INTRODUCTION

History, Memory, and What Lies in Between

History must be a manual for how to avoid the mistakes of the past; how to break the cycle; a roadmap toward a better world.

BARACK OBAMA, Eulogy for the Rev. Clementa Pinckney, 26 June 2015

There may be no more fitting way to begin this book than to recall the question at the outset of Marc Bloch's *The Historian's Craft:* "Tell me Daddy. What is the use of history?" The poignancy and profundity issue not only from the childlike naïveté in which the question was cloaked but from the circumstances in which it was posed. Bloch wrote his reflections not in the privileged environs of a university, where he had spent the previous twenty-three years of his life, but while serving in the French Resistance. After joining the Resistance in late 1942 or early 1943, Bloch was captured by the Gestapo in March 1944 and murdered three months later. It was in the last years of his life, facing the specter of Nazism, that Bloch completed his reflections on the use of history.

The great French historian was manifestly not interested in explaining or seeking sympathy for his own life. Rather, he intended to offer an "apology for history," as the book was titled in French, a defense of the discipline to which he was so passionately dedicated. He emphasized, among other points, that historians must be attentive to the present, as he no doubt was

in that dire moment in his life, lest they lapse into a somnolent antiquarianism. What could prevent such a descent was the recognition that history was the study not of what was dead but rather of what was alive. He continued by articulating a pair of key principles that defined the stakes of historical inquiry: "Misunderstanding of the present," he wrote with Santayanan echoes, "is the inevitable consequence of ignorance of the past." At the same time, Bloch observed that "a man may wear himself out just as fruitlessly in seeking to understand the past, if he is totally ignorant of the present."[1]

Bloch insisted on a dialogue between past and present in *The Historian's Craft.* It is only by "borrowing from our daily experiences" that we gain access to the richness and vibrancy of the past. Conversely, he asserted, lines of continuity in structures, forms of reception, and influence extend from the past into the present, providing us with a wide lens onto our current existence.

While *The Historian's Craft* is not an emotionally revealing book, it is hard not to be moved by it—by Bloch's steadfast dedication to his craft, by his sense of the vitality of history, and, not least, by his seeming intuition of the need to produce an epitaph for his labors while in captivity. I often invoked Bloch and his inspiring words in a time of crisis when I welcomed incoming graduate students to the UCLA History Department, where I served as chair for five years. The question these fledgling scholars asked themselves was similar, though of course formulated in a very different, which is to say far less threatening, environment: Why am I committing six years or more of my life to intense and often isolated work with no guarantee of employment upon completion of the Ph.D.?[2]

Especially after the economic crash of 2008, students and their parents have asked this question with ever greater frequency and concern. A drop in student enrollments—at times precipitously, as in the UCLA History Department, which experienced a 40

percent decline from 2007 to 2013—led to a loss of confidence among historians, and humanists in general, about the wisdom of doing what they do. Indeed, there has been abundant talk in recent years of a "crisis of the humanities." The troubles seemed particularly acute at public universities, which do not have the kind of financial cushion that wealthy private institutions do. But even *Harvard Magazine* reported in 2013 on a decline in humanities enrollments at Harvard that prompted that university to establish a task force to address the problem.[3]

This is hardly the first time that the humanities has seemed to be in crisis. In fact, a far more significant decline in enrollments than today's took place in the 1970s, as the literary scholar Michael Bérubé demonstrated in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* in 2013. Bérubé showed that humanities enrollments actually increased in the 1980s and 1990s and that the current numbers "are almost precisely where they were in 1970."[4] His argument adds a healthy dose of historical perspective, reminding us that crises come and go. Indeed, we often assume, while in the midst of a downturn of some sort, that never before in history have such depths been reached. To assuage my own anxieties over the fate of the field of history, I often recall this description of the state of affairs from an eminent scholar: "Student interest in history is waning; the academic job market is contracting. A generation of young Ph.D.'s, having completed their education in a period of scarce financial aid and spiraling costs, are competing for too few tenure-leading jobs, while they face years in short-term, revolving-door appointments. Others, unable to see careers in academe, are retooling and using their skills as historians in journalism, business, government, and organizational work."

This depiction sounds as if it could have been written yesterday. But, in fact, it was expressed thirty-five years ago by the distinguished historian Gerda Lerner when she assumed

the presidency of the Organization of American Historians in 1982.[5] Lerner, whom we shall encounter again in the first chapter, offered her assessment in an address called "The Necessity of History." Rather than succumb to the despair of the day, Lerner believed in the therapeutic force of history. History, she declared, "is the means whereby we assert the continuity of human life" through its capacity to shape and form memory.[6] In addition to offering up a notion of history's import, her words remind us that the current generation is not the first nor will it be the last to experience travails of the sort she describes.

Lerner's recollection offers a measure of consolation in ways that history frequently can and has done, as we shall have occasion to explore in Chapter 2. In fact, we already get a clearer picture of history's benefits at this juncture by observing the way it provides depth, perspective, clarity, and solace to the current moment in which we live. Knowing, for example, that the humanities have undergone repeated crises from their inception six hundred years ago in the heart of the Renaissance reassures us that we too can survive the struggles of our day, as well as our own predilection for narratives of decline.[7] This kind of deeper perspective dissolves our myopia and unravels our tightly bound, short-term temporality. Through history, we can position ourselves on a broader temporal landscape with greater accuracy and familiarity, knowing what came before and apprehending what might come after us. In this most serviceable form, history serves as an indispensable bridge not only between past and present, as Marc Bloch affirmed, but between past and future.[8]

The Perils and Promise of the Past

The present book is about this serviceable vision of history as it has played out in the modern age. More particularly, it is about

the uses to which Jewish history has been put by practitioners of the discipline, most of whom, though by no means all, have been Jews. Akin to peers in other fields, modern Jewish historians have devoted themselves not solely to the task of getting the facts right; they have also sought to draw inspiration, motivation, and clear direction from the past. In doing so, they have often promoted accounts of the past that blur the boundary between history and memory, between the goal of re-creating the past accurately and the task of fortifying pillars of remembrance, which was supposed to be newly reinforced in the modern age. Invoking these terms calls to mind the legacy of Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi (1932–2009), the distinguished historian and author of the now classic *Zakhor* (1982), whose subtitle, "Jewish History and Jewish Memory," marked off opposing poles on a spectrum. Arguing against this dichotomous rendering of the relationship of history to collective memory, and thereby complicating the received understanding of Yerushalmi, I maintain that Jewish historians in the modern age have exemplified the permeability of the border between history and memory in revealing fashion. I further suggest that in the course of their work historians have not only excavated the past but set in place new foundations of memory. They have drawn from historical sources and archives to craft narratives that foster (and in some cases disrupt) the historical recollection of their intended audience. This is one of the key ways in which historians use history to serve the present.

The case of Jewish history presents a clear illustration of the serviceability—and memory-forming features—of history. And yet, these functions are not unique to that case. Today, as in earlier ages, history serves as a vital engine of memory and identity formation for a variety of religious, national, gender, and ethnic groups. Historians frequently make use of the past to advance knowledge or alter misperceptions about groups with which they identify.[9] Eloquent testimony to this mission is offered

by John Hope Franklin, the late scholar of African American history. Over the course of six decades, Franklin played a pioneering role in retrieving significant though neglected chapters of U.S. history in which African Americans were central actors, including in his best-known book, *From Slavery to Freedom,* which has sold over three million copies. Franklin understood the importance of disrupting the received narrative of white domination in American history and setting in place a new frame of historical memory, which led him to write not only dozens of monographs but also textbooks intended for school-age children. His work embodied the principle that every new generation of parents aims "to rewrite and reinterpret the nation's history so that their children will be able to understand it better and thus enhance their sense of informed citizenship." He felt an urgent commitment to reinterpret the "nation's history" and expand the bounds of its historical memory as a precondition to social change. On this view, historical knowledge was an essential precondition of social change.[10]

In the complicated universe in which we dwell, there are always risks attending the historian's role as a forger of group memory, especially the distortion and manipulation of evidence. Perhaps the baldest example is Holocaust denial, which stubbornly clings to the claim that millions of Jews were not murdered by the Nazis. Here both ideological fervor and deliberate disregard of a massive trove of evidence seem to be at work.

But the manipulation of evidence in the name of a cause is hardly restricted to this exceptional example. From his distinctive perch, the medievalist Patrick Geary has raised alarm bells about the subservience of modern historical study to the idol of nationalism. This reliance, he writes, "has turned our understanding of the past into a toxic waste dump, filled with the poison of ethnic nationalism, and the poison has seeped deep into popular consciousness."[11]

Geary is joined by the eminent Canadian historian Margaret MacMillan, who sounds a similar warning in *Dangerous Games: The Uses and Abuses of History,* in which she points to the threat of distorting or falsifying history even in the name of a noble ideal. She calls attention to the tendency of ideological partisans to cull evidence selectively to prove "the existence of the nation through time."[12] Trenchant critiques such as these cannot be dismissed lightly. They serve as cautionary notes against the misuse, intentional or not, of the historical medium in framing memory. But they also leave us with an unanswered and perhaps unanswerable question: Where exactly do we draw the line between a surfeit of ideological commitment and acceptable, even unavoidable, political dispositions that no sophisticated practitioner or consumer of history can deny? For example, should we exclude from serious consideration the work of the English historians E. P. Thompson, C. L. R. James, and Eric Hobsbawm because of their unabashed Marxist perspective? These examples suffice to demonstrate that even scholars with deep and visible ideological commitments are capable of illuminating and pathbreaking work.

A second challenge to the utility of history is the fear that historical research is teaching us more and more about less and less. Whereas the concern about ideological distortion relates to the perceived failure of historical scholarship to be objective, the concern about the piling up of historical data goes beyond questions of historical method to the very raison d'être of history. One of the sharpest exponents of this latter issue was Friedrich Nietzsche, whose short essay of 1873–1874, "Vom Nutzen und Nachteil der Historie für das Leben" (On the Advantage and Disadvantage—or Use and Abuse—of History for Life), inspired the subtitle of this book.[13] Nietzsche's essay was written in the wake of an outbreak of chauvinist fervor in Europe that followed the unification of Germany in 1871 and the crushing

economic crisis that came shortly thereafter in 1873. In this grim moment, in which his doubts about the forward march of history grew, Nietzsche diagnosed "a malignant historical fever" whose chief symptom was a deluge of historical data that dissolved the holism and integrity of past actors, texts, and events from the past—and thus prevented us from deriving any inspiration from them. The consequences, Nietzsche warned, were dire: "For with a certain excess of history, life crumbles and degenerates, and finally, because of this degeneration, history itself degenerates as well."[14]

Nietzsche's dark admonitions about the excesses of history did not lead him to surrender all hope for history. He catalogued and distinguished among three modes of historical writing: monumental, antiquarian, and critical. Assessing the strengths and weaknesses of each led him to contemplate the prospect of a productive historical enterprise. History *could* serve a valuable educational function, he thought, but only if it operated "in the service of a powerful new life-giving influence."[15] By contrast, if history were pursued for its own sake or only in the name of the false idol of objectivity, it would fail its mission.[16] At times, Nietzsche advocated the path not of remembering but of forgetting the past.

Nietzsche's reflections served as backdrop and inspiration to Yosef Yerushalmi, who also evinced skepticism over the utility of history a century later. Writing in *Zakhor,* Yerushalmi offered this assessment: "The modern effort to reconstruct the Jewish past begins at a time that witnesses a sharp break in the continuity of Jewish living and hence also an ever-growing decay of Jewish group memory. In this sense, if for no other, history becomes what it had never been before—the faith of fallen Jews." Echoing Nietzsche's critique of history for history's sake, Yerushalmi insisted that history "can never substitute for Jewish memory." At best, it might provide a measure of succor or stim-

ulation to those who had experienced the rupture of modernity. The historian, he continued in Nietzschean terms, is not capable of healing the "malady" that results from "the unraveling of that common network of belief and praxis" that undergirds collective memory."[17] Yerushalmi contrasted the modern Jew, who in his opinion suffers from this malady, with the ancient Israelites, who squeezed out of the past a significance that went well beyond the moment. They were "the fathers of meaning in history,"[18] whereas their modern-day heirs swam aimlessly in an ocean of historical details, unable to assign greater or lesser value to any of them. In describing this condition, Yerushalmi recalled Jorge Luis Borges's fictional character Funes the Memorious, who suffers a strange but characteristically modern fate when, after a fall from a horse, he loses the capacity to forget anything.[19] "The shadow of Funes the Memorious," Yerushalmi intoned, "hovers over all of us." The accumulation of historical detail filled Funes's head with "memories" but prevented him from forging a lucid memory upon which to form a coherent sense of the past.[20]

In offering his somewhat dolorous assessment of the state of modern scholarship, Yerushalmi launched a robust discourse about history and memory in the field of Jewish studies and beyond that has lasted to this day.[21] I should add that his words have had particular weight for me, since Yerushalmi was my teacher and mentor at Columbia University. Indeed, it was he who introduced me to the unique challenges and pleasures of studying Jewish history, as he did for so many others.

And yet, I have always sensed that the contrast he posed between history and memory in *Zakhor* was overdrawn.[22] Modern historians are neither completely sequestered in the archive nor altogether detached from the task of memory formation by the rupture of modernity. Indeed, the relationship between history and memory for them is reciprocal. They deploy their profes-

sional tools to craft a picture of the past, which can serve—and may well be intended for—those who did not undergo the historical events themselves, but who feel a strong sense of identification with the experiences of their forebears. The resulting picture of the past contributes to forming our memory of the past, which becomes collective when multiple members of a given group are drawn to it. And yet, just as memory is, in this sense, the product, at least in part, of the historian's labors, so too it is a prod to those labors. The nineteenth-century theorist of history Wilhelm Dilthey reminded us that history comes about "thanks to the configuration of its course in memory, which does not reproduce singularity, but reconfigures cohesion itself in its stages."[23] Memory, as a cohesive picture of the past, can be and often has been a platform from which historians commence their inquiry into the past.

When I gave voice to a version of this claim about a reciprocal relationship some fifteen years ago, Yerushalmi sharply and unequivocally disagreed, insisting that modern historians' "reconstructions and interpretations of the Jewish past are most often in open conflict with those preserved in what remains of Jewish collective memory." He expressed strong agreement with the view of his friend, the renowned French scholar Pierre Nora, who declared in the introduction to *Les Lieux de mémoire* that "memory is always suspect in the eyes of history, whose true mission is to demolish it, to repress."[24]

In affirming this divide, Yerushalmi clarified that he was focused on the collective memory associated with traditional Jewish religion and not on "such modern and relatively recent constructs of collective memory as those of Zionism, the Holocaust, or the State of Israel." He further acknowledged that there were tensions between these repositories of memory and "critical historiography."[25] On this point, I am in complete agreement; those kinds of modern memory "constructs," to which

historians have undeniably contributed, have been the focus of my attention, both in our exchange and elsewhere.[26] The question remains, however, whether the "traditional" modes of Jewish memory that Yerushalmi sought to differentiate and consign to the past can be so clearly distinguished from the historical memories forged out of movements fueled by modern Jewish national or religious ideologies.

The competing idea that there is an affinity rather than a chasm between history and memory was put forward forcefully in 1989 by Amos Funkenstein, who was one of the few contemporaries in the field who equaled Yerushalmi in erudition and eminence. Responding to *Zakhor* in the newly established journal *History and Memory,* Funkenstein proposed the category of "historical consciousness" as a mediating agent between the poles of history and memory. In contrast to Yerushalmi's depiction of the historian as one who catered to the "faith of fallen Jews," Funkenstein described the historian as a "priest of culture" who tended to the "secular liturgical memory" of the nation-state.[27] He thus offered a very different image of the modern historian from the one Yerushalmi did in *Zakhor,* which went along with his less antagonistic vision of the relationship between history and memory.

But while these two images of the historian differ sharply in both tenor and content, Yerushalmi and Funkenstein may not be entirely irreconcilable. As a number of commentators have already noted, a close examination of key texts in Yerushalmi's oeuvre, including but not restricted to *Zakhor,* yields traces of an alternative view of the function of the historian, one that comes closer to Funkenstein's "priest of culture" than to the image of a scholarly priest ministering to faithless "fallen Jews."[28] Sadly, Yerushalmi is no longer alive to address, affirm, or refute this claim; he passed away in 2009 at the age of seventy-seven. And it is perhaps unfair to project upon him like a ventriloquist

a view that he did not clearly articulate. But in the spirit of his own "Monologue with Freud" in *Freud's Moses,*[29] I would like to propose—cognizant of his probable dissent—that Yerushalmi offered up multiple profiles of the modern historian, not simply the one made familiar by *Zakhor.* More than a decade before he published that slender masterwork, in 1970, he devoted a commencement address at Hebrew College in Brookline, Massachusetts, to a reflection on his vocation titled "A Jewish Historian in the 'Age of Aquarius.'" The thirty-eight-year-old Yerushalmi began his speech with a gloss on lyrics from the popular rock musical *Hair,* drawing on its iconic declaration of "the dawning of the Age of Aquarius."[30] He described this "Aquarian" proclamation as reflective of a recurrent apocalyptic sensibility in Jewish and Christian thought: a desire to wipe clean the slate of history. The slogan that captured this sensibility against which Yerushalmi cautioned was: "Down with the past for the sake of the future." Countering the then popular countercultural youth mantra, Yerushalmi asserted that historical amnesia was "not a goal but a disorder." Historians, he added, have an important role to play in healing that disorder. It is they who must ward off the nihilism of Aquarianism by preserving the past; indeed, their first professional obligation is to remember, as in the Hebrew verb *zakhor.* Moreover, it is they, he noted in evocation of the German-American philosopher Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy, who must become "physicians of memory," acting "under a moral pressure to restore a nation's memory, or that of mankind."[31] In this version, the historian is more a traverser of the boundaries of history and memory than a guard standing at a fixed border between them.

Twelve years later, Yerushalmi repeated this quotation from Rosenstock-Huessy in *Zakhor.* But now he cast doubt on the image he had presented to his 1970 audience, arguing that the historian is "at best a pathologist, hardly a physician," more ca-

pable of an autopsy than a cure from the past. Our story might plausibly end there, signaling Yerushalmi's mature realization of the limits of history's healing powers. But there is another curious and perhaps countervailing piece of evidence regarding the task of the historian: Yerushalmi's 1993 *Freud's Moses: Judaism Terminable and Interminable,* based on the 1989 Franz Rosenzweig Lectures at Yale University, which was briefly mentioned above.

Confronting the rupture of modernity, Yerushalmi's Freud seeks to move beyond an unbridgeable chasm between history and memory. Yerushalmi attempts to demonstrate this through a detailed reading of Freud's last book, *Moses and Monotheism* (1939). Yerushalmi relates that he was drawn to write *Freud's Moses* as a result of his "profound interest in the various modalities of modern Jewish historicism, of that quest for the meaning of Judaism and Jewish identity through an unprecedented reexamination of the Jewish past which is itself the consequence of a radical break with that past, a phenomenon of which Freud's book is at once an exemplary and idiosyncratic instance."[32] Yerushalmi's inquiry led him to a different summation of Freud's relationship to Judaism from that which previous readers of *Moses and Monotheism* had proposed. Rather than deny the Jews one of their grandest achievements, the development of monotheism, *Moses and Monotheism* revealed Freud's recognition of the Jews' uncommon capacity for survival. In particular, Yerushalmi identified Freud's "psycho-Lamarckism"—his tendency to recognize the ability of Jews to adapt to external circumstances and transmit their evolving sense of collective memory "phylogenetically through the unconscious." Yerushalmi argued that Freud's mission in *Moses and Monotheism* was to expose this lineage, especially its latest irony-bound incarnation, with which he deeply identified: the "fiercely 'godless Jew' who emerges and persists out of what seems to be a final and irreparable rupture

in the tradition."[33] The ultimate outcome of Freud's historical labor, which Yerushalmi regarded as an inextricable part of his psychoanalytic project, was the excavation of a unique Jewish type, the Psychological Jew, who somehow persisted as a Jew, albeit "without tradition in any traditional sense."

In crafting this profile, Freud the historian was neither celebrating nor papering over the rupture of the present age. He was both chronicling and living the consequences of it, for indeed it was his personal condition as well. In the "Monologue with Freud" with which he concluded the book, Yerushalmi directly addressed Freud, assuring him (and perhaps himself) that "hardly you alone" dwell in that state.[34] Modern Jews at large were caught in the breach, latter-day heirs of the early modern Marranos, the crypto-Jews who lived outwardly Catholic and inwardly Jewish lives, who interested Yerushalmi throughout his career.[35] So too, he suggested, the modern Jewish chronicler was caught in the breach, but with the added responsibility of explaining this very predicament. In a bold act of self-identification, Yerushalmi recast Freud as a fellow traveler seeking to chart—and to stay afloat in—the swirling byways of Jewish history.

In similar terms, Yerushalmi later recalled with reverence his predecessor in Spanish Jewish history, the German-born Yitzhak (Fritz) Baer, who was the first Jewish historian hired by the new Hebrew University in Jerusalem in 1930. Yerushalmi's introduction to the French edition of Baer's *Galut* in 2000 focused not only on Baer's wide-ranging erudition in Jewish history and the characterization of the German original as a "tour de force" of concision at one hundred pages, but also, and more pointedly, on the fact that it was, like Bloch's, "an extreme book written *in extremis.*" Published in 1936, *Galut* summarized, in sweeping and selective fashion, the long history of Jewish thinking about exile. The thinly veiled message of the slim volume in that fateful period, Yerushalmi discerned, was that Ger-

man Jews "must make every effort to leave the Galut and make their way to the Land of Israel."[36]

Yerushalmi emphasized that his main aim was not to defend Baer but rather to understand him with "humility and a certain respect."[37] Indeed, while he did not share Baer's impulse to negate the Diaspora, he did evince considerable sympathy for "a book not merely by a historian of the Jews, but by a very Jewish historian, existentially implicated in his subject, writing from within Jewish history and addressing his own people in its hour of crisis." He knew well the trying circumstances in which Baer was writing (though they were not yet as dire as those in which Bloch set down his reflections on the historian's craft). Does it strain credulity to suggest that Yerushalmi felt an affinity with Baer, apart from their shared vocation as scholars of Spanish Jewish history? Might he have subconsciously modeled his *Zakhor* on *Galut,* both compact volumes covering vast swaths of history defined by their powerful single Hebrew word titles? Might Baer's volume, and the entire Schocken Bücherei series from which it was drawn, have represented a kind of existentially engaged scholarship that intrigued and inspired Yerushalmi, who was writing in a very different time, though one that induced in him a melancholic sense of loss?[38]

My desire to revisit and complicate Yerushalmi's views stems from more than the autobiographical fact that he was my chief intellectual interlocutor with whom I remain in constant imaginary dialogue. A critical engagement with his views can help us develop a more textured sense of the function of the modern Jewish historian and the broader question of the relationship between history and memory in the modern age. Over the course of Yerushalmi's career, he proposed a variety of models: the Physician of Memory in "The Age of Aquarius," the Fallen Jew of *Zakhor,* the Psychological Jew of *Freud's Moses,* and the "very Jewish historian" writing in extremis in the Baer review.

Each of these personae stood at a distinctive station along a spectrum bounded by the poles of critical history and collective memory. A composite of these types adds up to a profile of the modern Jewish historian as a figure who aspires to bridge the gap between history and memory, mindful of the Sisyphean nature of the task, but not altogether succumbing to despair over it.

This figure is clearly related to, yet distinct from, the melancholic historian of *Zakhor.* That latter figure attested to the profound, and perhaps unbridgeable, rift between history and memory. Indeed, it is not just in *Zakhor* that we see such a stance but in the work of many historians, including Yerushalmi's contemporary (and scholarly foil in matters Freudian) Peter Gay. Gay warned in particularly acute terms against a sort of "lazy and fuzzy thinking" that might lead us to conflate storytelling and critical study of the past. He sharpened the point by observing that "it was not Moses who was the first historian, but Herodotus."[39]

Against this view, in this book I argue that there is ample ground between Moses and Herodotus, between the poles of prophetic storytelling and critical history, as well as between memory and history. Both the earlier and the later Yerushalmi—in contrast to the author of the middle-period *Zakhor*—intuited this, at least as I read him. But even if I am reading him against the grain of his own understanding, , the broader point remains. And it is one which deeply resonates with me. It draws from the insight of the Holocaust historian Saul Friedlander, another of Yerushalmi's intellectual peers, that "an opposition [between history and memory] is far from clear-cut." Friedlander's pioneering work, noteworthy for its simultaneous empirical command and theoretical sophistication, has demonstrated how this opposition can be narrowed when the accumulated results of historical inquiry inform "the prevailing historical consciousness of a group." He points to a middle space between the poles

of history and memory in which historians tend to operate, navigating between the quest to describe the past as it was and the impulse to articulate and promote a vision of the past that echoes beyond the archive.[40]

Following in this path, I attempt to examine here the middle space occupied by modern Jewish historians as they mediate between the poles of history and memory. I believe that this middle space not only merits attention; it should be recognized as fertile ground on which to construct a vision of the utility of history—not as a begrudging concession to an inescapable subjectivity but as a realization of its power and efficacy to serve society in multiple ways.[41] Indeed, it is in this middle space that I dwell as a historian.

A Roadmap: Between History and Memory

This book comes in the midst of or perhaps at the end of a robust discussion over the relationship between history and memory that has taken place over the past few decades.[42] Many intellectual sources inspired this discourse, including representatives of the French *Annales* School (Fernand Braudel, Pierre Nora, Mona Ozouf, and François Furet), German cultural memory studies (Aleida Assmann and Jan Assmann), and Holocaust-related research (Friedlander, Lawrence Langer, Dominick LaCapra, and James Young). An important early inspiration was the French sociologist Maurice Halbwachs, who analyzed in *La Mémoire collective* (1950) the social frameworks that enable and contain a group's memory. Yosef Yerushalmi himself drew from Halbwachs at the outset of *Zakhor,* in which he identified ritual, liturgy, and commemorative acts as part of the rich fabric of group memory.[43] The fourth chapter, however, marked a shift in focus from collective memory to the function and intentions of the modern historian.

While much scholarly attention on memory has been trained on the recollections, remembrances, and ritual practices of groups, my interest in this book is on the latter and narrower understanding of memory as the product of the individual historian's constructive and constitutive act. This interest rests, in turn, on an understanding of the work of the historian that borrows from the mid-twentieth-century philosopher R. G. Collingwood. Collingwood, as I elaborate in a brief methodological postscript, grasped the historian's labor as a concerted mental effort aimed at "re-enactment," a process of the historian's "re-thinking for himself the thought of his author."[44]

In the process of re-enactment, historians bring parts of themselves, in all their variegated humanness, into the interpretive process. They shape images of the past not through unmediated access to raw historical data but through a process of mental imagination that mixes a careful sifting of sources and a healthy measure of cognitive creativity. This combination of functions allows the historian to piece together shards of historical evidence into a coherent narrative formation. At times, that narrative formation undergirds the collective memory of a group with which the historian identifies. At other times, the historian proceeds with the conscious intention to disrupt, upend, or replace older memory formations with new ones.

This sort of work, it bears repeating, is not unique to Jewish historians. Scholars in other fields have repeatedly used their professional tools to revise or discard existing historical narratives that they regard as partial in the name of a more accurate or serviceable one. It also bears noting that one need not be a member of a particular group to engage in historically informed political activism or the work of memory formation related to it. In the case of Jewish historical scholarship, whose modern practitioners have been overwhelmingly Jewish until now, more and more scholars today come with little Jewish background

or are not Jews.[45] Some, perhaps most, approach the field as a subject of pure scholarly interest, no more nor less. Others approach it, however, with more utilitarian or instrumental aims.

An example worth considering is contemporary Germany, where non-Jews predominate in the various Jewish studies programs that stretch from Munich to Hamburg. Whereas before the Holocaust, Wissenschaft des Judentums was primarily populated by Jews, the postwar work of Jewish studies in Germany is overwhelmingly, and understandably, run by non-Jews.[46] From its inception, the postwar project of Jewish studies was part of a larger, difficult process by which Germany confronted its criminal past, known in German as *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*. This process picked up particular momentum in the 1980s, as a fierce debate among historians about the singularity of Germany's crimes known as the *Historikerstreit* entered the public domain.[47] Through this charged debate, the past became vividly, even explosively, alive in the present—in public discourse, in educational settings, in literary circles. In parallel, the intense focus on the place of Nazism and the Holocaust in the German past added new relevance and meaning to Jewish studies.[48] Faculty and students increasingly engaged topics of contemporary relevance such as German-Jewish history, the Holocaust and antisemitism, and Zionism and the State of Israel. They did so for a variety of reasons: to answer deeply existential questions about their own (or their parents') identity, out of a sense of moral obligation to the victims of Nazism, and as a way of restoring memory of a vibrant Jewish cultural presence to the German landscape.[49]

This example suggests that existential engagement and a personal connection to the study of the Jewish past are not exclusive to Jews. Jewish historians of various stripes and religions have used the study of the past not only for the declared purpose of pure research but also for an array of political, ethical,

and personal aims. In doing so, they have exemplified some of the manifold utilities of history and pointed to the will of the historian not just to record but to shape our picture of the past.

It is my mission in the present book to uncover that will and excavate its myriad effects in the work of modern historians. To those familiar with the history of Jewish historical writing, some of the terrain covered will be recognizable. What is distinctive is that each of the three main chapters follows a guiding theme that has prompted the modern Jewish historian to traverse the porous boundary between history and memory. The three themes—liberation, consolation, and witness—are hardly exhaustive. Historians, after all, have been guided in their work by many different motifs and motives. But these themes are not random either. They rise to the surface after a sustained reading of modern Jewish historical scholarship, revealing the often unwitting fealty of its practitioners to religiously inspired themes that are deeply rooted in their cultural backgrounds. This fealty, in turn, points to continuities in theme and function between medieval chroniclers and modern historians.

Relying on this link, I imagine this book as a lesser, albeit more directed and applied version of what Marc Bloch called his "apologie pour l'histoire." Thus, I set out in the conclusion my own sense of the link between past and present, arguing for the importance of history as an ingredient in informed civic debate. Throughout, I seek to push beyond the fashionably flip dismissal of "identity politics" by suggesting that the historian's emotional and identitarian investments are neither avoidable nor wholly negative: they can open new horizons of research and insert a note of urgency and relevance into the scholarly undertaking.[50] This is not, for me, an abstract matter. My own Jewish and political commitments have guided my historical explorations of the relationship between history and memory, as well as my ongoing interest in the relationship between Jews

and Arabs in Israel/Palestine. Concomitantly, I believe that historical research, informed by passion *and* judiciousness, can be a productive resource both in fortifying and helpfully disrupting memory, as well as in exposing us to the human face of our seeming enemy.

In this way, I attempt to bridge the ways in which Jewish historians have functioned in the past and the ways in which history and historians might function today. At one level, the sheer volume of historical data, made ever more plentiful in our internet age, is so overwhelming as to make some amount of forgetting a necessity, if not an actual desideratum. And yet, we do so at our own collective risk, for historical knowledge amplifies our ability to understand the world in which we live and which we hope to pass on to future generations. So too the strands of memory that historians weave together make comprehensible the worlds we live in, often in enriching ways, though also at times in excessively particularistic ways that induce fear of the "other." Therein lies the potential for abuse in history. Notwithstanding that danger, and despite the gravitational pull toward forgetting in our twenty-first-century state of information overload, we would do well to acknowledge and avail ourselves of historical knowledge as a useful implement in the toolkit of societal repair.

I

History as Liberation

We begin our profile of the task of the Jewish historian in the modern age with an important, if at some level counterintuitive, goal: history as liberation. On the face of it, and at the most latent level, history is about the past. Historians use an array of sources and methods to immerse themselves in it. Leopold von Ranke, the nineteenth-century Prussian historian, notably, though not uncontroversially, expressed the belief that the historian should "extinguish" himself in order to gain access to the past.[1]

The attempt to understand and even enter the past would seem to be a necessarily preservative act. In fact, historians relish the prospect of settling into an archive and being transported back to a world which they happily and painstakingly reconstruct. But this impulse toward reconstruction is but one facet of the historian's vocation. We need only recall the specter of presentism of which historians have periodically accused one another—that is, the tendency to read, and even bend, the past through the lens of the current moment. This impulse is misguided, critics say, because history "is not a redeemer, promising to solve all human problems in time." Indeed, its focus, Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., once observed, is "anxiety and frustration, not progress and fulfillment."[2]

But mustn't we ask, Are we not all, at some level, presentists, as even Herbert Butterfield, the author (and erstwhile critic) of *The Whig Interpretation of History,* came to realize?[3] Not only are historians undeniably products of their time and place, but they have consistently applied the results of their research to present and future concerns—wittingly and unwittingly. Indeed,