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Exhibiting Atrocity

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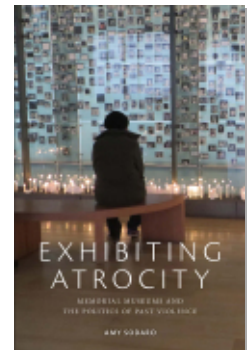
Published by Rutgers University Press

Sodaro, Amy.

Exhibiting Atrocity: Memorial Museums and the Politics of Past Violence.

Rutgers University Press, 2018.

Project MUSE.muse.jhu.edu/book/57541.



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The Creation of a “Living Memorial”

The US Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM) was dedicated by President Clinton in 1993 as a new kind of museum and memorial—one that would go beyond preserving the past and remembering the victims, instead working as a “living memorial” intended to “stimulate leaders and citizens to confront hatred, prevent genocide, promote human dignity, and strengthen democracy” (Clinton 1993). Clinton spoke of it as “an enduring tribute to democracy,” from which we could “learn the lessons [of the Holocaust] and transmit those lessons from generation to generation,” by seeking to “find in our diversity our common humanity” (1993). Harvey Meyerhoff, chairman of the US Holocaust Memorial Council, spoke of the museum’s ability to demonstrate the “awful consequences of bigotry, oppression, hatred and intolerance.” The museum was there, he said, to teach the American people “about the responsibilities that each of us has as citizens of a democratic society,” those responsibilities that would ensure “liberty and justice for all” (Meyerhoff 1993).

The museum had been first conceived fifteen years earlier, in 1978, when an anxious President Carter, worried about alienating the important community of Jewish voters, formed a presidential commission to recommend an appropriate American memorial to the victims of the Holocaust. The

idea of an American memorial to the Holocaust was controversial from the start. However, Carter's commission believed that "Americans have a distinct responsibility to remember the Holocaust," not only because the US army had liberated many camps, but also because America had stood by passively for years while the Nazis annihilated the European Jews: America, as a leader of the free world, must remember her indifference and work to prevent any such tragedy from happening again.¹

The commission also believed that a mere monument or memorial would not accomplish this goal. The commission's report says, "While a monument alone may commemorate the victims, no structure can fully reveal the process that culminated in extermination; nor can it document the awesome dimensions of the crime or analyze its causes and implications." Rather, they wanted to create a "living memorial" that could serve as "a moral compass to keep America on course" (Bloomfield, qtd. in Linenthal 1995, 65). And so this memorial was intended not only to honor and remember the victims but also to create a lasting, permanent record of the past that could stand up to any future attempts at historical revisionism, to educate the public about the causes and implications of the Holocaust, as well as to morally educate its audience to work to prevent such atrocity from happening again in the future.

The idea of a "living" memorial that would harness the memory of the past in a way that would shape the future was quite a new proposal, and the breadth of these goals that the commission set for the memorial necessitated an entirely new form of memorialization; one that not only would work within today's "regretful" politics and incorporate responsibility, regret, and empathy but would also actively work to build a better future. A memorial alone was deemed insufficient to accomplish the commemorative and educative goals of the commission, and so, after fifteen long years of discussions, debates, and planning, the USHMM opened as a very new kind of institution.

In this chapter, I examine the USHMM as an exemplar of a new cultural form of commemoration that marks a peak in efforts to find new ways to memorialize and educate about past atrocity, especially the Holocaust. First, I briefly outline early approaches to Holocaust memorialization, including the sites of destruction themselves and Yad Vashem in Israel. I then focus on the conception and development of the USHMM, which sheds light on why this new form emerged and what exactly it is intended to do, as well as the particular politics that shaped the museum. Finally, I

examine the USHMM's exhibitions and strategies to understand how, as a memorial museum, it seeks to use the memory of the Holocaust to prevent future violence and build a better, more democratic future. However, as Jennifer Hansen-Glucklich reminds us, a Holocaust museum like the USHMM "reveals the national Holocaust ideology of its context, including the way that the Holocaust is framed within the country's 'civil religion'" (2014, 23). Like the other memorial museums examined in this book, the USHMM reveals much more about America's attitude toward its past—and especially its present—than it does about the historical event that it recounts.

THE HOLOCAUST'S CHALLENGE TO MEMORIALIZATION: TO COMMEMORATE AND PRESERVE

From the moment the Nazi labor, concentration, and death camps were liberated, the challenge of memorializing the millions of victims of the Holocaust arose. The earliest Holocaust memorials were makeshift markers erected in the camps and on the sites of massacres and battles by the prisoners and survivors who wished to remember those who had perished and by the American, Soviet, and British soldiers who liberated the camps and wished to remember their comrades who were killed in the brutal war (Young 1993, 49). These wooden obelisks, stone markers, and handmade plaques were the first efforts to remember the victims before the Holocaust became known as the Holocaust and well before its impact would be fully felt. These were memorials in honor of those who had died; their purpose was not unlike a headstone in a cemetery, though they were intended to remember multitudes.

Together with this impulse to remember was an impulse to preserve and to document evidence of the atrocities. Even before the end of World War II, in November 1944, Majdanek, a Nazi concentration camp outside of Lublin, Poland, was turned into a memorial and museum. The purpose then, which holds today, was to "cultivate the memory and promote historical education . . . particularly by means of *commemorating* the victims, *preserving* the relics and *documenting* the history of the concentration camp at Majdanek and the death camp in Bełżec" (my emphasis, Majdanek). Just one year later, in 1945, the Polish Committee of National Liberation granted the same status to Stutthof, the first Nazi camp created in Poland,

and to Auschwitz-Birkenau (Young 1993, 120). In Germany as well, those camps that were not turned into refugee camps or prisons were left as they were found for the purpose of preservation and education about the incomprehensible: American soldiers led memorial tours through Buchenwald; in Dachau, they put up an exhibit of graphic photographs from the camp (Young 1993, 75). As the American soldiers photographed and recorded what they found to rally Americans around their just cause,² so too the impulse immediately following the end of the war seemed to be to preserve the camps as evidence of the crimes committed and justification for the brutal end to a terrible war.

This double impulse to commemorate as well as preserve and document the truth of what happened has endured through the decades of debate and discussion about how to memorialize the Holocaust and is evident in examples from the sites of destruction themselves and those far removed. The drive behind the desire to commemorate is clear. For all of their existence, humans have found ways to remember and honor those who have died. However, the need to balance commemoration with efforts to preserve and document what happened with the urgency and fervor with which it has been done is new. As the world struggled to make sense of the incredible atrocity that was the Holocaust, material evidence that documented the scale of the Nazi destruction—like the barracks where prisoners were inhumanely confined; the remains of the crematoria the Nazis had tried to destroy; the shoes, eyeglasses, hairbrushes, suitcases, clothing, and other personal effects stolen from the victims; and the piles upon piles of hair shaved from the victims' heads—took on an importance not seen in prior efforts at commemorating war (or other) dead. In this way, sites and their material remains were mobilized to tell certain stories and provide evidence of particular crimes. Thus the persistent moral obligation to remember the dead met with what Jeffrey Blustein deems remembrance's "duty of justice" to preserve the past in the effort to shape the present and future (2015, 75).

Throughout Europe, these sites of destruction were variously preserved and interpreted in ways that would tell particular narratives of victimization, persecution, and resistance according to present needs and politics. In Germany, initially many of the memorials erected were to celebrate and commemorate those who had resisted Nazi policies and rule. In the death and concentration camps that were turned into sites of memory and education in Poland—Auschwitz being most notable—the narrative was of Polish

suffering under fascist rule until the fall of communism in 1989; framed by the communist leadership, with an emphasis on the victimization of Polish citizens, the story of the Jewish genocide went untold for decades. In a very different context, the Anne Frank House in Amsterdam, which opened to the public in 1960, told stories of the horrors of occupation and the universal suffering under Nazi rule as embodied by the iconic Anne Frank—a not-very-Jewish German-Dutch “everyteenager” who has become a “primary symbol of identification with the victims of the Holocaust” (Stier 2015, 101). And so it is no surprise that in other places deeply affected by the Holocaust and World War II, notably Palestine, though far removed from the sites of destruction, particular narratives were gaining traction and needed a home in which to be told.

From 1942, when the first reports of the mass killings in Europe made their way to Palestine, until the end of the war in 1945, in what would soon become Israel, a number of more ambitious programs of remembrance and documentation were proposed. Over the course of these three years, Mordechai Shenhavi, who had grown up in Eastern Europe and Russia before emigrating to Palestine in 1920, conceived, reconceived, and fought for a “national project” that would both commemorate the suffering and loss of the Jews of the Diaspora as well as firmly root memorialization of the Holocaust in the Zionist vision of redemption and rebirth (Brog 2002, 305). It would take several years to clarify his proposal and make it public, including gaining an understanding of what exactly was being commemorated, but in 1945 Shenhavi submitted a proposal to the Jewish National Fund in Palestine for the “Yad Vashem Foundation in Memory of Europe’s Lost Jews: An Outline of a Plan for the Commemoration of the Diaspora” (Young 1993, 244).

More than just a memorial site, Yad Vashem was proposed to be a multi-dimensional remembrance and documentation site, and the first proposal already contained many of the elements that we continue to see in Holocaust and other memorial museums around the world: a hall of remembrance, a collection of names of those who perished, a research center, conference facilities, a museum, and of course, a memorial (Brog 2002, 324). Further, it was proposed to be far from the sites of destruction, built in what was Palestine to remember Europe’s Jews, and envisioned as an integral part of the Zionist political goals: Yad Vashem “shall have two goals: a) everlasting historical documentation and b) a political and legal aim. . . . Its

political value lies in the tangible basis that it will create for our demands: Look what they did to us” (Goldberg, qtd. in Brog 2002, 324–25).

It would take more than a decade before Yad Vashem would be built, and it continues to develop;³ by the time it opened in 1953, it was no longer in Palestine but in Israel, adding another dimension to the memory work it was intended to do. In Israel memory of the Holocaust has a special meaning; as the state itself was born from the ashes of the Holocaust, so the memory of the Holocaust is present in every threat to Israel and her people as well as in every celebration of having a homeland at long last. The narrative of the Holocaust that Yad Vashem tells is one that is completely intertwined with the story of Israel, with a dual focus on both victimization and heroism and resistance (Cole 2000). Just as the earliest Holocaust memorials at the sites of destruction told the story of each country’s or people’s suffering, it inscribes “its visitors into a collective and national narrative” (Hansen-Glucklich 2014, 138).

In many senses, Yad Vashem is the first example of the memorial museum as a new form of commemoration. Much more than a memorial or a museum, its multidimensionality is evidence of a new approach to remembering and dealing with the negative past coming out of the pervasive political regret of the day. Remembering is no longer simply about the victims, though this is central; today, remembering past violence strives to activate that memory to build a community around democratic ideals that run counter to the persecutions and oppressions of the past, with the goal of preventing future violence and victimization.

THE HOLOCAUST IN AMERICAN LIFE

Just as the various political, social, and national contexts of Europe or Israel determined how the Holocaust was remembered, Holocaust memory in America has its own particular genealogy and emphasis. Unlike countries that experienced the Holocaust directly like Nazi-occupied Europe, and unlike Israel, which in many senses owes its existence to the Holocaust, the United States has no special, direct relationship to the Holocaust. With the exception of its role as bystander and later as liberator, the United States is far removed from the sites of the atrocities. And despite the fact that many Jewish survivors made their homes in the United States after

the war, the Jewish American community makes up less than 3 percent of the population. Nevertheless, the Holocaust has found a place at the center of American consciousness, and memory of the Holocaust has experienced a tremendous boom in America in the past few decades. The opening of the USHMM in 1993 was something of a peak in this frenzy of memorialization, though memorials and museums continue to be erected throughout the country and the Holocaust shows no sign of budging from its central position in American memory and perceptions of the twentieth century.

Most of the American Jewish historiography of the postwar period focuses on an overwhelming silence vis-à-vis what would become known as the Holocaust; scholars have asserted that the American Jewish population engaged in a “conspiracy of silence” (Sorin 1997, 217) in which the Holocaust was “barely remembered [and] rarely mentioned” (Jick 1981, 308–9). Eager to forget the horrors of what had happened and to start a new life, the story goes, American Jews sought assimilation and the American Dream. This unwillingness to remember the Holocaust is argued to have been broken at last in the 1960s and 1970s by a series of events, including the publication of Raul Hilberg’s *The Destruction of the European Jews* (1961), the capture of Adolf Eichmann in 1961 and his subsequent trial and execution in Jerusalem, Israel’s Six-Day War in 1967 that has been argued to have “awakened dormant memories of the Holocaust” (Linenthal 1995, 9), the Yom Kippur War of 1973, and popular culture events such as the nine-and-a-half-hour NBC miniseries *Holocaust*, which aired in the United States in 1978, reaching an audience of more than one hundred million.

As entrenched as this narrative of an awakening of Holocaust awareness in the United States is, recent work by Hasia Diner (2009) has compellingly argued otherwise. In her book *We Remember with Reverence and Love: American Jews and the Myth of Silence after the Holocaust, 1945–1962*, Diner argues that American Jews had fully incorporated memory of the Holocaust into their collective lives and experiences well before the 1960s and 1970s. Though there was not yet an agreed upon name for the event—it was referred to variously as “the catastrophe,” “the six million,”⁴ or the “Hitler Holocaust,” among others (Diner 2009, 21)—or set of practices and modes for memorializing the victims, Diner argues that Holocaust remembrance was very much part of Jewish life. Diner argues that in the 1960s and 1970s, when events like those outlined above encroached on Jewish—and American—life, the Holocaust began to take a more central

place in not just Jewish communities but American society as well, and new modes of remembrance emerged. Thus when President Carter announced plans to create a US Commission on the Holocaust in 1978, this marked a shift in Holocaust remembrance in the United States from the “earlier disorganized, scattered and spontaneous” memorials of American Jewish communities to a new model of Holocaust commemoration distinguished by its “prominence, mammoth funding, and colossal size” (Diner 2009, 17). Though there are clear disagreements in historiographical analysis of the Holocaust’s place in American Jewish life in the immediate postwar period, what cannot be denied is that by the end of the 1970s, the Holocaust had become a central part of American historical consciousness.

WHY A HOLOCAUST MUSEUM?

In 1978, at a ceremony celebrating Israel’s thirtieth anniversary, President Jimmy Carter announced plans to set up a President’s Commission that would make recommendations for the creation of a national memorial to the “six million who were killed in the Holocaust” (Novick 1999, 216). As is often the case with Holocaust memorials, especially in the United States, this was a political decision, prompted by Carter’s increasing troubles with the Jewish community for his perceived lack of support for Israel. The president’s alienation of the Jewish community through his sale of arms to Saudi Arabia and his support for the “legitimate rights of the Palestinian people” had the potential to be disastrous in his efforts for reelection; to placate the important Jewish community of voters, Jewish White House staff members suggested that the president propose a national memorial, as his “relations with the Jewish community need[ed] every boost possible” (Novick 1999, 217). So, out of political motivations, and with a keen eye to the Jewish response, the President’s Commission was born to recommend an appropriate national memorial to the victims of the Holocaust.

It is important to note that from the start it was a Holocaust memorial that was proposed, not a museum or monument celebrating Jewish culture and history. A century ago, political placating would have likely taken the form of a celebratory monument, but with the rise of political regret and reparations politics, a memorial to the genocide of the Jewish people was deemed appropriate and effective. Further, the decision to build a Holocaust memorial in the nation’s capital points toward the centrality of the

Holocaust as a reference to past violence that instills a moral obligation to remember. To justify a Holocaust memorial in the nation's capital, the museum would have to convey a more universal message than the destruction of European Jewry. Indeed, the construction of the USHMM suggests that Levy and Sznajder were correct in arguing that the Holocaust has created a "memory imperative" that shapes how individuals, groups, and societies around the world remember their own pasts and those of others. But what Levy and Sznajder overlook in their optimistic account of a cosmopolitan memory imperative is that memory is always political and can be easily co-opted by the nation-state to promote national political agendas.

The formation of the President's Commission thus marked not only the institutionalization of Holocaust memory in America but also its politicization in the form of a governmentally appointed body that would determine the shape of American memory of the Holocaust. The selection of Elie Wiesel as chairman of the commission perhaps determined, more than any other single factor, the shape that memory would take. Wiesel, a survivor, writer, and extremely important figure in the creation of America's reading of the Holocaust,⁵ believed that the Holocaust is a "sacred mystery" that can only be understood by those who were there (Novick 1999, 211). Wiesel was also one of the most outspoken proponents of the uniqueness of the Holocaust.⁶ Had another prominent American Jewish figure—like Simon Wiesenthal—been appointed, the museum might have looked much different.

Upon its formation, the President's Commission began to search for the best way to memorialize the event that many, especially Wiesel, believed to be unapproachable. In its research on Holocaust memorialization, the commission solicited advice from numerous groups, such as survivors and civic organizations and Polish American, Armenian, African American, and American Indian groups. Several members traveled to Europe and Israel to understand how the Holocaust was remembered and memorialized abroad, a pattern we will see replicated in each of the other museums in this book. Immediately, however, the question of the uniqueness of the Jewish Holocaust versus inclusion of other victims arose, and what was intended as a political gesture by President Carter to placate an important constituency turned into a fifteen-year struggle over the meaning of the Holocaust, ownership of the Holocaust, and the place of the Holocaust in American life.

The answer to the question of why a Holocaust museum, then, can be quite simple: it was an effort to bolster the support of the important and influential Jewish community in America. However, a national memorial to the victims of the Holocaust is one thing; a \$168-million, state-of-the-art museum cum memorial that has attracted more than forty million visitors since its opening, steps from the National Mall, is quite another. How precisely Carter's political strategy turned into such a massive undertaking and resulted in such an elaborate institution is the next part of this chapter. Certainly the selection of Wiesel as chairman was one important decision that shaped the entire process of the creation of the museum. Though the White House would argue for inclusion over uniqueness, the museum is ultimately intended to remember "the six million Jews and millions of non-Jews who were murdered by the Nazis" (Weinberg, qtd. in Berenbaum 1993, xiv), and this politics of uniqueness would plague the process of its development. The museum's creation would also be challenged by the tension inherent in representing that which Wiesel and many others believed could not be represented. Each step of the way, the decisions made to address these and other problems shaped the way the Holocaust is remembered by and represented in the USHMM, and—as the USHMM serves as a model for memorial museums around the world—these decisions have helped produce the present form of memorial museums.

THE STRUGGLE TO CREATE AN AMERICAN HOLOCAUST MUSEUM

The decision to establish a national Holocaust memorial in Washington, DC, provoked a wide response from those groups who felt they had been victimized and should be represented in the museum. In order to convince the public that such a memorial deserved a place in the center of the nation's capital, amid the symbols of national pride and triumph, an emphasis in the museum had to be placed on American ideals such as pluralism, immigration, liberty, and tolerance. Thus members of Armenian, Romany, Polish, Ukrainian, Russian, and other groups who had been victimized felt that it was their right as American citizens to have their experience acknowledged in what would be one of the most prestigious Holocaust memorials in the world.

The demand by groups for recognition of their victimization is something new that, as we have seen, accompanied and even spurred the rise of political regret and its focus on coming to terms with the past. Victimhood attained a privileged status as previously marginalized groups sought recognition, and in doing so, they brought the negative past to the forefront of historical consciousness. As is well illustrated by the case of the USHMM, Olick and Coughlin argue that “memory and regret are not the result of the integration of the collectivity but of the impossibility of this in an age of competing claims, multiple histories, and plural perceptions” (2003, 56). The Holocaust, and in particular its commemoration in an American context, could be seen as what Levy and Sznajder describe as a “universal ‘container’ for memories of myriad victims” (2006, 195). However, this new opening up of the claims of memory to such a diversity of groups vying for recognition of victimization does not at all mean that memory is no longer a political tool that is wielded by the state; rather, it often makes memory an even more diffuse political strategy, and it leaves the past wide open as a battlefield for current political battles.

Because “memorials and museums represent public statements about what the past has been, and how the present should acknowledge it” (Hodgkin and Radstone 2003, 12), the stakes attached to recognition of victimization in the museum are clearly very high. The argument over inclusion is, indeed, over ownership of Holocaust memory. American national memory is made up of a plurality of narratives of those many groups who have made their homes in America. At the same time, to counter the assimilation that is inevitable in America, group identity reinforcements are necessary. The Holocaust, being viewed as a pivotal moment in American history, is therefore an important memory to “own.”

In the beginning, it was primarily Polish American and Ukrainian American communities who fought hardest for representation on the Museum Council. Both argued that their people had been slated for extermination and should take their rightful place next to their Jewish counterparts on the council and in the museum itself. This presented a significant problem, though; despite the fact that many Poles and Ukrainians suffered at the hands of the Nazis, many looked the other way, and still others took active part in the murder of their Jewish neighbors. Though the Jewish council members were willing to “share” Holocaust memory to some degree, to sit on the council with members from nations that were perceived to have been complicit in Nazi crimes was seen as “disturbing, if not offensive”

(Berenbaum, qtd. in Linenthal 1995, 41). Nevertheless, the White House, in order to avoid “open controversy with concerned ethnic groups and their advocates in the Congress,” remained firm on the issue of inclusion, expanding the council in the attempt to please everyone (Linenthal 1995, 43).⁷

It was not only reluctance to sit on the council with members of groups that had possibly persecuted Jews that worried Jewish council members but also suspicion of the motives behind their desire for representation on the council and involvement in the planning of the memorial. They feared the Americanization of the Holocaust and its politicization and eventual degradation. The sacred event that Wiesel saw as impossible to ever truly understand was falling into the realm of political maneuverings and seemed now to belong to any group that wished to lay claim to it. Many Jewish council members felt that they were losing their hold on the memorial that was supposed to honor the six million, especially as Romany and Armenian groups entered the struggle for inclusion in the museum’s narrative. As one member Hyman Bookbinder warned, “Careful as we may be . . . the very inclusion of non-Jewish victims will be interpreted by the average viewer as meaning there were Jewish and non-Jewish victims of the Holocaust” (qtd. in Linenthal 1995, 54).

In the attempt to synthesize the arguments for and against the uniqueness of the victims, Michael Berenbaum, then project director of the USHMM, proposed that only through inclusion and comparison is it possible to truly see the uniqueness of the Jewish Holocaust. He claims that inclusion “deepens our moral sensitivity while sharpening our perception” and that “comparisons do not innately obscure the uniqueness of the Holocaust—they clarify it” (1989, 96). Instead of viewing inclusion as “submersion” of the Jewish experience, seeing the Holocaust from a universal perspective would carry its message beyond Elie Wiesel’s sacred mystery, to all of humanity. Still a proponent of uniqueness, Berenbaum attempted to mollify both sides, and this was ultimately the approach that was adopted by the museum. Essentially Berenbaum proposed a hierarchy of victims, with Jews at the center and other victim groups radiating out.

In addition to struggles for inclusion, which, for the most part, were decided in favor of the Holocaust’s uniqueness, there were other struggles and questions about how to represent the event that many believe is unrepresentable that helped shape the institution that is the USHMM today. Wiesel’s idea was for the museum to express the impossibility of understanding the Holocaust: a place where “the sacred mystery that was the Holocaust

would stamp itself on individual psyches, and visitors would, ideally, emerge with a renewed appreciation of its mystery” (Linenthal 1995, 122). Wiesel thus believed that the prosaic matters that were in fact an essential part of the planning would contaminate the sacredness of the event, but the museum’s planners had to address these issues. Museum professionals were necessarily called in to actually make the museum work, but most survivors did not believe that they could ever understand the Holocaust enough to be entrusted with bringing their stories to the public (Linenthal 1995, 127). Thus several teams of museum professionals presented numerous plans for the museum in the nine years following its conception, all of which were rejected.

However, while survivors were worried that their stories could never be represented by those who were not there, it was understood by all that the purpose of the museum was to bring the story of the Holocaust to generations of (mostly) Americans who were not there and couldn’t possibly understand; the museum would need to present the Holocaust as what James Young refers to as a “vicarious past” (2000). The museum *had* to tell the story of the Holocaust and *had* to render it comprehensible. Hence Jeshajahu Weinberg, the creator of the Museum of the Jewish Diaspora in Tel Aviv, was brought into the project, introducing the “conceptual” or “story-telling approach” that would most successfully blend a chronological, narrative approach with elements of Wiesel’s mystery (Linenthal 1995, 128). Under Weinberg’s leadership, in 1989 an exhibition team led by Michael Berenbaum was able to put together a story line for the permanent exhibit that was unanimously approved by the Council, and work was able to commence. Though numerous questions would continue to arise, such as how graphic the exhibit should be and how best to convey the horror of the Holocaust without putting off visitors, the major hurdles had been overcome.

The actual construction of the museum was perhaps the simplest part of its coming into being. Congress passed a bill allocating a plot of federal land on the National Mall, and James Ingo Freed’s impressive design worked within the requirements for federal buildings located on the Mall. Although it is a federal institution, the museum was funded through private donations, which would have been a problem but for the outpouring of generosity of the American Jewish community. The museum was funded by the contributions of more than two hundred thousand private donors, mostly from the Jewish community. It was also these private membership

contributions combined with federal funding that kept the museum's programs and operations running, though today the federal government has for the most part taken over operating costs. The importance of the museum to the American Jewish community is evidenced by the extraordinary amount of money that has been privately poured into it.

Though wildly successful today, there were many steps along the way when it looked as if the museum would never be realized. With each dilemma that arose, the project became more complicated. To address the difficult issues that surfaced throughout the fifteen years of the museum's development—questions of inclusion and representability, of necessity and sacredness, and of who the proper stewards of such an undertaking should be—the museum's council had to come up with ways to include other victims without de-judaizing the Holocaust, balance mystery with comprehensibility, and negotiate the tensions between museum professionals and Holocaust survivors. Throughout years of compromise and collaboration between a plurality of actors with divergent memories and agendas, the project grew, and today the USHMM is one of the largest Holocaust research, education, and memorial centers in the world. And because of these particularities of the context of its creation, the project evolved into the first self-conscious *memorial museum*, which has firmly planted itself at the center of American Holocaust consciousness and memory, telling a particularly American version of the Holocaust.

THE USHMM: AN AMERICAN HOLOCAUST

The USHMM is unlike any other museum, monument, or memorial on the National Mall. In the midst of Washington's bland, neoclassical landscape of democracy and freedom, James Ingo Freed's building stands as a symbol of mankind's ultimate inhumanity. Though throughout the facade, it maintains the requisite limestone of the surrounding architecture, beyond that facade, the building conveys the "essence" of the Holocaust. Freed traveled to a number of Holocaust sites for inspiration and created a building meant to be a "resonator of memory" (USHMM). Brick and steel in the construction are reminiscent of the barracks of Auschwitz and a critique of the modern, industrial society that enabled the Holocaust to occur; other elements such as disconcerting and disproportionate dimensions, simulated watch-towers and ruptures, and alternating stark emptiness and claustrophobic

closeness take the visitor from the heart of the free world into its antithesis. It is what Hansen-Glucklich refers to as an “architecture of experience, as it seeks to lead visitors into a vicarious encounter with the sites and spaces of the Holocaust” (2014, 158). Yet despite its deeply disturbing subject matter, since its dedication in 1993 “as a physical container to preserve the memory of the Holocaust for all Americans” (Linenthal 1995, 1), the USHMM continues to be one of the most popular tourist destinations in Washington, DC.⁸

History and memory of the Holocaust are such sensitive subjects to navigate, particularly in an American setting, that the museum has had to transcend the usual role of museum as collector and displayer of historical artifacts. As Leon Wieseltier (1993) pointed out, the very name—memorial museum—presents a paradox that is emblematic of the institution’s many duties. Memorials are the embodiment of memory, while museums are traditionally viewed as houses of history—fact-driven, objective, and empirical. Thus this museum attempts to be a space in which “the vividness of recollection joins the sturdiness of research” (Wieseltier 1993, 19). History is a corrective to memory’s fallibility, and memory is often believed to be a therapeutic alternative to history’s objectivity and scientific claims, and the museum attempts to embody the best of each.

Contending with issues of memory and history, any museum must carefully negotiate the “post-modern dilemma” of today’s museums, described by Iwona Irwin-Zarecka as “the need for the museum not to claim authority on historical truth, all the while constructing legible exhibits about the past” (1994, 102). As a national memorial, the museum strove for an “objective” telling of the story of the Holocaust, presenting “all that happened, the way it happened, without embellishment, without emotion, without distortions” (Linenthal 1995, 111). This, however, is easier said than done. The museum is meant to serve as a living memorial, composed of different and dynamic forms of remembrance and education, which are intended to resolve some of the difficulties arising in Holocaust memorialization. Thus the USHMM has a permanent exhibit, rotating temporary exhibits, a Committee on Conscience, a Holocaust learning center, a library and archive, a Center for Advanced Holocaust Studies, and full programs of conferences, functions, lectures, and days of remembrance.

While the other parts of the institution, such as the rotating exhibits and learning centers, are there to flesh out the experience and story of the Holocaust, the permanent exhibit is there to tell the story, and in this



FIGURE 1. Visitors in the Hall of Witness at the US Holocaust Memorial Museum. Photo by Max Reid, US Holocaust Memorial Museum.

it departs from traditional conceptions of museums. Traditional history museums revolve around their collections, displaying, cataloguing, and educating through artifacts. The USHMM, though it has the world's largest collection of Holocaust artifacts, does not take its point of departure from the collection; former director Jeshajahu Weinberg instead argues that "its point of departure is the story line of Holocaust history"; it is "an attempt at visual historiography . . . a narrative museum" (1994). But it is more than that and is best described as an "experiential" museum. Traditional museums are repositories for artifacts to be studied and displayed in the effort to impart an understanding of history, science, or art; this museum, however, is first and foremost telling a story, and its collection is only important to the extent that it advances the narrative. In this it lays the groundwork for a new kind of experiential, memorial museum that seeks to do something dramatically new.

In combining historical storytelling with experiential memory, the USHMM seeks an emotional response from its visitors, not mere intellectual impact—it is meant to upset and disturb. It is a plot-driven narrative, which induces identification with the "hero" (victims, survivors, and liberators) and the development of a "negative attitude towards the villain" (Weinberg 1994). Aside from the fact that the subject of the Holocaust is highly emotional, even for those visitors who have no direct connection to or memory of it, "the emotional involvement of the visitor has great cognitive importance. It facilitates the internalization of the moral lessons embedded in the story" (Weinberg 1994). The permanent exhibit is designed to tell the story of the Holocaust "from a specific point of view, to evoke specific responses and instill specific ideas for today's world and for future generations" (USHMM Design Concept Proposal 1986).

The museum also differs from those Holocaust memorials and museums that are constructed on the sites of the atrocities, such as Auschwitz-Birkenau or Majdanek. Place and memory are intimately connected and the places themselves often speak of the tragedy that occurred there. Though of course texts are necessary to explain and contextualize those artifacts and buildings that remain in situ, the story is primarily told through the place itself. The USHMM, however, is far removed from the "topography of terror" and so must tell its own story. As is evident even from approaching the imposing facade of Freed's building, the Holocaust as told by this museum is a meticulously constructed story and memory of something that occurred far away and long ago.

In the attempt to simulate the authenticity of place, the museum did actually transplant a railroad car, bunks from Auschwitz, trees, stones, and many other artifacts from their original sites; it has also re-created things that couldn't be removed from their sites, such as the Auschwitz entry gate and the Warsaw Ghetto wall. These artifacts and reproductions create the scenic backdrop for the telling of the Holocaust story and are as carefully designed as any Hollywood set. In addition to authentic artifacts and recreations, the exhibit relies heavily on texts, photos, and documentary and audio footage, all of which are submitted to various forms of interpretation. The permanent exhibit is the result of a major collaboration between historians, documentary filmmakers, exhibition designers, and other museum professionals; their collective contributions to its design and implementation are further testimony to its departure from traditional museums. The result is an exhibition that is carefully constructed and presented: the design team strategically made "choices of which aspects of that chronological history . . . define the emotional effect on the visitor's memory of the experience" (USHMM Design Concept Proposal 1986).

In order to tell its story, the permanent exhibit, *The Holocaust*, uses a controlled circulation path that covers three floors of the museum building and presents a mostly chronological, narrative history using more than nine hundred artifacts, seventy video monitors, and four theaters playing historic film footage and testimonies. There are three chapters composing the exhibition: "Nazi Assault," "Final Solution," and "Last Chapter." The exhibition begins with an elevator ride to the fourth floor, during which the visitor hears a US serviceman describe in horror what his battalion had just encountered: "A big prison of some kind, and there are people running all over. Sick, dying, starved people" (qtd. in Cole 2000, 152). The elevator doors open onto a gruesome image of American soldiers staring in disbelief at a pit of charred corpses. Thus the museum begins with the United States' liberation of the camps in Germany, orienting the visitor to the American telling of the story; it becomes clear that the story in the USHMM is one of not just victims and perpetrators but also liberators.

After this unusual orientation, upon turning a corner, the visitor is swept back through time to a very brief presentation of Jewish life in prewar Europe, orienting the visitor to the American telling of a Jewish story. Serene images of the Jewish Diaspora merely set the stage for the "Nazi Assault," which chronicles, step-by-step and in a linear, chronological framework, the rise of Hitler, National Socialism, and anti-Semitism starting in 1933.

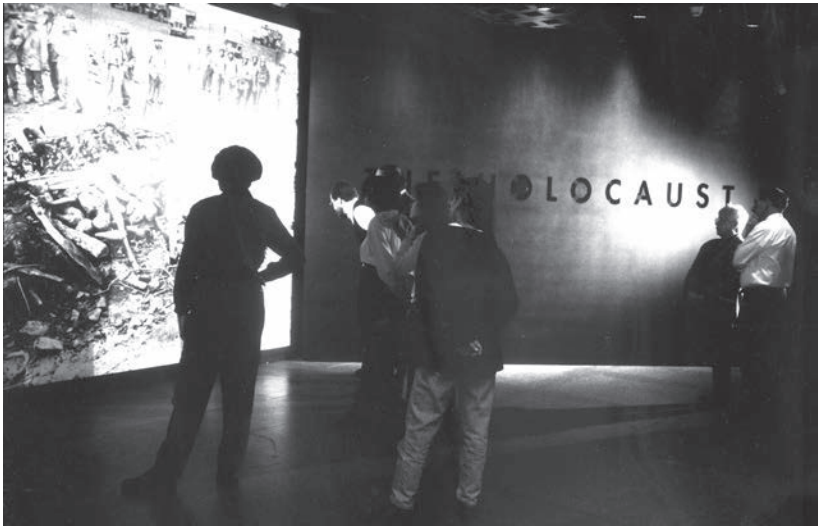


FIGURE 2. Visitors view the liberation mural on the fourth floor of the permanent exhibition in the US Holocaust Memorial Museum.
US Holocaust Memorial Museum.

This confusing chronology in the start of the exhibit—beginning with the liberation, then sweeping the visitor back in time only to start the story in 1933—points toward a tension that all memorial museums face: determining the temporal context of the story they are telling. While technically World War II did start in 1933, Armenians, for example, argued that the Armenian genocide should be included in the story as a precedent (Linenthal 1995). And it could be argued that World War I or the rise of anti-Semitism in Europe in the decades before World War II should really be the start of a story that is well contextualized historically. However, because of the politics behind the creation of the museum—a story that had to be nominally inclusive, though focused on the Jewish experience; one that had to be comprehensible to an audience with no prior historical knowledge; and one that must focus on American ideals and values—the story that the museum’s temporal framing begins in 1933 with the rise of Nazis to power and ends with emigration, framing the story in terms that will resonate with an American audience.

“Nazi Assault” is the most text-heavy of the chapters: dense with photos, documentary footage, and artifacts, it creates the feeling that the visitor is witness to the “objective” voice of history. Documents, photos, and charts follow the rise of anti-Semitism and intolerance and the withdrawal

of Jewish civil and fundamental rights. To the sound of Nazis goose-stepping in the background and healing Hitler, the visitor reads about race science, book burnings, anti-Semitic propaganda, the 1933 boycott of Jewish shops, and the growing terror as the Nazis launched their attack on the Jews of Germany and Austria. A corner of the exhibit gives a glimpse of other victims—Roma, Jehovah’s Witnesses, and Communists—but bringing the visitor back to the central, Jewish narrative, “Nazi Assault” culminates with the Kristallnacht pogroms of 1938. The visitor also has the first of two encounters—the second will come on the descent to the final chapter—with the USHMM’s Tower of Faces exhibit, a stunning three-story tower of photographs from the Eishyshok Shtetl in what is today Lithuania. The approximately one thousand photographs of daily life in the village, which was wiped out by the Einsatzgruppe in 1941, help give a sense of the individual identities of some of the six million whose lives are remembered in the museum and, as we shall see, establishes a key trope used by memorial museums—photographs of individuals—that is meant to help restore humanity and individual identity to the victims and inspire empathy and affect in visitors. Having foreshadowed the destruction that is to come, the narrative is suspended while the visitor descends to the third floor.

“Final Solution” takes the visitor out of the role of witness to history and places her in the role of victim. No longer strictly chronological, the exhibition path leads the disconcerted visitor into a reconstruction of *l’univers concentrationnaire*. Though there are a few discreet early exits, the visitor sees no way out, as she is taken from the ghettos of occupied Poland, through “transport” in a railroad car, arriving in Auschwitz itself. Walking under the steel “Arbeit Macht Frei” entry gate, the visitor/victim ends up in a prisoners’ barracks—a simulation of that camp, which is emblematic of the depths of evil. After being led through the barracks, past images of medical experiments, forced labor, and inhuman living conditions, one finally escapes the camp, but only after passing a small scale model depicting the murder of the victims in the gas chambers and crematoria.

Testimonies from Auschwitz survivors play in the background, and thousands of artifacts including toothbrushes, kitchen gadgets, suitcases, and piles of shoes—an intended allusion to Auschwitz—provide the emotional and physical evidence for the horrors of the camps and demonstrate not only the magnitude of the lives lost but also the individuality and humanity of the victims. Before leaving “Final Solution,” one must pass one last panel,



FIGURE 3. View of a casting taken of the gate to the main camp at Auschwitz with the sign “Arbeit Macht Frei” (Work Makes One Free) that is displayed on the third floor of the permanent exhibition in the US Holocaust Memorial Museum. US Holocaust Memorial Museum.

asking “Why Wasn’t Auschwitz Bombed?” Puzzling over the indifference of the US government, the visitor is relieved to descend once more, this time into the “Last Chapter.” The second and final floor is devoted to the defeat of the Germans, resistance and rescue, and the redemption of the victims. Displays on the rescue of European Jews, footage of the Nuremberg Trials, images of Jewish immigration to the United States, and a triumphant display on the founding of Israel allow the visitor to leave on a cautiously positive note. While the horror is overwhelming, democracy and liberty have prevailed in the end, and the visitor leaves the exhibition confident that the whole Holocaust story has been told and that good has triumphed over evil.

The permanent exhibition is a multimedia Holocaust experience. It simulates for the visitor the experience of the Holocaust in a way that appeals to today’s world of media inundation; the exhibition uses film, television, and audio effects, complete with scenery and props, to facilitate the telling of one of history’s most horrific stories. Scripted and designed, it is as if one has walked onto a Hollywood set and been thrown into the role of

victim. This Holocaust simulation is part of Weinberg's "visual historiography," which intends to tell the story in a way that maximizes the emotional response of the visitor and so must engage the visitor in ways that other history museums do not. For those who were not there (most of the visitors), the exhibition attempts to render the Holocaust comprehensible: "If visitors could take the same journey [as the victims], they would understand the story because they will have experienced the story" (Berenbaum, qtd. in Linenthal 1995, 170). It is this Holocaust experience that provides a basis for understanding and remembering the Holocaust for all those young visitors who have no direct experience with it; and through the museum, in part, a national memory of the Holocaust is proliferated through American culture.

Deepening the "Holocaust experience" and aimed particularly at young visitors is the other permanent exhibit, "Remember the Children: Daniel's Story." Echoing a visit to the Anne Frank House, this exhibit takes visitors through the World War II experience of a young German Jewish boy Daniel who, with his family, is swept up in the horrors of the Holocaust. Drawn from stories of children's experiences in Germany, the Łódź Ghetto and Auschwitz, with Daniel's (fictional) diary providing the narrative, the exhibit takes visitors from Daniel's carefree childhood filled with laughter and love to his mounting fear as the Nazis came to power and enforced increasing restrictions on the Jewish population. Daniel's world becomes smaller and more precarious as he is prohibited from going to school, his family's synagogue is burned down, and he is forced to wear a yellow star; finally his family is deported to a ghetto and then a concentration camp. While Daniel survives, he never sees his mother and sister again. The exhibit presents visitors with spaces where they can touch, listen, and learn in an experiential and interactive way: they are invited into Daniel's world—a world that cannot help but resonate with young visitors for whom the Holocaust is far removed. Its vivid evocation of a "typical" childhood that was ripped apart by Nazi terror is a powerful lesson in the dangers of hatred and intolerance, and the exhibit implores its visitors to read Daniel's diary, visit his house, and remember his story. In this way, the exhibit asks visitors to take some responsibility for the fate of Daniel and the millions of other children swept up in the Holocaust.

This transfer of memory is precisely what Alison Landsberg (2004) means by "prosthetic memory," which is acquired in experiential spaces like the USHMM by visitors who have no actual memory of the Holocaust,

but who internalize the experience, memory, and message of the museum. However, while Landsberg finds prosthetic memory to be liberatory in that it removes claims of ownership from any traumatic memory and instead opens up the past to different communities and groups, it is also clear from the USHMM that the particular experience and memory provided for the visitor is highly mediated with very specific goals in mind. Further, this prosthetic memory, as mediated and porous as it is, can replace the need to work harder at an understanding of the Holocaust. Iwona Irwin-Zarecka argues that museums like the USHMM, with its “attractive packaging of the past” and carefully constructed narrative, can allow us “to claim we have gained understanding without having to work at it” (1994, 108). The Holocaust in the museum is packaged like a Hollywood movie—scripted, well-designed, and widely accessible—intending its visitors/audience to have a specific reaction and thus carry away with them a specific Holocaust memory.

And it is a uniquely American telling of the Holocaust. The USHMM frames its narrative according to American ideals, set in sharp contrast to the Nazi’s horrific policies. Upon entering the exhibition, the first sounds and images that greet the visitor are the American liberators of the camps. The irony, of course, is that the Soviet army was the first to liberate Nazi camps, in particular those that were most notorious, like Auschwitz, in Poland; those that the US army liberated were in the west and mostly held non-Jewish political prisoners. Nevertheless, in beginning the exhibit with the US liberation of Ohrdruf, the visitor realizes that this is an American telling of the story and that, despite America’s faults and failures during the war, the United States was ultimately a liberator. The final chapter of the exhibition brings the visitor back from the horrors of the ghettos and concentration camps of Europe to the liberation, the founding of Israel, and immigration to America. Thus American ideals of liberty and immigration frame the story, and the view of the United States as watchdog and savior is maintained throughout the story. As Tim Cole argues, the permanent exhibit’s narrative is one of “redemptive closure offered by liberation and post-war emigration from the scene of the murders” that is meant to “reaffirm in those who visit a commitment to American values” (2000, 153–54). Politically, to build the museum on the mall in Washington, DC, it was necessary for the museum to represent an American telling of the Holocaust that emphasizes American ideals and values. Through its carefully constructed telling of the story of the Holocaust, the USHMM “defines what

it means to be American by graphically illustrating what it means not to be American” (Young 1993, 337).

MOBILIZING HOLOCAUST MEMORY

From the start, it was not enough for the USHMM to be an American museum educating about and remembering the Holocaust. In order to justify its position in the heart of the nation’s capital and its existence so far from the site of the events (not to mention the fact that when it was built there was no national museum to remember the horrors of America’s own past, such as the destruction of the Native Americans or foundation upon the institution of slavery⁹), it had to have a broader mission. And as we can see in the examples of the earliest memorials in Europe as the war came to an end, and Yad Vashem’s dual political and commemorative purpose, Holocaust memory is not simply about the past but very much created by and for the present and future. After all, the USHMM claims to be “a living memorial to the Holocaust,” intended to “inspire citizens and leaders worldwide to confront hatred, promote human dignity, and prevent genocide” (USHMM “About”).

This presumption that a visit to an experiential museum will lead to moral transformation that will contribute to the prevention of future violence means that the USHMM, and all memorial museums that have moral education as their purpose, must determine how to transform the experience of the museum into sustained action beyond the duration of the visit. Thus another element of memorial museums’ work that sets them apart from more traditional museums or memorials is a commitment to public and educational programs that will make them active centers of memory and education for their communities in the hope of enacting change. The USHMM has perhaps the most robust set of public programming of any memorial museum; intended for its local community, the nation, and the world, the USHMM’s programs have the goal of transforming memory of the Holocaust into an active commitment on the part of individuals, educators, leaders, and policy makers to prevent genocide, intolerance, and atrocity.

The arm of the museum aimed at turning history’s lessons into the present and future struggle against genocide and other atrocities is the Simon-Skjodt Center for the Prevention of Genocide, under the purview of

Committee on Conscience, which was founded in 1995 as a watchdog group intended to “alert the national conscience, influence policy makers, and stimulate worldwide action to confront and work to halt acts of genocide or related crimes against humanity” (USHMM “Confront Genocide”). In addition to many public programs related to genocide and human rights, the Committee on Conscience and Simon-Skjodt Center produce educational films, hold teacher trainings, curate temporary exhibits, produce policy papers, hold conferences, conduct research, and assess risks of genocide in places like Myanmar and Central African Republic. For example, at the moment, they have the small exhibition “Genocide: The Threat Continues,” which examines genocidal policies and the targeting of populations by the Islamic State and the Assad regime in Syria.

While this exhibit brings the work of the Simon-Skjodt Center to the museum’s visitors who may otherwise leave the permanent exhibition grateful that freedom and tolerance have triumphed, the museum also attempts to reach those around the country and world who cannot visit the museum itself. It has a very sophisticated website with interactive components related to the permanent and temporary exhibitions, a vast archive of photographs, podcasts of museum events, videos about the museum and the Holocaust, ongoing blogs on present and past topics related to genocide, and resources for stopping or preventing genocide. The museum’s website itself is intended to be a center for Holocaust and genocide education and research and is constantly updated with news about the museum, Holocaust research and remembrance, genocide and genocidal situations around the world, and commentary on political issues and events. It is a clearinghouse of Holocaust and genocide information, commentary, and news and is the most dynamic and accessible part of the museum; with the world as its audience, the site had more than 18.5 million visits last year (USHMM “Press Kit” 2016).

The museum also sends traveling exhibitions and events around the country and world (more than three hundred presentations of nine exhibitions since its opening) and has strong partnerships with many other Holocaust museums around the world. In this way, it shares not only its content, especially in the steady stream of loans and exchanges of collections, but also its museological practices; its influence can be seen in Holocaust and other museums, from Houston to Cape Town as well as in the other museums analyzed in this book.

CONCLUSION

According to Michael Berenbaum, the story of the Holocaust as told in the USHMM must “resonate not only with a survivor in New York and his children in Houston or San Francisco, but with a black leader from Atlanta, a Midwestern farmer, or a northeastern industrialist. Millions of Americans make pilgrimages to Washington; the Holocaust Museum must take them back in time, transport them to another continent, and inform their current reality. The Americanization of the Holocaust is an honorable task provided that the story is faithful to the historical event” (qtd. in Young 1993, 337). In order to build an American memorial to the Holocaust on the National Mall, the Holocaust had to be fit into American history and ideals and the current American reality. Thus the museum works to Americanize the Holocaust and make it comprehensible to every American, ensuring that the event enters and remains in the American collective consciousness.

The process of creating the USHMM was fraught with controversy, and along the way decisions were made to ensure that the museum’s story of the Holocaust would resonate with its visitors. Thus inclusion was nominally chosen for political purposes, but the museum maintains a strict hierarchy of victims that places Jewish victims firmly in the center of the American telling. The museum also had to make sure that the Holocaust would remain accessible to American generations who are further and further removed from the event; thus, the museum seeks to tell the full story of the Holocaust in as detailed and comprehensible a way as possible so that future generations of Americans come to understand this ultimate example of humankind’s inhumanity. But lest the horror of the Holocaust alienate American visitors, American values, such as democracy, liberty, plurality, and immigration, prevail. The ultimate tale of oppression, inhumanity, racism, genocide, and hatred is thus mobilized in the USHMM to reinforce the opposite values—freedom, democracy, plurality, protection, and tolerance. The USHMM works to create for Americans a shared understanding of a past that was not ours, but has become central to the ways in which we imagine America and our duties as American citizens.

In an effort to keep the museum and the memory of the Holocaust relevant to its many visitors for whom the Holocaust is and will be far removed, the USHMM developed new, experiential, and affective exhibitionary strategies and an unparalleled level of public programming in the attempt to bring the lessons of the Holocaust into the twenty-first century. These

programs actively seek to turn the Holocaust's lessons into lessons about present and future genocide and atrocity and seek to do so for generations to come, and the USHMM is unquestionably a leader in its attempt to translate the lessons of history into action. It has also been, from the start, a self-reflexive institution, very aware that it is doing something that has not been done before. We can see within the USHMM some of the tropes that emerged with the very first memorials in Europe and in the initial proposals and ultimate realization of Yad Vashem, but the USHMM has institutionalized the memorial museum form in a way that others seek to emulate.¹⁰ Around the world, it is considered a model to those looking for ways to memorialize and educate about genocide and atrocity, and it serves as such, though sometimes indirectly, for the other museums that I visit in this book.

Clearly, the USHMM comes out of today's politics of regret and the urgent need to remember the negative past. The fact that the museum was built as a solution to Carter's political problem evidences just how powerful regret as a political tool is today; it is very revealing that a museum celebrating Jewish American heritage and culture was not proposed and a Holocaust memorial was. And the museum seeks to embody the memory imperative of Levy and Sznajder that posits Holocaust memory as a universal lesson that will ultimately benefit us all; the museum is America's (and the world's) "prosthetic conscience." However, what these theories of the transformative power of memory overlook, but that is obvious in a close examination and reading of the museum, is that it is a highly political institution that tells us much more about American politics in the present than about the Holocaust or even about the memory of the Holocaust. The universal lesson of the Holocaust is actually, in the USHMM, a lesson in what it means to be an American (Cole 2000; Young 1993). Though the museum suggests that this means standing up for freedom, tolerance, and rights, being American has often meant something quite different throughout history, including since the museum's creation.¹¹ This is particularly worrying in the political and social climate in the United States at the time that this book is being written. Donald Trump rode a wave of xenophobia, racism, and sexism into power and is, with the support of a considerable portion of the population, creating exclusionary and discriminatory policies, such as his "immigration [Muslim] ban" of January 2017. In this climate, there is an even greater chance that Holocaust memory as represented in the museum will serve as a screen, allowing Americans to feel "self-righteous" (Cole 2000, 158), while masking the intolerance, racism, and hatred, including anti-Semitism,

that is circulating in American society. Hate crimes are spiking in the United States since the election of Trump, including many instances targeting Jewish populations. While the museum has forcefully spoken out against the rise of white nationalism and neo-Nazi ideology and parallels have been drawn between some of the contemporary political rhetoric and that of the Nazis (USHMM “Museum Condemns White Nationalist Conference Rhetoric” 2016), there is still the risk that, as Tim Cole reminds us, it will be “so much easier to look at someone else’s racism, intolerance, dictatorship and persecution in the past, than to confront the racism, intolerance, dictatorship and persecution in . . . our own present” (2000, 158).

While the USHMM serves as a model for the tropes, exhibition and narrative strategies, and experiential and educational techniques that other memorial museums utilize, it also reminds us that each memorial museum is born of a particular political context and what they might have in common—beyond their eternal flames, narrative structures, or “experience” of genocide and terror that they provide for visitors—is their deeply political role in the societies that have born them. Once memory is taken from the realm of the individual and presented in an institutional framework, it becomes inherently and indisputably political; memorial museums, as containers for education and memory about past violence and genocide—some of the most politically sensitive moments of any history—are thus deeply political institutions and must be read and understood as such.