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There are few terms or concepts that have, in the last twenty or so years, rivaled "collective memory" for attention in the humanities and social sciences. Indeed, use of the term has extended far beyond scholarship to the realm of politics and journalism, where it has appeared in speeches at the centers of power and on the front pages of the world's leading newspapers. The current efflorescence of interest in memory, however, is no mere passing fad: it is a hallmark characteristic of our age and a crucial site for understanding our present social, political, and cultural conditions. Scholars and others in numerous fields have thus employed the concept of collective memory, sociological in origin, to guide their inquiries into diverse, though allegedly connected, phenomena. Nevertheless, there remains a great deal of confusion about the meaning, origin, and implication of the term and the field of inquiry it underwrites.

The Collective Memory Reader presents, organizes, and evaluates past work and contemporary contributions on the questions raised under the rubric of collective memory. Combining seminal texts, hard-to-find classics, previously untranslated references, and contemporary landmarks, it will serve as an essential resource for teaching and research in the field. In addition, in both its selections as well as in its editorial materials, it suggests a novel life-story for the field, one that appreciates recent innovations but only against the background of a long history.