



Twenty Years After Communism: The Politics of Memory and Commemoration

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Twenty Years After Communism: The Politics of Memory and Commemoration From Oxford University Press

While the fall of the Berlin Wall is positively commemorated in the West, the intervening years have shown that the former Soviet Bloc has a more complicated view of its legacy. In post-communist Eastern Europe, the way people remember state socialism is closely intertwined with the manner in which they envision historical justice. *Twenty Years After Communism* is concerned with the explosion of a politics of memory triggered by the fall of state socialism in Eastern Europe, and it takes a comparative look at the ways that communism and its demise have been commemorated (or not commemorated) by major political actors across the region.

The book is built on three premises. The first is that political actors always strive to come to terms with the history of their communities in order to generate a sense of order in their personal and collective lives. Second, new leaders sometimes find it advantageous to mete out justice on the politicians of abolished regimes, and whether and how they do so depends heavily on their interpretation and assessment of the collective past. Finally, remembering the past, particularly collectively, is always a political process, thus the politics of memory and commemoration needs to be studied as an integral part of the establishment of new collective identities and new principles of political legitimacy. Each chapter takes a detailed look at the commemorative ceremony of a different country of the former Soviet Bloc. Collectively the book looks at patterns of extrication from state socialism, patterns of ethnic and class conflict, the strategies of communist successor parties, and the cultural traditions of a given country that influence the way official collective memory is constructed.

Twenty Years After Communism develops a new analytical and explanatory framework that helps readers to understand the utility of historical memory as an important and understudied part of democratization.



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Editorial Review

Review

"An incisive and timely anthology... this volume represents an original and worthy contribution on account of its advancing of theory in 'memory studies', the rich empirical data, and its contribution to democracy studies." --German Politics

"Remembering a nation's past shapes its future. We should know this in our bones, but thanks to Bernhard, Kubik, and their contributors, we have both theory and method to approach it analytically across the world, and inspired empirical studies of the post-communist world. One of the best volumes I have read in years. It is required reading for those who want to understand how cultural politics matter." --Michael D. Kennedy, Professor of Sociology and International Studies, Brown University

"In contrast to most studies of collective memory, which usually focus on one or a small handful of cases, *Twenty Years After Communism* systematically compares 17 cases of Eastern European memory of 1989. In order to do so, it develops a rigorous theoretical framework for studying 'official memory' in postcommunist countries. Both its conceptual introduction and the individual chapters mark a significant advance in social scientific memory studies and in understanding of this crucial region. It is sure to be a landmark volume." --Jeffrey K. Olick, Professor of Sociology and History, University of Virginia

"'Memory studies' has become a crowded area of scholarship, with much rather sentimental work and too many books mechanically reproducing existing approaches. This volume is different: it offers an original theory of 'memory regimes' and uses it to compare the commemorations of 1989 across Central and Eastern Europe. The resulting chapters are a treasure trove of insights into the political cultures of post-communist countries." --Jan-Werner Müller, Professor of Politics, Princeton University

"This volume [is] a seminal original contribution that shows the relevance of the politics of memory and commemorations to post-communist politics and democratisation processes, and may also be read with profit by scholars of Eastern Europe from disciplines neighbouring political science." -- Europe-Asia Studies

"The editors' bold theoretical framework, clear methodology, and precise research questions thoroughly infuse each of the ten chapters on the twentieth anniversary of the 1989 revolutions in seventeen post-communist countries. All in all, the book not only focuses on mnemonic issues but also presents a broader panorama, spanning two decades, of political processes, identity formation, and nation-building in Central and Eastern Europe."

-- Ab Imperio

"Bernhard, Kubik and their contributors have produced a major contribution to the study of memory politics in Central and Eastern Europe. Twenty Years After Communism deserves not only to be remembered in two decades' time, but should be on the shelves of all scholars of the region who need to incorporate an understanding of the role of the past into their analysis of the present." -- East European Politics

"This volume has much to offer to media and communication scholars, especially those interested in developing comparative research on issues of cultural politics and commemoration." -- European Journal of Communication

"[A] particularly stimulating work." -- Revue d'études comparatives Est-Ouest

About the Author

Michael Bernhard is Raymond and Miriam Ehrlich Chair of Political Science at the University of Florida. Jan Kubik is Professor and Chair of Political Science at Rutgers University.

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