

Preface

The history of memory has become a particularly dynamic field of research. Marked by pioneering works dealing with World War II, it has become established and is constantly growing both in France and elsewhere. I am thinking here primarily of works by Sylvie Lindeperg on representations of World War II in film, by Henry Rousso on the memory of Vichy, and by Annette Wieviorka on the memory of the Shoah. But although individual studies are abundant, works of synthesis are rare, and general readers seeking to inform themselves may experience great difficulty in tracing a path through the dense thicket of available works. This book is intended to fill this gap by presenting a political history of the French memory of the dark years.

The book began as a commission from the Direction de la mémoire, du patrimoine et des archives (DMPA) of the Ministry of Defense. Anxious to go beyond the borders of France, the ministry, perhaps seeking inspiration, wished to analyze foreign examples, which led it to issue a call for proposals; a group of fifteen researchers, headed by Antoine Prost and me, presented the winning proposal. Having taken on particularly the memory of World War II, I mentioned the project to Thierry Pech, then managing editor of *Le Seuil*, who jumped at the chance to suggest that I go into greater detail, a suggestion that I accepted with pleasure.

This book focuses on the study of public policy since the Liberation. It examines the debates, controversies, and disputes these policies provoked, as well as presenting a somewhat briefer consideration of the social and cultural history of that memory. This is not to suggest that those concerns are illegitimate or of secondary interest. Literary and artistic works have helped shape the contours of memory; imaginative representations play a major role in giving form to memory; and it is obvious that a good deal of memory comes through individual and family channels, creating

a circulation that may be hidden but that plays a decisive role. But that is not the subject of this book, which is intended primarily to define the influence of the dark years on political debate by considering the respective positions the state, political parties, and associations adopted in giving an account of them.