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Review by Stacie E. Goddard, Wellesley College

History is central to national identity, and there is perhaps no history more critical to a nation's sense of self than its narratives about the origins of war. The very act of war can threaten national identity, and thus "demarcating the national 'us' from 'them' becomes a matter of life and death" (14). After wars end, the history that is written raises significant questions about a nation's strength, virtue, guilt, and sacrifice. Previous work on collective memory and World War II has productively focused on Germany's remembrance of the Holocaust, Japan's 'forgetting' of war crimes, and the United States' narratives of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, just to name a few.[1] In this excellent book, Patrick Finney turns our attention to how narratives about the origins of World War II reflect larger debates about national identity in the Soviet Union, Germany, Italy, France, Britain, the United States, and Japan.

There is much to commend in *Remembering the Road to World War II*. Finney's core claim that history is not objective, that even professional historians are engaged in acts of national myth-making, is certainly nothing new, not in a field long conversant in the language of culture and memory. But his application of this argument to the origins of World War II is novel, and it is an exercise that produces significant insight about the evolution of national historiographical debates. In the Soviet Union, for example, Finney demonstrates how understandings about the 1939 Nazi-Soviet pact and its secret protocol shifted as politicians struggled to legitimate their own rule. For example, Nikita Khrushchev encouraged an historical narrative that castigated Joseph Stalin for the Soviet Union's early setbacks: the Soviet people may have prevailed, but it was largely in spite of, not because of, Stalin's approach to the Nazi state. Such narratives were actively suppressed after Khrushchev's resignation in 1964, only to reemerge on a grander scale in the Soviet Union's last days.

Likewise, in Britain, Finney argues that historical narratives have evolved as much in response to political debates as they have to the availability of documentary evidence. Certainly scholars have long read key early texts on appeasement as being political: it impossible to see Winston Churchill's indictment of Neville Chamberlain in *The Gathering Storm* as value-free work.[2] But Finney pushes this argument further. The revisionists' resuscitation of Chamberlain, and their portrait of a man deeply constrained by structural factors, for example, cannot be read outside of anxieties over Britain's decline in the post-

[1] On Germany and collective memory of the Holocaust see Jeffrey K. Olick, *In the House of the Hangman: The Agonies of German Defeat, 1943-1949* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005); On war crimes, Japan, and memory, see Carol Gluck, "Operations of Memory: 'Comfort Women' and the World," in Sheila Miyoshi Jager and Rana Mitter, eds., *Ruptured Histories: War, Memory, and the Post-Cold War in Asia* (Harvard University Press, 2007); On the United States and memories of the atomic bomb see J. Samuel Walker, "History, Collective Memory and the Decision to Use the Bomb," *Diplomatic History*, (1995) 19 (2): 319-328.

[2] Churchill, *The Gathering Storm* (The Second World War, Vol. 1). (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1948).

World War II world. Nor can the recent post-revisionist history, which is far more critical of Chamberlain's decisions, be understood apart from Thatcherism and the tropes of individual responsibility.

Finney's book is an impressive piece of work. For its analysis of the historiography alone, and its bibliography of key works of the origins of World War II in seven countries, it is a good addition to the bookshelves of scholars interested in World War II. Beyond this, Finney's work provides tantalizing ground for engagement between historians and political scientists on questions surrounding the causes of this war. Whereas political science scholars could productively augment Finney's arguments about collective memory and history by exploring questions of authority and institutions, Finney's core arguments should serve as important checks on the work of political scientists, particularly those of us who are engaged in building causal theories of war.

On the one hand, there are silences in Finney's work that open up potential areas of inquiry for political scientists. Who, for example, has the authority to articulate national historical narratives? More specifically, under what conditions are historians likely to shape the national identity? Finney is well aware of the limits of his argument about history and national identity, and he makes it clear that it is political debates that shape "international history rather than *vice versa*" (30). But this raises questions about who has the capacity to create historical narratives about the origins of war. In Finney's work, we see a range of actors shaping the history of World War II. In the Soviet Union, perhaps not surprisingly, the historiography is very much state-influenced, at least until the central state apparatus notably weakens and once-marginalized actors are empowered to question official claims. In Germany, historians and other academics seem to have much more influence on official contestations over national identity: witness, for example, Jürgen Habermas's widely-read criticisms of apologist history in the 1980s (93). In the United States, in contrast, public intellectuals are often sidelined by mass culture, and Stephen Spielberg has much more power in shaping visions of the nation at war than did the 'Wisconsin School' of American foreign policy. All of these sources of authority are eminently plausible, but it would be interesting to flesh out why certain actors can legitimately narrate the nation, while others are relegated to the wayside.

So too might scholars pursue questions about the role political institutions play in the construction of history and national identity. One need not have complete faith in the 'marketplace of ideas,' for example, to suspect that debates about national identity play out differently in liberal democratic states than they do under autocratic or totalitarian ones. Certainly liberal democracies do not produce 'objective' history—in Finney's account, narratives about the origins of World War II are as political in the United States, Britain and France as they are in the Soviet Union. At the same time, documentary evidence is more likely to be available to historians in democratic polities, and propagating a counter-narrative is these societies is unlikely to land one in the gulag. Again, Finney is certainly aware of this variation in his cases, but it would have been fruitful to explore these how these institutional factors shape historical debates more systematically.

On the other hand, political scientists would be well-served by considering the implications of Finney's arguments for our own work. Scholars of international politics often rely on 'advances' in historical debates as evidence for their preferred theories. For example, scholars who insist that the British decision to appease Germany was rational often suggest that alternative theories rely on an outdated "Churchillian" historiography.[3] Yet while these scholars rightfully point to the political nature of Churchill's narrative, they simultaneously suggest that revisionist historiography is "getting history right."[4] Finney's own account of British historiography in the last seventy years should cast serious doubt on these claims. Likewise, Finney's work should encourage political scientists to be more sensitive to the normative and political implications of certain arguments. The argument that Germany engaged in a preventive war with the Soviet Union in 1941, for example, might find a receptive audience among American neorealist scholars. Should it matter that much of this historiography became fodder for right-wing elements seeking to minimize Germany's role in World War II?

Finally, while political scientists are often eager to use history to buttress more general theories about the causes of war, Finney does an excellent job capturing the fact that the origins of World War II will ultimately remain contested. Whatever documents come to light from Soviet archives, whatever new 'smoking gun' is found in existing collections, our collective understandings of this war cannot, by definition, be stable. Instead, they will continue to be shaped by evolving contests over national identities. This does not mean that historians or political scientists should desist in their attempts to offer new narratives of this war; to the contrary, these narratives are a part of a vital process, through which nations articulate, critique, and recreate their political purpose. It is, however, to remind scholars that their work is political, and that this imposes inherent limits on their ability to produce knowledge.

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[3] See e.g., Christopher Layne, "Security Studies and the Use of History: Neville Chamberlain's Grand Strategy Revisited," *Security Studies*, 17(3): 400; Norrin M. Ripsman and Jack S. Levy, "The Preventive War that Never Happened: Britain, France, and the Rise of Germany in the 1930s," *Security Studies*, 16(1): 58.

[4] Layne, 437

Review by Norrin Ripsman, Concordia University

Patrick Finney's *Remembering the Road to World War II: International History, National Identity, Collective Memory* (London: Routledge, 2011) explores the interplay between political culture, evolving national identity, and the historiography of the interwar period in each of the leading participants of World War II (Germany, the Soviet Union, Italy, Japan, France, Great Britain, and the United States). Finney argues that national historical memory evolves depending on political expediency and the constellation of social, political, and ideological at a particular moment in time. Thus, for example, early postwar German and Italian scholarship treated National Socialism and fascism as aberrations completely unconnected to German and Italian history, respectively, as a means of easing the reintegration of these defeated countries into the Western order after World War II. As the Social Democratic Party broke the conservative Christian Democratic Party's stranglehold on power in the Federal Republic of Germany in the late 1960s and 1970s, however, a more critical narrative developed that stressed that the German excesses in the war and the consequences of the defeat were products of the German failure to embrace and institutionalize liberal traditions. In the Soviet Union, the Great Patriotic War myth propagated by Stalinist historians to justify and bolster the Soviet program was revised during periods of reform, particularly Mikhail Gorbachev's, to include savage critiques of Joseph Stalin's culpability in signing a pact of aggression with Adolf Hitler in 1939. In Great Britain, historians during Margaret Thatcher's political revolution began to reject revisionist interpretations of appeasement, focused on British incapacity, in part because Thatcherite Britain wished to dispel the "People's War" myth that had endured in British scholarship throughout the post-war era in favor of a rugged individual myth of Winston Churchill triumphing over the naïve and craven appeasers. Consequently, Finney paints a world in which historians, far from pursuing objectivity, actually knowingly contribute to a particular set of national myths. They both feed and are fed by prevailing national attitudes toward the past. In this regard, Finney fits in well with postmodernist challenges to historiographical objectivity.

There is much to admire in this book. It engages a broad sweep of historiography in seven different national contexts – a monumental task – yet it does so without sacrificing the complexity of the national debates or displaying greater mastery of some national debates over others. Furthermore, on the surface, it presents a credible case linking the central trends in understanding the path to World War II in each country with core national myths as well as changing political trends in the latter half of the twentieth century.

Nonetheless, the central argument of the book might be overstated. While historians may be influenced by and contribute to national attitudes toward historical events, are they really as malleable as Finney suggests? It seems likely that governments might manipulate public symbols and historical memory for political purposes, as Finney demonstrates Chancellor Helmut Kohl's West German government did in having U.S. President Ronald Reagan visit a German military cemetery on the anniversary of VE Day in 1985 to "close the books on the past" (92). But are historians really guilty of the same manipulations? It is

easy to accept that, in a more centralized state like the Soviet Union, where promoting an unauthorized view of was not only a poor career choice, but could lead to imprisonment, historians might tow the official policy line in their research. It is a harder sell, though, that historians in open polities, such as France, Great Britain, or the United States, were responsive to prevailing sentiments and the requirements of the political elite in their assessments of the road to war. Thus, for example, the implication (213-215) that the counter-revisionist movement in British historiography of appeasement grew out of the Thatcherite revolution in Great Britain, which rejected welfare state democracy and narratives of British incapacity, is troubling. Does Finney mean to imply that academic historians in Britain, who were economic victims of Thatcherism, helped shape a narrative conducive to the central tenets of its philosophy? Did they do so willingly or unwittingly? Why?

This raises the broader point about the degree to which historians act as honest scientists or researchers in the quest for truth and understanding. Finney's account suggests that, as a group, they do not. Instead, they act as political partisans flogging their own particular ideological predilections, knowing tools of the powers-that-be that produce narratives that are likely to please their political masters, or even merely unconscious reproducers of prevailing political attitudes in their historical research. This is difficult for me to accept, as most historians and political scientists I have encountered claim to be animated by a thirst for truth. (I certainly do not view myself as a mouthpiece for any political party or group. Does Finney view himself in this manner? Is he merely advancing an ideological point of view that is a product of Cameron's Britain?) It is plausible that historians are political instruments, but if so Finney must spell out the mechanism through which the state or popular culture influence their writings and demonstrate that they do so. If not, the argument remains a matter of speculation.

Finney's speculation of intentional or unintentional collusion – he writes of "the complicity between history and nationalist projects" (13) and, more damningly, "the complicity of historians in the elaborations of these discourses and the concomitant negotiation of historical memory" (21) – is belied, however, when one considers the degree of contestation in different periods in different countries. Finney describes dominant attitudes or interpretations of the war in each of the seven countries, but at no time in the democratic countries was there an exclusive interpretation. Instead, there were contending schools of interpretation or, at times of greater consensus, alternative voices. Thus, for example, in the United States, scholarship on the American role in the war was characterized throughout the Cold War by the debate between traditionalists and revisionists. Italian historiography consisted of a debate between three approaches to Mussolini's foreign policy; "as mere propaganda, as pragmatic *realpolitik* or as fanatical ideological expansionism," (111) with attendant implications for the wisdom of his actions and broader Italian culpability. In Great Britain, Finney notes that from the beginning of the postwar era, two narratives competed for attention: a "guilty men" narrative and a revisionist narrative. If, as he observes (193-194), the guilty men narrative initially found a more sympathetic audience in the British public and political elite, if different American and Italian schools of thought are privileged at particular points of time, that says more about the consumers of historiography than its producers.

Of course, Finney appears to be deliberately overstating his argument, presenting "partial readings" of the history, "intended to be suggestive rather than definitive" (304). Nonetheless, the implications of Finney's claims are disturbing from my perspective as a political scientist. If historiographical research can never resolve debates, if documentary material can never be read outside of the researcher's biases – standard fare for postmodernists – then the quest for knowledge and cumulation of observations is futile. That would undermine the entire enterprise of theory testing and theory building in the social sciences, as all this would merely entail the advancement of entrenched ideological positions for potential political gain. It would be impossible to learn lessons from historical events that could inform contemporary policy debates, since the truth of historical events would essentially be unknowable. Fortunately, while I accept Finney's claim that historiography can be politicized, I do not believe it is always so. Honest historians relying engaging in open-minded debate based on the available evidence may be able to shed light on key events of the past, including the road to World War II.

Norrin M. Ripsman is a Professor in the Political Science Department at Concordia University in Montreal, Canada. His primary research interests include: the domestic sources of foreign security policy in democratic states, postwar peacemaking, constructing regional stability, the political economy of national security, international politics of the 1930s, and the impact of globalization on national security. He is the author/co-author/co-editor of six books, including Norrin M. Ripsman, *Peacemaking by Democracies: The Effect of State Autonomy on the Post-World-War Settlements* (University Park: Penn State University Press, 2002), and Jeffrey W. Taliaferro, Norrin M. Ripsman, and Steven E. Lobell, eds., *The Challenge of Grand Strategy: The Great Powers and the Broken Balance Between the World Wars* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), and has authored numerous peer-reviewed journal articles in *International Security*, *International Studies Quarterly, Security Studies*, *Millennium: A Journal of International Studies*, *International Interactions*, *International Studies Review*, *Geopolitics*, *International Journal*, and *The Canadian Journal of Political Science*. He has written two articles on British and French grand strategy in the 1930s: Norrin M. Ripsman and Jack S. Levy, "Wishful Thinking or Buying Time? The Logic of British Appeasement in the 1930s," *International Security*, vol. 33, no. 2 (Fall 2008), pp. 148-181; and Norrin M. Ripsman and Jack S. Levy, "The Preventive War that Never Happened: Britain, France, and the Rise of Germany in the 1930s," *Security Studies*, vol. 16, no. 1 (January 2007), pp. 32-67.

Author's Response by Patrick Finney, Aberystwyth University

I am very grateful to Stacie Goddard and Norrin Ripsman for taking the time to engage with my book and to share their thoughts in this forum. I would also like warmly to thank Diane Labrosse for facilitating this exchange of views. When I was writing the book I envisaged its core target audiences as being international historians, memory studies scholars and historical theorists. The manuscript had already gone to press when in June 2010 H-Diplo/ISSF published a very important roundtable exchange on 'Politics and Scholarship' which explored the ideological implications of writing in both international history and political science. This resonated in diverse ways with my work, and suggested that – as the reviewers here draw out – it might also have important consequences for political scientists.[1] The roundtable led to lively exchanges on H-DIPLO, which have been resumed on several occasions since, and I am delighted to have this opportunity to contribute to that ongoing discussion.

My book narrates the evolution of historical interpretations of the origins of the Second World War in each of the seven major combatant countries, analysing how the work of international historians has been shaped by broader cultural discourses of national identity and collective memory. It seeks to demonstrate to international historians that the historiography of the origins of the war cannot be satisfactorily understood without serious consideration of these issues, and that our historiographical debates more generally would be enriched by systematic incorporation of a range of such ideological factors into them. It is simultaneously an intervention in the literature on collective memory of the Second World War, thickening our understandings of the multiple ways in which that conflict was memorialised and instrumentalised across the post-war decades and advancing the case for more comparative approaches. Finally, it argues for a particular theoretical understanding of historical representation *per se*, by advancing a series of claims about the cultural origins of underpinning emplotments, the relative significance of new empirical data and broad ideological shifts in precipitating historiographical change, and above all the unavoidably political nature of historical representation. Conscious that these would be contentious to many practitioners in international history, I sought to demonstrate their pertinence in considerable detail in specific bodies of historical writing and across a wide range of cases.

There is nothing with which I would disagree in Stacie Goddard's summary of my book's aims and positive appraisal of its achievements. She is also quite justified in drawing attention to certain issues that I was unable to treat in exhaustive detail. Writing a 'total history' of the historiography in any one of these cases would be a daunting task, and it was obviously not possible given the constraints of space in a comparative study. My focus was on outlining the broad political contexts – in relation to national identity and collective memory - which informed writing on the origins of the war, exploring how these influenced historical representations and endowed them with ideological valence. This focus necessarily elided

[1] Robert Jervis (ed.), *H-Diplo/ISSF Roundtable on 'Politics and Scholarship',* 1 June 2010, http://www.h-net.org/~diplo/ISSF/PDF/ISSF-Roundtable-1-2.pdf.

other internal aspects of the historiographical operation, such as scholarly politics and the professional dynamics of the historical discipline, and external issues such as how precisely this writing performed political work in the wider world as it was disseminated and consumed.

These certainly merit further study. There is some intriguing new work going on into the professional sociology of international history upon which future analyses of the internal dynamics of historiographical debates might draw.[2] The role of historians as propagators of national narratives and their relationship to other actors and institutions shaping national identity is more well-trodden ground, with a substantial relevant literature now available.[3] Some of this does indeed explicitly address the point that Goddard makes about the different political relationships that pertain in democracies and autocracies, though it provides copious evidence that despite the scope for greater contestation in the former, there has nonetheless often been a pronounced intimacy between the dominant views of historians and 'official' political discourses. In any event, I agree that there is much more to be said about these issues but this does not, I think, detract from the validity of my core claim that the role of national identity and collective memory in the production of historiography needs to be more fully acknowledged.

I heartily endorse what Goddard says about the potential implications of my work for political scientists. My position does not deny that there can be progress in historical research in the sense that our factual knowledge of subjects does expand, not least as a consequence of the emergence of new archival sources. Equally, there are a range of rational criteria that can be brought to bear to discriminate between competing interpretations, which include the range, volume, and variety of sources consulted, how well different types of evidence have been integrated, and aesthetic factors such as scope, originality, style, coherence and cogency. Yet we will search in vain for interpretations that are beyond politics, for narratives that are not enmeshed in wider ideological frameworks and freighted with political and normative implications. Undoubtedly, this creates a problem for political scientists seeking to use historical interpretations as stable ground for theorising about the causes of war or the nature of the international system. As Goddard says, this does not make such theorising futile, but it does suggest that it needs to take greater account of the partial, provisional, and politically-situated nature of all historical interpretations.

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[2] See, for example, two pieces from a recent collection on the historiography of the origins of the First World War: Stephan Petzold, 'The Social Making of a Historian: Fritz Fischer's Distancing from Bourgeois-Conservative Historiography, 1930-60', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 48 (2) 2013, 271-289; J. F. V. Keiger, 'The Fischer Controversy, the War Origins Debate and France: A Non-History', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 48 (2) 2013, 363-375.

[3] See, for example, Stefan Berger and Chris Lorenz (eds), *Nationalizing the Past: Historians as Nation-Builders in Modern Europe* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010). For an insightful comparative study of how national and transnational forces impacted on two of the national historiographies that I consider, see Sebastian Conrad, *The Quest for the Lost Nation: Writing History in Germany and Japan in the American Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010).

These concerns also figure in Norrin Ripsman's response. While his review generously acknowledges the scope of my book and concedes a certain credibility to its claims, he finds its argument to be over-stated; he rejects the notion that historiography is always politicised and the implied challenge to political scientists' habitual use of history. To an extent, his reservations depend upon a demand for greater specification of the mechanisms at work in these historiographical processes, and of how precisely prevailing political sentiments have influenced the writings of particular historians. This is not dissimilar to Goddard's point, and I would again agree that there is of course scope for yet thicker descriptions of how this work was produced. That said, I would contend that my book does present a considerable volume of compelling evidence as it tracks the intricate co-implication and imbrication of politics and scholarship through the decades since the 1940s and across seven cases. But of course it is very difficult to 'prove' definitively what influences have been paramount in a creative cultural process such as history-writing, and the weight attached to the evidence will depend in part upon the matrix of pre-existing intellectual investments through which it is construed.

Beyond this, there are two respects in which Ripsman's response seems to miss nuances which I had endeavoured to impart to my arguments and which it might be helpful to recapitulate here. First, I do not claim that all historians within a given polity writing on its past are totally encapsulated by dominant political discourses and simply reproduce national myths. Even where powerful and coherent sets of political ideas about national identity and collective memory are in place – which is by no means always the case – the diversity of the ideological and practical variables in play in the production of any piece of historical writing ensures that responses to them will never be uniform. The existence of a plurality of views, and of contestation of varying degrees, is the norm. (The evidence for such contestation which Ripsman adduces is, after all, largely drawn from my account.) True, I do identify certain periods and places in which historians collectively might be said to have been totally "in thrall" (309) to wider discourses of national identity and collective memory, but in general the relationship between history and politics was more complex. So, in other cases, scholarship was "subtly underpinned by unacknowledged normative assumptions about the status of the war and visions of national identity", while in yet others it rather served as "a vocabulary and vehicle for meditation and contestation" about identity and memory (309). I am not arguing for the pervasive existence of a single kind of relationship between international history and these wider discourses, but rather that they were always mutually entwined and that international history therefore unavoidably possessed "political inspirations and entailments" (309) that should be the subject of more analysis.

The second and related issue concerns historical objectivity. Ripsman argues that I depict international historians as active and willing partisans of political ideologies, "knowingly" contributing to the propagation of "national myths" and indulging in "manipulations" to please their "political masters". This, he claims, is misleading since historians are rather more like "honest scientists … animated by a thirst for truth". This characterisation does not really accurately capture my position, for two reasons. First, although there are undoubtedly examples of international historians who have professed overt contemporary political commitments that palpably shaped their historical writing, for the most part this is a matter of more elusive, unwitting, or second-order implication. This is the precise reason why I think it is desirable to bring these issues into focus for discussion, since as my analyses illustrate, it is

not always a simple matter to read out the contemporary ideological ramifications of particular historical interpretations. Second, I think that it is a mistake to conflate honesty and objectivity. Honesty is most certainly a cardinal scholarly virtue and I do not doubt that international historians and political scientists strive to maintain it in their work. But my argument is that however impeccable this honesty, and however sincere the aspiration only to seek the truth, these cannot deliver objective historical accounts, in the sense of ones that are beyond political positioning. Hence I conclude from my case studies that "neither scrupulous objectivity, nor the conventions and procedures of a professional discipline, nor formidable arrays of archival sources, can provide any sort of safeguard against implication in ideological contestation" (309).

I certainly do not claim that my book offers a definitive account of the evolution of the historiographies which it discusses. My readings of particular texts can be contested, just as my exposition could be supplemented by more fine-grained discussion of the processes through which these historiographies were produced. Equally, the lenses of national identity and collective memory will not always be the most appropriate through which to view international history writing in order to tease out its ideological valence. Yet these reviews seem to confirm that I have succeeded in my goal of bringing the politics of this historiography into focus, thereby challenging conventional wisdom and provoking fresh discussions of some fundamental issues. I am grateful to the reviewers for providing the opportunity to extend the conversation.

Patrick Finney is a Reader in International History in the Department of International Politics, Aberystwyth University UK. His next book, *How the Second World War Still Shapes our Lives*, is forthcoming from Oxford University Press in 2014.