

Webcast: Exploring 9/11 – The World Before and After

Supplementary Materials

Edward Berenson discusses how memory forms, evolves, and shapes our understanding of the past.

The Speaker

Edward Berenson is a professor of History and Director of the Institute of French Studies at New York University (NYU). He also co-directs a French-American research center at NYU in partnership with the French National Center for Scientific Research (CNRS), and is a partner on a three-year study with the National September 11 Memorial & Museum researching memory and memorialization. He has edited or written seven books (two in print) on British, French, and American political and cultural history in the 19th and 20th centuries.

Review Questions

CHAPTER 1: *The interdisciplinary quality of memory studies and the nature of a funded French/American partnership exploring memory and memorialization.*

1. Dr. Berenson notes that memory studies “builds bridges” between different academic disciplines. Which disciplines does he reference? Can you think of others that could inform the study of memory?

CHAPTER 2: *The evolution of public and private memory in museums and individuals.*

1. The conversation focuses on the D-Day museum in France. How has the museum’s focus changed over time? What does this shifting focus tell us about public memory?
2. Dr. Berenson describes one neuroscientist’s description of how we retrieve and store memories in our brains. To what does he liken this process and what are its consequences?

CHAPTER 3: *The biology of memory and role of time in our recollections.*

1. How have scientists’ methods of observing our brain processes changed since the case of the patient known as “H.M.”?
2. Dr. Berenson describes a study of 9/11 survivors’ recollections of their experiences during the attacks. What did the study find? What are two possible reasons for the findings?

CHAPTER 4: *The relationship and tension between history and memory.*

1. Dr. Berenson asserts that history and memory are “not at all the same thing.” Explain what he means.
2. Why does he state that memory is a part of history? Do you agree?

KEY REFERENCES

Collective Memory

Separate from individual memory, this refers to memory constructed, passed along, and sometimes consciously shaped, by a group or a society.

fMRI

Shorthand for “Functional Magnetic Resonance Imaging,” this scanning machine allows scientists to unobtrusively observe brain function. Findings from the fMRI have helped memory scientists better understand the formation, retrieval, and malleability of memories.

French Collaborationists

Refers to French citizens and government officials who willfully cooperated with, and aided, the Germans during the Nazi occupation of France in World War II.

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Review Questions (continued)

CHAPTER 5: *Collective memory and the collective repression of memories in different societies.*

1. What are reasons that a country, culture, or government would choose collectively *not* to remember an event?
2. Dr. Berenson gives two examples of countries that did not acknowledge specific episodes in their histories. What allowed those memories to resurface collectively?

CHAPTER 6: *How societies' selective memory evolves over time.*

1. Define “collective representation” and provide an example of an event or an object exemplifying this idea.
2. What does the example of Primo Levi’s book tell us about Italian attitudes towards the Holocaust?

CHAPTER 7: *Remembering 9/11 and how future societies will contextualize the attacks.*

1. According to Dr. Berenson, how has the public’s focus shifted over time with regard to 9/11?
2. What are some of the different ways in which 9/11 could be remembered in the future? What might influence those differences?

Questions for Further Discussion

Different societies remember 9/11 in different ways. Provide evidence of how another country has remembered or memorialized the attacks, and compare it your own memories or the memories of your family. Are they the same? Are they different? How and why?

Dr. Berenson mentions the idea that membership in a group is predicated on shared memories within that group. Memories, then, become powerful tools for group identity and influence. Is this a useful way to view and define groups? Provide evidence supporting or refuting this idea.

Dr. Berenson discusses the debate over whether to build a museum focused on American slavery. What were the arguments for each side? With whom do you agree? Why?

Recommended Resources

Memory and Memorialization of Trauma and War, Joint Academic Program: <http://www.cnrsnyu.com/>

Nelson, R.S. and Olin, M. (Eds.), *Monuments and Memory, Made and Unmade*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

KEY REFERENCES (continued)

“Writing for the drawer”

The notion of secretly writing for future readers. The term is primarily used to describe authors who write in spite of their works being prohibited at the time.