Exhibiting the Holocaust: Museum Tour Narratives as Presentations of Institutional Post-Holocaust American Identity

Master's Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences
Brandeis University
Department of Near Eastern and Judaic Studies
Ellen Smith, Advisor
Jon Levisohn, Advisor

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for

Master's Degree

by
Zachary Albert

May 2012
Acknowledgements

I owe my deepest gratitude to my thesis advisor, Ellen Smith, whose patience, support, and guidance from the beginning of my graduate school career to my graduation has given me such a deep and rich passion for museum and material culture studies. Her courses and our conversations can be heard throughout this text. In short, this thesis could not have been written without her advice, reassurance, and suggestions.

I am grateful to have Jon Levisohn on my thesis committee. His dedication to his students is unparalleled, and through our conversations, he has provided direction and encouragement for this thesis. I would also like to thank Professors Jonathan Sarna and Antony Polonsky for their always edifying courses and discussions that helped to inform this study. My Brandeis experience would not have been the same without these historians, teachers, and role models.

I would like to thank the Robert D. Farber University Archives and Special Collections Department for giving me not only invaluable research and teaching experience, but for giving me a deeper understanding of the inner-workings of a collections and exhibitions department.

I sincerely appreciate the support of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum and the Museum of Jewish Heritage: A Living Memorial to the Holocaust in
making this study possible. Specific to the Museum of Jewish Heritage, I would like to thank Museum Director David Marwell, Director of Education Elizabeth Edelstein, Museum Educators Loren Silber and Bonnie Unger, and the generous support of the Gruss Lipper Foundation.

I am indebted to the incredible generosity of Wendy and Harry Brandon throughout my academic career, and the Brandeis University Near Eastern and Judaic Studies Graduate Tuition Remission grant for making this research possible.

Thank you to my friends and colleagues for being a source of laughter and joy, scholarship and support.

To my family, Mom, Dad, and Zoe, thank you for your constant and unconditional love, support, and encouragement.
ABSTRACT

Exhibiting the Holocaust: Museum Tour Narratives as Presentations of Institutional Post-Holocaust American Identity

A thesis presented to the Department of Near Eastern and Judaic Studies

Graduate School of Arts and Sciences
Brandeis University
Waltham, Massachusetts

By Zachary Albert

Holocaust museums on American soil not only offer visitors a mediated version of history, but they offer a position of post-Holocaust American identity. This thesis attempts to explore the ways in which two of the largest Holocaust museums in America – the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C. and the Museum of Jewish Heritage: A Living Memorial to the Holocaust in New York City – publish their message, and how these messages correspond to their understanding of their own museological and national identities.

As mainstream cultural institutions, these museums publish their message – first and foremost – through their principal exhibition narratives. These narrative scripts are educational devices, and often represent initial encounters by
contemporary American students with the events of the Holocaust. This investigation will attempt to understand how and to what end these narratives communicate intentionally constructed reflections of specific social, cultural, and political objectives.

This study promotes a more nuanced and comprehensive assessment of institutional identity and the ways in which history is exhibited. By concentrating on these narratives, *Exhibiting the Holocaust* will provide support for the argument that institutional identity directly informs a highly constructed depiction and experience of the Holocaust.
Prologue: My Hamsa or How Value Systems are Reflected Through Objects, Images, and Performances

My hamsa playfully dangles from my neck as I write this piece. It has been a part of me since the admittedly insignificant date of May 26, 2008. It had been two weeks since I had seen my family and friends, and it would be another three months before I would make it home again.

I had just finished a cup of Polish coffee from a café located in the Jewish quarter of Kraków. I went inside to pay, and found myself looking at an array of small, local jewelry pieces. This was hardly the “collecting souvenirs” kind of trip, but I thought a nice piece of Judaica might be appropriate. The small, silver hamsa with the Hebrew “chai” inside the palm captured my attention. Maybe it attracted me with its beauty and simplicity, or maybe I purchased it because I thought that having a defense against the “evil eye” in the coming months wouldn’t be a bad idea. You see, I was surrounded by death. I could feel it on my clothes and taste it in my food. It paralyzed my legs as I attempted to walk on cobblestones. I had been participating in a Holocaust Travel Seminar, a two-week course organized by professors from Rhodes College, Union University, and the University of Tennessee-Martin that had us studying in Germany, the Czech Republic, and Poland. I called it a two-week funeral. For me, the seminar was complete mourning: emotion

---

1 This text was originally written for the Brandeis University, Near Eastern and Judaic Studies Department, course 133A, “Art, Artifacts, and History,” Ellen Smith, professor (Spring, 2011). It has been re-worked for inclusion in this larger discussion of narrative and institutional identity.
superseded information. I had been studying the Holocaust since before I was Bar-Mitzvah, so the retelling of the graphic violence and terror was not the catalyst for my emotions. It seemed space - physical and mental - activated my feelings. The physical spaces entertained cruel paradoxes. On the one hand, visitors to the ghetto outside Terezín, Czech Republic walk past children playing soccer in a courtyard and mothers hanging clothes out to dry before entering the “model camp.” These contemporary families live in Terezín. They laugh and cook next to torture chambers. In the old Jewish Quarter of Prague, renovated synagogues act as commercial shells. The once ritual spaces are destinations for tourists. Are they intentional museums or accidental memorials? Answers only complicate. If they are intentional, how do these spaces counteract a Hitlerite vision of a museum to an “extinct people”? If they are accidental, how can a principal narrative surface that educates and respects?

For me, the physical space I encountered was in limbo between life and death, honor and desecration. In regard to mental space, I was alone. Not in an “angst-y teen poetry” way, but truly isolated. I was the lone Jew on the trip. As a Southern Jew, I have been bestowed the role of “token” a fair amount, but yet another reprisal did not shake my uneasiness. As we entered museums, synagogues-turned-museums, and concentration camps all eyes were “on me.” “How was Zach handling it?” “What does Zach think?” “What is Zach doing?” Was I to be the Jewish litmus test? Not only was I experiencing, I was also performing. Whether I liked it or not.
The other students on the trip wanted to see my purchase. I unfolded the small envelope holding the pendant, and placed the hamsa in my palm. I gave an extremely abridged history of the symbol, and then placed it on a silver necklace that once contained a Star of David I had received as a Bar Mitzvah present. Within the week, the trip ended in Poland and my classmates and professors boarded a plane back to the States. I had decided to remain in Europe and find ways to volunteer with the small, struggling Czech Jewish community of Ostrava. As the rest of the students flew home, I began a summer-long Jewish cemetery restoration project.

As the train barreled across the Polish countryside, from Warsaw to Ostrava, I was alone again. I remember optimistically thinking that my restoration project would act as a memorial to the lives of those whose funerals I had just attended. I could do what the families of these graves would have done had the Holocaust not come to Ostrava, and in that way honor their lives.

Well-past twelve o’clock the train arrived at Ostrava’s main station. Zuzanna, the English-speaking member of the thirty member Jewish community, was there with her husband waiting for me. She greeted me with a smile and hug, and explained that she would be taking me to my building: a dormitory converted into a hostel for the summer months. On the way, we talked about family, food, and some logistics about my stay. I remember staring out her car window and feeling a shock that our pleasant conversation was not corresponding to my view of “White Power” graffiti on highway walls and storage buildings marked with freshly tattooed swastikas. With every turn my hamsa clung to my chest. “What have I gotten myself
into?” I wondered. Before I could completely digest my own question, Zuzanna informed me that someone would call to let me know what I would be doing tomorrow. As she left, she cautioned, “It is probably best if you don’t tell people why you're here. Don’t tell them you’re Jewish.” This, coupled with the swastikas, was not becoming the “memorial” I had envisaged. I thanked Zuzanna and her husband for their help and hospitality, laid my backpack on the floor, and sat in my empty room.

The morning brought promise. But as afternoon approached, the promise soon faded with the waning prospect of plans. I found myself in this routine for the next few days. Waiting for a call, a call from someone I had never met, to take me to begin a project I had only imagined.

Then, one morning at 7:30am, about a week after I had arrived, Petr telephoned. He didn’t speak any English, but I took the sign of a call as evidence to investigate outside the building. Petr was there, waiting in his car. He smiled reluctantly as he looked at a napkin he had in his hand. He had scribbled some English and Czech words on the thin paper. He looked up from his “Rosetta napkin” and asked if we were going to the cemetery. I nodded my head and we drove off.

When we arrived at the cemetery in Hlučín, we got to work. For the first few days it was a “monkey-see, monkey-do” operation. I was never able to ask Petr,

---

2 Hlučín is a town in the Moravian-Silesian Region of the Czech Republic located 11 km northwest of Ostrava, Czech Republic. According to the International Association of Jewish Genealogical Societies International Jewish Cemetery Project, the Jewish population in 1930 totaled 21 individuals. The Jewish cemetery, founded in 1814, was “completely destroyed by the Nazis in 1942-1943” and tombstones were “used for a drainage trough.” In 1946, the Soviet army transferred Jewish remains to another location and used a portion of the cemetery for soldier burials. No stones are in their original locations. International Association of Jewish Genealogical Societies, “International Jewish Cemetery Project,” www.iajgsjewishcemetryproject.org/czech-republic/hlucin.html. Accessed on April 9, 2012.
“Why did you choose, as a non-Jew, to help these graveyards?” but I think in working side-by-side we explained to each other the importance of the activity. As I uncovered stones from brush, earth, and ditches, I felt a pride in knowing that there was not a more important place I could have been. I remember on one of the first days clouds formed in the distance, and then the rain began to beat down like a never-ending cliché. But as grass turned to mud, the rain brought a strange comfort. It saturated the ground and clung to the faded stones. Before my trip, a close friend and Holocaust survivor told me a story about how the Nazis gathered the Torah scrolls from his community and brought them to the town center.\textsuperscript{3} There, they put a match to them, creating a bonfire of defilement. For three days and three nights, the Torah scrolls were lit on fire, and for three days and three nights the rains came to quell the flames. In this, he understands, was a miracle. These tortured cemeteries feel that fire. Yet the rains come like family, like sons and daughters who perished in the flames of Auschwitz, to heal and help repair a tradition, a way of life, a religion that cannot be washed away.

This community and these cemeteries don’t know me, but somehow I feel like I know them. I feel this strong connection that is ingrained into every fiber of my being. And not to break the hearts of my Sunday school teachers, but I don’t think I received it through rigorous Hebrew school lessons or observance of every Jewish holiday. I think this sense of tradition - \textit{l’dor v’dor} - was given to me at birth. There is an old teaching that states, at birth, a newborn cries because it had learnt all of the Torah, all of HaShem’s words, and understood them perfectly. When the

\textsuperscript{3} Mike Jacobs, \textit{Holocaust Survivor: Mike Jacobs’ Triumph over Tragedy} (Eakin Press, 2001), 30-31.
child is born that knowledge is lost, and one must spend his or her life trying to find it again. That’s what I felt like I was doing in the cemeteries. When I brushed my fingers over the worn Hebrew on the stone tablets, I felt a shock in my soul that can only be described as hearing HaShem’s words for the first time, again.

As days turned to weeks and months, I worked in the cemeteries with Petr. As I uncovered headstones, pieced together broken fragments, and pulled weeds, my hamsa was with me. As it twisted and danced with my movements, it was brought to life by the memories it had been charged to keep. I may never know the origin of my connection to the cemeteries - although I am partial to the aforementioned fable - but I understand my hamsa as the bridge that connects my memory with action. Author Colleen McDannell utilizes the “Bible in the Victorian home” to explain an object’s physical power to contain religious emotion and memory.4 Similarly, my hamsa acts as a bank safe, collecting and saving certain sentiments and bonds of memories. Its literal closeness activates personal memories much like the Family Bible hymns sing of Bibles “pressed” and “clasped" to the body.5 The hamsa symbolizes the layers of my faith and it reminds me what is most valued in my life. It was also my only companion and keeper of my memories in Poland and the Czech Republic. Peter Burke understands that material culture is all about relationships.6 Objects don’t make any noise on their own: they need interaction in order to speak. My hamsa joined me later in my life - it wasn’t an

5 Ibid., 85.
6 See Peter Burke, Eyewitnessing: The Uses of Images As Historical Evidence (Cornell University Press, 2007).
heirloom or cherished family possession - but it accompanied me on a journey that undeniably created and defined its identity for me. Today, it continues to sway around my neck. The silver is tarnished and gives off the appearance of lead. It gives the charm a worn look to complement its rare collection of memories.

This introduction to the thesis is part autobiography and part methodology. While the travel seminar wasn’t my entry point into Holocaust studies, it was my first encounter with the Holocaust sites of Europe. It allowed me to experience these locations as museums and monuments, and meditate on meaning embedded in silver and stone. Across cultural, religious, and language barriers, I had a shared commitment to something. Specific to this study, the account of my hamsa serves to describe the possibilities of material culture as story-teller and story-collector. The story serves to pose foundational questions: What does the object look like? What is it made out of? What condition is it in? What can the language tell us about this object? What can tradition tell us about the importance of this object? The story also drives us to more probing questions: In a location bereft of Jews, how does one connect with Jewish history? Why is this object attached to this story? And, how does this object embody memories? All of these questions help to create a relationship to and a personal value system from the object.

My hamsa is attached to a particular place and time, but it also has come to carry a series of events and personal transformations that occurred during that
time. It resides simultaneously in the past and the future, links them, and defines meaning for both. It is a repository of new experiences and personal growth which in time becomes personal memory. The selective nature of purchase and collection identify my hamsa as a personal choice and a personal marker. At different points in my life, being “Jewish” was imposed on me. Now, it could be on my terms with my initial authority. This observation that I had power over the presentation of the things that identified me is similar to Stephen Weil’s young “Kelly” character and his revelation that, through the collection and ordering of materials, he could “raise kings and topple kingdoms. . . . Deity stirred within him.” A material integrated with experience, meaning, and self helps generate identity. Experience of place, plus action, plus material object creates a visceral, emotional, and permanent connection. The cemetery restoration project linked me with a specific Jewish past that wasn’t directly mine by cultivating these relationships among memory, material, and action.

An individual, as well as an institution, has the ability to create or destroy relationships, narratives, and identity. Just as Weil explains that there is great power that accompanies collecting, there is great power that accompanies ownership. Narrative, and especially historical narrative, deeply aids the formation and presentation of identity. What we decide to keep matters, and what we decide to omit matters as well. This Hamsa story has presented the narrative I wanted it to

---

7 Ellen Smith, Advisory Thesis Meeting, Brandeis University, April 2, 2012.
9 See Weil, “The Great and Renowned Kelly Sock Collection,” 127-131. The power discussed here, in an individual or institution, is the party’s ability to create hierarchy.
offer, the memory I choose to keep, and the only knowledge of the events you, the reader, can have. I chose to omit the episode with the Czech college students at a local pub, I cut the scene with the antisemitic volunteer in the cemetery, and I left out my day trip to play golf on the former Rothschild estate. Self-censorship is always at play as narrative gives you the power to construct the story you want to construct. My hamsa contains private memories, but through expressed narrative it becomes a public identity marker. At that point, it may be accessed and responded to by an audience. In the public ether, a specific and stylized narrative is subjected to the variety of audience responses and the range and fluidity of meaning. An audience forms a relationship with the narrative, the object, and the people involved; each with varying layers of accessibility and meaning. But in its genesis as an exhibited possession, my hamsa tells my narrative because I made that choice. Memory and identity are something we create, frameworks we construct, and narratives we enact. So it is with American Holocaust museum narratives, the central story of this thesis.
**Table of Contents**

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS iii  
ABSTRACT v  
PROLOGUE vii  
INTRODUCTION 1  
UNDER THE INFLUENCE OF MUSEUMS 6  
Holocaust Museums in America  
THE UNITED STATES HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL MUSEUM – A CASE STUDY 17  
Location, Location, Location  
Creation and Dissemination of Narrative  
Tour Performance  
Final Message  
THE MUSEUM OF JEWISH HERITAGE: A LIVING MEMORIAL TO THE HOLOCAUST – A CASE STUDY 46  
What’s in a Name?  
The Origin of Narrative: The Mission Statement  
Tour Performance  
Final Message  
EXHIBITING THE HOLOCAUST, EXHIBITING THE SELF 67  
BIBLIOGRAPHY 79
Introduction

This study attempts to position American Holocaust memorialization within the context of the key American Holocaust museum narratives, tour scripts, and exhibition displays. The personal story recounted in this thesis’ preface may serve as a microcosm of the museum’s ability to construct and control its own narrative and so create both a particular Holocaust memory and a post-Holocaust American identity. The two museums central to this study – the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM) in Washington, D.C. and the Museum of Jewish Heritage: A Living Memorial to the Holocaust (MJH) in New York City – shed light on the American, Jewish, and Jewish-American understandings of the European Holocaust. Both institutions consciously attempt to intersect and merge American and Jewish ideals, interests, and values, often with one perspective dominating another for specific purposes to be discussed.

The post-Holocaust American identity in this study is the unique perspective of a foreign entity imposing its democratic principles on the events of the Holocaust. The “American” values detailed in the Declaration of Independence inform the study of this history. This identity attempts to use “certain inalienable rights” to create a story of universal significance. The post-Holocaust Jewish American identity displays similar perspectives as the post-Holocaust American identity, but with the significant added difference of a Jewish experience and viewpoint that makes the
study of the Holocaust more of an insider or personal account. While the museums being studied are directed at a Jewish experience, they also attempt to create a universal meaning. A Holocaust museum’s institutional identity, then, is the official collaboration and combination of a post-Holocaust identity and a location. The institutional identity signals its mission and narrative.

Since their dedications – the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum in 1993 and the Museum of Jewish Heritage in 1997 – these museums have welcomed a combined estimated total of 31.5 million visitors.\(^\text{10}\) Of that number at least one-third are school children on educational field trips. At the Museum of Jewish Heritage, these students take guided tours in the form of a docent-led tour, a group tour, or gallery lecture. These docent tours in particular have become an “educational mainstay” of museums worldwide.\(^\text{11}\) Docent tours incorporate an oral and a visual presentation of information found within the museum. At the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum, the tour is self-guided and facilitated by the informational panels of the exhibit. Many of these audience visits, and the majority of these tours, represent the visitors’ first experiences in a museum about the Holocaust. Therefore the education patrons receive is not only important to further lines of personal inquiry, but it is important to the ways in which patrons situate

---

\(^{10}\) Since 1993, the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum has welcomed more than 30 million visitors, including more than 9 million school children and 91 heads of state. Today, 90 percent of the USHMM’s visitors are not Jewish. According to the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum, “About the Museum,” http://www.ushmm.org/museum/about/.


themselves in regard to the event, experience, and memorialization of the Holocaust. As student and adult groups are led through the museum, they receive a version of mediated history as well as a window into an institution’s understanding of itself – both with the conscious intention of shaping the visitor’s understanding of and response to the Holocaust.12

By studying the narrative scripts of these tours found within the core exhibitions of two of the largest Holocaust museums in America, we may better understand how these museums present their specific position of post-Holocaust identity. Situated in bastions of American heritage, the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington D.C. and the Museum of Jewish Heritage in New York City offer ideal sites for this investigation. Museums in general, and these museums in particular, are places “where Americans first learn, and later reassure themselves, about their culture, history, environment, or technology.”13 These museums have developed intentionally constructed narratives that reflect specific educational, cultural, social, national, and political goals and in doing so tell us deep truths about institutional identity construction, the process of memory collecting, and the presentation of mediated histories.

The first chapter of this thesis discusses the impact and influence museums have on society. It looks at museums in general as public-centric institutions interested in conveying a specific and focused message. It also examines the phenomenon of Holocaust museums in America and how they relate to the grand

---

study of history. The second chapter examines the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum, its mission, and its self-guided tour method. Here, the museum’s tour narrative is unpacked and understood as a facilitator for American institutional identity. Chapter three focuses on the Museum of Jewish Heritage, its educational mission, and its inquiry-based tour method. Similarly, its tour script will be studied as a presentation of Jewish-American institutional identity. Both of the museums’ locations, tour styles, information, and target audiences will play a central role in their respective narratives. The final chapter explains the importance of understanding these Holocaust museums as political institutions with narratives that support their political goals. This section compares the differences in the narrative identities of the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum and the Museum of Jewish Heritage. There is also a discussion of the museums’ responsibilities to the public and the possible purposes of Holocaust museums in the future. Lastly, this chapter reiterates the themes of memory, narrative, and identity in order to deliberate on the subjectivity and limits of Holocaust museums and the legacy of Holocaust memory in America today.

Methodologically, this thesis is the product of on-site research at the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum and the Museum of Jewish Heritage and extensive touring of each institution’s principal exhibitions. At the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum, the Wexner Center provided access to the resources used in the permanent exhibition. The Library and Archival Collections located in the Center for Advanced Holocaust Studies provided a closer look at the museum’s history and the formation of the permanent exhibition. At the Museum of Jewish Heritage, I was
granted an intimate experience by being named a spring 2012 Lipper Intern for the Lipper Intern School Partnership Program. This program connects interns with public secondary schools throughout the Northeast in order to teach about the Holocaust and Jewish heritage. As an intern, I participated in a training workshop at the museum where I studied the “Meeting Hate with Humanity: Life during the Holocaust” tour script in particular, and the museum’s collections, exhibitions, and education departments in general. I also led museum tours to a variety of schools from Connecticut, Massachusetts, New York, and Rhode Island. The secondary readings and research influential in this project include: studies on Holocaust history; America and the Holocaust; approaches to studying and interpreting the Holocaust; pedagogical practices and educational principles in teaching the Holocaust; narrative and meaning in Holocaust memorials and museums; museum politic; and the limits and possibilities of contemporary museums.
1) Under the Influence of Museums

“The mere choice of facts presented in an exhibition offers a definite point of view. When selecting historical data, one must consider what to exclude, what to emphasize and why. . . . A statement made by a museum carries great weight. It implies final authority and eternal remembrance.”


Museums are a crucial tool used by society to depict the present and remember the past. As places of public instruction, collective imagination, and personal reflection, museums influence the ways in which nations and individuals define and represent themselves. Museums today differ from their predecessors in that they are no longer cabinets of curiosities that “merely provide a pleasant refuge from ordinary life, nor are they simply repositories of received wisdom.” In the nineteenth century, many major museums served as “vital outposts for the civilizing mission of that time’s ‘pedagogical state’.” Today, museums continue to act as antennas or outposts for a variety of social, political, and cultural trends. Museums are not simply about presenting objects, but they are about transmitting a message. Museums and their exhibitions offer order, meaning, and influence. Part of the institutions’ power lies in the influence they can have over an audience’s perception.

---

15 Steven C. Dubin, Displays of Power: Controversy in the American Museum from the Enola Gay to Sensation (New York University Press, 1999), 5.
of a historical event. The purpose of museums, which is becoming more public-centric every day, is to situate ideas with and within items. The art of the metonym, as Barbara Kishenblatt-Gimblett maintains, “accepts the inherently fragmentary nature of the object” or item.\textsuperscript{17} It is a part that stands in for a whole. Artistically, this is not an attempt to re-create environments, but re-create memories. Educationally, it is an attempt to re-create ideas. Museums have the ability to “solidify culture” and “endow it with a tangibility, in a way few other things do.”\textsuperscript{18} Exhibitions and collections can teach, inspire, and honor. They can act as a conduit to the past and to memorialization. They have the ability to challenge a community and to engender conversation. Yet, museums can only engage in these actions if they can form significant relationships with their patrons. Audiences are not \textit{tabula rasa}; they experience museum narratives in the context of their own personal experiences. Audience perception can challenge and alter an institutionally constructed message, and museums understand this in their attempts to generate educational, entertaining, and aesthetic displays.

Every museum tries to stimulate curiosity by “present[ing] an artful display of artifacts and ideas to entertain and educate its visitors.”\textsuperscript{19} Engendering curiosity is still a mainstay technique from the culture of some of the earliest museums. It is this element that holds the strongest pull to define museums as entertainment centers. Their power to define and legitimize a particular narrative defines these institutions at worst as manipulators and at best as stylized public textbooks. As

\textsuperscript{17} Barbara Kishenblatt-Gimblett, \textit{Destination Culture: Tourism, Museums, and Heritage} (University of California Press, 1998), 19.
\textsuperscript{18} Dubin, \textit{Displays of Power}, 3.
Timothy Luke contends, "[Museum exhibitions are] a materialized ideological narrative, fabricating its own focalized normative code of practices and values out of peculiarly arranged displays with historical artifacts, corporate products, natural organisms, technological devices, or art works."\(^\text{20}\)

In general, a museum’s role is constructed by its creators, producers, curators, educators, and funders and then takes on the challenge of convincing its public that such a role is legitimate. In public institutions, like the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum and the Museum of Jewish Heritage, these “constructors” still maintain an authoritative role, yet its relationship with the public is more symbiotic. That is, the role is conferred on them by a willing public and then the museum must continue to legitimate its role to its constituents and its patrons.

Most current debates about memorialization, monuments, and museums revolve around competing narratives. Every institution constructs and disseminates their narrative based on a range of influences: self-interest, choice, perspective, privilege, needs, audience, and varying other categories, in order to shape and influence its patrons toward particular perspectives and practices.\(^\text{21}\) The goals and techniques of the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum and the Museum of Jewish Heritage in these efforts are the subject of this study.

Holocaust museums are a strong place to conduct this study of post-Holocaust American identity because these institutions use objects and tour narratives as entry points for understanding the perceived values and circumstances of the past as well as the aspirational values and circumstances of the


\(^{21}\) Advisory Thesis Meeting, April 2, 2012.
“Material objects matter,” explains scholar Ann Smart Martin, “because they are complex, symbolic bundles of social, cultural, and individual meanings fused into something we can touch, see, and own.”22 Throughout history, people have been studied and identified through the objects which they make, buy, own, use, and display. While the majority of objects in individuals’ lives are used, rather than displayed on a museum pedestal, they are nonetheless publically presented.23 For example, my hamsa makes the translation from personal use to official public display the moment it becomes visible around my neck and its narrative transitions from penned to published. The private and institutional context of a selected object imposes huge changes and perceptions on them, but both are selective displays, and both illuminate an exhibition of identity through material manifestation. Purchases and subsequent displays are by no means arbitrary. The material world is intentional; individuals and institutions give context to and form complex relationships with objects. The ownership of an item confirms the identity associated with it. In the realm of the individual, Samuel Heilman explains, “What I buy or own displays what I am.”24 This statement easily makes the transformation into the realm of the communal: “What [museums] buy or own displays what [museums] are.”

In this study, I am not attempting to write a comprehensive history from a material culture source, but rather to write about museums about history (and more

---

specifically about museum narrative scripts about history). Museum tours combine oral and visual presentation elements to discuss the objects within an institution that define its values and identity. Today, more and more museums incorporate “museum educators” – those with a significant knowledge of the institution’s collection and the institution’s mission statement, and with some degree of pedagogical training and skills – to present their exhibition of history. These educators present and perform the tour scripts and, like the objects on display and the official mission statement before them, provide carefully constructed but valuable portals into consciously presented history and identity.

In an increasingly demanding socially, culturally, and educationally minded society, the role of the museum, the museum educator, and the museum tour script is as important as it has ever been.\textsuperscript{25} It is precisely for this reason that we, as a society, must consider the dialogue between museological memory, narrative, and identity in order to productively situate ourselves as coherent, understandable, and valuable human beings in the world.

\textit{Holocaust Museums in America}

Greig Crysler and Abidin Kusno define a Holocaust museum as a “space that collects, classifies, and arranges artifacts, testimonies, and documentary evidence, etc., in order to present a specific audience...with a narrative or set of narratives

about the Holocaust.”26 Holocaust museums have generally taken upon themselves the tasks to educate the general public about the Holocaust, to preserve and display certain memories, and to combat Holocaust denial. Yet they are no more impervious to cultural, educational, and identity politics than any other museum or institution. As history is traditionally a narrative of victors, “unflattering, embarrassing, or dissonant viewpoints are typically unwanted.”27 Collateral and “secondary” experiences are often swallowed up by those grand, epic, dominant narratives. We often witness victory history in American public education while studying Christopher Columbus and the colonization of “America,” Thomas Jefferson’s use of Manifest Destiny, and the U.S. involvement in the World Wars. Museums, containing “ratified claims of superiority,” subject these hidden collateral experiences to the traditional grand or national narrative.28 This thesis is not meant to argue for or against the inclusion of the stifled narrative, but rather to explain that museums are always competing organizations. One museum’s history narrative is not the narrative of history. Rather, museums practice history just as doctors practice medicine and lawyers practice law. We should never lose sight of the fact that all narratives surround, compliment, and contradict each other, none of them being the definitive account of history.

James E. Young makes clear the importance of the study of commemorative forms to the grand study of history, stating, “historical inquiry [is] the combined

27 Dubin, Displays of Power, 3.
28 Ibid., 3.
study of both *what happened and how it is passed down* to us.”

The Holocaust memorialization process encompasses not only the event, but also its transmission. In Holocaust museums, exhibits and educational tours offer history, remembrance, hope, and unity in the form of community building. Both the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum and the Museum of Jewish Heritage situate the Holocaust in this “redemptive endeavor” of community building. The U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum attempts to define America based on the events of the Holocaust “over there.” The museum identifies the tragedy of the Holocaust as a clear victory for the superiority of American ideals and values. The Museum of Jewish Heritage attempts to understand Jewish heritage based on the events of the Holocaust “within personal memory.” The museum identifies the tragedy of the Holocaust within the greater narrative of 20th century Jewish life and the loss of humans and humanity that impacts us all. The approach reinforces the American narrative that individuals are important, and define the state – not vice-versa. In both cases, these “American” messages are global and generalizable. The museums’ constructed narratives focus on a particular people in a particular time in a foreign place, but transcend these borders to convey a relatable, U.S. nationalistic, and humanistic message.

In this case study, the struggle over representation and interpretation might not carry the same weight of the so-called “culture wars of the late 1980s and 1990s,” but they nonetheless reveal important information about the displays of

---


30 Whereas strictly artistic memorialization efforts are often categorized as part of an anti-redemptive movement, museum educational and curatorial departments are understood as redemptive endeavors.

history exhibited.\textsuperscript{32} Based on physical location (the National Mall), core exhibition (The Holocaust: Nazi Assault, Final Solution, and Last Chapter), and primary mission statement (devoid of any mention of “Jews”) of the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum, it can be surmised that it is an American institution whose primary obligation is the dissemination of “Holocaust knowledge” as it affected and effects a generalized American audience. Conversely, the Museum of Jewish Heritage, whose physical location (New York City, with sightlines to the Statue of Liberty and Ellis Island) and core exhibition (Jewish Life A Century Ago, The War Against the Jews, and Jewish Renewal) operates exclusively as a “living memorial” to the six million Jewish victims of the Holocaust and presents a narrative of Jewish community and continuity defining the museum as a Jewish or Jewish-American institution.

Questions of “uniqueness” abound when teaching and presenting Holocaust history. Holocaust museums must question and determine if their unique narrative will create a hierarchy of suffering of Holocaust narratives or of other genocidal events. Yet, the number of Holocaust museums, and moreover, the number of Holocaust museums in America, describes a society specifically interested in Holocaust study.\textsuperscript{33} Many students and scholars question, “Why feature or privilege the Holocaust over any other attack on humanity?” Its alleged uniqueness cries “never again,” yet genocide has and is happening again. If the Holocaust is unique or particular in some fashion, yet mass killing and systematic genocide are not exclusive to Nazi Europe, then what is the unique element? One could argue that the

\textsuperscript{32} For information regarding the “culture wars” and the ways in which “symbolic politics…replac[ed] realpolitik” see Dubin, \textit{Displays of Power}, 2.

\textsuperscript{33} This interested in Holocaust study stems from a combination of the American Holocaust survivors and the Jewish community as well as local and national governments finding the study political advantageous. For more information see Peter Novick, \textit{The Holocaust in American Life} (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1999).
overwhelming uniqueness lies in its aftermath: the quantity of museums, memorials, and public Holocaust education institutions that have been created on American soil.\textsuperscript{34} One is hard-pressed to find another American institution that focuses directly on an event that did not take place on American soil and that did not feature an American presence for the majority of the event. While it is true that a large number of Holocaust survivors immigrated to the United States, the phenomenon of the American Holocaust museum is no less curious.\textsuperscript{35} The presence of survivors in America cannot solely explain the number of American Holocaust institutions.

For most Americans, the Holocaust as an event took place on a different continent in a different time. This geographical and temporal distance allows American museums to view the Holocaust through a conscious institutionalized lens, whether through an American or Jewish-American lens. The U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum understands America’s primary role in the Holocaust as a liberator. Americans liberated the Jews of Europe, but more so, liberated Europe from Nazism. American values, such as democracy and the unalienable rights of the individual, are “antithetical to the values of the Nazi state,” and therefore the easiest to display in concrete terms.\textsuperscript{36} The U.S Holocaust Memorial Museum valorizes

\textsuperscript{34} Other “unique” elements surely include the Nuremberg Trials in 1945-1946 as well as the creation of the State of Israel in 1948, but for this study, the Holocaust as an American phenomenon is undoubtedly a unique situation.

\textsuperscript{35} The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum and the Shoah Foundation document roughly 300,000 Holocaust survivors that immigrated to America. See Edward T. Linenthal, \textit{Preserving Memory: The Struggle to Create America’s Holocaust Museum} (New York: Viking, 1995).

\textsuperscript{36} Alexandria Fanjoy, “Mapping a Blindspot: Perpetrators, Shoah, and American Jewish Holocaust Education” (MA Thesis, Brandeis University, 2011), 14. Fanjoy argues that this core contrast implies that the Holocaust is something that could never happen in the United States.
freedom and liberty while it demonizes the Nazi political theory as restrictive, unjust, and inhumane.

The Museum of Jewish Heritage illuminates the centrality of Jews and Judaism in the Holocaust. In terms of the Holocaust, this museum displays Jews as victims, resisters, survivors, and immigrants. The core exhibition also showcases the Jewish religious and cultural artifacts and the lives of the once thriving European Jewish communities. As a museum in New York City, it too, is afforded the distance to speak about the Holocaust through an American lens. However, this institution understands its presentation of Holocaust history as specifically Jewish.

In the years prior to any Holocaust museum in America, Lucy Dawidowicz in Ronald Berger’s *Fathoming the Holocaust* spoke in favor of New York as the site for a national Holocaust museum, arguing that it was the “center of the Jewish population in the United States and the cultural crossroads of the modern world.”37 Proponents of a national museum in Washington, D.C. felt that it would locate the Holocaust deep within American national memory and an American national identity. Now with a major Holocaust museum in each location, hindsight allows us to declare that both arguments were workable and relevant. Site selection is equivalent to self-censorship by a leadership to emphasize the positive aspects of the role of the United States or the positive aspects of the American-Jewish community.38 Museum location possesses a power to “shape collective values and social understandings in

---

a decisively important fashion.” After the creation of a mission, selection of a location, and organization of an exhibition, the tour narrative performance highlights – on a daily and ongoing way – the museum’s social, political, and cultural perspective in a direct conversation with the visitor.

2) The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum – A Case Study

Upon its dedication on April 22, 1993, the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, designed by architect James Ingo Freed, became America’s national Holocaust museum. Located among the American monuments “to freedom on the National Mall,” the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum offers a “powerful lesson in the fragility of freedom, the myth of progress, [and] the need for vigilance in preserving democratic values.” 40 Its inception began fifteen years earlier in 1978 when then-President Jimmy Carter announced his intention to create the President’s Commission on the Holocaust with the aim to design an American memorial to the Holocaust. 41 The result became the $147 million federally-supported U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum and its permanent place adjacent to the National Mall in Washington, D.C. This location situates the history of the Holocaust within American time and space. The narrative that it tells relies heavily on the American ideals of democracy, pluralism, and universalism. As the museum understands itself to contain a “unique power and authenticity,” feasibly derived from its location and governmental provenance, it attempts to teach people about the “dangers of unchecked hatred and the need to prevent genocide...encourage[ing] them to act, cultivating a sense of moral responsibility...so that they will respond to the

41 See Linenthal, Preserving Memory.
monumental challenges that confront our world.” At this institution, the events of the Holocaust function to provide valuable lessons regarding freedom, liberty, democracy, and morality. It is an American institution with a distinctly American voice. As former Project Director of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (1988-1993) and Director of the museum’s Holocaust Research Institute (1993-1997), Michael Berenbaum explains the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum as “a national memorial doesn't have the liberty to create an exclusively Jewish” presentation. Undoubtedly, there is a focus on the Jewish experience of the Holocaust, but the ultimate message is less about Jewish memory and more about universal freedom and morality.

A Jewish narrative is in no way subliminal at the museum. Artifacts and photographs donated by Jewish survivors and their family members populate the exhibition cases and walls. However, the Jewish narrative is constantly second to the American narrative; a narrative favoring a global reach in the name of democracy. In that manner, the core exhibition is identical to each visitor, yet the experience is individualized through the use of the identification card booklets. These booklets, separated by gender and received upon entering the core exhibition, grant visitors a constructed identity. Of the roughly 600 identity cards, the majority are constructed Jewish identities, but the cards also construct identities out of Roma.

45 For a full set of identification cards see the Wexner Learning Center located within the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. For a small sample used by the division of education as a resource for the classroom see http://www.ushmm.org/education/foreducators/resource/pdf/idcards.pdf.
and Sinti, Jehovah’s Witnesses, and French Huguenot resistance fighters, among others.\textsuperscript{46} The individual’s story found within the booklet is available to the visitor from the beginning of the exhibition, and therefore it does not have the effect of uncovering a personal history as the larger narrative unfolds throughout the museum. Though this lessens the impact of a constructed identity, it also reduces the problematic nature of saying: “This is your identification card.” This burdensome gift, however problematic, immediately personalizes each visitor’s experience. To uphold the values of life and liberty becomes essential as the visitor is chosen to embody this temporary identity rather than merely empathize with it. It is an attempt by the museum to “eschew forever the role of the bystander” by making every visitor a player in the Holocaust and a victim of Nazi policy.\textsuperscript{47} However, it is difficult to argue the ways in which the American narrative from 1933 until December 7, 1941 wasn’t the narrative of a bystander.\textsuperscript{48} In this museum, America’s non-existent and negative roles in the Holocaust are minimized for the positive effects of American involvement, namely the military and ideological defeat of the Nazis and the liberation of the concentration camps. The liberation of concentration camp inmates, however, was not “by any means an American priority,” yet it is “featured as though it had been one of the prime reasons for America’s involvement in World War II.”\textsuperscript{49} The U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum filters the “master narrative of the Holocaust” through a lens that chooses to

\textsuperscript{46} The identification cards are a mixture of true, fictionalized, and composite accounts of survivor and victim stories. The number of cards is estimated online to be 600, yet one of the cards that I received during my tour was numbered 5204.
\textsuperscript{47} Linenthal, \textit{Preserving Memory}, 171.
\textsuperscript{48} In this context, I am defining “bystander” as a witness and the antithesis of a participant.
\textsuperscript{49} Saidel, \textit{Never Too Late to Remember}, 220.
enhance America’s positive role during and after the Holocaust. It is also a fertile
ground to endorse pro-American, anti-fascist values. In other words, the museum
consolidates Holocaust experience within an American national narrative of
freedom and liberation that grants the oppressed in the U.S. and abroad that
freedom.\(^{50}\)

**Location, Location, Location**

The real estate agent’s adage about location determining success and value
rings true not only in the tourist sense (placing a museum where the most people
will see it and visit it; i.e. foot-traffic), but in the ideological sense as well (placing a
museum in a specific geographic area in order to reflect certain social and political
values). In the nation’s capital, the Holocaust is viewed through a distinctly
American venue. Reflected in the memorials and monuments that surround it (and
in part, the various heads of state that visit it), the museum exists as a continuation
of this larger American saga. As Berenbaum speculated prior to the museum’s
have been the painful and parochial memories of a bereaved ethnic community [the
Jews] and apply them to the most basic of American values. Located adjacent to the
National Mall – surrounded by the Smithsonian Institution, [the World War II
Memorial,] and the monuments of Lincoln, Jefferson, and Washington – the building
and its contents are being designed with the neighbors in mind so that the
Holocaust Museum will emerge as an American institution and will speak to the

---

\(^{50}\) Advisory Thesis Meeting, April 23, 2012.
national saga.” In other words, the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum’s “social construction of reality” – the way in which historical facts are presented – is directly “related to its official government status” and its chosen location. Regardless of location, any reputable Holocaust museum would provide a basic history of the Holocaust and most likely a clear memorialization attempt. But, location has the power to offer an added viewpoint and an added authority to the previously presented Holocaust history. This national museum is “designed to be a shrine that projects the political message of ‘America, the righteous.’ The message here, although the museum clearly memorializes and teaches about the Holocaust, is a more specifically American and more universal message than that of the projected New York museum.” While this statement about an American vs. Jewish narrative is made prior to the completion of the museum in New York City, it maintains its integrity today. (Although there is a universal message that can be and is drawn from the Museum of Jewish Heritage’s core exhibition). As visitors leave Washington's core exhibition, they “bump squarely into the seal of the United States” accompanying the Elie Wiesel inscription “For the dead and the living we must bear witness.” This “Americanization” of the Holocaust and Holocaust memorialization does not make the overall message any less significant or universal,

52 Saidel, *Never Too Late To Remember*, 218.
53 Ibid., 219.
54 Ibid., 220.
but it is something that must be understood in order to fully absorb the narrative the institution propagates, and why it can comfortably have government sanction in a nation where church and state are separated.\textsuperscript{55}

\textit{Creation and Dissemination of Narrative}

While the museum has only been open for two decades, it has welcomed more than 30 million visitors, including more than 9 million school children.\textsuperscript{56} As one-third of the visitors are school children on museum tours, the tour narrative plays a significant role in these students’ experience of the Holocaust and Holocaust education. Due to the size of the institution and the number of students that visit, the museum elected to present the permanent exhibition using a completely self-guided tour.\textsuperscript{57} Using a self-guided tour is strictly a lecture style experience with the visitor unable to interact with or contest the omnipotent voice of the museum. This style of presentation creates a constant tour script experience for each visitor: there are no variables in the performance of the museum’s narrative.

This distribution model allows the museum to reach the largest quantity of people in the quickest way possible.\textsuperscript{58} This is reflected in the museum’s mission to

\textsuperscript{55} Advisory Thesis Meeting, April 23, 2012.
\textsuperscript{57} Tour guides are available for special exhibits, but they are designed to be self-guided as well. The special and temporary exhibits are also beginning to experiment with technology and interactive elements to facilitate the museum experience. The permanent exhibition has some docent led tours (usually reserved for special groups and/or political dignitaries), but they don’t make up a large enough percentage to focus on. Interestingly for school groups, their teachers are often faced with the choice of allowing the museum to lead the students through the exhibit or to take on the role of “museum expert” themselves through the guidance of the museum’s online tools. See http://www.ushmm.org/visit/groups/information/tourguides/.
\textsuperscript{58} This lecture format has seeped into the museum’s online campaign as well. According to the museum, its website receives visitors from over “100 different countries daily” with “hundreds of thousands of online visitors from countries with majority Muslim populations.” With this influx of online visitors from
“broaden public understanding of the history of the Holocaust” and to serve a global constituency as “America's national institution for the documentation, study, and interpretation of Holocaust history” and to serve as America’s “memorial to the millions of people murdered during the Holocaust.” 59 It is significant to report that this mission statement does not mention any of the peoples involved in the event nor does it make any mention of Jewish victims or survivors. It is as vague and universal as it possibly can be. The statement goes on to explain that the museum is in place to “advance and disseminate knowledge about this unprecedented tragedy; to preserve the memory of those who suffered; and to encourage its visitors to reflect upon the moral and spiritual questions raised by the events of the Holocaust as well as their own responsibilities as citizens of a democracy.” 60 Again, the “memory of those who suffered” is invoked, but we are not told whose memory specifically. Obviously the museum has no interest in honoring or expressing the memory of those German soldiers who suffered during World War II and the countries with majority Muslim populations, the museum is focusing on translating the website into Arabic and Farsi. Portions of the “world’s leading online authority on the Holocaust” are available in more than 20 languages. The reason for the specific and lone “Muslim” inclusion can be understood as a political move. In the recent past, Iranian president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad called for the “International Conference to Review the Global Vision of the Holocaust” which many scholars and news media described as a “Holocaust Denial Conference.” Other country’s with a majority Muslim population have denied, questioned, or praised the events of the Holocaust. These claims are wholly political and often aimed at the American Jewish population and its power within American international policy and at the State of Israel. It seems that the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum is attempting to present the use of education as the ultimate response to anti-American and antisemitic sentiments. The effectiveness of the website in this battle remains to be seen.

museum surely does not want to find itself in a “Bitburg” style controversy, yet the question remains: “Who is this museum for?”

Based on its location, tour script, and visitor demographic information, the museum is designed for non-Jewish middle and high school students and proponents of democratic citizenship. The permanent exhibition moves through three floors, starting from the top: “Nazi Assault – 1933 to 1939,” “The ‘Final Solution’ – 1940 to 1945,” and “Last Chapter.”

The museum’s first reference to the Jewish victims is found within its definition of the Holocaust as a “state-sponsored, systematic persecution and annihilation of European Jewry by Nazi Germany and its collaborators between 1933 and 1945.” The museum declares that the Jews were the primary targets and victims under Nazi tyranny, yet explicitly states the Gypsies, the handicapped, homosexuals, Jehovah’s witnesses, the Poles, political dissidents, and Soviet prisoners of war were also targets for oppression or “destruction or decimation for racial, ethnic, or national reasons.” By consciously including these other important and silenced voices, the museum presents Holocaust history as an outsider with

---

61 In 1985, President Ronald Reagan planned a visit with West German Chancellor Helmut Kohl to the Bitburg Military Cemetery which contained the graves of 49 members of the Waffen-SS. There Reagan and Kohl would “lay a wreath […] in the spirit of reconciliation, in a spirit of forty years of peace, in a spirit of economic and military compatibility.” After public outcry from major Jewish organizations and Holocaust survivors, Reagan made matters worse by equating dead German soldiers with the victims of the Holocaust. See Encyclopaedia Judaica, under “Bitburg Controversy,” http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/.
authority and answers. Again, America is a liberator and American life is a “melting pot” of freedom and equality. Albert Abramson, an American Jewish lay leader and supporter of the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum, believed that the final message of the museum must “convey hope in order to satisfy the American public.”66 This “happy ending syndrome” quickly, albeit incompletely, answers the question: “Why study this narrative?” Hope as a lesson of the Holocaust is quite important and can be seen throughout a majority of Holocaust museums. But the ways in which this hope is conveyed in the Washington museum make it undeniably American.67 The hope that a future after Auschwitz will be brighter is tempered by a call to the American understanding of morality and justice.

Tour Performance

The tour begins even before one enters the permanent exhibition. In the lobby, the building sets the tone for the exhibition narrative. Exposed brick, steel beams, concrete, black marble, and glass give the environment an industrial, oppressive, barracks-style feel. Yet the artifacts and quotes on display – the “Flags of 20 U.S. Army Divisions Active in Liberating Nazi Concentration Camps,” excerpts from the Declaration of Independence, and the “National Flags of the Liberators” – bring out an inspirational and patriotic mood.68 The museum lobby is an

66 Linenthal, Preserving Memory, 251.
67 The museum presents America as the happiest ending of all. Advisory Thesis Meeting 23, 2012.
68 “Flags of 20 US Army Divisions Active in Liberating Nazi Concentration Camps” can be viewed from the 14th street SW entrance. The Declaration of Independence quote, “All men are created equal that they are endowed by their creator with certain unalienable rights; …among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness,” can be viewed from the 15th street SW entrance. The “National Flags of the Liberators” can be clearly viewed through the large cut-outs of the black marble. These flags – US, Canada, France, Italy
amalgamation of Nazi cruelty and American resolution. The entire permanent exhibition is sandwiched between this dichotomy of Nazism and Americanism. The “Hall of Remembrance,” the final stop on the exhibition tour, features a memorial fire with the quote: “Here lies earth gathered from death camps, concentration camps, sites of mass execution, and ghettos in Nazi-occupied Europe, and from cemeteries of American soldiers who fought and died to defeat Nazi Germany.” In this stylized mass grave, American liberators physically combine with the memories of these distinctly anti-American sites. This blend of earth memorializes the American military and their sacrifice, but it also shows the strength of American ideals to symbolically and literally burrow into Nazi soil in order to transform it and de-Nazify it. These American liberation narratives bookend the permanent exhibition as well as weave themselves throughout the Holocaust narrative to extoll American life and liberty. Moreover, it acts as a constant rationale for having a Holocaust museum in the United States, for telling an American narrative of the Holocaust, and for having a stake in Holocaust history.

This American narrative of the Holocaust speaks, at times, from a Jewish tradition, but expresses it to an American-Christian and international audience. The main quote in the lobby, “You are my witness,” is from Isaiah 43:10 and is understood as a victim’s plea for American response and intervention. The “you” in the statement is directed at the 90% non-Jewish individuals who visit the museum, and the “my” represents the victims of the Holocaust.

---

(Partisan Unit), New Zealand, Poland, UK, USSR, and Yugoslavia (Partisan Unit) – are displayed with the corresponding camps that they liberated.

To understand the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum’s presentation of a Holocaust narrative, it will be beneficial to separate this discussion into three themes, or lenses with which the museum exhibits its artifacts and texts: American presence, Jewish presence, and Nazi presence. The American presence manifests itself through the specific American actions and reactions to the events of the Holocaust. This includes American quotes, photographs, videos, and flags, among other artifacts. The Jewish presence in the museum exhibits itself primarily through memorial elements that speak from a Jewish tradition of commemoration. The Nazi presence expresses itself as the anti-America. Occasionally, Nazi artifacts and ideologies are presented from a Nazi lens, but only to show the stark contrasts between Nazi identity and American identity. The Nazi presence is strongest in the first two exhibit floors, but the third overpowers with American presence. The Jewish presence is scattered throughout, but always as a subordinate to the more dominate Nazi or American presences. Jews are no longer the central players in the story of the Holocaust. In other words, there is a focus on how the “other” – either perpetrator or liberator – viewed and behaved toward the victimized.

The tour of the permanent exhibition begins with an American understanding of Nazi cruelty and Jewish victimhood. As elevators take visitors to the fourth floor, a video monitor shows footage of American soldiers liberating a concentration camp and expressing utter shock at what they had stumbled upon: “a patrol leader called in by radio and said that we have come across something that we are not sure what it is. It’s a big prison of some kind, and there are people running all over. Sick, dying, starved people...such a sight as that, you...you can’t
imagine it. You, you just...things like that don’t happen.”

With the soldier’s voice still ringing in the visitors’ ear, they walk into a barely lit room with the authoritative words “The Holocaust” in black stone and a roughly 12’ by 12’ photograph of the remains of the Ohrdruf concentration camp. The label reads: American troops “encounter the charred remains of prisoners.” This graphic image introduces the end of the Holocaust as the first image a visitor encounters. But, if we understand this as a distinctly American narrative then this image is really the beginning for American eyes. America’s first public documentation of the totality of the Nazi death camps began with the American troops liberating the camps. This non-chronological introduction to the Holocaust is continued through President Dwight D. Eisenhower’s April 15th, 1945 quote on his visit to Europe: “...I made the visit deliberately in order to be in a position to give first-hand evidence of these things, if ever, in the future, there develops a tendency to change these allegations merely to ‘propaganda.’” This quote ties in to the Isaiah quote found in the museum’s lobby. They both discuss the importance of witnessing, whether it is for memorial, activist, or political reasons.

The American presence continues throughout the “Nazi Assault – 1933 to 1939” exhibition. While the museum is particularly American in its narrative, it does discuss the moments of inaction by the American government. Two rooms of video programs detail the American responses to the events that took place in Nazi

---

70 U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum, Permanent Exhibit.
71 Ibid.
72 Ibid. Words underlined by the museum. Eisenhower served as President of the United States from 1953 until 1961. In 1945, he was designated as the Supreme Allied Commander in Europe and the Supreme Allied Commander of the Allied Expeditionary Force.
Germany from 1933-39. While these videos appropriately discuss the mixture of action and inaction of the American government to the knowledge of Nazi persecution, the images that border the room all point to American public condemnation of German products, Hitler, and Nazism. This presentation coupled with the liberator’s introduction to the Holocaust, forces an audience to view these videos with the knowledge that America eventually saves the Jews and defeats the Nazis.

This foresight is utilized again in the panel that discusses “Why Auschwitz was not bombed” in the “Final Solution – 1940 to 1945” exhibit. As a direct American inaction during the war years, the museum responds by detailing the political climate in American at that time. In 1944, the World Jewish Congress and the U.S. government’s War Refugee Board “forwarded requests to bomb Auschwitz to the U.S. War Department. The requests were denied.” The panel goes on to explain that on August 14th, 1944, the Assistant Secretary of War, John J. McCloy, advised the World Jewish Congress that “such an operation could be executed only by the diversion of considerable air support...now engaged in decisive operations elsewhere...” The War Department had ruled out using military personnel in non-military or rescue operations. The American government argued that the most effective way to liberate victims of Nazi oppression would be a swift end to the

---

73 U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum, Permanent Exhibit. Each of the three exhibit floors has an American Response video section. For the sake of brevity, I will be unable to discuss them in full detail, but they each present various attempts at action and inaction within America regarding Nazi Europe.
74 Ibid.
75 Ibid.
76 Ibid.
war. McCloy added that bombing “might provoke even more vindictive action by the Germans,” yet within the week, “the U.S. Army Air Force carried out a heavy bombing of the I.G. Farben synthetic oil and rubber (Buna) works near Auschwitz III – less than five miles away from Auschwitz-Birkenau.” The United States knew of the Nazi killing centers by 1944, but knowledge of the Nazi killing operations had been circulating prior to the McCloy-World Jewish Congress confrontation. The museum’s “fairness” in representing a “failure” of the American government to rescue Nazi victims is only presented because the museum can display many more “successes” of the American government in condemning Nazi actions. Spatially within the museum, the 1942 poster “This is Nazi brutality” produced by American artist Ben Shahn for the U.S. Office of War Information denounces the mass murder that took place at Lidice. In general, the entire museum acts as a “success” of American ideals and institutions in combating Nazi ideals and institutions.

The “Last Chapter” exhibit details the successes of America that brought about the end of war. The theme that dominates this exhibit floor is “Liberation.”

---

79 Lidice was a village in the Nazi Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia that was completely destroyed by Nazi forces in retaliation for the assassination of Reich Protector Reinhard Heydrich. See “The History of Lidice Memorial Before Year 2000,” www.lidice-memorial.cz, and the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum, *Holocaust Encyclopedia,* “Lidice.”

“Liberation: Encounter” discusses the Soviet (Majdanek and Auschwitz), British (Bergen-Belsen), and American (Nordhausen, Dachau, and Buchenwald) liberation operations. The videos taken by liberating armies upon their arrival can be viewed by looking over a privacy wall. These videos have been hidden “due to the graphic nature” of the film footage. The U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum gives discretion to the audience. They have the choice to “look or not look.” There are additional videos where this privacy wall warns visitors, and there are opportunities to take other paths in order to not view or experience a certain elements of the museum. In these instances, the constructed Holocaust narrative marginalizes the extent of the atrocities. Yet in other instances, graphic videos and photographs detailing Nazi violence are central to the tour narrative.
The title panel “Liberation: Encounter” informs an audience that this is an outsider’s
encounter of the concentration camp inmates, and not a victim’s account of their
liberation. The liberations were never a “primary objective” for the Allied armies;
rather they were a “byproduct of the goal, which was to defeat Germany and its
allies.”

Regardless of happenstance, the museum concludes that the fact liberation
occurred is the most important element, not the how or why.

After liberation, America is seen as “A New World” and becomes one of the
“most favored destination[s] of Jewish Holocaust survivors.”

The museum explains that from December 22, 1945 to June 1947, “a total of 22,950 Displaced
Persons were admitted to the US, 2/3 were Jewish... By 1952, 137,450 Jewish
refugees had settled in the US.”

During this influx of refugees to America, President Harry S. Truman politicized America as a moral compass, a justice-seeker, and a humanitarian: “There are left in Europe 1.5 million Jews, men, women, and children, whom the ordeal has left homeless, hungry, sick, and without assistance. These, too, are victims of the crime for which retribution will be visited upon the guilty. But neither dictates of justice nor that love of our fellowman which we are bidden to practice will be satisfied until the needs of these sufferers are met.”

81 U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum. Permanent Exhibit.
82 Ibid. The most favored destination of Jewish Holocaust survivors, the museum maintains, was Israel.
83 Ibid. According to the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Holocaust Encyclopedia: The
1945, President Truman “issued a directive that loosened quota restrictions on immigration to the U.S. of
persons displaced by the Nazi regime. Under this directive, more than 41,000 displaced persons
immigrated to the United States; approximately 28,000 were Jews. In 1948, the U.S. Congress passed the
Displaced Persons Act, which provided approximately 400,000 U.S. immigration visas for displaced
persons between January 1, 1949, and December 31, 1952. Of the 400,000 displaced persons who entered
the U.S. under the DP Act, approximately 68,000 were Jews.”
84 Ibid. Quote from February 25, 1946. In order to continuously situate and justify the American presence
during the Holocaust the museum explains that two years later, an amended 1948 law served as a turning
point in American immigration policy, establishing a precedent for later refugee crises.
Speaking to a war-tired America, Truman states “[European Jews], too, are victims.”
Truman painfully comes to the realization of a suffering European Jewry, yet explains that “they,” like Americans, need justice. The guilty, which the museum calls “the Killers,” must be brought to trial in order to “satisfy” all of the “needs of these sufferers.” Here, the museum discusses the Nuremberg War Crime Trials and the subsequent verdicts. Finally, the museum presents a relatively modest “Bystanders” panel that includes three paragraphs with no artifacts or pictures hung on a blank wall. Bystanders within this panel are defined as the “majority of Europeans,” not a world that watched and most assuredly not America. It seems geographic requirements are necessary in order to indict a party as a “bystander.” Yet, as a visitor can clearly see throughout the permanent and temporary exhibits, those geographic requirements disappear as technology and universal morality turn every individual into a witness.

Many of the museum’s artifacts, texts, and images prompt endless, uninterrupted fear. Yet, an audience arrives at the museum with some level of foresight towards an end to World War II and to the Holocaust. In that knowledge which is continuously reinforced in the permanent exhibition through national pride (flags, medals, and emblems), location (windows that overlook the Washington monument), and narrative (American), an audience knows of an imminent American victory. On one of my research trips to the museum, I encountered a young college-aged woman and her friends that helped demonstrate

---

85 U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum. *Permanent Exhibit.* The original title which can be faintly seen from the faded sticker residue above the words “Bystanders” reads “The Guilt of Bystanders.” Why “The Guilt of” was removed might be insignificant or it could have been a very political process.
this point. In the elevator at the beginning of the exhibit, this woman was pretending to be a museum employee, asking patrons to: “Come in the elevator. Your tour will start momentarily. Please let me know if you have any questions.” All the while, her friends were giggling in the background. The other museum visitors rolled their eyes, but kept quiet. Once the elevator doors opened, we parted ways. That is until I saw her again on the “Final Solution – 1940 to 1945” floor, attitude unchanged. As she crossed the glass walkway that separates the two Concentration Camp exhibits, she broke out into song: “The sun’ll come out, tomorrow.” I initially sighed and chalked her approach up to immaturity. Now, I won’t deny that immaturity played a large role in her actions, but I think what it interesting about this outburst is that it shows a visitor’s reaction to Nazi death camps with the anticipation of American victory already planted in her mind. The museum narrative overtly discusses in text and image the American victory in Europe and the Allied liberation of the concentration camps. The visitor’s knowledge of a “brighter tomorrow” informed her entire museum experience.

Let us turn now to the ways in which a Jewish presence finds itself within the museum. The Jewish themes are often related to memorialization attempts, and find themselves balancing between choosing to remember life or remember how one died. In the “Nazi Assault – 1933 to 1939” exhibit, the “Lost Communities” glass etchings present the “names of towns and cities whose Jewish communities were wholly or partially lost as a result of the ‘Final Solution.’”86 The wall preserves the Jewish-given Yiddish place-names and in that act keeps the memory of a Jewish

heritage alive. Additionally, the museum presents a “Haggadah” and a small
collection of “Roman Vishniac Photos” with the intention of describing Jewish life
before the Holocaust. Here, the “Ejszyzki Shtetl Collection” is experienced by the
visitor. This photographic essay of a Lithuanian shtetl is conveyed as a Jewish
Talmudic mecca. It is arguably one of the only attempts by the museum to show
Jews as they lived and not as they died. However, this display is meant to
foreshadow the ultimate destruction of the shtetl and its inhabitants. These artifacts
are supplemented with one panel, “Before the Holocaust,” with two paragraphs on
2,000 years of Jewish life, with a focus on 19th century European Jewish life. Telling
a “Jewish story” is not in the museum’s interest. What was done to the Jews and
other victims is what is to be presented and remembered.

In the “Final Solution – 1940 to 1945” exhibit, the “End of a Shtetl” display
links itself to the “Ejszyzki Shtetl Collection:” The portraits once seen on the
previous floor waterfall down to the current section. They were previously viewed
as portraits of the living and now they must be understood as the “final testament"
of the murdered. The final paragraph on the label panel reads: “In the Jewish
calendar, the dates of the massacres were Tishrei 4 and 5, 5702. 900 years of Jewish
life and culture in Eishishok came to an end in two days. Today, no Jews live in
Eishishok.” This display encapsulates the life and death of the town of Eishishok,
while the use of the Jewish calendar remembers the community’s Jewish identity
and heritage. Eerily, visitors who are currently viewing the first shtetl section walk
above visitors in the final shtetl section. Only a metal bridge divides the spaces. Just

---

as the museum relates that Jewish prisoners were forced to walk on Jewish
tombstones from Treblinka to a “nearby forced-labor camp,” visitors are forced to,
unknowingly, walk over the lost community of Eishishok. On the lower level, the
visitor is forced to experience being that lost community, that buried heritage.

The final exhibit floor, “Last Chapter,” continues this atmosphere of loss and
death with a casting of the Remu Synagogue cemetery tombstone memorial wall in
Cracow. It is titled, “Europe: A Jewish Graveyard,” and connotes this sense of lost
communities. While this memorial does grapple with grief and sadness, it does not
discuss any forms of trauma after the Holocaust. The use of the word “Last” in the
“Last Chapter” is quite definitive. No dates are given with this title, unlike its
counterparts, so it must be inferred that the “Last Chapter” deals with all of the
consequences associated with the conclusion of the Holocaust (e.g. liberation,
emigration, trials, etc.). If so, this continues a narrative that completely disregards
the ways in which trauma can resurface after the end of the traumatic event. Even
the positive impacts of the survivor community are suppressed. The idea of a “Last
Chapter” creates a “happy-ending” that puts everything in its place. While it is
difficult to display an artifact that communicates memories, repression, and trauma,
they are an integral part of the survivor experience and a Holocaust narrative.

Finally, the Jewish presence intertwines with the American presence to
conclude this “feel-good” vision of hope for humanity and the future at the “Hall of
Remembrance.” Before entering the six-sided room with its deconstructed Star of
David floor titles, a small sign requests audience cooperation to make this space a
place of “reflection, contemplation, and remembrance.”88 This room combines Jewish biblical quotes and Yizkor memorial candles with strategically placed windows that allow the visitor to view a majestic American flag waving in the wind while the monolithic Washington monument stands behind it. As the audience meditates on their experience, they are reminded that they are surrounded by “America, the beautiful” and the “land of the free and the home of the brave.” It is the most open, well-lit, and simple room in the museum which allows the visitors to contemplate the quotes inscribed on the walls: “Only guard yourself and guard your soul carefully, lest you forget the things your eyes saw, and lest these things depart your heart all the days of your life, and you shall make them known to your children, and to your children’s children.”89 This quote, as well as the others within the Hall, invokes the importance of “witnessing.” Not as a perpetrator, bystander, or European Jew, but as a rescuer, a liberator, an opposer of bigotry and discrimination. Caryn Aviv and David Shneer write in New Jews that “After the Holocaust, and especially after the Cold War, American Jews’ notion of placement and roots changed again... In a post-Holocaust world, many American Jews came to see Eastern Europe no longer as the real place from which to draw roots but as a mythic home, not one they want to return to but one they want to bear witness to. It is a land of Jewish ghosts and of lost cultures.”90 The Jewish heritage known before the Holocaust was destroyed, but those who witnessed it then and witness it

89 Deut. 4:9. The other quotes are Deut. 30:19, “I call heaven and earth to witness this day; I have put before you life and death, blessing and curse. Choose life – that you and your offspring shall live,” and Gen. 4:10.
through the museum narrative now must internalize and convey their witnessing. “To be witness” to the events of the Holocaust as one who has invited its memory “is an exercise in conscience.” 91 Not only that, but the museum concludes that the American ideals of life, liberty, and freedom were under attack during the Holocaust yet, “witnessing” is the first step towards remembrance and then positive action in the future.

The final element of the museum’s tour performance is the Nazi presence. There is a strong focus on the rise of Nazism and Nazi terror. First, take the name of the first exhibit floor, “Nazi Assault – 1933 to 1939.” This is a narrative where Nazi aggression is favored over Jewish/victim experience as the way to disseminate Holocaust knowledge. It is an account where Nazi images dominate. The “Nazi Society,” “Police State,” and “Nazi Propaganda” panels display a SA uniform, photographs of Nazi boycotts of Jewish businesses, and audio of Reich Minister of Propaganda Joseph Goebbels. All these artifacts serve the museum’s message of a Nazi Germany that is the antithesis of America. In a video in this section, Hitler speaks to the Hitler Youth. The camera angle depicts Hitler as a booming, neo-classical hero and the Hitler Youth are shown as innocent yet noble. They stand on their toes to listen to their father figure, Hitler. They know only to obey orders from the Fuehrer, to become strong and powerful through “Aryan” unity. Hitler explains, “You are Germany... [You] must not collapse.” 92 In the context of the museum, this display powerfully depicts a Nazi monopoly on German society. Nazism is a

brainwashing, restricting, and inhumane state. To show the Nazi indoctrination of children is to show the potential longevity of the Nazi party and Nazi policy: all the more reason, as an American audience, to applaud the victory of American ideals and morals. For, as President Eisenhower stated above, Nazism was not only an attack against European Jews and other specifically targeted groups, but it was a direct confrontation with opposing American values.

As visitors enter the “Final Solution – 1940 to 1945” exhibit, they walk straight into life-sized photo panels with accompanying wooden walking paths to simulate the Lódź ghetto. Visitors are required to walk through the quasi-reconstruction while reading large quotes from Hitler and Nazi officials on the walls. This experience borders on reenactment as the full-scale images of ghetto inmates elicit feelings of oppression and fear. The Nazi presence dominates these images of Jews “under their control.” The sculpture of Crematorium II in Auschwitz-Birkenau by Mieczyslaw Stobierski details the process of the Zyklon B gassing and cremating of camp inmates. In it the audience receives a bird’s eye view of the killing procedure; witnessing the inevitable murder of these figurines. The “hidden” videos behind the privacy walls also display the ways in which Nazis understood and viewed their victims. Videos of the Einsatzgruppen, mobile killing units, and medical experiments within the killing centers further broadcast the depths of Nazi cruelty and brutality. The medical experiments in particular had no concern for

---

93 U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum. *Permanent Exhibit*. While this area of the museum must be experienced in order to continue the exhibit, other elements of the museum allow for visitors to choose their level of participation, such as the graphic videos behind noted privacy walls and the additional path off the side of the railcar.
ethical limits, the Hippocratic Oath, or legitimate science. To an American audience, these killings and experiments are viewed as lawless and barbaric. It is the realization that phobia, indifference, and opportunity can rewrite reality and turn medical professionals into precise killers. Yet, medical profession and the Hippocratic Oath are universal, and therefore aid in creating a relatability factor for American viewers.

The Nazi presence also finds itself in relatively emotionless map displays of the German war effort with some panels discussing Germany’s annexations and expansions. The “Last Chapter” exhibit, also, shows European maps of German military collapse. While these occupied zones had grim consequences for “enemies of the state,” the museum discusses the expansion and contraction maps in militaristic terms. (Information about the ghettoization, deportation, and institution of the Final Solution of Nazi targets is not offered until much later in the exhibit).

Jews became the Nazis “main target, but hundreds of thousands of others were oppressed as ‘enemies of the state.’” The museum exhibits Pastor Martin Niemöller’s typewriter and a Roma wagon in order to show the discriminatory reach of the Nazi party. In exhibiting the “prisoners of the camps,” these previously

---

95 U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum. Permanent Exhibit. “Enemies of the State” according to the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum include: political opponents, homosexuals, Jehovah’s witnesses, and freemasons. The handicapped (mentally and physically) and the Polish people, each have an exhibit panel that discusses the terror against them. The handicapped panel displays information about forced sterilizations and the Operation T4 (“Euthanasia” Killings). The Poles panel explains that Nazis conducted mass killing campaigns “against the country’s intelligentsia and suspected resistance fighters.”
96 Ibid.
stated “enemies of the state” make another appearance. Images of their prison mug-shot simultaneously show how they were viewed by “the other” and show the diversity of the Nazi enemy. The “Tattoos” photo display illuminates tattooed numbers on arms on a black backdrop. These arms don’t belong to bodies, faces, or identities. There are four faces in the middle which help to remind the visitor of the personhood attached to these arms, but the overall display conveys a message of Nazi dehumanization. Yet the message is complicated, as the “severed” arms give an audience the imaginative control to complete the missing body creating an “American” or personal representation of the Holocaust.

Even though the main target of Nazi aggression was the Jews, the museum is devoted to informing an American audience about the variety of groups under attack. This purpose is three-fold: 1) to attempt to tell as many of the histories of the Holocaust as possible (one of the advantages of a large scale museum); 2) to universalize evil in order to relate it to an American audience; 3) to showcase the diversity of sufferers in order to relate it to an American audience.

In continuing to transmit a simultaneous pro-American/anti-Nazi value system, the majority of the exhibits are devoted to showing the ways in which the Nazis viewed the Jews. 97 Although the Museum of Jewish Heritage in New York abstains from a major “Nazi presence” in its core exhibition, the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum believes that it is irresponsible to not immerse an audience in the depths of Nazi prejudice and violence; if not for the sole reason of juxtaposing

---

97 Many of these exhibits also show the ways in which non-Jews might view Jews. For instance, a prayer Rabbi Leo Baeck wrote for Yom Kippur 1938 is referred to as a prayer for the “Jewish Day of Atonement.” This translation further attests to the attempts at relating a Jewish story or tradition to an American audience. It is interesting to see the moments in the museum that omit a Jewish presence and then the moments where they are the most important message (e.g. the “Ejszyzki Shtetl Collection”).
Nazi values with American values. In the *Kristallnacht* display, Torah scrolls are shown scattered, unfurled, and piled on top of each other. They are arranged to show the way in which Nazis would have ripped them from synagogues and set fire to them in the streets. This display powerfully shows that the Nazis desecrated Torah scrolls, but it does not adequately show how Jews used them and what they meant to those who read from them every *Shabbat* morning. In the “Final Solution – 1940 to 1945” section, a *tallit* is titled as a “victim’s belongings.”\(^98\) Again, there is no other importance to this religious item other than it was a possession of a Nazi victim. The 90% non-Jewish audience has two choices when they view this artifact. They may see the *tallit* just as the Nazis would have, as an unimportant possession. Or, they may transcend its religious context and view it as an important possession, like any possession. Not mentioned is the fact that a visitor could very well arrive at the museum with an understanding of Jewish heritage and tradition, and therefore see the *tallit* in its religious context. But, the museum displayed this *tallit* to tell the story of the Nazi institution of the Final Solution. It is not a *tallit* that is *allowed* to tell the story of its life prior to the Holocaust. The U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum believes that it can tell the story of the Holocaust and the story of its Jewish victims without discussing the importance of the Jewish ritual items that are displayed which stands in glaring contrast to the Museum of Jewish Heritage: A Living Memorial to the Holocaust.

\(^98\) U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum. *Permanent Exhibit*. Additionally, in the “Last Chapter” exhibit floor, prisoner uniforms are given the title “The Victims.”
Final Message

Alain Resnais’s documentary feature, *Nuit et Brouillard* (Night and Fog, 1955), displays a world haunted by the memory of Auschwitz. In creating a powerful, relatable narrative about the disturbing depths of inhumanity, Resnais universalizes the Holocaust in order to create a collective accountability. The U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum, like *Night and Fog*, is a memorialization of lost souls, but more than that it is a meditation on the questions, doubts, and fears an event like the Holocaust can conjure up. While the Holocaust museum in Washington investigates the cyclical nature of violence, it presents the conclusion that such horrors couldn’t happen on American soil. As Michael Berenbaum states, “When America is at its best, the Holocaust is impossible in the United States.” Because of this national impossibility, the museum instead charges its audience with a global moral responsibility. This call to remembrance and action is revealed on the walls of the Hall of Remembrance through the biblical quote “Hark, they brother’s blood cries out to me from the ground!” The museum presents the Holocaust narrative as not just a Jewish affair, but a human affair. In the context of this museum,

---

99 Made ten years after the liberation of the Nazi concentration camps, *Night and Fog* was commissioned by the *Comité d'Histoire de la Deuxième Guerre Mondiale* (a government commission assigned to the task of assembling documentary material on, and of launching historical inquiries and studies in, the period of the French Occupation) and the *Reseau de Souvenir* (an association devoted to the memory of those who died in the camps).

100 Philip Gourevitch, “Behold now behemoth: the Holocaust Memorial Museum: one more American theme park,” *Harper’s Magazine* (July 1, 1993): 55-62. Gourevitch responded to Berenbaum’s comment by asserting, “The fact remains, however, that the Holocaust was a European event, and that even at its utter worst, America has been a place where the Holocaust--a program of genocidal extermination mandated and implemented by every organ of a nation-state--has never entered the realm of possibility. America's problems and America's faults, however extreme, have been and remain different from those of fascist Germany. To suggest that there are meaningful comparisons can only distort our already feeble understanding of European history and--worse --obscure our perception of current American reality.”

“brother’s blood” transcends race, religion, and nationality. Americans have the duty to care for their “brothers” around the world.

The use of unsettling images in the permanent exhibition makes the narrative difficult to view at times, but the images are not presented unintentionally or for a cheap shock. They are meant to convey a universal understanding of the extent of evil in order to illuminate responsibilities of the past and present. Like Night and Fog, a plea for accountability and responsibility become the museum's moral imperative. There is the responsibility for the Holocaust and a responsibility to the Holocaust that must be accounted for. During the Nuremberg Trials, captured in Night and Fog, a Kapo exclaims, “I am not responsible.” An officer says definitively, “I am not responsible.” Another continues the refrain. Then “who,” the narrator asks, “is responsible?”102 While it is never explicitly stated, the film gains its identity through its subtle indictment against all humanity. The narrator concedes that humanity’s natural state is at war, since “war [may] nod off to sleep, but keeps one eye always open.”103 Memory of trauma must remain fresh in a community’s mind if it intends to ward off future evils. In a closing soliloquy of questioning doubt, what Roger Sandall calls a “grave poetry of warning,” the narrator calls out to the audience while images of broken buildings and mangled metal and wire [images of man’s ability to destroy] overwhelm the screen:104

“Who among us keeps watch from this strange watchtower to warn of the arrival of our new executioners? Are their faces really different from our own? Somewhere in our midst, lucky Kapos still

103 Ibid., 30:00.
survive, reinstated officers and anonymous informers. There are those who refused to believe, or believed only for brief moments. With our sincere gaze we survey these ruins, as if the old monster lay crushed forever beneath the rubble. We pretend to take up hope again as the image recedes into the past, as if we were cured once and for all of the scourge of the camps. We pretend it all happened only once, at a given time and place. We turn a blind eye to what surrounds us and a deaf ear to humanity’s never-ending cry.”

The conclusion of Resnais’s journey into “man’s inhumanity to man” offers a contemplation and meditation to a scarred society. A kind of “romantic horror takes place when we gaze at the ruins of history: we try to imagine what went on in the closed world of the concentration camps and try to relate that to our time.” In finding relatable ground, the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum uses a universal understanding of evil and inhumanity. It is for this reason that the museum chooses to display its more graphic images of the atrocity. The museum does not spare its audience; they are invited to view destruction. In dark rooms with numerous videos and physically inflated images, the audience is forcibly left alone in mediation as mangled bodies are used as canvases for medical experiments, charred skeletons lie one on top of another, and a corpse’s wide-open eyes stare directly at the museum’s audience. The corpse’s soul has left his body, yet his eyes pierce and question the audience, “Where were you? Where is your soul?”

The museum takes great care in discussing the numerous victims of Nazi aggression, and focuses specifically on the European Jews, yet it is not central to the museum’s narrative of inhumanity during the Holocaust. Corpses are viewed as corpses, regardless of religion, nationality, or ethnicity. But, does this more

105 Nuit et Brouillard, 30:58.
106 Ewout van der Knaap, Uncovering the Holocaust: The International Reception of Night and Fog (Wallflower Press, 2006), 7.
universal narrative unconsciously repress the memory of a Jewish genocide? In other words, have the politics of remembrance inhibited the possibility for a Jewish narrative in a national arena? The universalization or Americanization of the Holocaust dismisses the particularities of the event and thus makes it unidentified, but it also makes the narrative easier for an American public to digest. It is not that Jews are translated into Americans, but rather Nazis are assuredly translated into the anti-Americans. Harold Kaplan suggests, “In America and the West we should remember Hitler, the ideologue, best (and know ourselves better) in his hatred for all aspects of liberal humanist democracy.” As long as Nazism is understood as that which is anti-American, the Holocaust “will remain a permanent touchstone” for the American people.

\[107\] Joshua Hirsch, *Afterimage: Film, Trauma, and the Holocaust* (Temple University Press, 2004), 28. Hirsch discusses *Night and Fog* as the “most important, if not the sole, originator of posttraumatic cinema.” Additionally, Hirsch contends that the film simultaneously “combat[s] the repression of memory of the camps in France” while “paradoxically, contribut[ing] to the repression of the memory of the Jewish genocide.”


\[109\] Kaplan, *Conscience and Memory*, 170.

3) The Museum of Jewish Heritage: A Living Memorial to the Holocaust – A Case Study

The first Holocaust memorial in New York City was dedicated in 1946-1947. Rochelle Saidel recounts in her history of New York City’s Holocaust Museum that “in Riverside Park at West Eighty-third Street there is an engraved stone, placed there in October 1947 and intended as a cornerstone, which reads: ‘This is the site for the American memorial to the heroes of the Warsaw Ghetto battle April-May 1943 and to the 6 million Jews of Europe martyred in the cause of human liberty.’” For another fifty years, this would be the sole location for public, non-religious Holocaust memory and remembrance in New York City. With the opening of the Museum of Jewish Heritage – A Living Memorial to the Holocaust in 1997, an educational message combined a major museum and the mission “to remember.”

---

111 Saidel, *Never Too Late to Remember*, 29. According to Saidel, there seems to be “no record of any attempt to create a major Holocaust memorial in the United States before the first effort in New York City in 1946-47.”

112 *Ibid.*, 3-8. After 1978, when Holocaust memorialization was placed on the agenda of the United States government, the idea of a Holocaust museum or memorial became “more important for the organized Jewish community and thus ripe for adoption by New York City Mayor Edward Koch.” In 1981, the commission for a Holocaust memorial in New York City was created. However, Mayor Koch, like President Carter, didn’t create his Holocaust commission “in response to pressure from Jewish interest groups. Instead, these two elected officials co-opted the issue of the memorialization of the Holocaust in order to gain favor with the organized Jewish community and thereby obtain Jewish votes and financial backing for their upcoming election campaigns.” In other words, the Holocaust had become politically advantageous. For more information regarding the history of the creation of the Museum of Jewish Heritage, see Saidel’s *Never Too Late to Remember*. The book ends in the summer of 1996 as the museum is but a skeletal construction.
Created as a “living memorial” to those who perished during the Holocaust, the Museum of Jewish Heritage “honors those who died by celebrating their lives – cherishing the traditions they embraced, examining their achievements and faith, and affirming the vibrant worldwide Jewish community that is their legacy today.”\footnote{Museum of Jewish Heritage: A Living Memorial to the Holocaust, http://www.mjhnyc.org/findex.html, Accessed on January 5, 2012.} Here, the Shoah is constructed as the Jewish experience. It is not only considered sui generis, but an exemplar of Jewish legacy and a trial that could not destroy the Jewish people.

For a number of scholars, the narrative of this museum is generated by Jews for Jews in order to counteract perceived disengagement from Jewish life.\footnote{See Thomas D. Fallace, \textit{The Emergence of Holocaust Education in American Schools} (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008). Novick, \textit{The Holocaust in American Life}, and Rona Sheramy, \textit{“Defining Lessons: The Holocaust in American Jewish Education,”} (PhD diss., Brandeis University, 2000).} Jeshajahu Weinberg, the first director of the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum, believed the period of the 1970s, a time when America saw the creation of various Holocaust memorial and educational commissions, was a “period of flourishing ethnicity [and] secular Jews had a problem knowing what their center of ethnicity was.”\footnote{Saidel, \textit{Never Too Late to Remember}, 40.} It seems as though, for many American Jews, this ethnicity increasingly centered on the Holocaust.

However, non-Jewish school groups make up the majority of visitors to the museum which suggests that the museum’s exhibition does not speak to an exclusively Jewish audience. It does, however, “speak Jewishly” to them.

The exhibition is designed to tell a Jewish story. It focuses primarily on the 20\textsuperscript{th} century European-Immigrant-Jewish experience. Each floor of the core
exhibition wrestles with life in relation to the Holocaust. The first floor, officially titled “Jewish Life a Century Ago,” can be understood with tragic foresight as “Jewish Life Before the Holocaust.” The exhibit’s primary attempt is not to foreshadow, but rather to present a life so rich and in its own context that its loss reverberates as a deep tragedy. However, it is impossible to enter a museum with the subtitle “A Living Memorial to the Holocaust” and not anticipate the looming destruction. The second floor, “The War Against the Jews,” or Jewish life during the Holocaust, is devoted to describing the climate in Nazi Europe and the escalation to genocide, here traced in full detail. The third floor, “Jewish Renewal,” can only be viewed from the deep and dark shadow cast by the Holocaust, and is therefore understood as “Jewish Life After the Holocaust.” Just as the museum’s title and the subliminal titles assert, the main message of the museum is the “livingness” of the Jewish community: “Jewish Life before the Holocaust” illuminates religious and cultural heritage; “Jewish Life after the Holocaust” discusses Jewish lives impacting social justice issues; and “Jewish Life during the Holocaust” expresses the ways in which Jews struggled to live and in six million cases lost their lives. The floor plan contains an inherent tension: one floor of “death” between two floors of “living.” As a Holocaust memorial, one could classify this arrangement as a shroud or an attempt to hide the dead. The Museum of Jewish Heritage’s definition of a “living memorial,” however, deems this arrangement as the logical progression of a vibrant and dynamic, yet tortured and oppressed people. The museum illuminates the triumph of the Jewish people, rather than the American people, in the face of Nazi

---

victimization. This presentation proposes that the Holocaust and Holocaust memory is characteristically a Jewish experience. Or, that through learning about Jews and Judaism through the lens of the Holocaust it might suggest that the Holocaust is at the core of the American Jewish consciousness and Jewish culture and identity. In the broadest sense then, it is not truly a “Holocaust Museum,” but a Jewish Heritage Museum that discusses the impact of the Holocaust on Jewish heritage. Here, Jews are not just depicted as victims of the Holocaust, but as a people whose history has surrounded, complimented, and challenged them, and whose culture survives and continues to shape us all – Jews and non-Jews alike.  

The original exhibition concept had four central themes: “(1) “The World Before,” the European and North African Jewish civilization that thrived for two thousand years before it was destroyed by the Nazis; (2) “The Holocaust,” particularly as it was experienced by the Jews, both those who perished and those who survived; (3) “The Aftermath,” of survival, including the plight of refugees, the establishment of the State of Israel, and the pursuit of Nazi war criminals; and (4) “Renewal in America,” Jewish immigration to the United States from 1654 to the present.”  

The addition of “Renewal in America” was not mentioned in earlier documents, and Saidel argues that this could have been an attempt to “define reality in a way that would ‘Americanize’ the image of the museum for the General Services Administration (the administration that received the Holocaust commissions memorandum for lease space in the Customs House [the original planned location of

---

the museum, currently, the National Museum of the Native American is housed there) and the federal government.”

However in the current exhibition, the “Renewal in America” theme is integrated into the “Jewish Renewal” floor. America and Jewish immigration are necessary, only in the fact that they tell the larger story of 20th and 21st century Jewish life. Hence the title “Jewish Renewal” is privileged over a title that omits the word “Jewish.”

Architecturally, the museum displays its distinctly Jewish identity. The building which houses the core exhibition is a hexagon which reminds, not just museum visitors but all of Battery Park City and those who work in and visit lower Manhattan, of the six million Jewish victims of the Holocaust as well as the Star of David as a symbol of the Jewish faith. Viewing the building from a far, an individual can count six tiers on the building’s roof and six square windows on each side of the hexagon. Every element of the museum’s being helps instruct institutional identity and a specifically Jewish narrative of the Holocaust.

What’s in a Name?

Museum of Jewish Heritage: A Living Memorial to the Holocaust; or A Living Memorial to the Holocaust: Museum of Jewish Heritage? Prior to the 1994 groundbreaking ceremony, the proposed museum became a joint city-state project and both the mayor and the governor were given “powers of approval.”

New York State Governor Mario Cuomo attempted to change the seemingly parochial message and image of the museum fearing “criticism from advocates of separation

---

119 Saidel, *Never Too Late to Remember*, 216.
120 Ibid., 10.
of church and state, and requests for parcels of land or air rights from other religious groups.” He called for a toning down of the “Jewish” imagery by renaming the museum “A Living Memorial to the Holocaust: Museum of Jewish Heritage.” In early 1990s press releases and brochures, the museum identifies with this rebranding. After the dedication of the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum, the New York project retained its Jewish narrative and its “more Jewish” title. Mayor Koch, “an outspokenly Jewish mayor,” described the New York project as a museum to “the Jewish Holocaust. The Museum in Washington is not.”

The New York museum’s current title lends itself to this Jewish narrative. While the museum is a secular institution, the subject matter is Jewish history and heritage. While this is a conscious attempt to not “duplicate what is already available in other institutions,” it is also an effort to create a safe and welcoming space for the New York City Holocaust survivor community and their families.

During the October 16, 1994 groundbreaking ceremony, museum trustee Ernest Michel asked during his speech, “Why, after the success in Washington, should we have a memorial in New York?” He then answered himself, “I would like to be able to come to this place and say Kaddish [the memorial prayer] for my parents who have no grave.” While this statement affirms Governor Cuomo’s concerns about the separation of church and state at the museum, it demonstrates how ideological need shapes memory and identity. New York City was the entry point to America for the immigrant survivor population, and currently, is home to nearly 2

121 Saidel, Never Too Late to Remember, 10.
122 Ibid., 224.
123 Ibid., 224.
124 Ibid., 241.
million Jews.\textsuperscript{125} This location and population envelopes the museum in specific ideological and memorial goals. Every museum is “bound up with very different political aims, cultural goals, and beliefs about learning.”\textsuperscript{126} These diverse representations attest to the countless ways politics, culture, memory, and education may be connected and understood. It is for this reason, among many others, that the Museum of Jewish Heritage's way of remembering is more Jewish than the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum's.

\textit{The Origin of Narrative: The Mission Statement}

According to the Museum of Jewish Heritage's current website, “Now in its second decade, the Museum has welcomed more than 1.5 million visitors from all over the world who come away with a message of memory and hope that is of universal significance.”\textsuperscript{127} While the message of “universal significance” is important in creating lessons out of the Holocaust, the museum's mission statement emphasizes the singular importance of Jewish life and history: “The mission of the Museum is to educate people of all ages and backgrounds about the broad tapestry of Jewish life in the 20\textsuperscript{th} and 21\textsuperscript{st} centuries—before, during, and after the Holocaust. Multiple perspectives on modern Jewish history, life, and culture are presented in the Museum's unique Core Exhibition.”\textsuperscript{128}

\textsuperscript{125} According to the \textit{World Jewish Population Study} (2002).
Since the museum first opened its doors, almost as soon as visitors began touring the core exhibition, tour guides were there to express the narrative. The museum utilizes public education programs taught by museum educators to inform students about Jewish heritage and Jewish life before, during, and after the Holocaust. While it is possible to tour the museum as an individual, the majority of school groups take organized tours. Encouraging a group experience and open questioning, the museum’s emphasis on guided tours is part of its core pedagogy, and supports the central message of living Jewish experiences.\textsuperscript{129}

One of these education programs, the Lipper Internship, is designed to train college and graduate school students as museum docents. The Lipper program trains them to educate middle and high school students in their classrooms and at the museum. These guides speak to students before their visit to the museum in a “pre-visit” lecture at their school, and after their visit in a “post-visit” lecture/discussion at their school. Both apply the “inquiry/discussion technique” utilized during the museum tour that “interjects facts as needed to meet tour objectives.”\textsuperscript{130} The “Lipper Intern” training guide states, “At the Museum you will serve as a mediator and facilitator for dialogue.”\textsuperscript{131} The tour guide has the power to create an environment that will either alienate or encourage dialogue. As a

\textsuperscript{129} Advisory Thesis Meeting, April 23, 2012.  
\textsuperscript{131} Museum of Jewish Heritage, “Meeting Hate with Humanity: Life during the Holocaust,” \textit{Tour Outline} (Revised Aug. 2011), 1. The three main objectives of the “Meeting Hate with Humanity” tour: 1) To explore issues of heritage and cultural identity; 2) To understand WWII and the Holocaust, and its impact on Jewish life; and 3) To investigate ways in which individuals and nations responded, or failed to respond, to the crisis.  
“mediator and facilitator” at the museum, these interns become *de facto* “experts” to their students. This technique may run the risk of perpetuating a hierarchy of knowledge that disempowers the student. When a museum authority lectures *at* students instead of conversing *with* them, the students assume a passive role in the education process. The museum attempts, through directed and scripted dialogue, to dismantle the hierarchy in order to deepen students’ understanding and heighten intellectual independence. The carefully framed questions presented in the tour scripts represent a key component of the “inquiry/discussion” method.

Yet the tour “outline” is a highly scripted affair. The questions are pre-determined. At times, the answers are pre-determined. Even the tour length is timed down to the exact minute for each display. With these restrictions, the museum finds itself inflexible to the academic desires of its student visitors. Instead, the student-guided inquiry tour is used as a mask for an institutionally designed investigation.

**Tour Performance**

The “Meeting Hate with Humanity” tour is one of eight general tours the museum offers.132 It is one of two, however, that offer a pre- and post-visit session

---

132 Museum of Jewish Heritage, “School Tours,” http://www.mjhnyc.org/teacher_tours.html, accessed on April 4, 2012. The general school tours available to grades K-12 are as follows: Meeting Hate with Humanity: Life During the Holocaust; Highlights of the Museum Exhibition; My House to Your House: Community Life from Generation to Generation; Love Thy Neighbor: Immigration and the U.S. Experience: Israel and the Diaspora; Building a Bayit: There’s No Place Like Home; Coming of Age During the Holocaust, Coming of Age Now; Our Jewish Heritage.
to public middle and high schools. Lipper interns strictly conduct the pre- and post-visits, but both Lipper interns and Gallery educators lead museum tours.¹³³

Upon entering the museum, themes of identity and heritage play central roles in the visitors’ experience. Every artifact on display – when possible – has the original owner’s picture and name linked to it. This reparative act shows the audience the deep relationships between object, personal identity, and narrative. It also demonstrates the “living” aspect of the inanimate objects telling the story.¹³⁴

According to the “Meeting Hate with Humanity: Life during the Holocaust” Tour Outline, the tour guide is instructed to “learn the names of the students […] discuss what names reveal about identity [-] personal and communal identity,” and discuss the name of the Museum.¹³⁵ This line of inquiry helps facilitate a larger discussion about heritage and the importance of Jewish community. After this initial introduction, the core lobby directs visitors to two large biblical quotes in Hebrew embedded in stone. This lobby, the original lobby of the 1997 museum layout, is now the location of the first “tour stop.” The quotes with accompanying English translation, “Remember...never forget” and “There is hope for your future,” introduce universal themes of memory and hope, but in their original Hebrew context, they are explicitly Jewish statements in a Jewish tradition.¹³⁶ The rest of the first floor creates conversation around Jewish religious tradition and how Jews

---

¹³³ The Museum of Jewish Heritage Gallery Educators are volunteers who serve as “tour guides for youth, adult, and family groups.” As stated on the Museum of Jewish Heritage’s current website, the requirements to be a Gallery Educator are as follows: “Once chosen for the program, candidates attend a 12-week course of study followed by a 8-week in-gallery practice course. Candidates should have an interest in learning how to teach using artifacts and be able to be on their feet for two hours while leading visitors through the galleries.” http://www.mjhnyc.org/a_volunteering.html, accessed on April 24, 2012.

¹³⁴ This decision to have secure provenance on the artifacts also acts as a guard against Holocaust deniers.

¹³⁵ Museum of Jewish Heritage, Tour Outline, 2-3.

“retain and celebrate their heritage in various parts of the world.” Tour guides discuss tzedakah [charity and justice] and the synagogue as a community and religious center. The first floor leaves no doubt that this museum is wholly Jewish.

To transition from the first floor “Jewish Life a Century Ago” to the second floor “The War Against the Jews,” the tour participants are asked to view the “Rat Catcher” illustration. This picture from Germany in 1899 is based on the Pied Piper of Hamelin story. Here, the rats are “portrayed as stereotypical Jews, who represent a supposedly negative influence on German life.” The objective at this exhibit case is to demonstrate that antisemitism did not begin with Hitler and the Nazis, but rather has had a pervasive history. Here and on the second floor, the racism and bigotry depicted are exclusively directed at the Jewish population.

The “War Against the Jews” exhibition floor features a board game describing how antisemitism was “a part of German culture at all levels.” The game’s title, “Jews Out,” further attests to the singular nature of Nazi racism. In discussing the beginnings of official Nazi discrimination, the museum tour discusses the 1935 Nuremberg Laws and German Jewish responses to the situation. At the exhibition case featuring Jewish passports and identification cards, the tour guide indicates the red “J” stamped on these documents as well as the insertion of the middle name “Israel” for Jewish men and “Sara” for Jewish women. While the Jewish people were undoubtedly central targets of the Nazis, the museum censors itself by not discussing the early 20th century eugenics movement and the T-4 and euthanasia.

---

137 Museum of Jewish Heritage, Tour Outline, 4.  
138 Ibid., 5.  
139 Ibid., 6.
program which targeted the mentally and physically handicapped. Moreover, Nazi policy attacked the homosexual population, political dissidents, Roma and Sinti, Slavs, and Poles. These victims of Nazi policy and brutality are absent from the “Meeting Hate with Humanity” tour script. Interestingly during the planning phases of the museum, various “Holocaust victims groups” asked that their stories and input be included in this museum, but the committee declined in favor of a Jewish narrative that would be able to “universalize” without a universal population.

The tour script focuses on the Holocaust as experienced by the Jewish victims, survivors, and resisters. In the exhibits featuring “Kristallnacht,” “Imposing Nazi Racial Policy in Poland,” and “Life in the Ghetto,” the emphasis is on the importance of religious piety, religious community, and spiritual resistance. The tour script asks the guide to point out the displayed Torah scroll and relate the story of Seligmann Bamberger. On Kristallnacht, Seligmann went out to “save this Torah from his synagogue. He managed to save the Torah. Meanwhile, he also avoided being arrested when angry mobs came to the door of his home. He says that he saved the Torah, and the Torah saved him.”

“Life in the Ghetto” is presented by a Rabbi’s spice box. Here, the focus is on how Jews met “hate with humanity.” Cultural and social life is presented as having a deep impact on the Jewish communities under Nazi occupation. Forms of spiritual resistance occupy a large percentage of the tour discussion on the second floor of the core exhibition.

141 See Saidel, Never Too Late to Remember.
142 Museum of Jewish Heritage, Tour Outline, 7.
A conversation about Jewish children is also included within the larger discussion of Jewish reactions to Nazi policy and violence. The tour makes stops at a Kindertransport video, a photograph of Lily Glass hiding in a Belgian convent, Yocheved Farber’s toy loom, and Jacques Wisniak’s portrait. The script’s objective is to “demonstrate the resourcefulness of Jewish families in attempts to save children” and to “demonstrate the brutality of the Nazi policy towards children.” In both of these objectives the child’s agency is missing. In this understanding, to be a child of the Holocaust meant to be at the will of one’s parents and ultimately one’s perpetrators. This narrative gives the illusion of an intact family unit. While deciding the direction of a child, either to a new country, hiding with neighbors, or remaining in the same place, the family is portrayed as a cohesive and connected unit.

The dialogue regarding “Armed Resistance” centers on youth as well, but illuminates the Vilna Ghetto partisans’ control over their own destiny precisely because of the loss of their parents and families. Tour guides are encouraged to ask, “Why do you think young people were often leaders in these movements?” It is important to state that at no point does the tour script ask the tour audience to imagine themselves within these stories. While the children within this Holocaust narrative are roughly within the same age-range of the school children who attend the museum tours, the script does not want to put its visitors “in someone else’s shoes.” With that being said, research shows that emotionally/reactionary-based

143 Museum of Jewish Heritage, *Permanent Exhibit.*
questions are answered more frequently than historically-based questions. Question like “How do you think each person is feeling?” or “What do you think this meant to him or her?” received more student participation than questions related to historical events and dates. These emotionally charged questions allowed students with limited Holocaust knowledge to engage in conversation. Yet, should museum instructors privilege a sympathetic, aware citizenry devoid of critical historical knowledge? As the events of the Holocaust fade in time and memory, will this type of instruction become the future of Holocaust education? If my uninterrupted eighteen years of education have tried to instill in me anything, isn’t it the notion that rigorous study will lead to an informed action? Will an emotionally-charged inquiry tour only temporarily influence an audience during their brief introduction into the Holocaust?

The only tour section not to have scripted dialogue is the exhibit on the “Killing Centers.” This section features six photographs representing six killing centers, a camp uniform, and roughly a thousand Serge Klarsfeld photographs of French Jewish families before the Holocaust. Similar to the “Ejzyzki Shtetl collection” at the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum, visitors are asked to “explore the photographs...on your own, silently, and with respect, and focus on remembering the victims.” The entire museum is a memorial, but this silent aspect of the tour allows for a more individualize experience. The audience is allowed to mediate on the images and the narrative they have heard thus far.

145 Personal research in various CT, MA, NY, and RI 9th-12th grade classrooms using the Museum of Jewish Heritage “Meeting Hate with Humanity” Tour Outline as a 2012 Lipper Intern.
146 Museum of Jewish Heritage, Tour Outline, 11.
Across from the Klarsfeld photographs, visitors are shown arguably the most “gruesome” images in the museum. The tour specifically does not mention these images. As a “living memorial,” the museum attempts to show the Jewish community as they lived and as they viewed themselves rather than how the perpetrators viewed them. Again, even though it is an unscripted space, visitors are confronted with a specifically Jewish memory of the concentration camps and killing centers.

As the transition from the second floor into the third floor, the tour script reflects on “Liberation.” Specifically, the conversation is about the liberation of the Jewish survivors of the European concentration camps and killing centers. American involvement in liberation is only mentioned in passing; the importance lies in the experience of the survivors. Survivor Thea Gottesmann’s “liberation blouse, skirt, [made from Allied fabrics] and bag [made from her prison uniform]” are displayed to show a simultaneous hope for her future and a remembrance of her past. This literal and symbolic “baggage” represents the trauma many survivors faced in the years after the war. For many survivors, liberation remained a lifelong challenge not a single event brought on by the end of the war. A specific genocide may be finite, but its trauma is infinite and “ongoing in a lifetime of a people.” It is history and contemporary. Emotional scars linger, and the museum and the “Meeting Hate with Humanity” tour do not address this narrative. Rather, the script

147 The liberation by Allied and American forces aid the story of survivors and refugees immigrating to the United States. Interestingly, American issues of guilt during and after the war are not discussed in the “Meeting Hate with Humanity” tour script. The American experience of the Holocaust is not the mission of the museum, and the tour stays true to it.

would have one believe that all survivors pieced their lives back together in the Displaced Persons (DP) camps, emigrated to the United States or Israel – the “ancient Jewish homeland” – and then engaged in demanding social justice issues, vowing to “continue helping each other in times of need.” While this story is true for some, it is a far less joyful and static for others. Survivors’ Holocaust identity can inform their values and morals in positive social ways, but they can also influence more idiosyncratic and detrimental behaviors due to Holocaust traumas. Internal timelines of – especially traumatic or fragile – memories do not correspond to measurable time, chronological history, or logical reason. Rather they reflect emotional limits, psychological ruptures, and fragmented experiences organized around personal salience. One might speculate that the Museum of Jewish Heritage has yet to discover a way to relate this survivor experience within a traditional exhibition display that relies heavily on measurable time and chronological history. Life equals change over time, but museums and memorials try to make life more static than in reality. They give fixed permanence to memories and personal and communal narratives that are ever-changing.

Themes of “Activism and Social Justice” permeate the third floor, “Jewish Renewal,” exhibition. However, these universal themes are couched in strictly Jewish affairs or Jewish efforts in worldly affairs. Jewish solidarity is presented through a New York poster advocating helping Soviet Jewry in the decades after the Holocaust. Additionally, a board game called “Route to Freedom” looks at the ways

in which Jews around the world took up the cause of Soviet Jews and organized politically. To discuss how Jews have worked with other groups towards social justice issues, the tour script offers the friendship of Martin Luther King, Jr. and Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel. Students are asked, “What do you think motivated [Jews to get involved with the Civil Rights movement]?”\textsuperscript{151} The script supplies an answer: the Jewish community “know[s] what can happen when people are persecuted.”\textsuperscript{152} The Holocaust becomes a lesson-generator so-to-speak. Also, it allows the museum to showcase the variety of Jewish involvement in prejudicial, discriminatory, and genocidal events. The museum discusses this involvement as the reaction to the events of the Holocaust. This problematically situates the Holocaust as a vehicle to portray the Jewish community's devotion to positive, life-affirming missions. Now the Holocaust itself has become an artifact for the museum and its mission. Which begs the question: If the Holocaust is merely a vehicle for this larger goal, how easily can “the Holocaust” be exchanged for another tragedy? Could this museum achieve the mission of creating socially just citizenry without a dominant Holocaust narrative? Not to place Holocaust education against “Holocaust education goals,” but it seems as though the goals are often privileged over the history.

The final artifact on the third floor is a Holocaust Torah scroll hidden by a Polish farmer. The script's objective is to "discuss why remembering the Holocaust is important."\textsuperscript{153} While the Torah is seemingly out of place during this social

\textsuperscript{151} Museum of Jewish Heritage, \textit{Tour Outline}, 15.
\textsuperscript{152} Ibid., 15.
\textsuperscript{153} Ibid., 16.
activism discussion, it serves to re-introduce the presence of Jewish heritage in every element of Jewish action. While this might be true for the religious Jewish community, this style of narrative omits the involvement of the secular Jewish community. Moreover, it doesn’t allow the inclusion of a Jewish contribution that doesn’t contain religious significance or come from a religious source.

As students are led out of the museum, they make one final stop at Andy Goldsworthy’s “Garden of Stones.” Eighteen trees grow from eighteen large boulders in this outdoor memorial space allowing students to “reflect on their experience of the core exhibition.” This time allows for the students to interpret the Garden in any way they so choose, but it is hard to deny that the memorial is laden with a Jewish message. First, the number eighteen has spiritual significance in Judaism: the Hebrew word *chai*, life, has the numerical value of eighteen. This idea of life rising from the inconceivable stone reminds an audience of the “re-birth” of the Holocaust survivors after liberation. Again, this narrative speaks only of those survivors who understand themselves as the proverbial phoenix rising from the ash of Auschwitz to “Jewish Renewal” in America. It is no coincidence then that the Statue of Liberty and Ellis Island are to be witnessed from the Garden. As a symbol for new life in America for the approximately 96,000 Jewish immigrants under President Harry Truman’s 1945 directive and the 1948 Displaced Persons Act, the Statue of Liberty is not only an important piece of the museum landscape, but it is integral to the museum narrative.

---

lifeless stone is made possible through America. Just as Israel’s Holocaust museum, Yad Vashem, ends with a panoramic view of Jerusalem’s blossoming countryside and the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum concludes with the Washington Monument and American flags on the National Mall, the Museum of Jewish Heritage rationally and emotionally leads to one of the most recognizable symbols of America in the Statue of Liberty.

**Final Message**

The Museum of Jewish Heritage: A Living Memorial to the Holocaust understands the importance of presenting Jewish life before, during, and after the Holocaust. Too often in scholarship, the “master narrative” focuses on the Holocaust from the rise of German National Socialism to the construction and institution of the Final Solution. While this difficult history is invaluable to the study of the Holocaust, it problematically turns the victims into dehumanized pieces of the larger Nazi history. The “Meeting Hate with Humanity: Life during the Holocaust” tour script offers a narrative that describes the Holocaust as not “six million murdered people,” but that it was the murder of “one, plus one, plus one, plus one…” living people. By studying the Holocaust, its victims and their lives, the museum highlights the importance of heritage, history, and identity. As Jewish inmates arrived at Auschwitz, they were tattooed and in that act of desecration, the Nazis eliminated

---

According to Hasia R. Diner in *Hungering for America: Italian, Irish, and Jewish Foodways in the Age of Migration* (Harvard University Press, 2003), 1, 178, 2.5 million East European Jews immigrated to America in the 19th and 20th centuries.
name and family. The museum’s focus on life beautifully demonstrates that the victims of the Holocaust had faces, had names, and had families, and all were taken away be hatred and intolerance.

In Theodore Eisenman’s article on Goldsworthy’s artistic addition to the museum, he explains how the “Garden of Stones” is a living memorial in the truest sense of the word. The trees blossom and retreat with the change of the season, but “ultimately the trees will fuse with the rock, the living cambium beneath the bark will break, and the trees will die.” These trees are our Holocaust survivors and their memories of the Holocaust; they symbolize life and hope, death and pain. Too often visitors to memorials believe that communal memories are safe, and they don’t need to keep them because the art piece, or symbol, or museum will do it for them. These institutions make us believe that memory, narrative, and identity is safe for it is housed in a brick and mortar establishment, a permanent fixture. Young considers the function of these memorials as a tool for active forgetting: “we encourage monuments to do our memory-work for us... For once we assign monumental form to memory, we have to some degree divested ourselves of the obligation to remember.” But this museum’s mission charges its audience to active remembrance: to “never forget” by always remembering. So the trees’ ultimate passing is likened to the passing of a torch. It is the asking of someone else

156 The U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum, Holocaust Encyclopedia, “Tattoos and Numbers: The System of Identifying Prisoners at Auschwitz,” http://www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/article.php?ModuleId=10007056. According to the Holocaust Encyclopedia, tattoos were introduced in the autumn of 1941 at only “one location, the Auschwitz concentration camp complex, which consisted of Auschwitz I (main camp), Auschwitz II (Auschwitz-Birkenau), and Auschwitz III (Monowitz and the subcamps).”
to hold on to precious memories. By linking past and present history and memory, the museum explains that “we are all participants in, as well as custodians of, our history.” As the events of the Holocaust fade into the deep timeline of history, the museum charges visitors with the responsibility to be the voice of impermanence. Students of all ages are “lovingly burdened” with the history of the Holocaust, and as they grow and graduate their memories and their knowledge become a continuation of the idea of a living memorial.

4) Exhibiting the Holocaust, Exhibiting the Self

“We are the shoes, we are the last witnesses.
We are the shoes from grandchildren and grandfathers
From Prague, Paris, and Amsterdam
And because we are only made of fabric and leather
And not of blood and flesh, each one of us avoided the hellfire.”
- Moses Schulstein, Yiddish Poet, 1911-1981

What is a memory once no one else remembers? Arguably, this question is the reason we collect, maintain, and display material objects. They are representations of our constructed identity. We save things to speak to and speak for the dead. We save things and instill meaning in them so that they might live on after us. It is simultaneous memorialization, identity formation, and action. When we exhibit history, we exhibit ourselves. Narratives, memories, and objects are an extension of one’s self: “The body is not large, beautiful, and permanent enough to satisfy our sense of self. We need [material] to magnify our power, enhance our beauty, and extend our memory into the future.”

We, as a society, are happier when we can situate ourselves in a history. And, therefore turn to a specific history or narrative that complements our understanding of ourselves. This

---

160 U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum. Permanent Exhibit. Shown next to a pile of worn shoes from prisoners of Nazi concentration camps.
statement speaks to the often questioning of the need for multiple Holocaust museums and memorials. It is important to remember that many histories surround each other, none being the absolute version of history. Having only one museum implies a monopoly on the history of an event, a people, and how it should be and will be remembered in the future. One museum will never be able to tell the “whole” story. One museum will never be able to “make everyone happy.” But, one museum can tell one interpretation of history. One museum can think globally, but act locally. The localization of Holocaust museums in America has produced important narratives of the Holocaust and insight into the politicization of these institutions. The multitude of American Holocaust museums and their tour narratives heightens intellectual independence and deepens understanding of all narratives.

Museums take an active role in determining which traces remain of real memories and narratives through time. What museums decide to display matters, and what stories they decide to tell matters. It means that a specific narrative has made it through the gauntlet, the sifter that assigns a hierarchy of importance to material culture and history. In their handling of history, Holocaust museums and educational institutions decide what is precious and what should be incorporated into a national, Jewish, American identity. Just as Mihály Csikszentmihály believes the home is a repository for objects that showcase the continuity of the self, museums act similarly in response to historical narratives and corporate or national selves. Via forgetting and selectivity, there is a metaphorical fire continuously burning in the archives of every museum. As public keepers of history, these
museums must run into the fire and save what they deem most worth saving. They ask themselves: “Which traces do we save? Which memories tell the story we want to tell?” The narrative that is chosen acts as an entry point for understanding values and circumstances of the past. The chosen institutional narrative can tell us deep truths about political, cultural, and social memories and the process of memory collecting, but do they prevent future atrocities? Is that their intention? And if not, do they then justify atrocity by creating “entertainment” out of it?

A level of self-consciousness from the museum will demonstrate awareness of its own subjectivity and limits. The “central focus” of the museum is no longer the events of the Holocaust, but rather the mediated Holocaust narrative. Exhibitions tell society much more about institutional identity – local or national culture, ideas, and values – than the history on display. As James Clifford explains, “every version of an ‘other,’ wherever found, is also the construction of a ‘self,’ and the making of ethnographic texts...has always involved a process of ‘self-fashioning.’”163 The fact that museums “recontextualize and interpret objects is a given, requiring no apologies.”164 But self-awareness and transparency must be key components in a museum’s philosophy. It may be argued that the museum has a moral obligation to the public to explain that their view is a view and not the view. A sort of disclaimer: “The views and opinions expressed in this museum...are exactly that, views and opinions. Come study at this institution, but know who you are studying from.”

---

As we cherish the ability of material objects and narratives to aid in the process of community building, we heed the risk of museums as divisive agents of hierarchy and institutional/political agendas. It is a risk that museums know full and well, and debate on an on-going basis: to construct a fixed narrative where historical ownership belongs to the institution or to give room for dissention and audience agency. How can a museum let everyone voice their opinion? Should everyone be allowed to voice their opinion? What is the museum's responsibility as an authority figure? And, who should decide the answers?

Ultimately, with self-consciousness, sensitivity, and serious investment, we must seek to remember the Holocaust and the vast histories of the Holocaust in all their ambiguity, peculiarity, and contradiction; if not for a comprehensive Holocaust education, then to recognize these narratives' importance to a sense of contemporary post-Holocaust self.

The Holocaust was – and is – massive by every measure. It was geographically extensive, narratively complex, innovative in terrifying ways, and had far-reaching socio-political implications. One can study the event, even experience the event and come out feeling lost and overwhelmed. Mainstream Holocaust institutions attempt to alleviate some of these feelings of paralysis through highly constructed narrative tours of the museum’s principal exhibitions. These narratives become part of the way knowledge of the Holocaust is made
accessible and intelligible; and the memory of the Holocaust is transmitted to future generations. But the question must always be asked: “Whose memory of the Holocaust?” Remembrance in and of itself is not enough: we must know whose past and what parts of it we are remembering. These Holocaust museums are not built in a political or geographical vacuum. There is a deep intersection of historical memory (documentation) and political identity (presentation) at play. These institutions are not simply fiction or non-fiction, but an important and complex interaction of both. It sounds problematic to call a museum fictitious, especially a museum about the Holocaust, but its fiction lies in the selected documentation and the chosen portrayal. Linda Hutcheon writes that history and literature are not separate categories, and all accounts of history are narrations and therefore not objective or definitive. Fiction, or more comfortably narrative, in Holocaust museums directly reflect how a museum wants to present itself to its patrons. Museum narratives, unlike a traditional historical chronicle or other forms of historical representation, do the “imagination” for its students. The museum’s perspective and selectivity is available in three-dimensions. The tour narratives act as an instrument to disseminate this constructed history. It is for this reason, among others, that the Holocaust museums in this study are more comfortably labeled “narrative museums” instead of history museums. Narrative museums by their very definition are self-serving, but fairness and balance “don’t always apply to

---

cultural matters.”\textsuperscript{168} These institutions can still be a valuable resource to the student of the Holocaust and to society.

The U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum and the Museum of Jewish Heritage are architecturally, geographically, culturally, and politically different. They offer divergent tour experiences and convey differing narratives. Yet, they serve a fairly similar demographic: middle to high school aged students.\textsuperscript{169} Each of their narrative presentations offers something that the other institution cannot. By comparing the same event through different lenses, we are better equipped to decipher the type of history and the reason for a specific history being offered to its patrons.

The Museum of Jewish Heritage exhibition experience is facilitated by a human museum guide. The tour contains specific items and the guide explicitly states that the visitor will be unable to see every exhibit case and every artifact. In this way, the experience of the museum’s objects and objectives is controlled. The U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum exhibition experience is guided by the individual visitor. With no tour guide, the visitor encounters specific items based on a multitude of factors: 1) The specific visual appeal of an object; 2) The overall visual appeal of a display; 3) Intriguing or forceful audio/video; 4) A personal or academic interest in specific area; 5) An individual who by nature must see and read everything the museum offers; and 6) Time available for the visit.\textsuperscript{170}

\textsuperscript{168} Dubin, \textit{Displays of Power}, 14, 17. When author Steven C. Dubin interviewed contemporary artist Fred Wilson, Wilson explained that he created exhibitions that questioned the silent ways that institutions influence what the audience views: “…Museums pride themselves on being objective, and they don’t want you to believe that there’s a view that they’re producing.”

\textsuperscript{169} While the age demographic is similar, the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum markedly has a more widespread reach.

\textsuperscript{170} In conjunction with the visual and audial interest factors, there is a voyeuristic element involved in the age-restriction/height-restriction and curiosity on viewing certain materials.
As an overall performance, the Museum of Jewish Heritage interacts with the visitor as an “insider” to Holocaust history and Jewish heritage. The narrative looks at the Holocaust and America through Jewish eyes, and it is an exhibition that focuses on Jews as the model victim and survivor group. In the presentation of concentration camp inmates and victims, the museum provides individual and family portraits taken prior to the war to represent the life lost. Additionally, this approach shows the victims the way they saw themselves.

Conversely, the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum relates with the visitor as an “outsider.” The Holocaust is seen through American eyes. The mug-shots and liberation footage present the ways in which “the other” and the Nazis viewed the concentration camp inmates and victims. In the handling of biblical quotes, the museum speaks to a Jewish tradition, but speaks to an American-Christian and international audience. The text is directed at the non-Jewish visitor who is charged to be a “witness” for the victims of the Nazis. The Museum of Jewish Heritage speaks to a familiar trope in Jewish tradition: remembering tragedy, but seeing light in the future. Both museum narratives are powerful memorials. The Museum of Jewish Heritage is more of a memory of the lives Jewish survivors and victims led, whereas the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum is more of a memory of death and the inhumanity of Nazi actions. Both are invaluable educational tools, and both provide forms of comfort and consolation. A further study would be interested in discovering if visitors take on the responsibility of commemoration through activism as readily via a “Jewish” story at the Museum of Jewish Heritage as they might through a “universal” story at the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum.
A visitor will find much more of a Nazi display as well as depictions of Nazi atrocities in the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum than at the Museum of Jewish Heritage. The event of the Holocaust is so undeniably graphic, the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum contends that, so too must be the presentation. On the other hand, the Museum of Jewish Heritage attempts to create a Holocaust narrative that removes the majority of graphic and explicit Nazi killings. Which invites the important question: Is it irresponsible not to include gruesome photographs or Nazi commandants and officials in the history of the Holocaust? Even though it is a part of the story, does it have to be a part of the museum’s story?

Regardless of the answers, two additional questions should guide any construction of Holocaust history with the hope of informing a more just and accepting society: “What is it in human nature and institutions that made the Holocaust possible? And what is it in human nature and institutions that could make its recurrence improbable?” These museums struggle to answer these questions with varying degrees of success, and further statistical study on the success and failure of lived Holocaust museum education in secondary public education must be conducted in order to state any findings definitively. But, it can be said that the fears of the devaluation of human life guide Holocaust educational institutions in the 21st century. Certain histories of the Holocaust use the phrase “never again,” as an anti-genocidal cry and other histories incorporate modern

---

171 Kaplan, Conscience and Memory, xi.
atrocities into the "Holocaust narrative" to develop stronger ties to active citizenship, morality, and humanity. Yad Vashem chairman Avner Shalev explains, “The Holocaust does, in some way, hold our identity together. At the same time, the buildup of interest in the Holocaust around the world has created a growing awareness of genocide generally, and [Holocaust museums] have an important role to play in that.”173 These relationships attempt to construct and reinforce identity while teaching coexistence.

Today, Holocaust museums “deputize the muses of knowledge to instruct the masses who, in turn, visit them to learn about deeper realities, even as those realities are being written and wrought by elites around them.”174 Museums cannot be static. They must ebb and flow, and attempt to grow alongside the communities they support. Static or fixed museums can harm the timeline of memory, because collective-memory and identity is ever-changing. As public institutions, these Holocaust museums have a public responsibility. They are the construction zones of a social conscious. To remain relevant and productive they must teach with the intention of action. Without action, an institution will not remain vital to its society. But “action” is vague and ambiguous. Precisely what action is paramount to a public-centric institution whose study is particular but whose mission is universal?

Dialogue. Discourse. Discussion. Conversation in community is the essential anti-violence tool available to general citizenry.175 Museums have the ability to teach visitors to be adept and respectful conversationalists. Our relationship with

the Holocaust and the narratives of the Holocaust must be an engagement in critical reflection. It is the type of reflection that can be classified as meditative and at the same time communal. It is not enough to introspect, if it does not eventually involve the community. This is to say, thoughtfulness achieves its pinnacle when in company. This thoughtfulness can then translate into a commitment to thoughtful discussions, inquisitive mindsets, and respectful behavior. Holocaust museums, and Holocaust education, must teach students “how” to learn about the Holocaust. The study is interdenominational, interdisciplinary, and international. With deeper school integration, a museum tour narrative will be able to better accommodate true student-guided inquiry. A museum is a tool for teachers and students: it aids in shaping an understanding of the Holocaust.

In discussing the diversity of possible educational and memorial actions, Kaplan finds it “remarkable how many of those who have addressed the Holocaust with eloquence have almost simultaneously recommended silence and done penance for speaking.” To combat this call to silence, Edward Linenthal argues that contemporary museums are more like forums than temples. Museums must present safe places that invite public gathering and public conversation. The social experience aspect of these spaces transforms them into a marketplace for the sharing of knowledge, personal experience, and ideas. Holocaust museums are institutions for historical education, but now more than ever, they must offer a

176 Kaplan, Conscience and Memory, ix. Kaplan concludes, “We understand what it is that commands silence, and the eternal criticism that interrupts us. In a sense, silence here is an effort to allow extinguished voices to be heard. It is the victims’ silence that is a problem, not ours. If we speak, we bring them back out of chaos; they come back to human identity and bring us back as well, for the human identity, though enclosed by silence, is our one inheritance.”
sacred space to receive personal Holocaust testimony. The time will soon come when every eyewitness to the Nazi crimes against humanity will have passed on. My generation will be the last to say they met a Holocaust survivor. How will we preserve “original” memory and meaning? How will the objects, photos, and films take over after the survivors are gone? What will be the role of the museums and owners of mediated memories? Will the new “owners” of these stories change their meaning?

In order to participate in the continuation of a living memorial and engage in testimonial transmission, a museum’s purpose and presentation must not allow a visitor to be an inactive spectator. All museums provide a history and some form of material evidence, but a great museum makes the visitor feel the need to keep the information close. The great museum gives context to and forms complex relationships with the material world and the world of ideas. The great museum makes a visitor feel pressure knowing that the information garnered is important and life-affirming. If we, as a society, utilize museums in this fashion, dialogue as a pedagogical tool will create individual and communal competencies. The utilization of the object-person relationship should inform and support the more important person-person relationship. The lessons that may be gleaned from one of the darkest periods in humankind are infinite, and in that expanse one can find hope that the future will be brighter. The Holocaust is a prime example of how dangerous our world can be when we don't stand up and speak out. If we can and will speak to one another and speak up in the face of human rights violations and violence then perhaps “never again” will ring true.
Additionally, communities must be involved in the construction and reconstruction of exhibitions and their narratives. They must hold museums to a level of cultural empathy in their interpretations of history so that these museums – their collections, exhibits, and narratives – give people self-respect and an understanding of others. In short, museums must create relationships. And any process of memorialization that fosters positive relationships (e.g., relationships that link history with moral choices) must be understood as a productive endeavor. Using the realm of the Holocaust as a sort of moral litmus test to illuminate human behavior – past and present –, museums can contribute to the task of forming a more thoughtful, aware, humane, and just society.
Bibliography


----------. Permanent Exhibit. Museum Exhibit, New York, NY.


Sandall, Roger. “Review: Night and Fog.” *Film Quarterly* 14, no. 3 (Spring, 1961): 43-44.


----------. *Permanent Exhibit Guide*. Washington, D.C.


-------. “The Counter-Monument: Memory against Itself in Germany Today.”

-------. The Texture of Memory: Holocaust Memorials and Meaning. Yale University

-------. Writing and Rewriting the Holocaust: Narrative and the Consequences of