

Germany's Unforgettable War: The Twisted Road from Berlin to Moscow and Back

Reading Warren Kimball's plea to bring World War II back to American history, I was reminded of a television documentary shown in Germany almost twenty years ago. This Soviet-American coproduction was based on a wealth of footage from German archives (especially the well-known *Wochenschauen*, or weekly newsreels, screened before every feature film in German cinemas during the Third Reich) and, even more interesting and definitely more innovative, on a vast number of Soviet newsreels that had never been seen in the West. This enabled German viewers to watch for the first time the Soviet perspective of the war as it was presented to domestic audiences in the 1940s. Indeed, the German television channel that broadcast the film anticipated a barrage of vehemently negative responses from a public still unfamiliar with the view of the war from the other side of the hill. To forestall such criticism, a panel of (German) historians and military experts was invited to discuss each episode immediately after it was screened and to publicly "correct" any Soviet distortion of the "objective," or at least German, historical truth that the use of such contaminated material might have introduced. That the contemporary German newsreels shown in the film were often taken by propaganda companies at the front and processed by Goebbels's ministry was seen as somewhat less threatening to the public's sensibilities.

Characteristic of the radically different perspectives on World War II were the entirely different titles given to this documentary in the countries that screened it. On Soviet television it was called by the official Communist and current designation of the war (which for the Soviet Union, as for the United States, took place only between 1941 and 1945), namely, "The Great Patriotic War." This still popular name was part of Stalin's effort to arouse Russian patriotic feelings in the face of foreign invasion, rather than to exhort his empire's citizens to defend the cause of international communism, whose destruction in the Soviet Union many of them would have welcomed.¹ In the

1. Nina Tumarkin, *The Living and the Dead: The Rise and Fall of the Cult of World War II in Russia* (New York, 1994); Richard Stites, ed., *Culture and Entertainment in Wartime Russia* (Bloomington, 1995). For sophisticated discussions of the links and contradictions between communism, war, and

German Democratic Republic (GDR) it was lamely called “The Second World War,” so as to avoid any embarrassing questions about the loyalties of German workers who fought for Hitler while allegedly opposing him and destroyed Russia while allegedly committed to the international solidarity of the working class.² In the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG), however, the documentary was called “The Unforgettable War.” Since the film focused on the war on the Eastern Front, where the vast majority of German soldiers fought and died, and where the back of the Wehrmacht was broken by the Red Army, it seemed an appropriate title.³ For Germans, even several decades after the fall of Nazism, World War II consisted of two phases: The first was made of extraordinary expansion and breathtaking victories; the second of costly withdrawals, widespread destruction, humiliating capitulation, foreign occupation, and national division. Toward the end of the war increasing numbers of Germans felt that, as the saying went, it was better to come to “an end filled with terror” than to keep living in a condition of “terror without end.” The growing intensity of American and British aerial bombing of German cities, the horrific losses on the Eastern Front, and the approach of the Red Army to the territory of the Reich have remained etched in the German memory as the most traumatic episodes in a century filled with tragedies and traumas.⁴

Not surprisingly, the American version of this documentary was titled “The Unknown War.” Nothing better illustrates the vast difference between the American (and, from a somewhat different vantage point, also the British) perspective on World War II and the German memory of the event. Americans knew then and know very little now about the Eastern Front. For them, the war against Germany was fought in the air, in North Africa, Italy, and Western Europe. And then, of course, there was the Pacific. To be sure, when the horrors of the concentration camps were revealed to a larger public in the last weeks of fighting, the notion of waging a chivalrous war against a decent military (if politically despicable) foe was severely undermined.⁵ But by and large, the

the ethnic policies of the Soviet Union see Terry Martin, “The Origins of Soviet Ethnic Cleansing,” *Journal of Modern History* 70 (December 1998): 813–61; Amir Weiner, “Nature, Nurture, and Memory in a Socialist Utopia: Delineating the Soviet Socio-Ethnic Body in the Age of Socialism,” *American Historical Review* 104 (October 1999): 1114–55; Peter Holquist, “To Count, to Extract, to Exterminate: Population Statistics and Population Politics in Late Imperial and Soviet Russia,” in *A State of Nations: Empire and Nation-Making in the Soviet Union*, ed. Ronald Grigor Suny and Terry Martin (forthcoming).

2. On the differences between the manner in which the GDR and FRG came to terms with the Nazi past see Jeffrey Herf, *Divided Memory: The Nazi Past in the Two Germanys* (Cambridge, MA, 1997).

3. On the war on the Eastern Front see Omer Bartov, *The Eastern Front, 1941–1945: German Troops and the Barbarisation of Warfare* (London, 1985); idem, *Hitler's Army: Soldiers, Nazis, and War in the Third Reich* (New York, 1991); and Rolf-Dieter Müller and Gerd R. Ueberschär, *Hitler's War in the East, 1941–1945: A Critical Assessment* (Providence, 1997).

4. Elisabeth Domansky, “A Lost War: World War II in Postwar German Memory,” in *Thinking About the Holocaust: After Half a Century*, ed. Alvin H. Rosenfeld (Bloomington, 1997), 233–72.

5. On the early encounter with atrocity photographs see Barbie Zelizer, *Remembering to Forget: Holocaust Memory through the Camera's Eye* (Chicago, 1998); on the more mixed German response to

image of the German army, as distinct from that of the SS, remained relatively unimpaired. It was vaguely known that things in the East were somewhat different. But since the East became the site of the United States's most formidable enemy, and West Germany was soon transformed into the United States's most important ally in continental Europe, the horrors of the Eastern Front were relegated to history books – a diminishing number of which had much to say about it anyway.⁶

This view of World War II from a Western perspective is not limited to the Americans. To be sure, one can say that no single nation profited as much, and at such a relatively low price, from the war as did the United States. Of the two superpowers that emerged from the devastation of the war, one was almost unscathed while the other was almost ruined. The Soviet Union lost an estimated twenty-seven million people, the majority of whom were civilians; total American losses, including the Pacific, were three hundred thousand. Not an inch of the continental United States was either occupied or damaged by enemy action. Conversely, the western regions of the Soviet Union, from Leningrad in the north to Stalingrad and Rostov in the south, from the Baltic countries and Belorussia to western and southern Russia, the Ukraine, the Crimean Peninsula, and parts of the Caucasus, were laid waste by vicious fighting, scorched earth policies by both sides, and widespread exploitation of economic and human resources. Thousands of villages and towns were destroyed in so-called antipartisan campaigns intended to depopulate territories foreseen as Germany's postwar living space, and millions of men, women, and children were murdered in operations of collective punishment or through the hunger, epidemics, and exposure to the elements that resulted from state-directed robbery and devastation of property. One can hardly think of a greater difference between conditions in the two main victor nations in 1945. In many ways, the Russians are still paying the price of victory. For it cannot be overemphasized that however criminal and odious Stalin's regime surely was, without the Red Army and its horrendous blood sacrifice, the Wehrmacht would have not been defeated and Nazism would have remained a fact in Europe for many more decades.⁷

views of their victims and their own sense of victimhood see Dagmar Barnouw, *Germany, 1945: Views of War and Violence* (Bloomington, 1996).

6. On the transformation in the status of the FRG see David Clay Large, *Germans to the Front: West German Rearmament in the Adenauer Era* (Chapel Hill, 1996). On the evacuation of the Holocaust – and by extension, all other crimes by the Wehrmacht in the east – from military history see Donald G. Schilling, “Re-presenting the Holocaust in the General Histories of World War II” (unpublished paper, 1998). For a classic example of writing on German occupation policies in the Soviet Union with the Wehrmacht's crimes largely left out and no systematic analysis of the genocide of the Jews there see the otherwise pioneering study Alexander Dallin, *German Rule in Russia, 1941–1945: A Study of Occupation Policies*, 2d ed. (London, 1981).

7. See especially, Horst Boog et al., eds., *Das Deutsche Reich und der Zweite Weltkrieg* [The German Reich and World War II], vol. 4, *Der Angriff auf die Sowjetunion* [The attack on the Soviet Union] (Stuttgart, 1983); and Rolf-Dieter Müller and Hans-Erich Volkmann, eds., *Die Wehrmacht. Mythos und Realität* [The Wehrmacht: Myth and reality] (Munich, 1999). One sobering fact is that Red

Among the European nations, Eastern Europe suffered terribly from the war. Poland, with a population of thirty million, lost six million, half of whom were Jews (almost the entire Jewish population of Poland), under German occupation. Romania and Hungary, which fought on the side of the Germans, paid a heavy toll in military casualties; they also participated in the murder of hundreds of thousands of their own Jewish citizens. Southeastern Europe was devastated; Greece, Albania, and Yugoslavia were torn apart in a series of clashes with German and Italian occupiers, as well as between local fascist, royalist, and Communist organizations, and in devastatingly costly partisan campaigns. Conversely, Western Europe not only paid a far lower price than the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, it was actually far less severely damaged than in World War I. Thus, both British and French losses in fighting the Germans, and German losses in fighting in the West, were significantly smaller than in 1914–1918 and almost marginal when compared to the cost of the fighting in the east. Of over 3 million German military deaths, possibly 150,000 died in the west. France lost about 1.5 million soldiers in World War I, and fewer than 200,000 official military casualties in World War II out of a total of 600,000 (which includes 75,000 murdered Jews, some 25,000 members of the Resistance who died in the camps, 10,000 executed on French territory, 40,000 French volunteers killed wearing German uniforms, and civilian losses incurred during military air and land operations in France). British losses in World War I were somewhat under 1 million, whereas between 1939 and 1945 they stood at 240,000 soldiers and 60,000 victims of air raids (the same figure as French air raid victims).⁸

This means that when we speak of World War II as a devastating war, indeed, an unprecedented war of subjugation, destruction, and genocide, this does not mean that everyone, or every nation, suffered from and experienced the war in the same degree and manner. For some nations or population groups it was an unparalleled catastrophe. This was the case for the Soviet Union and Poland, for the Jews and the Gypsies. Germany's losses in World War II were double those of 1914–1918. But despite the terrible strategic bombing and subsequent occupation of the country, only about 500,000 civilians deaths were registered (excluding of course the Jewish population sent to the death camps). Hence, despite a significant loss of life and very substantial material damage, and although it lost the war, Germany subjected its neighbors in the east and those

Army casualties in the battle of Berlin were equivalent to the total figure of American casualties during the entire war in both the European and the Pacific theaters. Similarly, between 1 July and 31 December 1944, the Wehrmacht lost a monthly average of over two hundred thousand men (killed, wounded, and missing) on the Eastern Front, compared to an average of only eight thousand casualties per month on the Western Front (which was only then reactivated following the landings in Normandy).

8. Pieter Lagrou, "Utopia, Violence, Resistance: The Legacy of Nazi Occupation in Western Europe" (unpublished paper, 1999); more generally, idem, *The Legacy of Nazi Occupation: Patriotic Memory and National Recovery in Western Europe, 1945–1965* (Cambridge, England, 2000); and Jay M. Winter, *The Great War and the British People* (Cambridge, MA, 1986), 66–76.

population groups it targeted for decimation or extermination to far greater destruction than it sustained, both in absolute and in relative quantitative terms. The long-term price of defeat for Germany was the loss of territory and the division of the country. It is only following the fall of communism in 1990 that the military and political debacle of 1945 has been reversed.⁹

As far as the other Western powers, France and Britain, were concerned, their more limited losses in World War II were largely the result of a widespread feeling that their populations would not agree to yet another bloodletting on the scale of 1914–1918. Eventually, their rather qualified victory in the war (Britain with massive American and Soviet help, France as a German satellite for much of the time) also symbolized their decline to the status of middle-ranking powers. Under the conditions of the Cold War they had to concede the hegemony of the United States as the only power capable of stemming Soviet expansion; under severe domestic economic and political pressures and a growing tide of nationalism in the Third World they were gradually compelled to relinquish control of their colonial empires in the first two postwar decades.¹⁰ Britain, however, remained proud of its stand against Nazism in the dark years between the collapse of France and the entry of the United States into the war. Conversely, the humiliating debacle of 1940, the German occupation, the Vichy regime's complicity in Nazi genocidal policies, and the internal struggle between the collaborators and the Resistance, left a deep scar on France's national psyche. This ambivalent record of the war years, successfully suppressed by Charles de Gaulle's myth of the Resistance in the early postwar decades, has more recently come to play an increasingly important role in French domestic politics. The French have thus paid a steep moral price whose impact is difficult to gauge but impossible to ignore. In this sense, while the British clung to the nostalgia of their greatest hour of glory and were reluctant to face up to the melancholy realities of their postwar decline, the French have struggled with the hangover of a belatedly admitted disgrace and an only partially articulated sense of shame. But whichever way one thought of the war, it doubtlessly remained an event of momentous importance for much of the second half of the century in all European countries.¹¹

This said, it is also quite true that the onset of the Cold War shortly after the end of hostilities against Germany changed not only the political but also the psychological and historical (and thus eventually the historiographical) parameters of people's perceptions. This can be demonstrated in the case of

9. For further analysis see Richard Overy, *Russia's War* (New York, 1998); and idem, *Why the Allies Won* (New York, 1997).

10. Paul Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers: Economic Change and Military Conflict from 1500 to 2000* (New York, 1989), 347–95; Alan S. Milward, *The Reconstruction of Western Europe, 1945–1951* (Berkeley, 1984).

11. On France's preoccupation with the past see Henry Rousso, *The Vichy Syndrome: History and Memory in France since 1944* (Cambridge, MA, 1991). On Eastern Europe since 1945 see Joseph Rothschild, *Return to Diversity: A Political History of East Central Europe since World War II*, 2d ed. (New York, 1993).

numerous European nations, ranging from the Soviet Union, Poland, and Yugoslavia, to France, Britain, and Italy, to name only some of the most important. Similarly, the end of the Cold War, or rather, the fall of communism, once more changed the parameters of the debate and in more than one sense allowed for a variety of issues that had been repressed since the late 1940s to resurface again. But since history can never be turned back, this “return of the repressed” actually heralded a new transformation in perceptions that has had, and is still having, a major impact on domestic and foreign European politics.¹²

In the limited space of this article I obviously cannot analyze the changing perceptions of World War II in Europe as a whole. Suffice it to say that some of the most important features of such changes since the fall of communism include reevaluations of national histories in countries liberated from Soviet occupation; reexaminations of the role of resistance to Nazi occupation both in Eastern and in Western Europe; rethinking the extent of collaboration and complicity with German authorities; expanding the historical record on the extermination of the Jews and other policies of genocide, ethnic cleansing, and exploitation by the Nazi regime; and, last but not least, reviving the theory of totalitarianism that tends to conflate Nazism and communism and, intentionally or not, to play in favor of nationalist, at times chauvinist interests in a variety of nations.¹³ Nonetheless, from this point on I will focus on the case of Germany as one of the most interesting and crucial examples of the war’s long-term effects and the vicissitudes of its interpretation.

Warren Kimball’s reference to that little song by Jimmy Buffet, “So what the hell were we fighting for, such a long, long time ago,” is a good launching point for a discussion of Germany’s unforgettable war. For the question is not whether Germans can remember the war, but how they remember it and the implications of their memories. What were the Germans fighting for? How much of it remained relevant after 1945? How was the war experience reinterpreted by the FRG? To what extent was this interpretation influenced by postwar circumstances and beliefs, disillusionments and denials? Can we now perceive a new cycle of interpretations and reinterpretations in the wake of reunification? What may be the political consequences of such revisions? These are some of the questions I will try to address briefly in the next few pages.

12. This is expressed also in recent reviews of the twentieth century. See, for example, Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Extremes: A History of the World, 1914–1991* (New York, 1995); and Mark Mazower, *Dark Continent: Europe’s Twentieth Century* (New York, 1999). See also Helmut Peitsch et al., eds., *European Memories of the Second World War* (New York, 1999).

13. For some examples see R. J. Crampton, *Eastern Europe in the Twentieth Century* (London, 1994); Michael Geyer and John W. Boyer, eds., *Resistance against the Third Reich: 1933–1990* (Chicago, 1994); Marc Olivier Baruch, *Servir l’État français: L’administration en France de 1940 à 1944* [To serve the French state: The civil service in France from 1940 to 1944] (Paris, 1997); Christian Gerlach, *Kalkulierte Morde: Die deutsche Wirtschafts- und Vernichtungspolitik in Weissrussland 1941 bis 1944* [Calculated murders: German Economic and extermination policies in Belorussia, 1941 to 1944] (Hamburg, 1999); François Furet, *The Passing of an Illusion: The Idea of Communism in the Twentieth Century* (Chicago, 1999); and Stéphane Courtois et al., *The Black Book of Communism: Crimes, Terror, Repression* (Cambridge, MA, 1999).

Germany's aims in World War II were a combination of traditional military and political goals dating back to the pre-1914 Wilhelmine Empire and the new ideology of Nazism as expressed especially by Hitler. Germany's main foreign policy goal throughout the interwar period was to reverse the *Diktat* of Versailles, that is, to change the peace terms dictated by the victorious Entente powers, whose provisions severely diminished its territory and limited its army. There was a wide consensus in German politics about the need to undo the treaty, and growing numbers of politicians in other countries agreed that Versailles had caused more harm than good and ought to be revised in favor of Germany. Most mainstream Germans agreed that their country should become again a great European power, and the conservatives and the military supported German territorial expansion well beyond the borders of 1914, rather in line with Germany's war aims in World War I, which included some annexations in the West (especially of the mineral-rich areas in Belgium and northeastern France) and wide expanses of land in newly reestablished Poland, as well as the Ukraine and the Baltic. It was on this basis that the nationalists and the army ultimately promoted Hitler's nomination as chancellor by President Hindenburg and supported his regime in the 1930s, striving mightily to create the economic and military infrastructure that would facilitate the extraordinary gains of the first two years of the war.¹⁴

Nazi ideology, however, had much more far-reaching goals. These were based on two fundamental principles, that of race, and especially anti-Semitism, and that of gaining *Lebensraum*, or living space, especially in the Slav lands of Eastern Europe and Russia.¹⁵ To be sure, neither anti-Semitism nor anti-Bolshevism was a monopoly of the Nazis. Quite the contrary, these were deeply ingrained sentiments in conservative and bourgeois circles in Germany. While the roots of modern political and racial anti-Semitism reached back well into the Second Empire, anti-Bolshevism had emerged as a powerful rallying cry, made up of deep anxiety and violent hatred, ever since the Bolshevik revolution of 1917 (engineered in part by the German army high command) and the German revolution of 1918.¹⁶ The crucial difference, however, was that the Nazi conceptualization of both race and space was entirely open-ended. For Hitler's regime, the racial cleansing of Germany, and later on of all areas annexed to the Reich or occupied by the Wehrmacht, was a *sine qua non*. This meant, of

14. F. Fischer, *Germany's Aims in the First World War* (London, 1967); Klaus-Jürgen Müller, *The Army, Politics, and Society in Germany, 1933–45: Studies in the Army's Relation to Nazism* (New York, 1987); F. L. Carsten, *The Reichswehr and Politics, 1918–1933*, 2d ed. (Berkeley, 1973); John Wheeler-Bennett, *The Nemesis of Power: The German Army in Politics, 1918–1945*, 2d ed. (London, 1980).

15. Eberhard Jäckel, *Hitler's World View: A Blueprint for Power* (Cambridge, MA, 1981).

16. Peter Pulzer, *The Rise of Political Anti-Semitism in Germany and Austria*, rev. ed. (Cambridge, MA, 1988); Ulrich Herbert, *Best: Biographische Studien über Radikalismus, Weltanschauung und Vernunft, 1903–1989* [Best: Biographical studies of extremism, ideology, and reason, 1903–1989] (Bonn, 1996).

course, first of all entirely wiping out the Jewish “race.”¹⁷ But this was far from the end of Europe’s cleansing. Indeed, the Third Reich began by cleansing its own “Aryan” population through the forced sterilization and then the medical murder of the physically and mentally handicapped.¹⁸ And, along with its anti-Semitic policies, the regime turned against the Sinti and Roma, or Gypsies, who were considered both “asocial” and racially inferior.¹⁹ These three groups, the Jews, the handicapped, and the Gypsies, were slated for extermination. But then there were the Slavs, among whom some, such as the Czechs, were potential “human material” for Germanization; some, such as the Croats and the Ukrainians, could prove to be useful allies; and some, especially the Poles and the Russians, were “subhumans” who, following the destruction of their elites and a process of decimation through starvation, would be made into the helots of those representatives of the German master race charged with colonizing this vast eastern *Lebensraum*.²⁰ Germany’s racial policies had, therefore, no limit, for both the Aryans and the foreign races needed constant control, the former by uprooting such “negative elements” as congenital diseases, hereditary criminality, and physical deformities, the latter by genocide and subjugation.²¹ Mass murder, ethnic and biological cleansing, slave and forced labor, were thus inherent elements of the regime’s ideology and policies; indeed, the dynamic of Nazism dictated an ever more frenzied pace of implementation and ever greater numbers of victims. Only the total destruction of the regime could bring an end to this process.

Space was a similarly unlimited proposition. Following the invasion of Poland, the SS planned the Germanization of the newly won spaces by means of a vast ethnic cleansing operation that would expel Poles and Jews farther east, while bringing ethnic Germans from other eastern European and Soviet territories and resettling them in the “evacuated” areas, houses, and farms. With the invasion of the Soviet Union, these relatively limited plans were expanded to encompass the whole of the western territories of the Soviet Union according to the so called *Generalplan Ost*, or General Plan East. This would have covered an area stretching from the eastern basin of the Black Sea, through Moscow to Leningrad. Unwanted elements were to be expelled east of the Ural

17. Gerald Fleming, *Hitler and the Final Solution* (Berkeley, 1984); Ian Kershaw, *Hitler, 1889–1936: Hubris* (New York, 1998); Norman Rich, *Hitler’s War Aims: Ideology, the Nazi State, and the Course of Expansion* (New York, 1973).

18. Henry Friedlander, *The Origins of Nazi Genocide: From Euthanasia to the Final Solution* (Chapel Hill, 1995).

19. Michael Zimmermann, *Rassenutopie und Genozid: Die nationalsozialistische “Lösung der Zigeunerfrage”* [Racial utopia and genocide: The Nazi “solution of the Gypsy question”] (Hamburg, 1996).

20. John Connelly, “Nazis and Slavs: From Racial Theory to Racist Practice,” *Central European History* 32, no. 1 (1999): 1–33.

21. Michael Burleigh, *Death and Deliverance: “Euthanasia” in Germany, 1900–1945* (Cambridge, England, 1994); Zygmunt Bauman, *Modernity and the Holocaust* (Ithaca, 1989).

Mountains.²² Meanwhile, German forces were attempting to occupy North Africa and the Middle East, with the intention of linking with what was to have been a German-controlled Caucasus opening the path to the oil fields of the Black and Caspian Seas.²³ As recent studies have shown, the Germans were also planning yet another stage of the war that would have enabled a Nazi occupied Europe to confront the United States with long-range bombers, ballistic missiles, and a vast new navy.²⁴ With the collapse of the USSR, Central Asia and China would have been cut up between Germany and Japan. A final German victory, therefore, would have come only after a fundamental transformation of the world order; the only limits to Nazi expansion were those imposed on all humanity, namely, the available space for human habitation.

Once we understand this aspect of German policy, which both revolutionized world politics and constituted a throwback to such empire builders as Genghis Khan, we can turn to the manner in which the war was presented to the Third Reich's citizens and soldiers between 1939 and 1945 and examine how it was remembered and represented by the FRG and some of its major allies and foes in the postwar era. In this context it is important to underline that while the victory over France in May–June 1940 was considered an extraordinary military feat at the time (when memories of the slaughter on the Western Front of 1914–1918 were still fresh) and raised Hitler's popularity to unforeseen heights, the main goal of the regime, and the main urge of Nazi ideology, was the destruction of "Judeo-Bolshevism" and the conquest of living space in the east. Fear of the Soviet Union's "Slavs," "Asiatics," and "Mongols," whose "innate barbarism" was supposedly whipped into ideological fanaticism by the Communists (seen as synonymous with the Jews) was widespread in Germany and heavily promoted by the regime. By the time the Soviet Union was invaded, most Germans were persuaded that this was and had to be a war of annihilation against an enemy who had been about to attack and destroy both Germany and the rest of Western civilization. The orders given to German soldiers declared this to be no ordinary military campaign: Here enemy soldiers were not comrades in arms, but rather a mass of subhumans led by murderous Bolsheviks and Jews, who must be wiped out with the utmost ruthlessness and brutality so as to eradicate the Soviet system and the Jewish race. If many German soldiers and civilians feared the cost that such a war would entail, they appear to have simultaneously believed it to be fought for a just and right cause. This was, as most people thought, a struggle for the existence of the German nation, race, and culture.²⁵

22. Götz Aly, *"Final Solution": Nazi Population Policies and the Murder of the European Jews* (New York, 1999).

23. Andreas Hillgruber, *Hitler's Strategie. Politik und Kriegsführung, 1940–1941* [Hitler's strategy: Politics and warfare, 1940–1941] (Frankfurt/M., 1965).

24. Norman J. W. Goda, *Tomorrow the World: Hitler, Northwest Africa, and the Path toward America* (College Station, TX, 1998).

25. Bartov, *Hitler's Army*; Marlis G. Steinert, *Hitler's War and the Germans: Public Mood and Attitude during the Second World War* (Athens, OH, 1977).

This is the way the Wehrmacht fought the war in Russia, and this is why it collaborated so extensively with those agencies of the regime charged with ethnic and political cleansing, resettlement and colonization, and biological genocide.²⁶ But when the war ended, a rather different version of the major impetus for the invasion and the destruction of vast areas in the east was promoted in Germany and disseminated among those who soon became the FRG's allies. One central component of the war in the east was dropped almost entirely in its postwar reconstruction, namely, its close links to the genocide of the Jews.²⁷ This obviously criminal action was attributed exclusively to the SS and its agencies and presented as separate and distinct from the military effort undertaken by the Reich. Here was a rather curious construction, related to the fact that while the International Tribunal at Nuremberg had only recognized crimes perpetrated in wartime, it simultaneously relented from focusing on the genocide of the Jews as a primary target of prosecution and failed to pursue evidence indicating that the Wehrmacht had facilitated the Holocaust both by conquering areas with large Jewish concentrations and by providing the perpetrators with logistical support and often also direct assistance in the killing itself.²⁸ Once the genocide of the Jews was separated from the fighting, the Wehrmacht could claim to have carried out the crucial task of providing a bulwark against communism for Germany and the rest of Europe. This became an increasingly credible argument as the Cold War progressed from a threat to a reality. Instead of conceding that it had conducted a war against Russia's alleged Judeo-Bolshevik system, it was now argued that the Wehrmacht had merely fought a war of survival against communism while the SS murdered the Jews behind the army's back, actions of which the brave soldiers at the front

26. Hannes Heer and Klaus Naumann, eds., *War of Extermination: The German Military in World War II, 1941–1944* (New York, 2000); Christian Streit, *Keine Kameraden: Die Wehrmacht und die sowjetischen Kriegsgefangenen, 1941–1945* [Not comrades in arms: The Wehrmacht and Soviet prisoners of war, 1941–1945], 2d ed. (Bonn, 1991); Bartov, *The Eastern Front*; Helmut Krausnick and Hans-Heinrich Wilhelm, *Die Truppe des Weltanschauungskrieges: Die Einsatzgruppen der Sicherheitspolizei und des SD, 1938–1942* [Soldiers of the ideological war: The Einsatzgruppen of the security police and the SD, 1938–1942] (Stuttgart, 1981). The *Einsatzgruppen*, literally “task units,” were the murder squads charged with killing Jews and other “biological” and political enemies of the Nazi regime. The SD, or *Sicherheitsdienst* (security service), was the secret police of the SS and Nazi Party. The SD, Gestapo (secret state police), and Kripo (criminal police) were centralized under the RSHA (*Reichssicherheitshauptamt* or Reich Security Main Office) commanded by Reinhard Heydrich in 1939. The *Sicherheitspolizei* (Sipo, or Security Police) was eventually made up of the Gestapo and Kripo. See further in Robert Gellately, *The Gestapo and German Society: Enforcing Racial Policy, 1933–1945* (Oxford, 1990); George C. Browder, *The Foundations of the Nazi Police State: The Formation of Sipo and SD* (Lexington, KY, 1990); and idem, *Hitler's Enforcers: The Gestapo and the SS Security Service in the Nazi Revolution* (New York, 1996).

27. For a historiographical survey see Omer Bartov, “German Soldiers and the Holocaust: Historiography, Research and Implications,” *History & Memory* 9 (Fall 1997): 162–88.

28. Michael R. Marrus, *The Nuremberg War Crimes Trial, 1945–46: A Documentary History* (Boston, 1997).

were entirely ignorant and for which they could consequently not be held responsible.²⁹

The Allies often knew better, but the realities on the ground made it appear politically impossible to insist on the criminality of the Wehrmacht as Hitler's main tool of occupation, subjugation, and genocide. The Wehrmacht was gone, of course, but the Red Army was there to stay, Germany was still smack in the center of Europe, and the Soviet Union seemed poised to continue its westward expansion (ironically made possible by Hitler's failed attempt to conquer "living space" in the east by destroying the USSR). By the early 1950s the main interest of the United States was to make sure that Germany, along with other Western nations, would provide the troops necessary to protect the heart of Europe from Soviet invasion. Conversely, the Adenauer administration in Bonn was keen to create a new military organization that would legitimize Germany as a major European power once more and reintegrate it into the European community. This quid pro quo arrangement made for the close link between the reappearance of West Germany on the international scene, its rearmament, and the recognition of its vital strategic role in the new postwar order. It was also predicated on the construction of an acceptable version of the Wehrmacht's function in World War II that rejected outright any claims of army complicity in Nazi genocidal policies.³⁰

For the Germans, World War II remained a major event not because it had occasioned the devastation of vast foreign territories and the destruction of millions of human beings but because of the price Germany had paid in defeat. German perceptions of victimhood consisted of four main components. First, the aerial destruction of German cities and the civilian losses it entailed. Second, the so-called orgy of revenge by the Red Army, whose most traumatizing aspect was the mass rape of German women by Soviet troops. Third, the expulsion of some twelve million German citizens and ethnic Germans from territories in the eastern provinces of Prussia and east European countries where they had either been resettled by the Nazi regime or had lived for many centuries. And finally, the incarceration of hundreds of thousands of German POWs in Soviet camps that ended only in the mid-1950s.³¹ While the strategic

29. This was reflected in a spate of memoirs by Wehrmacht generals published in the first couple of decades after the war. See, for example, Heinz Guderian, *Panzer Leader*, 3d. ed. (London, 1977); and Erich von Manstein, *Lost Victories* (London, 1958).

30. See note 6, above. Also see Donald Abenheim, *Reforging the Iron Cross: The Search for Tradition in the West German Armed Forces* (Princeton, 1988); and Andrei S. Markovits and Simon Reich, *The German Predicament: Memory and Power in the New Europe* (Ithaca, 1997).

31. Atina Grossmann, "A Question of Silence: The Rape of German Women by Occupation Soldiers," in *West Germany under Construction: Politics, Society, and Culture in the Adenauer Era*, ed. Robert G. Moeller (Ann Arbor, 1997), 33–52; Norman M. Naimark, *The Russians in Germany: A History of the Soviet Zone of Occupation, 1945–1949* (Cambridge, MA, 1995); Rebecca Boehling, *A Question of Priorities: Democratic Reform and Economic Recovery in Postwar Germany* (New York, 1998); Robert G. Moeller, "War Stories: The Search for a Usable Past in the Federal Republic of Germany," *American Historical Review* 101 (October 1996): 1008–48; Frank Biess, "Survivors of Totalitarianism: Returning POWs and the Reconstruction of Masculine Citizenship in West Germany, 1945–1955," in *The Miracle*

bombing was evoked less frequently because it had been carried out by those who were now Germany's allies, and mass rape was a topic of some embarrassment both to officials and to female victims, the expelees and the POWs came to symbolize German martyrdom, on the one hand, and Soviet barbarism and criminality, on the other. This image in turn served both to legitimize the Wehrmacht's attempt to destroy the USSR and to underline the need to remain at the forefront of the "civilized" West's bulwark against further Bolshevik expansion. It also had the added merit of qualifying Nazi crimes by presenting them as mere equivalents of, if not reactions to, Soviet criminality. That the "German catastrophe" was the result of the much greater catastrophes it had perpetrated on others was largely repressed. And while for a variety of reasons (not least of which was the desire to accomplish also moral reintegration into the international community) the FRG grudgingly agreed to pay restitution to the Jewish victims of the Holocaust (without directly accepting responsibility for the crimes of the Third Reich), as far as the USSR was concerned no such responsibility was accepted, no restitution paid, and no recognition of army complicity in mass crimes ever conceded.³²

The Wehrmacht thus won its final and long-term victory by obscuring its role in the most murderous war ever fought in modern history. World War II was remembered deeply and painfully in West Germany, not as a war in which the Wehrmacht had been complicit in mass crimes but as one in which German civilians and soldiers alike were first victimized by Hitler and then became the targets of the victors' vengeful policies. In the 1950s, the picture of an emaciated prisoner behind barbed wire did not recall to Germans the victims of the Holocaust but rather the Wehrmacht's POWs still held in Soviet captivity.³³ This image of the war was not merely the consequence of foreign policy needs and the emergence of the Cold War. It was also intimately linked to the disturbing fact that while the Wehrmacht, through whose ranks close to twenty million Germans had passed during the war, had been the people's army par excellence, it had also become Hitler's army by indoctrinating the troops in the spirit of National Socialist ideology and by serving as the Führer's crucial instrument

Years Revisited. A Cultural History of West Germany, 1949–1968, ed. Hanna Schissler (Princeton, 2001), 57–82. On the growing currency of such terms as "orgy of revenge" in the 1980s see Andreas Hillgruber, *Zweierlei Untergang: Die Zerschlagung des Deutschen Reiches und das Ende des europäischen Judentums* [Two kinds of downfall: The destruction of the German Reich and the end of European Jewry] (Berlin, 1986); Omer Bartov, "Historians on the Eastern Front: Andreas Hillgruber and Germany's Tragedy," in Bartov, *Murder in Our Midst: The Holocaust, Industrial Killing, and Representation* (New York, 1996), 71–88.

32. Norbert Frei, *Vergangenheitspolitik: Die Anfänge der Bundesrepublik und die NS-Vergangenheit* [The politics of the past: The beginnings of the Federal Republic and the Nazi past] (Munich, 1996); Frank Stern, *The Whitewashing of the Yellow Badge: Antisemitism and Philosemitism in Postwar Germany* (Oxford, 1992). A good example of early German interpretations is Friedrich Meinecke, *The German Catastrophe: Reflections and Recollections*, 2d ed. (Boston, 1963).

33. Robert G. Moeller, *War Stories: The Search for a Usable Past in the Federal Republic of Germany* (Berkeley, 2001).

of conquest and destruction.³⁴ Over the first few decades of the postwar period, the public in the FRG gradually came to accept that some Germans had participated in genocide, that, as the saying went, crimes had been committed “in the name of the German people.” But to admit that the Wehrmacht itself, both as an organization and as a conglomerate of millions of German individuals, was involved directly or indirectly in mass murder was too difficult to bear. Nor was this merely a matter of “coming to terms with the past,” since the admission of army complicity in genocide would have made the present almost as unbearable, considering the fact that the two postwar Germanies were largely built by the veterans of Hitler’s war. To concede their guilt was tantamount to saying that the notion of the “new Germany” was a myth propagated by Hitler’s former soldiers.³⁵

There is no room here to analyze the case of the GDR in any detail. Suffice it to say that while the FRG declared itself the successor German state, and therefore had to accept a measure of responsibility at least for the nation’s history, if not directly for the crimes of the Third Reich, the GDR presented itself as the homeland of German socialism and refused to recognize any continuity between itself and the national (or bourgeois) past. In this sense, the GDR could argue that it was the outcome of the struggle of the working class and the final answer to the German capitalist tradition that had culminated in Hitler’s regime. The fact that “fascism,” as Nazism was called in the socialist countries, received considerable support also from German workers, was not conceded by the GDR. To be sure, during its waning years East Germany desperately sought some new focus of identity for its population, and went as far as celebrating its Prussian roots and Frederician traditions. But by this point, as we can see in retrospect, the GDR was nearing its death-throes. What should be underlined in the present context is that following reunification in 1990, the millions of GDR citizens who joined (or, as some have claimed, were annexed to) the FRG, never saw themselves as having any historical links to Nazism and never felt any historical or moral responsibility for its crimes, whatever their personal record might have been.³⁶

Since the mid-1960s, and with increasing energy in the 1970s and 1980s, more and more German and foreign historians have begun to investigate the records of the German army. It gradually emerged that the Wehrmacht was in fact

34. See notes 7, 25, and 26, above. See also Manfred Messerschmidt, *Die Wehrmacht im NS-Staat: Zeit der Indoktrination* [The Wehrmacht in the Nazi state: The era of indoctrination] (Hamburg, 1969); and Klaus-Jürgen Müller, *Das Heer und Hitler: Armee und nationalsozialistisches Regime, 1933–1940* [The army and Hitler: The military and the Nazi regime, 1933–1940] (Stuttgart, 1969).

35. On the fate of the veterans themselves see James M. Diehl, *The Thanks of the Fatherland: German Veterans after the Second World War* (Chapel Hill, 1993).

36. See note 2, above, and Frank Biess, “Pioneers of a New Germany: Returning POWs from the Soviet Union and the Making of East German Citizens, 1945–1950,” *Central European History* 32, no. 2 (1999): 143–80. See also Mary Fulbrook, *The Two Germanies, 1945–1990: Problems of Interpretation* (Atlantic Highlands, NJ, 1992); and Stuart Parkes, *Understanding Contemporary Germany* (London, 1997).

deeply involved in the crimes of the regime. Indeed, as some historians put it, without the Wehrmacht there would have been no Holocaust, or such vast destruction of the Soviet Union, Poland, or Yugoslavia. But these arguments, although buttressed by an increasingly substantial body of documentation and analysis, confronted a powerful resistance by parts of the political, academic, and intellectual establishment, as well as major sectors of the media and public opinion. As long as the Cold War and communism were alive and well, such assertions of Wehrmacht complicity were seen as both betrayal of the aging veterans who had done their utmost to stop Bolshevism and as part of a conspiracy to undermine the FRG from within and sell out to the Russians. The Wehrmacht was the last bastion of German honor and decency, and the last outpost (now in Bundeswehr uniforms) facing the Asiatic hordes lurking east of the border. Criticizing it was close to sedition.³⁷

Nevertheless, the accumulation of scholarship on the Wehrmacht made it increasingly difficult to deny its complicity in Nazi policies. Gradually it became acceptable to say that the German army, or at least its top echelons, had indeed served Hitler's cause rather than constituting a "haven" from his regime, as the old generals repeatedly argued in the immediate aftermath of the war.³⁸ Only the Holocaust could still not be directly associated with the Wehrmacht, precisely because the "Final Solution" symbolized, at the latest since the 1980s, the worst of which the Nazi regime was capable, and thus the most easily identifiable cause for German shame and regret. To associate the Wehrmacht with crimes against Soviet POWs (of a total of 5.7 million 3.3 million died in German hands), political commissars (some 600,000 executed without trial by the army), or forced laborers (the Wehrmacht was the main recruiting agency of some 12 million foreign workers compelled to work for the Reich's war effort) was bad enough.³⁹ To associate it with the murder of 6 million Jews was another proposition altogether, because this clear-cut case of genocide came to epitomize evil in its most naked and frightening form. And yet, this is precisely what happened in 1995.⁴⁰

37. For background, see note 7, above, and Omer Bartov, *The Eastern Front, 1941–45: German Troops and the Barbarisation of Warfare*, 2d ed. (London, forthcoming), preface to the second edition. For updated scholarship see Müller and Volkman, eds., *Die Wehrmacht*.

38. For more details see Omer Bartov, "Soldiers, Nazis, and War in the Third Reich," in *The Third Reich: The Essential Readings*, ed. Christian Leitz (Oxford, 1999), 131–50; and idem, "The Conduct of War: Soldiers and the Barbarization of Warfare," in Geyer and Boyer, eds., *Resistance*, 39–52.

39. See note 26, above. See further in Ulrich Herbert, ed., *National Socialist Extermination Policies: Contemporary German Perspectives and Controversies* (New York, 2000); Ulrich Herbert, Karin Orth, and Christoph Dieckmann, eds., *Die nationalsozialistischen Konzentrationslager: Entwicklung und Struktur* [The Nazi concentration camps: Development and structure], 2 vols. (Göttingen, 1998); and Ulrich Herbert, *Hitler's Foreign Workers: Enforced Foreign Labor in Germany under the Third Reich* (Cambridge, England, 1997).

40. In greater detail see Omer Bartov, "Whose History is It, Anyway? The Wehrmacht and German Historiography," in Heer and Naumann, eds., *War of Extermination*, 400–16.

It was in that year that the Institute for Social Research in Hamburg, an independently financed research institution (an uncommon phenomenon in Germany, where academic institutions are public and academics are civil servants), opened an exhibition titled “War of Extermination: Crimes of the Wehrmacht 1941 to 1944.”⁴¹ Displaying some eight hundred photographs, mostly taken by soldiers, along with scores of documents, the exhibition brought to the German public for the first time the results of two decades of intense research on the complicity of the Wehrmacht in Nazi crimes and demonstrated the extent to which such crimes involved both direct and indirect collaboration in the Holocaust. This exhibition traveled in the following four years throughout much of Germany and Austria and was seen by close to a million visitors. It met with vehement protests by veterans, nationalists, conservatives, and neo-Nazis. There were riots in some cities, such as Dresden, demonstrations in Munich and Vienna, even a bomb attack. The Bundestag debated the exhibition and some representatives were moved to tears either by the evidence of Wehrmacht atrocities or by the alleged defamation of the German soldier. But despite the opposition the exhibition continued to travel from city to city, engaging high school and university students, professors, intellectuals, and public opinion in general in an ongoing debate on the involvement of “ordinary” Germans, the visitors themselves or their siblings, spouses, parents, grandparents, uncles, and neighbors, in untold crimes and destruction.⁴²

Since October 1999, however, the scene has changed once more. This happened just as it seemed that the German public had finally, albeit reluctantly, come to terms with the fact that the German army – as the true representative of Germans from all walks of life and of most ages – had indeed served Hitler’s evil cause. A somewhat revised version of the exhibition was set to travel to the United States and open in New York City in December. Then the bomb shell fell, possibly at least in part because of an apparent threat to Germany’s image abroad. Three articles published almost simultaneously in respectable academic journals, two of which were written by non-German scholars, accused the organizers of the exhibition of sloppy research and possible manipulation of their sources. When boiled down to the essentials, it appeared that a few of the photographs displayed in the exhibition did not show regular German

41. See the catalogue, available now in English, Hamburg Institute for Social Research, ed., *The German Army and Genocide: Crimes against War Prisoners, Jews, and Other Civilians, 1939–1944* (New York, 1999).

42. Hamburger Institut für Sozialforschung, ed., *Besucher einer Ausstellung: Die Ausstellung “Vernichtungskrieg. Verbrechen der Wehrmacht 1941 bis 1944” in Interview und Gespräch* [Visitors at an exhibition: The exhibition “War of Extermination: Crimes of the Wehrmacht, 1941 to 1944” in interview and conversation] (Hamburg, 1998); Helga Embacher et al., eds., *Umkämpfte Erinnerung: Die Wehrmachtsausstellung in Salzburg* [Memory wars: The Wehrmacht exhibition in Salzburg] (Salzburg, 1999). For the fiftieth anniversary of the end of the war and the debate around the event that served as an initial context for the exhibition see Klaus Naumann, *Der Krieg als Text: Das Jahr 1945 im Kulturellen Gedächtnis der Presse* [War as text: 1945 in the cultural memory of the press] (Hamburg, 1998).

personnel, but rather SS and SD (SS secret service) men, local collaborators and militias, and soldiers of other allied armies, such as Finns and Hungarians. It was also argued that some of the victims in the photographs were not Jews or other innocent civilians, but rather partisans, who were legitimate targets for the army as irregulars as well as a legitimate cause for collective punishment against the population that allegedly harbored them. Finally, and most damaging for the exhibition, the critics showed that in a very few of the photographs (between eight and eleven), the victims were apparently executed by the NKVD, the Soviet secret police, shortly before the Wehrmacht arrived, rather than by the Germans. This resulted in a general outcry that the exhibition had attributed the crimes of the Communists to the Germans.⁴³

These arguments played directly into the hands of those who had always looked for a way to discredit not merely the exhibition but its main argument, by then accepted by most serious scholars, that the army was an inherent part of Nazi policies in the USSR and other parts of Eastern Europe. The timing of this attack was no coincidence, not only because of the planned opening in New York and other American cities but also because Germany, and many other European countries, are now experiencing a revival of the 1950s argument about totalitarianism, according to which Nazism and Stalinism were essentially the same phenomenon. Hence, it is becoming increasingly difficult to speak of Nazi crimes without mentioning at the same time the crimes of communism, indeed, arguing that communism both originated Nazism and perpetrated crimes on an even larger scale.⁴⁴ The argument over the Wehrmacht exhibition in late 1999 Germany was, in fact, the revenge of the historians' debate, or *Historikerstreit*, of the mid-1980s. In the *Historikerstreit* a number of Germany's leading scholars argued that the Holocaust was merely the response by the Nazi regime to real, perceived, and anticipated crimes by Bolshevism; that the Holocaust was not an original, but a copy of the Soviet Gulag; and that the mass murder of the Jews was not unique, but very much part of a general phenomenon of

43. The articles that attacked the exhibition with detailed criticism are: Krisztián Ungváry, "Echte Bilder – Problematische Aussagen. Eine quantitative und qualitative Analyse des Bildmaterials der Ausstellung 'Vernichtungskrieg – Verbrechen der Wehrmacht 1941 bis 1944'" [Authentic pictures – Problematic assertions. A quantitative and qualitative analysis of the photographic material at the exhibition "War of Extermination – Crimes of the Wehrmacht, 1941 to 1944"] and Dieter Schmidt-Neuhaus, "Die Tarnopol-Stellwand der Wanderausstellung 'Vernichtungskrieg – Verbrechen der Wehrmacht 1941 bis 1944'. Eine Falluntersuchung zur Verwendung von Bildquellen" [The Tarnopol Panel at the traveling exhibition "War of Extermination – Crimes of the Wehrmacht, 1941 to 1944." A case study of the use of photographic evidence], both in *Geschichte in Wissenschaft und Unterricht* (October 1999): 584–95; Bogdan Musiał, "Bilder einer Ausstellung. Kritische Anmerkungen zur Wanderausstellung 'Vernichtungskrieg – Verbrechen der Wehrmacht 1941 bis 1944'" [Pictures at an exhibition. Critical remarks on the traveling exhibition "War of Extermination – Crimes of the Wehrmacht, 1941 to 1944"], *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte* 47/4 (October 1999): 563–91.

44. See, for example, Hans Maier, ed., *Totalitarismus und Politische Religionen. Konzepte des Diktaturvergleichs* [Totalitarianism and political religions: Concepts for the comparison of dictatorships] 2 vols. (Paderborn, 1996); Emilio Gentile, *The Sacralization of Politics in Fascist Italy* (Cambridge, MA, 1996); Courtois, *The Black Book*; and Furet, *Illusion*.

genocide, ranging from the murder of the Armenians by the Turkish government to the Pol Pot regime's genocide of its own people. And if the Holocaust was "normal," then, by the same token, there was nothing that extraordinary about Nazism.⁴⁵

Suddenly, then, in the last months of the last year of the century, it turned out that World War II was not merely alive in the individual memories of a diminishing number of Germans who had experienced it and in the collective memory of German society as a whole, but that it was in fact a major contemporary political issue with direct implications and a powerful public resonance. Indeed, the struggle over the role of the Wehrmacht in the Holocaust has become a testing ground for Germany's new nationalism as it gradually enters the public domain a decade after reunification. Nor is German patriotism at the end of the century limited to the conservative right; rather, it finds expression also among representatives of the mainstream liberal left, in the universities, the intelligentsia, and the media. Many former participants in the 1968 movement are now well established members of Germany's new political, academic, and business elite. They are proud to be German and resentful of outside interference and criticism; they dislike what they perceive as a foreign inclination to invoke the past as a means of undermining Germany's current success and importance. Both the right and the left in Germany share a common anti-American sentiment (although its source is quite different), and they all too often, either overtly assert or, more likely, insinuate, that politics and the media in the United States are excessively influenced, if not controlled, by the Jews. This is another reason why the attacks on the exhibition, which led to calls by conservative politicians to forbid its opening in New York, were met either by total silence or at best by feeble responses from those scholars who knew it to have presented the historical truth, despite a few marginal errors in photograph identification. Hence, too, the decision by the organizers, who found themselves under massive public pressure and with hardly any defenders, to temporarily close the exhibition, pending an examination of its contents, and to postpone its opening in the United States.⁴⁶

45. *Forever in the Shadow of Hitler? Original Documents of the "Historikerstreit," the Controversy Concerning the Singularity of the Holocaust* (Atlantic Highlands, NJ, 1993); Charles S. Maier, *The Unmasterable Past: History, Holocaust, and German Nationalism* (Cambridge, MA, 1988); Richard Evans, *In Hitler's Shadow: West German Historians and the Attempt to Escape from the Nazi Past* (New York, 1989).

46. For a sampling of the debate in the media see Heribert Seifert, "Gefährliches Spiel mit der Bildermacht" [Dangerous game with the power of pictures], *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, 12 November 1999; Jörg Friedrich, "Der Hamburger Bilderschau zur Wehrmacht ging es nicht um historische Aufklärung" [The Hamburg photograph exhibition was not about historical enlightenment], *Die Welt*, 11 November 1999; Fritz Göttler, "Bilder einer Einstellung" [Position pictures], *Süddeutsche Zeitung* [SZ], 9 November 1999; Götz Aly, "Machtbeflissene Verharmlosung" [Power-hungry dismissal], *Berliner Zeitung* [BZ], 8 November 1999; "'Geschrei ist unangebracht.' Wolfgang Benz zum Streit über die Wehrmachtausstellung" ["The outcry is out of place." Wolfgang Benz on the controversy over the Wehrmacht exhibition], *SZ*, 8 November 1999; Krisztián Ungváry, "Reemtsma's Legenden" [Reemtsma's legends], *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* [FAZ], 5 November 1999; Omer Bartov, "Eine Frage der Ehre" [A question of honor], *Die Woche* 5 November 1999;

I will not elaborate here the actual details of the exhibition. What is clear, and is finally but belatedly also emerging from a few articles by German experts,⁴⁷ is that the justified part of the criticism entailed a minuscule proportion of the photographs and in no way influenced the main thrust of the exhibit regarding the Wehrmacht's involvement in the Holocaust. Indeed, both the German army and the propaganda ministry made immediate use of the executions of alleged political enemies of the Soviet Union – carried out by the NKVD in late June and early July 1941 as the Wehrmacht was rapidly marching into Soviet territory – in order to incite pogroms of the Jewish population and to justify the beginning of the Holocaust as a reaction to Soviet crimes (which Nazi propaganda had always “predicted”).⁴⁸ But there is little point in debating this well-documented fact. What is astounding is that some major figures in German scholarship, such as the head of the Institute for Contemporary History in Munich, and a senior member of the Institute for Military History in Potsdam, not only came out against the exhibition but also argued (in the latter scholar's case against his own earlier assertions) that apart from some excesses, the Wehrmacht as a whole was not involved in mass crimes.⁴⁹ One

Bernhard R. Kroener, “Die Deformation des Menschen im Krieg” [The distortion of people in war], *Die Welt*, 4 November 1999; Norbert Frei, Feuilletonkommentar [Commentary in the literary section], *FAZ*, 2 November 1999; Jörg Friedrich, “Die 6. Armee im Kessel der Denunziation” [The Sixth Army in the cauldron of denunciation], *BZ*, 30 October 1999; Volker Ullrich, “Von Bildern und Legenden” [On pictures and legends], *Die Zeit* 44 (October 28, 1999); Michael Stürmer, “Tod, Trauer und Tabu” [Death, mourning and taboo], *Die Welt*, 28 October 1999; Jost Nolte, “Wahre Bilder, falsche Bilder – welche Bilder?” [True pictures, false pictures – Which pictures?], *Die Welt*, 27 October 1999; “Fotos der Wehrmachtsausstellung falsch zugeordnet” [Photographs at the Wehrmacht exhibition wrongly captioned] *FAZ*, 20 October 1999.

47. Johannes Klotz, “Kurzer Atem Resignierten die Macher zu schnell? – Eine Kritik der Kritiker der Wehrmachtsausstellung” [Out of breath the organizers resigned too quickly? – A critique of the critics of the Wehrmacht exhibition], *Frankfurter Rundschau* [FR] 26 November 1999. This article cites the unpublished paper by the prominent Wehrmacht historian Christian Streit “Die Kontroverse um die sogenannte Wehrmachtsausstellung” [The controversy over the so-called Wehrmacht exhibition], November 1999. Christian Gerlach, “In der Steppe versickert. Es geht nicht bloss um Fotos, es geht um die Wehrmacht” [Wasted away in the Steppe. It's not merely about photographs, it's about the Wehrmacht], *FR*, 30 November 1999.

48. See especially Dieter Pohl, *Nationalsozialistische Judenverfolgung in Ostgalizien, 1941–1944: Organisation und Durchführung eines staatlichen Masserverbrechens* [The Nazi persecution of the Jews in East Galicia, 1941–1944: Organization and implementation of a state-ordered mass crime] (Munich, 1996); Thomas Sandkühler, “Endlösung” in Galizien: Der Judenmord in Ostpolen und die Rettungsmassnahmen von Berthold Beitz, 1941–1944 [The “Final Solution” in Galicia: The murder of the Jews in East Poland and the rescue initiatives of Berthold Beitz, 1941–1944] (Bonn, 1996); and Walter Manoschek, “Serbien ist judenfrei”: Militärische Besatzungspolitik und Judenvernichtung in Serbien 1941/42 [“Serbia is free of Jews”: Military occupation policy and the extermination of the Jews in Serbia, 1941–1942] (Munich, 1995).

49. “‘Es geht nicht um die Wahrheit.’ Horst Möller, Leiter des Münchner Instituts für Zeitgeschichte, über die Fehler und den wissenschaftlichen Gehalt der Wehrmachtsausstellung” [“This is not about the truth.” Horst Möller, director of the Munich Institute for Contemporary History, on the errors and the scholarly content of the Wehrmacht exhibition], *Focus*, 25 October 1999; “Gegen Kritik immun.’ Der Potsdamer Historiker Rolf-Dieter Müller über die Wehrmacht im Zweiten Weltkrieg und die Thesen des Hamburger Instituts für Sozialforschung” [“Immune to criticism.” The Potsdam historian Rolf-Dieter Müller on the Wehrmacht in World War II and the theses of the Hamburg Institute for Social Research], *Der Spiegel* 23/1999.

hopes that this revisionist trend will be dammed by more responsible scholars and politicians. But for the moment it demonstrates that in Germany World War II is not only very much part of the past but also still at the center of contemporary politics. From this perspective, and thanks to Germany's growing importance in world politics, we would do well to follow Warren Kimball's advice and prevent World War II from disappearing into the mists of the Cold War in the American mind. Having emerged from the fall of communism as the most powerful European nation in the heart of the continent, Germany has brought back World War II as memory, history, and political agenda. If only for that reason, it should now be recognized as such also by Americans.