Legacies of Divided Memory for German Debates About the Holocaust in the 1990s
Jeffrey Herf

The legacies of almost a half-century of divided memory continue to influence commemoration of the Holocaust in unified Germany.¹ Because these practices were decisively shaped by the multiple restorations of past political traditions in the early postwar period, I will comment on the commemorations of the first two postwar decades in East and West Germany and conclude with brief remarks about how past legacies influence recent practices. I will examine the significance of the Holocaust in these events compared to the attention given to the suffering of Nazi Germany's non-Jewish victims. I will also consider the extent to which distinctions were made among the various victims of Nazi Germany, the kind of hierarchies that were established among them, and the use of commemoration for political purposes.

In the midst of the justly described era of silence and amnesia about the Holocaust at the level of popular mentalities, there emerged among some politicians (as well as among some intellectuals and artists) a tradition of commemoration of Jewish suffering. This tradition emerged in West Germany because of restorations of previously defeated political traditions and leaders made possible by complete allied victory. While millions of Germans avoided discussion of the Holocaust because they were either implicated in crimes, knew others who were, still harbored anti-Semitic views, or did not want to examine a criminal past, this same proximity to events drove some political leaders to speak out. Yet for these political leaders, proximity, personal experience, and memory spurred them on to establish public memory.

In East Berlin in the immediate postwar years, or the Nuremberg interregnum, the issue of where the mass murder of the Jews should fit into the general Communist memory was most passionately debated first within the organization Victims of Fascism (OdF, Opfer des Faschismus) and later in the Association of those Persecuted by the Nazi Regime (VVN, Verein des Verfolgten des Naziregimes). The OdF was the first political organization to stress, as one headline put it in September 1945, that "Jews were also victims of fascism" and the first to organize Gedenktage and commemorative events in which memory of the rassisch Verfolgten, or those persecuted on grounds of race (that is, Jewish victims) found a place. Though Communists clearly dominated this organization of former prisoners of concentration

camps and members of the anti-Nazi resistance, it also included Social Democrats, Protestants and Catholic clergy, and a large percentage of Jews. In these early years, leaders such as Franz Dahlem, who later fell victim to the anti-cosmopolitan purge of 1952/53, gave speeches that stressed Jewish suffering, as well as the persecution of political prisoners and the peoples of eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. Commemoration had not yet entered the period of a clear, zero-sum game in which the memory of the Jews was marginalized or repressed. Yet even in this early period, and despite Dahlem's comparative inclusiveness, he and other former resistance leaders, such as Alfred Kantorowicz, made a clear and clearly invidious distinction between "fighters against fascism" and "victims of fascism." The distinction broadly overlapped in the minds of leaders of the political resistance with the distinction between Jews and non-Jews, though many Jewish Communists accepted the distinction as well.

As tensions between the Soviet Union and the west intensified in these early years, commemorative events in the Soviet zone became part of "the fight for peace", that is, part of Soviet and Communist criticism of western policy. In April 1948, for example, ceremonies of commemoration at former concentrations camps took place under banners extolling "fighters against fascism, fighters for peace." Stefan Heymann, a VVN leader, evoked the memory of murdered Jews, Poles, resistance fighters, the soldiers in the allied armies ("above all the Soviet army") and asserted that "as fighters against fascism we were always fighters for peace." The idea that mass death had a meaning, that those killed by the Nazis had not died in vain, and that their deaths had a clear contemporary political significance remained a continuing theme of Communist commemoration.

The uneasy balance of the memory of Jewish suffering and of Communist martyrdom that one finds in the VVN's early ceremonies came to an end as a result of the anti-cosmopolitan campaign of 1949-1953, which reached its highpoint in the winter of 1952/53 with the arrest of Paul Merker and the purging of Franz Dahlem from the Central Committee. In February

2 "For years, we [German Communist camp inmates at Mauthausen] ourselves were powerless witnesses as every Jew in the Mauthausen concentration camp was beaten to death, driven into the electrified wires, driven through a cordon, and as week by week Russian officers among the prisoners of war, and especially the political commissars, were shot by a firing squad or in the back of the neck. We saw the intentionally planned extermination of Poland's and Czechoslovakia's intellectuals, of the Communist cadres of different countries, and of capture partisans and men of the resistance movements of Yugoslavia, Greece, France, Belgium, Italy who were hung, killed with lethal injections, poisoned and simply starved or frozen to death. We had to watch with clenched teeth in the last two weeks of the was as 3,000 individuals who had been starved to the point of skeletons and could barely stand were driven into the gas chambers, and as in the last moments before the collapse forty more of our best Austrian party comrades were killed. In view of the intended destruction of the camp, we ourselves escaped death thanks only to the rapid strikes of the United Nations." Franz Dahlem, "Einige Probleme unserer künftigen Arbeit in Deutschland: Rede vor ehemaligen Häftlingen des KZ Mauthausen", in Franz Dahlem, Ausgewählte Reden und Aufsätze 1919-1979 Zur Geschichte der Arbeiterbewegung (East Berlin, 1980), 251-69; reprinted from Franz Dahlem, Weg und Ziel des antifaschistischen Kampfes: Ausgewählte Reden und Aufsätze (East Berlin, 1952), 86-105. On Mauthausen see Gordon J. Horwitz, In the Shadow of Death: Living Outside the Gates of Mauthausen (New York, 1990).
1953 – two months after the executions in the Slansky Trial in Prague, and after Merker's arrest – the SED leadership dissolved the VVN. It assigned the responsibilities for commemoration of the Nazi past to organizations closely controlled by the SED Central Committee, particularly the "Committee of Antifascist Resistance Fighters." This committee, whose members included Alexander Abusch, Rosa Thalmann, Anna Seghers, and Johannes R. Becher, played a central role in the planning of the East German national memorials dedicated in Buchenwald in 1958 and in Sachsenhausen in 1961.

As I have argued in my book, *Divided Memory: The Nazi Past in the Two Germanys*, the anticosmopolitan purge of the winter of 1952/53 was the decisive event in the history of East German public memory of the Holocaust. This campaign was carried out in the Soviet Union and its eastern European satellites, including East Germany. It replaced the tension between the general memory of Nazi crimes and the specifics of the Jewish catastrophe, together with moments of solidarity between Communists and Jews of the Nuremberg interregnum, with a clear antifascist orthodoxy in which Jewish matters were, at best, marginalized. At worst, Jews became part of East Germany's imperialist, capitalist enemies. The contending voices within the Communist Party now gave way to one unified Stalinist version.

Abusch, who had endured the purge and reemerged as a leading cultural official only after a series of recantations of his deviations regarding the Jewish question in wartime Mexican exile, served as the minister of culture during the planning stages of both memorials. East German president Otto Grotewohl chaired the planning committee. In 1954 in memos to the committee, Grotewohl wrote that the memorials' most important goal was "to place the shame and disgrace of the past before the young generation so that they can draw lessons from it." Yet they must also "indicate the path toward the future… give expression to the will for life and struggle that developed among the prisoners" in their "resistance to Nazi barbarism." They should combine remembrance of the past and warning for the present and future, while demonstrating that the resistance legacy continued in the policies of East German antifascism. Though the memorials would show the victims' suffering, "above all they bear witness to the indefatigable strength of the antifascist resistance fighter" and should be "towering signs of victory over fascism." In other words, the memorials were Hegelian moments set in stone, intended to encourage optimism about the future based on memory of past heroism more than the reflection of unredeemable past tragedy and catastrophe.

The planning committee statement for the ceremony of September 14, 1958 convey Grotewohl's intended meaning. For the "honor of the dead" and for the "sake of the living",

---

3 See SAPMO-BA, ZPA NL Otto Grotewohl 90/553.
5 Grotewohl (see note 4), 96.
memory admonished "all of us" to action. "German militarism" was "again a major danger for peace in Europe" threatening the "security and independence of peoples. Again the militaristic and fascist gang in West Germany presents new aggression against the peace loving peoples." The statement denounced West German plans to introduce atomic weapons and missiles into the hands of "fascist murderers" and "old Nazi generals." The planning committee of the Buchenwald dedication demanded an immediate halt to nuclear weapons tests, the creation of a nuclear weapons free zone in central Europe, negotiations for disarmament and détente, and peace. Commemoration at Buchenwald was meant to focus attention on present politics and to lend the moral prestige of Communist martyrdom to East German foreign policy. Because it was thought to continue the legacy of Buchenwald's victims and martyrs, dissent from this policy was not only a political error but was also held to be a desecration of their secular but sacred memory. The clear message of the memorials was that East Germany was the successor to the antifascist resistance fighters, while West Germany was the successor to the fascists and Nazis. In his speech at the dedication of the Buchenwald memorial on September 14, 1958, Grotewohl praised the courage, bravery, and "heroism of the European resistance fighters." From Buchenwald, Grotewohl called "the living to action; we urge you not to be paralyzed in the struggle against fascism" and for peace. In June 1945 in their famous "appeal" to the German people, the Communists denounced "the millions and millions" who followed Hitler. After East Germany's founding the SED regime used commemorative and other occasions to offer a more benign public view of the Germans and GDR as the heirs to a heroic legacy of resistance. (Here one sees interesting parallels with what Henry Russo has called "the Vichy syndrome" and the exaggeration of the scope of resistance in postwar French retrospectives offered by both Gaullists and Communists). At Buchenwald, "resistance" to war and fascism now meant opposition to West German rearmament. Hence, fighting the cold war was synonymous with Vergangenheitbewältigung.

Grotewohl's Buchenwald address was any public declaration of solidarity with the Jews, past or present. Grotewohl used the occasion to attack US and British "acts of aggression in the Middle East against the Arab peoples" and called for struggle against the Bonn government's support of this aggression. He did not mention the Jewish catastrophe.

---

7 Grotewohl (see note 6), 46.
On the contrary, he used the dedication of the first major East German memorial to the victims of fascism to signal East German support for the Arabs in the Middle East conflict. The most important commemorative event in the history of the German Democratic Republic took place during the dedication of the memorial to victims of fascism in Sachsenhausen on April 24, 1961. An estimated 200,000 people from East Germany and from twenty-three foreign countries attended. Now-familiar slogans appeared on banners held aloft in the crowd: "our struggle against war and fascism continues"; "peace will always come from East Germany"; "the German Democratic Republic—bulwark against the spirit of Nazism in West Germany"; "Sachsenhausen demands the triumph of peace and humanity"; "in the spirit of antifascist resistance fighters"; "down with the war criminals in Bonn."

Walter Ulbricht delivered a classic, political funeral oration that connected the national past to the East German present and future.

With deepest respect we turn to our precious dead, the fighters against war, fascism and militarism, and to the victims of Nazi terror. This place is dedicated to memory [Erinnerung] and warning [Mahnung]: to the memory of countless martyrs and heroes of the antifascist resistance struggle and to warning coming generations never again to allow fascist barbarism to break out among our own people, or among other peoples.

Every foot of this earth is soaked with the blood and sweat of ten thousand martyrs from many countries, and of many different world views. They were driven and tortured to death, and murdered only because they loved their people, because they loved freedom, peace and democracy more than their own life, because they were socialists, because they rejected hatred among peoples, and rejected genocide, and because they dedicated their lives to humanism and to friendship among peoples.

Neither torture nor terror could break the fighter's spirit, Ulbricht said. The history of the resistance "under inhuman conditions of a factory for the extermination of human beings in Sachsenhausen" was "a painful but honorable chapter of the heroic history" of antifascist struggle by German Communist and other antifascist. Inside and outside of the concentration camps and torture chambers "people of diverse beliefs fought together with unheard of sacrifices against the blood-soaked Hitler regime. In so doing, they saved the future of the

---


10 "Walter Ulbricht bei der Einweihung der Gedenkstätte Sachsenhausen: Von der DDR wird stets der Frieden ausstrahlen", Neues Deutschland (April 24, 1961), 1 and 3.

11 Walter Ulbricht, "Von der DDR wird stets der Frieden ausstrahlen: Rede des Genossen Walter Ulbricht", Neues Deutschland (April 24, 1961), 1 and 3.
German nation."\(^{12}\) (Emphasis in original). Ulbricht then recalled the thousands of Communists, Social Democrats, Soviet and British prisoners of war, as well, as citizens of Poland, Luxembourg, Yugoslavia, Holland, Belgium, Denmark, Austria, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, and France who had been murdered in Sachsenhausen. He did not mention that Jews were killed in Sachsenhausen or anywhere else.

To be sure, there was some truth in what Ulbricht had to say. There had been "martyrs and heroes" who were murdered "only" because of their political convictions and activities. Many did die heroic deaths "in struggle" against fascism. Yet the untruths in his statement were even more important. In Sachsenhausen and other concentration camps, the Jews were not murdered because of their political actions or beliefs but simply because they were Jews. Yet Ulbricht clearly privileged "our precious dead" – the minority of Nazism's victims that was comprised of political opponents, as well as the members of the nations of Europe, especially eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. Ulbricht's Sachsenhausen address was less about mourning for past losses than it was a plea for redemption for the dead. "Comrades and friends died together in Sachsenhausen so that we, together, could complete their work and secure freedom, democracy and peace for humanity."\(^{13}\) The Holocaust was a mass death that could not be placed, or that Ulbricht chose not to place, in the service of his ongoing political goals. At the same moment in which he laid claim to the mantle of antifacism, Ulbricht pushed the memory of the Holocaust to the far margins of official commemorative practice.

After the speeches, political dignitaries led a march out of the memorial. The photo of that march is the defining image of East German memory of the Nazi era. It shows Walter Ulbricht leading the SED leadership out of the Sachsenhausen memorial in 1961. Behind him is the smokestack of the concentration camp and a crowd of people. Otto Grotewohl, Rosa Thälmann, and other members of the Politburo are among those walking next to Ulbricht. On either side, East German soldiers stand at attention. Ulbricht is waving the politician's wave of victory. The photo could be entitled "communism rises like a phoenix from the ashes of defeat." It was the supremely Hegelian moment, a moment of historical triumph and identification with past heroes and victors rather than with history's tragic and unredeemed victims. But within four months, the regime built the Berlin Wall to stem the flow of refugees from the West.

In West Germany a very different kind of commemorative practice emerged in the postwar years. Though Chancellor Konrad Adenauer supported financial restitution for Jewish survivors and for Israel as part of West Germany's responsibility to accept the burden of the Nazi past, he did not leave behind a distinctive style of Holocaust commemoration, though his reticence to discuss the topic publicly could be said itself to be a style of commemoration.

\(^{12}\) Ulbricht (see note 11).
\(^{13}\) Ibid.
The institutionalization in West Germany of a national day of mourning (Volkstrauertag) in 1952 went hand-in-hand with obliterating distinctions between perpetrators, bystanders, and victims. Indeed, at this early stage, some West German politicians included among the "victims of fascism" those German soldiers who died at the front, civilians killed by allied bombing of German cities, and the Vertriebenen (Germans who fled and were expelled from eastern Europe in the last year of the war and in the early postwar years). The distinctive West German form of Holocaust commemoration was established by the first FRG president, Theodor Heuss, as well as by two Social Democratic leaders, Ernst Reuter, the mayor of West Berlin in the early postwar years, and Carlo Schmid, a parliamentary leader of the SPD in Bonn.

In the early years, Kurt Schumacher and the SPD were the major political force pushing to include the memory of Jewish suffering in West German public commemoration. Schumacher was the political figure most admired and cherished by Jewish survivors. Had he lived longer, it is likely that he would have delivered major speeches on commemorative occasions. In the 1950s, Ernst Reuter and Carlo Schmid delivered the major commemorative speeches that both continued Schumacher's tradition and made the Social Democratic Party's identification with the Jews apparent.

Between 1950 and 1953, Reuter's speeches commemorated in turn the July 20, 1944 conspiracy, the pogrom against the Jews of November 1938, and the Warsaw Ghetto revolt. On April 19, 1953, at a memorial for the tenth anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto's destruction, Reuter delivered his most impassioned statement regarding the genocide of European Jewry. It remains one of the most moving and powerful statements of its kind in postwar German political culture.14

Ten years ago today, on April 19, 1943, following Hitler's orders, the attack on the Warsaw Ghetto began. Its goal was, as totalitarian discourse put it, liquidation of the ghetto. And then something began in the history of these awful years that indeed are behind us but still today burden our souls as a nightmare. It was something that the world had not seen before: Hitler's victims rebelled. They stood together. They fought to their last breath. They defended their lives. But by sacrificing their lives to the last person, they defended more than a short span of their lives. They defended their honor. They defended their rights. They defended everything that is sacred to every one of us in this room: the right of every human being to be free, free to live and free to raise his head to the heavens…

… We live in a time that is inclined to forget all too quickly. But in this hour we want to say that there are things which we are not permitted to forget, and which we do not want to forget:

---


Copyright © 2008 Yad Vashem The Holocaust Martyrs' and Heroes' Remembrance Authority
As Germans – I speak to you here as well as to my Jewish fellow countrymen as a German – we must not and we cannot forget the disgrace and shame that took place in our German name.\textsuperscript{15}

Reuter's commemorative evocation of Jewish heroism and martyrdom was unusual then – and it has remained unusual – in the canon of official expression of postwar memory. Perhaps too much German rhetoric about the Warsaw Ghetto revolt would have been construed as an effort to avoid those millions of Jews who had neither the opportunity nor means to engage in armed revolt. Conversely, perhaps for postwar Germans, Reuter's comments expressed a discomforting commonality between non-Jewish anti-Nazis and the Jews, and broke with stereotypes of passive Jewish victimization. Or, perhaps at the level of basic common sense, most German politicians were reluctant to praise Jews in the Warsaw ghetto who took up arms against German soldiers.

In the same speech, Reuter dramatically underscored his solidarity with Hitler's Jewish victims. That solidarity, as the following statement make clear, came both from moral and political convictions and his personal experience of imprisonment in 1933/34.

Until the end of my life, I will never forget the scream in the night, the scream of my comrade who had been beaten to death. And because I will never forget it, I, along with all of the others who experienced these things swore the following: We must dedicate our whole life to the task of making this impossible for all time. We cannot again allow individuals and peoples, races and religious confessions to attack one another.\textsuperscript{16}

Proximity to events and personal memories drove him to future political action. In contrast to the famous historical optimism of Social Democracy before 1914, Reuter, as Schumacher before him, was driven less by confident theories of future happiness than by the memory of past injustice and cruelty. Like other political leaders "of the first hour", Reuter also recalled an old Jewish friend or teacher, in his case, the German-Jewish professor of philosophy Hermann Cohen, and expressed his sense of loss. As he put it, he knew "what the Jewish component in our people meant" and that Jewish and German traditions had been more intensely intertwined "than in any other country."\textsuperscript{17} German youth after the war knew nothing of this past. They must be taught German history, not only its music and literature, but also about the role played by Jews in the "whole intellectual structure of our people" and the intersection of the German and Jewish people and traditions.\textsuperscript{18} As German intellectual and moral renewal was essential in order to assert that those who died in the Warsaw ghetto "did not die in vain. For they moved our conscience, and our conscience has not and will not

\textsuperscript{15} Reuter (see note 14), 714.
\textsuperscript{16} Ibid., 716.
\textsuperscript{17} Ibid., 718-19.
\textsuperscript{18} Ibid., 719-21.
Reuter was one of the first, if not the first, West German political leader to evoke Jewish martyrdom and heroism as an inspiration for democratic renewal in the Federal Republic. As we will see, Heuss also articulated the same sense of loss and impoverishment suffered by Germany as a result of the Holocaust; it is fitting that Heuss singled out Reuter for praise in his 1959 farewell address as FRG president.

From the earliest moments, postwar political memory included efforts to balance and weigh the relative suffering and victimization of different groups, including the Germans themselves. Schmid, the leader of the Social Democratic parliamentary fraction in Bonn, made a number of important yet rarely noted public contributions to West German commemorative practices. Schmid was a leading voice in favor of restitution payments to Jewish survivors. In the Federal Republic, no less than in the GDR, the issue of restitution required making determinations about who was and who was not a victim of National Socialism, who among these victims had suffered most, and who had a moral claim to restitution. The Wiedergutmachung, or restitution, debates entailed making distinctions among the kinds and extent of suffering during the Nazi era. In the February 1951 Bundestag restitution debates, Schmid argued against an undifferentiated view of past suffering:

Certainly, there are many victims of the Third Reich. One could say that almost all of those who survived the period are victims. But one shouldn't make this all too easy and forget that there are distinctions among them. People are beginning to forget. Indeed, things are getting to the point that even former SS and SD men are beginning to regard themselves as victims of National Socialism… [rumbling among the SPD]… and those who were given a negative classification by the denazification counsels are already beginning to consider themselves to be victims of National Socialism!

Schmid warned against forgetting just who "the really special victims of National Socialism" had been. Generalizing the victim category went hand-in-hand with obscuring the special features of the extermination of the Jewish people.

Among all that the Nazi regime brought about, the crimes committed against our Jewish fellow human beings were the most awful, not only because of the extent of murder, not only because it was a matter of millions of victims, not only due to the methodical mercilessness of the gassing in Auschwitz and Maidanek, not only because these acts of butchery also fell on

19 Ibid., 721.
21 Carlo Schmid, "Deutscher Bundestag, Stenographische Bericht", vol. 6, 120 Sitzung (February 22, 1951), 45-92; reprinted as "Zur Wiedergutmachung", in Carlo Schmid, Bundestagsreden (Bonn, 1966), 52.
22 Schmid (see note 21).
23 Ibid., 53.
women and children, but also because the whole Third Reich at its basis, at its core was set up to exterminate the Jews! [vigorous applause]. The Third Reich was integrated very much more around anti-Semitism than around, one is ashamed to use the term "pro-German", sentiment.\textsuperscript{24}

Schmid rejected an apolitical remorse for past victims that made no distinctions between perpetrators and victims. Such a stance was not a sign of higher morality. Rather, it represented an enduring failure to think clearly about politics and morality, or about the nature of the Nazi regime. In contrast to those who wished to place the Holocaust on the fringes of the Nazi era, Schmid insisted that it lay at the core of what the Nazi regime was about, and that Germans understood this to be so at the time. Hence to equate all victims was both morally unacceptable and historically inaccurate. It rested on a distorted and apologetic understanding of the Nazi regime.

In a speech in Frankfurt-am-Main's Paulskirche on March 6, 1955 to the Society for Christian-Jewish Cooperation, Schmid returned to the issue of memory and victimization in postwar discussion.\textsuperscript{25} Did not each of us, he asked, hear the biblical question, "Cain, where is your brother?"

Don't the shadows who once lived here in this city until they were taken to the gas chambers in Auschwitz direct these words to us from every street and every square? And don't they direct these words also to us on behalf of those millions of other Jews and non-Jews who were murdered as they were?\textsuperscript{26}

There were many, he continued, who thought that the meaning of a week of brotherhood was to "finally forget" the past and again take up a "friendship of forgiveness." After all, they would say:

Life goes on – and furthermore there are certainly also other massive episodes of evil in the world! Wasn't the bombardment of our cities also a horrible thing? A sin against the commandment of humanity and brotherhood? Thus aren't the "others" just as bad as us? In one of these demolished cities, in whose ruins live thousands – not only of soldierly men, but also peaceful women, innocent children – in this city I want to say: It is different if wounds are cause and life is destroyed in the course of …. Military actions, which like falling bombs touch one and not the other, of if one consciously seeks to make a group of people disappear from the face of the earth and is devoted to their annihilation, as was done to the Jews. [Emphasis in original].\textsuperscript{27}

\textsuperscript{24} Ibid., 53.
\textsuperscript{26} Schmid (see note 25), 7.
\textsuperscript{27} Ibid., 8.
The Jews were not, he continued, the victims of "unfortunate developments of war." Their status as human beings had been denied, they were declared to be subhuman. The Nazis said, "they should be exterminated like vermin. That is the particular and most inhuman aspect of this crime – and none of the crimes of the others can cleanse us of it."\(^{28}\)

While Wiedergutmachung was necessary, it could not cleanse the Germans of these crimes. The Germans had "many grounds for shame" in light of the legalistic, heartless, and "more fetishistic than Shylock" approach of "many of our officials" regarding restitution. Shmid rejected the idea of collective guilt, but he also, in the face of the German's failure to protest or stop the extermination of the Jews, rejected the notion of what he called "collective innocence."\(^{29}\)

The Germans must not view themselves as being free of guilt because they personally did not commit crimes. They should not respond as Cain did by asking, "Am I my brother's keeper?" The first commandment of brotherhood was "again and again to ask about your brother! Whoever asks learns and also knows where the Buchenwald, Auschwitz, and Waldheim of the time is."\(^{30}\)

For Schmid, commemoration entailed the willingness to make distinctions, eschew sentimentality, and foster moral and civic responsibility and political engagement crucial to building a new democracy.

The key figure in the early history of West German commemorative practices was Theodor Heuss. His singular accomplishment as president was to make the memory of the crimes of the Nazi era a constitutive element of national political memory. To his critics, he was the cultured veneer obscuring the failures of denazification in the Adenauer era. His efforts to keep the memory of Jewish persecution before the West German public never extended to similar efforts to bring about timely justice. Yet in speeches about German history, extensive private correspondence with Jewish survivors, resistance veterans, and West German and foreign intellectuals, Heuss planted the seeds within the West German political and intellectual elites for subsequent, broader public discussion and action. He evoked German liberal aspirations and honored those who had stood for democracy and human rights in German history. He expressed a sense of loss for the destruction of the German-Jewish country in which he had come of age and used commemorative occasions to urge postwar West Germans to face the Jewish catastrophe directly. He defined courage as the willingness to truthfully confront a disastrous past.

Just as Grotewohl in Buchenwald and Ulbricht in Sachsenhausen both defined the East German commemorative style, so Heuss's speech in Bergen-Belsen on November 30, 1952 entitled "No one will lift this shame from us" was the defining commemorative speech of West German practice. The Bergen-Belsen ceremonies reflected the realities of divided

---

\(^{28}\) Ibid.
\(^{29}\) Ibid., 9.
\(^{30}\) Ibid., 10.
memory. It was a very western event. Attending were government representatives from Britain, the United States, Denmark, Belgium, the Netherlands, Switzerland, Sweden, France, Yugoslavia, Israel, and the Jewish communities in Germany, Europe and the United States. None of the Communist states were represented. Nahum Goldmann spoke on behalf of the World Jewish Congress. The speeches were broadcast over national radio. The Jewish catastrophe, which had been marginalized in official East German antifascist narratives, came to the fore at the Bergen-Belsen ceremonies while the suffering of non-Jews in eastern Europe and the Soviet Union and of the political resistance, which were stressed in East Germany, received fleeting mention. Though Jewish survivors had gathered at the former concentration camps since 1945 for memorial services, the November 30, 1952 ceremony at Bergen-Belsen was the first occasion on which they were joined by the ceremonial head of state of the Federal Republic. In the presence of Heuss and the assembled officials, Goldmann delivered a powerful narrative of Jewish suffering. Then he said:

Speaking in the name of Jews around the world I repeat in this hour our pledge never to forget these dead. For all time, we will carry the memory of these martyrs, who died only because they were Jews, in our hearts and in the hearts of our children and children's children. With the inextinguishable memory that is the characteristic of our people, we will forever keep reflection on the Jewish victims of Nazi terror in our history. The ten thousand who are buried here symbolize for us all the millions who found their tragic end in Auschwitz, Treblinka, Dachau, and in Warsaw, and Vilna and Bialistock and in countless other places.

Goldmann's speech in Bergen-Belsen was the fullest account of the Holocaust presented at a political memorial ceremony in the first postwar decade in West Germany. Had he delivered it in East Berlin, it could have landed him in prison. Yet Goldmann, who fit the image of the Jewish cosmopolitan denounced by the Communists, drew attention to the eastern geography of the Jewish catastrophe. His memory of the Holocaust did not fit within the constraints of divided memory. In Bergen-Belsen, Goldmann broke the barriers of cold war memory to recall the millions who were murdered in places now "behind the iron curtain" – namely, Auschwitz, Treblinka, Warsaw, and "countless other places." At the same time that Stalinists such as Hermann Matern denounced the Jews as a source of western influence, Goldmann pointed out that the geography of memory did not fit easily into the fault lines of the cold war in the west. Memories of Nazi barbarism on the eastern front in World War II were not at all

---

31 Theodor Heuss, "Diese Schan nimmt uns niemand ab: Der Bundespräsident sprach bei der Weihe des Mahnmals in Bergen-Belsen", Bulletin des Presse – und Informationssammlung der Bundesregierung Nr. 189, (December 1, 1952), 1655-56. An abridged version appeared as "Das Mahnmal", in Theodor Heuss, Der Große Reden: Der Staatsmann (Tübingen, 1965), 224-30. See also Bundesarchiv Koblenz, NL, Heuss B122, 2082.

32 Nahum Goldmann, "Goldmann" (speech at Bergen-Belsen, November 30, 1952), Bundesarchiv Koblenz, NL Theodor Heuss, B122 2082, 1.

33 Goldmann (see note 32), 1-2.
common in the anticommunist narratives of the time. Memory of the Holocaust remained an uncomfortable, troubling, often inconvenient accompaniment to West German elite recollection. Though most of the Holocaust took place in eastern Europe and the Nazi-occupied Soviet Union, it was in the west during the bitterest days of the cold war that the memory of the Holocaust first found adequate public expression. The priority given to the memory of Jewish suffering raises the issue of whether it came at the cost of the memory of non-Jewish victims in eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. In general, those most inclined to reflect on anti-Semitism and the Holocaust were also those most willing to recall the suffering of eastern European and Soviet citizens. Nevertheless, one feature of divided memory was the separation of the memory of different groups of victims.

Neither Goldmann nor the great majority of West German political leaders up to 1989 made explicit the historical connections between memory of the Holocaust and memory of the millions of non-Jews in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union killed by German armies, the SS, and assorted special police units. Goldmann's understandable priority was to bring the memory of Jewish suffering to the center of West German national memory just as it was being repressed from public East German commemorations. While in the East the memory of non-Jewish suffering took priority, in the west, in Bergen-Belsen, the memory of the Holocaust was largely separated from memory of the German race war on the eastern front as a whole. In the era of divided memory, the separation of the memory of the Holocaust from the memory of non-Jewish victims was common in the commemorative practices in both Germanys.

Heuss's speech in Bergen-Belsen became known by its most famous sentence, "No one will ever lift this shame from us." It was the most extensive public reflection to come from a leading official of the West German government regarding the crimes of the Nazi era. It was broadcast on radio and reported in the West German press, especially the liberal press. The West German government press office reprinted the text. Heuss's speech marked a watershed for several reasons. First, it affirmed the inclusion of memory of Jewish suffering in postwar West German political memory.

Whoever speaks here as a German must have the inner freedom to face the full horror of the crimes that Germans committed here. Whoever would seek to gloss over, make little of or diminish the depth of these crimes, or even to justify them with reference to any sort of use of so-called "reason of state" would only be insolent and impudent.

Second, Heuss rejected efforts to obscure distinctions among victims, to equate Jewish suffering with that of other groups, or to divert attention from German culpability by pointing

34 Heuss (see note 31), 1655-56; "Heuss weiht Mahnmal in Belsen ein: Der Bundespräsident gedenkt der Opfer des ehemaligen KZ", Frankfurter Rundschau (December 1, 1952), 1.
35 Ibid., 1655.
to the misdeeds of others. He rejected the arguments of postwar German concerning what "the others" had done in the allied internment camps of 1945/46, the camps in the Soviet zone, or the East German show trials in Waldheim. Such balancing of accounts "endangers the clear, honorable feeling for the fatherland of everyone who consciously knows our history" and faces up to it. Violence and injustice were not things to "be used for mutual compensation."\(^{36}\)

In Bergen-Belsen, there were many victims of other countries and many Germans as well. But this place had a "deep meaning, which Nahum Goldmann expressed for everyone." Economic competition and religious fanaticism had made their contributions to the Nazi crimes. But it was the "breakthrough of biological naturalism" that led to the "pedantry of murder as a sheer automatic process… No one, no one will lift this shame from us."\(^{37}\) He also rejected appeals to leave the past in the past. "The Jews will never forget, they cannot ever forget what was done to them. The Germans must not, and cannot ever forget what human beings from their own people did in these years so rich in shame." To those who pointed to the misdeeds of "the others" he replied, "I know about all this, and I have never hesitated to talk about it. But to search for excuses by referring to injustice and brutality of the other in the method of those who lack a demanding moral code…"\(^{38}\)

… It seems to me that the scales of virtue \([\text{Tugendtarif}]\) with which the peoples defend themselves by comparison with others, is a corrupting and banal affair. It endangers a clear, honorable feeling for one's country which everyone who consciously places himself or herself in its history carries… Every people has in reserve its poets of revenge or, when they get tired, its calculated publicists.\(^{39}\)

Heuss spoke up for a patriotism self-confident enough to honestly face the dark past. "Honorable feeling for one's country" was not composed of comforting myths and resentment at others. Heuss sought to place the language of patriotism in the service of memory rather than avoidance and resentment. For Heuss, the moral imperative to recall the crimes of the Nazi era was not a burden imposed by the occupiers and victors but an imperative demanded by the better traditions of a still existing "other Germany."

In the speech, "No one will lift this shame from us", Heuss placed Jewish suffering at the center of official West Germany. He put the conservative forces in the Federal Republic on notice that he would oppose those who sought to equate amnesia and avoidance with the national interest or national honor, or again to misuse the discourse of patriotism for their own purposes. For him, memory, not avoidance, of a difficult past was a matter of national honor.

---

\(^{36}\) Ibid., 227.
\(^{37}\) Ibid., 1656.
\(^{38}\) Ibid.
\(^{39}\) Ibid.
He initiated an often unpopular but never completely extinguished component of the Federal Republic's identity.\textsuperscript{40}

Perhaps because the memory of the Holocaust in West Germany did not become a topic of broader discussion until the 1960s, much of the scholarly literature has failed to acknowledge the crucial role of the founding years in the inauguration of a tradition of public memory amidst widespread avoidance. The preceding summary of a much larger study suggests the need for a moderate revision of conventional wisdom to take into account the early roots of the unpopular, irritating, yet ultimately dominant memory tradition inaugurated by Heuss and Schumacher, and evident in the 1950s. Bundestag debates about reparations, the shortcomings of denazification, and the extension of the statute of limitations on war crimes. To a greater degree than we have been accustomed to acknowledging, the presence of public memory rested also on earlier, minority traditions of recollection that survived the classic era of postwar forgetting. From the 1960s to 1989 in West Germany, this founding tradition spread into broader section of West German culture, politics, and society. As Bitburg and the Historians' Debate demonstrated, it was accompanied by counter efforts such as "normalization" and marginalizing the memory of the Holocaust. When the German division ended in 1989, many observers, inside and outside of Germany, feared that this distinctive West German memory tradition would be eclipsed in a new era of nationally inspired

\textsuperscript{40} As the focus of this paper is on memory of the Holocaust, I am not including material on Heuss's commemoration of the anti-Hitler conspiracy of July 20, 1944. On this see Divided Memory, chapters 8 and 9. On July 20, 1954, the tenth anniversary of the plot to kill Hitler, Heuss delivered a speech to students at the Free University in West Berlin in praise of the resistance. As was his custom, Heuss consulted a wide range of intellectuals and scholars. On July 9, 1954 Hans Bott, director of Heuss's office, wrote to Max Horkheimer for suggestions of how best to commemorate the tenth anniversary. On July 12, 1954 Horkheimer sent a remarkable reply. In view of assertions that praise for the conspirators of July 20, 1944 served to legitimize a conservative restoration in the Federal Republic, the arguments of one of the most prominent of Germany's left-liberal intellectuals about their legacy for a new democracy were particularly significant. "In Germany", Horkheimer wrote, "there is much too little thought given to those who, during the years of horror, saved the name of humanity." The too-often forgotten members of the German resistance "deserve… greater love." Even if one does not share the conspirator political views, "nevertheless their act expressed the yearning for the whole." Horkheimer stressed that "a great deal would be gained if, in the new Germany events, such as those of July 20th would serve to educate its citizens. This would accomplish far more than expression of abstract respect for democracy as such. Democracy is a vague concept, which has no automatic link to freedom and justice. It demands the spontaneity of the individual, which cannot be exhausted in formal principles. One of the few survivors of the July 20 plot was once asked how he could participate in the enterprise when he must have known that should it fail he would face a fate worse than death. He responded that the existing state of affairs was so unbearable that everything, every torture and every ordeal was preferable [to tolerating the status quo]. It is this spirit of the determinate negation (das bestimmle Nein) that needs to play such a decisive role in not fully articulated goals and programs. Practitioners of Realpolitik alltoo gladly dismiss it as hazy and remote from reality. Yet in this spirit there lies that concrete connection to the possibility of something better. Its realization depends on it."

amnesia or simple indifference. To be sure, neo-Nazi violence in the streets and a nationalist,
right-wing intellectual revival did emerge.
Yet the founding tradition, though challenged, persisted. One thinks of such commemorative
events and texts as the 1964 trial of Auschwitz guards in Frankfurt-am-Main; Willi Brand's
*Kniefall* in Warsaw in 1970; Helmut Schmid's speech at Auschwitz-Birkenau in November
1977 (the first by a West German chancellor to be delivered there); the Historians' Debate and
Helmut Kohl and Ronald Reagen Bitburg fiasco; Richard von Weiszäcker's justly praised
speech of May 8, 1985. Phillip Jenninger's unjustly and unfairly criticized speech to the
Bundestag in November 1988; the April 1990 declaration by the short-lived East German
*Volkskammer*; Rita Süssmuth's 1993 speech to the Bundestag in response to the outbreak of
neo-Nazi violence; the unsuccessful efforts of a new intellectual right to push the Holocaust
out of the center of postwar German memory; several addresses by President Roman Herzog
during ceremonies marking the fiftieth anniversary of the end of World War II; the
establishment of January 27 (the anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz by the Red Army)
as a national day of mourning for the victims of National Socialist crimes of violence; and
most recently the long debate over and parliamentary approval of construction of a memorial
to the murdered Jews of Europe in the middle of the new capital, Berlin.
The collapse of the GDR and its official antifascist legitimation also freed the memory of the
specifics of the Jewish catastrophe from past Marxist-Leninist dogma. Just as the
marginalization of the Jewish question had been a chapter in the consolidation of the East
German dictatorship, its return to prominence in East German politics was also an important
chapter in the reemergence of democracy. Indeed, the first act of East Germany's first
democratically elected government ended forty years of Communist denial and evasion
regarding the Holocaust and its consequences. On April 12, 1990 the Volkskammer voted 379
to 0, with 21 abstentions, to approve a resolution that accepted joint responsibility for Nazi
crimes and expressed willingness to pay reparations and seek diplomatic ties with Israel.41
On April 14, 1990 the headline of the left-liberal *Frankfurter Rundschau*, the West German
daily that had most carefully reported on the anti-Jewish purges of the 1950s, firmly
established the link between democratization and discussion of the Holocaust. It read
"Volkskammer Recognizes Guilt for the Holocaust: First Freely Elected GDR-government in
Office."42 The Volkskammer statement read in part as follows:

---

41 "The East German Issue an Apology for Nazis' Crimes", *New York Times* (April 13, 1990), 1 and
A7.
42 "Volkskammer bekennt Schuld am Holocaust: Erste freigewählte DDR-Regierung im Amt",
*Frankfurter Rundschau* (April 14, 1990), 1-2.

Copyright © 2008 Yad Vashem The Holocaust Martyrs’ and Heroes’ Remembrance Authority
We, the first freely elected parliamentarians of East Germany, admit our responsibility as Germans in East Germany for our history and our future and declare unanimously before the world:

Immeasurable suffering was inflicted on the peoples of the world by Germans during the time of National Socialism. Nationalism and racial madness led to genocide, particularly of the Jews in all of the European countries, of the people of the Soviet Union, the Polish people and the Gypsy people.

Parliament admits joint responsibility on behalf of the people for the humiliation, expulsion, and murder of Jewish women, men, and children. We feel sad and ashamed and acknowledge this burden of German history.

We ask the Jews of the world to forgive us for the hypocrisy and hostility of official East German policies toward Israel and for the persecution and degradation of Jewish citizens also after 1945 in our country.

We declare our willingness to contribute as much as possible to the healing of mental and physical sufferings of survivors and to provide just compensation for material losses.

The Volkskammer statement broke with the view that West Germans alone should bear the burden of the crimes of the Nazi era, or that it was a marginal event in history of Nazism and World War II. Gone was the arrogance and lack of historical self-consciousness with which East German political leaders aided Israel's armed adversaries. Gone was a forty-year legacy of anti-Semitic code words clothed in Marxist-Leninist slogans, and denials that anti-Semitism could exist in an officially antifascist regime.

Yet, throughout the 1990s, calls for a Schlubstrich continued. They came from unrespectable neo-Nazis and skinheads, as well as from respectable conservative intellectuals. The latter group found its most prominent expression in the fall of 1998, when German novelist Martin Walser unleashed a tempest in the German establishment in his acceptance speech of the Peace Prize of German Publishers. He denounced efforts to build a Berlin Holocaust memorial and attacked the public culture of German commemoration of the Holocaust as a "moral cudgel", thereby unleashing yet more public controversy. In turn, Ignatz Bubis, the recently deceased chairman of the Central Conference of Jews in Germany, sharply criticized Walser's speech as an effort to displace the memory of the Holocaust in German public discourse, one that had previously been the prerogative of the far-right fringe in German

---

45 See Martin Walser, "Friedensprise des Deutschen Buchhandels 1998; Erfahrungen beim Verfassen einer Sonntagsrede", (Frankfurt am Main, 1998) and the abundant press reaction in the German prestige press.
politics and culture. In the ongoing struggle between memory and forgetting, perhaps the most striking, even surprising feature of commemorative practices in unified Germany has been the continued strength of public memory. To be sure, the Kohl government continued to oppose changes in Germany's ethnically based citizenship laws, and the chancellor himself refused to adopt as high a profile as he could have in support of foreigners subject to violence from right-wing extremists. Yet, rather than returning to the facile comparisons of Bitburg, Kohl in the 1990s emerged as one of the strongest supporters of the proposed Berlin memorial to the murdered Jews of Europe. Yet, as the controversy over the Berlin memorial indicated, the politics of memory by the late 1990s in Germany were the cause of additional surprise and ironic twists.

The most striking surprise of 1998 was a new source, now apparently short-lived, of reluctance to publicly recall the Holocaust. Conventional wisdom had it that members of the generation of 1968, having broken in the 1960s with the apologia and silence of the postwar era, would continue to publicly remember what conservatives had previously sought to forget, cover-up, and relativize when they had the opportunity to govern in the 1980s and 1990s. Yet, in the summer and fall of 1998, SPD chancellor candidate Gerhard Schröder and his nominee for the new position of cultural minister, Michael Naumann, struck very different tones in speaking of the need for Germans to look to the future rather than succumb to the burdens of the past. In August 1998, in a number of press conferences and public comments, Naumann, former editor of Der Spiegel and Rowohlt Verlag, unequivocally rejected both the general idea of such a memorial and its particular form of realization in a design by Peter Eisenman. The proposed memorial was, according to Naumann, superfluous. The "authentic" sites of memory already existed in the form of the former Nazi concentration camps such as Bergen-Belsen. A new memorial would detract from the missions of the existing memorial in Berlin such as the Topographie des Terrors, the museum of the Wannsee Conference, and the new Jewish Museum. Further, Naumann argued, Eisenman's proposed design for the memorial was, in its monumentality, comparable to Albert Speer's Nazi architecture. The decisiveness with which Naumann seemed to reject any memorial and the terms with which he criticized the Eisenman proposal unleashed a chorus of protest from across the political spectrum in Germany.46

Naumann's utterance occasioned considerable protest in Germany from those who wondered what a left-of-center government was doing urging less public memory of the Nazi past. Some of these protests came from those – such as television personality Leah Rosh and

historian Eberhard Jaeckel – who had been involved for a decade in Berlin in discussions of
an appropriate memorial to the Jews of Germany and Europe murdered in the Holocaust.
Supporters of such a memorial argued that a memorial to the murdered Jews in the very
center of Berlin was morally and politically essential for a number of reasons: (1) the
genocide of European Jewry was central in Nazi policy and war aims; (2) this genocide had
been directed from the government offices in Berlin; (3) the existing concentration camp
memorials within Germany were not the places at which the mass murder of European Jewry
had taken place and in any case were comfortably out of sight and out of mind in Berlin; (4)
the movement of the German government from Bonn to Berlin must not be accompanied by a
desire to push the difficult past from view. In the course of the Berlin debates, historians such
as Jürgen Kocka argued in favor of a museum fostering education and scholarship rather than
a mute memorial' while Reinhard Koselleck made the case for including non-Jewish victims
of Nazi persecution as well. Chancellor Kohl, in the heat of the fall election campaign,
strongly supported construction of such a memorial. Schröder, however, struck a decidedly
more ambiguous tone while stressing the need to look to the future. While some left-leaning
intellectual veterans of 1968 expressed their doubts, the Bündnis 90/Green coalition in Bonn
was particularly emphatic in its support for the memorial.
In January 1999, then – Chancellor Schröder stepped away from the equivocations of summer
and fall 1998 and embraced a proposal to build a slightly modified version of Eisenman's
design for a Berlin memorial to the murdered Jews of Europe in combination with an archive
and museum on the same site. Efforts during the last half of 1998 to focus on the future at the
expense of memory, this time largely driven by the veterans of 1968, failed just as previous
efforts to do so in postwar West Germany had. As in years past, there were too many "other
Germanys", too many fellow Europeans, too many survivors of the Holocaust and their
children and grandchildren, and, now more than ever, too many other German politicians and
citizens who had incorporated and deepened the founding traditions of post-war memory. A
new and surprising form of a Schlufstrichmentalität entailing a sadly ironic Social Democratic
break from Social Democracy's own noble and often unpopular traditions of memory did not,
as it turned out, translate into national policy. In early 1999, the West German and then
German tradition of public memory of the Holocaust that in part originated in the very heart
and soul of the postwar SPD surmounted the first inclinations of the new Social Democratic
government. Some Christian Democratic politicians, notably Berlin's mayor, Eberhard
Diepgen, continued to oppose the memorial. On June 25, 1999, following over a decade of
debate first in Berlin and then nationwide, the members of the Bundestag by a large majority
of 314 to 209, with 14 abstentions, voted in favor of building the national memorial in Berlin based on a modified Eisenman design.\textsuperscript{47}

Allied victory, postwar occupation, and multiple restorations of previously defeated, pre-1933 German anti-Nazi traditions all made decisive contributions to the emergence of public memory of the Holocaust in the immediate postwar decades. Yet at the same time, from the East German purges from 1949 to 1956 to the bitter West German attacks on the American "East Cost press" (that is, the \textit{New York Times}) during the Bitburg affair, those in both postwar Germanys who opposed public memory of the Holocaust have repeatedly attributed efforts to give it prominence to foreign—primarily Israeli, American, or simply Jewish— influences. At times, such arguments have been associated with old stereotypes about the power of international Jewry. The statement during the Bundestag debate over the Berlin memorial by SPD member and Bundestag President Wolfgang Thierse is of interest in this regard.

Today we must decide. After a debate lasting nineteen years, do we want to build a memorial to the murdered Jews of Europe in Berlin? Again and again, I hear that all of the arguments have been made. But I also hear that we, the Germans, are no longer free in our decision. The public as well as the international pressure is so great that the decision has in effect already been made. To that I say: this is our, yes, our decision to make, one that we take from our sense of responsibility with a view to our own national history and to the conditions of its memory.\textsuperscript{48}

Thierse went on to reject calls for a Schlubstrich and praised the founders of the citizen's initiative supporting the memorial in Berlin. Then, in phrases reminiscent of Heuss and Schumacher, Thierse concluded as follows: "The memorial that is the subject of today's decision aims at future generations with the message: Shame is a moment of our human dignity. Moral duties in the present and capacity to master the future grow from political and practical reflection on our history, one bound up with unimaginable injustice."\textsuperscript{49}

Had the Allies not fought the war to an unconditional surrender, arrested and put on trial the Nazi regime's leading figures, and insured through the occupation that Nazism would not return to postwar German politics as a major factor, the prospects for any public memory of

\textsuperscript{47} The vote was the lead story in all of the major German newspapers. See the editions of June 26/27, 1999 of: \textit{Die Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung}, \textit{Die Suddeutsche Zeitung}, \textit{Frankfurter Rundschau}, and \textit{Der Tagespiegel}. The official record of this and other Bundestag debates is now available on the website of the \textit{Deutscher Bundestag} as well as in the published \textit{Verhandlungen des deutschen Bundestages}.

\textsuperscript{48} Cited in "Scham ist ein Moment menschlicher Wurde", \textit{Der Tagesspiegel}, no. 48 (June 26, 1999), 2. The same edition includes excerpts from opponents as well as supporters of the memorial. One novel element in this longstanding debate was evident in several interventions from younger members of the Bundestag. In particular see the text of twenty-eight year old SPD member, Michael Roth, "Im Wortlaut: Das Denkmal dient der Zukunft", \textit{Frankfurter Rundschau} (June 26, 1999), 7.

\textsuperscript{49} Ibid.
the Holocaust or any other crimes of the Nazi regime would have been slim to none. Those Allied policies made possible the emergence of postwar memory first in Schumacher and Heuss's public pronouncements. The collapse of the GDR and its official antifascism, in which the specifics of the Jewish catastrophe could find little or no room, was another precondition for the persistence of Holocaust memory in unified Germany. The oft-defeated and then.revived indigenous traditions of democracy and human rights were evident in the bundestag vote of 1999. Thierse's comments indicate that, for the still-dominant segment of the national political establishment, public acknowledgement of a criminal and shameful past is not primarily the result of outside pressures. Rather, as some of the founders of democracy hoped, and as odd as it may seem to many, such acknowledgement itself has been and remains the source of a distinctive sense of honor and moral obligation in now longstanding and not easily dislodged postwar traditions.

For most of the postwar era, Holocaust memory in Germany has been a chapter in the history of divided memory – a history in which memory of the Jewish fate was sharply separated from recollection of the suffering of non-Jews, especially in eastern Europe. Until 1989, memory of the Holocaust was largely a phenomenon of West German concern. Will a comprehensive German memory of World War II and the Holocaust emerge in public commemorations in the years to come? How will the tension between the memory of the Holocaust and the memory of non-Jewish suffering be addressed? Or will, as some fear, an era of a "new indifference" to the burdens of the past characterize Germany? While this historical overview cannot conclude with definitive answers to these questions, we can say that those who attempt in the future to marginalize and forget the Holocaust in Germany will fight an uphill battle against a half-century of entrenched and now widespread traditions of memory.
