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Public Policy and the Public Historian: The Changing Place of Historians in Public Life in France and the UK

MARY STEVENS

Abstract: In 2002 the History and Policy network was set up in the UK in order to connect British historians with policymakers and “increase the influence of historical research over current policy.” At the same time a reverse process can be observed in France, where since 2005 historians have been campaigning against certain uses of history by politicians. This article compares the two trends, arguing that the French example demonstrates the need to pay as much attention to raising awareness of history as a practice as to transmitting content, if historians are to contribute usefully to public policy debates.

Key words: Public policy, France, History and Policy, authority, United Kingdom.

NOT SO VERY LONG AGO “RELEVANCE” WAS A DIRTY WORD for many professional historians in Britain. Being “relevant” meant bending one’s research to the fickle fashions of the day and by extension the dereliction of one’s primary obligation to scholarly objectivity.¹ This view has of course been widely

1. See also John Tosh, *Why History Matters* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 17–22; and John Tosh with Sean Lang, *The Pursuit of History: Aims, Methods, and New Directions in the Study of Modern History* (Harlow: Longman, 2006), 48.

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contested, ever since the publication of E. H. Carr's iconoclastic *What is History?*² in 1961,² in which he dismissed the idea that historians can stand outside of history and somehow divorce themselves from the concerns and pre-occupations of their day. If today it exists at all, it does so only in more subtle guises (for example in an emphasis on history as a source of personal cultural enrichment, not a "guide to living").³ What Carr's insight implies for the practice of history is not necessarily any clearer now than it was then. However, in the last few years powerful voices have begun to urge historians to take up a more prominent role in public debate in general and policymaking in particular, in areas of public life as diverse as foreign policy and disease control, notably through the "History and Policy" network. Historicism, it is argued, needs to get "practical." We, as an informed citizenry, have a great deal to learn from the past, and so long as appropriate caveats about the irreducible otherness of the past are in place, John Tosh, amongst others, has argued that the time has come for "applied history."⁴ This trend may not be quite as new as some of its advocates would have us believe: Virginia Berridge refers to a "golden age" of social science research influence in the 1960s and 1970s in which history was according to some the dominant discipline.⁵ But it remains the case that first, in recent years historians have more often than not been tacit observers rather than shapers of policy, and second, today British history is (once again) on the verge of going public.

The new openness of academic historians to see their work, when appropriate, as constituting a set of politically "useable pasts"⁶—history as advocacy, one might say—owes a great deal to intellectual shifts that can be traced back to the response to the challenge of the "linguistic turn" in the 1980s. Whilst many historians rejected what they saw as a relativist free-for-fall, claims in support of the unmitigated objectivity of the historian and the scientificity of history as a discipline became harder to substantiate. As Ann Rigney, looking back over this period, argues in the introduction to *Historians and Social Values* (2000), the "pragmatic turn in theoretical reflection," which has "prepared the way for a reconsideration of the historian's social role," "follows logically from the critique of essentialism."⁷ The theoretical trend also coincided with the rising stock of certain forms of knowledge about the past, in particular the elevation in the status of memory discourses and the value of witnessing, sometimes labeled the "memory boom," which has challenged the role of histori-

2. Edward Hallett Carr, *What is History?* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001). First published 1961 by Macmillan.

3. John Tosh, *Why History Matters* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 21.

4. John Tosh, "In Defence of Applied History: The History and Policy Website," *History and Policy* (2006), <http://www.historyandpolicy.org/papers/policy-paper-37.html> (accessed February 6, 2009).

5. Virginia Berridge, "Public or Policy Understanding of History?" *Social History of Medicine*, 16, no. 3 (2003): 513.

6. Ludmilla Jordanova, *History in Practice* (London: Arnold, 2000), 147.

7. Ann Rigney, "Introduction: Values, Responsibilities, History," in *Historians and Social Values*, ed. Ann Rigney and Joep Leerssen (Amsterdam University Press: Amsterdam, 2000), 8.

ans as uniquely qualified interpreters of past events. This challenge has been particularly vigorous in France, as shall briefly be discussed below. Furthermore, the boom in popular-appeal screen representations of the past, to which much serious critical attention has been devoted in this journal, has also forced even the most recalcitrant of historians to re-evaluate their status in relation to the public at large, even if only in some cases to reject the need for any change.

In short, a more pragmatic approach to the nature of historical knowledge and a growth in public engagement with the past in various but not always scholarly forms has generated a renewed interest in the role of historians in public life in much of the Western world. It is important to note that it is this latter aspect—the role of historians in public life—through which the still fluid (at least to European audiences) concept of “public history” is approached in this article. This is not to suggest that the term “public history” does not exist in the UK in ways that will be familiar to North American scholars and practitioners. Indeed, those historians who have inherited the mantle of the Raphael Samuel and the History Workshop are becoming increasingly visible advocates for both the practice and study of “public history” conceived as a democratized and “participatory historical culture”;⁸ “the work,” in Samuel’s still moving phrase, “of a thousand different hands.”⁹ However, to suggest that this vision of public historical practice disqualifies the kind of “applied history” under discussion here (the activities of academic historians in public life) from sheltering under the same terminological umbrella is unhelpful, since it perpetuates precisely the kind of divisions between categories of historian that both “public history” and the History Workshop movement have long sought to undermine. History, in this author’s view, becomes “public” when shaped for an audience to meet the demands of the present, irrespective of the professional or social status of either the shapers or the audience. Moreover, in France, which will serve as a point of comparison for the UK, there is no clearly defined or agreed upon concept of “public history,” and the activities of certain scholars, particularly those who have worked with community groups in the context of the new national museum of immigration (itself a product of policy molded by academic history, discussed below) do not neatly fit into discrete categories of “public” versus “applied” history.

Most scholars and practitioners in the UK with a vested interest in the public life of the past will be predisposed to cheer the revivification of historical discourse in the public sphere that the turn to advocacy ideally foreshadows. Yet when placed in international comparative context, discordant notes begin to sound. For across the English Channel a reverse trend seems to be gaining strength in France. In June 2005 a collective of historians es-

8. Hilda Kean and Paul Ashton, “Introduction: People and their Pasts and Public History Today,” in *People and their Pasts: Public History Today*, ed. Paul Ashton and Hilda Kean (Palgrave Macmillan: Basingstoke, 2009), 2.

9. Raphael Samuel, *Theatres of Memory: Past and Present in Contemporary Culture* (London: Verso, 1994), 8.

established a new network, the alarming-sounding “Committee for Vigilance with regard to the Public Uses of History” (*Comité de vigilance face aux usages publics de l’histoire*, or CVUH).¹⁰ The founding manifesto of the committee denounces “the increasing intervention of political authorities and the media in historical questions which tends to impose value judgments to the detriment of critical analysis.”¹¹ Since 2005 the CVUH has established itself as an influential presence in the French public sphere; on the table at the 2009 annual general meeting were its contract with a publishing house and the prospect of international offshoots in Italy and Switzerland.¹² Members of the group have also been invited to submit evidence to parliamentary committees.¹³ A related movement, *Liberté pour l’histoire* (Liberty for history) has also raised the alarm about political interference in the process of historical inquiry, although its concern has been more narrowly with what it sees as the censoring drive embodied in France’s so-called “memory laws.”¹⁴

The success of these movements, and the CVUH in particular—the Web site of the CVUH lists 153 members, almost all professional historians from a range of subdisciplines and employers,¹⁵ and a recent appeal from *Liberté pour l’histoire* attracted 882 initial signatures, to which many more may subsequently have been added¹⁶—begs the question of how, in a broadly similar intellectual climate, the obvious disparity between the role sought for themselves by French and British historians can be explained. And what might the French case have to teach British historians as they embark on a quest for greater public visibility? Voicing her reservations about the burgeoning domain of “applied history,” Ludmilla Jordanova has called for “a broad comparative approach” to the analysis of “decision-making, popular history and public history” with a particular focus on the nature of historical authority in different national contexts.¹⁷ The intention of this article is to take up this challenge and to make use of the broad arena of public history-making in France to illuminate the situation in the UK today.

It should here be noted that this article is not based on first-hand experience of the role of the historian in public life in Britain and France, but rather

10. The moniker contains echoes of the vigilance committees of the Paris Commune or even, distantly, the revolutionary Committee of Public Safety. The founding members of the CVUH were Gérard Noiriel, Michèle Riot-Sarcey, and Nicolas Offenstadt.

11. “Manifeste du Comité de Vigilance face aux usages publics de l’histoire,” CVUH, <http://cvuh.free.fr/spip.php?article5> (accessed January 15, 2009). All translations from French are the author’s own, unless otherwise stated.

12. “Assemblée Générale du CVUH,” CVUH, <http://cvuh.free.fr/spip.php?article213> (accessed January 15, 2009).

13. Gérard Noiriel, “Intervention de Gérard Noiriel devant la commission parlementaire sur les questions mémorielles,” CVUH, <http://cvuh.free.fr/spip.php?article188> (accessed January 15, 2009).

14. This movement is discussed in more detail below.

15. “Adhérents,” CVUH, <http://cvuh.free.fr/spip.php?article6> (accessed January 15, 2009).

16. “Appel de Blois,” *Liberté pour l’histoire*, <http://www.lph-asso.fr/actualites/50.html> (accessed January 15, 2009).

17. Ludmilla Jordanova, “How History Matters Now,” *History and Policy* (2008), <http://www.historyandpolicy.org/papers/policy-paper-80.html> (accessed February 6, 2009).

is written from the perspective of an outside observer, whose research is focused on the dynamics of cultural memory in the present and in particular on its material technologies: monuments, memorials, museums, archives. My interest in the particular issues at stake here was spurred during the course of doctoral research in France from 2005 to 2007, where I explored how a revised narrative about national history was being constructed through the project for a national museum of immigration (*Cité nationale de l'histoire de l'immigration*). This study, and related work on the role of historians as arbiters of conflict in other museum contexts (in particular the work of *Musée dauphinois* in Grenoble on postwar migration from Algeria) drew on the idea of historians and the institutions with which they work (such as museums) as "authorities of recognition,"¹⁸ a concept adapted from Stephan Feuchtwang's work on Holocaust memory in the public sphere.¹⁹ The American historian of memory in France, Daniel Sherman, exploring the participation of historians in museum exhibitions about the First World War, has also argued that recognition is a symbiotic relationship; historians are happy to be solicited for public history initiatives since such work confirms the authority and social utility "of a group of intellectuals whose prestige, while considerable, like that of any professional group [needs] constantly to be reinvented."²⁰ The desire of historians in Britain to exercise greater influence over policymaking can also usefully be understood in these terms, as part of a (by no means illegitimate or unwarranted) corporate struggle for power.

The exercise of authority, in very public and contentious contexts such as the French museum of immigration, has proved a fraught exercise for many historians. But it has also prompted serious reflection. Whilst in the first instance it may seem surprising, it is important to note that a number of the consultant public historians involved in the museum project *also* became leading lights of the CVUH, notably the immigration historian Gérard Noiriel, a founder member of both initiatives. Whilst the compatibility or otherwise of these two activities raises all sorts of questions, it is nevertheless clear that in both Britain and France the public role of historians is currently being questioned and tested with uncommon vigor and that this process in itself merits serious exploration from a more distanced, abstract perspective. At the same time, several of the historians involved in the debates described in this article in both Britain and France have written thoughtful, reflective pieces on the nature of their public engagement, and the reader looking for a first-hand perspective would do well to explore these.²¹

18. Mary Stevens, "Museums, Minorities and Recognition: Memories of North Africa in Contemporary France," *Museum and Society*, 5, no. 1 (2007): 32.

19. Stephan Feuchtwang, "Loss: Transmissions, Recognitions, Authorisations," in *Regimes of Memory*, ed. Susannah Radstone and Katharine Hodgkin (London: Routledge, 2003).

20. Daniel Sherman, "Objects of Memory: History and Narrative in French War Museums," *French Historical Studies*, 19, no. 1 (1995): 73.

21. For France see Marie-Claude Blanc-Chaléard, "Une Cité nationale pour l'histoire de l'immigration: Genèse, enjeux, obstacles," *Vingtième Siècle* 92 (2006); Nancy Green, "A French Ellis Island? Museums, Memory and History in France and the United States," *History Work-*

History and Policy in the UK

A comparative exercise requires some background about the contested status of historical discourse in the public sphere in the UK. For some years now historians and politicians have been bemoaning what David Lowenthal has termed the “attrition of historical awareness.” “The erosion of canonical names and events,” he writes, “maroons many today in the narrowest of presents, barring fruitful access to any past.”²² Whilst we may express our reservations about Lowenthal’s lament for a disappearing canon—its eclipse could also be read as a sign of a progressive diversification of the curriculum—his concerns have been widely shared for at least two decades.²³ Hand-wringing over the ignorance of young people about history, and specifically national history, backed up by survey data reported even by the “serious” press in sensationalist terms, is a regular feature of the British news.²⁴ The issue is of course complicated by debates over just what “national” might mean: commentators in London have a tendency to elide Britishness with Englishness, yet from a Scottish or Welsh perspective such terms look very different.²⁵ A new curriculum for secondary school history (11–19 year olds), intended to address some of these concerns by widening the subject areas from which teachers could select topics whilst seeking to imbue pupils with a sense of the sweep of historical time, came into force across England and Wales in 2008.²⁶ Curriculum reform is in part a response to the “discourse of derision” developed by the right-wing press in the 1980s to attack the professional historical es-

shop Journal 63 (2007); Gérard Noiriel, *Immigration, antisémitisme et racisme en France (XIXe–XXe siècle): Discours publics, humiliations privées* (Paris: Fayard, 2007), 669–95; Gérard Noiriel, “The Historian in the *Cité*: How to Reconcile History and Memory of Immigration,” *Museum International*, 59, no. 1–2 (2007). For the UK see in particular Virginia Berridge, “History Matters? History’s Role in Health Policy Making,” *Medical History* 52 (2008).

22. David Lowenthal, “Archival Perils: An Historian’s Complaint,” *Archives*, 114 (2006): 71–72.

23. For an introduction to debates over the history curriculum in the UK since the 1980s see James Arthur and Robert Phillips, *Issues in History Teaching* (London & New York: Routledge, 2000).

24. For example in the following quote from *The Guardian*, “A sizeable slice of younger Britons think Gandalf, Horatio Hornblower, or Christopher Columbus was the hero of the English fleet’s defeat of the Spanish Armada, a survey showed” (Press Association, “Gandalf finds a place in British history,” *Guardian*, August 5, 2004). See also Polly Curtis, “Flawed history curriculum ‘too focused on Hitler,’” *Guardian*, February 15, 2005; David Smith, “Young people struggle in British history quiz,” *Guardian*, August 17, 2008; “Young ‘have poor history knowledge,” BBC, November 10, 2001, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/education/1647439.stm> (accessed January 15, 2009).

25. For a discussion of recent attempts to use heritage to promote a sense of Britishness/Englishness and all the difficulties this entails see Rhiannon Mason and Zelda Baveystock, “What Role can Digital Heritage Play in the Re-imagining of National Identities?: England and its ICONS,” in *Heritage and Identity: Engagement and Demission in the Contemporary World*, ed. Marta Anico and Elsa Peralta (London & New York: Routledge, 2008).

26. Scotland and Northern Ireland have separate educational arrangements. See also Jerome Freeman and Tina Isaacs, “The 11–19 Curriculum and Qualifications” (paper presented at History in Schools and Higher Education: Issues of Common Concern, conference at the Institute of Historical Research, London, September 29, 2005), <http://www.history.ac.uk/education/sept/freemanisaacs.html> (accessed February 6, 2009).

tablishment and in particular school history teachers.²⁷ At stake was something far more fundamental than differences of opinion over appropriate pedagogy (although this was an important element of the debate); as Robert Phillips explains, “above all, history professionals were accused of undermining the cultural heritage of the nation” by “abandoning” British history.²⁸ And indeed, despite major improvements in school history teaching in England and Wales, which is regularly given the highest ratings by the Office for Standards in Education (the body responsible for school inspection in the UK), misconceptions about the quality of historical education in the UK persist.²⁹ As recently as December 2008, the art historian and former director of the Victoria and Albert Museum Roy Strong, taking a swipe at the Labour government, was quoted in an interview as saying, “this Government in particular has wiped out virtually the teaching of history in schools.”³⁰ Attempts to assess the level of historical knowledge amongst British teenagers in particular and the public in general probably reveal as much about the preoccupations of the questioner as they do about the extent of genuine (mis)understanding of the past; the important thing however is that the British public is *perceived* by both professional historians and the educated elite, from which policymakers are drawn, to be to a great extent ignorant of its past and that action is urgently required.³¹

For a number of historians, the tremendous dangers associated with what they identified as a pervasive ignorance came to the fore in the run-up to the Iraq war. Yet the finger was no longer being pointed at schoolchildren, but rather at national leaders. It was Tony Blair’s statement to the United States Congress that “there never has been a time when . . . a study of history provides so little instruction for our present day”³² that spurred many in the profession into action. John Tosh has described it as a “wake-up call,” suggesting that the paucity of historical awareness in this instance right up to cabinet level revealed “a political culture in which there was less readiness than ever to draw intelligently on the past.”³³ This critique perhaps needs to be nuanced:

27. Stephen J. Ball, *Politics and Policy Making in Education: Explorations in Policy Sociology* (London: Routledge, 1990).

28. Robert Phillips, “Contesting the Past, Constructing the Future: History, Identity and Politics in Schools,” *British Journal of Educational Studies*, 46, no. 1 (1998): 42.

29. Sean Lang, “Talking about History in British Education” (paper presented at the first History in British Education conference at the Institute of Historical Research, London, February 14–15, 2005), <http://www.history.ac.uk/education/conference/lang.html> (accessed February 6, 2009).

30. Alice-Azania Jarvis, “Pandora: History ain’t what it used to be, according to Sir Roy,” *Independent*, January 15, 2009.

31. One thing that one can say with certainty is that since history is not compulsory beyond the age of fourteen in the UK, young people for the most part receive far less history teaching over the course of their education than almost anywhere in Europe (Sean Lang, “Talking about History in British Education”).

32. Cited in John Tosh, *Why History Matters* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 5.

33. *Ibid.*

it has been argued that the Blair government's use of history can be split into two phases: an early "history-free" period, where the absence of useable pasts underscored the new administration's "radicalism," and a second, much more retrospective period, in which Blair and his government sought to consolidate their position with reference to their place in history. Virginia Berridge has argued, for example, that particularly with regard to domestic policy, in the light of these changes "2007 was probably a good time for inserting the message of history into policy."³⁴ Yet even prior to this second phase, interest in finding new ways to connect historians and policy makers was already growing. The History and Policy Web site was set up in 2002 by Cambridge historians Alastair Reid and Simon Szreter as "a forum for historians to discuss the policy implications of their research and make it accessible to non-academic audiences."³⁵ The initiative has been growing steadily ever since; in January 2009 eighty-nine papers by eighty-four historians were available online, not all of which by any means were by historians of the contemporary period.³⁶ In 2005 it secured funding for three years from the Philanthropic Collaborative for a three-year pilot project, based at the Centre for Contemporary British History at the Institute of Historical Research in the University of London. And whilst arguments about the need for a more historically informed foreign policy might be amongst the most emotive, the British government's actions overseas constitute only one aspect of the group's focus. Indeed, to date, the theme which has attracted the most papers is "political institutions and ideas" (admittedly one of the widest), closely followed by "medicine and public health," reflecting the research interests of the group's core members.³⁷

The approach of History and Policy towards policymaking is pragmatic, clearly recognizing that salience and public interest—the rational model—are not in themselves enough to guarantee an attentive audience. A key aspect of the pilot project was thus the development of an effective communications and media strategy and help with developing informal links with the very diverse audience for policy (from politicians, to pressure groups, advisers, and journalists) that enable ideas to translate into action. This has clearly

34. Virginia Berridge, "History Matters? History's Role in Health Policy Making," *Medical History*, 52 (2008): 326.

35. "Our philosophy," History and Policy, <http://www.historyandpolicy.org/philosophy.html> (accessed January 15, 2009).

36. Peter Heather, "Empire and Development: the Fall of the Roman West," *History and Policy* (2006), <http://www.historyandpolicy.org/papers/policy-paper-44.html> (accessed February 6, 2009).

37. The Cambridge pair was soon joined by Virginia Berridge, Director of the Centre for History in Public Health at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, whose reflections on the process are discussed in this article, and Pat Thane, Director of the Centre for Contemporary British History at the Institute of Historical Research. For an account of the background to History and Policy and an overview of its initial activities see Mel Porter, "History and Policy" (paper presented at the conference History and the Public in Swansea, United Kingdom, April 12–14, 2007), http://www.historyandpolicy.org/docs/mel_swansea.pdf (accessed February 6, 2009).

born fruit. In addition to the publication of papers under a range of thematic policy-linked headings, History and Policy is increasingly opening up opportunities for historians to contribute directly to the policy process, for example by giving evidence to parliamentary select committees.³⁸ At the official launch of the initiative in December 2007, the group staked out its ground in the clearest possible terms by using the event to call for the creation of the post of “Chief Historical Adviser to the Government,” along the lines of the existing Chief Scientific Adviser, and historical advisers in each government department.³⁹ The case was made by David Cannadine on the grounds that “historians can suggest, on the basis of past precedents, what might or might not work and counsel against raising public expectations that policies will be instantly effective.”⁴⁰

Just how popular statements such as these and the whole History and Policy agenda are amongst historians in Britain is hard to gauge. The project has received little comment in wider-reaching journals such as *History Today* or on the Internet, although in a 2008 report the British Academy, the UK’s national academy for the humanities and social sciences, identified its work as an example of best practice in the area of knowledge transfer, suggesting that

38. “H&P Policy submissions,” History and Policy, <http://www.historyandpolicy.org/resources/research.html#subs> (accessed January 15, 2009). Gauging the effectiveness of these submissions and other specific engagements in the policymaking process is difficult, since historians tend to draw attention to what has succeeded or failed in the past, rather than making specific recommendations. The extent to which the group has been successful in its attempt to generate more informed policy would require additional research amongst policymakers. At present there is no way of measuring the relative influence of submissions from historians against the multiple contributions from other social scientists, think-tanks, lobby groups, and so forth.

39. “Call for government to appoint Chief Historical Adviser,” History and Policy, http://www.historyandpolicy.org/docs/chief_historical_adviser_release.pdf#subs (accessed January 15, 2009). It is interesting to note by way of comparison that in-house historical advisers, or rather full historical committees, have long been a common feature of French government departments. For example, the Committee for the Economic and Financial History of France, attached to the Ministry of Finance, was created by Prime Minister Pierre Bérégovoy in 1986. Its missions include “contributing to a better understanding of the history of the State and its economic, monetary and financial role from the Middle Ages to the present day” and “preserving and valuing individual and corporate memories in the financial sector.” Its archive of oral history recordings already consists of 280 recordings running to a total of 3000 hours (http://www.comite-histoire.minefi.gouv.fr/sections/comite_pour_lhistoi/presentation_du_chef/presentation/view [accessed January 15, 2009]). Whilst such committees oversee potentially phenomenal resources for administrative and political historians of France, the risk exists that they could act to restrict access for independent researchers. Whilst some UK government departments do in fact already employ in-house historians—notably the Foreign Office and MI5 (Virginia Berridge, “Public or Policy?” 521), the experience of the Treasury, which experimented with the idea for twenty years from 1957 until the “Historical Section” was closed in 1976 when the tension between the demands of policymakers (brevity, simplification) and the inclinations of historians (complexity, comprehensivity) became irreconcilable, is perhaps more representative of the attitude of the uneasy relationship between government departments and historians in Britain (for a detailed discussion see Peter Beck, *Using History, Making British Policy: The Treasury and the Foreign Office, 1950–1976* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006)).

40. “Call for government to appoint Chief Historical Adviser,” History and Policy, http://www.historyandpolicy.org/docs/chief_historical_adviser_release.pdf#subs (accessed January 15, 2009).

the initiative has garnered mainstream academic support.⁴¹ The call for a Chief Historical Adviser has not been renewed or widely taken up either by the profession or the media. Nor have the members of the group published sufficiently widely under the group's banner for peer reviewing in journals to give much indication of the reception of their position. Indeed, when members of the group do publish monographs or collections of essays, explicitly positioning themselves in relation to policy, they lay themselves open to the (very valid) criticism that such books are perhaps not "the best way of gaining a hearing for the story history has to tell in the policy making circles that actually matter."⁴² Whilst there is some evidence that the approach of the group is seen by some as simplistic (here for example is James C. Riley on Simon Szreter's 2006 *Health and Wealth*: "It is well past time to set aside debates on what happened in nineteenth-century England, and to take up the problems faced by people who confront abridged survival today from a foundation of detailed understanding of their experiences,")⁴³ other reviewers applaud its clarity of purpose (here is Bill Luckin, a British reviewer this time, on the same book: "Every essay displays a critical, open-minded, and generously humane attitude toward abiding social and moral dilemmas").⁴⁴

Irrespective of the reception of the initiative by the group's peers, claims such as that made by Cannadine—that historians are well placed to alert the public to the possible lack of effectiveness of government policy—may also make greater involvement from historians in policymaking rather less than appealing to politicians, who have little interest in being told that their policies are neither so new nor so viable as they would wish the electorate to believe, as the journalist Polly Toynbee was quick to point out; in Toynbee's words "wise old memory might be a forbidding ghost at the political banquet."⁴⁵ The first claim—that historians have unique insight into the future—whilst obviously stripped of nuance for the purposes of attracting press coverage is also contentious, since it is profoundly dehistoricizing. As Tosh and Lang have argued, at the heart of the discipline's claim to be socially relevant is historical *difference* on the grounds that history offers an "inventory of alternatives" not a repertoire of repeatable solutions, as Cannadine's presentation of history as oracle seems to some degree to suggest.⁴⁶

41. Alan Wilson, *Punching our Weight: The Humanities and Social Sciences in Public Policy Making* (London: British Academy, 2008).

42. Paul Bridgen, review of *Britain's Pension Crisis: History and Policy*, eds. by Hugh Pemberton, Pat Thane, and Noel Whiteside, *Economic History Review*, 60, no. 3 (2007): 621.

43. James C. Riley, review of *Health and Wealth: Studies in History and Policy*, by Simon Szreter, *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 37, no. 4 (2007): 615.

44. Bill Luckin, review of *Health and Wealth: Studies in History and Policy*, by Simon Szreter, *Bulletin of the History of Medicine*, 81, no. 4 (2007): 879.

45. Polly Toynbee, "Posturing and Peddling Myths, these Prison Enthusiasts are Blind to History," *Guardian*, December 7, 2005.

46. John Tosh with Sean Lang, *The Pursuit of History: Aims, Methods, and New Directions in the Study of Modern History* (Harlow: Longman, 2006), 32.

Public History and National Identity

Indeed, despite the confident pronouncements by the History and Policy group of the intrinsic value of its work, historians must tread a very careful line when they start to seek to influence both those in power and those who hold them to account. At the intersection of “public” and “applied” history (as these are conventionally understood), learning to “think with history” is presented as a unique strategy for citizen empowerment; this goes beyond the idea of history as a good training for weighing up the evidence, to insist on the ways in which a combination of historical content and analytic competence can “illuminate current issues” and thereby make “critical judgments about matters of public concern.”⁴⁷ Yet somehow the astute communicator of history needs to avoid the twin pitfalls of both indoctrination (if the “content” dimension is too fixed) and instrumentalization (if the content loses its historical specificity and becomes merely a tool of civic instruction). For citizens to “think with history” they must find ways to appropriate it and make it meaningful to their current concerns, whilst avoiding the worst distortions.

The dangers associated with using history to give content to national identity are well known; Stefan Berger has drawn on his in-depth comparative work of the relationship between historiography and nation-building across Europe to make the case succinctly for History and Policy.⁴⁸ However, his warnings have done little to deter certain members of the British political class, most notably Gordon Brown, who from around 2005 consistently sought to forge a notion of “Britishness” grounded in “common values” derived from his reading of history. For example, in a speech to the left-wing think-tank the Fabian Society on January 14, 2006 (whilst still Chancellor of the Exchequer), Brown argued:

And if we look to the future I want to argue that our success as Great Britain, our ability to meet and master not just the challenges of a global economy, but also the international, demographic, constitutional and social challenges ahead . . . requires us to rediscover and build from our history and apply in our time the shared values that bind us together and give us common purpose.

Just what “our history” might comprise—a contentious issue given the diversity of “British” histories (English, Scottish, Welsh, Irish but also Indian, African-Caribbean, Australasian, Pakistani, Chinese, and so on and so forth)—to Brown posed few problems:

So there is, as I have argued, a golden thread which runs through British history—that runs from that long ago day in Runnymede in 1215; on to the Bill of Rights in 1689 . . . ; to not just one, but four great Reform Acts in less than a hundred years—of the individual standing firm against tyranny and then—an even more

47. John Tosh, *Why History Matters* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 121.

48. Stefan Berger, “History and National Identity: Why they should remain divorced,” *History and Policy* (2007), <http://www.historyandpolicy.org/papers/policy-paper-66.html> (accessed February 6, 2009).

generous, expansive view of liberty—the idea of government accountable to the people, evolving into the exciting idea of empowering citizens to control their own lives.⁴⁹

In June 2006 the political theorist (Lord) Bikhu Parekh cautioned the House of Lords that “the attempt to link history teaching with the cultivation of patriotism is fraught with all kinds of dangers. It inevitably falsifies history and leads to much myth-making.”⁵⁰ Brown’s speeches on “Britishness” and history illustrate this danger amply; elsewhere he has argued without a hint of irony that Britain’s imperial history can be understood by “a British openness to the world” which also drives “our concern about developing countries today.”⁵¹ Indeed, the Prime Minister’s whiggish “golden thread” arguably constitutes the very antithesis of the “thinking with history” as advocated by Tosh. And Brown, unlike Blair, can have no excuses: he holds a Ph.D. in history from the University of Edinburgh.⁵² Given this, we can only assume that Brown has deliberately sought to capitalize on widespread confusion about the purpose of history in the public sphere. His rhetoric demonstrates the extent to which a little history, even in its most serious academic forms (Brown is known to be an avid reader of Linda Colley’s work on the history of “Britishness”), can in the wrong hands be a dangerous thing. There is a risk that the best efforts of History and Policy, by making argument by analogy with the past a rhetorical strategy more readily accessible to time-pressed politicians, will actually unintentionally encourage loose uses and distorted readings of history (vigilance! French colleagues cry), leading to its discrediting as anything other than a useful training in the evaluation of evidence. Fingers burned by a brave sortie into the public domain, academic historians might well once again retreat to the safety of their ivory towers. Publicly engaged historians will see this possible outcome as regrettable. If we wish to avoid it, the French example may offer useful instruction.

History According to Sarkozy

In France, the community of historians currently occupies very different ground in the debate about the use of the past in political discourse. In 2008 a short, pithy book by a collective of historians was published entitled *The History of France According to Nicolas Sarkozy* (*Comment Nicolas Sarkozy écrit*

49. Gordon Brown, “The Future of Britishness” (speech given at the Fabian Society New Year Conference 2006 at Imperial College London, January 14, 2006), <http://fabians.org.uk/events/speeches/the-future-of-britishness> (accessed February 6, 2009).

50. http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld200506/ldhansrd/vo060605/text/60605-17.htm#60605-17_spnew0€ (accessed January 15, 2009).

51. David Goodhart et al., “Britain Rediscovered,” *Prospect* 109 (2005).

52. *The Labour Party and Political Change in Scotland, 1918–1929: The Politics of Five Elections* (University of Edinburgh, 1982). The thesis formed the basis of his biography of the Scottish politician James Maxton (*Maxton: A Biography* [Edinburgh: Mainstream, 1986]).

l'histoire de la France).⁵³ The book is composed of a “critical dictionary” (p. 14)—itself a self-consciously historical form, recalling in particular Voltaire’s *Philosophical Dictionary* of 1764—of forty nine short essays, arranged in alphabetical order from “Affaire Dreyfus” to “Vichy,” via the obvious, “Joan of Arc,” “Charles de Gaulle,” “Napoleon,” to the more surprising, such as the socialist Prime Minister Léon Blum and the communist resistor Guy Môquet. Its aim is systematically to unpack Sarkozy’s uses of the past, particularly since becoming president in 2007, and thereby exposing what its authors see as Sarkozy’s deeply disingenuous use of historical reference:

[Sarkozy’s] instrumentalization reflects a triple-pronged strategy: sowing confusion, flattering the electorate (in order to distract it) and defining a particular vision of national identity. The primary function of Nicolas Sarkozy’s “historical syncretism” is to depoliticize history by neutralizing or distorting the ideological import of its symbols. (p. 15)

The authors emphasize Sarkozy’s appropriation of the heroes of the Left—Guy Môquet, for example—as a means of driving a wedge between traditional supporters of the Left and a particular narrative about resistance to authoritarian power in France. The problem in France, the book seems to suggest, is not the dehistoricized nature of public discourse, but rather its saturation with decontextualized references: a surfeit where in Britain many see a void. Whilst Sarkozy’s rhetoric represents a climax of what many see as a regrettable tendency, he is arguably only extending an approach piloted by his Fifth Republic predecessors.⁵⁴ More fundamentally, the origins of this trend lie in what in France is referred to as the “*patrimoinialisation*” or “*hertigization*” of the present, the roots of which are to be found in the economic crisis of the 1970s and the gradual dismantling of heavy industry and its widespread replacement with “eco-museums” and heritage centers.

The History of France According to Nicolas Sarkozy is the second publication from the “Committee for Vigilance with regard to the Public Uses of History” (CVUH). The committee, introduced briefly above, was formed in 2005 in response to a now notorious law of February 23, 2005. This piece of legislation sought to enshrine recognition of the women and men “who participated in the work (*oeuvre*) accomplished by France in the former French departments of Algeria, in Morocco, in Tunisia and in Indochina.” Whilst seven of the law’s ten articles related to the financial situation of the *harkis* and their descendants (*harkis* were Algerians who fought on the side of the French in the War of Independence), it was article four that attracted all the controversy:

53. Laurence de Cock et al., *Comment Nicolas Sarkozy écrit l'histoire de la France* (Marseille: Agone, 2008).

54. On Mitterrand see Christian-Marc Bosséno, “Du Temps au temps, l’inventaire historique du premier septennat de François Mitterrand (1981–1988),” in *Politiques du passé: Usages politiques du passé dans la France contemporaine*, ed. Claire Andrieu, Marie-Claire Lavabre and Danielle Tartakowsky (Aix-en-Provence: Publications de l’Université de Provence, 2006). On Chirac see Jean-François Tanguy, “Le Discours ‘chiracuien’ sur l’histoire,” in the same volume.

"In particular the school curriculum will recognize the positive role of the French presence overseas, notably in North Africa." The law slipped through parliament largely unobserved by the opposition and the press. However, in the months following its promulgation it became a topic of heated debate and serious embarrassment for the government. In his 2006 New Year address President Chirac was forced to admit that the law needed to be rewritten and on January 25, 2006 he referred it to the Constitutional Council, France's highest constitutional authority, as the only means to nullify a piece of legislation passed by a majority on two occasions. Article four was repealed on January 31, 2006.⁵⁵

Historians in France were at the forefront of opposition to this law.⁵⁶ They were, however, by no means united, and a very public split developed between those seeking the abrogation solely of the law of February 23 and those campaigning for the repeal of all the so-called "memory laws" of the last few years, including the 1990 "Gaysot" Law, criminalizing Holocaust denial, a 2001 law recognizing the massacres of Armenians in 1915 as "genocide," and the "Taubira" Law of the same year, recognizing slavery as a crime against humanity (legislation in France is commonly named after its parliamentary instigator). In December 2005 a new group emerged under the banner, "Liberty for history" (a label cynics might see as a plea not just for freedom of expression but for freedom from social responsibility).⁵⁷ Their petition set out to define the nature of history as both a discipline and a social practice, and in so doing, epitomizes what might be termed the "new positivism." One clause, for example, declared assertively: "History is not the slave of current affairs. Historians do not slap contemporary ideological schemas on to the past and do not allow the events of the past to be colored by today's attitudes (*la sensibilité d'aujourd'hui*)."⁵⁸

55. An additional contentious clause, number three, calling for the creation of a state-sponsored "Foundation for the Memory of the Algerian War and the Combats in Morocco and Tunisia" remains on the statute books, however. The provision lay dormant, presumably in the hope that the controversy would blow over, until September 2007, when the Prime Minister, François Fillon, announced its creation for 2008. As of April 2010 there has been no sign of it, despite an announcement by the Minister for Veterans, Hubert Falco, in September 2009 that the foundation was 'in the process of being set up.' For more information see the debates reproduced on the Web site of the Toulon branch of the *Ligue des droits de l'homme* (<http://www.ldh-toulon.net/spip.php?article1116> [accessed January 15, 2009]). There are parallels between the French foundation and Gordon Brown's expressed desire to create an "Institute for British Studies" or "something similar" (David Goodhart et al., "Britain Rediscovered"). In both cases it is hard to imagine how such institutions could possibly support independent research.

56. For a detailed discussion of the various forms of mobilization by historians in response to the law see Gilles Manceron and François Nadiras, "Les Réactions à cette loi et la défense de l'autonomie de l'enseignement et de la recherche," in *La Colonisation, la loi et l'histoire*, ed. Claude Liauzu and Gilles Manceron (Paris: Syllepse, 2006).

57. <http://www.lph-asso.fr/doc.html> (accessed January 15, 2009). The original petition of December 12, 2005 is reproduced on this site (some text in English).

58. The group's position is currently set out in a document entitled the "*Appel de Blois*" or Blois Appeal, drawn up in the context of the October 2008 *Rendez-vous de l'histoire*, a national festival of history which in 2008 attracted five hundred speakers and 25,000 participants over four days ("Mission et objectifs du festival," <http://www.rdv-histoire.com/?q=node/170> (accessed

Who owns the past?

The contrast between the situations in France, where historians are actively campaigning to keep current affairs at arm's length, and the UK, where an admittedly small but vocal number is lobbying hard to be taken on board, is stark. At the root of this difference is the status of history and historians in the life of the nation-state. As "ethno-symbolist" theorists of nationalism such as Anthony Smith have emphasized, whilst the idea of the nation is clearly a modern invention, it derives its strength from a rootedness in real pre-existing traditions, sustained through myths and memories of the *ethnie*.⁵⁹ In France, the emergence of the modern nation-state in the crucible of the Revolution required the generation of new forms of collective self-imagining; citizens had to be able to conceive of themselves as a "national" public, a community of people bound by sentiment rather than by allegiance to the ruler. Historiography, as Susanne Citron in particular has highlighted, was the vector of this revised mythology, as expressed in the writings of Jules Michelet and Augustin Thierry, both of whom presented the Revolution as a fulfillment of national destiny. The new concept of the nation was projected backwards to create a primordialist and dehistoricized framework from which an eternal, unchanging "France" could arise.⁶⁰ In France, as in the Germanic world, the backlash against Romantic mythologization took the form of the emergence of historiography as a distinct scholarly discipline. This can be contrasted with the situation in Britain, where the national ideal developed both independently and largely in advance of Romantic nationalism.⁶¹ Whilst a comparison can certainly be drawn between Henrietta Marshall's 1905 *Our Island Story* and Ernest Lavisse's omnipresent Third Republic textbooks,⁶² in general, historians have not in Britain constituted a secular priesthood in quite the same way.⁶³

February 6, 2009)). The *Appel de Blois* is available in English (<http://www.lph-asso.fr/actualites/42.html> [accessed February 6, 2009]). The group has attracted prominent international support. See for example the AHA Statement on the Framework Decision of the Council of the European Union on the Fight against Racism and Xenophobia, September 2007, which explicitly supports "Liberty for history" (American Historical Association, <http://www.lph-asso.fr/actualites/52.html> (accessed February 6, 2009)) and a polemical piece by the historian Timothy Garton-Ash, which first appeared in the British newspaper *The Guardian* but which was subsequently reproduced in *La Repubblica* (Italy), *El Pais* (Spain), *The Los Angeles Times*, and *Gazeta Wyborcza* (Poland) (Timothy Garton-Ash, "The Freedom of Historical Debate is under Attack by the Memory Police," *Guardian*, October 16, 2008). The *Appel de Blois*, it should be noted, considerably less assertive in its claims for a monopoly of historians over history writing than the original manifesto.

59. Anthony Smith, *Myths and Memories of the Nation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

60. Suzanne Citron, *Le Mythe national* (Paris: Éditions Ouvrières, 1987), 164.

61. As Linda Colley explains, far more important were factors such as Protestantism and shared hostility to the French. *Britons: Forging the Nation 1707–1837* (New Haven & London: Yale Nota Bene, 2005).

62. See Eugen Weber, *Peasants into Frenchmen: The Modernization of Rural France* (London: Chatto & Windus), 334.

63. *Our Island Story* has recently been reissued by the conservative think-tank Civitas in response to the perceived failings of a fragmented school history curriculum. <http://www.civitas.org.uk/islandstory/republish.htm> (accessed January 15, 2009).

From the nineteenth century onwards, a dichotomy between memory and history emerged. At the turn of the twentieth century, memory was seen as the term at risk, "in crisis" as a consequence of the ruptures associated with modernity; history was feted as its salvation, the means of recovery of a vanishing past.⁶⁴ Today, however, memory's more affective relation to the past, characterized by attempts at individual and collective re-appropriation and re-identification, is seen as the ascendant, and history as a practice is perceived to be besieged. In the context of what Pierre Nora (one of the nineteen principal signatories of the "Liberty for History" manifesto and the association's chair) has described as the "upsurge in memory" arising from the "democratization of history," defined as "the emergence . . . of all those forms of memory bound up with minority groups for whom rehabilitating their past is part and parcel of reaffirming their identity,"⁶⁵ historians are increasingly called upon to act as "authorities of recognition" and to arbitrate between competing interpretations of the past (see above). Furthermore, as Allan Megill argues, the more troublesome identity discourses are in any given context (for example, within the framework of republican universalism, which in France has often been constructed to negate cultural difference), the more "memory" may grow in stature, in order to fill the gap left by a desire for forms of collectivity.⁶⁶ And, as many historians have recognized, there is a fine line between the idea of memory as a collective counter-discourse that contributes to a democratic proliferation of voices through its anti-hegemonic operation and the idea of memory as a tool in the service of exclusive ethno-racial nationalisms.⁶⁷

This is the intellectual context in which the resurgence in France of the kind of historicism epitomized by the "Liberty for history" manifesto needs to be situated. The suspicion that "memory" is being mobilized to "anti-republican" ends has contributed to a significant backlash with regard to the concept in France; many scholars fear the emergence of a regime of oppressive historico-political "correctness" and the closing down of free debate (a point of view clearly set out by the anthropologist Emmanuel Terray, amongst others).⁶⁸ The attitude of the authors of the "Liberty for history" manifesto is well summarized by the sociologist Stéphane Dufoix:

Memory is not—or is no longer—a good thing. It is denounced as partisan, pathological, threatening to liberty and dangerous. Dangerous either because of its tendency to fragment or, conversely, because of the risk of encouraging the installation of a consensus past, stripped of all conflict between the domi-

64. Richard Terdiman, *Present Past: Modernity and the Memory Crisis* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1993), 29–32.

65. Pierre Nora, "The Reasons for the Current Upsurge in Cultural Memory," *Tr@nsit: Europäische Revue* 22 (2002), www.univie.ac.at/iwm/t-22txt3.htm (accessed July 4, 2002).

66. Cited in Kerwin Lee Klein, "On the Emergence of Memory in Historical Discourse," *Representations* 69 (2000): 143.

67. Charles Maier, "A Surfeit of Memory?" *History and Memory*, 5, no. 2 (1993).

68. Emmanuel Terray, *Face aux abus de la mémoire* (Paris: Actes Sud, 2006).

nant and the dominated. Everyone defends the strength of history and everyone attacks the weakness of memory.⁶⁹

As Jörn Rüsen explains, memory may be experienced as a direct threat to the “professionalism of historians” because it “very easily transcends and even neglects those strategies of dealing with the past which constitute historical studies as a discipline or ‘science’.”⁷⁰ Coming, as the “threat” of memory does, in the aftermath of the period of methodological anxiety associated with post-modernism and known in France as the “crisis of history,”⁷¹ the reassertion of disciplinary boundaries and a wariness towards public engagement is hardly surprising. And although the assertion of a radical dualism between memory and history can, as Dufoix’s critique seeks to highlight, appear sensationalist, the strength of feeling can be explained by the fact that the role of “authority of recognition” is one with which few historians feel very comfortable. Hostility amongst professional historians towards memory politics has become all the more entrenched since the (failed) attempt in September 2005 by a French-Caribbean association (*Collectif des Antillais-Guyanais-Réunionnais*) to prosecute the historian Olivier Pétré-Grenouilleau for remarks made about the slave trade (specifically that it should be considered a crime against humanity but not a genocide) in an interview with the *Journal de Dimanche*, illustrating just how risky engagement with topics of contemporary public concern can be.⁷² This then is the context in which a collective professional consensus has emerged, with the attitude of the CVUH towards public history in fact representing the more epistemologically progressive end of the spectrum.

Professional historians in France appear however broadly united in their understanding of themselves as a category of citizen apart (as, in a less exclusive fashion, do their History and Policy colleagues in the UK). Announcing his decision to refer the law of February 23, 2005 to the constitutional council, on December 9, 2005 President Chirac asserted, “There is no official history in the Republic. It’s not up to the law to write history. Writing history is a matter for historians.”⁷³ In affirming who may write history—academic

69. Stéphane Dufoix, “Historiens et mnémographes,” *Controverses*, 2 (2006): 28–29.

70. Jörn Rüsen, *History: Narration, Interpretation, Orientation* (Oxford: Berghahn, 2005), 129.

71. Gérard Noiriel, *Sur la crise de l’histoire* (Paris: Belin, 1996).

72. In 2005 Pétré-Grenouilleau was awarded prizes by the Senate and the Académie Française for his book *Les traites négrières: essai d’histoire globale* (Paris: Gallimard, 2004), bringing his ground-breaking work on the trading of slaves to wide public attention. For a full chronology of these events see Luc Daireaux, “L’Affaire Olivier Pétré-Grenouilleau: éléments d’une chronologie,” *Les Clionautes*, posted January 4, 2006, http://www.clionautes.org/spip.php?article925&var_recherche=%E9tr%E9-Grenouilleau (accessed February 6, 2009). On a similar note, in 1995 Bernard Lewis was fined one franc under the law of January 29, 2001 (which official recognized the Armenian genocide, again without criminalizing its denial) for publicly challenging the applicability of the term “genocide” to these events (see Michel Wieviorka, “Les députés contre l’histoire,” *Le Monde*, October 16, 2006).

73. Jacques Chirac, “Déclaration de M. Jacques CHIRAC, Président de la République, à propos de la loi du 23 février 2005,” December 9, 2005, <http://www.elysee.fr/elysee/elysee.fr/francais/>

historians—by extension Chirac also determined who may not: not just parliamentarians but anyone whose discourse is not sanctioned by the apparatus of the state (that is, academic qualifications, research institutes, and so on), including all those who in the U.S. might be described as public historians, such as heritage site interpreters (who in France are licensed by the Ministry of Culture, rather than Education). A rigid division between producers and consumers of knowledge about the past is intended to protect the autonomy of professional historians. Yet as a reading of Foucault reminds us, setting formal requirements in this way has the effect of discrediting whole sets of knowledges. “Which speaking, discoursing subjects—which subjects of experience and knowledge—,” Foucault urges us to inquire, “do you want to ‘diminish’ when you say: ‘I who conduct this discourse am conducting a scientific discourse, and I am a scientist?’”⁷⁴ In the long run, to seek to exercise this kind of disciplinary control is liable only to be counter-productive; frustrated activists will continue to look to challenge academic histories with their “memory discourses.” Moreover, attributing a special, elevated status to historians is liable to promote increased rather than diminished competition between memory activists as each group seeks “validation” for a particular interpretation of the past. However, if history is to be promoted as a tool for civic engagement, then it is crucial that historians seek not just to advance knowledge, but also to understand how that knowledge is tested and negotiated. Moreover, perhaps if this were more widely understood, then the activists mentioned above would cease looking for endorsement from professional colleagues, but rather would turn their hands to testing their interpretations against the sources.

The increased participation of historians in the public sphere that some are seeking in the UK is risky because of the difficulties of controlling how the knowledge historians put forward may be used, as Gordon Brown’s fascination with “Britishness” demonstrates. But at its extremes the French approach, in seeking to delegitimize everyday discourse, is perhaps even more dangerous, given its undemocratic, disempowering implications. Both risks would however be diminished if historians could find ways to convince the media to focus less on the content of history and more on what it might mean to “think historically,” or, in other words, on how knowledge about the past is constructed (and never “found”). If Virginia Berridge’s report that “few” in the field of health policy, even amongst senior officials, “recognized that history was not simply incontrovertible ‘fact’,” hence a tendency to invoke “facts” out of context (and certainly without reference to a historian), then there is much work still to be done;⁷⁵ certainly the author’s own research amongst mu-

interventions/interviews_articles_de_presse_et_interventions_televisees./2005/decembre/declaration_du_president_de_la_republique_a_propos_de_la_loi_du_23_fevrier_2005.35202.html (accessed October 19, 2006).

74. Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972–1977* (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1980), 85.

75. Virginia Berridge, “History Matters? History’s Role in Health Policy Making,” *Medical History* 52 (2008), 318.

seum professionals in France confirmed the prevalence of this perception. Reflecting on the debates of 2005, Gérard Noiriel told a French parliamentary commission on the “memory laws”:

Our differences, referred to by certain newspapers as “the historians’ quarrel,” revealed to the general public something that was self-evident to academics. . . . Our field is no more homogeneous than the political world. It shelters teachers and researchers who have very different concepts of their profession, its aims and how to exercise it. A positive outcome of the polemics surrounding the memory problem would have been to publicize this pluralism.⁷⁶

Active citizens are critical, thinking citizens. And it will not be enough simply to instruct the British public to “think historically,” even when supplied with excellent models to follow, if we cannot collectively grasp the genius of history as a practice, holding in balance the dynamic, shifting relationship between fact and interpretation, negotiated by a range of actors; perhaps professional historians should put as much effort into thinking about how they transfer their skills as they do their ideas. As Ludmilla Jordanova has wisely cautioned, if we want to change “public cultures connected with history,” it is presentation as much if not more than substance that needs to be reconsidered.⁷⁷

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76. CVUH. Intervention de Gérard Noiriel devant la commission parlementaire sur les questions mémorielles. <http://cvuh.free.fr/spip.php?article188> (accessed January 15, 2009).

77. Ludmilla Jordanova, “How History Matters Now,” *History and Policy* (2008), <http://www.historyandpolicy.org/papers/policy-paper-80.html> (accessed February 6, 2009).