

Introduction

ON 2 MAY 1944, René Huyghe, director of paintings at the Louvre, wrote a friendly note to Jean-François Lefranc, a French art dealer who facilitated sales for Nazi collectors. Huyghe was a highly esteemed curator, art historian, and Resistance member who after the war would be elected to the Académie française and awarded the Legion of Honor. Lefranc was later sentenced to five years in prison for his wartime deals with works looted from Jewish collections.

What could these two men possibly have in common? A passion for world-class art. Writing from the chateau of Montal in southwestern France, where Huyghe monitored evacuated works of art from the Louvre and other museums, the curator regretted that he was not able to see Lefranc during a recent trip to Paris: “I would have liked to shake your hand and tell you how much I appreciate all of your dedication in promoting the Louvre’s interests in the Schloss affair.” Huyghe was referring to the temporary appropriation of forty-nine paintings from a looted Jewish art collection, which contained highly coveted paintings by Dutch and Flemish old masters. Although the forty-nine pieces eventually were returned to the Schloss family after the war, Huyghe had spent several months pursuing what he believed would be a permanent acquisition, raving to Lefranc that the masterpieces from the looted collection “greatly enhance the value of our Dutch gallery.”¹

Adolphe Schloss, a Jewish financier, had amassed the prestigious collection in the late nineteenth century. Born in Austria in 1842, he immigrated to France where he became a naturalized citizen in 1871. He built a sizable fortune as a commodities broker, and as his wealth grew, so did his art collection. Schloss became an autodidact in Dutch and Flemish art history and carefully selected paintings by Rembrandt, Rubens, Van der Neer, and Frans Hals, and an array of less famous artists, displaying the treasured

pieces in his elegant Paris townhouse on the avenue Henri-Martin. He died in 1911, and after the death of his widow in 1938, the collection passed to five adult heirs, three sons and two daughters.

By the eve of the Second World War, art experts around the world were familiar with the Schloss paintings, considered the finest collection of Dutch and Flemish masters in France. As tensions mounted between France and Nazi Germany in 1939, the eldest Schloss heir, Lucien, realized that a military invasion might put the collection in danger. He transferred the collection from the French capital to the remote chateau of Chambon, owned by a trusted friend near the city of Tulle, in the Limousin region of central France. During the Occupation, French and German art dealers, including Lefranc, were determined to find the hidden collection. In the summer of 1943, French agents working for the Germans located the collection in the Limousin region, largely thanks to Lefranc's detective work. The Vichy government negotiated with German authorities to transfer the collection back to Paris, in French moving trucks and under German supervision. There, in the Aryanized Dreyfus Bank, French and German curators and art experts divided up the collection: Huyghe and his colleagues secured the 49 paintings for the Louvre, German curators working for Hitler took 262 works, and Lefranc earned 22 pieces for facilitating the liquidation. French officials later argued that they had defended the French patrimony by saving forty-nine precious paintings from the Nazis and preventing damage or destruction in Germany. Implicit in this claim is the notion that the officials planned all along to return the paintings to the Schloss family, an idea that lives on even in recently published histories.² Yet wartime correspondence among French officials leaves no doubt that Huyghe and his colleagues believed they were acquiring the paintings for the Louvre—permanently.

Huyghe's superior during the war was Jacques Jaujard, director of French national museums. A dynamic civil servant who oversaw a massive evacuation of French art museums in 1939 and tirelessly worked to protect the collections from damage and theft, he remains a symbol of resistance in the arts administration. After the war, Jaujard was awarded a Resistance Medal and the Legion of Honor, and in 1955 was elected to the Academy of Fine Arts. Today the entrance to the Ecole du Louvre bears his name, paying homage to his role as a protector of French national treasures during the Occupation.

However, in securing paintings for the Louvre from the Schloss collection, Jaujard also facilitated negotiations between Huyghe and Louis Darquier de Pellepoix, commissioner of Jewish affairs from April 1942 to February 1944.³ Historian Henry Rousso has described Darquier as “the very embodiment of the most violent, irrational, and sinister aspects of Vichy’s anti-Jewish policy,” including state management of seized Jewish assets. Darquier later fled to Spain, received a death sentence in absentia from the postwar French government, and proclaimed in a 1978 interview with *L’Express* that only lice were killed at Auschwitz.⁴

Despite their drastically different legacies, in the summer of 1943 these four men—future Resistance figures Huyghe and Jaujard, and future condemned collaborators Lefranc and Darquier—had a common interest in liquidating the Schloss art collection. To be clear, that all four were involved in dividing up the paintings, with forty-nine of the finest works designated for the Louvre, does not invalidate the resistance activities of Huyghe and Jaujard. Huyghe served the Resistance from the art repository at Montal, where eleven of his guards were men from Alsace-Lorraine whom the Nazis had condemned to death in absentia. Jaujard similarly sought to protect Jews and communists in the arts administration and employed young men as guards who otherwise would have been forced to work in Germany. He also gave Resistance members access to his apartment at the Louvre and repeatedly opposed demands from the Nazis and Vichy officials that might threaten the French cultural patrimony. However, both men also sought to acquire paintings for the Louvre that had been seized from the Schloss heirs and several other Jewish families.

French handling of the Schloss art collection during the Occupation thus raises some important questions: How did Jaujard, Huyghe, and their colleagues develop plans to integrate pieces from a looted Jewish collection into the Louvre? Why is this complicated affair still absent from the dominant narrative of French resistance to Nazi looting? How does evidence of opportunism aimed to enrich museums, particularly at the expense of Jews, disrupt established notions of collaboration and resistance? Put simply, how should we evaluate the actions of resisters who collaborate with collaborators? Without denying the courageous acts that earned Jaujard and Huyghe their prestigious honors, I aim to provide a more complete picture of museum officials’ actions during the Occupation, addressing acquisition issues that do not appear in memoirs and histories written by the actors themselves or their present-day successors in the cultural administration.

Although the Schloss pieces eventually were returned to the family, the affair illustrates the arbitrariness of cultural property rights during the war for those affected by Vichy's exclusionary laws. It also helps us understand policy in the early postwar years, when the museum administration, run by many of the same men, established a guardianship over unclaimed objects from looted Jewish collections. This policy reflected norms or standards of conduct at the time but became controversial by the late 1990s when journalists stridently proclaimed, albeit simplistically, that French museums were holding looted art.⁵

The Schloss affair, the French government's effort to acquire art from sequestered Jewish art collections, and the postwar guardianship are examples of *patrimania*, defined here as a condition in which cultural and political figures succumb to opportunism in their pursuit of cultural acquisitions—not for personal gain but for the institutions they serve. By *opportunism*, I mean that individuals took advantage of circumstances to pursue acquisitions that potentially could harm the interests of previous owners. Of course, whether one considers certain practices opportunistic depends on one's own perspective of cultural property norms, past and present. The actions of the museum administration may have respected norms of the time, particularly in light of Vichy anti-Semitic laws that stripped Jews of property ownership rights. Yet in seeking a deeper understanding of this history, we should assess those norms with a critical eye.

Defending National Treasures is, in part, a story about what French leaders did when they had an unforeseen opportunity to control and possibly house highly coveted and valuable works of art. It also examines the development of important and enduring cultural preservation policy under Vichy. Thousands of historic monuments, chateaux, cathedrals, and art collections were continually threatened during the war and Occupation. Air raids and other combat operations created constant and widespread danger, even after the Franco-German armistice of June 1940, coupled with Nazi campaigns to "repatriate" Germanic works of art that were held in public and private art collections throughout France. As a result, the fine arts administration of the Vichy regime implemented numerous measures to protect French national treasures from the ravages of modern warfare and Nazi looting. Some laws were more effective than others in preserving art and historic sites, but all contributed to the development of national policy that postwar leaders would later validate and expand.

For some officials in the Vichy regime, these preservation laws served a broader political goal. High-ranking civil servants argued that French preeminence in the arts was the nation's last remaining comparative advantage. The nation had been defeated militarily and greatly weakened economically, but it could still lead the world in cultural and intellectual affairs. These officials optimistically envisioned an artistic mission that would celebrate French painting, sculpture, and architecture. They also believed that the government could not wait until the end of the war to implement cultural reforms that were necessary to maintain French prestige in the arts; they needed to act immediately, despite the pressing security and economic concerns brought on by the war. In the minds of these officials, protecting *le patrimoine national* (French national treasures) would serve the country on multiple levels. Domestically, it would signal the resurgence of France in the aftermath of a devastating military defeat; internationally, it would maintain French stature in the arts and cultural affairs. In economic terms, the vast wealth of French museums and historic sites would bolster the tourism industry, enabling France to pull itself out of the wartime crisis and reclaim lost grandeur.

Most of the preservation reforms carried out by the Vichy regime had been proposed and debated in parliament during the Third Republic, some for more than twenty years. Yet they were implemented during the Occupation with a new ideological justification. Under the Vichy regime's head of state, Marshal Philippe Pétain, preservation complemented the traditionalist domestic program dubbed the National Revolution. Viewed in this light, conservatives believed that the preservation of national treasures, symbols of "true France," would also serve as an antidote to a wide range of destructive social trends—socialism, laziness, excessive materialism, and individualism.⁶

A study of *le patrimoine* in the 1940s may initially seem anachronistic, as the term's cultural meaning is often held to have become widely used only in the 1970s and 1980s.⁷ Yet members of the cultural and political elite had been using it at least since the early 1940s, and it appears frequently in articles, reports, and letters during the Occupation. This repeated usage of the term justifies an analysis of what people meant by it. When officials invoked *le patrimoine national* in the early 1940s, in most cases they were referring to a relatively limited area of cultural heritage by today's standards. They had in mind the fine arts, akin to the realm of *le patrimoine artistique*—works of art, historic landmarks, and antiquities, usually predating 1900. Today

scholars, journalists, experts, curators, and political leaders continually re-define notions of *le patrimoine*, incorporating a wide range of objects, sites, and structures: *le patrimoine ethnologique* (folklore relics recalling France's peasant economy), *le patrimoine naturel* (landscapes), *le patrimoine industriel* (defunct factories), and *les écomusées* (mines-turned-"ecomuseums").⁸ I have chosen to focus on the more limited realm of artistic patrimony, focusing on museums and art collections, antiquities and archeological excavation, historic sites and commemorative monuments.

Studying policy related to a nation's cultural heritage tells us a great deal about the priorities and preoccupations of modern society, particularly in a country like France, where historically the state has largely assumed the responsibility of cultural preservation. Policy choices reflect the nation's desire to preserve vestiges of the past, as indicators of civilization and a superior culture. At the same time, assertions of grandeur rooted in a glorious heritage from the past can betray anxieties about a nation's military, diplomatic, and economic strength in the present. Focusing on a particular country—France—at a particular time of profound national crisis—the German occupation—this book examines French interests in a policy nexus where political, military, diplomatic, intellectual, and cultural history intersect. Drawing on various published and unpublished sources, including recently declassified archives, it deepens our understanding of French history in multiple areas, showing the roots of contemporary cultural policy in the Vichy years. The notion of cultural patrimony proves a malleable and powerful concept, not only in postwar republican history, marked by policy initiatives implemented under André Malraux, Charles de Gaulle's minister of culture from 1959 to 1969, but also during the exclusionary Vichy dictatorship.

This study builds on nearly forty years of important scholarly research on the Vichy regime. With the Liberation of Paris, Charles De Gaulle established a powerful and reassuring resistance myth, analyzed most notably by Henry Rousso in *The Vichy Syndrome* (original French edition, 1987), in which all French people, except a small number of traitorous collaborators, had opposed Nazi domination. For nearly twenty years afterward, most French writers, journalists, and historians further viewed the Vichy regime as a mere interruption in French history, a period disconnected from the years that preceded and followed it. Early postwar histories such as *Histoire de Vichy* by Robert Aron (1954) argued that ultracollaborators such as Laval were marginal in French society and that both Gaullists and Pétainists defended French interests. This perspective began to change with

groundbreaking studies by Stanley Hoffmann in the early 1960s, followed by Robert Paxton's *Vichy France*, first published in 1972. Hoffmann and Paxton both challenged the notion of the Vichy "interruption" in French history, underscoring the continuities in social and economic policy from the 1930s through the postwar period.⁹ Paxton also disrupted notions of a collaborationist cabal at Vichy, carried out by only a small number of traitors, by using German archives to prove incontrovertibly that Vichy leaders actively pursued collaboration and enacted measures such as the Jewish Statute without German pressure. Into the 1980s, historians such as Pascal Ory and Bertram Gordon focused attention on collaboration in various realms—political, economic, artistic, and intellectual.¹⁰ By the end of the decade, the myth of widespread French resistance had been so thoroughly discredited that historian John Sweets argued that an equally distorted countermyth had developed, depicting France as a "nation of collaborators."¹¹

Numerous scholars over the past twenty years have sought to understand the gray area between the extremes of active resistance and ardent collaboration. Studies of French society during the Occupation shifted attention beyond the realm of politics, such as Pierre Laborie's work on French public opinion and, more recently, in studies of everyday life by Robert Gildea, Richard Vinen, and Shannon Fogg.¹² In his highly influential study *France under the Germans*, Philippe Burrin offered an alternative analytical framework to the Manichean categories of resistance and collaboration through the notion of "accommodation." Lynne Taylor used a case study of northern France to examine various forms of popular protest beyond the realm of armed resistance. More recently, Jonathan Judaken has proposed an intriguing "C-curve," in which one may evaluate an individual's actions within twelve categories, ranging from active resistance to collaborationism, that is, "commitment to fascist or Nazi ideology."¹³

This redefinition of collaboration and resistance has yielded more nuanced studies that greatly enriched our understanding of French behavior—official and societal—under the Occupation. Yet in evaluating Vichy leadership, notions of accommodation and choices on the C-curve still leave an analytical gap, as they focus on the interaction between French and German authorities and the extent to which the French were willing to satisfy German demands. Much of Vichy policy that merits critical analysis, however, dealt with internal policies carried out independently of the Germans, as illustrated in studies by Annette Wieviorka, Susan Zuccotti, and Laurent Joly on the Vichy regime's anti-Semitic administration and

policies, and French responsibility in the Final Solution.¹⁴ The spoliation of real estate, bank accounts, gold, cash, and cultural objects was carried out not to satisfy German demands but to fill the state's coffers and pay for welfare programs such as National Aid. In evaluating French leadership, it is important to consider both French concessions to the Germans and the extent to which the agencies of individual administrators profited at the expense of the regime's victims.

The subfield of Vichy cultural history has been particularly rich in the past twenty years. When I first became interested in the Vichy cultural policy, I was greatly influenced by Christian Faure's study of folklore, Jean-Pierre Bertin-Maghit's work on French cinema, and studies of the visual arts by Laurence Bertrand Dorléac and Michèle Cone. The edited collection by Jean-Pierre Rioux, *La vie culturelle sous Vichy*, provided an effective overview of Vichy cultural history and policy, expanded more recently by Stéphanie Corcy in *La vie culturelle sous l'Occupation*.¹⁵ While Vichy cultural history is now a thoroughly researched area, historical surveys of French *patrimoine* tend to skip or merely gloss over the Vichy years, and the present study is the first to focus on heritage policy. Outside the Occupation period, however, a rich body of scholarship has developed on French cultural patrimony. As public awareness and appreciation of *le patrimoine* grew to a truly mass scale in the 1980s, scholarly texts on the topic quickly proliferated, a trend that both fed and stemmed from the broader field of memory studies. French sociologist Maurice Halbwachs (1877–1945) had provided an early intellectual framework in *On Collective Memory* (first French edition, 1941) by examining the social construction of memory in modern society. Four decades later, Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger examined the relationship between collective identity and constructed celebrations in their edited volume, *The Invention of Tradition*. David Lowenthal further analyzed the roots of the twentieth-century preservation movement, seeking to understand its “near universality.”¹⁶ Pierre Nora's multivolume project from the 1990s, *Les lieux de mémoire*, with contributions from dozens of scholars, represented an intensifying French obsession with “realms of memory,” the meaning of an array of events, objects, and historical figures—the tricolor flag, Bastille Day, the Gauls, Joan of Arc. Rousso's *The Vichy Syndrome*, again, was a groundbreaking study of French national memory of the German occupation.¹⁷

My own understanding of memory has been informed by scholars who question the notion of “collective memory,” in which certain interpretations of past events dominate a national public consciousness. When

attention is shifted from the national to the local level, fascinating contested realms of memory become apparent. I address local memories in case studies of dismantled bronze statues under the Vichy regime (Chapter 8) and found useful Daniel Sherman's definition of "dominant memory." Whereas Rousso sees dominant memory as "a collective interpretation of the past that may even come to have official status,"¹⁸ Sherman sees it as "a set of narrative explanations emanating from dominant groups," which may operate locally.¹⁹ Offering a more nuanced view of power and politics, this view of local memory takes into account the importance of local elites who actually controlled the business of commemoration, or "decommemoration" in the case of the Vichy regime.

In the history of French patrimonial policy, French scholars such as Dominique Poulot, Jean-Pierre Babelon, and André Chastel have examined the shift in heritage management from royal and aristocratic control to domination by a political and social elite in the nineteenth century, and, in the last few decades of the twentieth century, the advent of a national appreciation of patrimony on a mass scale. Former United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) consultant and curator of patrimony, Jean-Michel Leniaud, provided a frank assessment of the challenges in managing such expansive policy in *L'utopie française: Essai sur le patrimoine* (1992). From a historian's perspective, Philippe Poirrier has contributed a great deal to our understanding of patrimonial policy at national, regional, and local levels. Shifting from the national to local scale also helps avoid erroneous assumptions of a national, collective memory, as evidenced in the work of Loïc Vadelorge and Stéphane Gerson.²⁰

In the final years of the last century, some observers cautioned that the obsession with heritage could have damaging consequences. In *The Heritage Crusade* (1998), Lowenthal emphasized both the benefits of heritage—"it links us with ancestors and offspring, bonds neighbors and patriots, certifies identity, roots us in time-honored ways"—as well as the threats, arguing that it can be "oppressive, defeatist, decadent. Miring us in the obsolete, the cult of heritage allegedly immures life within museums and monuments. Breeding xenophobic hate, it becomes a byword for bellicose discord."²¹ While Lowenthal pushes the argument to an extreme, his critique constructively draws attention to the dangers inherent in overzealous devotion to heritage. In *Who Owns Antiquity?* (2008), James Cuno, director of the Art Institute of Chicago, argues that the governments of Italy, Greece, and Turkey, among others, have pushed nationalistic restitution

claims too far: “Antiquities are the cultural property of all humankind—of *people*, not peoples—evidence of the world’s ancient past and not that of a particular nation. They comprise antiquity and antiquity knows no borders.”²² Other museum directors echo this sentiment in *Whose Culture?* (2009), edited by Cuno. The contributors, which include then-director of the Metropolitan Museum of Art Philippe de Montebello and British Museum director Neil MacGregor, emphasize the right of museums to maintain the art and antiquities in their collections, in part due to the unsurpassed ability of well-established museums with significant resources to conserve and display treasured objects.

Among recent studies, the history of Nazi looting in France has garnered significant attention since the late 1990s, yet it is a field that has attracted few professional historians working in academe or research centers.²³ Some of the most influential histories of looting and restitution in France have been written by journalists (Lynn Nicholas, Hector Feliciano), retired teachers (Michel Rayssac), or amateur historians (Robert Edsel). And often with impressive results. Nicholas’s *The Rape of Europa* and Rayssac’s *L’exode des musées* derived from years of rigorous archival research.²⁴ Yet these authors have not addressed critically the issue of Jewish collections sequestered by the French museum administration. Recent histories published by the Musées de France or written by its administrators also omit in-depth analysis of policy toward sequestered art, most alarmingly in a contribution to the Mission d’étude sur la spoliation des Juifs de France, the so-called Mattéoli Commission report published in 2000.²⁵ Though the extensive, multivolume report aimed to promote transparency on the history of spoliation under Vichy, its conclusion that art looting in France was “a German affair” is strikingly oversimplified.²⁶ The Schloss case and others discussed in Chapter 9 show that certain French dealers, police agents, and members of the Vichy government took advantage of circumstances to appropriate and profit from stolen art, whether for personal or institutional benefit.

All of these trends in the history of the Vichy regime, cultural and patrimonial policy, and memory studies shaped this book, which underscores the malleability of notions of heritage, perceived variously as an effective political tool for democrats and dictators, a source of national unity and sectarianism. My analysis is grounded in archival research carried out at the French National Archives, the archive centers of the Musées nationaux, the French Institute, the Médiathèque du patrimoine, and the Center for Contemporary Jewish Documentation (CDJC), all in Paris. I also

use departmental archives for case studies on the recycling of bronze commemorative statues in the cities of Nantes and Chambéry. I incorporate German sources, including both published collections and unpublished documents seized by Resistance members during the liberation of France and conserved at the French National Archives and the CDJC.²⁷ Memoirs by Gerhard Heller, Arno Breker, and Albert Speer provide insight from the occupier's perspective, albeit with the self-interested spin of all memoirs. I also include German publications from the Occupation period, as well as secondary sources by German scholars.²⁸

The book's first two chapters provide an overview of the arts administration under the Occupation and the ways in which these cultural leaders and experts reconceived their troubled nation through its national treasures. At first glance, the war years appear to be an inauspicious moment for the development of patrimonial policy. The armistice of June 1940 partitioned the national territory into German-occupied and unoccupied zones, and the French bureaucracy was bifurcated between the cities of Paris and Vichy. French leaders operated in a perpetual economic crisis, and the wartime government increasingly became a puppet regime to the Third Reich. Yet these unusual circumstances actually created a reform paradox, facilitating the implementation of significant cultural legislation. The absence of parliament greatly hastened the legislative process, as new laws could be drafted by civil servants and approved by Pétain with relative efficiency. These new preservation policies, moreover, suited the conservative agenda of Pétain and his traditionalist appointees—namely, Jérôme Carcopino, education minister from February 1941 to April 1942, and Louis Hautecoeur, secretary general of fine arts for all but the last few months of the Occupation. Carcopino and Hautecoeur were particularly activist administrators who took advantage of parliament's absence and sought to strengthen control of the fine arts administration.

Building on this overview, Chapters 3 to 6 explore the implementation of several significant preservation policies during the war and occupation. Chapter 3 examines the massive evacuation of public art collections to makeshift storage depots in chateaux throughout France, involving several hundred thousand objects from more than two hundred museums. Chapters 4 to 6 explore the administrative reorganization of French public museums, preservation measures that increased protection of historic and natural sites, and the creation of centralized archeological regulations. All of these key reforms outlasted the Vichy regime. Following the Liberation

in 1944, Charles de Gaulle proclaimed the end of the Vichy regime and, in theory, the nullification of all its laws. In reality, the provisional French government of 1944 to 1946 validated many wartime laws, including key preservation reforms. The air raids of the war's final battles, in which entire neighborhoods and villages were destroyed, made the postwar argument for centralized patrimonial policy all the more compelling.

If the French enjoyed relative latitude in the implementation of preservation policies while under the Nazi jackboot, the limits to their sovereignty became painfully clear when the Germans demanded victor's spoils. The book's second half focuses on key areas of Franco-German conflict and negotiation. Chapters 7 and 8 address German requisitions of nonferrous metal, a scarce resource in central Europe needed for bullets and other armaments in Hitler's war machine. While the Germans seized church bells in other occupied territories, melting them down and recycling them into weapons, the French preferred to offer up bronze commemorative statues that inhabited public parks and town squares across the country. The Vichy regime determined which monuments would be sacrificed to the Germans, dismantling hundreds of bronze statues and leaving behind as many empty pedestals.

Chapter 9 examines Jewish-owned art collections as Nazi war booty. Works of art belonging to collectors and gallery owners who had fled France were particularly vulnerable, as Vichy anti-Semitic laws had stripped emigrant Jews of citizenship and property ownership rights. The Nazis looted prestigious collections throughout the Occupation, despite continual and vehement protests from numerous French agencies. However, French officials were asserting their *own* right to control the collections, in defense of the French *patrimoine*—not in defense of the Jewish collectors. I explore what happened when the French were able to sequester several prestigious Jewish art collections that had eluded the Nazis, including part of the vast Rothschild holdings. Considering the works “ownerless,” Jaujard and Huyghe developed plans to incorporate masterpieces into the Louvre and other museums—not as a temporary safeguard, as they and their colleagues later claimed, but permanently. As in the case of the Schloss affair, correspondence between Jaujard, Huyghe, and others in the arts administration reveals that these men saw the sequestration as an unforeseen opportunity to expand public museum collections during the wartime crisis.

Chapter 10 also considers the fate of French museum collections, from the perspective of Franco-German negotiations. Reichsmarschall Hermann

Göring demanded spoils for his personal collection, targeting key pieces from the Louvre. After a series of contentious meetings, Jaujard and curators in the national museum administration agreed to an exchange involving from the French side two highly valuable objects: a sixteenth-century statue by Gregor Erhart, *Saint Mary Magdalene*, and a Renaissance altarpiece panel entitled *Presentation in the Temple*. Göring proudly displayed the objects at Carinhall, his hunting lodge and personal art gallery, but never offered equivalent pieces in exchange. Although the pieces were recovered after the war and returned to the Louvre, the fact remains that Jaujard and his colleagues accommodated a significant Nazi demand that was unlikely to result in a reasonable exchange.

The final chapter on the legacy of Vichy policy explains the ways in which wartime preservation measures were adopted and implemented more fully in the postwar period. Along with the continuity of these reforms, the notion that the state ought to protect national treasures for the good of the collective—even at the expense of private interests—also endured. In perhaps its most injurious form, this guiding principle helped prolong the exploitation of the Vichy regime’s Jewish victims. This guardianship over unclaimed art that had been looted or sold from Jewish collections turned into a long-term appropriation of objects, including highly valuable paintings by artists such as Picasso, Matisse, and Monet. Following restitution norms of the time, relying on claimants to provide proof of ownership, museum officials held these pieces in public museums and storage depots without searching for the rightful owners—despite the administration’s access to extensive documentation on the looted collections. These documents, in part, had been gathered by the Germans as they carried out looting operations. The *Musées de France* initiated research using these archives only in the late 1990s, as a result of growing media scrutiny and public pressure. This delay raises some uncomfortable questions: To what extent did anti-Semitism play a role in the long-term guardianship? Would it have gone unchallenged for so long had the art previously belonged to Gentiles rather than Jews? Acceptance of the status quo by postwar curators and cultural administrators may be related to a broader lack of attention paid to the Holocaust, Vichy anti-Semitism, and the spoliation of Jewish assets, at least until the 1970s. But questions related to latent postwar anti-Semitism certainly are worth asking.

Beyond the history of Vichy, this study addresses the nature of the French state. By “the state” I mean not only *l’Etat français*, the title adopted by the Vichy regime, but the centuries-old administrative system that has evolved in France under various forms of government—monarchical, dictatorial, and republican. The Vichy regime controlled the government for four years, but the administrative machinery that constitutes the French state has been developing since the medieval Capetian kings. This study thus focuses on “the Vichy moment” in the history of the French state and cultural policy, taking into consideration continuities in the periods that preceded and followed it, as well as the changes brought about by the unique context of the Occupation.

A key goal here is to challenge a compelling notion that stems from the French Revolution—that the state necessarily acts for the benefit of the collective, “one and indivisible,” by transcending partisan interests. French culture and cultural administrations in particular appear to rise above factionalism, as the term *le patrimoine national* implies. Few French people would deny the inherent value of the Louvre’s collections, Notre Dame cathedral, and the well-preserved villages of Provence, the heritage that in many ways defines France today. Yet under Vichy, visions of national renewal through French heritage also yielded the pursuit of institutional gain at the expense of the regime’s victims.

Finally, *Defending National Treasures* raises important questions that are relevant beyond France, the Second World War, and the discipline of history: How does art shape national identity? What is the relationship between art’s material and aesthetic value? Do museums have an ethical obligation, if not a legal one, to grant restitution in response to legitimate claims? As the age of formal colonialism recedes into an ever-distant past, who ought to control artifacts still held in museums of former imperial powers? What lessons should we have learned from the German occupation of France that could have prevented the looting of the Iraqi National Museum following the 2003 U.S.-led invasion? What is the U.S. responsibility in helping Iraqis recover stolen items? Although I do not tackle all of these questions directly, the example of France during the Second World War sheds light on current cultural property disputes and the complicated relationship between governments, museums, and individuals—all coveting art.²⁹