

Shadings of Regret

America and Germany

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Why should we assume the faults of our friend, or wife, or father or child, because they sit around our hearth, or are said to have the same blood? All men have my blood and I all men's. Not for that will I adopt their petulance or folly, even the context of being ashamed of it.

— Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Self-Reliance*

The Spur of Regret

Never before have American leaders and officials apologized for so many things. Shortly after President Ronald Reagan expressed remorse over the internment of Japanese Americans during World War II, Americans observed the five-hundredth anniversary of Christopher Columbus's voyage to the New World by acknowledging his atrocities against its native people. As American Lutherans rejected the anti-Semitism of their founder, Martin Luther, and the Southern Baptist Convention formally apologized for sanctifying slavery, an interfaith delegation visited Japan to apologize for the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. In Sand Creek, Colorado, whites offered regrets to Native American descendents of the Cheyenne and Arapaho Indians massacred there a century before. More recently, President William Clinton apologized for America's many moral failings in Africa; Aetna, Inc. , apologized for issuing insurance policies on slaves' lives. The list of regrets seems endless.¹

During most of America's history, political and civil institutions resolved conflicts through formal treaties, restitution, or tacit understanding. Only during the last two decades of the twentieth century have formal, public apologies become necessary. What are we to make of this growing wave of repentance? Emile Durkheim led us to believe that "a man is surer of his faith when he sees to how distant a past it goes back and what great things it has inspired."² Remembering noble deeds, he said, elevates the community's dignity and moral values. How, then, are we to explain the spreading contamination of the past, the discovery in every nook and crevice of the memory landscape a new atrocity to be regretted, a new wrong to be set right?

The swelling wave of repentance corresponds to the outpouring of collective memory literature in the 1980s and 1990s, and both developments are part of the late twentieth-century "sensitivity revolution," with its unprecedented concern for minority dignity and rights.³ As old forms of religious and class conflicts evolve into ethnic, racial, and gender conflicts, disadvantaged groups become increasingly aware of the uses of public discourse. References to past injustice and suffering are particularly useful because they legitimate new distributional policies (affirmative action, including racial and gender quotas and preferences), new civil demeanor and discourse (political correctness), new interpretations of minority contributions to history, new heroes, new villains, new

insights into America's criminal history. Such is the background of the new ritual apology. The spur of regret intensifies as the "dominant culture" comes under attack.

In their broadest sense, America's repentance gestures are aspects of what James Hunter calls its culture wars—the conflict between "progressive" and "orthodox" (traditional) conceptions of moral authority. In the orthodox vision, moral authority arises from a "dynamic reality that is independent of, prior to, and more powerful than human experience."⁴ Whether it be a religion, a nation, or a political movement, this reality surpasses the existence of the individual, dignifies him, and promotes within him a sense of purpose and wholeness. Embracing absolute definitions of right and wrong, the orthodox reject relativism, multiple truths, and "alternative lifestyles." In the progressive vision, all racial, religious, ethnic, and gender boundaries are arbitrary but, ironically, must be maintained in a diverse and equal society. Progressives are suspicious of tradition, dedicated to minority rights, receptive to negative information about historically oppressive majorities, and inclined to relate minority short-comings to majority oppression.⁵ Ritual apologies, because they recognize oppression and its consequences, provide symbolic support for the progressive agenda.

Articulating the tension between traditional and progressive strains of American culture, Hunter's thesis rings true for many issues. But this thesis is self-limiting: by focusing on institutional policies, it downplays individual beliefs and underestimates their consensus.⁶ Hunter observes that controversial issues have "become institutionalized chiefly through special-purpose organizations, denominations, political parties, and branches of government," but to assume that institutions are the only significant participants in matters of moral authority is to skirt too many issues, including questions about the clash among culture, memory, and morality on the one hand and institutional and individual definitions of moral responsibility on the other.

We questioned university students in the United States and Germany to determine how different combinations of culture and historical experience lead to different perspectives on personal responsibility. Comparing state discourse to the beliefs of informed citizens, we do not assume that one level of responsibility is more authentic than another; we seek rather to understand how these different levels relate to one another. Our argument is simple: political exigencies, particularly international and internal political pressures, operate on American and German governments to express regret officially, while cultural values induce individual Germans to take seriously claims that Americans are hard-pressed to understand, namely, that people can be morally responsible for events in which they did not participate. Taking the German sample as our point of reference, we emphasize the American findings. The American state is ready and willing to express regret for past wrongs; the American citizen is decidedly unwilling to do so. On a broader level, this means that collective memory can have no significance apart from the relation among what historians say about the past, how political elites represent the past, and what ordinary people, constrained by their nation's experience and cultural values, think about the past. Regret and responsibility, properly understood, refer to the relation among these three elements. Such is the claim we wish to defend.

Individual and Collective Responsibility

Moral responsibility, according to Leszek Kolakowski, is a natural sentiment having nothing to do with one's conduct or the timing of one's birth. "Our primary relationship to the world," he believes, "is that of responsibility voluntarily assumed. [To live is] to take on the debts of the world as our own."⁸ Is Kolakowski saying that the sharing of shame and responsibility is a universal disposition, applicable to everyone in all times? If so, his burden of proof is heavy indeed.⁹

Assertions about moral responsibility are difficult to defend when applied universally. Oskar von der Gablentz, referring to the National Socialist era, therefore limits his claim: "Every member of the body politic is responsible according to his function, from the absolute ruler to the common voter."¹⁰ Even von der Gablentz's conception, however, is problematic. It is one thing for a state and its agents to assume responsibility for historical wrongdoing; it is another for an individual to assume responsibility for state misdeeds committed before his or her birth.

Gesine Schwan declares that moral guilt can never be transmitted across generations, but "the psychological and moral consequences of treating it with silence harm even the subsequent generation and the basic consensus of a democracy."¹¹ In this same connection, Jürgen Habermas used the image of history as a supermarket: we cannot pick out just what is convenient for us; on the contrary, democratic societies need to deal with the negative aspects of their past, especially when victims of earlier atrocities are still alive and still citizens.¹²

From the standpoint of both social identity theory¹³ and self-categorization theory,¹⁴ Schwan's argument makes sense. Since our self-image consists of both an individual and a group component, identification with social groups can support or undermine self-esteem, depending on what those groups have accomplished historically.¹⁵ As individuals identify with the past of their family, community, or nation, they enhance their sense of responsibility as group members. But how, precisely, does an open confrontation with guilt protect new generations and sustain democracy? Can one imagine a point at which constant invocation of past wrongs backfires, inhibits rather than promotes recognition of moral responsibility? Might a measure of silence—not total silence but partial relief from the clamor of self-condemnation—be necessary rather than harmful to the consensus of democracy?

Schwan's formulation, like von der Gablentz's and Kolakowski's, connects the burgeoning of regret to accelerating ethnoracial movements, human rights discourse, decolonization, and the politics of recognition; but it ignores the question of how accountability of the state and community can be convincingly extended to individual citizens. Michel-Rolph Trouillot asserts that collective bodies have traditionally assumed responsibility for harms committed against one another's members, but these bodies are incapable of emotions that convert formal admissions of regret into expressions that injured parties can recognize. Ritual apologies involve a fatal abstraction: representatives of past perpetrators offering apologies to representatives of past victims conceal the

affective trauma of the original offense. Apology rituals are abortive because they symbolize injuries no one can really feel and regrets no one can deeply affirm.¹⁶ Kolakowski, von der Gablentz, and Schwan overestimate the strength of the linkage between institutional and individual regret; Trouillot underestimates it. If ritual apologies were as empty as he claims, recipients would not react to them and they would have ceased long ago.¹⁷ Instead, the demand for contrition seems to grow stronger with each apology offered.

Under what conditions and at what levels is moral reconciliation possible? Jeffrey Olick and Brenda Coughlin have recently argued that in matters of the politics of regret, states take the lead and individuals follow (“[T]he confessional individual mimics the regretful state.”)¹⁸ In fact, the situation turns out to be more complex. By locating philosophical assertions within different cultural contexts, we try to contribute, in some slight and tentative way, to the analysis of this question.

Time Frames of Responsibility

Americans typically reject moral responsibility for the misconduct of others, especially their ancestors. This resistance is not an isolated trait to be dismissed as a moral failing; it reflects a cultural pattern made up of individualism and liberalism—a pattern that focuses so closely on individual rights and individual responsibilities as to distinguish the United States culturally and historically from other democracies.¹⁹

Traditional societies, which bind present generations to the values and programs of the past, are familiar to us through Old Testament affirmations of fathers’ sins being visited upon their posterity, and through medieval notions of collective guilt, including the eternal guilt of the Jew as Christ’s killer. Enlightenment ideals, by contrast, denounce the dead hand of the past. Characteristic of every Western society, the Enlightenment’s antitraditional animus is most prominent in the United States. Lacking feudalism’s rigid status system and traditions, America’s historical development promoted unique forms of present-centered individualism.”²⁰

While traveling in America Alexis de Tocqueville realized that the aristocrat “almost always knows his forefathers and respects them; he thinks he already sees his remote descendants and he loves them. He willingly imposes duties on himself towards the former and the latter and he will frequently sacrifice his personal gratifications to those who went before and to those who will come after him.”²¹ Aristocratic belief stems from the dependency of aristocratic communities, where all citizens occupy fixed positions dependent on patronage from above and cooperation from below. Having never known the profound inequalities of Europe, however, Americans have convinced themselves of their self-determination and have “acquired the habit of always considering themselves standing alone.... [N]ot only does democracy make every man forget his ancestors, but it hides his descendants and separates his contemporaries from him; it throws him back forever upon himself alone and threatens in the end to confine him entirely within the solitude of his own heart.”²²

That de Tocqueville had Thomas Jefferson in mind when he wrote about American individualism is doubtful, but he would have understood Jefferson perfectly. Jefferson believed it to be “self-evident that the earth belongs in usufruct to the living; that the dead have neither powers nor rights over it.”²³ If past debts, financial and otherwise, are not to burden the present generation, Jefferson believed, federal and state constitutions must be rewritten every nineteen years. How else can men and women renounce the past and govern themselves? “By the law of nature, one generation is to another as one independent nation is to another.”²⁴ Ralph Waldo Emerson’s American Scholar address echoed Jefferson and de Tocqueville: “Each age, it is found, must write its own books; or rather, each generation for the next succeeding. The books of an older period will not fit this.”²⁵

Nathaniel Hawthorne also raged against the past. In *The House of the Seven Gables*, he demands to know, “Shall we never, never get rid of this past? It lies upon the present like a giant’s dead body! In fact, the case is just as if a young giant were compelled to waste all his strength in carrying about the corpse of an old giant, his grandfather.... Just think, a moment; and it will startle you to see what slaves we are to by-gone times.”²⁶ Hawthorne was referring to his family’s sins, which he wished to redeem, while at the same time wishing to eliminate the pastness of the family itself. At fifty-year intervals “a family should be merged into the great, obscure mass of humanity, and forget about all its ancestors.” Likewise, public buildings, symbolizing public affairs, should be made of inferior materials that “crumble to ruin once in twenty years, or thereabouts, as a hint to the people to examine into and reform the institutions which they symbolize.”²⁷

A century later anthropologist Florence Kluckhohn distinguished American culture by its tendency to deemphasize the past and segment it from the present.²⁸ So, too, sociologist Robert Bellah observes: “We live in a society that encourages us to cut free from the past, to define our own selves, to choose the groups with which we wish to identify.”²⁹ When psychologist Thomas Cottle invited his American subjects to order past, present, and future in terms of separate (atomistic), touching (continuous), or overlapping (integrated) circles, 60 percent construed the circles atomistically; 27 percent, continuously; and 13 percent, integrated.³⁰ When Mikyoung Kim and one of the authors asked Korean students to do the same, only nine percent separated past, present, and future; 11 percent conceived time as continuous; and 80 percent integrated the three time spheres—the extreme opposite of the American pattern.³¹

Segmenting time affects the way Americans disconnect themselves from the sins of the past, but how wide is the gap separating official expressions of regret from individual feelings of regret?

Gathering Clues

To assert that American culture weakens the relation between the living and the dead does not mean that Americans never think about their relation to the past; it means that that relation means less to them than it does to people elsewhere. Culture’s influence on memory is best documented among nations in which judgments of the past differ despite

similar religious cultures, economic and educational systems, levels of democracy, and penchants for self-criticism. In this regard, Americans' sense of remorse over and liability for past oppression of minorities can be usefully compared to Germans' sense of remorse over and liability for National Socialism and the Holocaust. Such close comparison helps us distinguish the culture of memory from the institutional politics of memory.

Between 1998 and 2001, we administered different versions of a questionnaire titled "judging the Past" to 1,215 University of Georgia undergraduates. Our sample, which approximates the composition of the College of Arts and Sciences, is 88 percent white, eight percent black, and four percent Asian. The sample contains upperclassmen, but the majority, in almost equal proportion, are freshmen and sophomores. Female respondents slightly outnumber males, and the majority of all respondents (70 percent) were born in the South.

Given our topic, the following point warrants emphasis. The University of Georgia serves a conservative state, but its social science and humanities faculties have instituted liberal academic programs. As its faculty and administrators are acutely aware of the state's history of slavery and segregation, graduation requirements include several hours in courses with multicultural content, which includes material relevant to African Americans, Native Americans, Hispanic Americans, and Asian Americans. Ideologically, the student body leans slightly to the left: 53 percent of the students describe themselves as liberal or very liberal.

German data were drawn from four sources. The first set of data includes questionnaires administered to 360 undergraduate students in 1998. This sample includes mainly freshmen, 55 percent of whom were enrolled in sociology courses in the formerly West German city of Giessen; the remaining 45 percent of the students studied in Leipzig, an East German university. As is usual in Giessen social science courses, most students (79 percent in our case) were women oriented toward careers in public education. The student body leans decisively to the left, with 84 percent of the Giessen students defining themselves as moderately to very liberal; 16 percent, conservative. In gender, ideology, and occupational goals, Leipzig students are comparable to Giessen's. In a second (1999) sample, 44 Giessen students answered short questionnaires on specific aspects of German and American history. The third group of respondents comprises 110 students from the University of Stuttgart, an institution oriented toward technology, science, and the humanities alike. Most of the students were freshmen, evenly divided by gender, intending to major in political science and seeking careers in government, university teaching, or research. Stuttgart's students were no less liberal than the Giessen and Leipzig students, but their teachers were noticeably more conservative. Our fourth source of German data is a nationwide survey containing questions about national identity and attitudes toward the National Socialist era. These data were collected in 1995 and consist of 649 respondents.

Our student samples, drawn on the basis of availability, are sources of imperfect clues rather than clean, comparative evidence. Generalization is the most significant limitation: American and German university students do not and cannot represent the general population of America and Germany. We assume, however, that our data are defensible

in one respect: the difference between American and German students' judgments of the past approximates the difference between judgments of all American and German adults.

Degrading Events

Asked to name the “three events in American history of which you do not merely disapprove but which, in your opinion, degrade the United States and arouse in you as a citizen (rather than private individual) a sense of dishonor, disgrace, shame, and/ or remorse,” 41 percent of American students named slavery; 34 percent, the Vietnam War; 32 percent, offenses against American Indians. The next five most commonly mentioned events, named by less than 20 percent of the respondents, were segregation, the Civil War, internment of Japanese Americans, the use of the atomic bomb, and Watergate.

The conspicuous feature of the events condemned by Americans is their historical diffusion. Three of the eight events displayed in table 1—slavery, treatment of Indians, and Civil War—occurred in the nineteenth century, three events, segregation, internment of Japanese Americans, and the use of the atomic bomb occurred in the mid-twentieth century; the other two, in the late twentieth century. To this broad range of events corresponds a broad range of victim communities, from African and Native Americans to Hispanic and Japanese Americans, to citizens of Vietnam and Japan.

Table 1
Percentage of Respondents Naming Sources of Dishonor, Disgrace, Shame, and/ or Remorse in American History
(N=1,109)

Event	Percentage
Slavery	41.2
Vietnam War	34.0
Treatment of Indians	32.1
Segregation	17.4
Civil War	12.7
Internment of Japanese Americans	11.9
Use of atomic bomb	9.1
Watergate	7.3

In contrast, the three events that German students mention most frequently—World War II, the National Socialist regime, and the crimes of the regime—correspond to a narrow twelve-year period starting with Adolf Hitler’s assumption of power in 1933 and ending in 1945 with his death and Germany’s surrender (see table 2).

To determine how American and German students feel about the events they named, we asked three sets of questions. The first set, administered in the United States, includes: “I personally feel that my generation is morally responsible for treating the effects of past discrimination against all minority groups.” In Germany the parallel question was: “My generation is responsible today for dealing with the fascist past.”³² Seventy-one percent of Germans compared to only 23 percent of Americans agreed that their generation is

responsible for past offenses of the state. Comparable questions posed to a German national sample two years earlier yielded comparable responses.”

“Americans tend to think too much about the mistakes of the past. It is time to look more to the future.” The German version of this question was: “After 1945, Germans have dealt with their past too much.” With these statements 74 percent of the Americans and 29 percent of the Germans, respectively, agreed. The final question posed to Americans was: “Nothing can be done to offset the effects of past discrimination.” This question confounds belief that dwelling on the past is a waste of time with readiness to compensate for past wrongs. Forty-one percent agreed. The German version was more concrete but within the same realm of content: “The persecution of Jews by Germans is a huge guilt that cannot be extinguished historically.”³⁴ Eighty-two percent agreed.

Table 2
Percentage of Respondents Naming Sources of Dishonor, Disgrace, Shame, and/or Remorse in German History
(N = 333)

Event	Percentage
World War II	48.1
National Socialist crimes	46.7
National Socialism in general	38.1
Present xenophobia in Germany	24.2
World War I	16.1
Present German policy	5.8

Next, we asked students to characterize their nation’s past as a whole. Do the shameful and dishonorable events of the past outweigh events evoking a sense of pride and honor? Fifty-three percent of the American students disagreed with a statement defining the past as being more a source of shame and dishonor than pride and honor. Corresponding percentages for Giessen-Leipzig and Stuttgart students are 26 and 34 percent respectively.

Contexts of Regret

Many factors affect German and American judgments of the past. First, the negative parts of Germany’s past are concentrated in one time period, ending in 1945. In the United States, events are diffused over centuries, and the event deemed most serious, slavery, ended more than 135 years ago-before many American families’ ancestors arrived in the United States and after many family lines existing in 1865 had died out. Americans learn most of what they know about their country’s crimes at school, not home. Although German students also gain information about their country’s crimes at school, many are exposed to oral family histories. In these histories some discover authentic family secrets; for others, the silence of the home is a defense against guilty knowledge.

Second, Germans have been confronted with continual discourse about their moral guilt and collective responsibility for both the Holocaust and fascist military aggression. As

Germany is geographically contiguous to eight of the nations it attacked and occupied during World War II, reconciliation was politically and economically imperative. German leaders, accordingly, undertook moral recovery campaigns in the nation's press and mass media and through state rhetoric and policies. This intensive public discourse about National Socialism is supplemented in German school curricula and textbooks.³⁵ By contrast, America's crimes, committed largely against its own inhabitants, harmed no other nations; therefore, the American people have experienced no external pressure to recognize their misdeeds. American textbooks emphasizing the cruelties of the past did not appear until late in the twentieth century and expressed indigenous pressures that arose during a "rights revolution" emphasizing inclusion, diversity, and multiculturalism.

The quality of American and German offenses also differs. The National Socialist regime conducted war and persecutions that led to the death of at least 36 million people,³⁶ mostly civilians, and included the murder of six million Jews and hundreds of thousands of non-Russian communists, Gypsies, dissidents, and others. American slaveholders, in contrast, valued their bondsmen's lives, although denying them human quality. On the other hand, slavery's seriousness cannot be underestimated: the number of persons enslaved at a given period of time never exceeded four million, but far more than 100 million were enslaved during the era of slavery.

The difference among slavery, indiscriminate killing, and murder might go some way toward explaining why Americans are less inclined than Germans to accept responsibility for past wrongs, but it does not go far enough. Presently, slavery appears in the American media, school curricula, and textbooks as an absolute sin and the source of present racial troubles. This is not to mention media and textbook coverage of the oppression of Native Americans and the internment of Japanese Americans.

In terms of objective harm to human life, Americans and their German counterparts should feel comparable, if not identical, moral responsibility, but one recalls that a distinctive culture of memory reinforces the conditions leading Americans to consider themselves historically innocent. The cultural background of contemporary Americans, as Seymour M. Lipset tells us, revolves around the ideal of individualism.³⁷ Since the single individual strives to be self-reliant, to reach his goals independently of family or community, past failures of family and community members mean less to him than similar failures do to his German counterpart. This cultural trait powerfully affects the way American students attribute responsibility to young people in other nations.

Americans Judge Germans

Twelve different versions of our questionnaire were distributed among several University of Georgia samples to determine whether responses varied according to (1) *personal* or *generational* responsibility and (2) whether preceded or not by a question sensitizing respondents to their debt to the past (American soldiers killed during World War II). No differences were associated with these two split ballots. When comparisons were made among students defining themselves as liberal and conservative, only slight differences appeared.

If slavery and the oppression of minorities seem less serious to Americans than the mass murder of Jews, and if this difference affects ideas about moral responsibility, then American students would attribute less moral responsibility to themselves for slavery and minority oppression than they attribute to Germans for the Holocaust. Between University of Georgia students' assessment of their own and other nations' responsibility, however, there is little difference. Nine percent of the students agreed with the statement, "My generation is [or: I personally feel] morally responsible for the enslavement of tens of millions of black people over more than one hundred and fifty years." The level of agreement with the statement, "My generation is [or: I personally feel] morally responsible for the internment of Japanese-American men, women, and children in prison camps during World War II" was nine percent. Eleven percent agreed with the statement, "My generation is [or: I personally feel] morally responsible for the killing, forced expulsion, and other maltreatment of millions of Indians."

When we asked Georgia students about Japanese and German young people's moral responsibility for the atrocities in Asia and the Holocaust, we found a lower level of attribution: 5 and 3 percent, respectively, agreed with statements asserting that Japanese and German young people were responsible for their nations' wrong doing³⁸ The tendency for American students to judge themselves more harshly than they judge others is a fact that we note but leave unexplained (see table 3).

Denying and Affirming Responsibility

The fact that different people give the same response to a question does not mean they think about it in the same way. After eliciting responses to closed questions about moral responsibility, we asked a new block of University of Georgia students to "Explain in a few words your answer to the above question. Why is the present generation of Americans (or you personally) morally responsible or not responsible for slavery?" We randomly asked comparable questions about the oppression of Native Americans and internment of Japanese Americans, and we received comparable answers (see table 4).

Responses fell into four categories, the simplest of which was "I wasn't born yet." Thirty percent of Americans gave this type of response. For American students, "not born yet" means "not present," "no control," "not alive," "had nothing to do with it," was "not part of it." The passage of time itself made a difference: "It was a different era," "Before our time," "It's in the past." Sometimes the respondent deprecated the questioner by posing and answering a question of his own: "How can a present generation be responsible for any event in the past? Only past generations can be looked upon as responsible." Other respondents were more emphatic, declaring it "absurd" or "obviously" wrong to assign responsibility to unborn generations. In some cases, birth and choice went together. "Everyone has the right to make choices independently, so my ancestors' choices don't make me responsible." "My generation was not born. It was not our choice."³⁹ No respondent in this category, however, mentioned the harmful consequences of that choice.

Our second group of respondents, 42 percent of the total, recognized the offenses that occurred in the past but claimed moral innocence because they could not see themselves committing them. “My race was responsible, but not me as an individual.” The pattern is redundant: “That was my ancestors’ doing.” “My ideals and values completely differ from the attitudes of most of my ancestors.” “I feel guilty about what my ancestors did, but I do not feel responsible for their actions.” “I consider my heritage responsible for slavery, but not myself.” Students did not confine their references to ancestors in general; they dissociated themselves from specific relatives. “Being a white from the South, I know that parts of my family were once involved in slavery, but . . . I do not share the views of my ancestors.” These are the reactions of principled minds, but they are inner-directed minds indifferent to the conditions of their day, including minority disadvantages related to past abuses.

Table 3—American Students’ Attitudes toward Moral Responsibility for Past Wrongs

<i>“My generation is [or: I personally feel] morally responsible for the enslavement of tens of millions of black people over more than one hundred and fifty years.”</i>								
(N=383)								
Strongly agree	7	6	5	4 ^a	3	2	1	Strongly disagree
	2.1	3.6	3.6	5.2	7.0	19.2	59.3	
<i>“My generation is [or: I personally feel] morally responsible for the internment of Japanese-American men, Women, and children in prison camps during World War II.”</i>								
(N=382)								
Strongly agree	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	Strongly disagree
	2.6	2.6	3.9	3.9	8.6	23.6	54.8	
<i>“My generation is [or: I personally feel] morally responsible for the killing, forced expulsion, and other maltreatment of millions of Indians.”</i>								
(N= 383)								
Strongly agree	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	Strongly disagree
	3.1	2.1	6.0	5.0	9.1	20.9	53.8	
<i>“I believe the present generation of Japanese [or: Japanese young people] is morally responsible for Japan’s War crimes against Chinese and Korean civilians during World War II .”</i>								
(N =106)								
Strongly agree	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	Strongly disagree
	1.0	1.0	2.8	9.4	9.4	21.7	54.7	
<i>“I believe the present generation of Germans [or: German young people] is morally responsible for the Holocaust-Nazi Germany’s murder of six million Jews during World War II .”</i>								
(N = 95)								
Strongly agree	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	Strongly disagree
	1.0	1.0	1.0	2.1	8.5	25.4	61.0	

^aResponses are arrayed along a 7-point scale ranging from strong agreement (7) through a midpoint indicating neither agreement nor disagreement (4) to strong disagreement

Table 4—Reasons for Denial or Acceptance of Moral Responsibility for Past Wrongs

Reasons	Americans assessing own responsibility (N I 87)	Americans assessing German and Japanese responsibility* (N: 162)	Germans assessing American responsibility (Stuttgart, N: 108)
1. Respondent (or subject) not born at the time of offense. Not morally responsible.	29.9	54.9	28.7
2. Respondent recognizes (or subject should recognize) the gravity of the offense and condemns its perpetrators but is not morally responsible for it.	42.5	24.1	13.0
3. Respondent feels (or subject should feel) obligation to address present wrongs and to prevent reoccurrence of past wrongs but is not morally responsible for past wrongs in which he or she had no part.	18.4	17.3	37.0
4. Respondent feels (or subject should feel) obligation to redress present wrongs, prevent reoccurrence of past wrongs because he or she is morally responsible for them.	9.2	3.7	21.3

*Pooled frequencies based on comparable distribution of responses.

A third group of respondents denying moral responsibility, 18.4 percent of the total, not only recognized past wrongs but also felt a moral obligation to redress them. “I hold my ancestors responsible.... I want to try to make right what they did wrong.” “The only thing I can be responsible for is the present.” Multiculturally oriented respondents, while declaring themselves innocent of past wrongs, strove “towards racial equality and diversifying all parts of the American way of life.”

The fourth group of respondents, nine percent of the total, accepted responsibility. “Although I do not believe that very many of my ancestors were involved in slavery, I believe that it was wrong and that our country as a whole should take responsibility for slavery.” “I am a Caucasian woman and I am ashamed of the fact that my ancestors caused minority groups so much pain and suffering.” Such logic was rare; most students conceding moral responsibility referred to present consequences of past oppression.

“They have to accept responsibility for what their ancestors did. Good or bad. Not only do they benefit from what their ancestors did but it is their responsibility to correct the things of the past.” Another respondent held himself morally liable because his generation “facilitates this oppression and continues the cycle of inequality”; another, “because we have seen the benefits of our ancestors owning slaves.” Yet another declared, “Discrimination is embedded deep into our roots; therefore, each generation is a contributing factor to this segregation.”⁴⁰ Guilt over undeserved benefits and the assumption that existing inequalities between whites and blacks are due to slavery find frequent expression: “As a white person, I still enjoy preference and special privilege over minorities that were created and still perpetuated by institutions such as slavery. Therefore, I am still responsible for taking part in that aspect.”

Germans Judge Americans

Americans apply to German contemporaries the same reasoning they apply to themselves: no one can be responsible for events in which they take no part. What logic do German students apply?

We addressed this question in two steps. We asked a sample of 44 Germans to respond to two statements: “In the United States young people are morally responsible for the enslavement of tens of millions of black people over one hundred and fifty years” and “German youth are responsible today for dealing with National Socialism.” Seventy-five percent of the German students accepted the proposition that German young people are responsible for the crimes of National Socialism (see table 5a).

Table 5a

German Students’ Attitudes toward Moral Responsibility for Past Wrongs (Total sample, N=44)

“In the United States young people are morally responsible for the enslavement of tens of millions of black people over one hundred and fifty years” and “German youth are responsible today for dealing with National Socialism.”								
American youth responsible								
Strongly agree	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	Strongly disagree
	2.3	2.3	4.5	20.5	2.3	9.1	59.0	
German youth responsible								
Strongly agree	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	Strongly disagree
	43.2	20.5	11.4	4.5	13.6	2.3	4.5	

However, German responses to the question about American responsibility depended on question order. When the question about American responsibility for slavery appeared *before* the question about German Holocaust responsibility, four percent of German students agreed that Americans are responsible for historical wrongs. When the question about American responsibility appeared *after* the question about German responsibility, the percentage of German students agreeing that Americans are responsible rose to 13.5

percent, while the percentage falling into the ambivalent/neutral category (four in a 1 to 7 scale) increased from nine to 32 percent. The percentage disagreeing fell from 86 to 55 percent (see table 5b).

Table 5b
 German Students' Attitudes toward Moral Responsibility for Past Wrongs (Split sample, N =22)

"In the United States young people are morally responsible for the enslavement of tens of millions of black people over one hundred and fifty years" and "German youth are responsible today for dealing with National Socialism."

German responsibility, if slavery question is asked first

Strongly agree	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	Strongly disagree
	0.0	0.0	4.5	9.1	0.0	4.5	81.9	

German responsibility, if National Socialism question is asked first

Strongly agree	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	Strongly disagree
	4.5	4.5	4.5	31.9	4.5	13.6	36.5	

Changing question order affects response distribution because it transforms the questions' moral context. Asking about German responsibility invokes a framework within which all subsequent questions must be considered. However, no question-ordering effects appeared when the split-ballot procedure was used on a new sample of 276 University of Georgia respondents. Whether slavery or Holocaust questions appear first or second, the same percentage denied that their German contemporaries are responsible for ancestors' wrongdoing.

The numbers on which this analysis is based are small, but the direction and magnitude of the result warrant confidence. German students disdain National Socialism, but their qualified beliefs about American responsibility betray ambivalence. German youth commonly ask themselves why people of other nations are so eager to remind them of their forebears' crimes, even while knowing they were not alive during their commission. Logically, German students have no more right to hold their American peers responsible for slavery than to hold themselves responsible for the Holocaust; yet when reminded of the Holocaust their reasoning changes: they believe young people elsewhere must be responsible for their own ancestors' misdeeds. "Since others point to us and declare us guilty," they would say, "these people must be guilty, too."

The tone of the University of Stuttgart and University of Georgia responses could not be more different. When we asked American students to explain why they rejected moral responsibility for past oppression, we received straightforward, innocent, simple, unemotional, sincere answers: typically, "I wasn't born yet," or "I didn't do it," or "I'm only responsible for today's problems." German students' responses were more diverse,

complex, and perturbed.” Many German students believed that American young people are, like themselves, innocent because of the time of their birth; others couched this belief within a system of ideas unknown in America. To accept responsibility for past wrongs in Germany or America, they said, is to embrace the “controversial” and “reactionary” concept of *Erbschuld* inherited guilt—an idea connoting “the commercialization of grief.”⁴²

For some students the coupling in the questionnaire of American crimes and National Socialist crimes produced resentment. “Americans are responsible because one should be conscious about one’s own history/past; one should be conscious of one’s own fallibility. The United States, in contrast, insolently intervenes in international policy; assumes the role of world police.” Americans need to be taken down a peg or two and reminded of their own failures: Because they “are so proud on the one part of their history they have to bear responsibility for the other.” Slavery, segregation, endless racial injustice, the murdering of Indians and theft of their land, the imprisonment of their survivors on reservations—these are dark matters. “As Americans show an exaggerated national pride, it is reasonable to remind them of the circumstances in their history which can be neither ethically nor morally supported.” Present practices are also questionable. “Young U.S. citizens do not stand up for human rights in the U.S.; consider the death penalty in Texas.” German students are more willing than their American peers to face the past and fulfill their obligation to deal with it; yet German responses are tinged with an aura of resentment.” “Every generation deserves a chance of rehabilitation. Americans, yes. We Germans should get this chance, too, which is, however, often refused to us.” If Americans and Germans must be held responsible for past wrongdoing, “[t]he American generation has only the advantage insofar as others do not fling the mistakes of the Americans’ ancestors in their face.”

Martin Walser’s concept of *Moralkeule*—morality as a weapon—captures the many nuances of victimization through attribution of guilt.⁴⁴ Walser asserts that the Holocaust was an unmitigated moral wrong, but he believes that Germany’s neighbors have for too long used morality as a weapon to crush the dignity of its people. When Germans themselves recognize past atrocities and so carry Germany’s burden privately in their conscience, there will be no need for their country’s neighbors, or for the state itself, to remind them of their debts. Whether self-imprisonment by internalizing the guilt of an earlier generation is a “breakthrough” (*Befreiungsschlag*), as Walser believes, is contestable; whether repentance can be privatized let alone instilled and maintained without educational and ritual reminders is doubtful. The majority of German students, in any case, reject Walser’s argument.

One cannot read German students’ responses without being reminded of anthropologist Ruth Benedict’s distinction between shame cultures and guilt cultures. “Shame is a reaction to other people’s criticism. . . . Where shame is the major sanction, a man does not experience relief when he makes his fault public even to a confessor.”⁴⁵ In contrast, guilt results from an internalized censor, a conscience or superego, criticizing one’s ego independently of others’ knowledge of wrongdoing. Benedict stresses that people everywhere experience shame and guilt under different circumstances, but the emphasis

falls differently in different countries. Japan's is a shame culture while Germany, with its strong Protestant and Catholic roots, is, relative to Japan, a culture of guilt. On the other hand, Germany shares with Japan a feudal past in which relations governed by shame norms remain relevant. Sensitivity to the judgment of other nations is a sure sign that the shame dimension of German culture remains viable. That Germans, like Japanese, often feel resentment toward their judges and the obligations placed upon them is equally evident and no less an aspect of shame.

In summary, American and German responses fall into two categories: a majority denying responsibility and a minority accepting responsibility for the wrongs of the past. Open-ended responses, however, show that the size and makeup of the two categories differ. Twenty-one percent of the German students believe their American peers are morally responsible for historical wrongs against African and Native Americans, but only nine percent of the American students can think of reasons why they should be. Thirty-seven percent of the German students believe their American peers should feel an obligation to address present wrongs, even if not morally responsible for their causes; 18 percent of the Americans actually do. Germans then, are more likely than Americans to recognize an obligation to deal with historical injustice (see table 4). Americans' sense of obligation to the past is considerably more casual than Germans think it should be.

Conclusion

Assessing the way students think about responsibility is more than a mapping of the working of the mind; it is a way of knowing how human beings use their minds—symbol-making, conceptualizing, meaning-seeking—to fix personal experience at a definite time within the experience of the nation. Different combinations of culture and experience, we have found, lead to different perspectives on causation, blame, accountability, and, above all, community. Since the national community, as Robert Bellah conceives it, is a community of memory, it continually retells “its constitutive narrative, and in so doing it offers examples of the men and women who have embodied and exemplified the meaning of the community. These stories of collective history and exemplary individuals are an important part of the tradition that is so central to a community of memory.... And if the community is completely honest, it will remember stories not only of sufferings received but of sufferings inflicted—dangerous memories, for they call the community to alter ancient evils.”⁴⁶ In question is not whether Americans and Germans remember ancient evils but how they relate themselves to them, and this relationship is complex, reflecting many aspects of American and German culture, including the reckoning and framing of time itself.

American culture and German culture can be located on a continuum limited at one pole by traditional, “postfigurative” consciousness and at the other by modern, configurative consciousness. In “postfigurative” cultures, past and present are integrated into a single realm of experience.”⁴⁷ Programs for the present are modeled on the past; thoughts of the present and memories of the past commingle with no boundaries distinguishing their contents. “Integrators” experience today's projects, no matter what their goals, no matter when conceived and formulated, as continuations of yesterday's events. At the other

extreme are configurative cultures in which things of the past and things of the present exist in two untouching worlds. Guided by peers as much as predecessors, “segmenters” reserve a separate time zone for each. As segmenters cannot live in the present and past simultaneously, they cannot bask in the glow of past achievements; cannot assume guilt for past misdeeds; and cannot connect themselves to history in any causal or morally meaningful way. Segmenters know the past but do not-cannot-conceive themselves a part of it.”

Articulating responsibility is a form of boundary work, a way of expressing beliefs about the proper relation between the living and the dead. All cultures segment and integrate time, but American culture is largely a segmenting culture in which the living feel few obligations to the dead and assume few obligations of the dead. German culture, in contrast, is rooted in the residue of European status systems, with their strong traditions of status, honor, exclusion, and mutual obligation.” Assuming responsibility for peers enhances status solidarity as it enables all groups, whether ordered vertically, from the aristocratic ruling class to the peasantry, or horizontally by ethnicity or religion, to lessen the precariousness of life and manage conflict. German culture is an integrating culture in which the call to assume past debts, however strongly resisted, is more difficult to ignore than it is in America.

Culture is a context, not a cause, of national differences in historical consciousness. Before the 1960s German young people were far less sensitive to National Socialism and Americans less sensitive to slavery than are their successors. Within the same political structure, contrasting cultures of memory lead to different judgments of the past. Furthermore, institutions and individuals segment and integrate past and present differently. Regret, as noted, is orchestrated by institutions, including universities, media, and religious and political associations, but many individuals reject their premises. Many individuals cannot hold their generation let alone themselves responsible for past wrongdoings, but to say that organizations are for this reason morally superior to their members is misleading. To assert that accepting responsibility for the past is more virtuous than denying responsibility is equally misleading. Kolakowski, von der Gablentz, and Schwan, among many other moral philosophers, rely on this assumption, but their views apply more to Germany than to America. Admission of responsibility for present wrongs alone is rooted in ideas of what it means morally to be an American, what defines the good society, on what basis citizens are to live together, what claims one set of citizens may place on another, what rights it may demand of another. These moral ideas are not equally compelling to every American, but they are no less moral than beliefs about collective liability, to which many American institutions, especially American universities, are committed.

Beginning with the 1960s, new history teaching standards have thrown Unprecedented light on the underside of America’s past. The New American History, structured by a logic of inclusion and cultural diversity, not only condemns historical events that promoted exclusion and consensus but also defines these events as characteristic features of American history.” This “new history,” a product of late twentieth-century progressivism, provides the intellectual basis for affirming regret, but it has not negated

the logic of “traditional history,” whose narrative links public wrongdoings to individual failings, redeemable by holding the nation’s offenders, not the nation itself, responsible. The ideal of individual responsibility, then, is necessary to the way Americans conceive and relate themselves to events. Americans conceive all events, even random events like automobile accidents,” as products of individual responsibility and fit them into the way they run their institutions and socialize their children. The individual, not the society, is for most Americans the relevant agency of moral obligation.

Is a perspective that so radically denies the past viable? On the one hand, Americans’ belief that every generation is responsible for itself lessens appreciation of the legacy of the past and erodes motivation to sacrifice for posterity. On the other hand, Americans’ belief in the sanctity of the individual, forever free from the wrongdoings of his or her ancestors, mitigates racial, ethnic, and religious resentments and accelerates the quest for an inclusive society. Societies of unlimited inclusion require limited liability for past wrongs.”

Notes

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1. In Europe similar rhetoric is exemplified by French Prime Minister Jacques Chirac’s apologizing for French complicity in the Holocaust and expressly repudiating former Prime Minister Mitterand’s assertions of French innocence. Among scores of similar gestures are German President Roman Herzog’s regretting formally the Luftwaffe’s devastation of Guernica, public demands for acknowledgment of the German Army’s World War II atrocities against the Greeks, and Polish President Kwasnietzky’s public admission of wartime anti-Semitic pogroms by the Polish inhabitants of Jedwabne. Elsewhere, New Zealand officials apologized for British expropriation of Maori land and awarded the Maoris \$112 million and 39,000 acres in compensation. In Australia, white reformers rejected official apologies to aborigines for not going far enough.

2. Emile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* (1915, New York: Free Press, 1965), 420.

3. For detail, see Barry Schwartz, ed., “Introduction: The Expanding Past,” *Qualitative Sociology* 19 (fall 1996): 27 5-82; Barry Schwartz, “Postmodernity and Historical Reputation: Abraham Lincoln in Late Twentieth-Century American Memory,” *Social Forces* 77 (September 1998): 63-103.

4. James D. Hunter, *Culture Wars: The Struggle to Define America* (New York: Basic, 1991), 120.

5. *Ibid.*, 122-27.

6. For a critical overview of the culture wars thesis, see Rhys H. Williams, ed., *Cultural Wars in American Politics: Critical Reviews of a Popular Myth* (New York:

Aldine de Gruyter, 1997), esp. 63-100. For a general (balanced) overview, see James L. Nolan Jr. , ed., *The Culture Wars: Current Contests and Future Prospects* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1996).

7. Hunter, *Culture Wars*, 290.

8. Leszek Kolakowski cited in Gesine Schwan, *Politics and Guilt: The Destructive Power of Silence*, trans. Thomas Dunlap (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1997), II.

9. Friedrich Nietzsche already in the nineteenth century characterized Christian norms of regret as a triumph of “slave morality” that subordinates noble achievement to the resentment of history’s losers. In contrast, Richard McKeon locates moral responsibility historically by defining it as an attribute of democratic, not Christian, culture. As the word “responsibility” appeared in English and French in 1787 in connection with new reciprocal relations between the individual and the state, there arose the corresponding idea of a self-conscious “cultural” or “collective” responsibility. “The concept of responsibility relates actions to agents by a causal tie and applies a judgement of value to both.... The agent may be an individual or a group acting in the context of a society or a political state, or an individual, group, or community acting in the looser association of free individuals or independent communities or states whose actions affect each other.” “The Development and the Significance of the Concept of Responsibility,” in *Freedom and History and Other Essays*, ed. Zahava K. McKeon (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 82.

10. Oskar H. von der Gablentz, “Responsibility,” in *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*, ed. Edward L. Sills (1968, New York: Macmillan, 1979), 497.

11. Schwan, *Politics and Guilt*, 7-8.

12. Jürgen Habermas, “Grenzen des Neohistorismus.” Interview with M. Ferry, in *Jürgen Habermas: Die Nachholende Revolution: Kleine Politische Schriften* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1990), 7: 14.9-56.

13. Henri Tajfel and John C. Turner, “The Social Identity Theory of Intergroup Conflict,” in *Psychology of Intergroup Relations*, ed. Stephen Worchel and William G. Austin (Chicago: Nelson-Hall, 1986), 7-24.

14. John C. Turner, Michael A. Hogg, Penelope J. Oakes, Stephen D. Reicher, and Margaret S. Wetherell, *Rediscovering the Social Group: A Self-Categorization Theory* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1987).

15. Bertjan Doosje, Nyla R. Branscombe, Russell Spears, and Antony S. R. Manstead, “Guilty by Association: When One’s Group Has a Negative History,” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 75 (1998): 872-86; Eviatar Zerubavel, “Social Memories: Steps to a Sociology of the Past,” *Qualitative Sociology* 19 (fall 1996): 283-99.

16. Michel-Rolph Trouillot, “Abortive Rituals: Historical Apologies in the Global Era,” *Interventions* 2, no. 2 (spring 2003): 171-86.

17. For a useful if not altogether satisfactory discussion of the conditions under which apologies succeed or fail, see Nicholas Tavuchis, *Mea Culpa: A Sociology of Apology and Reconciliation* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991).

18. Jeffrey K. Olick and Brenda Coughlin, “The Politics of Regret: Analytical Frames,” in *The Politics of the Past*, ed. John B. Torpey (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2003). The rise of regret, in their view, is a characteristic of our age, “an age

of shattered time and shifting allegiances, indeed of skepticism toward allegiances at all” (37-62).

19. Seymour Martin Lipset, *American Exceptionalism: A Double-Edged Sword* (New York: W W Norton, 1996).

20. Louis Hartz, *The Liberal Tradition in America: An Interpretation of American Political Thought since the Revolution* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1955).

21. Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America* (New York: Knopf, 1945), 2: 104-5.

22. *Ibid.*, 2:105-6.

23. Thomas Jefferson, “Letter to James Madison,” in *The Portable Thomas Jefferson*, ed. Merrill D. Peterson (New York: Penguin, 1975), 445.

24. *Ibid.*, 448.

25. Ralph Waldo Emerson, “The American Scholar,” in *Selections from Ralph Waldo Emerson*, ed. Stephen Whicher (1837; Boston: Houghton-Mifflin, 1959), 67.

26. Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The House of the Seven Gables* (1859; New York: New American Library, 1962), 162.

27. *Ibid.*, 163.

28. Florence Kluckhohn, “Dominant and Variant Value Orientations,” *Social Welfare Reform* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1951), 97-113.

29. Robert N. Bellah, Richard Madsen, Ann Swidler, and Steven M. Tipton, *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life* (New York: Harper and Row, 1985), 154.

30. Thomas Cottle, *Perceiving Time* (New York: Wiley, 1976), 85-94.

31. Barry Schwartz and Mikyoung Kim, “Honor, Dignity, and Collective Memory: Judging the Past in Korea and the United States,” in *Culture in Mind: Toward a Sociology of Culture and Cognition*, ed. Karen A. Cerulo (New York: Routledge, 2001), 218.

32. With a similar statement, “My generation is responsible today for dealing with the National Socialist past,” 71 percent agreed.

33. In a German national sample, drawn and analyzed by Peter Schmidt and his associates, 64 percent of the respondents agreed with the statement, “I personally feel the persecution of the Jews by National Socialists is a very heavy burden.” Seventy-five percent agreed with the statement, “The persecution of the Jews by the National Socialists is a great crime, which historically cannot be eradicated.” In contrast, more respondents (49 percent) disagreed with the statement, “After 1945, the Germans have been too preoccupied with their own history” than the number of respondents agreeing with it (33 percent). Only 19 percent agreed with the statement, “Guilt over National Socialism has been implanted in us by Allied powers.”

34. When “fascists” is substituted for “National Socialists,” the same result, 76 percent agreement, obtains.

35. For detail on the geopolitics of memory, as they distinguish Germany from Japan, see Akiko Hashimoto, “Japanese and German Projects of Moral Recovery: Toward a New Understanding of War Memories in Defeated Nations,” *Occasional Papers in Japanese Studies* (Cambridge, MA: Edwin O. Reischauer Institute of Japanese Studies, Harvard University, March 1999).

36. Wolfgang Michalka, *Deutsche Geschichte 1933-1945: Dokumente zur Innen- und Außenpolitik* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 1993), 380.

37. Lipset, *American Exceptionalism*.

38. A slightly different version of the Indian and Holocaust question produced similar results: 15 percent of the American students agreed that "American citizens today bear moral responsibility for the killing, forced expulsion, and other maltreatment of millions of Indians." Five percent agreed with the statement, "I believe that German citizens born today bear moral responsibility for the Holocaust-Nazi Germany's murder of six million Jews during World War II."

39. Denying responsibility for the past does not necessarily mean that one feels no connection to it. As one denier put it: "I take pride in my history and ancestors when a minority forces me to think about it. For example, blacks run around saying we owe them for past abuse we didn't even commit. I don't agree and that upsets me that they really think that." The offense of this respondent's ancestors is less relevant to him than the fact of their kinship.

40. Slavery is not only transmuted into the present-day problem of segregation; "[s]lavery still exists for many people based on gender."

41. We did not ask German students expressly to explain their own sense of responsibility; however, when explaining whether or not they considered Americans responsible for their country's historical offenses the students' responses were peppered with comments about their felt relation to Germany's past.

42. *Erbschuld* (charge or encumbrance on an estate) is a legacy (the prefix, *erb*, refers to inheritance) differing from Thomas Jefferson's "natural law" of the earth belonging to the living unencumbered by the debts of the past. *Erbschuld* is a vehicle of guilt distinguishable from other legacies, including *Erbfall* (heritage), *Erbbesitz* (hereditary possession), *Erbrecht* (right of succession), etc. Only when *Schuld* (guilt) is the suffix does legacy become negative—"inadequate," "needless," and "coercive." *Zwanghaft* and *haftbar* likewise refer to moral responsibility as a libel immorally imposed. The German vocabulary of denial is rich and deep: to be held responsible for the distant past is to be responsible for "killing a people that is already dead." Against this libel some German respondents, thinking of their own country's past, referred to the "Mercy of a Late Birth" (quoting Helmut Kohl's remark to an Israeli audience).

43. Americans and Germans can also be linked by their common background. "The American majority has emerged from European tradition or the European value system with its latent sense of superiority." In both cases the obligation to express oneself publicly, a duty routinely ignored during the National Socialist era, becomes critical. "People cannot be accountable for past sins, but people can be held responsible where they shut their eyes and do not take an initiative." This respondent offers as his example the Americans' silence on capital punishment, which reminds him, as it does other German students, of the necessity to deal with the National Socialist past.

44. Martin Walser, "Erfahrungen beim Verfassen einer Sonntagsrede," *Dankesrede. Friedenspreis des Deutschen Buchhandels* (Frankfurt am Main: Borsenverein des Deutschen Buchhandels, 1998), 37-51.

45. Ruth Benedict, *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword: Patterns Japanese Culture* (Cleveland: World Publishing, 1946), 223. No analytic distinction has been more

misrepresented than Benedict's distinction between shame cultures and guilt cultures. Tavuchis, *Mea Culpa o*, 37, and Ian Buruma, *The Wages of Guilt: Memories of War in Germany and Japan* (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1994), 116-17, for example, are influential authors, but they are so concerned about "national profiling" that they consider the existence of a single guilt-ridden Japanese or a single shamed German as evidence of Benedict's cultural prejudice and inadequate concepts.

46. Bellah et al., *Habits of the Heart*, 153.

47. Margaret Mead, *Culture and Commitment: A Study of the Generation Gap* (New York: Doubleday, 1970).

48. For a discussion of integration and segmentation in the realm of home and work (private time and work time as opposed to present time and past time), see Christena E. Nippert-Eng, *Home and Work: Negotiating Boundaries through Everyday Life* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995).

49. Max Weber, "Class, Status, Party," in *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology* ed. Hans Gerth and C. Wright Mills (New York; Oxford University Press, 1958), 186-91.

50. Gilbert T. Sewell, *History of Textbooks at the New Century: A Report of the American Textbook Council* (New York: American Textbook Council, 2000).

51. Joseph Gusfield, *The Culture of Public Problems* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981).

52. "Surfeit of memory" is the term Charles S. Maier uses to portray the recent celebration of minority glories and sufferings. Such self-indulgence, Maier believes, diverts attention away from transformative politics. "It testifies to the loss of a future orientation, of progress toward civic enfranchisement and growing equality. It reflects a new focus on narrow ethnicity as a replacement for encompassing communities based on constitutions, legislation and widening attributes of citizenship." Maier, "A Surfeit of Memory," *History and Memory* 5 (1993):150. Maier is right about the dimensions of the problem but wrong about causal direction. The surfeit of memory is the effect, not the inhibitor, of narrow ethnicity.