen, *The Mystic Chords of Memory: The Transformation of Tradition in American Culture* (New York, 1991), 3.

<sup>8</sup> Jay Winter, e.g., defines the memory "boom" as "the efflorescence of interest in the subject of memory inside the academy and beyond" (in short, what others have termed the academic memory "industry"): Winter, *Remembering War*, 1. Winter, moreover, argues that the current memory boom was preceded by a prior memory boom from 1890 to 1920, which dealt with the invention of national identities and the commemoration of the fallen of World War I. I find Winter's usage of the term "boom" for both phenomena unnecessarily confusing and argue that the fin de siècle interest in remembrance is better described by a different phrase that he uses in his analysis, namely, "cult of memory" (25–26). Overall, what makes the memory boom of the last two decades unique is the traumatic nature and global scope of the historical legacies that have been confronted during it.

convenience, I will refer in this article to the eruption of a "boom" of public controversies over memory, on the one hand, and the growth of a scholarly "industry" devoted to studying them, on the other.<sup>9</sup>

Terminology aside, the emergence of memory represents one of the more noteworthy developments of contemporary Western, if not global, cultural and intellectual life. According to various observers who have studied the boom in public debates over the past, memory has developed into what Andreas Huyssen has called "a cultural obsession of [such] monumental proportions" that it has become, in the words of Jay Winter, "the historical signature of our own generation."<sup>10</sup> So frequently have public controversies erupted over contested historical legacies worldwide that a shorthand designation for them—"the politics of memory"—has entered popular parlance to describe the phenomenon.<sup>11</sup> In short, few would disagree with Susan Suleiman's contention that "the era we are living in is . . . the era of memory."<sup>12</sup> Echoing these claims about the memory boom are equally dramatic claims about the academic memory industry. For many scholars, memory has become the focus of a massive paradigm shift within the humanities and social sciences.<sup>13</sup> Historians have been particularly aware of this shift, with some describing memory as "the leading term in our new cultural history," others arguing that memory has replaced "society" as the primary focus of contemporary histor-

<sup>9</sup> I should stress that I do not use the term "industry" in the mildly pejorative sense of some scholars whose use of it seems to imply that the field's practitioners have somehow lost sight of their original—purely intellectual—goals and instead have begun opportunistically to pursue baser aims, whether status or profit. Rather, I use the term "industry" more neutrally, as a term of reference for a successful and popular, if also profitable, subset of the larger world of academic publishing. I also do not wish to imply that the "industry" is narrowly devoted to studying only historical controversies; it has also focused on the larger dynamics of remembrance more broadly.

<sup>10</sup> Huyssen, *Twilight Memories*, 26; Winter, "Generation of Memory," 13.

<sup>11</sup> For scholarly and journalistic uses of the phrase, see, among many others, Richard Ned Lebow, Wulf Kansteiner, and Claudio Fogu, eds., *The Politics of Memory in Postwar Europe* (Durham, NC, 2006); Alexandra Barahona De Brito, Carman Gonzalez Enriquez, and Paloma Aguilar, eds., *The Politics of Memory: Transitional Justice in Democratizing Societies* (Oxford, 2001); Jane Kramer, *The Politics of Memory: Looking for Germany in the New Germany* (New York, 1996); Raul Hilberg, *The Politics of Memory: The Journey of a Holocaust Historian* (New York, 2002); Joan B. Wolf, *Harnessing the Holocaust: The Politics of Memory in France* (Stanford, CA, 2004); Amos Elon, "The Politics of Memory," *New York Review of Books*, October 7, 1993.

<sup>12</sup> Susan Suleiman, *Crises of Memory and the Second World War* (Cambridge, MA, 2006), 8.

<sup>13</sup> Müller, "Introduction," 13. See also Wulf Kansteiner, "Finding Meaning in Memory: A Methodological Critique of Collective Memory Studies," *History and Theory*, May 2002, 180; Patrick Hutton, *History as an Art of Memory* (Hanover, NH, 1993), 1.

ical scholarship, and still others going so far as to say that “memory has become the discourse that replaces history” itself.<sup>14</sup>

And yet, while there is no shortage of declarations about memory’s new prominence, accounting for the origins of the memory boom and memory industry is a more daunting task. Perhaps the most obvious challenge, as Kerwin Klein has pointed out, is the fact that “memory . . . is applied to so many phenomena that an inclusive history of its origins would . . . approach the universal.”<sup>15</sup> It is small wonder, therefore, that the call of historians to write an overall history of memory has not yet been heeded.<sup>16</sup> Nevertheless, an increasing number of scholars have begun to pave the way for such a history by offering explanations of the joint appearance of the memory boom and the memory industry. These scholars’ explanations have differed in both their depth and their overall orientation, but they reveal that a wide range of political, social, cultural, and intellectual factors have been deeply involved in producing the recent mania for memory. In examining these factors in the pages that follow, I would like to emphasize that I do so in a somewhat sweeping and schematic fashion and that I recognize that the surging interest in memory is not reducible to them alone. Moreover, I do not claim to have exhaustively described every way in which these particular factors have contributed to memory’s new prominence. Still, even if done suggestively rather than definitively, surveying how these factors have contributed to memory’s rise should help us determine what their shifting status in the turbulent world of today portends for memory’s future.

## UNMASTERED PASTS

One of the most important preconditions for the recent memory boom has been the presence of numerous “unmastered” pasts throughout the West and other parts of the world. The concept of an “unmastered” past resists easy definition, but it essentially refers to a historical legacy that has acquired an

<sup>14</sup> Klein, “On the Emergence,” 128; Alon Confino, “Introduction,” *History and Memory* 17, nos. 1–2 (2005): 7; Maier, “Surfeit of Memory?” 142.

<sup>15</sup> Klein, “On the Emergence,” 144.

<sup>16</sup> Scholars have been calling for a “history of memory” for over a decade now. See Hutton, *History as an Art of Memory*, 1; Alon Confino, “Collective Memory and Cultural History: Problems of Method,” *American Historical Review*, December 1997, 1403; Peter Fritzsche, “The Case of Modern Memory,” *Journal of Modern History* 73 (March 2001): 115. Valuable efforts to historicize memory include Richard Terdiman, *Present Past: Modernity and the Memory Crisis* (Ithaca, NY, 1993); David Gross, *Lost Time: On Remembering and Forgetting in Late Modern Culture* (Amherst, MA, 2000); Harald Weinrich, *Lethé: The Art and Critique of Forgetting* (Ithaca, NY, 2004); Peter Fritzsche, *Stranded in the Present: Modern Time and the Melancholy of History* (Cambridge, MA, 2004).

exceptional, abnormal, or otherwise unsettled status in the collective memory of a given society.<sup>17</sup> This distinct status arises from the fact that the particular past in question typically involves the commission of a historic injustice—an act of war, genocide, or political oppression—that has been remembered differently by, and has caused discord between, the original perpetrators, victims, and their respective descendants. Because perpetrators are usually reluctant to accept responsibility for the past and prefer to forget it and because victims insist on bearing witness to their suffering and pursuing redress for it, legacies of historic injustice invariably become divisive and contested. Such discord over recent historical events can take time to emerge, of course. In the immediate aftermath of such events, both the perpetrators and the victims may tend to avoid discussing the past and prefer to displace it from the public to the private sphere. The result is the emergence of what some scholars have referred to as a "great silence" toward—or what others have imperfectly called the general "repression" of—the past.<sup>18</sup> To be sure, in most societies during this early phase, difficult historical legacies tend not to be avoided in their entirety. Rather than being altogether quarantined, the past may be addressed periodically in public fashion. When it is, however, its "unmastered" character is visible in the apologetic strategies that are used to

<sup>17</sup> The concept of an unmastered past has been discussed most thoroughly in the vast literature on the German struggle to deal with the legacy of the Third Reich—a struggle that is frequently described by the German term *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, or "mastering the past." For one of many examples, see Charles Maier, *The Unmasterable Past: History, Holocaust, and German National Identity* (Cambridge, MA, 1988). As for the controversial concept of "collective memory," I prefer not to get bogged down in a complicated discussion about terminology and will simply assert that I use the term loosely to encompass both "communicative" and "cultural" memories (i.e., both personally experienced and culturally mediated memories). Jan Assmann, "Kollektives Gedächtnis und kulturelle Identität," in *Kultur und Gedächtnis*, ed. Jan Assmann and Tonio Holscher (Frankfurt am Main, 1988). An unmastered past, of course, need not only refer to an unsettled legacy within a single society but can refer to a legacy that sparks disagreement among different societies as well.

<sup>18</sup> Numerous scholars have used the term "silence" to describe the evasion of the past in various nations. Tom Segev uses the phrase "great silence" to describe the early postwar Israeli response to the Holocaust (*The Seventh Million: The Israelis and the Holocaust* [New York, 1993], 10). Daniel Levy and Natan Sznajder use the term to describe the early postwar decades in Germany, the United States, and Israel in their study *The Holocaust and Memory in the Global Age* (Philadelphia, 2006), 16–17. See also Yasuko I. Takezawa, ed., *Breaking the Silence: Redress and Japanese American Ethnicity* (Ithaca, NY, 1995). The Freudian concept of "repression" has frequently been used by historians to refer to the evasion of the past. See, e.g., Henry Rousso's *The Vichy Syndrome: History and Memory in France since 1944* (Cambridge, 1991), which uses the term "repressions" to refer to the early postwar French response to collaboration (60–98). The concept of repression remains controversial among scholars. See Daniel Schacter, *Searching for Memory: The Brain, the Mind, and the Past* (New York, 1996), 234–35.

frame it, as well as in the taboos that come to surround it. Overall, until perpetrators, victims, and their descendants can reconcile with one another and arrive at some form of consensus about the meaning of a given historical legacy (something that is usually facilitated by the offering and acceptance of various legal, economic, symbolic, and commemorative gestures of atonement), the past can safely be described as “unmastered.”<sup>19</sup>

In Europe, the concept of an unmastered past has frequently been associated with (though not limited to) the traumas of the Second World War. The unprecedented crimes perpetrated by Nazi Germany against Jews and other civilians during the war years, the collaboration of countless Europeans in those crimes, and the persecution of those who resisted; the numerous episodes of ethnic cleansing and population transfer that took place during and immediately after the war; and the unprecedented brutality of wartime combat itself, epitomized by the unprecedented destruction of European cities in aerial bombing raids—all of these things were directly experienced or witnessed by millions of Europeans during the war years. After 1945, the memories of these experiences were so emotionally painful at the personal level that most Europeans simply preferred to avoid recalling the past altogether. Yet, it was not merely individual psychology but also tangible economic and political factors that were involved in the early postwar marginalization of memory. The magnitude of economic reconstruction reinforced the need for present mindedness, while the thorny task of restoring domestic political stability—achieved most often by reintegrating former perpetrators and collaborators into the postwar social and political order—discouraged historical reflection as well.<sup>20</sup> The acute geopolitical tensions caused by the cold war further contributed to this trend, with memories of the war years being tendentiously reconfigured (in both the West and the East) to suit the dictates of postwar politics. To be sure, the recent past was not entirely avoided. Certain aspects of the war years were discussed in the media, invoked by politicians, and portrayed in popular culture.<sup>21</sup> But when Europeans did mark the past, they did

<sup>19</sup> Martha Minow’s book *Between Vengeance and Forgiveness: Facing History after Genocide and Mass Violence* (Boston, 1999) offers a thoughtful typology of the legal, economic, symbolic, and commemorative methods that have been successfully used to come to terms with difficult pasts.

<sup>20</sup> The postwar failure of various countries, such as Germany, Italy, and France, to remove the supporters of prewar and wartime dictatorial regimes after 1945 has been the subject of a large specialized literature, which I will not cite here. For a general discussion, see Tony Judt, *Postwar: A History of Europe since 1945* (New York, 2005), chap. 2.

<sup>21</sup> In the case of Germany, Jeffrey Herf’s study *Divided Memory: The Nazi Past in the Two Germanies* (Cambridge, MA, 1997) and Robert Moeller’s book *War Stories: The Search for a Usable Past in the Federal Republic of Germany* (Berkeley, 2003) clearly reveal the absence of “repression.” So too does Lawrence Baron’s essay “The

so in self-centered, rather than "other"-centered, ways that enabled them to focus on their own suffering and evade a sense of guilt for the suffering of others.<sup>22</sup> This practice entailed a delicate balancing act, of course, and because of the past's acute sensitivity, most Europeans simply preferred to focus on the present and future. The future-oriented mind-set that took shape in these years was a crucial foundation for the continent's postwar recovery.<sup>23</sup> But one does not have to accept the problematic Freudian concept of the "return of the repressed" to recognize that the magnitude and complexity of the war years' legacy would make it difficult to keep the past at arm's length indefinitely.

Europe was not the only part of the world, moreover, that was burdened with difficult historical legacies. In Asia, the crimes committed by the Japanese in China, Korea, the Philippines, and other occupied parts of the continent during World War II left a legacy of trauma and resentment very similar to the one bequeathed by the Nazis to Europe.<sup>24</sup> In the United States, there was no comparable history of guilt or victimization from the Second World War, but the nation's long-standing evasion of the historic maltreatment of African Americans and Native Americans left it with a set of unmastered pasts that posed their own challenges.<sup>25</sup> Finally, nineteenth- and early twentieth-century

---

Holocaust and American Public Memory, 1945–1960," *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 17, no. 1 (2003): 62–88, which describes the absence of repression in discussions of the Holocaust among American Jews in the early postwar period.

<sup>22</sup> Eric Langenbacher alludes to this dynamic in "Changing Memory Regimes in Contemporary Germany?" *German Politics and Society*, Summer 2003, 52.

<sup>23</sup> Hermann Lübbe earned considerable criticism for proposing this idea in the 1980s. Hermann Lübbe, "Der Nationalsozialismus im politischen Bewusstsein der Gegenwart," in *Deutschlands Weg in die Diktatur: Internationale Konferenz zur Nationalsozialistischen Machtübernahme im Reichstagsgebäude zu Berlin*, ed. Martin Broszat (Berlin, 1983), 329–49. More recently, it has been embraced by Tony Judt, "The Past Is Another Country: Myth and Memory in Postwar Europe," *Daedalus*, Fall 1992, 95–96. See also Richard Bessel and Dirk Schumann, eds., *Life after Death: Approaches to a Cultural and Social History of Europe during the 1940s and 1950s* (Cambridge, 2003).

<sup>24</sup> Ian Buruma, *The Wages of Guilt: Memories of War in Germany and Japan* (New York, 1994); Joshua Fogel, ed., *The Nanjing Massacre in History and Historiography* (Berkeley, 2000); Iris Chang, *The Rape of Nanking* (New York, 1998); Erna Paris, *Long Shadows: Truth, Lies, and History* (London, 2002), chap. 3.

<sup>25</sup> Following the Civil War and the end of Reconstruction, American society's hasty pursuit of sectional reconciliation contributed to the emergence of a dominant white memory of the recent past that ignored the horrors of slavery. For more on this process, see Kammen, *Mystic Chords of Memory*, chap. 4; David Blight, *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory* (Cambridge, MA, 2001); William Blair, *Cities of the Dead: Contesting the Memory of the Civil War in the South, 1865–1914* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2004); W. Fitzhugh Brundage, *The Southern Past: A Clash of Race and Memory* (Cambridge, MA, 2005). Similarly, early twentieth-century episodes of racial



atrocities perpetrated by Western nations against their colonial possessions (such as Belgium's murderous rule of the Congo) and mid-twentieth-century atrocities perpetrated by recently liberated nations against one another in the wake of decolonization (as in postpartition India and Pakistan) constituted other unmastered pasts around the globe. They, too, would figure centrally in the eventual memory boom.

#### GENERATIONAL CHANGE

It took time, of course, before these historical legacies could be confronted. Many factors were involved in directing attention toward them. In the West, one of the more important ones was the generational turnover that took place during the tumultuous decade of the 1960s.<sup>26</sup> The generation that came of age after World War II was a future-oriented generation whose members yearned to replace what they saw as the hopelessly conservative political and economic order with a radical, left-leaning program of social and political change. Yet while this generation largely pursued its radical goals via concrete action in the present—through campus sit-ins, street demonstrations, and eventually revolutionary violence in the fateful year of 1968—it also mobilized the buried past to challenge the hated status quo. The young people of this generation were not responsible for their countries' historical misdeeds and thus had few inhibitions about moralistically holding their parents and grandparents accountable for them. In Europe and the United States, an overdue process of historical reckoning began. In West Germany, left-leaning youth attacked the centrist Christian Democratic and Social Democratic coalition government by comparing its actions to those of the Third Reich.<sup>27</sup> The same

---

violence have disappeared from public memory, having been obscured by veils of silence, shame, and ignorance. Scott Ellsworth, *Death in a Promised Land: The Tulsa Race Riot of 1921* (Baton Rouge, LA, 1992); Tim Madigan, *The Burning: Massacre, Destruction, and the Tulsa Race Riot of 1921* (New York, 2001), esp. chap. 15; Michael D'Orso, *Like Judgement Day: The Ruin and Redemption of a Town Called Rosewood* (New York, 1996). The persecution of Native Americans, meanwhile, was never really even conceptualized as a historic injustice. Steven Conn, *History's Shadow: Native Americans and Historical Consciousness in the Nineteenth Century* (Chicago, 2004).

<sup>26</sup> Claudio Fogu and Wulf Kansteiner address this point in their essay "The Politics of Memory and the Poetics of History," in Lebow, Kansteiner, and Fogu, *Politics of Memory*, 296–97.

<sup>27</sup> For the generation of 1968, the presence of ex-Nazis, such as Chancellor Kurt-Georg Kiesinger, in the postwar state establishment; the passing of the emergency laws (*Notstandsgesetze*) by the parliament; and the heavy-handed police suppression of student protests confirmed its fears that the postwar Federal Republic was little

trend appeared in France and Italy, where young people assailed the ruling regimes by challenging state-sponsored myths of wartime antifascist resistance.<sup>28</sup> In the United States, meanwhile, the civil rights and pan-Indian movements implicitly challenged dominant official and popular memories of the past by demanding that long-ignored historical injustices be acknowledged and redressed.<sup>29</sup> In short, the 1968 generation's fight for social and political justice in the present fostered a growing effort to confront the sins of the past.

#### IDEOLOGICAL EXHAUSTION, IDENTITY POLITICS, AND THE POLITICIZATION OF MEMORY

Yet, it was not so much the ambitious hopes of the 1968 generation but the failure to realize them that contributed to the eventual memory boom. When the attempt to overthrow the industrial capitalist order failed in the abortive revolutions of 1968, many European and American leftists became skeptical about the viability of socialism as a collective project. As a result of this ideological exhaustion, many leftists during the 1970s began to shift their political engagement away from a universalistic "politics of redistribution" toward a more particularistic "politics of recognition" that aimed to secure greater social and political rights for specific constituencies (esp. women, ethnic minorities, and homosexuals).<sup>30</sup> These new movements, which came to be classified under the headings of "identity politics" and "multiculturalism" after the 1970s and 1980s, developed a strong interest in memory, for a crucial part of their present-day political engagement was their quest to redress long-standing legacies of oppression and discrimination.<sup>31</sup> Especially as these

---

different from the Nazi dictatorship. For a convincing analysis of this generation's views of the Nazi past, see Nick Thomas, *Protest Movements in 1960s West Germany: A Social History of Dissent and Democracy* (Oxford, 2003).

<sup>28</sup> On France, see Rousso, *Vichy Syndrome*, esp. chap. 3. In Italy, the 1968 generation criticized its elders in the center-left governing coalition for abandoning the wartime resistance's real revolutionary potential and for hiding the continuities between the fascist and postwar eras. See Claudio Fogu, "*Italiani brava gente*: The Legacy of Fascist Historical Culture on Italian Politics of Memory," in Lebow, Kansteiner, and Fogu, *Politics of Memory*, 149, 153–56.

<sup>29</sup> W. Fitzhugh Brundage asserts that it has been "since the 1960s [that] . . . the contest over . . . the southern past . . . has entered the public arena more directly than at any time since Reconstruction" (Brundage, *Southern Past*, 313, 274). Native American demands for redress were already emerging in the early years after World War II but intensified after 1960 (Barkan, *Guilt of Nations*, 173 and, more generally, chap. 8).

<sup>30</sup> John Torpey, "Making Whole What Has Been Smashed: Reflections on Reparations," *Journal of Modern History* 73 (June 2001): 352.

<sup>31</sup> Various scholars have pointed to the importance of identity politics for the memory boom. See Maier, "Surfeit of Memory?" 144–47; Klein, "On the Emer-

new movements dovetailed with the concurrent historiographical phenomena of oral history and the history of everyday life (*Alltagsgeschichte*)—both of which accorded significance to the memories of ordinary people—they succeeded in forming countermemories of specific historical legacies that fought for attention and inclusion within their nations' dominant official memories. In this context, Western European blue-collar workers, European and American Jews, and Japanese and African Americans, to name merely a few groups, increasingly began to find a voice for, and demand the acknowledgment of, their experiences of oppression.

Just as the exhaustion of socialism promoted the turn to memory, so too did the exhaustion of another ideology, nationalism.<sup>32</sup> Nationalism, of course, had been substantially discredited throughout Europe due to the horrors of the Second World War, but various postwar trends weakened the idea of the nation-state still further. The onset of decolonization and the eruption of crises stemming from it, whether at Suez or in Algeria, forced European imperial powers like Great Britain and France to accept diminished roles for themselves as nation-states on the world stage and to reassess their larger national identities. This process of national self-reevaluation was further promoted by the massive waves of immigration to Europe from the former colonies and other parts of the developing world. For nations that had long been relatively homogenous in their social composition, the striking increase in ethnic and religious diversity led many Europeans to sense a weakening of national identity. With France experiencing these geopolitical and social trends most dramatically, it was no wonder that it was a French scholar, Pierre Nora, who identified the growing interest in collective memory as part of a compensatory desire to offset the loss of a unified national identity in an era of rapid social transformation.<sup>33</sup> By wistfully pointing to the significance of *lieux de mémoire*—the “sites of memory” in France where shared representations of the past had once (but no longer) coalesced—Nora revealed how memory could appeal to a nostalgic, if not conservative, sensibility.<sup>34</sup> In the process, his work pointed to a trend of considerable future significance—namely, the fact that

---

gence,” 143; Müller, “Introduction,” 16; Winter, *Remembering War*, 34–36. Pierre Nora has written that “those who have long been marginalized in traditional history are . . . haunted by the need to recover their buried pasts” (Pierre Nora, “Between Memory and History: *Les Lieux de Mémoire*,” *Representations* 26 [Spring 1989]: 15). Barkan cites multiculturalism’s promotion of the “neo-enlightenment” idea of group rights as influencing the subsequent emergence of the global restitution movement (Barkan, *Guilt of Nations*, 161).

<sup>32</sup> Maier, “Surfeit of Memory?” 147; Torpey, “Making Whole What Has Been Smashed,” 241, 247.

<sup>33</sup> Nora, “Between Memory and History.”

<sup>34</sup> The conservative thrust of Nora’s project has been identified by Steven Englund

while the social fragmentation within Western European nations after 1968 inspired many left liberals to embrace a multiplicity of counter-memories, it eventually also prompted conservatives to reassert a dominant, consensual form of official memory.

The result of this politically ecumenical mnemonic trend was the increasing politicization of memory during the 1970s and 1980s. Public disputes over memory became more common in these years as liberals and conservatives mobilized the past for partisan purposes. These disputes, which were the immediate precursors to the later memory boom, largely revolved around the extent to which specific historical legacies should be viewed from a moralistic perspective. If the young people of the 1968 generation had consciously embraced morally informed and highly critical views of their nations' pasts, conservatives responded by trying to reimpose a prouder, nationalistically oriented historical perspective. In France in the 1970s, for example, presidents Georges Pompidou and Valéry Giscard d'Estaing responded to the increasingly critical view of the Vichy years (epitomized by Marcel Ophüls's controversial 1971 film, *The Sorrow and the Pity*) by emphasizing the need to "draw a veil over the past" and pursue reconciliation between the perpetrators and victims.<sup>35</sup> Similarly, in Germany during the 1980s, conservative Chancellor Helmut Kohl rejected the 1968 generation's inward historical critique by trying to relativize the crimes of the Third Reich in order to establish a "normal" sense of national identity—a mission that sparked the best known disputes of the 1980s, the Bitburg controversy of 1985 and the Historians' Debate of 1986–87.<sup>36</sup> These and other disputes, such as the Waldheim affair in Austria, which began in 1986, suggest that it was precisely the efforts of conservatives in the 1980s to roll back the self-critical mnemonic impulses of the preceding years that ended up motivating liberal groups to redouble their efforts to confront unaddressed aspects of the past in the 1990s.

## POSTMODERNISM

If the political and social realities of the 1960s helped to initiate the growing interest in memory, subsequent intellectual and cultural trends during the 1970s nurtured it as well. Perhaps the most important development in this period was the emergence of postmodernism.<sup>37</sup> Although notoriously difficult

---

in his review essay "The Ghost of Nation Past," *Journal of Modern History* 64 (June 1992): 299–320.

<sup>35</sup> Rousso, *Vichy Syndrome*, 123.

<sup>36</sup> Geoffrey H. Hartmann, ed., *Bitburg in Moral and Political Perspective* (Bloomington, IN, 1986); Maier, *Unmasterable Past*.

<sup>37</sup> Barry Schwartz, "Introduction: The Expanding Past," *Qualitative Sociology*

to define, postmodern thought and culture grew out of the political disillusionment of the post-1968 era and ushered in a newly skeptical perspective toward the prevailing ideas and values of Western life.<sup>38</sup> Postmodern thought, in particular, was influenced by the insight of French poststructuralists that knowledge and truth were both functions of language that, rather than transparently reflecting reality, worked within systems of power to produce “discourses” that themselves subjectively created reality. This insight, made famous by Michel Foucault, together with Jacques Derrida’s idea of supplementarity (which showed how meaning was linguistically produced via exclusion and negation), gave poststructuralist intellectuals powerful weapons to “deconstruct” all kinds of hegemonic concepts that were rooted in binary oppositions that repressed the otherness within them.

The deconstructionist impulse of postmodernism had profound implications for the relationship between history and memory. Since the inception of the modern historical profession, a relatively strict divide had been maintained between history—widely regarded as an objective discipline that sought the truth about the past—and memory, whose inherent subjectivity led it to be seen as an inferior path to genuine historical understanding. Postmodern thought, however, challenged the rigid polarization between history and memory by challenging the existence of objective truth itself. Indeed, as historians became acquainted with postmodernism in the 1980s and 1990s, they began to challenge history’s reputation for objectivity by showing that it, too, was trapped within rules of language and composed through a subjective process of representation strikingly similar to that which informed history’s alleged “other,” memory.<sup>39</sup> Building on this insight, many historians began to shift their attention away from the prevailing focus on social history and make a “cultural” or “linguistic” turn toward the study of representation and, before long, memory itself.<sup>40</sup> In short, as postmodernism made increasing numbers of historians more skeptical about the truth claims of history, they began to shed

---

19, no. 3 (1996): 277–78; Klein, “On the Emergence,” 144; Winter, *Remembering War*, 33.

<sup>38</sup> Perry Anderson’s book *The Origins of Postmodernity* (London, 1998) cites the slow death of socialism in the wake of the failed 1968 revolutions as crucial for leading Western European intellectuals toward postmodern thought.

<sup>39</sup> Many scholars have explored the implications of postmodernism for the field of history. See, e.g., Keith Jenkins, *Re-Thinking History* (London, 1991). The idea of memory as representation rather than recollection or retrieval is a major theme of the neurobiological literature on memory. See, e.g., Schacter, *Searching for Memory*, 56–60.

<sup>40</sup> Hutton, *History as an Art of Memory*, 1–10. Moreover, as historians became more self-reflexive about their own representation of the past, they became better able to take more self-critical stances toward their nation’s historical legacies.

their biases against, and become increasingly interested in, memory. In the process, postmodernism helped pave the way for the later emergence of the scholarly memory industry.

## THE END OF THE COLD WAR

If postmodernism helped popularize memory as a topic of interest among scholars, the end of the cold war helped to bring memory to the attention of the general public.<sup>41</sup> One important way that the end of the cold war contributed to the memory boom of the 1990s was by changing the directional outlook of Western society at large. With the collapse of communist regimes throughout Eastern Europe in the revolutions of 1989, it was not only socialism that was seen as having died but all future-oriented or utopian projects for political change.<sup>42</sup> This death of the future—the gloomy sense of “post-ness” after 1989, as John Torpey has termed it—helped redirect the attention of Western society toward the past.<sup>43</sup>

But it was not the past in a generic sense that was now revisited but rather the many difficult historical legacies that had never been fully confronted during the postwar era. If the general climate of insecurity and the calculating imperatives of realpolitik had encouraged the embrace of self-justifying and triumphalistic historical narratives during the cold war, the end of the East-West conflict and the resulting sense of security enabled the emergence of more morally informed and self-critical views of the past.<sup>44</sup> This trend was particularly visible in Germany, where, following unification in 1990, the conservative Christian Democratic government of Helmut Kohl—having previously avoided taking responsibility for the crimes of the Nazi past in favor of focusing on the misdeeds of the communist East German government in the present—increasingly took significant steps to confront the legacy of the Nazi years.<sup>45</sup> Similarly, other Western European nations, such as France, Switzer-

<sup>41</sup> Müller, “Introduction,” 6; Judt, “Past Is Another Country,” 108; Bill Niven, *Facing the Nazi Past: United Germany and the Legacy of the Third Reich* (London, 2002), introduction.

<sup>42</sup> As Charles Maier put it in 1993, “At the end of the twentieth century, Western societies have come to the end of a massive collective project, . . . of the capacity to found collective institutions that rest on aspirations for the future” (Maier, “Surfeit of Memory?” 147).

<sup>43</sup> Torpey, “Making Whole What Has Been Smashed,” 241, 251.

<sup>44</sup> Barkan, *Guilt of Nations*, xvi.

<sup>45</sup> Müller, “Introduction” 4; Niven, *Facing the Nazi Past*, 2–4. Whether in the form of political pronouncements of regret for the Nazi era, the creation of national holidays and memorials marking the Holocaust, economic measures to pay reparations to survivors (particularly slave laborers), or intense debates over historical monographs, memoirs, and museum exhibitions, the Germans took unprecedented responsibility for

land, and Sweden, began to wrestle with their wartime histories of collaborating with the Nazis, while newly postauthoritarian nations like Spain confronted their own difficult pasts as well.<sup>46</sup> In Eastern Europe, meanwhile, the end of the cold war and the liberation from Soviet rule helped launch the painful process of confronting long-buried histories, whether crimes committed during the Second World War or traumatic episodes associated with decades of communist rule.<sup>47</sup>

To be sure, even as the security provided by the end of the cold war fostered a turn toward the past, the uncertainties produced by it did so as well.<sup>48</sup> In parts of Europe, the cold war's end unleashed such long-unseen forces as virulent nationalism and right-wing political violence that raised the specter of bygone atrocities from the Second World War. The crimes perpetrated by Serbs and Croats against one another and against Bosnian Muslims and Kosovar Albanians during the Yugoslav civil war of the 1990s, for example, resurrected images of the Nazi Holocaust and fueled a commitment to honor the mne-

---

the crimes of the Third Reich in the years leading up to, and following, the fiftieth anniversary of the end of World War II in 1995.

<sup>46</sup> Rousso, *Vichy Syndrome*; Georg Kreis, ed., *Switzerland and the Second World War* (London, 2000); Richard J. Golsan, ed., *Memory, the Holocaust, and French Justice: The Bousquet and Touvier Affairs* (Hanover, NH, 1996); Henry Rousso, "Justice, History, and Memory in France: Reflections on the Papon Trial," in *Politics and the Past: On Repairing Historical Injustices*, ed. John Torpey (Lanham, MD, 2003), 277–93; Tom Bower, *Nazi Gold: The Full Story of the Fifty-Year Swiss-Nazi Conspiracy to Steal Billions from Europe's Jews and Holocaust Survivors* (New York, 1997); Barkan, *Guilt of Nations*, chap. 5; Paloma Aguilar, "Justice, Politics, and Memory in the Spanish Transition," in De Brito, Enriquez, and Aguilar, *Politics of Memory*, 92–118.

<sup>47</sup> The renewed interest in the past was somewhat less self-critical in Eastern Europe than in Western Europe. This trend reflected the reluctance of newly independent nations to sully their newfound national pride by airing their dirty historical laundry in public. Most preferred to see themselves as guiltless historical victims rather than guilty historical perpetrators. In the former Yugoslavia, Serbs and Croats reembraced historical memories of being victimized by one another in the Second World War; Poles preferred to focus on their victimization by the Germans and the Soviets rather than their own complicity in the murder of Polish Jews, and Czechs predictably refrained from acknowledging the expulsion of ethnic Germans at the end of the war. Judt, "Past Is Another Country," 99–100. See the controversy over Jan Gross's book *Neighbors: The Destruction of the Jewish Community in Jedwabne, Poland* (New York, 2002); Antony Polonsky, *The Neighbors Respond: The Controversy over the Jedwabne Massacre in Poland* (Princeton, NJ, 2003).

<sup>48</sup> David Cesarani, "Holocaust Controversies in the 1990s: The Revenge of History or the History of Revenge," in *After Eichmann: Collective Memory and the Holocaust since 1961*, ed. David Cesarani (London, 2005), 91–99.

monic mandate "never again."<sup>49</sup> The wave of neo-Nazi violence against foreigners in the early 1990s temporarily raised concerns about Germany's political reliability in the wake of reunification and stimulated a commitment to accept the moral legacy of the Nazi era. And neofascist political agitation against immigrants in France, Italy, and Austria motivated many citizens in these countries to take responsibility for their own checkered pasts.

The wave of memory that swept Europe in the 1990s also extended to other parts of the world. In the United States, historical injustices, ranging from the internment of Japanese Americans in World War II to the persecution of African Americans, were tackled at the highest levels of government and investigated in the media.<sup>50</sup> In Asia, Japan was increasingly pressured to admit to having perpetrated horrific war crimes against subject peoples, whether the infamous Nanking massacre, medical experiments against enemy POWs, or the sexual exploitation of Korean "comfort women."<sup>51</sup> In Latin America, various truth commissions took up the issue of "dirty wars" waged by authoritarian governments in countries like Chile and Argentina against sus-

<sup>49</sup> Alan Steinweis, "The Auschwitz Analogy: Holocaust Memory and American Debates over Intervention in Bosnia and Kosovo in the 1990s," *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 19, no. 2 (2005): 276–89.

<sup>50</sup> The internment of Japanese Americans was confronted in the form of reparations, apologies, and new commitments to documenting this forgotten history at specific historic sites. Marita Sturken, "Absent Images of Memory: Remembering and Reenacting the Japanese Internment," in *Perilous Memories: The Asia-Pacific War(s)*, ed. Takashi Fujitani (Durham, NC, 2001), 33–49; Robert A. Jones, "Whitewashing Manzanar," *Los Angeles Times*, April 10, 1996, B2. In the late 1990s, the topics of slavery and Jim Crow-era violence against African Americans gained attention, with elite universities probing their involvement in the slave trade, major newspapers apologizing for running advertisements for slaves, truth commissions established to probe early twentieth-century race riots, memorials erected for forgotten lynching victims, and larger discussions emerging in political circles about the possibility of reparations for past persecution. Yale and Brown were among the universities that confronted their slave-trading pasts. Kate Zernike, "Slave Traders in Yale's Past Fuel Debate on Restitution," *New York Times*, August 13, 2001; Frances Fitzgerald, "Peculiar Institution: Brown University Looks at the Slave Traders in Its Past," *New York Times*, September 12, 2005; "A Newspaper Apologizes for Slave-Era Ads," *New York Times*, July 6, 2000, B1. On the Tulsa Race Riot Commission, see Madigan, *Burning*, chap. 16. The state legislature of North Carolina established the Wilmington Race Riot Commission to unearth the truth of the horrific pogrom against blacks in 1898. Brent Staples, "When Democracy Died in Wilmington, N.C.," *New York Times*, January 8, 2006, 13. Monica Davey, "It Did Happen Here: The Lynching That a City Forgot," discusses the lynching of three black men in Minneapolis in 1920 (*New York Times*, December 4, 2003, A22). On the issue of reparations for slavery see Roy L. Brooks, ed., *When Sorry Isn't Enough* (New York: New York University Press, 1999), 341–61; and Barkan, *Guilt of Nations*, chap. 12.

<sup>51</sup> Peter Li, ed., *Japanese War Crimes: The Search for Justice* (New Brunswick, NJ, 2003); Barkan, *Guilt of Nations*, chap. 3; Fujitani, *Perilous Memories*.



pected leftist insurgents and civilians.<sup>52</sup> In Africa, the maltreatment of blacks under the racist apartheid regime in South Africa was confronted in truth commissions, while older atrocities, such as the genocide of the Hereros in German Southwest Africa (today, Namibia), also earned newfound attention.<sup>53</sup> Similar crimes from the imperialist era were confronted in places like Australia, where the government apologized for the maltreatment of Aborigines.<sup>54</sup> Even major transnational entities, such as the Catholic Church, participated in the memory boom, issuing a series of major apologies for crimes committed over the centuries against religious dissenters, native peoples in the New World, and Jews.<sup>55</sup>

#### FROM THE MEMORY BOOM TO THE MEMORY INDUSTRY

As the memory boom of the 1990s left few parts of the world untouched, it was little wonder that the burgeoning scholarly interest in memory came to be seen as an outright industry around the same time.<sup>56</sup> The wave of scholarship that came to comprise this “industry” has been well documented by scholars and is too vast to be discussed in depth in the limited space of this essay.<sup>57</sup> Still, several basic facts are worth restating. Perhaps the most important point

<sup>52</sup> Alexandra Barahona De Brito, “Truth, Justice, Memory, and Democratization in the Southern Cone,” in De Brito, Enriquez, and Aguilar, *Politics of Memory*, 119–60; Sharon F. Lean, “Is Truth Enough? Reparations and Reconciliation in Latin America,” in Torpey, *Politics and the Past*, 169–92.

<sup>53</sup> Minow, *Between Vengeance and Forgiveness*, chap. 4; Annie E. Coombes, *History after Apartheid: Visual Culture and Public Memory in a Democratic South Africa* (Durham, NC, 2003). On the memory of the Herero genocide, see the work of Reinhart Kössler, much of which is summed up in “Awakened from Colonial Amnesia? Germany after 2004,” <http://www.freiburg-postkolonial.de/Seiten/koessler-colonial-amnesia.htm>.

<sup>54</sup> “Australia Expresses Regret for Injustice to Aborigines,” *New York Times*, August 27, 1999, A14; see Dirk Moses, ed., *Genocide and Settler Society: Frontier Violence and Stolen Indigenous Children in Australian History* (New York, 2004).

<sup>55</sup> Paul Valley, “A Sorry Business,” *London Independent*, December 19, 1998; “The Vatican and the Holocaust,” *New York Times*, March 17, 1998.

<sup>56</sup> Only the Middle East largely escaped the wave of historical self-examination. Although Israel witnessed the emergence of the controversial “post-Zionist” school of historians, which subjected reigning historical myths to critical scrutiny, most Arab and Muslim nations, being authoritarian societies, did not enjoy the same freedom of expression present in the newly postauthoritarian nations of the world and continued to adhere to distorted, if politically expedient, views of the past. See the special issue of *History and Memory* entitled “Israeli Historiography Revisited,” vol. 7, no. 1 (Spring/Summer) 1995. The rise of post-Zionism can be partly explained by the comparatively secure post-Oslo climate of the early and mid-1990s.

<sup>57</sup> Much of the literature is discussed in Jeffrey K. Olick and Joyce Robbins’s essay, “Social Memory Studies: From ‘Collective Memory’ to the Historical Sociology of Mnemonic Practices,” *Annual Review of Sociology* 24 (1998): 105–40.

to emphasize is that the scholarly interest in memory clearly predated the memory boom. As Patrick Hutton has pointed out, it was the cultural turn in Western historiography in the 1970s—specifically the new focus on *mentalités*, or structures of cultural perception—that helped give rise to the first important works on memory in the early 1980s, such as Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger's *The Invention of Tradition* (1983), Pierre Nora's *Les Lieux de Mémoire* (1984), and Yosef Yerushalmi's *Zakhor: Jewish History and Jewish Memory* (1982), not to mention the rediscovery of Maurice Halbwachs's pioneering work on collective memory from the early twentieth century.<sup>58</sup> These early studies, which focused on the role of remembrance in the forging of national or group identity in the modern world (as well as on the alleged threat posed to "organic" memory by modern forms of historical consciousness), constituted the first major branch of the emerging field of memory studies. This branch's studies addressed a variety of topics, but they were all generally influenced by growing concerns about the weakening of national or group cohesion in what was increasingly being recognized as a postcolonial and postmodern era. Pierre Nora's important study was particularly influenced by the adverse impact of postwar immigration, post-1968 political anomie, and post-Vatican II secularism on French national identity.<sup>59</sup> Similarly, Hobsbawm and Ranger's work, like British geographer David Lowenthal's equally pioneering study, *The Past Is a Foreign Country*, was shaped by the growing nostalgia for the glories of the British past during the bleak 1970s and Thatcherite 1980s.<sup>60</sup> In these two countries and elsewhere, Nora's famous lament, "We speak of memory because there is so little of it left," reflected the growing concern of many that modern forces were attenuating group memory and identity.<sup>61</sup>

Around the same time, a second branch of memory studies was being established that focused on the persistence of unmastered pasts in the contemporary world. Influenced by the growing centrality of the Holocaust in Western cultural and intellectual life, this branch of scholarship was pioneered

<sup>58</sup> Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, eds., *The Invention of Tradition* (New York, 1983); Pierre Nora's *Les Lieux de Mémoire* appeared in English as Pierre Nora and Lawrence D. Kritzman, eds., *Realms of Memory: Rethinking the French Past*, vols. 1–3 (New York, 1996–98); Yosef Yerushalmi's *Zakhor: Jewish History and Jewish Memory* (New York, 1989); Hutton, *History as an Art of Memory*, 1–10. Hutton cites the work of Philippe Ariès as inaugurating this field of scholarship, which also includes such works as Maurice Agulhon's *Marianne into Battle: Republican Imagery and Symbolism in France* (Cambridge, 1981).

<sup>59</sup> Hue-Tam Ho Tai, "Remembered Realms: Pierre Nora and French National Memory," *American Historical Review*, June 2001, 909, 912.

<sup>60</sup> Peter Clarke, *Hope and Glory: Britain, 1900–2000* (New York, 2004), 379–80, 386–87; David Lowenthal, *The Past Is a Foreign Country* (Cambridge, 1985).

<sup>61</sup> Nora, "Between Memory and History," 7.

by scholars such as Saul Friedländer, whose self-reflexive early studies, *When Memory Comes* (1978) and *Reflections of Nazism: An Essay on Kitsch and Death* (1982), set the stage for later works, whether on the legacy of the Nazi genocide, by such figures as Charles Maier, Henry Rousso, and Tom Segev, or on other contested events in American and European history, by Michael Kammen, Adam Hochschild, and Tina Rosenberg, among many others.<sup>62</sup> These studies on unmastered pasts, together with the studies on memory and national identity and other related works on the theoretical dimensions of memory, appeared in ever-increasing numbers during the 1980s and 1990s.<sup>63</sup> But it was the study of unmastered pasts that arguably experienced the most notable success, its fortunes having been boosted by the “boom” in public debates about divisive historical legacies following the end of the cold war.<sup>64</sup> As the general public became increasingly aware of, and interested in, such debates and as more and more scholars began examining them in analytical fashion, the status of memory studies as a burgeoning field of scholarship was quickly upgraded. Even though the study of memory predated the memory boom itself, the latter directly contributed to the belief that the former had become a full-fledged industry.

By the turn of the millennium, the memory boom and the emerging memory

<sup>62</sup> Saul Friedländer, *When Memory Comes* (originally published in French in Paris, 1978), and *Reflections of Nazism: An Essay on Kitsch and Death* (New York, 1982); Maier, *Unmasterable Past*; Segev, *Seventh Million*; Rousso, *Vichy Syndrome*. See also Buruma’s *Wages of Guilt*. Other works that followed in this tradition and examined the cultural and intellectual impact of memory include (to mention merely examples on the topic of the Third Reich) Alvin Rosenfeld, *Imagining Hitler* (Bloomington, IN, 1985); Anton Kaes, *From Hitler to Heimat: The Return of History as Film* (Cambridge, MA, 1989); Saul Friedländer, ed., *Probing the Limits of Representation: Nazism and the “Final Solution”* (Cambridge, MA, 1992); James Young, *The Texture of Memory: Holocaust Memorials and Meaning* (New Haven, CT, 1993); and Ernestine Schlant, *The Language of Silence: West German Literature and the Holocaust* (New York, 1999). Other studies followed on the unmastered pasts of other countries, including Kammen, *Mystic Chords of Memory*; Adam Hochschild, *The Unquiet Ghost: Russians Remember Stalin* (New York, 1994); Tina Rosenberg, *The Haunted Land: Facing Europe’s Ghosts after Communism* (New York, 1995).

<sup>63</sup> Other works that examined the links between memory and national identity included John R. Gillis, ed., *Commemorations: The Politics of National Identity* (Princeton, NJ, 1994); Yael Zerubavel, *Recovered Roots: Collective Memory and the Making of the Israeli National Tradition* (Chicago, 1995); Alon Confino, *The Nation as a Local Metaphor: Imperial Germany, and National Memory, 1871–1918* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1997). Theoretical works on memory included Assmann and Holscher, *Kultur und Gedächtnis*; Paul Connerton, *How Societies Remember* (Cambridge, 1989); Iwona Irwin-Zarecka, *Frames of Remembrance: The Dynamics of Collective Memory* (New Brunswick, NJ, 1994).

<sup>64</sup> Listing even only the most significant studies from this wave of scholarship would exceed the boundaries of this article.

industry made the subject of memory an indisputable phenomenon. Signs of memory's new prominence were visible nearly everywhere. Scholars from multiple disciplines in the humanities and social sciences began to gravitate to the study of memory, books on the subject started to proliferate as never before, journals devoted exclusively to the study of memory were founded, Internet discussion groups were established, university presses created special series dedicated to the topic, and innumerable academic conferences were held to explore its diverse dimensions.<sup>65</sup> With the mainstream media also getting into the act and devoting attention to covering controversies over monuments, museums, trials, truth commissions, and reparations payments around the world, memory became virtually inescapable in everyday life.

### THE FUTURE OF MEMORY

Whether memory will remain a permanent fixture within contemporary life, however, is open to question. Some scholars, such as Jay Winter, have argued that "it is unlikely that the memory boom will fade in the foreseeable future" due to the likely persistence of one of the main factors that helped give rise to it in the first place—the traumatic experience of war.<sup>66</sup> As discussed above, however, war is hardly the only factor responsible for the memory boom. Moreover, while war may regrettably persist in the future, some of the other factors that originally brought forth the boom have begun to wane in recent years. Finally, since the turn of the millennium, new political, cultural, and social trends have emerged that may begin to erode memory's influence in the public sphere as well. In short, we may be entering a period that may not be able to sustain the same interest in memory as the one that originally stimulated it in the first place.

<sup>65</sup> In 1987, the leading journal in the field of memory studies, *History and Memory*, was founded, and in 1998 Stanford University Press established its book series, *Cultural Memory and the Present*. Among the more significant conferences were "The Future of Memory," at Yale University in October 1992, "Germany, Jews, and the Future of Memory" at Princeton University in April 1999, and "Confronting the Past: Memory, Identity, and Society" at the University of California, Los Angeles, in January 2001. In 2007, the new journal *Memory Studies* (published by SAGE journals) was founded, and a new Internet listserve H-Memory was established. The first source readers on memory appeared as well. See Michael Rossington and Anne Whitread, eds., *Theories of Memory: A Reader* (Baltimore, 2007); and Jeffrey Olick, Vered Vinitzky-Seroussi, and Daniel Levy, eds., *The Collective Memory Reader* (Oxford, 2008).

<sup>66</sup> Winter, *Remembering War*, 8.

## PROGRESS IN COMING TO TERMS WITH THE PAST

If the existence of unmastered pasts was an initial precondition for the memory boom, the substantial progress made in Europe and other parts of the world in openly confronting them raises the theoretical possibility of mnemonic closure and an eventual end to the recent preoccupation with memory.<sup>67</sup> This possibility is particularly suggested by the case of Germany, whose recent engagement with the Nazi past has been praised effusively by scholars.<sup>68</sup> The fact that one of Germany's most eminent (and usually most critical) historians, Hans-Ulrich Wehler, noted not too long ago that "the Federal Republic has brilliantly faced up to the Nazi past" is a testament to the considerable progress achieved by the nation over the course of the last decade.<sup>69</sup> So successful has Germany been, according to John Torpey, that the country has essentially "set a standard of reckoning with the past that others have been forced to confront."<sup>70</sup> In light of such progress, it is worth asking whether Germany can possibly sustain its intense engagement with its Nazi legacy in the years to come. While answers to this question are necessarily speculative, anecdotal evidence suggests that the nation may not continue to interrogate the Nazi era as energetically as before. Already in 1995, German historian Peter Reichel asserted that "public memory has become [so] institutionalized and commercially organized, . . . [so] admirably exhibited, administered, and politically neutralized . . . [that] it is extremely doubtful that the recent intensity of the debates about the formation of [Germany's] mem-

<sup>67</sup> The question of whether any past can truly be "mastered" still awaits a definitive answer from scholars. Some, like Eric Langenbacher, have openly spoken about the possibility of closure. See Langenbacher, "Changing Memory Regimes in Contemporary Germany?" 54. By contrast, Charles Maier has written that "historical narratives finally end . . . not when there is agreement on one narrative . . . [but when] clarification is reached on two or perhaps three basic stories, whose representatives understand the issues that separate them . . . and agree to live . . . side by side" (Charles S. Maier, "Overcoming the Past? Narrative and Negotiation, Remembering, and Reparation: Issues at the Interface of History and Law," in Torpey, *Politics and the Past*, 302).

<sup>68</sup> John Torpey, "Introduction," in Torpey, *Politics and the Past*, 2.

<sup>69</sup> "Bravourös bewältigt," *Die Welt am Sonntag*, May 8, 2005. Bill Niven's *Facing the Nazi Past* is one of the more upbeat analyses of recent German memory. Already in 1981, Peter Steinbach described the Germans' postwar relationship to the Nazi era as a "radical confrontation with the past, singular in human history" (Peter Steinbach, *Nationalsozialistische Gewaltverbrechen: Die Diskussion in der deutschen Öffentlichkeit nach 1945* [Berlin, 1981], 8). To be sure, dissenters exist. Some critics of Germany's new form of national identity have dubbed it a perverse form of pride in sin (*Sündenstolz*). See Richard Herzinger, "Am Anfang der Wahrheit," *Die Zeit*, no. 51, 2003.

<sup>70</sup> Torpey, "Introduction," 2.

ory landscape will last much longer."<sup>71</sup> To be sure, more than a decade has passed, and Reichel's assertion has still not been fully borne out. But his larger point may eventually prove to be true; namely, that as the German confrontation with the Nazi era becomes more systematized over time, it will gradually lose its original sense of urgency.

Suggestive signs that Germany's "memory work" may soon be slowing down have increased of late. After a period of intense commemorative attention toward the sixtieth anniversary of the events of World War II over the last several years, the conclusion of the ceremonies in 2005 means that Germans will, in all likelihood, take a break from their recent rigorous schedule of commemoration for the remainder of the decade. This is especially probable as the upcoming seventieth anniversary commemorations of the Second World War, set to begin in 2009, may be relatively modest in scale out of deference to the more numerically significant seventy-fifth anniversary events, which are approaching in 2014.<sup>72</sup> There is also the possibility that the seventy-fifth anniversary events will be overshadowed by the centennial ceremonies for World War I, which will begin the same year. Moreover, if recent trends continue to hold, future commemorations of the Second World War, when they do occur, should be relatively free of controversy. Just as the May 8, 2005, ceremonies were far less contentious than those of 1995 and 1985 (largely due to the greater willingness of England, France, the United States, and Russia to invite Germany to participate in them), there is little reason, at least at present, to suspect that the commemorations half a decade from now will not reflect this normalizing trend.<sup>73</sup>

As with commemorative anniversaries, the same trend may surface in other

<sup>71</sup> Peter Reichel, *Politik mit der Erinnerung: Gedächtnisorte im Streit um die Nationalsozialistische Vergangenheit* (Munich, 1995), 326.

<sup>72</sup> They will also face competition from the twentieth anniversary celebrations marking the collapse of the Berlin wall in 1989 and German reunification in 1990.

<sup>73</sup> It was Germany's exclusion from the D-day commemoration ceremonies of 1984 that led Helmut Kohl to stage the controversial Bitburg ceremony of May 5, 1985. By 1995, however, Kohl was treated much more fraternally as one of the "Allies," being invited to London to the end of the war commemoration ceremonies on May 8 and hosting the leaders (or acting representatives) of England, France, Russia, and other countries in Berlin on May 8, 1995. See Niven, *Facing the Nazi Past*, chap. 4. Still, the 1995 ceremonies were partially overshadowed by a controversial right-wing German manifesto, "May 8, 1945—against Forgetting," which demanded that more attention be paid to German suffering during the war. By contrast, the ceremonies a decade later were quite calm, marked by the first-time inclusion of Germany at the June 2004 D-day commemorative ceremonies and the May 9, 2005, ceremonies in Moscow—both of which, according to Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder, symbolically marked the "final end" to World War II and the postwar era. "For the Germans, the War's Ambiguities Persist," *International Herald Tribune*, June 7, 2004, 1; Knut Pries, "Zyklus des Gedenkens," *Die Frankfurter Rundschau*, May 9, 2005.

areas of German life. In the heretofore hotly contested realm of monuments, the recent completion of Germany's central Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe in Berlin in 2005 will likely bring to a close the emotional, two-decade-long national discussion over how to commemorate the Holocaust in public fashion.<sup>74</sup> Meanwhile, in the area of politics, Angela Merkel's short tenure as chancellor since 2005 has thus far borne out media predictions that, as a representative of a younger generation of Germans, she would not share her predecessors' preoccupation with the Nazi past and would probably abstain from becoming embroiled in the larger politics of memory.<sup>75</sup> Finally, the possibility that Germany's Nazi past is weighing less heavily upon the nation these days is suggested by the growing readiness of ordinary Germans to display a normal sense of national pride, as was amply revealed—and much commented upon—during the nation's hosting of the 2006 World Cup.<sup>76</sup> To be sure, as was shown by the recent flap over Günter Grass's disclosure in 2006 of his membership in the Waffen-SS, controversies over the Nazi era will not disappear entirely. Moreover, the achievements of official memory may not fully reflect (or influence) the realities of popular memory, as is demonstrated by the persistence of neo-Nazism and xenophobia within certain segments of German society. Still, a more normalized and less emotionally fraught relationship to the Nazi past seems to be more of a reality these days than ever before.

If these suppositions are correct, then it is worth asking whether Germany's future course of memory work will set a precedent for other nations' confrontations with their own historical legacies and for the "memory boom" in general. Predicting the end of general phenomena based upon individual (and potentially isolated) cases can be hazardous, of course. Even if the Germans begin to reduce their attention to their own troubled past in the future, it does not follow that memory will evaporate as a global concern any time soon. After all, even in certain countries that have made strides in atoning for past historical injustices—for example, the United States or France—work remains to be done, particularly with respect to the legacies of slavery and colonialism.<sup>77</sup> Meanwhile, other nations, such as Japan and Russia, seem unable to

<sup>74</sup> To be sure, monuments will continue to be built at the local level in Germany but probably without the pathos or publicity of the Berlin debate.

<sup>75</sup> "Germany Passes Torch to New Generation," *New York Times*, November 22, 2005, A3.

<sup>76</sup> Richard Bernstein, "In World Cup Surprise, Flags Fly with German Pride," *New York Times*, June 18, 2006; Roger Cohen, "Germany and the Cup: A Liberating Normality," *New York Times*, June 17, 2006.

<sup>77</sup> Michael Bess has argued that France has mastered the legacy of Vichy. Michael Bess, *Choices under Fire: Moral Dimensions of World War II* (New York, 2006), 323. Yet the legacy of colonial rule in Algeria continues to haunt the nation. See William Cohen, "The Algerian War and French Memory," *Contemporary European History* 9,

decisively adopt self-critical perspectives toward their pasts, especially their behavior in the Second World War.<sup>78</sup> And still others, such as Turkey and China, have barely begun to confront such difficult legacies as the Armenian genocide and the Cultural Revolution.<sup>79</sup> Considering the fact that many parts of the world have unfinished historical business to attend to—the communist past in Eastern Europe, the legacies of colonial rule and postcolonial dictatorships in Latin America and Africa, and the experience of war and political violence in the Middle East all come to mind—the topic of memory will hardly disappear anytime soon. Still, any exercise in trend spotting always aims to identify the crest of the wave as a sign of things to come. And so, at the risk of flirting with overly teleological thinking, I think it would be a mistake to ignore the theoretical implications of Germany's increasingly successful managing of its past for other nations in the future. Even if it never reaches any abstract point of closure, Germany's trajectory of remembrance may be that of other nations in the long run.

This possibility seems more likely than not in light of the growing recognition that confronting painful pasts has become a major factor in determining the political legitimacy of modern nation-states. As Helmut Dubiel has noted, a new "culture of legitimation" has emerged throughout the world that is defined by "the abandonment of the traditional 'positive' form of political legitimation"—typically marked by "triumphalistic assertions of national history"—in favor of one that "incorporates the remorseful commemoration of collective injustice" perpetrated by nations at some point in their past.<sup>80</sup> This strategy makes not only political sense, moreover, but also economic sense, as political elites have realized that gaining the moral high ground by confronting

---

no. 3 (2000): 489–500. In the United States, the legacy of slavery continues to spark calls for apologies and reparations. See Jonathan Capehart, "Contrition for America's Curse," *Washington Post*, April 12, 2007, A27.

<sup>78</sup> Japanese Premier Shinzo Abe's recent denial of wartime sex slavery caused outrage in Asia during the spring of 2007. Norimitsu Onishi, "Japan Repeats Denial of Role in World War II Sex Slavery," *New York Times*, March 17, 2007, 4. Russia's angry reaction to Estonia's dismantling of a Soviet-era World War II memorial in 2007 reflects the nation's ongoing reluctance to question its mythologized view of the Second World War. Steven Lee Myers, "After Violent Night, Estonia Removes a Soviet-Era Memorial," *New York Times*, April 28, 2007, A8. See also Nina Tumarkin, *The Living and the Dead: The Rise and Fall of the Cult of World War II in Russia* (New York, 1994).

<sup>79</sup> See the *New York Times* editorial "Turkey, Armenia and Denial," May 16, 2006. On China's reluctance to confront the crimes of Mao's Cultural Revolution, see "Ignoring the Past: China," *Economist*, May 20, 2006.

<sup>80</sup> Helmut Dubiel, *Niemand ist frei von der Geschichte: Die Nationalsozialistische Herrschaft in den Debatten des Deutschen Bundestages* (Munich, 1999), 290, 292. See also Barkan, *Guilt of Nations*, xi.



their countries' difficult pasts is "good for business" and can help attract economic investment.<sup>81</sup> These trends reveal that for nations to retain their legitimacy and ensure their prosperity in the future, the extent to which they embark upon a process of historical reckoning will be decisive. In this regard, John Torpey's comment that "we are all Germans now" appropriately recognizes the standard set by Germany for the rest of the world.<sup>82</sup> And yet, this trend, however encouraging, has ambiguous implications for memory's future. For at the same time that the institutionalization of remembrance as a basic principle of the modern state's political legitimacy symbolizes memory's heightened influence, it also suggests that its influence may well be peaking and will have nowhere left to go but down.

This scenario has been implied by various scholars who have recently predicted an imminent end to the memory boom. In assessing Europe's history since 1945 in his recent book, *Postwar*, Tony Judt has written, "The first postwar Europe was built upon . . . forgetting as a way of life. Since 1989, Europe has been constructed . . . upon a compensatory surplus of memory: institutionalized public remembering as the very foundation of collective identity. The first could not endure—but nor will the second."<sup>83</sup> Echoing this point in a recent review of Judt's book, Charles Maier has claimed that one of the most "powerful European development[s]" of recent years is the "outgrowing of memory," observing that "whoever passes through a European airport and looks at the young or even middle aged professionals boarding a flight from London to Frankfurt, or Paris to Rome, must come away with the sense that the struggles of the postwar period are irretrievably past."<sup>84</sup> In light of such observations, it is possible that the memory boom's success may eventually prove to be its undoing.

#### SEPTEMBER 11, 2001, AND THE END OF THE POST-COLD WAR ERA

Another reason for the possible future decline of memory as a cultural phenomenon is the dramatically new political context that has emerged world-

<sup>81</sup> Economic motives were directly involved in Switzerland's decision to establish a five-billion-dollar fund for Holocaust victims who lost money in Swiss banks. Barkan, *Guilt of Nations*, xvi. Similarly, Montgomery, Alabama, has begun to market its progressive confrontation with segregation and the civil rights movement as a means of luring business to the city and region at large. See Tony Horwitz, *Confederates in the Attic: Dispatches from the Unfinished Civil War* (New York, 1998), 357–58. The NAACP's decision in 1999 to launch an economic boycott of South Carolina in order to halt the flying of the confederate flag over the state house in Columbia is another example of what might be called the "economics of memory."

<sup>82</sup> Torpey, "Introduction," 3.

<sup>83</sup> Tony Judt, *Postwar*, 829.

<sup>84</sup> Charles Maier, "Europa Europa," *Nation*, January 9, 2006, 24.

wide since September 11, 2001. As noted above, some observers have interpreted the memory boom of the 1990s as a byproduct of the "death of the future"—that is, the general retreat from progressive political activism following the cold war's end. In this sense, the surge of interest in memory could arguably be seen as something of a luxury made possible by the arrival of a comparatively secure, postideological world without major political threats to worry about or causes to pursue.<sup>85</sup> If true (and the point is debatable), then the sudden return of ideological struggle and insecurity in the wake of the September 11, 2001, attacks in the United States, the ensuing wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, and the global spread of radical Islamic terrorism have dramatically changed the dominant political context throughout the world.<sup>86</sup> For this reason, it is questionable whether the focus on memory—on struggles over the past—will maintain its current relevance in a world facing major crises in the present. Terrorism is hardly the only threat facing the West today. The destabilizing behavior of aspiring or existing nuclear nation-states, such as Iran and North Korea, the rise of China and India as major economic competitors to the West, and the worrisome prospect of global warming all represent serious threats as well. As these challenges become more acute, they may eventually make the 1990s look like a blissfully naive belle époque in retrospect—an interlude between the cessation of the cold war and the dawning of an era still to be defined. In such a world, the study of memory, seen as so urgently necessary in the comparatively relaxed 1990s, may increasingly appear to be a luxury that a new era of crisis can ill afford.

## THE END OF IDENTITY POLITICS

In today's dramatically supercharged political climate, it is arguable, furthermore, that another factor that originally boosted the interest in memory—the rise of identity politics and multiculturalism—is beginning to decline as well. If it was the comparatively postpolitical atmosphere of the 1990s that allowed identity politics to thrive, the return of political crisis since September 11 has led some observers to brand identity politics a "self-indulgent" pursuit unbefitting of changing times.<sup>87</sup> No wonder, then, that increasing numbers of journalists and other pundits have begun to proclaim the "death" or "end" of

<sup>85</sup> This is the implication of Charles Maier's essay "Surfeit of Memory?" and John Torpey's essay "The Pursuit of the Past: A Potential Perspective," in *Theorizing Historical Consciousness*, ed. Peter Seixas (Toronto, 2004), 240–55.

<sup>86</sup> To be sure, some historians have questioned whether 9/11 deserves to be seen as a point of rupture in the periodization of the twenty-first century. Niall Ferguson, "2011: Ten Years from Now," *New York Times Magazine*, December 2, 2001; Joseph J. Ellis, "Finding a Place for 9/11 in American History," *New York Times*, January 28, 2006, A17.

<sup>87</sup> This was Francis Fukuyama's assessment in the immediate wake of 9/11. "Francis

multiculturalism altogether.<sup>88</sup> To be sure, it is not that different groups have entirely stopped, or will stop, pursuing their own particularistic political agendas in the near future but rather that the attacks of September 11 and the ensuing wars in Afghanistan and Iraq have undercut the legitimacy of identity politics as a broader agenda within many circles. After all, if identity politics emerged out of a process of social fragmentation and a declining sense of national affiliation during the 1970s, the events of 9/11 may have given the nation-state a new lease on life by promoting the cause of national unity. The phenomenon of external threats promoting internal unity within nation-states, of course, is an old and familiar one (as is the “social imperialist” manipulation of such threats), and so it is hardly surprising that it has manifested itself throughout the world in those nations that recently have been targeted by radical Islamic terrorist groups.<sup>89</sup> The attacks of 9/11 immediately forged a climate of national unity in the United States, and, while it proved to be temporary, it signaled new possibilities for national affiliation. It is true that unity can easily fray in times of crisis, but as long as the threat of terrorism persists, it will arguably tend to reinforce centripetal forces and lessen the appeal of pursuing particularistic political agendas.

The trend toward unity is especially reflected in the plummeting appeal of multiculturalism throughout Europe. Radical Islamic terrorism has shattered the vision of a multicultural society in which different ethnic and religious groups were permitted to live (frequently with generous state support) without integrating into mainstream society. As a result, the idea of integrating new immigrants (mostly of Arab and Muslim background) into the larger society, instead of allowing them to maintain their particular distinctiveness, has now gained traction within intellectual and political circles in nations such as France, Germany, the Netherlands, and Great Britain.<sup>90</sup> In the process, the goal

---

Fukuyama says Tuesday's Attack Marks the End of 'America's Exceptionalism,'" *London Financial Times*, September 15, 2001, 1.

<sup>88</sup> David Brooks, "The Death of Multiculturalism," *New York Times*, April 27, 2006, A27; Amnon Rubinstein, "The End of Multiculturalism," *New York Sun*, May 1, 2006, 9; John Lloyd, "The End of Multiculturalism," *New Statesman*, May 27, 2002, <http://www.newstatesman.com/People/200205270012>.

<sup>89</sup> Francis Fukuyama predicted that the 9/11 attacks would "make American society stronger and more unified at home" ("Francis Fukuyama says Tuesday's Attack Marks the End of 'America's Exceptionalism'"). The same dynamic surfaced in other European nations that suffered terrorist attacks, such as England and Spain, as well as in other nations, such as Lebanon and Jordan, that witnessed mass demonstrations of people united against a common terrorist threat.

<sup>90</sup> In France, in the wake of the *banlieue* riots in the fall of 2005, political elites are now trying to devise new ways to integrate young Muslims into the social and economic order. "Sarkozy Plans 'Contracts' for New Migrants," *London Financial*

of multicultural diversity is being challenged by the growing desire for national unity.<sup>91</sup>

The implications for the memory boom seem clear. If the rise of identity politics initially encouraged separate groups to probe their own histories and formulate "countermemories" to the dominant historical narratives within their societies, the potential decline of identity politics and the increasing tendency to affiliate with the nation-state may well discourage such investigations in the future. This is not to suggest that the quest for particularistic forms of memory will disappear among various groups. But it is doubtful whether they will get as patient a hearing as they did in the multicultural 1990s. As the problems of the present mount, the lure of the past will likely wane.

#### THE WANING OF POSTMODERNISM

At the same time that the appeal of identity politics seems to be fading, so too is the influence of postmodernism. As it became increasingly embraced by Western academics during the 1990s, postmodern theory lost its subversive edge and became an established part of the Western intellectual canon. For this reason, it is no surprise that one of the most recognizable gurus of postmodernism, Jean Baudrillard, recently affirmed that "nobody needs French theory" anymore, while cultural historian Michael Roth flatly declared, "The theory wars are over. . . . The new has grown old. It's time to write the history of postmodernism."<sup>92</sup> Apart from the sense of postmodernism's intel-

---

*Times*, February 6, 2006, 8. In Germany, politicians are reviving the old discussion about forging a German—or, as some prefer, a European—dominant culture (*Leitkultur*). "Why Europe Needs a 'Leading Culture,'" *Spiegel-Online*, November 26, 2004; Charles Hawley, "Germany's Pseudo Culture War," *Spiegel-Online*, November 23, 2004. Dutch political leaders in the Netherlands have begun to question the country's separatistic social order of "pillars," which has been blamed for keeping Muslim immigrants from assimilating into the majority society. Christopher Caldwell, "Holland Daze: The Dutch Rethink Multiculturalism," *Weekly Standard*, December 27, 2004; Maria Margaronis, "Dutch Tolerance Tried," *Nation*, December 20, 2004. And politicians in Great Britain have also, if controversially, called for British culture to become more homogenous. "Race Relations Chief Savaged for Call to End Multiculturalism," *Observer*, April 4, 2004; "Multicultural Britain Is Not Working Says Tory Chief," *Daily Telegraph*, August 3, 2005.

<sup>91</sup> To be sure, while support for identity politics may be declining within large sections of European and American society, it may actually be intensifying among Muslims worldwide.

<sup>92</sup> Deborah Solomon, "Continental Drift," interview with Jean Baudrillard, *New York Times Magazine*, November 20, 2005; Michael Roth's review of Keith Jenkins's *Refiguring History*, in *History and Theory*, October 2004, 378. Andreas Huyssen has

lectual exhaustion, the main reason why various observers have felt compelled to declare “the end of postmodernism” is the bleak new reality of the post-9/11 world.<sup>93</sup> Today, there is less desire in many circles for relativism than certainty, and postmodernism’s association with the former has led it to be attacked from all wings of the political spectrum for being out of step with the new cultural mood. Predictably, conservatives charged that postmodernism’s promotion of relativism left it unable to condemn the evil of al Qaeda’s 9/11 attacks and predicted, as the *National Review* did in 2002, that the movement was consequently “on its way to the ash heap of history.”<sup>94</sup> But centrists, such as Edward Rothstein of the *New York Times*, also hoped that the attacks of 9/11 would spark a rejection of postmodernism, while critics on the left, such as Terry Eagleton, admitted that postmodern theory had been “silent” on the topic of evil.<sup>95</sup> Even though defenders of postmodernism, such as Stanley Fish, have predictably tried to defend the cause, it seems safe to say that the public mood has turned against it.<sup>96</sup>

In truth, even without 9/11, a turn away from the relativistic mind-set associated with postmodernism was probably overdue. Intellectual and cultural currents have come and gone with a fair degree of regularity in American history. As Peter Novick’s book *That Noble Dream* has shown, the American historical profession has fluctuated between phases of belief in the possibility of objective historical scholarship and the certainty of historical truth, on the one hand, and more “presentist” periods of commitment to the subjectivity and relativity of historical knowledge, on the other. Since the United States—and much of Western society in general—has been immersed in a four-decade period of commitment to relativism, borne of the social movements of the 1960s and the rise of postmodernism in the 1980s, it was probably ready to

---

agreed, writing that the “whole debate about postmodernism . . . appears quite parochial today” (Andreas Huyssen, “Introduction: Modernism after Postmodernity,” *New German Critique*, Fall 2006, 2).

<sup>93</sup> Julia Keller, “After the Attack, Postmodernism Loses Its Glib Grip,” *Chicago Tribune*, September 27, 2001; Louis Menand, “Faith, Hope, and Clarity: September 11th and the American Soul,” *New Yorker*, September 16, 2002.

<sup>94</sup> David Kopel, “Uncertain Uncertainty,” *National Review Online*, April 4, 2002, <http://www.nationalreview.com/kopel/kopel040402.asp>. For another conservative prediction of postmodernism’s demise, see Charles Colson and Anne Morse, “The Postmodern Crackup,” *Christianity Today*, December 2003, 72.

<sup>95</sup> Edward Rothstein, “Attacks on U.S. Challenge the Perspectives of Postmodern True Believers,” *New York Times*, September 22, 2001, A17; Elaine Showalter, “A Champion of Cultural Theory?” *Chronicle of Higher Education*, January 23, 2004.

<sup>96</sup> Stanley Fish, “Condemnation without Absolutes,” *New York Times*, October 15, 2001, A19. Rothstein replied to Fish in “Moral Relativity Is a Hot Topic? True. Absolutely,” *New York Times*, July 13, 2002.

shift back toward objectivism. The stage may thus be set for a return to the kind of "consensus history" that took root in the American historical profession during the struggles against fascism and communism from the 1940s through the 1960s. Such a turn would clearly suit the mood of an era attempting to forge a unified struggle against the West's enemies and assuredly satisfy conservatives.<sup>97</sup> And yet, leftists have spoken out against relativism and on behalf of objectivity as well. As the British Marxist historian Eric Hobsbawm recently put it, "It is time to re-establish the coalition of those who believe in history as a rational inquiry into the course of human transformations, against . . . relativists and postmodernists who deny this possibility."<sup>98</sup> Moreover, it is not only scholars who are calling for a return to objective truth. There seems to be a desire for it emerging within American culture more broadly, as part of a backlash against the striking number of cases involving plagiarism, lies, and deception in contemporary American cultural, intellectual, and political life.<sup>99</sup>

All of these trends may bode ill for the memory boom. If memory partly rose to prominence on the coattails of postmodern relativism, it may decline in status with the intensifying desire for objective truth. Before long, if present trends continue, memory will once more have to take a backseat to its traditional rival, history.

## ACADEMIC LIFE CYCLES

The life span of memory's influence as an academic specialization (and, by extension, an "industry") may also be nearing an end, finally, for reasons having to do with the natural rhythms of scholarly innovation. As scholars of historiography have shown, new areas of specialization within the field of history have typically lasted for no more than several decades before being eclipsed by newer methodological trends and movements. In the twentieth

<sup>97</sup> Peter Novick, *That Noble Dream: The 'Objectivity Question' and the American Historical Profession* (Cambridge, 1988). Novick discusses a period of belief in objectivity from the late nineteenth century to 1914, a new era of relativism between 1918 and the outbreak of World War II, a return to objectivity from the 1940s to the 1960s, and a new surge of presentist relativism since the 1960s.

<sup>98</sup> Eric Hobsbawm, "In Defence of History: It Is Fashionable to Say 'My Truth Is as Valid as Yours.' But It's Not True," *Guardian*, January 15, 2005, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2005/jan/15/news.comment>.

<sup>99</sup> The scandals over plagiarism in academic scholarship and literature involving Doris Kearns Goodwin, Joseph Ellis, and Kaavya Viswanathan; the embellishment or outright fabrication of fact by novelists like James Frey and J. T. Leroy; the fraudulent reporting of journalists Stephen Glass and Jason Blair; and the insertion of political propaganda into legitimate media outlets, whether by government-paid journalists like Armstrong Williams in the United States or U.S.-Army-funded Arab journalists in Iraq, have all inspired outrage.

century, the field of European history largely remained focused on political and diplomatic history until challenged by a series of subsequent movements, which included (among others) the “total history” of the French Annales School, which remained influential from the 1920s through the 1950s; the Marxist-influenced “new social history” of the 1950s and 1960s; the short-lived movement of psychohistory in the late 1960s and 1970s; and the “new cultural history” of the 1980s and 1990s.<sup>100</sup> To be sure, none of these earlier methodological specialties entirely disappeared, and most continue to exist today. All of them, however, have had to accept varying, if temporary, degrees of marginalization as newer movements have grabbed the spotlight.

This dynamic may also apply to the study of memory. Having emerged as an outgrowth of the new cultural history during the 1980s, the field of memory studies has now been established for more than two decades. During this period, the discipline has thrived. Yet if prior patterns hold, it may soon be nearing the peak of its influence and will eventually be supplanted by a new field of inquiry. The increasing questioning of cultural history’s elevated status within the historical profession is one indication that memory’s influence may soon be waning.<sup>101</sup> So too is the fact that graduate students in the nation’s premier graduate programs in history do not seem to be writing dissertations on memory as much as they did a decade ago.<sup>102</sup> It is unclear at

<sup>100</sup> Georg Iggers, *New Directions in European Historiography* (Hanover, NH, 1984); Gertrude Himmelfarb, *The New History and the Old: Critical Essays and Reappraisals* (Cambridge, MA, 1987); Lynn Hunt, ed., *The New Cultural History* (Berkeley, 1989).

<sup>101</sup> Geoff Eley’s article “The Profane and Imperfect World of Historiography,” which draws on his recent book, *A Crooked Line*, recently sparked a discussion in the *American Historical Review* Forum about whether cultural history has reached the end of its influence and ought to be replaced by a return to social history. See the April 2008 issue of the *American Historical Review*, 391–437.

<sup>102</sup> Searching the American Historical Association (AHA) Web site’s database History Doctoral Programs by Name under the category “recent PhDs,” I examined the titles of the dissertations produced by graduate students at the top twenty-five graduate programs in history (as ranked by *U.S. News and World Report*). I found fifty-three dissertations with “memory” in the title. (I deliberately kept my search narrow, fully aware of the fact that dissertations can focus on the subject of memory without having the term in the title.) These fifty-three dissertations were produced between the years 1991 and 2008. Of these, thirty were filed before the attacks of 9/11 (that is in 2001 or before), and twenty-three were filed afterward (2002–8). Within this latter category, most (eighteen) were filed in the immediate years after 9/11, meaning they were conceived before the attacks occurred. Only five were filed in 2007 or after, which is the soonest any graduate student could have completed a dissertation conceived after 9/11. The fact that forty-eight of fifty-three dissertations on memory were conceived before 9/11 and five were conceived afterward suggests a falloff of interest in memory. That said, a look at “current dissertations” on the AHA Web site lists nineteen dissertations underway with “memory” in the title. Adding this number to the five filed

the moment whether any new thematic or methodological focus is poised to take memory's place. One would suspect that, since the turn of the millennium and 9/11, graduate students have become interested in probing the roots of the world's present-day crises and have turned their attention to studying the history of the modern Middle East, Africa, China, and India (all of which are fields where faculty positions have begun to increase) as well as such topics as environmental history and globalization.<sup>103</sup> Of course, it is possible, as Geoff Eley has recently argued, that no single interpretive paradigm will emerge and that a "new pluralism" will reign in the humanities and social sciences.<sup>104</sup> Yet, in view of prior patterns of historiographical turnover, it seems likely that the study of memory will eventually be eclipsed by some new specialization that reflects the changing circumstances of the contemporary world.

#### THE FADING OF MEMORY: FOR BETTER OR WORSE?

In light of the multiplying signs that the interest in memory may soon be fading, it is worth asking whether this development should be welcomed or bemoaned. Not surprisingly, opinions have differed sharply on this question. A good number of scholars have taken a bearish stance on the memory industry, citing a variety of reasons why they relish its impending demise. Some have complained about its allegedly adverse impact upon the practice of history. Kerwin Klein, for example, has expressed the concern that the memory industry's embrace of unrigorous, "sacralizing" concepts borrowed from "New Age" thought—such as "trauma," "mourning," "redemption," "healing," and "testimony"—has undermined the field of history as a "secular, critical practice."<sup>105</sup> Other scholars, meanwhile, have complained about what they see as the worrisome political tendencies of the memory boom. John

---

after 2007, a total of twenty-four dissertations have been conceived since 9/11. If we consider the fact that these twenty-four dissertations have been conceived in six years' time together with the fact that the forty-eight mentioned above were conceived in the ten years between 1991 and 2001, the falloff in production does not seem as dramatic. It suggests, indeed, that there will not be any crash of the memory industry but rather a "soft landing." For the AHA Web site, see <http://www.historians.org/projects/cge/PhD/AlphaList.htm>.

<sup>103</sup> Robin Wilson, "Job Market Is Hot for Now," *Chronicle of Higher Education*, January 27, 2006, 12. Advertisements for beginning faculty jobs in African history, e.g., were up 92 percent in 2004–5 over the year before, and jobs in Middle Eastern history were up by 64 percent.

<sup>104</sup> See Eley, "Profane and Imperfect World of Historiography," 433.

<sup>105</sup> Klein, "On the Emergence," 145. See also Barbara A. Misztal, "The Sacralization of Memory," *European Journal of Social Theory* 7, no. 1 (2004): 67–84.



Torpey and Charles Maier have charged that the new prominence of memory reflects a neoconservative trend of political quietism that reflects “our current incapacity to entertain transformative political projects for the future.”<sup>106</sup> Still other scholars have questioned both the memory boom and the memory industry by attacking one of the trends that directly contributed to their emergence—the rise of Holocaust memory. For David Stannard, Peter Novick, and others, the increased attention toward the Holocaust—what the notorious polemicist Norman Finkelstein sarcastically, but tellingly, termed the “Holocaust industry”—has had the adverse effect of overshadowing, if not denying, the existence of other groups’ historic sufferings.<sup>107</sup> Whatever their specific objections to the topic of memory, these critics have implicitly recommended a healthy dose of forgetting. After predicting the imminent end of Europe’s obsession with remembrance, for example, Tony Judt has concluded that “some measure of . . . forgetting [is a] . . . necessary condition of civic health.”<sup>108</sup> And Charles Maier, believing there to be a “surfeit of memory,” has expressed the hope “that the future of memory is not too bright.”<sup>109</sup> Especially as other scholars, such as Harald Weinrich, David Gross, and Marc Augé, have begun to historicize the phenomenon of forgetting and recognize its virtues, it appears that memory will no longer be automatically hailed as an unalloyed good.<sup>110</sup>

At the same time, however, many scholars have remained bullish on memory and have energetically defended it. Some have rejected the idea that memory has had an adverse effect on history, pointing out, as Wulf Kansteiner has done, that in the wake of postmodernism, most scholars have been forced to recognize that neither memory nor history has a claim to absolute objectivity.<sup>111</sup> Others have rejected the charge of memory’s political conservatism, insisting that it has promoted a largely progressive political agenda throughout the world. Evidence for this claim has been marshaled by scholars like Elazar Barkan, Daniel Levy, and Natan Sznaider, who have specifically credited the

<sup>106</sup> Maier, “Overcoming the Past?” 303; Torpey, “Pursuit of the Past,” 246–47. See also David Hoogland Noon, “Operation Enduring Analogy: World War II, the War on Terror, and the Uses of Historical Memory,” *Rhetoric and Public Affairs*, Fall 2004, 339–65.

<sup>107</sup> For a larger discussion, see Gavriel D. Rosenfeld, “The Politics of Uniqueness: Reflections on the Recent Polemical Turn in Holocaust and Genocide Scholarship,” *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 13, no. 1 (Spring 1999): 28–61.

<sup>108</sup> Judt, “From the House of the Dead,” 16. See also Tony Judt, “The ‘Problem of Evil’ in Postwar Europe,” *New York Review of Books*, February 14, 2008, 33–35.

<sup>109</sup> Maier, “Surfeit of Memory?” 151.

<sup>110</sup> Weinrich, *Lethe*; Gross, *Lost Time*; Marc Augé, *Oblivion* (Minneapolis, 2004).

<sup>111</sup> Kansteiner quotes Peter Burke’s remark from 1989 that “neither memories nor histories seem objective any longer” (Kansteiner, “Finding Meaning in Memory,” 184).

growth of Holocaust memory with the emergence of a "global morality" and a "global memory culture" that has inspired other persecuted groups to pursue redress for historical injustices and helped to advance human rights worldwide.<sup>112</sup> In a slightly different vein, Aleida Assmann has recently pointed to the transnational effort in Europe to create a "common historical memory for the growing European Union" as a promising method of strengthening European integration and transforming the European Union into a "community of memory."<sup>113</sup> For these and other scholars, the emergence of calls to appreciate the virtues of forgetting are ill-advised. From their perspective, the intensifying talk of "memory fatigue" simply underscores the need to reaffirm memory's merits. As Eric Langenbacher and Friederike Eigler have concluded, "Memory still matters."<sup>114</sup>

It is impossible to resolve this ongoing discussion in the limited space of this article. But it is worth noting that both the critics and the defenders of memory can easily be charged with tendentious argumentation. The fact that some of the scholars who have predicted memory's impending decline are the same ones who have criticized its alleged shortcomings leads one to suspect that their predictions may partly be exercises in wish fulfillment. The same can be said of those who continue to defend memory's enduring relevance while ignoring the massive changes that have swept the world since the boom first began. Both sides of the debate, of course, have a major stake in its outcome. Indeed, in arguing about the future of the memory boom, both sides are positioning themselves to determine the future of the academic memory industry. Just as critics of the boom hope that attacking it will weaken the industry and open up the contemporary scholarly terrain to new topics of inquiry, their opponents hope that defending it will enable them to protect the scholarly redoubts that they have labored so long to create. This being the case, it is hard to trust either camp's conclusions. This fact, in addition to the possibility that the debate may only be in its beginning stages, makes it difficult to determine whether the eventual end of the memory boom should be viewed with anticipation or unease.

For the time being, the safest conclusion is that neither reaction is warranted. It would be just as misguided to cheer the memory boom's demise as to be overly fearful of it. Memory may have been unfairly criticized, but it should not be seen as an unadulterated good in and of itself. There is plenty

<sup>112</sup> For defenses of memory's progressive political character, see Barkan, *Guilt of Nations*, xxiii–xxiv, 26; Levy and Sznajder, *Holocaust and Memory in the Global Age*.

<sup>113</sup> Aleida Assmann, "Europe: A Community of Memory?" *Bulletin of the German Historical Institute*, Spring 2007, 11–26. See the reply by Peter Novick and Assmann's rejoinder (27–38).

<sup>114</sup> Eric Langenbacher and Friederike Eigler, "Introduction: Memory Boom or Memory Fatigue in 21st Century Germany?" *German Politics and Society*, Fall 2005, 1.

of historical evidence, after all, that memory and forgetting have each served indispensable functions within societies the world over. Part of their value derives from their ability to serve as counterweights to one another. Just as memory serves an important ethical function during periods of forgetfulness, forgetting permits life to move forward in eras that cannot escape memory's grip. Both, moreover, are necessary for true historical understanding. As Otto Friedrich has persuasively argued, even if "[George] Santayana was probably right . . . [in arguing that] those who cannot remember history are condemned to repeat it . . . [it] is probably just as true that those who cannot forget the past are condemned to misunderstand it."<sup>115</sup> Of course, it remains tremendously difficult to assess objectively whether too much or too little memory exists in a given society at a given time. One person's shortage is another's surfeit. For this reason, memory's future may continue to spark disagreement for some time to come.

## CONCLUSION

In the final analysis, I am reluctant to make any definitive claims about the ultimate fate of either the memory boom or the memory industry. I hesitate to do so partly because I share most historians' discomfort with making predictive claims but also because I am aware of the difficulties inherent in trend spotting as a mode of analysis. Even though we may belong to the "trend spotting generation" and have become adept at recognizing how diverse factors slowly converge until they reach a "tipping point" and become new trends, it is my sense that we remain less clear about why existing trends fade and ultimately disappear.<sup>116</sup> I have tried to suggest that the cultural and intellectual factors that originally fostered the memory boom have begun to wane since the turn of the millennium, but whether they have yet collectively reached what we might call the tipping point in reverse remains unclear. That point is surely in the offing, however, and the memory boom's status will inevitably be downgraded once it is reached.

The same is true of the memory industry. The production of academic studies on the subject of memory, as noted above, will partly be affected by memory's changing status in the world at large. But, appropriately enough, economic forces may shape the industry's future as well. In recent years, the field of memory studies has expanded so rapidly that it could face something like a crisis of overproduction. With the field currently spanning everything

<sup>115</sup> Otto Friedrich, *Before the Deluge: A Portrait of Berlin in the 1920s* (New York, 1995), xxi.

<sup>116</sup> Daniel Radosh, "The Trendspotting Generation" (originally published in *GQ*, April, 1988), <http://www.radosh.net/writing/trends.html>; Malcolm Gladwell, *The Tipping Point: How Little Things Can Make a Big Difference* (New York, 2002).

from international relations to cookbooks, there exists the possibility that the supply of scholarship will outpace demand and eventually result in a memory glut (or, to use the contemporary term of choice, a memory “bubble”).<sup>117</sup> This outcome is especially possible if the competition between scholars to discover uncharted analytical terrain increasingly drives them to narrowly specialized topics that appeal only to small audiences. At this juncture, as the industry’s excess capacity becomes apparent, many of the scholars who once jumped onto the memory bandwagon may decide to leap to other topics, and the field of memory studies will no longer be able to sustain its previous rate of expansion.

This is not to say that the memory industry will experience anything like a crash. Indeed, it is far more likely to experience a soft landing. Even if certain scholars leave the field of memory studies, others will continue to do productive work as the discipline matures. Moreover, just as there is a considerable time lag between the emergence of scholarly trends and their manifestation in the world of academic publishing, it is equally true that their waning will take time to register as well. Even once the memory boom is over, in other words, the scholarly memory industry may survive for some time thereafter. By then, of course, the field will have been downgraded from a formidable industry to an ordinary subdiscipline within academia at large.

Some may be tempted to view this demotion with anxiety, as a popping of the memory “bubble.” But they need not be overly concerned. For as Daniel Gross’s recent work of economic history, *Pop! Why Bubbles Are Great for the Economy*, has shown, the collapse of most economic bubbles in the United States during the past two centuries has had a silver lining by leaving behind valuable infrastructure and cultural know-how that has provided the basis for further growth and development.<sup>118</sup> A similar fate may lie in store for the memory boom and the memory industry. Both have created a massive infrastructural apparatus—in the form of innumerable museums, memorials, documentation centers, and academic journals—that will keep memory institutionally anchored even after it departs from the spotlight. Even if they no longer make international headlines, historical exhibits will continue to be organized and monographs will be written and conferences convened—and all of them will contribute to our evolving historical knowledge. The same can be said about the habits of mind that have been created by the memory boom and the memory industry. The many debates that have erupted over divisive historical legacies since the late 1980s have conditioned us to think about the

<sup>117</sup> Andrei Markovits and Simon Reich, *The German Predicament: Memory and Power in the New Europe* (Ithaca, NY, 2001); Jan-Werner Müller, *Memory and Power in Postwar Europe*; Cara De Silva, *In Memory’s Kitchen: A Legacy from the Women of Terezin* (New York, 1996).

<sup>118</sup> Daniel Gross, *Pop! Why Bubbles Are Great for the Economy* (New York, 2007).

relationship between history and memory in new and more sophisticated ways. Today, it is easier for us to identify the telltale signs of unmastered pasts and to recognize genuine efforts to atone for historical injustices. As a result, whenever controversies over the past erupt in the future—and they are sure to surface wherever unmastered pasts remain—our recent experience of the memory boom will, one hopes, make us better able to understand and resolve them.

These realities should hearten those who fear for the future of remembrance at the end of the memory boom. There will probably not be another worldwide wave of interest in memory like the one we have just witnessed anytime soon. The volatile course of contemporary events will probably ensure that public attention remains focused more on the present than the past. But even as the boom ebbs, its legacy will remain with us in countless ways. Indeed, to the extent that today's world crises have their roots in unmastered pasts, our newfound ability to probe their origins may help us master the challenges of the present.