



© David Wu, UCLA Alan D. Leve
Center for Jewish Studies

Michael Rothberg, Ph.D.

Professor of English and Comparative Literature, 1939 Society Samuel Goetz
Chair in Holocaust Studies

University of California, Los Angeles

Born in 1966 in New Haven, Conn., USA
B.A. in English and Linguistics from Swarthmore College, Ph.D. in Comparative
Literature from the City University of New York Graduate Center

PROJECT

Comparison Controversies: Conflicts in Cultural Memory

Drawing on two decades of research on the memory of the Holocaust and other histories of political violence, I will focus on what I call “comparison controversies” – impassioned public debates that emerge from provocative historical comparisons or from the use of historical analogies to describe contemporary crises. My book, *Comparison Controversies: Conflicts in Cultural Memory*, will consider a series of case studies: debates about the comparison of the Holocaust in Germany, about fascism in the United States, and about the use of Holocaust analogies as responses to the COVID-19 pandemic and the crisis of global warming. Working from those cases, as well as from ongoing controversies such as the use of references to Nazism and the Holocaust in wars in Russia-Ukraine and the Middle East, it will seek to address urgent questions about the ethics and politics of comparison and about the uses and abuses of public memory. Indeed, the proliferation of comparison controversies in our day seems to correspond to the difficulty of understanding a present and a rapidly approaching future that are marked by social, ecological, and political emergencies. As crises unfold and catastrophes loom, we turn to the past for orientation – correctly, since historical analogies can help guide action in the present, but also with obvious disadvantages, since comparisons and analogies can only ever be imperfect instruments for measuring novel conditions. Without slighting an assessment of comparison’s flaws and dangers, *Comparison Controversies* will make an affirmative argument for the critical, indeed unavoidable, nature of comparison as a feature of human cognition and ethical action.

Recommended Reading

Rothberg, Michael. *Traumatic Realism: The Demands of Holocaust Representation*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000.

–. *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009.

–. *The Implicated Subject: Beyond Victims and Perpetrators*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2019.