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The Power of Apology and the Process of Historical Reconciliation

Robert R. Weyeneth
University of South Carolina - Columbia, weyeneth@sc.edu

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History, Memory, and Apology

The Power of Apology and the Process of Historical Reconciliation

ROBERT R. WEYENETH

Terry Gross: In the course of the research for this book [*Slaves in the Family*], you connected with several African Americans who were the descendants of slaves that had been owned by your family. Did you apologize? Did you ask for forgiveness? Do you feel forgiveness of something like that could be granted?

Edward Ball: I have apologized to two different families that I've spent time with. Not to all of the families, because I think an apology is an important gesture. And I also think that it should not be superficial. Part of the legacy of slavery is that whites, not just the descendants of slaveowners, but all whites, are members of a caste that has greater privilege than black Americans, who are members of a different caste. And by reaching out to individual families, I've tried to lessen that separation somewhat. I also think that an apology is not something that I, or that white Americans or

ROBERT R. WEYENETH is an associate professor of history at the University of South Carolina, where he co-directs its graduate program in public history. He is the author of *Historic Preservation for a Living City: Historic Charleston Foundation, 1947-1997* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2000) and a previous article in *The Public Historian*, "History, He Wrote: Murder, Politics, and the Challenges of Public History in a Community with a Secret" (Spring 1994). He would like to thank Leslie Arnovick, Mary Giles, Kathleen Hilliard, and Janet Tomkins for directing his attention to many of the historical apologies discussed in this article. A version of this article was presented as the closing plenary address at the New Orleans meeting of the American Association for State and Local History in September 2000.

even the government, can give to black Americans or to black individuals. That's really the wrong way around. Although, it has made a difference in the lives of the people to whom I've apologized. It's also true that an apology does more for white people than it does for black, because it allows us the opportunity to acknowledge that our history has been at least as marked by the legacy of slavery as the lives of black people have been marked by it.

Gross: Well, I think what you're saying too is that, you know it's—a white person gets forgiveness if it's asked for, but what does the black person get? I guess an acknowledgment of the suffering.

Ball: Right. Well, it's not a deal. It's—for me, if the only thing I've done is to touch the lives of a few dozen black folks, then I think that I've done something. And I'm satisfied with that.

Gross: How does the rest of your family feel about your book, and your apologies?

Ball: I would be dishonest if I didn't say that this project has divided the family. It has aroused a lot of emotion in the family. Some of it is good, and some of it is unhappy. I have nothing but affection for those in the family who have resisted this project, because, what I am doing, what I have done, is to rewrite a story that all of us have learned since childhood. And I'm sure that must be painful. And I regret that, but, I think that our story as a family is a rather small fact, and the story of the plantations we owned is a rather large fact. In other words, it's much bigger than we are, it's much more important than we are. And I think for those reasons, it has been necessary to tell the bigger story.¹

As the rest of the “Fresh Air” interview on National Public Radio makes clear, *Slaves in the Family* is not just an apology from a white descendant of a prominent slaveowning family. Using archival research and oral history, Edward Ball has written *Roots* from a white perspective, chronicling the author's journey into a family genealogy full of racial and historical meanings for Americans today. The book is family history at its best, broadened beyond the parochial and contextualized as American history.²

The NPR interview also illustrates one of the ways history is making the headlines today: in discussions of whether the present can apologize for the past. These days it seems that everyone is consumed with remorse about historical injustices. Governments, churches, and corporations are apologizing for institutional deeds committed in their names months or centuries ago; individuals are expressing regret for their own past actions. In recent years, we have seen apologies for religious prejudice and persecution, racist policies and behavior, colonialism, the dispossession and deaths of native

1. “Fresh Air,” 18 March 1998, National Public Radio. Transcription from Federal Document Clearing House, Inc. Used with permission of WHYY, Philadelphia, from whom a complete transcript is available.

2. Edward Ball, *Slaves in the Family* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1998); Alex Haley, *Roots* (Garden City, N. Y.: Doubleday, 1976).

peoples, slavery, political executions, complicity in the Holocaust, war crimes, medical experiments, the Red Scare, police violence, environmental contamination, and other historical events and government policies now out of favor.

This article analyzes the current vogue by asking if historical apologies have the ability to facilitate a process of historical reconciliation. In its first three sections, it examines the range and forms of apologies reported in the press during the last decade or so, the motives and goals of apologists, and the reasoning of those with misgivings about the utility and wisdom of apologies. A fourth section assesses the efficacy of historical apologies. Is an apology a meaningful way for the present to engage the past or to address historic human injustice? Do apologies have this power to reconcile? A final section offers a brief explanation for why we seem to be living in an age of apology.

There are two sides, of course, in any dialogue about historical reconciliation: apology and forgiveness. On one side are those individuals, institutions, and societies that have come to see themselves as perpetrators, however temporally remote, of an injustice in the past. They are the ones apologizing. On the other side are the recipients of historical wrongs. They, too, play a role in reckonings with history through expressions of forgiveness. Because forgiveness originates with those who have been wronged, reconciliation is complicated when injuries lie deep in the past where no one is alive to offer forgiveness. Although the present generation may apologize for the transgressions of countless long-dead ancestors, forgiveness is a commodity in shorter supply. The present may apologize for the dead and to the dead, but the dead cannot forgive, and expressions of forgiveness by the living on their behalf are not always satisfactory. This is one reason that apology is far more common than forgiveness in the headlines of late. The subject of forgiveness for historical wrongs warrants the attention of a separate essay; this article focuses on the first portion of the dialogue about reconciliation, on efforts to make amends for history through apologies.³

1. Regretting the Crimes of the Past: The Forms of Apology

A useful way to begin the analysis is with a taxonomy. What forms do historical apologies take? The answer to this question is less self-evident than

3. For an ethicist's assessment of the role of forgiveness in history and politics, see Donald W. Shriver, Jr., *An Ethic for Enemies: Forgiveness in Politics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995). For a theologian's perspective, see Walter Wink, *When the Powers Fall: Reconciliation in the Healing of Nations* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998). Also thought-provoking is Simon Wiesenthal's *The Sunflower* (New York: Schocken Books, 1976), a meditation on a Jew who is asked—and who refuses—to forgive a Nazi who has confessed crimes on his deathbed. The book includes a set of responses to this moral tale from thirty-two theologians, jurists, philosophers, and writers who identify a number of issues associated with the idea and uses of forgiveness, as it raises the question of whether there are events so horrific that apology and forgiveness are not possible. For assessments of forgiveness in an interpersonal context, see Robert D. Enright and Joanna North (eds.), *Exploring Forgiveness* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1998) and Beverly Flanigan, *Forgiving the Unforgivable* (New York: Macmillan, 1992).

one expects, because apologies take forms that run the gamut from the obvious (words of regret delivered at a podium) to the imaginative (a multi-year walk of reconciliation). In my survey of the various forms of apology, I have allowed apologists and their critics to speak for themselves whenever possible. It is their voices that enable us to understand the logic, emotions, and agendas of the apology phenomenon and the backlash it inspires. Because the analysis is focused on contemporary popular usage—how public figures and private citizens make their cases for and against apologizing for the past—it employs the commonly understood definition of an apology as an expression of regret for an offense, injury, or injustice. Usually an apology is comprised of two components: the acknowledgment that one has been in the wrong, together with a statement of remorse.⁴ Historical apologies also follow this formula of recognition and remorse, but their form is varied and wide-ranging.

On the spectrum of apologies that have been offered in recent years, one of the more prevalent types comes from a political leader in the form of a statement for the public record. Through such figures of authority, a nation can apologize for collective misdeeds in its past. On the fiftieth anniversary of Japan's surrender in World War II in 1995, Prime Minister Tomiichi Murayama of Japan offered his country's first outright apology for its wartime conduct. Expressing his "heartfelt apology," the prime minister admitted that Japan had "through its colonial rule and invasion, caused tremendous damage and suffering to the people of many countries, particularly to those of Asian nations." It was an acknowledgment that all other

4. The flurry of apologizing in recent years has given historical topics (and historians) an unaccustomed prominence in journalistic headlines, but the study of apology has remained largely the realm of linguists, philosophers, sociologists, and lawyers. For linguistic and philosophical perspectives on apology and similar speech acts (actions performed via a spoken or written utterance), see John R. Searle, *Speech Acts: An Essay in the Philosophy of Language* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1969) and his "A Taxonomy of Illocutionary Acts," in Keith Gunderson, ed., *Language, Mind, and Knowledge* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1975), 344–369. John Austin first struggled with a classification for apologies, and his thinking on the subject remains important; see Marina Sbisa and J. O. Urmson, eds., *How to Do Things with Words*, second edition (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1975). For a formal pragmatic definition of apology and the verb "apologize," see Daniel Vanderveken, *Meaning and Speech Acts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 213–19; Kent Bach and Robert M. Harnish, *Linguistic Communication and Speech Acts* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1979), 51–55; and Anna Wierzbicka, *English Speech Act Verbs: A Semantic Dictionary* (Sydney: Academic Press, 1987), 215–17. Sociologist Nicholas Tavuchis has written a useful analysis of apologetic discourse, *Mea Culpa: A Sociology of Apology and Reconciliation* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991), that focuses primarily on the linguistic, psychological, and interpersonal dimensions of apologetic speech; its function in modern politics and history is briefly discussed on pages 98–117. Tavuchis categorizes the forms of apology as one-to-one (an individual to another individual), one-to-many (an individual to a collectivity), many-to-one, and many-to-many. In *When Sorry Isn't Enough: The Controversy over Apologies and Reparations for Human Injustice* (New York: New York University Press, 1999), legal scholar Roy L. Brooks has assembled an anthology that surveys various methods of "civil redress," chiefly monetary settlements and reparations, that have been applied (or proposed) to address well-documented military and political abuses such as Nazi persecution, the Japanese "comfort women" of World War II, the treatment of Native Americans and Japanese Americans, slavery, Jim Crow segregation, and apartheid in South Africa.

postwar Japanese governments had deflected previously, through carefully crafted and ambiguous expressions of general regret.⁵ Also in 1995, shortly after taking office as president of France, Jacques Chirac acknowledged his country's responsibility for deporting tens of thousands of Jews to German death camps during World War II. Previous French governments had sought to place blame on Nazi occupiers and Vichy collaborators, but Chirac chose to admit that France itself—"the homeland of the Enlightenment and of the rights of man"—had committed a "collective error." It was time, he said at the dedication of a memorial to these victims, "to recognize the errors of the past and the errors committed by the state, not to hide the dark hours of our history."⁶ In 1997 President Bill Clinton issued a formal apology to the survivors and relatives affected by the "Tuskegee Study of Untreated Syphilis in the Negro Male," in which medical researchers had recruited hundreds of poor black men with the false promise of free health care, when the real purpose was to study the long-term effects of untreated syphilis. "To our African-American citizens, I am sorry that your Federal Government orchestrated a study so clearly racist," the president said. "What was done cannot be undone, but we can end the silence."⁷

The apologies of presidents and prime ministers are just one means by which countries acknowledge collective wrongs. Governments can offer apologies in other ways, through the public statements of high-ranking officials. Jane Stewart, the Indian Affairs Minister, apologized in 1998 to Canada's indigenous peoples for racist policies and paternalistic assistance programs stretching back to the nineteenth century.⁸ Bill Richardson, the Secretary of Energy, offered an apology to workers at an American nuclear recycling plant that had exposed them to higher levels of radiation than they had been told.⁹ A historical apology by government may also take the form of a legislative act. Congress issued a formal apology to native Hawaiians in 1993 for the overthrow of the Kingdom of Hawaii by the United States government in 1893, an act which paved the way for subsequent annexation of the islands as an American territory.¹⁰

5. *New York Times*, 16 August 1995. On remembrance of World War II in Japan, see Shriver, *An Ethic for Enemies*, chapter 5; Brooks, ed., *When Sorry Isn't Enough*, section 3.

6. *International Herald Tribune*, 17 July 1995.

7. *New York Times*, 12 May 1997, 17 May 1997. The subjects had contracted syphilis prior to being recruited (this is what made them eligible for the study), but the government did not inform the men that they had the disease so its progress could be monitored. The federal program began in 1932 and ran until 1972, when it came to public attention. For a collection of primary documents and latter-day commentary, see Susan M. Reverby, ed., *Tuskegee's Truths: Rethinking the Tuskegee Syphilis Study* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000). More recently, in June 2000, President Fernando de la Rúa issued a formal apology for Argentina's role in harboring Nazi war criminals; see *Columbia The State*, 14 June 2000.

8. In a "Statement of Reconciliation," the minister offered the first formal apology from the Canadian government to its First Nations, as native peoples are called in Canada. The apology included the offer of a \$245 million "healing fund"; see *New York Times*, 8 January 1998.

9. *Louisville Courier-Journal*, 17 September 1999.

10. *Los Angeles Times*, 28 October 1993; *New York Times*, 17 November 1993.

One of the more unusual—and potentially powerful—forms of remorse is the dual apology. The leaders of Germany and the Czech Republic signed a declaration in 1997 by which both nations acknowledged wrong-doing toward each other during the Nazi era. In carefully couched phrases, Germany apologized for Hitler’s invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1938, and the modern Czech Republic apologized for the expulsion in 1945–46 of millions of German civilians living in the disputed Sudetenland. “We want to ask for forgiveness, and we want to forgive,” the German chancellor explained, echoed by the Czech prime minister’s observation that “we should not forget, but we should not permit the tragic past to complicate our good-neighborly relations.” Although the declaration left unresolved a number of issues like property claims and compensation, the idea of a dual apology seemed to hold out promise for encouraging the process of historical reconciliation in instances where there are multiple and competing claims to historical victimhood.¹¹

Setting aside a day for contemplating the past is yet another way to apologize. Australia marked its first “Sorry Day” in 1998, named after the Aboriginal term for grieving ceremonies, “the sorry business.” Sorry Day acknowledged one of the injustices done to Australia’s indigenous peoples: a government policy that had forcibly removed Aboriginal children from their families on the assumption that their culture was doomed. From the 1910s through the 1970s, light-skinned children were put up for adoption to white families, and dark-skinned children were placed in orphanages. Sorry Day was intended to acknowledge the suffering of this “stolen generation.”¹² In a related vein, on 15 July 1999, the 900th anniversary of the sacking of Jerusalem, five hundred western Christians assembled in Jerusalem to apologize to Jews, Muslims, and Eastern Orthodox Christians for the Crusades. This mass apology was the culmination of a “Reconciliation Walk” that had begun three years earlier, in which groups of the repentant from twenty-three countries undertook treks along the route of the First Crusade, apologizing to Jews in Germany’s Rhine Valley, then moving on to Turkey, Lebanon, and Israel for the final ceremony. “We deeply regret the atrocities committed in the name of Christ by our predecessors,” the formal statement read. Unlike a public statement of apology from a political leader, this was a mass apology organized by a self-appointed group that hoped the fifteenth of July would receive recognition as an international day of repentance.¹³

11. *New York Times*, 22 January 1997. On remembrance of World War II in Germany, see Shriver, *An Ethic for Enemies*, chapter 4; Brooks, ed., *When Sorry Isn’t Enough*, section 2. For comparative studies of how Germany and Japan have come to terms with their roles in World War II, see Ian Buruma, *The Wages of Guilt: Memories of War in Germany and Japan* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1994) and Laura Hein and Mark Selden (eds.), *Censoring History: Citizenship and Memory in Japan, Germany, and the United States* (Armonk, N. Y.: M.E. Sharpe, 2000).

12. *Manchester Guardian*, 26 May 1998; *International Herald Tribune*, 27 May 1998.

13. *Jerusalem Post*, 3 May 1999, 18 July 1999; *London Evening Standard*, 15 July 1999; *Boston Herald*, 19 July 1999.

Whether placed by public action or private initiative, memorials and plaques can sometimes function as apologies. When a monument to the Tuskegee Airmen was dedicated at the former army air force base in Walterboro, South Carolina where the African-American pilots had trained during World War II, many of the veterans understood the occasion as an apology for the racism they had encountered in the community. It was “very unsettling,” one former pilot complained, that the German and Italian prisoners of war held at the base enjoyed access to places of recreation not open to black servicemen. The monument, and the naming of nearby streets for some of the pilots, helped to make amends. “It is significant because the town that was so hostile to us back then is now apologizing for what they did to us American patriots,” one veteran explained.¹⁴ In another example of a memorial used as an apology, the United Church of Christ dedicated a bell in Providence to apologize to African Americans for the slave trade that had once centered in Rhode Island. The bell was intended to be an “act of repentance” for the past actions of members of constituent churches who had been slave traders.¹⁵

Geography has also been conscripted to the apology cause, as name changes have become an increasingly common form of historical apology. The Australian state of New South Wales will rename Botany Bay national park, landing place of Captain Cook and therefore the birthplace of white Australia, to incorporate indigenous words that encourage “healing” and racial understanding.¹⁶ Amid considerable controversy over plans to re-interpret Custer Battlefield National Monument in Montana, a century-old historic site that memorialized the American general and the troops defeated by the Sioux and Cheyenne in 1876, it was renamed Little Bighorn Battlefield National Monument in 1991 to acknowledge a less one-dimensional, more capacious meaning for its history.¹⁷ Discussions about the wisdom of renaming the majestic volcanic plug in Wyoming known as Devils Tower with its traditional Indian name have also ignited fierce passions. “That name change idea is like a rattlesnake,” one white opponent explained. “You can’t just let it sit there.” So far, no topographical apology has been made in this case.¹⁸

If geographic revisionism and Sorry Days are relatively novel forms of apology, one of the more traditional can be found in the legal system where

14. *New York Times*, 27 May 1997.

15. *New York Times*, 26 June 1999; “United Church of Christ dedicates bell in apology for slavery,” Worldwide Faith News archives, 6 July 1999, www.wfn.org.

16. Manchester *Guardian*, 26 May 1998.

17. The controversy over the name change and site interpretation was almost as bloody as the original battle. “Few undertakings are more perilous than tampering with established nomenclature,” one National Park Service official warned early in the discussions. Edward T. Linenthal offers a case study of the debate over site interpretation at Little Bighorn in *Sacred Ground: Americans and Their Battlefields*, second ed. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993), 127–71. The quote appears on page 147.

18. *New York Times*, 8 July 1997.

apologies are sometimes parts of legal settlements. As a lawsuit related to the Crown Heights racial violence neared settlement, the mayor of New York issued a formal apology for the city's "clearly inadequate response" to the disturbances, which he called "one of the saddest chapters in the history of the city."¹⁹ Judges are experimenting with "apology rituals" in the criminal justice system. Vandals who defaced monuments at several Civil War battlefields were required to write letters of apology to the National Park Service and to the families of Union and Confederate soldiers as part of their punishment.²⁰ In Maryland some young people convicted of misdemeanors are required to apologize on their knees to the victims of their crimes; they are released if and when the victims find the apology sincerely remorseful.²¹

Pardons are time-tested forms of apology also with significant legal and symbolic import. President Clinton pardoned Lieutenant Henry Ossian Flipper, the first African-American graduate of West Point, who was later court-martialed for theft and dishonorably discharged from the army in 1882. Some officers at the time suspected that Flipper was being persecuted because of his race, and an army investigation a hundred years later did in fact exonerate him, at which point he was re-buried with full military honors. The presidential pardon, long sought by family members, restored his good name. "I welcome you all to an event that is 117 years overdue," said the president, heralding the ceremony as "a moment in 1999 when we correct the error and resolve to do even better in the future." President Clinton also made a point of pardoning other African Americans convicted of crimes with racial overtones, including Freddie Meeks, who was convicted in the Port Chicago mutiny of 1944, and Preston King, who was convicted of draft evasion in 1961.²²

A different form of apology is the request for forgiveness, by which a transgressor asks a group or person to stop feeling anger for past actions. One of the best-known instances is the case of George Wallace, the ardent segregationist who as Governor of Alabama became synonymous with white resistance to civil rights. In the wake of civil rights victories that enfranchised African Americans, as well as an assassination attempt that left him paralyzed, Wallace experienced a change of heart in his racial views. He asked for forgiveness from African Americans and stayed in politics with the support of a significant number of black voters. Amid the inevitable suspi-

19. *New York Times*, 3 April 1998.

20. *Columbia The State*, 3 December 1999.

21. Jeffrey Rosen, "The Social Police," *The New Yorker* (20 & 27 October 1997), 174.

22. *New York Times*, 20 February 1999, 24 December 1999, 22 February 2000. Individuals may receive pardons when their innocence is subsequently (or even posthumously) established or when a case can be made that they have been unfairly convicted through a miscarriage of the judicial system. It should be remembered, however, that not all pardons are apologies. A pardon granted to an individual who has been justly convicted simply releases the prisoner from further punishment. And some political prisoners have been known to decline an offer of a pardon on the grounds that a pardon represents forgiveness for what one did, rather than an affirmation of one's actual innocence.

cions about political pragmatism, Wallace became the model penitent, offering apologies to his former enemies and asking that he be forgiven by them.²³

Repentance is a form of apology surrounded by religious overtones. In addition to an expression of regret, repenting is an action that usually implies both an awareness of a past sin and a change of heart. The Vatican issued a report in 1998 entitled “We Remember: A Reflection on the Shoah” that acknowledged the “errors and failures” of Roman Catholics during World War II to speak out when they saw their Jewish neighbors disappearing. “This is more than an apology,” the cardinal who headed the Commission on Religious Relations with the Jews explained. It is an “act of repentance, since, as members of the Church, we are linked to the sins as well as the merits of all her children.”²⁴ Under John Paul II, the Vatican has also reassessed the Inquisition and other historical efforts to curb heresy; the pope has recently asked for forgiveness for the church’s “use of violence...in the service of truth.”²⁵

Expressing *regret* about a past deed is seldom viewed as equivalent to an apology. Even though an apology can be defined as an expression of regret for a wrong, the apology has a crucial second component: the recognition that one has been in the wrong. The coupling of remorse with recognition of one’s responsibility distinguishes the apology from simple regret, and it can make expressions of regret seem less heartfelt than outright apologies. One Grand Dragon of the Ku Klux Klan, who was implicated in the burning of an African-American church in rural South Carolina and ordered to pay a \$15 million fine, sent a letter of “regret” to the black congregation—“the senseless destruction of God’s house was wrong”—hoping the sentiment would persuade church members to drop collection of the judgment, even though he declined to take responsibility for the arson or to renounce his racist views. “You could call it an apology,” his lawyer argued. “It’s certainly an expression of regret.” The Klansman’s wife was more direct: her husband would never apologize, she told the press, because an apology “is a thing of guilt.”²⁶

Statements of regret about the past are often crafted to avoid being seen as apologies. For years after the end of World War II, the Japanese

23. Wallace’s requests that his racism be forgiven seem to be part of a pattern among some whites burdened by racial guilt. One recent study of white southern autobiographies written between the 1940s and 1970s finds remarkable similarities to seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century Puritan conversion narratives. The autobiographies describe journeys from bigotry to enlightenment using a distinctly religious vocabulary of sin, awakening, repentance, and bearing witness. See Fred Hobson, *But Now I See: The White Southern Racial Conversion Narrative* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1999). On Wallace’s search for forgiveness, see Dan T. Carter, *The Politics of Rage* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1995), 460–62; Stephan Leshner, *George Wallace: American Populist* (Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley Publishing, 1994), 501–506.

24. *New York Times*, 17 March 1998.

25. *New York Times*, 31 October 1998, 13 March 2000.

26. *Columbia The State*, 4 August 1998, 5 August 1998, 6 August 1998.

government refused to offer an unambiguous apology for its wartime conduct, preferring instead to issue carefully worded statements of “remorse” and “regret,” that infuriated Asian nations that had been invaded by the Japanese army, until a full apology came from the prime minister in 1995.²⁷ In 1999, two years after John Howard, the Australian prime minister, refused to apologize to Aborigines for the government policy that had removed children from their birth families between the 1910s and 1970s, the parliament passed a resolution expressing “its deep and sincere regret that indigenous Australians suffered injustices under the practices of past generations, and for the hurt and trauma that many indigenous people continue to feel.” A motion to strengthen the resolution by using the word “sorry” was defeated.²⁸

All of the different versions of historical apologies discussed above are essentially symbolic acts, but the payment of reparations is an apology that takes a distinctly material form. In part to head off lawsuits and compensation claims, the German government announced in 1999 the establishment of a “Remembrance, Responsibility, and the Future Fund” to compensate individuals exploited as forced labor and slave labor by private companies during the Nazi era. The multi-billion dollar fund is to be financed with contributions from the German government and thousands of German corporations.²⁹ Sweden has put in place a compensation plan for the victims of a government sterilization program rooted in the early twentieth-century eugenics movement. An estimated 63,000 people, whose behavior was deemed socially and economically risky to Sweden’s pioneering welfare state, were coerced into being sterilized beginning in the 1930s and continuing into the 1970s.³⁰

Perhaps the best-known example of reparations in the United States was the compensation paid to Japanese Americans interned in camps during World War II. In 1988 Congress passed, and President Ronald Reagan signed, legislation that apologized for the incarceration and paid \$20,000 to each survivor of the camps. Checks were mailed beginning in 1990 with a cover letter from President George Bush:

A monetary sum and words alone cannot restore lost years or erase painful memories; neither can they fully convey our Nation’s resolve to rectify injustice and to uphold the rights of individuals. We can never fully right the wrongs of the past. But we can take a clear stand for justice and recognize that serious injustices were done to Japanese Americans during

27. *New York Times*, 7 June 1995, 16 August 1995.

28. *San Francisco Chronicle*, 17 December 1997; Manchester *Guardian*, 26 May 1998; Columbia *The State*, 27 August 1999.

29. *New York Times*, 8 July 1998, 11 September 1998, 20 October 1998, 17 February 1999, 25 August 1999, 15 December 1999, 18 December 1999, 24 March 2000, 3 June 2000, 18 July 2000; *Wall Street Journal*, 15 May 2000.

30. *Los Angeles Times*, 2 September 1997; London *The Independent*, 29 June 1999; Columbia *The State*, 14 November 1999.

World War II. In enacting a law calling for restitution and offering a sincere apology, your fellow Americans have, in a very real sense, renewed their traditional commitment to the ideals of freedom, equality, and justice.³¹

A total of 82,219 people received redress through the so-called Civil Liberties Act of 1988 and its subsequent amendments, and funds were also authorized for programs to educate the American public about the history of Japanese-American internment. In 1994 the state of Florida followed a similar model in granting redress for the destruction of Rosewood, an African-American community burned in 1923 by a white mob. Through legislative action, the state accepted responsibility for failing to prevent the destruction and death, and offered financial compensation to the affected families and a college scholarship fund for descendants.³² Recently an investigative commission recommended that reparations be paid to the survivors and descendants of those killed in the Tulsa Race Riot of 1921, which destroyed 1,200 structures and killed perhaps as many as 300 people in white-led violence abetted by city officials.³³

Whether African Americans in general should receive reparations for enduring a history of racial injustice is just beginning to stimulate public debate. The question is often phrased “Should the United States pay reparations for slavery?” which has led in turn to asking “Who would be entitled to this hypothetical compensation?” Unlike Japanese Americans interned during World War II, no living African American has ever been enslaved. Nor is every black American a descendant of slaves. However, millions of African Americans alive today did experience the *legacy* of slavery first-hand through the systems of segregation and discrimination established after the Civil War. From a historical perspective, it seems more compelling and potentially more fruitful to broaden the question to a discussion of reparations for slavery *and* Jim Crow segregation. A second subject attracting attention in this nascent debate has been the form that reparations might take: what is an appropriate formula for compensation? Some advocates have explored an individualistic approach, trying to calculate how much wealth slaves created for slaveowners in the antebellum economy, the hypothetical wages that enslaved people might have earned, and the modern-day value of the Reconstruction promise of forty acres and a mule. Other advocates have taken a more collectivist approach, urging

31. For a history of the politics of the reparations movement, see Mitchell T. Maki, Harry H. L. Kitano, and S. Megan Berthold, *Achieving the Impossible Dream: How Japanese Americans Obtained Redress* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1999). See also Shriver, *An Ethic for Enemies*, 155–69; Brooks, ed., *When Sorry Isn't Enough*, 183–228.

32. Maki, *et al.*, *Achieving the Impossible Dream*, 213–27, 240; Brooks, ed., *When Sorry Isn't Enough*, 435–37. See also Michael D'Orso, *Like Judgment Day: The Ruin and Redemption of a Town Called Rosewood* (New York: Boulevard Books, 1996).

33. *New York Times*, 5 February 2000. See also “Tulsa Burning,” *Civilization: The Magazine of the Library of Congress* (February/March 1997), 46–55. The final report of the Tulsa Race Riot Commission, issued in December 2000, can be found at www.ok-history.mus.ok.us/trrc/trrc.htm.

government investment in programs of education, job training, health and housing assistance, crime prevention, and affirmative action, basically calling for a renewed commitment to many of the initiatives of Lyndon Johnson's Great Society. Both of these are essentially political remedies that look to government for redress, either through individual compensation packages or broad-based social programs. Another, more recent approach to the calculation of reparations centers on the courtroom rather than the legislature. Deadria Farmer-Paellmann, a New York attorney, has embarked on a campaign to seek redress from American businesses whose corporate ancestors benefited from slavery. (It is inspired by the fund recently established in Germany to compensate people exploited as slave labor and forced labor by private companies during the Nazi era.) Already the campaign has proved remarkably effective in directing journalistic attention to how northern businesses, as well as southern plantations, profited from slavery. With any settlements she wins, Farmer-Paellmann has pledged to set up a foundation to support educational and business ventures for African Americans. Although the idea of reparations is not yet "on the radar screen" as a serious issue for most Americans, it is nevertheless stimulating considerable discussion in the black community. The wisdom of paying reparations to African Americans—much less how to place a monetary value on the historical suffering of a large group of people—remains an intriguing open question in the United States.³⁴

To sum up, evidence in the popular press over the last few years shows that acknowledgment of historical wrongs comes in diverse forms: outright apologies, requests for forgiveness, acts of repentance, expressions of regret, and payments of reparations and compensation. Apologies can be communicated in a wide range of ways, through verbal statements issued publicly, joint diplomatic declarations, legislative resolutions, documents and reports, legal judgments, pardon ceremonies, apology rituals, days of observance, reconciliation walks, monuments and memorials, even names bestowed on the landscape. Both individuals and institutions apologize, for personal transgressions and for collective wrongs. Nor does there seem to be any statute of limitations for recognizing past injuries. Apologies have been offered for something that happened only days before and for historical events that took place centuries ago.

34. For a sampling of some of the arguments and proposed remedies, see Richard F. America, ed., *The Wealth of Races: The Present Value of Benefits from Past Injustices* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1990); Richard F. America, *Paying the Social Debt: What White America Owes Black America* (Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 1993); "Paying for Slavery," *The Economist* (13 August 1994), 28–29; Shriver, *An Ethic for Enemies*, chapter 6; Clarence J. Munford, *Race and Reparations: A Black Perspective for the 21st Century* (Trenton, N.J.: Africa World Press, 1996); George Schedler, *Racist Symbols and Reparations: Philosophical Reflections on Vestiges of the American Civil War* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 1998), part 2; Brooks, ed., *When Sorry Isn't Enough*, sections 6 and 7; Randall Robinson, *The Debt: What America Owes to Blacks* (New York, N.Y.: Dutton, 2000), especially chapter 9; Columbia *The State*, 19 March 2000, 9 April 2000; *New York Times*, 29 May 2000, 13 July 2000, 24 July 2000; *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, 8 July 2000.

This latter observation is especially important because it suggests a final way to think about and classify apologies. Historical apologies, despite myriad forms that range from public symbolism to private compensation and from the grand topographic gesture to a reflective research document, fall into two general categories. The *contemporaneous* apology is an expression of remorse that occurs when an event is still within living memory; it is offered by participants to those directly injured. In contrast, the *retrospective* apology is offered subsequently, by and to generations far removed in time from the historical events. Proponents of historical apologies find both the contemporaneous and the retrospective apologies valuable, as we shall see in the next section. Critics of the apology phenomenon find the retrospective apology particularly troublesome, as suggested in section 3. In section 4, where we discuss the potential utility and power of historical apologies, we return to the distinction between contemporaneous and retrospective.

2. A Process of Historical Reconciliation: The Motives of Apologists

As the framework above suggests, the historical apologies of recent years are a varied and versatile lot. What are the authors of these apologies seeking to accomplish? What are apologies supposed to do? Despite their diverse forms, each is an attempt to define a meaning for the past constructed around the notions of remorse and responsibility. The agendas of apologists are almost as wide-ranging as the forms of the apology itself, but taken together they represent a unique and ambitious effort to reconcile past and present.

One important purpose of an apology may be to allow people to ask forgiveness from those they believe they have harmed. Individuals experiencing guilt about their roles in war, for example, may apologize. After years of memories, an American gunner who flew thirty-five missions over Europe sought forgiveness by writing the mayors of the German towns he had bombed. "While our target was strategic," he wrote in a typical letter, "the grim possibility exists that innocent lives were lost, citizens maimed and civilian property destroyed.... I beg forgiveness for battle agonies inflicted." Several German towns reprinted the American's letters in local newspapers.³⁵ A Japanese pilot who bombed a portion of coastal Oregon during World War II subsequently expressed remorse for the air raid. Through the promotional efforts of local boosters in the town of Brookings, the pilot visited the Pacific Northwest in 1962 to present the samurai sword he had carried on his wartime flights as a symbol of apology.³⁶

35. Columbia *The State*, 17 November 1996.

36. Columbia *The State*, 3 October 1997. After the Japanese pilot's death in 1997, his daughter explained that her father had been unsure of the reception he would receive in the United States and had brought the sword for a second reason, in the event he had to commit ritual suicide. See also Derek Hoff, "Igniting Memory: Commemoration of the 1942 Japanese Bombing of Southern Oregon, 1962-1998," *The Public Historian* 21, no. 2 (Spring 1999): 65-82.

While individuals burdened by guilt may seek forgiveness, organizations will often apologize in order to restore an institutional reputation. Acknowledging its origins in the sectional conflict over slavery prior to the Civil War, the Southern Baptist Convention apologized in 1995 to African Americans for the denomination's support of slavery. The apology also included acknowledgment that Southern Baptists had failed to work against the legacy of slavery in the generations that followed: "We repent of both conscious and unconscious racism...and apologize to all African Americans for condoning and perpetuating individual and systemic racism in our lifetime."³⁷ The International Committee of the Red Cross apologized for its "moral failure" during World War II in keeping silent about its evidence that Nazis were murdering Jews. It had collected information that it chose not to share publicly, for fear of losing access to Allied prisoners of war.³⁸

Businesses may apologize to buttress their corporate image in the public mind. The Colonial Pipeline Company, which was fined \$7 million for discharging a million gallons of diesel fuel into a river, took out a full page advertisement in the *New York Times* under the banner headline "WE APOLOGIZE!" Saying that it "accepts full responsibility for this incident and offers its sincere apology for this event," the company promised to become "a responsible environmental neighbor."³⁹ After the Royal Caribbean cruise line pleaded guilty to dumping pollutants in Alaskan waters and agreed to pay \$18 million in fines, its president visited three Alaska cities to apologize.⁴⁰ Recently the Aetna insurance company apologized for helping slaveowners protect their investments in the decade before the Civil War by insuring the lives of slaves. "We express our deep regret over any participation at all in this deplorable practice," its press release assured modern policy holders.⁴¹ Inspired by the Aetna story to look into its own corporate history, the *Hartford Courant* apologized for publishing advertisements in the newspaper between 1765 and 1823 that listed slaves for sale.⁴²

Both institutions and individuals may issue an apology in order to defuse a volatile situation. After a SWAT team stormed the wrong Boston apartment in a drug raid gone awry, terrifying an elderly black minister who subsequently died of a heart attack, the police commissioner moved quickly to apologize to family members and to the city.⁴³ In order to quiet the waters

37. *Atlanta Journal and Constitution*, 21 June 1995. The denomination had been established in 1845 when southern Baptists broke from the church in a dispute over slaveowning.

38. *Columbia The State*, 8 October 1997; *Vancouver Sun*, 11 January 2000.

39. *New York Times*, 1 March 1999.

40. *New York Times*, 26 August 1999.

41. *New York Times*, 9 March 2000; Aetna Statement on Pre-Civil War Insurance Policies, www.aetna.com/news/2000/pr_20000310.htm; *Columbia The State*, 19 March 2000. The apology was prompted by attorney Deadria Farmer-Paellmann's call that Aetna pay reparations for the profits it earned from slavery as part of her quest for redress from American businesses whose corporate ancestors benefited from slavery.

42. *New York Times*, 6 July 2000.

43. *New York Times*, 4 April 1994.

prior to a visit from the pope, an Austrian cardinal apologized for his predecessor, who had been accused of molesting young boys.⁴⁴ The dual apology offered by Germany and the Czech Republic represented an attempt to move beyond a bitter legacy from World War II, in the interests of normalizing relations between Germany and former eastern bloc nations in the post-Cold War world.

Sometimes people try to discover “closure” through a symbolic act such as an apology. The hope is that an apology can provide a meaningful conclusion to a difficult chapter of history. In 1996 leaders of the United Methodist Church apologized to the Cheyenne and Arapaho tribes for the murderous actions of an American cavalry officer (who was also a Methodist lay preacher) in Colorado in 1864. His forces had attacked an Indian encampment, killing some two hundred people, mostly women and children, in a raid that came to be known as the Sand Creek Massacre. The catalyst behind the modern apology was an outsider and part-time pastor himself, who had learned how intensely Sand Creek was remembered today and how much blame was placed on a Christian minister. The apology from the Methodist church directly addressed this problematical issue in the historical memories of the Cheyenne and Arapaho.⁴⁵

Apologies can be offered to establish accountability and encourage a future relationship. Pope John Paul II has made significant efforts to acknowledge the historic role of the Christian church in fostering anti-Semitism through the centuries. The pope has sought better relations between Christians and Jews, and his efforts culminated in his pilgrimage to Israel in March 2000.⁴⁶ Looking to facilitate closer ties with Native Americans, the Episcopal Church in 1997 launched a decade of “remembrance, recognition, and reconciliation” with an apology for the church’s role in English colonialism stretching back to the Jamestown settlement. Acknowledging that it was painful to read the original Virginia charter with its call for the Church of England to convert the “infidels and savages” living in “darkness and miserable ignorance of true knowledge,” the presiding bishop set forth a “new covenant of faith” between the Episcopal Church and all native peoples.⁴⁷ The British prime minister’s acceptance of responsibility for England’s role in the Irish potato famine of the 1840s—“standing by while a crop failure turned into a massive human tragedy”—occurred as

44. *New York Times*, 20 April 1998.

45. *New York Times*, 27 April 1996; *Columbia The State*, 28 April 1996. To acknowledge the tragedy and to open access at the massacre site for Cheyenne and Arapaho descendants, Congress in 1998 authorized the National Park Service to investigate the feasibility of designating Sand Creek a unit of the national park system. See: www.nps.gov/planning/sand.

46. *Columbia The State*, 1 November 1997; *New York Times*, 7 February 1998, 25 March 2000, 27 March 2000.

47. “Episcopalians apologise for treatment of Native Americans,” *Worldwide Faith News* archives, 9 November 1997, www.wfn.org.

negotiations in the Northern Ireland peace process seemed to be gaining momentum in 1996.⁴⁸

When issues are especially intractable or a society fundamentally divided, an apology can offer a starting point for healing, even if reconciliation itself is not possible at the time. At the burial of Czar Nicholas II and his family, eighty years to the day after their execution in the Bolshevik Revolution, President Boris Yeltsin characterized the official funeral as “an act of human justice...a symbol of unity of the nation, an atonement of common guilt,” while urging Russians to “end the century, which has been an age of blood and violence in Russia, with repentance and peace, regardless of political views, ethnic or religious belonging.”⁴⁹

Many of the goals described above were evident in the mission of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission established in post-apartheid South Africa in 1995. The Commission represented an ambitious effort to use admissions about the past to further the process of political reconciliation in South Africa. It is perhaps too early to judge the success of this exercise in national healing—its final report was issued in October 1998 to mixed reviews and challenges—but the intentions of its proponents were clear. The Commission grew out of the compromise that had brought a peaceful end to the white apartheid government. Rather than an offer of blanket amnesty for all the abuses of the apartheid era, a course preferred by the white government, amnesty was to be granted by the new black government on a case-by-case basis. If perpetrators (on both sides) could prove that they acted with a political motive or under a direct order—and they had not acted “disproportionately”—they could be offered criminal and civil amnesty in exchange for full testimony about their actions. Those who did not come forward to confess, or those who failed to tell the truth in confessions, would be prosecuted. In theory, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission had considerable potential for encouraging political criminals on all sides to make public admissions. From the standpoint of “truth,” its investigations and hearings held out hope that South Africans could learn in detail what had actually happened during a divisive period of national history, that those facts could be placed squarely on the table, and that the accountability of participants could be firmly established. From the perspective of “reconciliation,” the Commission was in a unique position to turn the nation from a quest for revenge toward a course of healing and unity. With the Commission only recently having completed its work and with the new black-led South African government only a few years old, it remains a question whether efforts to learn the truth will in fact produce reconciliation between

48. *New York Times*, 3 June 1996.

49. *Columbia The State*, 28 February 1998, 19 July 1998; *New York Times*, 17 July 1998, 18 July 1998.

whites and blacks and between the past and present.⁵⁰ One measure of the potential of the South African model is suggested by a similar commission recently established in Nigeria by the new civilian government.⁵¹

In all the situations discussed here, the authors of historical apologies seek some degree of equanimity with a past that they regard as difficult or problematical. Apologists want to be forgiven, to restore institutional integrity, to defuse volatile situations, to find closure, to establish accountability, to forestall retribution, and to point the way to a future relationship. In short, those who offer apologies about the past are motivated by a hope that their acts of contrition will foster a process of historical reconciliation. Some thoughts on whether apologies live up to the expectations of proponents—whether they have this catalytic power—will be discussed in the section after next. First it is useful to look at the backlash that the apology phenomenon has stimulated.

3. *The Dangers of Revisiting the Past: Arguments against Historical Apologies*

The fervor to apologize for all these different reasons and in all these various ways has irritated many today. The critics of apologies marshal a number of arguments against the practice. While they approach historical apologies with misgivings rooted in a couple of different perspectives, they agree that the practice of revisiting the past to express remorse can be dangerous for the present. What follows are some of the most frequently voiced observations raised today by those who question the wisdom of apologizing for history.

People alive today did not commit the past acts. This view is perhaps the most frequently voiced objection to historical apologies. When one California community was asked in 1996 to apologize to its current Native American residents for past injustices, a citizen summed up the misgivings of many: “You’re asking people who didn’t do wrong to apologize to people who weren’t the actual victims.”⁵² On the idea of apologizing for slavery, which was discussed briefly in the United States during 1997-98, one white

50. Tina Rosenberg, “Recovering from Apartheid,” *The New Yorker* (18 November 1996), 86–95; Michael Ignatieff, “Digging Up the Dead,” *The New Yorker* (10 November 1997), 84–93; *New York Times*, 30 October 1998, 1 November 1998. For Archbishop Desmond Tutu’s observations about the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, which he chaired, see his *No Future Without Forgiveness* (New York: Doubleday, 1999). For a sampling of testimony and commentary, see Antjie Krog, *Country of My Skull: Guilt, Sorrow, and the Limits of Forgiveness in the New South Africa* (New York: Times Books, 1998); Brooks, ed., *When Sorry Isn’t Enough*, 443–510.

51. Columbia *The State*, 15 December 1999.

52. Chico *Enterprise Record*, 22 August 1996.

woman commented that the idea seemed “ridiculous” to her: “We’re apologizing for something that happened 200 years ago? That’s nuts.”⁵³ The Australian prime minister has refused to apologize to Aborigines for the forced removal of thousands of children from their families between the 1910s and 1970s, because he says he cannot apologize for the actions of previous governments.⁵⁴ This line of reasoning suggests that merely apologizing for something that happened a long time ago is neither logical nor useful. It underscores the problem of responsibility in historical apologies: modern apologists are not the perpetrators and people today are not the historical victims.

There are so many past deeds for which to apologize. Why single out this one? An Irish unionist criticized the British prime minister’s expression of regret about the potato famine by arguing, “I suppose it is a nice gesture by the prime minister, but he will find it will not satisfy, and there will be yet more demands. The Irish mentality is one of victimhood—and to ask for one apology one week and another on a different subject the next.”⁵⁵ Priests who opposed the Episcopal Church’s apology to gays and lesbians for past prejudice and discrimination argued, “When you begin to single out groups for apology, there is no end to the list.”⁵⁶ A British critic of the gathering in Jerusalem that apologized for the Crusades argued that public contrition about the past had become so fashionable and illogical that “one might as well have the UN General Assembly apologise for history.”⁵⁷ This argument likens history to a Pandora’s box of infinite injustice, where it would be futile and absurd to try to get the lid back on through a constant stream of apologies.⁵⁸

It’s time to look forward not backward. One elderly African-American woman who had grown uneasy about all the attention being directed to the Tulsa Race Riot of 1921 as a newly formed commission investigated what had happened and whether reparations ought to be paid asked why “stir up

53. *Charleston Post and Courier*, 20 June 1997. During the presidential visit to Uganda in 1998, in the wake of almost a year of discussions in the United States about whether Congress should pass a resolution apologizing for American slavery—an idea proposed by Tony Hall, a white Democratic representative from Ohio—Bill Clinton chose to offer an expression of regret for one facet of the institution: “Going back to the time before we were even a nation, European-Americans received the fruits of the slave trade and we were wrong in that.” See *New York Times*, 6 August 1997, 25 March 1998, 28 March 1998, 1 April 1998.

54. *Manchester Guardian*, 26 May 1998; *New York Times*, 29 May 2000. Polls indicate that the prime minister enjoys strong popular support for his position, based to some extent on concern that an apology could open the door to compensation claims.

55. *New York Times*, 3 June 1997.

56. *Columbia The State*, 26 July 1997.

57. *London Evening Standard*, 15 July 1999.

58. Discussions about whether the American government should apologize for policies that sanctioned racial slavery caused some to wonder whether Native Americans deserved a similar apology for the genocidal policies and military campaigns waged against them; see *New York Times*, 29 June 1997. For an overview of what has and has not been done as redress to Native Americans, see Brooks, ed., *When Sorry Isn’t Enough*, 261–304, which focuses on land claims, experiments in Indian gaming, and repatriation of religious and cultural artifacts.

stuff” from the past? “I think with the progress that has been made since then [in race relations], they ought to let a dead dog lie dead.”⁵⁹ One white South African expressed misgivings about the investigations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission: “We should all turn our backs on the past and move forward. We need them and they need us. Let’s all make money and let good economic conditions prevail.”⁶⁰ History may affect the present, the critics concede, but because it can be inconvenient, we should work to minimize the implications.

Why dredge up the past? It’s too divisive. Critics of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa argued that revelations about the past were both unjust and dangerous. Perpetrators who confessed would escape punishment, and revelations of particularly horrific deeds could lead to retribution. Others have wondered more generally if documenting atrocities is the best way to bring together a historically divided society.⁶¹ Recent wars in the Balkans have also been reminders of the dangers of revisiting the past. Some observers argue that *forgetting*, not remembering, is necessary to fashion viable societies, pointing out that inventing a national identity must rest on memories that are selective. Responding to the headlines from Bosnia in 1995, Lawrence Weschler wrote:

Yugoslavia today has been turned back into one of those places where people not only seem incapable of forgetting the past but barely seem capable of thinking about anything else: the Serbs and Croats and Muslims now appear to be so deeply mired in a poisonous legacy of grievances, extending back fifty years, a hundred years—indeed, all the way back to the fourteenth century—that it’s almost as if the living had been transformed into pale, wraithlike shades haunting the ghosts of the long-dead.⁶²

Another commentator made the argument more bluntly: the Balkan peninsula, he asserted, suffered from “an excess of history.”⁶³

War is war. There is nothing to apologize for. This was President George Bush’s reasoning as he opposed suggestions that the United States apologize to Japan for dropping atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945. “No apology is required,” the president declared. “War is hell, and it’s a terrible thing. But there should be no apology requested [by the Japanese government].” Arguing that use of atomic weapons may have saved millions of American lives—and that the United States went to great lengths to rebuild Japan after the war—the president (a former naval aviator) asked, “Now, do we mourn the loss of innocent civilians? Yes. Can I empathize with a family whose child was victimized by these attacks? Absolutely. But I can also empathize with my roommate’s mother, my roommate having been

59. Columbia *The State*, 9 August 1999, 10 August 1999.

60. *New York Times*, 29 October 1998.

61. *Vancouver Sun*, 25 November 1998.

62. Lawrence Weschler, “Inventing Peace,” *The New Yorker* (20 November 1995), 63.

63. *Vancouver Sun*, 2 March 1996.

killed in action.”⁶⁴ Reacting to news reports from the escalating Balkan wars of the 1990s, one former sailor made a similar point: “I liked it better when we didn’t apologize and make excuses. What do people think war is these days? Can you imagine William Westmoreland saying, ‘I’m sorry,’ and promising to investigate every bomb that hit the wrong target [in Vietnam]?”⁶⁵ This hard-boiled realism has no time for the leisurely second-guessing of armchair observers who weren’t there when it happened.

It was a tough decision, and people today cannot understand the historical circumstances at the time. Film director Elia Kazan testified before the House Un-American Activities Committee during the McCarthy era, denouncing communism and naming colleagues who had, with him, once belonged to the Communist Party. The names were already known to the committee, but Kazan’s decision to testify was controversial at the time and has remained so. Others chose not to testify, and some lost jobs when Hollywood blacklisted them. “Anybody who informs on other people is doing something disturbing and even disgusting. It doesn’t sit well on anyone’s conscience,” Kazan explained in an interview in 1971. “But at that time I felt a certain way, and I think it has to be judged from the perspective of 1952.” In 1999, when some of the formerly blacklisted artists urged Kazan to apologize in order to defuse the controversy surrounding his honorary Oscar at the upcoming Academy Award ceremony, Kazan’s lawyer brushed off the suggestion: “Apologize? Recant? That’s a good Stalinist word. It seems to me he never said it was an easy decision.”⁶⁶ The more general point is that the past is a different place, “a foreign country” even, and it needs to be understood on its own terms rather than measured by some modern moral yardstick. “More important than grand public acts of contrition,” one commentator argued, is “learning to live with the sins of our forebears.”⁶⁷

It’s too easy to use the past as a scapegoat when blame can be found in the present. One minister who works with troubled youth worried that an apology for slavery would give his kids an excuse not to get their lives together: “It is not the Klan, not the Aryan Nation that are causing havoc in our communities. It is them killing themselves.... [Blaming] our past for our positions today is something that could be a great cop out.”⁶⁸ One policy analyst offered a similar opinion about the wisdom of a slavery apology: “The danger of an apology is that many whites would see it as the end of the issue altogether. It would be an out for them.”⁶⁹ The circumstances of the present may have as much to do with creating modern problems as the

64. *New York Times*, 2 December 1991.

65. *San Francisco Examiner*, 16 May 1999.

66. *New York Times*, 23 February 1999; [Toronto] *Globe and Mail*, 13 March 1999.

67. Daniel Szechi, “Apologizing for History,” History News Service, 18 March 2000.

68. *Charleston Post and Courier*, 20 June 1997.

69. *Charleston Post and Courier*, 20 June 1997.

legacy of the past, these critics assert. Demonizing the past may permit history's victims to avoid introspection and personal initiative, just as it may excuse history's winners from acting with a sense of social responsibility in the present.

Apologies are just lip service when material support is needed to repair historical injustice. When the citizens of one California community were considering an apology for its historic treatment of Native Americans, the chair of the local Wintu tribe said she was looking for “support to repair their community” rather than a statement of regret for the past.⁷⁰ On the idea of apologizing for American slavery, the Reverend Jesse Jackson argued that it was hollow rhetoric: “Any genuine repentance occurs with a commitment to repair damage done and the effects of it. If you admit that you wounded someone, there must be a commitment to be a part of the healing process.... [An apology] is an empty gesture that carries with it no commitment to repair damage.”⁷¹ “Economics has always been the basis for racism,” Tom Turnipseed, a repentant segregationist now active in civil rights work, wrote in response to President Clinton’s call for a national conversation on race. “Attempts at racial healing and reconciliation are futile unless America repents of its continuing heritage of white supremacy and faces the issue of reparations or restitution for the African-American holocaust.”⁷² In line with this thinking, the reparations movement in the United States is seeking more than an apology. Advocates are putting forward various plans for direct and indirect compensation to African Americans, as discussed earlier.

To summarize, then, there seem to be two camps when it comes to misgivings about the utility and wisdom of historical apologies. On the one hand are those who regard the practice as the slippery slope of ill-conceived revisionism. These critics argue that there will be no end if the present starts digging through the myriad divisive issues of the past trying to correct wrongs it did not commit and probably cannot fathom or realistically judge. In short, it’s “political correctness” at its silliest. On the other hand are those who see apologies as empty rhetoric that salves guilty modern consciences. Here the arguments emphasize the hollowness of apologies if they remain merely words without the material resources to make a difference, thereby letting the present off the hook when more needs to be done. Apologies have their place, but they cannot be substitutes for action, this set of critics asserts. Although their doubts are based on somewhat different assumptions about history and whether it shapes the present, both camps agree that revisiting the past to apologize carries with it distinct problems for the present.

70. Chico *Enterprise Record*, 22 August 1996.

71. Charleston *Post and Courier*, 20 June 1997.

72. Columbia *The State*, 25 September 1997.

4. *Coming to Terms: Do Apologies Have Power?*

Critics raise compelling arguments against historical apologies, yet the headlines chronicle an on-going stream of regrets for past injustices. The regularity of the remorse suggests that apologies matter, despite the voices raised in protest. Apologists seem to find these expressions of public penance useful. Is it possible to gauge the efficacy of regretting the past? Do recipients of apologies view them as important? Do they facilitate a process of reconciliation for the present with problematical chapters of history?

One clear indication that apologies matter is the fact that they are in demand. There is a market for apologies at the moment. People with grievances, whether groups or individuals, campaign for apologies for both recent insults and long-ago wrongs. When a white justice on one state supreme court told a racial joke by circulating an e-mail message to friends and colleagues entitled “Vocabulary Words” – including such examples as “AFRO: I got so mad at my girl, AFRO a lamp at her” – the local chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People asked for a public apology. The NAACP chapter president called on the justice to admit he had made an error and say that he was sorry.⁷³ In the somewhat more distant past, the Orangeburg Massacre remained an open wound in South Carolina for decades, in part because state government had never fully taken responsibility for the three African-American students killed by police on the South Carolina State University campus during a civil rights protest in 1968. Although the one protester imprisoned was eventually pardoned, he and other participants continued to seek an apology and compensation for the families of the killed and wounded. Finally, in an emotional commemoration of the thirty-third anniversary of the violence in February 2001, Jim Hodges became the first South Carolina governor to officially acknowledge the three deaths as “a great tragedy for our state.” Expressing his regret, he urged citizens to “continue down the path of reconciliation.”⁷⁴ People ask for apologies, and their requests in themselves hint of the potential power of public statements of remorse.

If a satisfactory apology is received, historical wounds do seem to begin healing. When the Episcopal Church apologized to homosexuals in 1997 for “years of rejection and maltreatment by the church,” the statement was greeted warmly by gays and lesbians who expressed hope that it would “create a new climate of conversation” where “the words of apology [could be] translated into deeds of tolerance and inclusion.”⁷⁵ Pardons have a similar therapeutic effect. Businessman J. B. Stradford was one of many African Americans charged with inciting the Tulsa Race Riot of 1921; his great grandson, an Illinois judge, spearheaded a campaign to get the original

73. Columbia *The State*, 15 May 1999.

74. Columbia *The State*, 6 February 1998, 8 February 1998, 8 February 2001, 9 February 2001.

75. Columbia *The State*, 26 July 1997.

charge dismissed, which occurred in 1996 at a ceremony attended by four generations of family members, as well as the Governor of Oklahoma. Observing that it was “regrettable that we have to come together to recognize an embarrassment, a historic event that never should have happened,” the governor gave Stradford an honorary executive pardon, restoring his good name and pointing the way to an end for the story.⁷⁶

When an apology is requested but is not offered, passions intensify. In this way, the absence of apology and the reaction it inspires illustrate the importance attached to the act of apologizing. The furor over the decision by the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences to bestow an honorary Oscar on director Elia Kazan is instructive. Hollywood writers and actors who had been blacklisted in the McCarthy era could not forget Kazan’s testimony in 1952 to the House Un-American Activities Committee, and they organized a silent protest during the Academy Award ceremony for Kazan. In the midst of the controversy, several blacklisted artists told the press that an apology from Kazan would take the steam out of the planned protest, but none was forthcoming.⁷⁷ Similarly, at the height of the recent debate over the Confederate flag in South Carolina, one state senator described the NAACP as the National Association for Retarded People and then refused to apologize for his statement (he eventually apologized to the mentally disabled), compounding the insult.⁷⁸

At the moment, apologies are in demand because they have meaning for potential recipients, when they receive them—and if they do not. When an apology is forthcoming, the symbolism of the gesture does make a difference to recipients; they often find it a balm for the injury. When an apology is withheld, especially after a specific request, wounds seem to fester. Why do apologies (or their absence) matter so much to their potential recipients?

An apology provides moral restitution, offering recipients something of nonmaterial value as a way to make good for injury, loss, or damage. One British veteran and a former prisoner of war in Asia urged Japan to apologize for its role in World War II as the fiftieth anniversary of its surrender approached. “Now is the time to make this moral reparation,” he declared. “And until you do...we will never forget, and we will never forgive.”⁷⁹ Sometimes even recipients of financial compensation regard such material reparations as insufficient without a formal apology. When the Australian government offered a \$41 million assistance package to make amends to the “stolen generation,” some Aborigines deemed the offer “fundamentally flawed” because the government had refused to apologize as well.⁸⁰ Similarly, in their class action lawsuit the survivors and heirs of the Tuskegee

76. *New York Times*, 26 October 1996.

77. *New York Times*, 23 February 1999; [Toronto] *Globe and Mail*, 13 March 1999.

78. *Columbia The State*, 11 January 2000, 12 January 2000, 30 January 2000, 4 February 2000.

79. *Vancouver Sun*, 30 November 1994.

80. *San Francisco Chronicle*, 17 December 1997.

syphilis experiment had won at out-of-court settlement of \$10 million in 1973, but American leaders had never formally apologized. A group formed in 1996 to press for an apology, which came from President Clinton in 1997.⁸¹

An apology is ultimately a symbolic act, and symbolism can be significant. As author Edward Ball explained to Terry Gross in the NPR interview about his book *Slaves in the Family*, he had “apologized to two different families that I’ve spent time with. Not to all of the families, because I think an apology is an important gesture.... It has made a difference in the lives of the people to whom I’ve apologized.”⁸² Reflecting on the suggestion that Congress pass a resolution apologizing for slavery, one African-American nurse who thought it a good idea observed, “Maybe some of the whites could understand the African Americans and understand the reasons they feel the way they feel.... [Blacks] don’t trust the white people because of slavery and because of the way they were treated afterwards.”⁸³ Civil rights activist Julian Bond agreed about the utility of a slavery apology: “Apologies don’t provide jobs, but I think there’s a place for symbolic acts.... It wouldn’t solve the problem of race, but it would mean that we are beginning to be a bit more realistic about it and that, as a society, we’re moving away from this denial. The first step toward recovery is eliminating denial.”⁸⁴

Apologies can provide more than symbolic restitution; they can also ignite vigorous debate about history. Apologizing offers a vehicle by which societies as a whole can think about the relevance of the past, particularly about events that remain controversial. In the discussions (and passions) that swirled around the idea of the American government apologizing for slavery in 1997–98, one African-American columnist in Boston argued that the debate itself became the apology. “White folks need to study slavery,” he wrote, and “education is the apology.” To his way of thinking, “The best apology is to keep the movies, the magazine articles, and the scholarship coming. You cannot undo nearly four centuries of white superiority with a 40-minute speech. It is far more important for white leaders to understand how four centuries of that superiority still make remedies like affirmative action so vital to the notion of equal opportunity.”⁸⁵ An apology, then, may derive power from the ability to compel the present to think about the past. It is the conversation about history that is important, rather than judgments about crimes and culpability.

In stimulating debate about history and its significance, acknowledgment of wrong-doing puts the issue on record, formally and publicly. In this way, the apology becomes a part of the story. This reckoning with history may be one of the chief accomplishments of South Africa’s Truth and Reconcilia-

81. *New York Times*, 12 May 1997.

82. “Fresh Air,” 18 March 1998, National Public Radio.

83. *Charleston Post and Courier*, 20 June 1997.

84. *Charleston Post and Courier*, 20 June 1997.

85. *Columbia The State*, 13 December 1997.

tion Commission. While some have criticized its grants of amnesty for allowing the perpetrators of apartheid-era abuses to escape punishment, the enticement of obtaining amnesty in exchange for truthful testimony has brought to light an enormous volume of first-hand testimony about how the system of apartheid operated between 1960, the date of the Sharpeville massacre, and 1993, when agreement was reached on dissolving the white government. “Truth doesn’t bring the dead back to life,” one Chilean human rights lawyer has argued in a different context, “but it brings them out from silence.”⁸⁶ Discovering the truth can function as a kind of justice in itself, a process which reduces, as one journalist observed, “the number of permissible lies in a society.”⁸⁷ As public statements about history, apologies offer a perch for viewing the past, and that perspective becomes part of the historical record for subsequent generations.

There are few final judgments in history, but apologies can help write closing chapters where the past is filled with difficult events. One recent example in international relations is illustrative. After decades of bitterness between South Korea and Japan, the two nations seem to be drawing closer. There are compelling political and economic forces today helping to overcome the memories of the Japanese occupation of Korea between 1910 and 1945, but a highly symbolic part of the continuing process of reconciliation was the written apology obtained from the Japanese government by the newly elected president of South Korea in 1998. Such moments of resolution hold out the promise of long-term reconciliation in other places and suggest the power of apologies to offer moral accounting and an acknowledgment of historical responsibility.⁸⁸

To encourage historical healing, though, apologies must go far enough to satisfy potential recipients. In the discussions ignited by the idea of an apology for American slavery, the chairman of President Clinton’s advisory commission on race argued that such a hypothetical apology would have to extend beyond slavery to include the system of segregation and discrimination established after the Civil War, which was dismantled only by the modern civil rights movement.⁸⁹ To this observer, an apology for slavery would be insufficient because it would ignore the on-going legacy of slavery. When the Vatican’s Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews issued its study “We Remember: A Reflection on the Shoah” in 1998, the church was criticized for not accepting as much responsibility as it might for acts of both commission and omission in the Nazi era.⁹⁰ In an editorial, the *New York Times* applauded the Vatican study for going further than the church ever had in “reckoning honestly with its passivity during the Nazi era and its historic antipathy toward Jews.” But the *Times* also faulted the

86. Rosenberg, “Recovering from Apartheid,” *The New Yorker* (18 November 1996), 90.

87. *Vancouver Sun*, 25 November 1998.

88. *New York Times*, 20 September 1999.

89. Columbia *The State*, 30 September 1997.

90. *New York Times*, 17 March 1998.

document for its “defensive, incomplete depiction” of the church’s response to the Holocaust and its failure to acknowledge Pope Pius XII’s silence about Nazi atrocities.⁹¹ The contrast between the Vatican statement and that of the Roman Catholic Church in France during the previous year was instructive. At a ceremony at Drancy, a railway stop near Paris that became an “antechamber of the death camps,” the bishops asked that the French church be forgiven for not having done more to oppose the Holocaust, particularly by speaking out against the anti-Semitic laws passed by the Vichy government and anti-Semitic sentiment in France generally: “We confess that silence was a mistake. We beg for the pardon of God, and we ask the Jewish people to hear this word of repentance.”⁹² Full and complete apologies may facilitate historical reconciliation in a way that qualified and nuanced expressions do not.

To understand the power that apologies may have, it is useful to look at why some apologies prove completely ineffective. The best-known recent example of an ineffective apology was Bill Clinton’s several attempts to express regret about his relationship with the young White House intern. On one level the president seemed to do all the right things and use all the right phrases: admitting wrong, expressing regret, asking for forgiveness, saying he was sorry, urging reconciliation and healing, and eventually offering private and public apologies. On another level his admissions always seemed too little too late. They began when most Americans had come to believe that he was being less than truthful about the relationship. As the regrets continued in their various forms, the president seemed to be playing catch-up, offering slightly more each time events moved beyond his control.⁹³ As Clinton’s apology evolved, the overall impression was that it was neither sincere nor freely given. Political calculations were also apparent in a similarly unsuccessful apology from Southeast Asia. Two former leaders of the Khmer Rouge tried to apologize for killing millions of people when they ruled Cambodia in the 1970s. Each was careful, though, to avoid accepting any personal responsibility for the reign of terror, and their statements seemed to be part of a political deal arranged with the current prime minister. The apology seemed sincere only in its goal of allowing them to avoid prosecution.⁹⁴ Apologies are usually ineffective when they are seen as having underlying motives.

91. *New York Times*, 18 March 1998. When the pope visited Yad Vashem, Israel’s Holocaust memorial, on his pilgrimage to the Holy Land in March 2000, his pronouncements followed a similar pattern of deploring the Holocaust but declining comment on the actions of Pius XII; see *New York Times*, 24 March 2000.

92. *New York Times*, 1 October 1997.

93. *New York Times*, 3 August 1998, 29 August 1998, 10 September 1998, 11 September 1998; *Columbia The State*, 18 August 1998, 3 September 1998; *Vancouver Sun*, 5 September 1998; *Los Angeles Times*, 10 October 1998.

94. *San Francisco Chronicle*, 30 December 1998, 1 January 1999; *New York Times* 5 January 1999.

Ultimately, apologies do seem to encourage a process of historical reconciliation because the act of acknowledging a wrong and taking responsibility for it matters. It matters to potential recipients, who campaign for apologies, who find satisfaction when they are offered, and who express anger when requests for apologies are rebuffed. If an apology is sufficiently complete, and is freely and sincerely given, it reveals the webs that entangle the present with the past and concedes the weight of accountability in human affairs. Apologies may be acts of simple symbolism, but they provide a form of moral restitution that can point the way to a future of mutual design.

Finally, the issue of agency is important in understanding the potential power of an apology. Some argue that apologies should be offered only by a government or institution for specific policies or programs it implemented and which it now regrets.⁹⁵ As noted earlier, we might call these *contemporaneous* apologies. A contemporaneous apology represents an acknowledgment of wrong-doing by the responsible party to victims personally affected who may still be alive. Examples of contemporaneous apologies include those by soldiers experiencing remorse for wartime deeds, by the French Catholic Church for not doing more to aid French Jews under the Vichy government, and by the American government to the survivors of Japanese-American internment camps and the Tuskegee syphilis experiment. In all these cases, apologists accepted responsibility for their actions or those of their immediate institutional predecessors. When an apology comes, it can be particularly powerful if the wrong has been long denied, covered up, or minimized. The Japanese apology in 1995 for its conduct in World War II was hailed by many nations, especially in Asia, because Japanese governments in the postwar years had never acknowledged this kind of responsibility, preferring more ambiguous expressions of regret.

In contrast to the specificity of the contemporaneous apology, the general *retrospective* apology acknowledges injustices of a systematic or structural nature (such as anti-Semitism and colonialism) or long-past historical events (like the Crusades, the Inquisition, and the slave trade). It is vulnerable to the criticism that people who did not commit the wrong are apologizing to people who were not the actual victims, but the retrospective apology is not without its own appeal and power. In taking the long view, it acknowledges that history matters: perpetrators and immediate victims may be gone, but their legacy continues to shape the present. Few could disagree, for example, that modern racism and religious prejudice have historical roots or that native peoples in the United States, Canada, and Australia continue to confront burdens imposed by the past. History casts long shadows, whether the present wants it to or not, and the general retrospective apology seeks to reckon with these shades. An apology for

95. *New York Times*, 29 June 1997; *Vancouver Sun*, 25 July 1997.

slaveowning and slave trading “does more for white people than it does for black,” author Edward Ball has argued, “because it allows us the opportunity to acknowledge that our history has been at least as marked by the legacy of slavery as the lives of black people have been marked by it.”⁹⁶ In this sense, a retrospective apology provides a means for the present generation to respond to the past and to draw lessons from it.

5. Conclusion: Why Now?

Although apologies are not unique to the modern era, we do seem to be witnessing a flurry of intense apologizing today. In fact, we hear so many apologies that some have suggested that the outpouring threatens to nullify any power they might have.⁹⁷ How do we explain the current vogue? One is tempted to attribute the phenomenon to Bill Clinton and his politics of contrition, and the president is certainly an easy target in this regard. Clinton has probably surpassed his predecessors in the number of apologies he has offered, as well as the range of historical subjects he has tackled.⁹⁸ In one satirical column, the conservative commentator George Will took Clinton to task for a fictional apology to Russia, issued on the grounds that American foreign policy had caused the collapse of communism, thus diminishing the “political diversity” of the planet.⁹⁹ Another observer has argued that Americans have always been predisposed to apologize, pointing to the historic cultural dominance (and confessional tendencies) of Protestantism, as well as on-going guilt among white Americans for the conquest of Native Americans and the enslavement of Africans.¹⁰⁰ But apologizing for the past is not limited to the United States. The phenomenon is world-wide, and this pervasiveness is quite recent. Regular remorse has become an international preoccupation, involving nations in both North and South America, Asia and the Pacific, Africa, and Europe. It is the global village, not just Bill Clinton or Americans, that has made this the age of apology. The new sense of connectedness on “spaceship earth” that has emerged in the last half-century—through the perception of both global bonds and planetary threats—heightens sensitivity to the wrongs done to nations and to neighbors.¹⁰¹

96. “Fresh Air,” 18 March 1998, National Public Radio.

97. For one satire of “the burgeoning field of national remorse,” see Joe Queenan, “Who’s Sorry Now?,” *Wall Street Journal*, 9 January 1998.

98. Significantly, one theme of Clinton’s apologies was a focus on racism and civil rights, as in his apologies to the survivors of the Tuskegee syphilis experiments, his statement of regret about the slave trade delivered in Uganda, and his pardons to African Americans for racially motivated convictions.

99. Columbia *The State*, 29 March 1998.

100. Richard Brookhiser, “America the Apologetic,” *American Heritage*, December 1998, 42–48.

101. Elazar Barkan argues that the global scale of modern life has produced a “new international emphasis on morality” for nations confronting their histories; see *The Guilt of Nations: Restitution and Negotiating Historical Injustices* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2000).



"Yet another apology."

Cartoonist Tom Cheney pokes fun at the apology phenomenon of the late twentieth century by transporting it to a different time, where it seems notably irrelevant. In doing so he suggests that the modern penchant to apologize is rooted in a distinct moment in human history. *The New Yorker*, 25 January 1999. ©The New Yorker Collection 1999 Tom Cheney from cartoonbank.com. All Rights Reserved.

There are other reasons for the apology phenomenon besides the propinquities of the shrinking postwar world. Many recent apologies were inspired by Christianity's anticipation of the beginning of the third millennium after the birth of Christ. This calendrical circumstance stimulated considerable introspection and historical reflection, especially from John Paul II, who has spoken frequently since his election as pope in 1978 of the necessity for an "examination of conscience" about church history as a way to prepare for the future. To mark the significance of the year 2000, the pope offered a remarkable and sweeping Ash Wednesday apology in which he repented the errors of the church over the last two millennia. Acknowledging "an objective collective responsibility" for "past and present sins," the pope noted the church's intolerance toward other religions and its "use of violence," which was understood to refer to the Crusades, the Inquisition, and the forced

conversion of indigenous peoples. But such repentance has by no means been confined to the Roman Catholic Church. The patriarch of the Eastern Orthodox Church has offered similar observations and apologies about specific institutional mistakes, as have numerous Protestant denominations.¹⁰²

Recent historical events have also propelled us into the age of apology, particularly World War II and the Cold War. The various fiftieth anniversaries associated with events of World War II provoked much remembrance and some amount of apologizing. The commemorations also renewed efforts in some quarters to make amends for complicity in the Holocaust while—or perhaps because—survivors are still alive. In addition, as Germany and Japan have re-emerged as major world economies, each has undertaken acts of apology for wartime conduct designed to promote reconciliation with neighbors in eastern Europe and Asia. And, more recently, the end of the Cold War has fostered a new openness about that ideological confrontation. Archives are now accessible in Russia and the West that allow scrutiny of both the Soviet era and postwar democratic governments. One result has been apologies for Bolshevik excesses, anti-communist hysteria, and secret government radiation experiments.¹⁰³

Finally, history itself is up for grabs these days. The rush to apologize (or to demand an apology) has been shaped by the shifting sands—across centuries and across recent generations—of what constitutes a historical injustice. It is only comparatively recently, for example, that government policies rooted in racism have passed out of favor or that the claims of native peoples have begun to be taken seriously. The modern climate of opinion supports a rhetoric, if not a reality, of pluralistic tolerance. Societies now find themselves compelled to confront their past in its entirety, to ask new questions about it, and to rewrite the story “all of us have learned since childhood.”¹⁰⁴ We are at one of those moments when the meaning of history is being vigorously debated and renegotiated, not just by professional historians but by the public in popular forums. In the last analysis, the age of apology springs from the interpretive fluidity of history in general and the current revisionist impulse in particular.

102. *New York Times*, 21 October 1997, 1 November 1997, 7 February 1998, 17 March 1998, 31 October 1998, 25 December 1999, 13 March 2000; [Toronto] *Globe and Mail*, 18 September 1999.

103. The opening of previously classified Cold War records in the United States is beginning to reveal government abuses, such as the radiation experiments conducted on American citizens without their knowledge from the 1940s through the 1970s; President Clinton apologized for these in 1995. More recently the federal government has apologized to workers at nuclear weapons plants who were exposed to radiation and toxins; compensation is being offered to an estimated 3,000 workers. See Columbia *The State*, 30 January 2000, 13 April 2000.

104. “Fresh Air,” 18 March 1998, National Public Radio. For two recent case studies of contested history in the American context, see Edward T. Linenthal and Tom Engelhardt (eds.), *History Wars: The Enola Gay and Other Battles for the American Past* (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1996) and Gary B. Nash, Charlotte Crabtree, and Ross E. Dunn, *History on Trial: Culture Wars and the Teaching of the Past* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1997).