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Willie T. Reaves, Jr. April 7, 2012

Revealing the Atrocities: Collective Memory and National Identity in Spain, From the Franco Regime to the Present Democracy

by

Willie T. Reaves, Jr.

Dr. Thomas D. Lancaster   
Adviser

Department of Interdisciplinary Studies in Culture and Society

Dr. Thomas D. Lancaster

Adviser

Dr. Peter Wakefield

Committee Member

Dr. Hazel Gold

Committee Member

Dr. Deborah Lipstadt

Committee Member

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Historical Memory, National Identity, and International Law in Spain: An Examination of Francisco Franco’s Effect on the Present

By

Willie T. Reaves, Jr.

Dr. Thomas D. Lancaster

Adviser

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Abstract

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The purpose of this project was to explore how atrocities committed by the authoritarian Franco dictatorship have affected the collective memory and national identity of Spaniards. My research led to five principal findings. First, that democratic Spain made a deliberate decision to give political amnesty to past human rights abusers in an effort to move forward, rather than looking back. Second, that the Franco regime attempted to reconstruct history to create a unified social memory. Third, that there are significant generational differences in Spaniards’ opinions of the Franco regime, as illustrated by my data. Fourth, that the national identity imposed upon Spaniards by the Franco regime has given way to an array of regional identities largely because the regime severely suppressed all non-conformist ideas and identities. Finally, this paper argues that Spaniards are only now learning about many atrocities of the past because the nation has reached the critical point at which nearly all of those citizens with first-hand experiences from the dictatorship have passed away.

In the same way that Spain experienced a transition to democracy in the late 1970s, the nation has undergone a gradual shift in memory of the past that has contributed to political discord in such areas as the Spanish National High Court. My analysis demonstrates that the creation or continuation of a national collective memory is integral to the stability of a national identity. While Spain is used here as a case study, many of my findings regarding collective memory and national identity may have bearing on other nations that have converted from authoritarian rule to democracy. This thesis details the way in which collective memory and forgetting can be legally and socially institutionalized, and how national identity hinges on a common conception of the past.

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