# Tailoring Truth

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Tailoring Truth: Politicizing the Past and Negotiating Memory in East Germany, 1945–1990
*Jon Berndt Olsen*

# Tailoring Truth

## Politicizing the Past and Negotiating Memory in East Germany, 1945–1990

Jon Berndt Olsen

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To my parents, David and Audrey Olsen

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# Abbreviations

| | |
|---|---|
| AdsD | Archiv der sozialen Demokraten (Archive of the Social Democrats) |
| BND | Bundesnachrichtendienst (Federal Intelligence Agency) |
| BStU | Bundesbeauftragte für die Unterlagen des Staatssicherheitsdienstes der ehemaligen Deutschen Demokratischen Republic, Berlin (The Federal Commission for the Records of the State Security Service of the former German Democratic Republic, Berlin) |
| BVG | Berlin Verkehrsgetriebe (Berlin Transport Services) |
| BwA | Buchenwald Archiv (Buchenwald Archive) |
| CDU | Christliche Demokratische Union (Christian Democratic Union) |
| CPSU | Communist Party of the Soviet Union |
| CSU | Christlich-Soziale Union (Christian Social Union) |
| DEFA | Deutscher Film AG (German Film AG) |
| DGB | Deutscher Gewerkschaftsbund (German Federation of Unions) |
| DHM | Deutsches Historisches Museum (German Historical Museum) |
| FDJ | Freie Deutsche Jugend (Free German Youth) |
| FDP | Freie Demokratische Partei (Free Democratic Party) |
| FES | Friedrich Ebert Stiftung (Friedrich Ebert Foundation) |
| FIAPP | Fédération Internationale des Anciens Prisonniers Politiques (International Federation of Former Political Prisoners) |
| GDR | German Democratic Republic |

| | |
|---|---|
| KA | Kreisarchiv (county archive) |
| KPD | Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands (Communist Party of Germany) |
| LDP | Liberale-Demokratische Partei (Liberal Democratic Party) |
| LHASA | Landeshauptarchiv Sachsen-Anhalt |
| MfDG | Museum für Deutsche Geschichte (Museum for German History) |
| NVA | Nationale Volksarmee (National People's Army) |
| OdF | Opfer des Faschismus (Victims of Fascism) |
| PDS | Partei des Demokratischen Sozialismus (Party of Democratic Socialism) |
| SAPMO-BArch | Stiftung Archiv Parteien und Massenorganisationen, Bundesarchiv |
| SBZ | Sowjetische Besatzungszone (Soviet Occupation Zone) |
| SDP | Sozialdemokratische Partei (Social Democratic Party) |
| SED | Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands (Socialist Unity Party of Germany) |
| SMAD | Soviet Military Administration in Germany |
| SPD | Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands (Social Democratic Party of Germany) |
| STA | Stadtarchiv (City Archive) |
| Stasi | Staatssicherheitsdienst (State Security Service) |
| USPD | Unabhängige Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands (Independent Social Democratic Party of Germany) |
| USSR | Union of Soviet Socialist Republics |
| VVN | Vereinigung der Verfolgten des Naziregimes (Association of Nazi Persecutees) |
| ZIG | Zentralinstitut für Geschichte (Central Institute for History) |

# Introduction

## Tailoring Truth in East Germany

The visual prominence of memorials to the heroes of communism and the German working class might strike a tourist traveling through contemporary eastern Germany as out of place so long after the collapse of the communist regime that built them. The colossal monument dedicated to the memory of former communist leader Ernst Thälmann still resides in the Berlin neighborhood of Prenzlauer Berg. Similarly, a large park and statue ensemble in the main government district in Berlin commemorate Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. Each January, thousands gather at the Socialists' Cemetery in Berlin to honor the memory of Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht, who were killed by radical anti-socialist forces in 1919. A large monument complex devoted to the communist struggle against fascism still greets visitors as they enter onto the grounds of the Buchenwald concentration camp. Such reminders of the past—or memory traces—are not confined to Berlin or sites of historical significance. Indeed, they can be found throughout the cities and towns in the federal states that once made up the territory of East Germany—monuments dedicated to heroes of the working class, to former leaders of the communist party, and to historical events important to the German worker's movement.

In order to interpret these memory traces, it is necessary to understand the complicated events that led to the construction of such sites of memory. Following its defeat in May 1945, Germany was divided into four occupation zones. Initially, political power in the Soviet Occupation Zone (SBZ) rested solely in the hands of the Soviet Military Administration (SMAD). Despite agreements among the four occupying powers to cooperate, the Cold War soon took its toll on keeping Germany unified. In May 1949, the three western occupation zones unified to form the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) and in October the Soviets allowed their zone to transform itself into the German Democratic Republic (GDR). East Germany adopted many of the Soviet traits of political repression in an attempt to solidify the communist party's control over society. This included the use

Notes for this chapter begin on page 14.

of Soviet tanks to put down an attempted uprising in 1953, a reliance on the secret police to keep dissidents in check, and ultimately the construction of the Berlin Wall in 1961. Throughout this early period, the GDR claimed to represent Germany's sole successor state and actively sought to distance itself from its West German neighbor. Relations between the two German states improved during the 1970s and 1980s, but did not alter East Germany's claim to represent the better Germany. Despite the repressive nature of the state, there were also avenues for resistance and dissonance. These forces united during 1989 to topple the government, tear down the Berlin Wall, and bring an end to communist rule. Following a turbulent year of economic and social change, the two Germanys united on 3 October 1990.

Throughout this period, the East German state made a concerted effort to populate the memory landscape with monuments, museums, and commemoration festivals that supported its vision of the past and bolstered the regime's claim to represent the best interests of German society. Many of these socialist state-driven memory projects have seen significant changes and alterations since the fall of the Berlin Wall. Many of the spaces they once occupied have given way to places of modern, pluralistic remembrance. However, the legacy of the SED's (Socialist Unity Party) memory-work did not simply disappear in 1990—remnants of that ideological project remain visible in the debates that occurred (and to some extent continue) over what to do with the cultural heritage left behind by the GDR.

These socialist-oriented sites of memory remain a large and highly visible part of the built landscape in this portion of united Germany. They were the product of a concerted effort by the SED to cultivate a very specific form of memory culture during the forty years it was in power, 1949–1989. During the 1990s, the citizens of united Germany undertook a public discussion about which memorials constructed by the SED regime during its forty-year reign should remain, and which should be removed from public view. In short, local authorities removed those deemed out of place or superfluous, such as the colossal memorial for Vladimir Lenin or the hundreds of smaller Ernst Thälmann monuments located in towns throughout the GDR. But local governments also decided to keep many monuments that they judged as still relevant to German history and society.[1]

Calls to remove these items have not disappeared entirely. Some Germans see artifacts of an official East German memory culture as relics of the SED's repressive politics, and thus as monuments that should be destroyed, or at least quietly forgotten through a practice of benign neglect. In January 2012, Peter Ramsauer, the Federal Minister for Construction, suggested moving the Marx-Engels monument from downtown Berlin to

the Socialists' Cemetery on the outskirts of the city, a place he referred to as a "socialists' dump."[2] His remarks were immediately met with arguments favoring the monument's preservation from political opponents and in the press.[3] Indeed, despite calls like Ramsauer's to remove these monuments from public view, most of the GDR's prestige memory projects remain intact.[4]

The memory landscape in eastern Germany has also seen the addition of dozens (if not hundreds) of new memory projects (memorials, museums, historical sites, etc.) that honor previously neglected aspects of Germany's past: the prisons of Bautzen and Berlin-Hohenschönhausen that held East Germany's political prisoners; the inter-German border museum at Marienborn; new interpretive exhibits at Sachsenhausen, Ravensbrück, and Buchenwald; the permanent exhibit at the *Zeitgeschichtliches Forum* (Contemporary History Forum) in Leipzig; and the Berlin Wall museums and memorials—to name just a few examples. At the same time, heated post-unification debates erupted over whether or not Germany should preserve prominent GDR-era buildings, like the East German parliament building, the *Palast der Republik* (the Palace of the Republic), or reconstruct other sites, like the Berlin City Palace (demolished in 1950) in an effort to rebuild "historic" Berlin. All of these are important debates and reveal a great deal about how a new memory culture—one that is pluralistic, open, and engaged—has emerged since 1990.[5]

Nonetheless, those markers of an East German official memory culture that remain represent the remnants of the policies pursued by the SED to saturate the public sphere with icons that it hoped would create direct, legitimizing links to it and its proclaimed mission to create a "better" Germany. The fact that many of these icons not only persist, but also have been actively preserved is telling. It indicates that, although the party's memory-work may not have won over the majority of East German society, its memory politics did indeed have a lingering effect on East German society that outlived its monopoly of power.

In his study of professional historians in the GDR, Martin Sabrow argues that, while we cannot ascertain to what extent the general population internalized the SED's historical policies, or whether they helped stabilize acceptance of the regime, the field of history functioned as an important place of conflict over the legitimacy of the party's perception of the past. Moreover, Sabrow notes that a strong divergence in historical consciousness between East and West Germany only began to converge by the middle of the 1990s.[6] A similar case can be made for the SED's memory-work, which was an extension of its policies toward academic historians. While we cannot accurately estimate how successful the SED was in manipulating popular memory, the way in which it attempted to influence percep-

tions of the past is still important for our understanding of East Germany as a modern state-socialist dictatorship. Indeed, Annette Leo has found that the SED's memory policies have had a lasting impact on post-1990 German society. Studying school groups visiting the Buchenwald concentration camp in 1997 and 1998, she discovered that both teachers and parents had prepared many students to view the memorial site according to the pre-1990 official interpretation and had ignored newer information about the history of the camp as a Soviet internment camp or other aspects of the memorial site that had been added since 1990.[7] Alon Confino is correct to point out that the issue of reception is the "ogre that awaits every cultural historian" and that without critically examining reception we risk "constructing the history of memory from visible signs whose significance is taken for granted."[8] However, memory-work (whether in a totalitarian state or by interest groups within a pluralist society) rarely has immediate, measurable effects on collective memory. Memory politics must be measured, when measurable at all, over a long-term period.

The period covered by *Tailoring Truth* spans from the immediate postwar period to the collapse of the East German regime in 1989 and analyzes the evolution of how the state and party sought to harness the power of memory to legitimize its own claim to rule. The GDR's attempt to present itself as the new Germany, the tragic historical shadow from which it emerged, and the presence of a West German rival all turn the state-building process in East Germany into a unique opportunity to explore the creation and eventual erosion of a new state's memory culture and its role in regime legitimation. By exploring when and how the East German state altered its course or adapted its message, we can see a culture of official memory politics emerge that differed significantly from West Germany. As Siobhan Kattago has argued, "Official memory in the GDR meant a restrictive ideological representation of the past with little public debate. Official memory in the Federal Republic, on the other hand, was a public and highly controversial topic in West German political culture."[9] Yet even within this restricted representation, we find elements of debate and negotiation—both within the party apparatus as well as between members of the party and the sculptors, museum curators, and others who were tasked to carry out the party's memory-work.

Previous studies that address East German memory politics and sites of memory in the GDR have focused on specific events or memorials.[10] The comparative approach of both James Young and Jeffrey Herf are excellent early contributions to the field, but both primarily center on memories of the Nazi period, do not engage with the many other forms of memory politics pursued by the SED, and appear to at least in part champion the West German approach toward memory.[11] In a similar fashion, Thomas Fox's

*Stated Memory: East Germany and the Holocaust* concentrates exclusively on the SED's treatment of Holocaust memory in East German historiography, memorials, literature, and film.[12] Konrad Jarausch and Martin Sabrow, in the many volumes that they have edited or co-edited, have both used their contributions to theorize the role of history and memory in postwar German society. The strength of Sabrow's work rests with his ability to connect the work of professional historians to broader trends of GDR society and Jarausch's contributions have stressed the societal impact of historical narratives and the political role of memory and history (*Geschichtspolitik*) in both divided and unified Germany.[13]

By focusing not only on the SED's execution of memory-work but also on the difficulties it faced in completing this task, *Tailoring Truth* bridges the gap between two different strains of historiography of the GDR. On the one hand, this study contributes to a growing body of work that examines the limitations of SED rule, while on the other hand it also acknowledges the central role of state and party institutions in establishing parameters for acceptable behavior. Historians have increasingly called attention to the limits of state power. Jeffrey Kopstein and Mark Landsman have both shown how the party failed to deliver on its stated economic goals, despite the control it wielded over the economy as a whole.[14] Alan Nothnagle and Alan McDougall have both demonstrated that the party also failed to successfully regulate the indoctrination of East German youth, so that young people did not uniformly conform to the party's vision of budding socialists.[15] Indeed, in most instances the party needed to make ideological compromises and never achieved the level of control that it desired. Esther von Richthofen addressed this limitation of party power in her work on the GDR's cultural institutions and argues that this limit was in part due to disagreement within the party apparatus itself as well as between the party and the general population.[16] Indeed, there was also a great deal of debate and negotiation present within the realm of official memory policies as well. Those charged with carrying out the party's memory policies often found it necessary to modify the party's vision of the past in order to attract an audience to a commemoration, to engage a sculptor to create a monument, or to attract visitors to a museum exhibit.

Such limits of total control stand in contrast to earlier works on the GDR that reasserted the totalitarian model during the early 1990s. Scholars like Sigrid Meuschel and Klaus Schroeder highlighted the overtly repressive nature of the East German regime where the SED was fully in control of the state and society, while other non-state actors played no real part in shaping East German society.[17] Against this resurgent totalitarian model, social and cultural historians have sought to demonstrate that life in East Germany meant more than merely accepting total party control.

This has led to new attempts to characterize the GDR as a *durchherrschte Gesellschaft* (a ruled society),[18] a *Fürsorgediktatur* (a welfare dictatorship),[19] and a "participatory dictatorship."[20] While each of these nuanced interpretations of a dictatorship take issue with the concept of totalitarianism, they do indicate a consensus that the SED desired to wield as much control over society as it could, and that it employed multiple strategies that incorporated tactics beyond simply the use of force. This same dynamic can be found in the party's memory policies. The party wanted to control the public representation of the past, yet it was never able to completely control this process and thus found itself constantly retailoring its message and launching new memory projects.

The more we study the nature of the East German state, the less we are intrigued by its collapse and instead fascinated by how it was able to appear to be so stable. Armin Mitter and Stefan Wolle attribute the apparent stability of the regime to the presence of an extensive secret police apparatus, the travel restrictions imposed by a closed border and the Berlin Wall, and to the presence of Soviet troops. Taken to its logical conclusion, they argue, once these oppressive elements were removed, the regime began to crumble and eventually collapsed entirely.[21] Against this argument, Andrew Port has argued that despite the repressive nature of the state, East German citizens were anything but silent. Indeed, the major challenges to SED rule, represented by the uprisings in August 1951 and June 1953, erupted during the height of Stalinism in East Germany. Instead, Port finds that "social fragmentation—as well as official accommodation—were nevertheless the most important keys to East German stability and the longevity of the socialist regime."[22] Alternately, Charles Maier and others disagree that the East German state was indeed stable and instead point to a long and gradual decline in the regime's political, social, and economic performance combined with decreasing tolerance by the public to accept such conditions.[23] Others, like Timothy Garton Ash, avoid the question of internal stability by emphasizing how external factors such as the growth of democratic movements in neighboring East European states, Mikhail Gorbachev's reforms, and the waning of the Cold War influenced the fall of the Berlin Wall and eventually German unification on 3 October 1990.[24]

Other historians have attempted to approach studying East German history from below, in the form of a renewed interest in *Alltagsgeschichte*, with its emphasis on how politics influenced everyday life.[25] These authors have made significant contributions to rethinking the power relationship between the party and the people, especially how the party attempted to wield its authority at the local level. Others have focused on how consumer culture and consumption operated as a means by which everyday people

could and did influence party policy.[26] While the purpose of this study is not to gauge individual reception of the SED memory-work policies, it takes into consideration the voices of individuals when such sources were available, such as in the form of letters to the editor, visitor comments, and correspondence between artists and the regime.[27] The GDR only rarely engaged in the polling of public opinion and even these surveys did not ask questions geared toward the study of popular perceptions of the past. Even if they had, one cannot compare such studies with similar polls in the West, since East German respondents could not fully trust that their anonymity would be respected.[28] Instead, when assessing the "success" or "failure" of the SED's memory-work policy, this study relies primarily on the party's internal assessment. It analyzes decisions by party leaders to initiate changes in course or implement new memory policies to explore the party's willingness to continue investing state resources on certain projects or finance new initiatives instead. It also looks at the factors that led to such reconsiderations.

Thus, unearthing elements of negotiation and compromise are key elements to understanding the SED's memory-work. In order to bring its vision of the past into the public realm, the state depended on a variety of partners—the museum workers who curated exhibits, the artists who created the monuments, and the organizers and participants of commemoration activities. The formal and informal negotiations between the state and these non-state actors reveal that the state rarely pushed through its agenda without compromise. It is precisely this push and pull between the state and its citizenry over the SED's "memory-work" (*Erinnerungsarbeit*), the official party policy term, that illustrates the process of negotiation that was necessary to project a party-specific interpretation of the past into the built environment.

In democracies such as the United States or the Federal Republic of Germany, we can assume a certain amount of plurality in the way the public engages in debates about historical representation. Scholars of memory have sought to show the importance of competing voices in shaping collective memory and framing official interpretations of sites of memory in Europe. In the case of France, the contributions to Pierre Nora's *Realms of Memory* demonstrate that non-state actors played a major role commissioning monuments, building museums, or organizing commemorations independently from the state.[29] Contributors to Etienne François and Hagen Schulze's three-volume edited work have looked at similar case studies within the German national context.[30] The collection is organized into categories of memory, such as "empire," "arch enemy," or "guilt," which are explored through 121 essays focused on specific memory sites, personalities, events, or concepts throughout German history. Each essay attempts

to locate the site of memory within the broader context of German history and interpret how these sites have influenced perceptions of the past: "In other words: the individual remembers, but he does not remain alone. The milieu in which he lives creates the parameters, the form, and the content that determines and defines a common memory; the historical interpretation and pattern of perception are created out of the interaction between personal recollection and the shared, collective memory."[31] Within the context of the GDR, the ultimate goal of the SED was to take control of such parameters, instill them with its own ideological interpretation, and then actively use these sites of memory as a means to shape collective memory.[32]

This goal of controlling and managing memory was common throughout the state socialist societies of Eastern Europe after the Second World War. In each case, communist governments attempted to supplant former symbols of power with new ones that rationalized their position of authority.[33]As Aleida Assmann has stated, "institutions and larger social groups, such as nations, governments, the church, or a firm do not 'have' a memory—they 'make' one for themselves with the aid of memorial signs such as symbols, texts, images, rites, ceremonies, places, and monuments."[34] Assmann argues that totalitarian states "attempt to restore the premodern state monopoly over history and under modern circumstances and with modern means."[35] In East Germany, the SED attempted to establish such a monopoly, but it was never able to achieve its goal. However, it did present a "tailored truth" about the past, which was designed to have a long-term impact on how East German society internalized the past and in turn viewed the present.[36] When opportunities arose to commemorate an historic event, construct a museum, or build a monument, the only entity with the resources to pay for such undertakings was the state. Thus, the curators, artists, and event organizers were dependent on the state, which could use its position of power to shape the public's exposure to specific strands of memory that it wanted to highlight over all other competing memories. By confining the parameters of an acceptable and usable past, the SED dictatorship hoped to control the process of state identity formation and steer it toward contributing to the party's cultural legitimacy.

In his contribution to *Verletztes Gedächtnis*, Konrad Jarausch separates memory into a hierarchy of three categories—the individual, the group, and the collective. Memories formed and represented at all three of these levels are influenced by differences in gender, race, nationality, religious affiliation, occupation, and other social experiences. Individual memories are transformed and altered as they work their way up the hierarchy from individual, to group, to collective memories. In a democratic and pluralistic society, this process often involves political actors competing to have

their interpretations of events dominate in the public sphere.[37] However, in the GDR, where private memories seldom found a voice in the public sphere, the state was able to dominate public representations of the past and thus this book's analysis remains primarily at the top level of this hierarchy, but does occasional dip down into the lower two levels when the sources have allowed such insights.

The intent of this book is not to employ a top-down methodology that reifies the SED's assertion of power, but to differentiate between the party's ideological goals within the realm of memory politics and the extent to which it could implement its policies. The main assertion is that memory policies in East Germany were not static. They were not conceived in 1945 and then simply replicated throughout the entire period of the GDR. Jeffrey Herf has stated that the SED's anti-cosmopolitan campaigns of the 1950s "left a wound that never healed and an official memory of Nazism that remained intact until the collapse of the East German regime in 1989."[38] This may hold true concerning official memory of Nazism in East Germany, but not for all of the other strands of memory that fed into East Germany's official memory. Instead, the SED's approach to memory politics changed over time and adapted to changing conditions and challenges, both internal and external. The projects covered here demonstrate that the SED constantly and obsessively monitored how the state could employ memory-work to further its ideological and political goals. As a result, the state continuously attempted to resolve its shortcomings, both real and perceived, over the course of its nearly half-century of existence.

The SED hoped that memory might function as a non-material means of influence over East German society. Despite all the effort and resources committed by the state and party to this endeavor, the SED ultimately could not significantly influence how society viewed the past nor cultivate a unified historical consciousness capable of securing sufficient regime loyalty to fend off popular opposition. In fact, the state faced opposition to its public presentation of memory throughout its reign, yet it continued to invest its scarce resources in memory projects in an effort to bolster the SED's claim to power until its final collapse in the autumn of 1989. As the SED lost control over its official memory politics, ceding space in the public sphere for counter-memories, new opportunities arose that allowed opposition leaders to turn the SED's official memory culture around and use it as a means to protest against the state.

While similar examples can be found in other East European states of how the state attempted to manipulate popular perceptions of the past, East Germany's relationship with the past was unique. Unlike its East European neighbors, who often attempted to differentiate themselves from

the Soviet Union, the GDR faced the extra challenge of competing for its national heritage and historical legacy with West Germany. Just as West Germany laid claim to the democratic traditions of 1848 and the Weimar Republic as the historical foundation for its collective identity, East Germany focused on a Marxist-Leninist interpretation of Germany's past on which it could also construct a collective identity. This search for historical continuity provided the basis for both West Germany's master-narrative and East Germany's antifascist-based counter-narrative.[39] While the meta-narratives in divided Germany developed in very different ways, they remained interconnected and often responded to historiographical and political developments in the other camp.[40]

The study of memory in East Germany is closely linked to the study of professional historians, an area that saw a great deal of attention even prior to German unification. Western scholars had easy access to the published scholarship of GDR historians. However, they were limited by only reading what the state approved for official publication. Nonetheless, historians such as Andreas Dorpalen and others set the standard for the intellectual history of East German historians based on the materials to which they had access.[41] Following unification, however, historians could study not only published works, but also gain slow but steady access to archival documents, directives, and other ancillary evidence. For example, Martin Sabrow's study of GDR historians and the phenomenon which he has termed the GDR's "history culture," i.e. how historians interacted with the state and party, helps us understand the politicized nature of academic history in East Germany.[42]

It is my intention to build on our understandings of the basic structures of East Germany's history culture and extend them into the public sphere. Understanding attempts by GDR historians to (re)write history and develop new interpretations that bolstered the historical continuity of the SED is a necessary first step. To take the next step, it is necessary to look beyond the writing of academics and turn our focus to forms of public historical representation. While there are many categories that might fit within the realm of official memory-work, monuments, museums, and commemorations were among the most important to the state for its instrumentalization of the new Marxist-Leninist interpretations of Germans past.

This book does not claim to provide a complete account of monuments or museums in the GDR, but rather a historical narrative that draws on a select set. These are representative examples of memory projects chosen from a wide range of possibilities, including film, literature, street signs, the names of schools and factories, and many others.[43] Some prominent

memorials have been left out, such as those built by the Soviet Union or the Frauenkirche in Dresden, which was left in ruins as a monument to the victims of the "Anglo-American Terror Attack," better known as the Dresden bombing of 1945, and instrumentalized by the SED.[44] The list of other possible places of memory that could have been included here is extensive. However, the examples chosen for the case studies are intended to provide a means to trace the overall trends in East German memory policies and connect these projects to the legitimating claims of the East German regime. In each case, the state constructed or heavily influenced these memory projects in an effort to convey specific messages to the public. Monuments, such as the one at Buchenwald, or the various political monuments that dotted the memory landscape in Berlin, were constructed to visually reinforce the party's interpretation of specific events, figures, or historical sites. Many, such as the Ernst Thälmann statue in Berlin, figured directly into the state's antifascist founding myth or were meant to sustain a direct memory link between the current generation and specific, earlier heroes of the German working class. Museums in the GDR served as educational instruments for the workers and students. Factories, trade unions, and school groups organized special state-funded trips to the Museum for German History in Berlin and to local "*Heimat*" museums, such as the one in Merseburg. The most dramatic element of historical representation in the GDR were the commemoration festivals, such as the Martin Luther festival or the annual parade in honor of Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg in Berlin. These commemorations brought a diverse group of people together to participate in the memory-work of the state and actively partake in official rituals of remembrance, yet also provided a space for alternative memories.

Using these three categories of memory culture, I identify a series of five stages in the development of a uniquely East German culture of remembrance, each of which form the focus of the five chapters that follow. Although these stages generally occur in chronological order, there are several instances where stages overlap and continue simultaneously with another phase. Chapter 1 looks at the first stage, which took place immediately following the Second World War and extended into the early 1950s. The German Communist Party (KPD)/SED faced the significant task of establishing itself as the dominant party in the SBZ. This process of legitimizing the party in the minds of the German people meant drawing on existing memories of the German working class and elevating the perceived importance of these traditions in order to claim a dominant position in the minds of the Germans. Most importantly, this stage attempted to promote the concept of antifascism as the defining element of the SED. Con-

cretely, the party sought to shape an emerging postwar memory culture through the renovating the Socialists' Cemetery in Berlin-Friedrichsfelde, hosting an exhibit about the "Other Germany" that highlighted the role of communist resistance, and attempted to infuse the 100th anniversary of the 1848 revolution with its own concepts of how the lessons of the past should be applied to postwar Germany.

Chapter 2 focuses on the second stage of development that took root following the creation of the GDR in 1949. The SED's attention turned to grafting the party's legacy onto the new state. This process included finding and amplifying the traditions of the German labor movement. It moved beyond celebrating the communist party's antifascist traditions to incorporating broader interpretations of a struggling working class that finally achieved its goals with the founding of the East German state. The young state constructed a new Museum for German History (MfDG) that propagated its new line of Marxist-Leninist historical development that culminated in the creation of the first communist state on German soil. The state seized on opportunities to take over memorial initiatives like the one at the Buchenwald concentration camp in an effort to establish control over how this site would be remembered. This stage also saw some failed attempts at commemorating Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, and Ernst Thälmann. Such failures highlight areas where the party was not able to impose its vision of the past on the emerging memory landscape.

The third and fourth stages involved extending the basis for this cultural legitimacy. Chapter 3 addresses the third stage, roughly from the 1950s to the 1960s, during which time the regime endeavored to transfer the memories of the antifascist struggle to the next generation and develop new interpretations of the past that spoke directly to the political concerns of the time. Additionally, the SED sought to locate the history of the East German state within the narratives of local and regional history, which it hoped would provide a more solid footing for the state's own narrative of historical development. The state transformed many smaller historical sites into politically charged interpretive memorials, revamped many of the local history museums in an effort to localize the national historical narrative, and sponsored teacher training workshops to better influence how teachers used places like the MfDG and Buchenwald to educate the youth.

Chapter 4 examines how the fourth stage of development, which covers the 1970s and 1980s, signaled a new direction in East Germany's official memory policies. The new approach allowed for the rehabilitation of historical figures and events previously determined not to belong to the GDR's "progressive" state narrative. Such "reactionary" figures as the

Prussian King Frederick II, the nineteenth-century statesman Otto von Bismarck, Martin Luther, and others were now seen in a new interpretive light. This made it possible to differentiate between acts by these figures that led to German nationalism and those that contributed to (or stunted) the growth of the German working class. By expanding the repertoire of acceptable historical figures and events that could be commemorated, the regime hoped to expand its reach beyond the party faithful and make inroads among the general public.

Chapter 5 explores how revisions to the national narrative marked the erosion of the historical narrative that the SED had so painstakingly built. This final stage is characterized by the party's resumption of memory projects it had previously abandoned. Having placed new emphasis on the "reactionary" figures during the previous stage, the party now felt it needed to return to older memory culture traditions from the founding years. The regime returned to previously abandoned efforts to construct monuments honoring Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, and Ernst Thälmann to deflect criticism they were now being ignored. However, the difficulties that the regime faced in bringing such projects to fruition reflect not only the rigid historical conception of an aging gerontocracy, but also reveal active resistance to the party's narrow interpretation of the past. The growing distance between the memory vision of the party and the state's memory-work partners can be seen in the difficulty that the party experienced finding artists who would create the type of monuments desired by the SED leadership. The party's narrow interpretation also presented the opportunity for opposition leaders to reappropriate the memory of figures such as Rosa Luxemburg and use her legacy against the policies of the state. Thus the erosion of the memory culture that the party worked so hard to create ultimately contributed to the SED's demise.

Viewing these three categories of memory over the entire period of SED rule reveals how and why the state's memory policies changed over time. In the end, it is clear that East Germany's memory culture was dynamic. It developed in stages over the span of forty-five years. The SED drew upon pre-existing memories of the working class and tailored these memories to fit the new political realities of postwar Germany. Once in power, the party continued to construct a memory landscape intended to further bolster its authority. However, maintaining control over its own official memory policies proved difficult. Although the SED attempted to stem the tide of erosion with a new round of political monuments similar to those built during earlier stages, these new projects were unable to hold back the emerging push toward democracy and the public's rejection of a one-sided, state-imposed memory culture.

## Notes

1. *Bericht der Kommission zum Umgang mit den politischen Denkmälern der Nachkriegszeit im ehemaligen Ost-Berlin* (Berlin: Abegeordnetenhaus, 1993).
2. Thomas Fülling, "Minister: Marx und Engels sollen weg," *Berliner Morgenpost,* 21 January 2012, p. 2.
3. To follow the debate that Ramsauer's remarks touched off, see: Katrin Betinna Müller, "Immer schön vergessen," *Die Tageszeitung,* 20 January 2012, p. 16; "Soll das Denkmal von Marx und Engels aus Mitte verschwinden?" *B.Z.,* 20 January, 2012, p. 8; "Leserbriefe," *Berliner Zeitung,* 21 January 2012, p. 9; and "Sakko und Jacketti," *Berliner Tagesspiegel,* 29 January 2012, p. 16.
4. While most of East Germany's prestige memory projects remain in their original form, there are a few examples where the monuments have been removed or relocated. The Lenin monument in Berlin is the most prominent example of a monument that has been completely removed from public view and the monument for Marx and Engels has been consolidated into one corner of the park rather than as its focal point. Markus Falkner, "Marx und Engels blicken sieben Jahre lang nach Westen," *Berliner Morgenpost,* 15 April 2010.
5. Martin Sabrow, Rainer Eckert, et al., *Wohin treibt die Erinnerung? Dokumentation einer Debatte* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2007); Silke Arnold-de Simine, ed., *Memory Traces: 1989 and the Question of German Cultural Identity* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2005); Heidi Behrens and Andreas Wagner, eds., *Deutsche Teilung, Repression und Alltagsleben: Erinnerungsorte der DDR-Geschichte* (Leipzig: Forum Verlag Leipzig, 2004).
6. Martin Sabrow, *Das Diktat des Konsenses: Geschichtswissenschaft in der DDR 1949–1969* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 2001), p. 10.
7. Annette Leo, "Nicht Vereint: Studien zum Geschichtsbewusstsein Ost- und Westdeutscher," in Behrens and Wagner, *Deutsche Teilung,* pp. 58–68, p. 65.
8. Alon Confino, "Collective Memory and Cultural History: Problems of Method," *American Historical Review,* Vol. 102, No. 5 (December 1997), pp. 1386–1403, here p. 1395 and p. 1397. See also Alon Confino, *Germany as a Culture of Remembrance: Promises and Limits of Writing History* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006).
9. Siobhan Kattago, *Ambiguous Memory: The Nazi Past and German National Identity* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2001), p. 3.
10. Martin Sabrow, ed., *Erinnerungsorte der DDR* (Munich: C.H. Beck, 2009); Konrad Jarausch and Martin Sabrow, eds., *Verletztes Gedächtnis: Die Erinnerungskultur und Zeitgeschichte im Konflikt* (Berlin: Campus, 2002); Carola S. Rudnick, *Die andere Hälfte der Erinnerung: Die DDR in der deutschen Geschichtspolitik nach 1989* (Bielefeld: Transcript, 2011); and Sabrow, Eckert, et al., *Wohin treibt die Erinnerung?*
11. Jeffrey Herf, *Divided Memory: The Nazi Past in the Two Germanys* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997); James Young, *Textures of Memory: Holocaust Memorials and Meaning* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1997).
12. Tomas C. Fox, *Stated Memory: East Germany and the Holocaust* (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 1999).
13. Jarausch and Sabrow, *Verletztes Gedächtnis*; Konrad Jarausch and Martin Sabrow, *Die historische Meistererzählung: Deutungslinien der deutschen Nationalgeschichte nach 1945* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2002); Martin Sabrow, Ralph Jessen, and Klaus Große Kracht, eds., *Zeitgeschichte als Streitgeschichte: Grosse Kontroversen seit 1945* (Munich: C.H. Beck, 2003).
14. Jeffrey Kopstein, *The Politics of Economic Decline in East Germany, 1945–1989* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997). Mark Landsman, *Dictatorship and De-*

*mand: The Politics of Consumerism in East Germany* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005).

15. Alan L. Nothnagle, *Building the East German Myth: Historical Mythology and Youth Propaganda in the German Democratic Republic, 1945–1989* (Ann Arbor: Michigan University Press, 1999); Alan McDougall, *Youth Politics in East Germany: The Free German Youth Movement, 1946–1968* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2004); Uta G. Poiger, *Jazz, Rock and Rebels: Cold War Politics and American Culture in a Divided Germany* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000); and Mark Fenemore, *Sex, Thugs and Rock'n'Roll: Teenage Rebels in Cold-War East Germany* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2008).
16. Esther von Richthofen, *Bringing Culture to the Masses: Control, Compromise and Participation in the GDR* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2008).
17. Sigrid Meuschel, *Legitimation und Parteiherrschaft in der DDR: Zur Paradox von Stabilität und Revolution in der DDR 1945–1989* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1992). Klaus Schroeder, *Der SED-Staat: Partei, Staat und Gesellschaft, 1949–1990* (Munich: Hanser, 1998). For an overview and critique of this approach, see Konrad Jarausch, "Care and Coercion: The GDR as Welfare Dictatorship," in *Dictatorship as Experience: Towards a Socio-Cultural History of the GDR* ed. Konrad Jarausch (New York: Berghahn Books, 1999), pp. 47–69.
18. Jürgen Kocka, "Eine durchherrschte Gesellschaft" in Hartmut Kaelbe, Jürgen Kocka, and Hartmut Zwar, eds., *Sozialgeschichte der DDR* (Stuttgart: Klett Cotta, 1994), pp. 547–54.
19. Jarausch, "Care and Coercion," pp. 47–69.
20. Mary Fulbrook, *The People's State: East German Society from Hitler to Honecker* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2005).
21. Armin Mitter and Stefan Wolle, *Untergang auf Raten: Unbekannte Kapitel der DDR-Geschichte* (Munich: Bertelsmann, 1993).
22. Andrew Port, *Conflict and Stability in the German Democratic Republic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 279.
23. Charles S. Maier, *Dissolution: The Crisis of Communism and the End of East Germany* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997); Konrad Jarausch and Martin Sabrow, eds., *Weg in den Untergang: Der innere Zerfall der DDR* (Göttingen, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1999); Mary Fulbrook, *Anatomy of a Dictatorship: Inside the GDR 1949–1989* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995); and Corey Ross, *The East German Dictatorship: Problems and Perspectives in the Interpretation of the GDR* (London: Arnold, 2002).
24. Timothy Garton Ash, *In Europe's Name: Germany and the Divided Continent* (New York: Vintage Books, 1993); Peter H. Merkel, *German Unification in the European Context* (University Park, PA: Penn State University Press, 1993).
25. Stefan Wolle, *Die heile Welt der Diktatur: Alltag und Herrschaft in der DDR: 1971–1989* (Berlin: Ch. Links Verlag, 1998); Hans-Hermann Hertle and Stefan Wolle, *Damals in der DDR: Der Alltag im Arbeiter und Bauernstaat* (Munich: Goldmann, 2006); Paul Steege, *Black Market, Cold War: Everyday Life in Berlin, 1946–1949* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008); and Jan Palmowski, *Inventing a Socialist Nation: Heimat and the Politics of Everyday Life in the GDR, 1945–1990* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009). See further, Paul Steege, Andrew Bergerson, Maureen Healy, and Pamela E. Swett, "The History of Everyday Life: A Second Chapter," *Journal of Modern History,* Vol. 80, No. 2 (2008), pp. 358–78.
26. Katherine Pence, "Schaufenster des sozialistischen Konsums: Texte der ostdeutschen 'consumer culture,'" in *Akten, Eingaben, Schaufenster: Die DDR und ihre Texte,* ed. Alf Lüdtke and Peter Becker (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1997), pp. 91–118. See also: Katherine Pence, "Women on the Verge: Consumers between Private Desires and Public Crisis," in *Socialist Modern: East German Everyday Culture and Politics,* ed. Katherine

Pence and Paul Betts (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2008), pp. 287–322; and Donna Harsch, *Revenge of the Domestic: Women, the Family, and Communism in the German Democratic Republic* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008).

27. I am less interested in oral history–generated memories that help explain an individual's interpretation of their pasts and more interested in how contemporaries approached these memory projects. Applying oral history methods to uncover personal memories runs into the complication of these memories being shaped by events since 1990 and would not necessarily represent how individuals interacted with the state's memory policies while they were being implemented. Such an approach would be better employed in a study of personal memories of the GDR today (that is in the present) rather than one focused on examining the role of the state's memory politics in the past. As Alessandro Portelli has demonstrated in his work on the Fosse Ardeatine massacre in Italy, oral histories are often better suited to analyze current memory debates, rather than establishing an historical record of past memory debates. Alessandro Portelli, *The Order Has Been Carried Out: History, Memory, and the Meaning of a Nazi Massacre in Rome* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003).
28. Heinz Niemann, *Hinterm Zaun: Politische Kultur und Meinungsforschung in der DDR: Die geheime Berichte an das Politbüro der SED* (Berlin: Edition Ost, 1995).
29. Pierre Nora, ed., *Realms of Memory: Rethinking the French Past* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996). For further examples from Europe and the United States, see: Pierre Nora, "Between Memory and History: *Les Lieux de Mémoire*," *Representations* (Spring 1989), pp. 7–25; Pim den Boer and Willem Frijhoff, eds., *Lieux de mémoire et identités nationals* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 1993); Mario Isnenghi, ed., *I luoghi della memoria*, 3 Volumes (Rome: Laterza, 1997); and William E. Leuchtenburg, ed., *American Places: Encounters with History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000). See further: George Mosse, *Fallen Soldiers: Reshaping the Memory of the World Wars* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990); Michael Kammen, *Mystic Chords of Memory: The Transformation of Tradition in American Culture* (New York: Knopf, 1991); Thomas Lacquer, "Memory and Naming in the Great War," in *Commemorations*, ed. John Gillis (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994), pp. 150–67; Claudia Koonz, "Between Memory and Oblivion: Concentration Camps in German Memory," also in Gillis, *Commemorations*, pp. 258–80; Aleida Assmann, *Erinnerungsräume: Formen und Wandlungen des kulturellen Gedächtnisses* (Munich: C.H. Beck, 1999); and Jan Assmann, *Das kulturelle Gedächtnis: Schrift, Erinnerung und politische Identität in frühen Hochkulturen* (Munich: C.H. Beck, 1997).
30. Etienne François and Hagen Schulze, eds., *Deutsche Erinnerungsorte* (Munich: C.H. Beck, 2001), Vol. 1–3.
31. Etienne François and Hagen Schulze, "Einleitung," in François and Schulze, *Deutsche Erinnerungsorte*, Vol. 1, p. 13.
32. Jürgen Danyel, "Unwirtliche Gegenden und abgelegene Orte? Der Nationalsozialismus und die deutsche Teilung als Herausforderungen einer Geschichte der deutschen 'Erinnerungsorte,'" *Geschichte und Gesellschaft*, Vol. 24 (1998), pp. 436–75.
33. For examples from the Soviet Union, Eastern Europe, and China, where communist parties held similar control over the public presentation of memory, see: Nina Tumarkin, *Lenin Lives! The Lenin Cult in Soviet Russia* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983); Lisa Kirschenbaum, *The Legacy of the Siege of Leningrad, 1941–1995* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009); Catherine Merridale, *Night of Stone: Death and Memory in Twentieth-Century Russia* (New York: Viking, 2000); Michael Meng, *Shattered Spaces: Encountering Jewish Ruins in Germany and Poland* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011); Michael Steinlauf, *Bondage to the Dead: Poland and the Memory of the Holocaust* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1996); and the collection of essays

in Rubie Watson, ed., *Memory, History, and Opposition under State Socialism* (Santa Fe: School of American Research, 1994).

34. Aleida Assmann, "Transformations Between History and Memory," *Social Research*, Vol. 75, No. 1 (Spring 2008), pp. 49–72, here p. 55.
35. Ibid., p. 64.
36. Given the restrictive nature of East German society, it is necessary to adapt Maurice Halbwachs's concept of a "social memory" when we look at collective memory in the GDR (Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory,* trans. and ed. Lewis A. Coser [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992]). Within a pluralistic society, the collective frameworks that structure Halbwachs's understanding of social memory would themselves be constructed through a social process of negotiation between interest groups with dominant and counter-veiling memories in dialogue in the public sphere. In the context of East Germany, however, the party sought to control how these frameworks functioned in the public sphere. This is not to deny the existence of other frameworks (such as personal experience or religious affiliation), but acknowledge that they were restricted by the SED from playing a significant role in determining state policy.
37. Konrad Jarausch, "Zeitgeschichte und Erinnerung. Deutungskonkurrenz oder Interdependenz?" in Jarausch and Sabrow, *Verletztes Gedächtnis,* pp. 9–37, p. 14.
38. Herf, *Divided Memory,* p. 162.
39. Konrad Jarausch and Michael Geyer, *Shattered Pasts: Reconstructing German Histories* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002); Robert Moeller, *War Stories: The Search for a Usable Past in the Federal Republic of Germany* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003); Norbert Frei, *Adenauer's Germany and the Nazi Past: The Politics of Amnesty and Integration* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002).
40. Martin Sabrow, "Auf der Suche nach dem materialistischen Meisterton. Bauformen einer nationalen Gegenerzählung in der DDR," in Jarausch and Sabrow, *Die historische Meistererzählung,* pp. 33–77; Chistoph Cornelißen, "Der wiederentstandene Historismus. Nationalgeschichte in der Bundesrepublik der fünfziger Jahre," in Jarausch and Sabrow, *Die historische Meistererzählung,* pp. 78–108.
41. Andreas Dorpalen: *German History in Marxist Perspective: The East German Approach* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1985), Ulrich Neuhäusser-Wespy, *Die SED und die Historie: die Etablierung der marxistisch-leninistischen Geschichtswissenschaft in der DDR in der fünfziger und sechziger Jahren.* (Bonn: Bouvier, 1996), Alexander Fisher and Günther Heydemann, eds., *Geschichtswissenschaft in der DDR* (Berlin: Duncker & Humbolt, 1988).
42. Martin Sabrow, ed., *Verwaltete Vergangenheit: Geschichtskultur und Herrschaftslegitimation in der DDR* (Leipzig: Akademische Verlagsanstalt, 1997) and Martin Sabrow and Peter Th. Walther, eds., *Historische Forschung und sozialistische Diktatur: Beiträge zur Geschichtswissenschaft in der DDR* (Leipzig: Leipziger Universitätsverlag, 1995).
43. For a discussion of how textbooks perform a parallel function of reinforcing the memory politics of other objects and aid in the overall construction of a state memory culture, see: Nothnagle, *Building the East German Myth,* and Benita Blessing, *The Antifascist Classroom: Denazification in Soviet-Occupied Germany, 1945–1949* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).
44. Cortney Glore Crimmens, "Reinterpreting the Soviet War Memorial in Berlin's Treptower Park after 1990," in *Remembering the German Democratic Republic: Divided Memory in a United Germany,* ed. David Clarke and Ute Wölfel (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), pp. 54–64; Rudy Koshar, *From Monuments to Traces: Artifacts of German Memory, 1870–1990* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), pp. 283–84; Anne Fuchs, *After the Dresden Bombing: Pathways of Memory, 1945 to the Present* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).