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Narrative, Identity, and Holocaust Memorialization in the United States

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An Honors Paper for the Department of History

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For Mom and Dad

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Introduction: Memorials, Museums, and Active Remembrance

Sometimes museums don't tell the truth. Occasionally, museum exhibitions have factual errors or make accidental mistakes. Propaganda in museums is somewhat common in certain parts of the world, too. But sometimes a museum's curators believe they are telling a true story—even when the premises of the story are entirely questionable—because the story is ingrained in who they are. It is part of their identities.

When I studied Jewish history in Prague for a semester in 2018, I took many trips to the National Monument to the Heroes of the Heydrich Terror. The site is multipurposed. In the main room—the basement of a Greek Orthodox Church—there is a museum exhibition about the Second World War, the assassination of Reinhard Heydrich, and the ensuing period of random murders of Czechs, known as the Heydrich Terror.[1] My Czech roommate took me for my first visit. During that initial visit, I was intrigued. I knew little about the story beyond the fact that Heydrich was assassinated in Prague and was awe-stricken to be standing in the very spot at which Heydrich's assassins held their final standoff against Nazi soldiers. The second time, I went alone. The third time, I was with my classmates on a trip my program organized. I also took family and friends when they visited. Throughout these visits, I had the opportunity to hear Czech perspectives on the site—from my roommate, my program's directors, and an educational film played by the site's curators. My two takeaways were simple: (1) The narrative they told was neither fully accurate nor complete, and (2) the place was, and is, unmistakably important in Czech identity.

[1] Military History Institute Prague, "The National Memorial to the Heroes of the Heydrich Terror" (web page), Military History Institute Prague (website), accessed April 13, 2020, http://www.vhu.cz/english-summary/.

First, the narrative. There were factual errors: for example, the film asserted that Reinhard Heydrich was Adolf Hitler's hand-picked successor, the Nazi second-in-command. This is untrue.[2] But there is a reason for stating Heydrich was Hitler's number two: it adds significance to his assassination by Czech paratroopers. This is where the narrative becomes particularly misleading. The Czech paratroopers—who, by the way, were trained by the British Special Operations Executive—have come to symbolize the entirety of Czech resistance.[3] The courage of the paratroopers is presented as the manifestation of the courage of the Czech people as a whole. It was the *Czechs* who assassinated Heydrich, who dealt a major blow to Nazism by killing Hitler's number two. This role as resistors is the mythical national triumph of the war. Its counterpart, the national tragedy, came as a response to the assassination: the razing of the nearby town of Lidice and the Heydrich terror. Altogether absent from this national tragedy and sense of collective trauma is any mention of the fact that Czech Jews bore the brunt of the response: some three thousand Jews were deported to Theresienstadt in response to the assassination.[4] Further, the Holocaust, in which nearly 200,000 Czech Jews were murdered, is also absent.[5]

It is precisely because the site represents both the national triumph and the national trauma of the war that the site is critical to Czech national identities. The site simultaneously embodies and shapes Czech identities. Factually, the story it tells is neither completely true nor complete, yet it is entirely true and complete insofar as it captures what it meant to be Czech

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[2] William L. Shirer, *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich: A History of Nazi Germany* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1960), 599. Most evidence suggests that Hermann Göring was Hitler's chosen successor. Other candidates, such as Heinrich Himmler and Joseph Goebbels, were also more likely successors than Heydrich.
[3] Shirer, 991.
[4] Shirer, 991.
[5] Milan Hauner, "Terrorism and Heroism: The Assassination of Reinhard Heydrich," in *World Policy Journal* 24, no. 2 (June 2007): 86, http://web.b.ebscohost.com.ezproxy.bowdoin.edu/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?vid=4&sid=508e4c4f-47a9-4e89-af89-bb7ac0b93639%40pdc-v-sessmgr05.

during World War II. The Czech title for the site translates to either *National Monument* or *National Memorial*, but I argue that it is both a monument and a memorial. It is a site for solemn reflection, a place at which to contemplate the collective trauma of the war—a memorial. It is also a space that glorifies the past and the individuals who shaped it—a monument. Acting in this dual role, or even triple role if considered also as a museum, the site told me little about what actually happened during the war in Prague, but it told me a lot about what it meant to be Czech at that time. It also offers a concept of what it means to be Czech today and to have inherited the legacies of trauma and heroism of the war.

The site in Prague is not a Holocaust-related site of remembrance. But as I visited Holocaust-related sites across Europe, I found that what was true in Prague was true elsewhere: the site, whether it was a memorial, a monument, or a museum, contained something about the identities of the people who made it and how they understand themselves. The sites both shape and are shaped by the spaces in which they are found. The deliberate narratological choices the curators or creators make—what they include, what they omit, and who gets to tell the story—illuminate parts of their identities. Nations and communities memorialize events they consider important to who they are, moments worth remembering. They erect monuments for those individuals and moments they glorify—though, who exactly "they" are and how "they" decide what is worth remembering is highly variable. And for many across Europe, Jews and non-Jews alike, the Holocaust remains significant enough to individual and communal identities to warrant memorials, monuments, and museums.

This thesis explores Holocaust memorialization in the United States by drawing on this framework for understanding European sites of remembrance when considering American sites.

The narratives at several Holocaust memorials and museums in the United States present the significance of the Holocaust in contemporary American life. Do these sites of remembrance embody the identities of their creators and their communities? Do the sites influence these identities? Particularly, what are the symbiotic relationships between narrative, identity, and memorialization at each site?

The sites in this text tell a range of Holocaust narratives. The main exhibitions at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM) in Washington, D.C. and the Museum of Jewish Heritage (MJH) in New York City present global Holocaust narratives. They speak beyond national borders, are meant for Jewish and non-Jewish visitors, and tell the stories of people from around the world. They seek to appeal to universal human identities rather than specific ones, insofar as the Holocaust was a human phenomenon. The temporary exhibition *Americans and the Holocaust* at the USHMM and the New England Holocaust Memorial in Boston present more intentionally national narratives. They look at the Holocaust from American perspectives, both by urging a reconsideration of the American relationship to the Holocaust during WWII and by placing the Holocaust into an American historical identity next to other significant moments in US history. The New Castle Holocaust Memorial in Chappaqua, New York presents a local narrative. It is located in an area with a sizeable Jewish population, and it embodies the identities of its creators.

This thesis considers a variety of academic topics: historical and collective memory, Holocaust memory, narrative theory, and Holocaust memorialization and museology. Of course, many scholars have contributed greatly to each of these fields. A comprehensive historiography

of each field would likely be both impossible to create and overwhelming, so I will reference only the major works that contributed to my research.[6]

In Chapter 1, the writings of some of these scholars serve as frameworks for understanding history, historical and collective memories, and, in some specific cases, the Holocaust. These frameworks are useful for analyzing the sites of remembrance in Chapters 2 and 3. Historian Dan Stone provided a historiographical framework for some of the work on narrative and the Holocaust in Chapter 1 in his essay "Paul Ricoeur, Hayden White and Holocaust Historiography." Both Ricoeur and White, Stone explained, dealt with the Holocaust at some point in their writings, particularly because of the position the Holocaust has taken in historical thinking. The Holocaust, as the scholars referenced in Chapter 1 mention, has become an absolute of history, a historical event that represents the extremes of human morality and experience, as well as the limits of historical understanding.[7] This thesis does not necessarily counter or further expand the theories these scholars have developed. Rather, their writings offer a framework through which to study several Holocaust memorials and museums in an attempt to better understand how the Holocaust retains significance in modern American consciousnesses.

A significant aspect of this thesis—particularly in Chapters 2 and 3—is my attempt to differentiate between Holocaust memory at universal, national, and local levels. Narratives that capture these varied forms of collective memory are often quite distinct from one another, insofar as they each have a particular relationship with identity. Universal narratives attempt to

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[6] The major works used in this study: Maurice Halbwachs, *The Collective Memory* (1950); Lawrence Langer, *The Holocaust and the Literary Imagination* (1975); Hayden White, *The Content of the Form* (1987); James Young, *The Texture of Memory* (1993); Edward Linenthal, *Preserving Memory* (1995); Rochelle Saidel, *Never Too Late to Remember* (1996); Peter Novick, *The Holocaust in American Life* (1999); Hilene Flanzbaum, *The Americanization of the Holocaust* (1999); Paul Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting* (2000, trans. 2004); Dan Stone, *History, Memory and Mass Atrocity* (2006); Hayden White, *The Practical Past* (2014); Timothy Snyder, *Black Earth* (2015); Natasha Goldman, *Memory Passages* (2020).

[7] Dan Stone, "Paul Ricoeur, Hayden White and Holocaust Historiography," in *History, Memory and Mass Atrocity: Essays on the Holocaust and Genocide* (London: Vallentine Mitchell, 2006), 108.

connect with some kind of universal human identity; national narratives appeal to national identities; local narratives are supposed to most closely represent the specific experiences of suffering and heroism of community members. This is not an altogether new way of analyzing Holocaust memory. Many Holocaust scholars have noted the tendency to believe there is something universal about the Holocaust, something with which everyone can relate (Chapter 1). Timothy Snyder's essay, "Memory of sovereignty and sovereignty over memory: Poland, Lithuania and Ukraine, 1933-1999," contributed to this framework. In the essay, Snyder distinguished between what he termed "mass personal memory" and "national memory." [8] Mass personal memory, Snyder explained, refers to "personal recollections held by enough individuals to have national significance."[9] National memory, on the other hand, is the institutionalized remembrance of a particular event whose narrative is carefully developed to agree with or help construct a national identity.[10] Together, these three types of memory—if they can even be called memory—are present at sites of Holocaust remembrance around the world, including in the United States. These variations of memory and the narratives through which individuals, communities, and nations convey them show the continually evolving presence of the Holocaust today.

Holocaust memory in the United States has become an academic sub-field in its own right. Scholars have investigated why Americans have given the Holocaust, which occurred thousands of miles away, so much attention—more attention than many European nations have paid to it, and likely more attention than some Americans have paid to significant moments in

[8] Timothy Snyder, "Memory of sovereignty and sovereignty over memory: Poland, Lithuania and Ukraine, 1933-1999," in *Memory and Power in Post-War Europe: Studies in the Presence of the Past*, ed. Jan-Werner Müller (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 39.
[9] Snyder, "Memory of sovereignty and sovereignty over memory," 49.
[10] Snyder, "Memory of sovereignty and sovereignty over memory," 50.

US history. There is, of course, no simple explanation for this development. Scholars who point to single moments or currents in the latter half of the twentieth century as *the* reason for the Holocaust's prominence in American consciousness are naïve in their oversimplifications. For example, Norman Finklestein, in his polemic *The Holocaust Industry*, condemned the Holocaust's presence in America and claimed that the development was largely the result of American-Israeli politics and the Hollywoodization of the Holocaust.[11] Rather, the Holocaust's significance in the United States can be *understood through* developments such as the rise of Holocaust television and film, as explained by Alan Mintz in his book *Popular Culture and the Shaping of Holocaust Memory in America*.[12]

There also is no clear consensus as to exactly when and how Holocaust memory and significance developed in the United States. Peter Novick, author of *The Holocaust in American Life*, asserted, "the Holocaust wasn't talked about very much in the United States through the end of the 1950s."[13] In the 1960s and 1970s, he claimed, that changed. Yet, as some scholars have pointed out, Novick's statement is, for one thing, difficult to verify insofar as what people spoke about in private during the 1950s is not necessarily widely known. But his claim also is simply limited by whether a lack of *public* remembrance of the Holocaust is the same as a lack of remembrance altogether. As Hilene Flanzbaum pointed out, millions of Americans read the first edition of *The Diary of Anne Frank* when it was published in 1952. Anne Frank's account does not constitute the entirety of the Holocaust, yet the popularity of her diary suggests that the

[11] Tim Cole, "Representing the Holocaust in America: Mixed Motives or Abuse?" in *The Public Historian* 24, no. 4 (Fall 2002): 129, https://www-jstor-org.ezproxy.bowdoin.edu/stable/pdf/10.1525/tph.2002.24.4.127.pdf?refreqid=excelsior%3Ac0aa1f0568fbb279c163a188fcc61fbf.
[12] See chapter on Holocaust filmography in Alan Mintz's *Popular Culture and the Shaping of Holocaust Memory in America*. Alan Mintz, "The Holocaust at the Movies: Three Studies in Reception," *Popular Culture and the Shaping of Holocaust Memory in America* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2001): 85-158.
[13] Peter Novick, *The Holocaust in American Life* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1999), 127.

Holocaust was not altogether absent from American psyches during the first decade after the war.[14] Regardless, these various scholars have shown that the Holocaust remembrance is, indeed, a part of American history in some capacity.

This thesis is a study of public forms of remembrance, particularly memorials and museums. Many scholars have already completed excellent work in this field. Most notable is the work of James Young. Young, in *The Texture of Memory*, analyzed myriad Holocaust memorials across the globe "with an eye toward discovering the ways different nations and communities publicly marked the destruction of European Jewry."[15] For the most part, Young's analysis is aesthetically-focused—he has been particularly interested in the intersection between a nation's or community's remembrance of the Holocaust and "the physical and metaphysical qualities" of memorials.[16] This thesis focuses on a different, albeit similar intersection at memorials: that of narrative and identity. To this end, Young's analysis again proved useful, as he recognized that each memorial site presents—implicitly and explicitly, through text and art—its own definition of the Holocaust.[17] In Chapter 1, I expand this idea using Paul Ricoeur's ideas of narrative and the creation of cohesive historical events. This thesis contains the idea of reconstructing popular conceptions of what constitutes 'The Holocaust' throughout. One of the reasons Holocaust memorials and museum exhibitions are created in the first place is to take part in this process of reconstructing the definition of the event. Other scholars have contributed to this field, as well.[18] Edward Linenthal and Rochelle Saidel wrote books about the USHMM and MJH, respectively. The two books, *Preserving Memory* (Linenthal) and *Never Too Late to Remember* (Saidel),

[14] Hilene Flanzbaum, "Introduction: The Americanization of the Holocaust," in *The Americanization of the Holocaust*, ed. Hilene Flanzbaum (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), 1.
[15] James E. Young, *The Texture of Memory: Holocaust Memorials and Meaning* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), viii.
[16] Young, ix.
[17] Young, viii.
[18] See note 3.

detail the creation of the two largest Holocaust museums in the United States. Their works provide significant background knowledge about the museums which feature in Chapter 3.

This thesis expands on the existing scholarship in four ways. First, the studies of the specific memorials and museum exhibitions in this text are, for the most part, novel. The New England Holocaust Memorial makes only brief appearances in academic literature. The other three sites and exhibitions—the New Castle Holocaust Memorial, *Auschwitz: Not long ago. Not far away.* (MJH), and *Americans and the Holocaust* (USHMM)—were created within two years of writing this thesis, so work on each of these sites is mostly limited to brief newspaper articles. Second, unlike Young and other scholars who have mostly studied the physical and aesthetic designs of memorials, this thesis is a study of sites of remembrance specifically from the perspectives of narrative and identity. How does each site define the Holocaust? Who is part of the story? Who is left out? What do these narratological choices tell us about what the site's creators believe are important? What do the narratives say about their identities, or about the perceived identities of the intended audiences? As mentioned, the answers to these questions depend on the size of the audience and the perceived relatability of the narrative (i.e. is this Holocaust narrative universal, national, or local). Third, I have studied each site from the perspective of how it encourages its visitors to engage in what I refer to as 'active remembrance.' Active remembrance has many variations, but it is essentially remembrance with a purpose. Active remembrance is considering and reconsidering one's own history and the history with which one identifies (what I call 'historical identity'). It is drawing moral lessons from the past to guide actions in the present. It is the reconciliation with shame, the mourning of tragedy, and the glorification of heroism. It is the conscious type of remembering the past that contrasts with a

more passive, subconscious recollection of things past. Fourth, by writing in 2019 and 2020 about sites mostly created and curated in 2018 and 2019, this is a study in the ways particular Americans remember and re-remember the Holocaust, an event fixed firmly in the past, right now. Like any other historical event, the way nations, communities, and individuals remember the Holocaust changes over time—communities build new memorials, schools and states alter curricula, new books and movies represent it in ways not considered before, contemporary events inspire recollections of the Holocaust for certain moral reasons. By observing a few current methods of Holocaust remembrance, I have studied an aspect of American society in 2018 and 2019 in an attempt to understand something about (some) American identities today.

This final contribution to the existing scholarship of the Holocaust indicates that this thesis is not a traditional work of history. It is not an analysis of a particular moment of the Holocaust. This thesis neither presents a new narrative that reveals a previously forgotten story of the past nor rewrites an existing one. For the most part, I have not engaged with archival documents as my primary sources. This is also not a work of historiography; apart from a few instances in Chapter 1, there is no discussion of changing scholarship of the Holocaust over time. Instead, I have analyzed how some Americans understand a particular moment of the past today, why they understand it in those ways, and what those understandings tell us about who those people are. The sites of remembrance are the primary sources. I am interested in how people portray, remember, and learn about the Holocaust right now.

Each chapter includes distinct sites and works, and it is organized thematically. Chapter 1 is an exploration of narrative theory and Holocaust narratives. The discussion in Chapter 1 forms the framework for analyzing the narratives at the sites of remembrance studied in Chapters 2 and 3. Chapter 2 examines the ‘local’ Holocaust narrative and its relationship with local identity

through the case study of the New Castle Holocaust Memorial. Finally, Chapter 3 is both an analysis of how two current Holocaust exhibitions—*Auschwitz: Not long ago. Not far away.* (MJH) and *Americans and the Holocaust* (USHMM)—redefine the Holocaust to serve contemporary, moral purposes and an examination of how the two museums, as well as the New England Holocaust Memorial, have placed the Holocaust into American history.

In the process of analyzing these Holocaust narratives, I have, in effect, created my own narrative of Holocaust remembrance in the United States. This narrative, like the ones studied here, is limited and at times finds meaning in places where perhaps there is none. But together, the three chapters that follow are an exploration of a wide range of interconnected topics in the field of Holocaust memory. When considering the purpose of this project, I consistently return to two somewhat rhetorical, somewhat explicit questions about Holocaust remembrance from Elie Wiesel: "Why remember? Why remember at all?"[19] Most basically, we, as people, remember because that's what humans do. The very existence of active remembrance, though, suggests that maybe we also remember to redefine who we are, to reconsider the events that we hold dear, to think about how we can learn from the past by recognizing similarities between past and present. My ultimate point is simple: the reasons we remember the past and the ways we remember it matter because they tell us about who we are.

[19] United States, *President's Commission on the Holocaust, Report to the President*, ([Washington, D.C.]: Reprinted by the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 2005), i, https://www.ushmm.org/m/pdfs/20050707-pres-commission-79.pdf.

1 Narrative and the Holocaust

When a true narrative of the past is related, the memory produces not the actual events which have passed away but words conceived from images of them, which they fixed in the mind like imprints as they passed through the senses.

–Augustine of Hippo, *Confessions*

A true war story is never moral. It does not instruct, nor encourage virtue, nor suggest models of proper human behavior… If a story seems moral, do not believe it.

–Tim O'Brien, *The Things They Carried*

On Sunday, December 8, 1991, Art Spiegelman's *Maus II* debuted on the *New York Times* Best Sellers list for fiction at number thirteen.[1] Three weeks later, on December 29, the *Times* again listed the graphic novel at thirteenth, but this time in the nonfiction category.[2] The change was far from subtle. The logical dichotomy between fiction and nonfiction should, in theory, make the two categories mutually exclusive. So, why did the *Times* make the change?

The simple answer is that Spiegelman wrote a letter to the editor of the paper, in which he expressed his unease about having his work listed as fiction. The *Times* reconsidered and altered the categorization. The paper cited the categorizations used by Spiegelman's publisher, Pantheon Books, and the Library of Congress—both of which considered *Maus* to be a historical memoir––in its explanation for the move.[3]

However, a more nuanced answer provides a lens for examining the nature of historical truth—both how the past actually occurred and how individuals experienced it—in Holocaust

[1] "Paperback Best Sellers," *New York Times*, December 8, 1991, https://timesmachine.nytimes.com/timesmachine/1991/12/08/594491.html.
[2] "Best Sellers," *New York Times*, December 29, 1991, https://timesmachine.nytimes.com/timesmachine/1991/12/29/521591.html?pageNumber=68.
[3] Art Spiegelman, letter to the editor, *New York Times*, December 29, 1991, https://www.nytimes.com/1991/12/29/books/l-a-problem-of-taxonomy-37092.html.

narratives. The difference between fiction and nonfiction often is, at the most basic level, about factual accuracy—fiction includes imaginary elements, while nonfiction does not. But many works, like *Maus*, do not fit neatly into either category. *Maus* tells the story of Spiegelman's father, a Holocaust survivor. It is a memoir of both his father's experiences and Spiegelman's personal identification with the Holocaust as the son of survivors. The graphic novel is a depiction of real events. But the characters are depicted as animals, and Spiegelman's drawings are his own recreations of events, many of which he did not personally experience. The role of imagination in the graphic novel is undeniable. Yet, the question remains whether *Maus* is any less faithful to the telling of past events than more traditional histories, or if his unconventional narratological method is simply a different way of relating a history.

The original placing of *Maus* on the fiction list "indicates," as Spiegelman wrote in the letter to the editor, "that [the] work isn't factual."[4] Of course, the graphic novel is based on careful research, much like traditional nonfiction. Spiegelman, to the best of his knowledge, did not invent any of the events he portrays. He simply used the materials he had at his disposal: his father's oral testimony, written documents, etc. In other words, Spiegelman's depiction of events differs only from a 'true' history in its presentation form.

Maus, then, is no less a depiction of past events than other Holocaust narratives are, but it remains difficult to characterize. Spiegelman wrote, "I know that by delineating people with animal heads I've raised problems of taxonomy for you. Could you consider adding a special 'nonfiction/ mice' category to your list?"[5] Spiegelman's argument, though presented tongue-in-cheek, went to the heart of the problem of understanding the relationship between accuracy, experience, and meaning in Holocaust history, as well as history as a whole. Historical truth is a

[4] Spiegelman, letter to the editor.
[5] Spiegelman, letter to the editor.

present-day projection of the past. The past *was* and no longer *is*, so therefore it is not readily observable. Historians piece together evidence of how the past was and what life may have been like in it to create an inevitably incomplete picture. There will always be aspects of human experiences that history cannot recover. Equally important, though, is the notion that the past does not readily offer meaning, morals, and lessons which could each, in turn, make the past more attainable. These meanings instead come from the narratives writers create. Understanding the past requires imagination, and it is this imagination rather than the evidence of the events themselves that can lead to a grasping of some kind of meaning. However, the Holocaust occurred, and people have looked and will continue to look for narratives that allow for its comprehension. Writers will continue to extract meaning when perhaps there was none and lessons to help future generations avoid a similar human catastrophe. Finding meaning in the past is a critical aspect of historical memory; it is what distinguishes a more subconscious form of remembrance from an active remembrance, a critical reflection of the past to find meaning in the present.

As survivor and writer Primo Levi explained, one could not understand the human experiences of the Holocaust without having actually experienced them, a consequence of their horrific nature. Levi, himself, was aware of his inability to understand the experiences of other survivors besides his own. Any attempt at understanding the Holocaust requires a simplification that emphasizes particular aspects and lessons of the history, otherwise its horrors remain unimaginable. But simplifying the past leaves behind an incomplete version. Simplification inherently obscures a full grasp of reality, and therefore non-survivors cannot understand the Holocaust as it actually happened.[6] Survivors, journalists, historians, novelists, film directors,

[6] Primo Levi, *The Drowned and the Saved*, trans. Raymond Rosenthal (New York: Simon & Schuster Paperbacks, 1986), 25.

museum curators, and the long list of those who have attempted to convey something about the Holocaust have all struggled with this same issue. If the Holocaust defies reason and is unique, then it demands careful attention as a case study of the extremes of humanity and as a moral boundary that can never be crossed again. Yet, how can anyone take an event that eludes human understanding, at least in perception, and make it understandable? This paradox confronts most writers and artists who have studied the Holocaust. If the Holocaust defied reason and was unique in its exposition of human evil, as writers and survivors often assert, how can anyone hope to distill the genocide into any kind of experiential or meaningful truth?

What, then, does it mean to create a narrative about the Holocaust? Are narratives of the Holocaust, as has often been asserted, supposed to convey some sort of meaning or moral takeaway of the event? Is this longed-for meaning supposed to be practical and applicable to contemporary society? How do writers attempt to convey this meaning? What is the nature between the morals of the narrative and the narrative's relationship to factual accuracy? To complicate the issue further, narratives require choices. Which information is included, and which is omitted? Which moments are emphasized as important? Factual accuracy, insofar as it could be determined, is often of secondary importance to drawing meaning based on contemporary desires.

When writers and artists recognize the Holocaust as beyond comprehension, it is often the case that, in recognition of this incomprehensibility, they simplify the web of events that made up what we know as 'the Holocaust' in two critical ways. The first method of simplification is omission. Indeed, considering the vastness of events that fall under the Holocaust's umbrella, omission is necessary to tell a succinct narrative. However, omission can be pernicious. The inclusion of particular narratives over others does more than simply make

some events appear more important than others—instead, the choices involved in what to include in a narrative can entirely restructure popular understanding of what is meant by 'the Holocaust.' Secondly, writers often seek simplification in the hopes of extracting (or implanting) meaning or moral lessons. Isolated events contain no single meaning, and it is through a simple narrative structure that writers attempt to derive a cohesive takeaway from the past. Consequently, audiences are left not only with a (hopefully factually accurate) narrative of the past but with a mechanism through which the narrative can be interpreted for its relevance and importance. These meanings are often derived from present-day needs, not contemporary historical ones. Moral- and lesson-based narratives are fundamental to active remembrance. They offer more than a means for reconsidering the past on its own. Instead, Holocaust narratives reconfigure historical identities and offer, at least in perception, moral parameters for present-day society.

"This is still not something we can talk about": Tatana Kellner's Artist's Books

The writer's or artist's narratological method offers a starting point to exploring theoretical conceptions of narrative. How does the author convey the story and the story's intended meaning or truth? Tatana Kellner's artist's books about her parents' experiences in the Holocaust will contextualize the following discussion of historical narrative. Kellner is an American artist and the daughter of two Czech Holocaust survivors.

In 1992, Kellner published two artists' books, one describing her father's survival of the Holocaust, the other detailing her mother's. They are titled, respectively, *B-11226: Fifty Years of Silence: Eugene Kellner's Story* and *71125: Fifty Years of Silence: Eva Kellner's Story*. Kellner included the same introduction in both books, explaining her purpose in creating the projects: "I always was curious about my parents' experiences and am very sad that I didn't ask my

grandmother; her story died with her. I didn't want the same to happen to my parents' stories."[7] Rather than simply translating and subsequently publishing her parents' stories, Kellner decided that an artist's book, combining interactive visual art and the text of her parents' stories, would more successfully relay their experiences. As Kellner explained in an interview, she asked her parents to write down their stories and "describe their experiences during that period of time."[8]

In the two books, Kellner made use of the possibilities of interactive art to convey a narrative through unconventional means. The reader first must take each 30 centimeters by 51 centimeters book out of storage-like wooden boxes (figure 1-1). The boxes resemble coffins and are meant to represent the coffins that Holocaust victims did not receive themselves.[9] Immediately, the reader confronts the most striking feature of each book: a three-dimensional plaster of each parent's arm, tattooed with an inmate identification number, rises through an arm-shaped cutout on every page (figure 1-2). For Kellner, the arms were a necessary component of the books for two reasons: "first of all, it had the tattoo. Second of all, the Nazis… utilized every part of the body in war production…. They would use up the entire human being. So I felt like to have the human presence, to be confronted by actual physicality of the flesh and the marring of the flesh that would classify you as nonhuman was central to the story."[10] The arm follows the reader throughout the book, an ever-present reminder of the physical horrors of the Holocaust. If the text does not provide the reader with a vivid enough experience, the arm supplements it.

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[7] Tatana Kellner, *B-11226: Fifty Years of Silence: Eugene Kellner's Story* (Rosendale, New York: Women's Studio Workshop, 1994); and Tatana Kellner, *71125: Fifty Years of Silence: Eva Kellner's Story* (Rosendale, New York: Women's Studio Workshop, 1994).
[8] Erin Zona, "Interview with Tatana Kellner about *50 Years of Silence,*" (*Women's Studio Workshop* video, 05:43), April 13, 2020. George J. Mitchell Department of Special Collections & Archives, Bowdoin College Library, Brunswick, Maine.
[9] Zona, "Interview."
[10] Zona, "Interview."

Figure 1-1: Bowdoin College Library's copy of Tatana Kellner's Fifty Years of Silence *in its storage box. Photo taken by the author; published with the permission of the George J. Mitchell Department of Special Collections & Archives, Bowdoin College Library, Brunswick, Maine.*

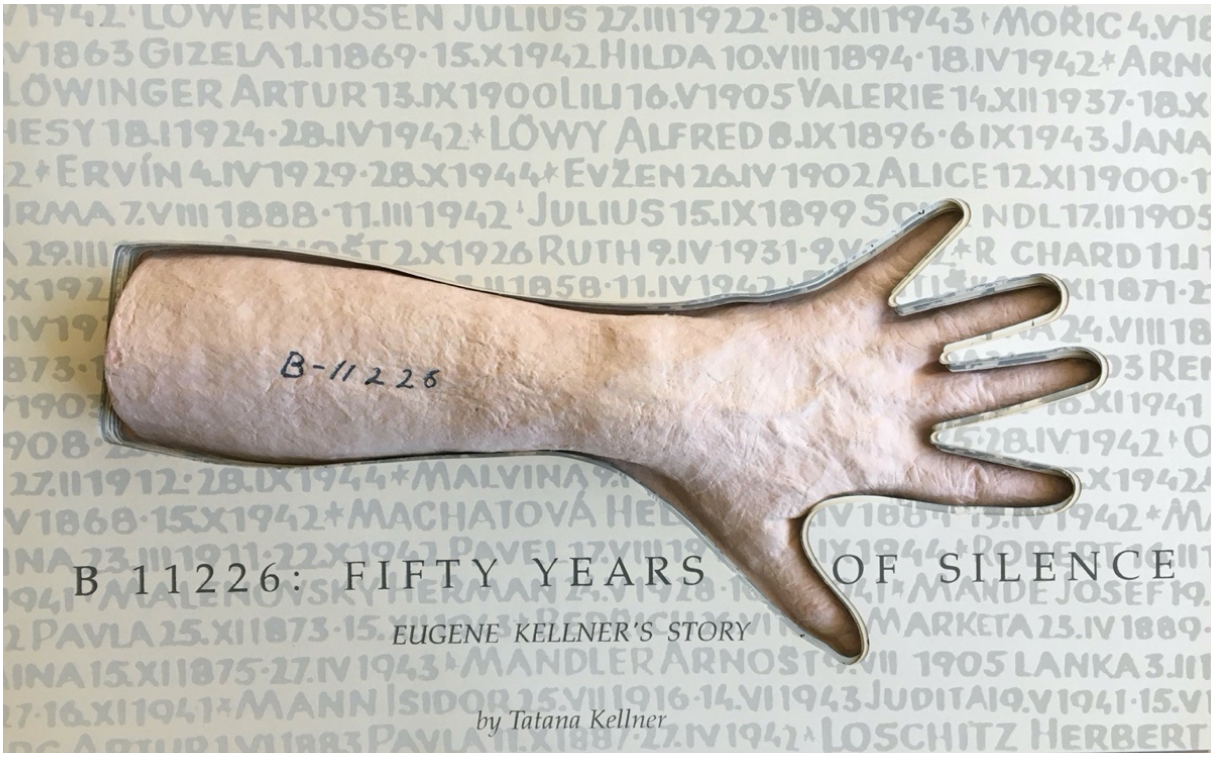

Figure 1-2: Bowdoin College Library's copy of Tatana Kellner's Fifty Years of Silence*. Title page. Photo taken by the author; published with the permission of the George J. Mitchell Department of Special Collections & Archives, Bowdoin College Library, Brunswick, Maine.*

When paging through the books, Kellner's narratological structure is clear. Rather than orally transmitting their stories, Kellner's parents insisted on handwriting their accounts and sending them to her, since the Holocaust was "still not something we [could] talk about."[11] Kellner's parents handwrote their experiences in Czech and sent them to her to translate into English. In the book, Kellner includes both the original handwritten Czech as well as her typed translations. In this sense, she visually showed that a narrative is a performance: a translation of the past so it can be understood by a present-day audience. Kellner's parents wrote their accounts, in Czech, decades after the Holocaust, relying on memory, a type of translation in its own right. Kellner translated the words into English. Then, to further translate her parents' experiences into something relatable, she supplemented the text with artistic design. In short, the work itself shows layer after layer of translation between the in-the-moment experience of a historical event and the attempt at understanding the event, as an outsider, many years later.

Kellner further emphasized the difficulty of seeing into the past and actually understanding what occurred during the Holocaust with the artistic design of the Czech text. Not every page contains text—she followed the pattern of including two pages of text (the left side of the centerfold in Czech, the right in English) followed by two pages of photographs (the left showing pre- and post-war family photos, the right showing images of the Holocaust, such as disfigured corpses, railways, and barbed wire; figure 1-3). The left and right sides juxtapose a private, happy life with the public life of the camps.[12] Notably, the Czech writing is printed on translucent paper, so a reverse image of the words is visible from the previous page. But, for an English-speaking audience, the narrative is unknowable: the text is blurred, backward, and

[11] Kellner, *B-11226: Fifty Years of Silence*.
[12] Zona, "Interview with Tatana Kellner about *50 Years of Silence*."

written in a foreign language (figure 1-4).[13] As a result, the story is not understandable until the reader turns the page and finds the English translation.

Figure 1-3: Bowdoin College Library's copy of Tatana Kellner's Fifty Years of Silence*. Family photographs are juxtaposed with graphic photographs of human suffering. Photo taken by the author; published with the permission of the George J. Mitchell Department of Special Collections & Archives, Bowdoin College Library, Brunswick, Maine.*

Figure 1-4: Bowdoin College Library's copy of Tatana Kellner's Fifty Years of Silence*. Handwritten narrative in Czech and typed narrative in English show through the translucent paper. Czech text appears backward. Photo taken by the author; published with the permission of the George J. Mitchell Department of Special Collections & Archives, Bowdoin College Library, Brunswick, Maine.*

[13] Kellner, *B-11226: Fifty Years of Silence*.

Continuing the theme of extending the nature of the narrative beyond the text, Kellner included various artistic elements that force the reader to constantly confront the horrific nature of the Holocaust. The arms and their tattoos follow the reader on every page, a constant reminder of the Holocaust's lasting physical impact. The cutouts of the arm on each page confront the reader with the permanence of the Holocaust in a survivor's life and the emotional holes it left in the rest of the story. As scholar Marianne Hirsch wrote, "Kellner's text is literally built around a hole and thus this paradoxical dilemma of transmission structures Kellner's work nowhere more obviously than in the tattooed arm at the center of each book."[14] Names of victims and their dates of birth and death, taken from a wall in Prague's Pinkas Synagogue, are scattered throughout the book (Figure 1-3).[15] The family photographs from before the war in Prague and after the war in the United States are juxtaposed with the grotesque images of victims of inhumane treatment on adjacent pages.[16] In sum, Kellner portrayed the gravity and horror of the Holocaust with a multi-sensorial experience. The photographs, names, art, tattoo, and foreign language supplement the text to create a more powerful narrative.

The dualistic nature of the narrative in Kellner's work provides a way to understand theories of narrative. She recognized the inherent need to supplement traditional textual narratives with something else—interactive art, in Kellner's case—to better convey her parents' experiences. In other words, the Holocaust did not occur as a textual narrative, nor was it experienced as one. To help her readers understand her parents' stories, then, she made the

[14] Marianne Hirsch, "Marked by Memory: Feminist Reflections on Trauma and Transmission," in *Extremities: Trauma, Testimony, and Community*, ed. Nancy K. Miller and Jason Tougaw (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2002), 81.
[15] The Pinkas Synagogue in Prague is the Holocaust memorial associated with Prague's Jewish Museum. The walls of the synagogue are covered with the painted names of all Czech and Slovak victims of the Holocaust along with their dates of birth and death. The project began in the 1950s and was open to the public beginning in 1960. However, after the ending of the Prague Spring in 1968, the Synagogue was closed, and the names were painted over. The names were restored after the end of the communist regime in Czechoslovakia in 1989.
[16] Hirsch, "Marked by Memory," 79.

reader's experience more than simply textual narrative. It is also a physical and visual one. More than anything, though, Kellner's work is an acknowledgment of what many of the writers mentioned in this chapter have also confronted: thoughtful narratological structure is necessary for conveying events and experiences of the past to contemporary readers. Narratives are always incomplete, require choices, and are performances that recall the past based on present-day parameters of remembrance.

Theories of Narrative and the Holocaust

Kellner's work offers a grounding for a discussion of theories of narrative and their relationship to the Holocaust. As an event of the past, the Holocaust is subject to the same question as any other: how can it be studied and subsequently presented by historical thinking in a manner which promotes contemporary understanding? Historians and philosophers have long debated whether there could exist a specific historical methodology that could enable a true, scientific study of historical fact.[17] Regardless of which historical methodologies, if any, are used in determining what actually occurred in the past, writers often turn to narrative as a means for conveying their findings.

In an essay titled "Narrative Time," philosopher Paul Ricoeur explored the relationship between temporality and the narrative structure. He argued that the one could not be understood without the other: "I take temporality to be that structure of existence that reaches language in narrativity and narrativity to be the language structure that has temporality as its ultimate

[17] Many historians and philosophers have attempted to come up with historical methodologies. The modern discussion began mostly in the nineteenth century as a result of scientific advancements and the industrial revolution. The basic thought is this: if the physical world can be understood by careful observation and close adherence to scientific methods, why would the past be any different? Over the century and a half since the question first arose, some have presented specific methodologies, while others have argued against methods altogether.

referent. Their relationship is therefore reciprocal."[18] In other words, narrative is the necessary interlocutor for understanding the passing of time and the events that occur within it.

Consequently, Ricoeur believed that narrative is required to explain events specifically relating to the Holocaust. As historian Dan Stone wrote, "With particular reference to the Holocaust, Ricoeur believes that, as with all events, only narrating the events can safeguard the memory of the victims."[19] For Ricoeur, the tumultuous twentieth century furthered his belief in the necessity of narrative to convey any notion of the past, rather than uproot this theory. Ricoeur argued that the Holocaust qualified as a unique historical event. As such, narrative remains as the only viable method of understanding the events; narrative presents the past in a useful way that, at the very least, provides some coherence where there otherwise is none. Indeed, Ricoeur argues, without narrative, there is no event.

When studying narrativity, Ricoeur emphasized the role of plot insofar as plot reveals a relationship between the overall meaning of a story and the facts, events, and characters that make up the narrative. He wrote, "A story is *made out of* events to the extent that plot *makes* events *into* a story. The plot, therefore, places us at the crossing point of temporality and narrativity: to be historical, an event must be more than a singular occurrence, a unique happening."[20] (Italics in original). Taking Ricoeur's comment and placing it in the context of the Holocaust, though, is quite a complicated and potentially problematic task. What would a plot of the Holocaust contain? Where would it begin and end, and would this ending appear to be a natural conclusion based on the events of the story itself?

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[18] Paul Ricoeur, "Narrative Time," in *Critical Inquiry* 7, no. 1 (Autumn 1980): 169, https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/1343181.pdf?refreqid=excelsior%3A0eee8754c23cb51b1e3976bd472a53a7.
[19] Dan Stone, "Paul Ricoeur, Hayden White and Holocaust Historiography," in *History, Memory and Mass Atrocity: Essays on the Holocaust and Genocide* (London: Vallentine Mitchell, 2006), 109.
[20] Ricoeur, "Narrative Time," 171.

There is something deeply troubling about applying Ricoeur's basic hermeneutic principles to a wide range of events that have since been amalgamated into a single historical 'event' known as the Holocaust. It is unlikely that a plot structure of the Holocaust could at once explain the experiences of an 'asocial' in 1933, a German Jew living in Berlin in 1935 after the passing of the Nuremberg Laws, a Ukrainian Jew about to be murdered at Babi Yar in 1941, a Hungarian Jew being thrown into the Danube by Arrow Cross soldiers, a Czech Jewish child performing in the children's opera in Theresienstadt in 1944, and so on. It is equally unlikely that from each of these individual experiences that a single, coherent plot could ever be conceived—the experiences were too vast, too disparate, and each deserves to be recognized for its individuality. Yet, if Ricoeur is correct in stating that the best method for true historical understanding is through the use of a narrative structure, the result is likely that through narrative *something* is learned, but clearly that something is not the full truth of the past. Kellner's work also struggles with this issue. Her parents' stories, though enlightening, only reveal two individuals' experiences and must not be taken out of context. Additionally, when Kellner's parents wrote down their accounts for their daughter, they, too, were forced to synthesize nearly a decade of traumatic experiences into a short, written narrative. Surely, Eugene and Eva Kellner made narratological choices that simplified the past events of their own lives—after half a century of re-remembering and reinterpreting—to create a story they believed could be understood by others.

The problem encountered here is not, of course, limited to the Holocaust. The past did not occur the way it is portrayed by narratives; there was no beginning, no structured set of events that clearly influence the next moment. Yet, narratives demand these elements. As historian Hayden White wrote in "The Value of Narrativity in the Representation of Reality,"

"Narrative becomes a problem only when we wish to give real events the form of story. It is because real events do not offer themselves as stories that their narrativization is so difficult."[21] In this sense, narrative does not represent the past as it occurred. It is White's ultimate thesis in the essay, though, that best connects to the ideas discussed in this thesis: "that narrativizing discourse serves the purpose of moralizing judgments."[22] Narrative holds value insofar as it allows for the extraction of meaning from the past. Again, returning to Kellner's work is useful. She did not want her parents' experiences to die with them, as her grandmother's had done. The reason for this is clear from her depiction of the human extremes of the Holocaust: Kellner wanted to show the terrible things that people did to other people, her parents included. Thus, her visually profound narratological style conveys this meaning. In particular, the visual and interactive aspects of her narrative do what written narratives fail to do. Written language is limited, in part, by a reader's ability to imagine and understand precisely what the author intends. Kellner confronted this shortcoming of the written word, supplementing it with the multisensorial nature of the book.

This is precisely where the larger connection to the Holocaust arrives. As already mentioned, countless writers working with the subject of the Holocaust have insisted that there is something to be learned from it. There must be meaning. The dead cannot be forgotten and the proper way to honor those who perished and those who survived is by not allowing a similar tragedy to happen again. As Primo Levi wrote in the conclusion of *The Drowned and the Saved*: "We have to be listened to: …we were collective witnesses to a fundamental and unexpected event, fundamental precisely because it was unexpected, unforeseen by anyone… It happened

[21] Hayden White, "The Value of Narrativity in the Representation of Reality," in *The Content of the Form* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), 4.
[22] White, 24.

once and it can happen again. This is the heart of what we have to say."[23] It is out of this desire to ensure that the catastrophe of genocide is not repeated that narratives of the Holocaust are born.

Knowledge of history presents a challenge insofar as one must determine what to do with it. Narratives of the past exist so that the past is not unreachable. Individuals from the present cannot truly know what a past they did not live was like, so narrative exists as an interlocutor between past and present. This enables those living in the present to make use of historical knowledge. Narrative is necessary for those living in the present so that the past has extractable meaning. The "moralizing judgments" that narratives of the past enable collectively comprise a form of active remembrance in the present—a conscious consideration of the lessons the past might have for creating a better present and future.

Simplification and Fictional Holocaust Narratives

Fictionalized narratives—film, in particular—offer an understanding of the importance of narratological choices on the popular remembrance of the Holocaust. To reiterate, the problem of Holocaust fiction (including historical fiction) is somewhat straightforward. Fiction can make audiences care about the characters and their tribulations more than scholarly historical narratives do. Fiction is, perhaps, also superior to nonfiction in conveying meaning. However, the past, in itself, often contains no meaning. People later assign meaning to past events. Fiction, which already involves imagination and perhaps the alteration of accepted facts, is both useful and problematic. When a narrative is infused with meaning, it can make an audience or reader care; it can instruct in a potentially positive manner. Yet, as far as accuracy is concerned,

[23] Primo Levi, *The Drowned and the Saved*, 186.

fictional (or fictionalized) narratives leave audiences with an incomplete understanding of the past.

First, consider the potential value of fictionalization in historical narratives at large. In analyzing the usefulness of literature in historical comprehension, Louis Mink wrote the following:

> Memory, imagination, and conceptualization all serve this function…: they are ways of grasping together in a single mental act things which are not experienced together, or even capable of being so experienced, because they are separated by time, space, or logical kind. And the ability to do this is a necessary (although not a sufficient) condition of *understanding*.[24] (Emphasis and parenthesis in original)

The past as it occurred is not something that an individual of any moment in time can fully understand. History is meant to bridge the past and the present. As Mink points out, memory, imagination, and conceptualization—fundamental components of literature—can help deliver this much-desired comprehension. Literature, like Kellner's imaginative combination of interactive art and text, provides a mechanism through which a reader can connect to the past and therefore acquire any concept of the meaning or truth of historical events.

Lawrence Langer, a scholar of Holocaust literature, confronted the need for what Mink described as the necessity of memory, imagination, and conceptualization in what he refers to as "the literature of atrocity." Langer pointed out that writers "perceived [the Holocaust] as unique."[25] As a result of this perception, conveyors of narratives about atrocities implicitly believe that any reader who did not experience the atrocity in question must be aided by mechanisms that make the historical truth more palatable. To explain the methods of such writers, Langer wrote, "Perhaps we can say that there are two forces at work… in most of what I

[24] Louis O. Mink, "History and Fiction as Modes of Comprehension," in *New Literary History* 1, no. 3, History and Fiction (Spring, 1970), 547.
[25] Lawrence Langer, *The Holocaust and the Literary Imagination* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1975), xii.

have designated the literature of atrocity: historical fact and imaginative truth."[26] If Langer was correct in his assessment, then the amalgamation of some amount of fact and perceived truth is what makes a narrative, as Mink described, comprehensible.

Regardless of the usefulness of fictionalized Holocaust narratives in attracting popular interest in the event, as well as conveying some form of meaning, consider the issue further: how do these narratives obscure popular understandings of historical truth? Scholars and survivors, such as Elie Wiesel, often assert that narratives of the Holocaust should not be altered away from historical facts to best honor the memories of those who experienced the events. Indeed, the stories of survivors and the deceased should be remembered, but how? In *The Practical Past*, Hayden White explained the problem succinctly:

> If the Holocaust is conceded an ontological status that would prohibit its representation in images or as an occasion for anything other than reverence or celebration, then obviously any artistic or literary treatment of the Holocaust would have to be viewed as approaching near to the status of blasphemy.[27]

White claimed, though, that the use of "artistic" and "literary" elements in narratives is by no means limited to those categorized as fictional. Instead, similar devices appear in more conventional, "historical" narratives as well. He continued:

> This attitude would rule out in advance any historiographical treatment of the Holocaust insofar as it might use aestheticizing or fictionalizing strategies in the composition of the presentation. And yet, in my view at least, this is exactly what a narratological treatment of the Holocaust or any part of it would do.[28]

In other words, any depiction of the Holocaust, whether intentionally fictionalized or academically historical, requires the same basic elements of memory, imagination, and conceptualization that Mink posited to confront the issue of comprehension of past events.

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[26] Langer, 8.
[27] Hayden White, *The Practical Past* (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 2014), 27.
[28] White, 27.

Nonfictional histories use the same structures as fictional stories. If a survivor were to provide an oral testimony about their experiences during the war, the story would likely present the same challenges to factual accuracy as a well-researched fictionalized narrative would. However, what can be passed on is some notion of how the past was experienced, or, rather, how the past is perceived to have been experienced by those who experienced it.

Certain fictionalized narratives of the Holocaust have received immense public attention.[29] Fictional narratives about the Holocaust have not only proven useful in giving writers a pathway toward possible comprehension; such narratives have additionally helped bring the Holocaust into popular attention and, simply, make audiences care. The effectiveness of fictional narratives on public perception of the Holocaust is particularly apparent in the reception of Holocaust cinematography in the United States.

Two distinct cinematographic examples that have received popular acclaim in the United States serve as case studies here: Gerald Green's *Holocaust* miniseries and Steven Spielberg's *Schindler's List*. Both works reached large audiences in the United States and contributed in their own ways to the popular understandings of the Holocaust.

Scholars have disagreed over which moments in the post-war period contributed most to ingraining the Holocaust into American consciousnesses and including the genocide in national histories. There is a long list of candidates: the war itself, the Nuremberg Trials, the televised 1961 trial of Adolf Eichmann in Jerusalem, the Six-Day War of 1967 between Israel and some of its neighboring nations, the 1973 Yom Kippur War, or simply general Cold War relations between the United States and Israel. Each theory has its merits. There is a consensus among scholars, though, that by the end of April 19, 1978, the final day of the airing of Gerald Green's

[29] Hilene Flanzbaum, "Introduction: The Americanization of the Holocaust," in *The Americanization of the Holocaust*, ed. Hilene Flanzbaum (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), 5.

Holocaust, the Holocaust was firmly solidified into the American mainstream.[30] What makes *Holocaust* relevant to this study is its status as a work of fiction and its compelling narrative. It is this use of narrative, I argue, that made the miniseries so significant in changing the trajectory of Holocaust memory.

Holocaust was NBC's response to ABC's 1977 miniseries, *Roots*, which critics lauded and won the network unprecedented ratings.[31] Consequently, *Holocaust* follows a similar narrative structure to *Roots* as a family-centered saga showcasing oppression. A rival network to ABC, "NBC hoped to match, perhaps even best, the success of *Roots* in popularity, critical acclaim, and impact," Jewish studies scholar Jeffrey Shandler wrote.[32] NBC's goal, then, was to make *Holocaust* a business success by searing the genocide into the minds of the American public.

As historian Peter Novick wrote in *The Holocaust in American Life*, "Without doubt the most important moment in the entry of the Holocaust into general American consciousness was NBC's presentation, in April 1978, of the miniseries *Holocaust*."[33] The miniseries brought the Holocaust into the homes of nearly 100 million Americans with a compelling narrative and emerging Hollywood stars such as Meryl Streep and Michael Moriarty.[34] Many responses to the miniseries were positive. Critics, scholars, and religious leaders alike agreed that the series was not only historically accurate, but its creators also succeeded in their mission of making the human elements of the Holocaust relatable and approachable.[35]

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[30] Shandler, *While America Watches*, xv.
[31] Shandler, 160.
[32] Shandler, 163.
[33] Novick, *The Holocaust in American Life*, 209.
[34] Shandler, *While America Watches*, 161; Novick, *The Holocaust in American Life*, 209.
[35] Richard F. Shepard, "Ethnic Leaders React to the Impact of 'Holocaust,'" *New York Times*, April 16, 1978, https://timesmachine.nytimes.com/timesmachine/1978/04/16/139846362.pdf.

Holocaust follows the lives of two German families living in Berlin in the 1930s and 1940s. The Weiss family is Jewish, while their also fictional counterparts, the Dorfs, are gentiles. At the start of the series, the two families live in disparate conditions. The head of the Weiss household, Josef Weiss, is a Polish-born doctor who runs a successful practice in Berlin. The Dorfs, on the other hand, are victims of the economic depression in Germany. Erik Dorf, a well-educated lawyer, cannot find work in Berlin. The contrasting situations of the two families are immediately apparent in the first scenes: the Weiss family celebrates a lavish wedding between Karl Weiss and a gentile German woman, Inga, while Erik and Marta Dorf quarrel over money troubles. Importantly to the plot development, it is shown that the two families know each other. Dr. Weiss treats Marta at his practice and remembers Erik from when he was a child.[36]

Though the miniseries focused on the experiences of two particular families, the scope of the project was vast; *Holocaust*'s narrative covered a wide range of Holocaust-related issues. Writer Gerald Green wasted no time in injecting the main source of conflict in the narrative, as characters make overt references to Nazism, "the party," and tensions between Jews and gentiles (highlighted at the wedding). Although he does not agree with Nazism, Erik seeks a job as a Nazi officer out of financial necessity, immediately bringing him into contact with Gestapo director Reinhard Heydrich, a particularly notorious figure in Holocaust history and historiography for his role in planning the Final Solution.[37] As time passes from the beginning of the series in 1935, the stories of the two families are interrupted by actual footage from the 1930s of Nazi rallies

[36] Gerald Green, *Holocaust: The Story of the Family Weiss*, DVD, directed by Marvin J. Chomsky, written by Gerald Green, NBC, aired on April 16-19, 1978.
[37] Various figures are often "credited" with coming up with the idea for the Final Solution (or, The Final Solution to the Jewish Question in Europe). For example, Adolf Eichmann is often accused of this, as he was in his 1961 trial in Jerusalem. Reinhard Heydrich oversaw the 1942 Wannsee Conference, at which the procedures for coordinating the Final Solution were outlined. As such, Heydrich is particularly infamous in his role in creating the most horrifying aspects of the Holocaust, namely, mass murder at extermination and concentration camps. Doris L. Bergen, *War and Genocide: A Concise History of the Holocaust* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2016), 208-209.

and parades. The series depicts *Kristallnacht* as a critical moment for both families, as well—Dorf helped plan the pogrom to ensure his promotion, while all members of the Weiss family could no longer ignore the dangers they faced by staying in Berlin. The references to antisemitism and Nazism, which create a sense of teleology headed toward the catastrophe that is the Holocaust, are fictionalized and dramatized. However, they are critical to the development of a narrative that compels the series' audience. The symbols of the Holocaust remind the viewers of what is likely coming next, yet it is entirely unclear how the story will unfold. Will the Weisses survive? Is there any chance that Erik Dorf, who is first presented as a decent man who simply wants to serve his family, could redeem himself? Regardless, the action-packed first episode, which aired on April 16, 1978, did in a single night what writers who had previously tackled the Holocaust had not achieved: it provided both the perpetrators and the victims human faces and brought those faces into the homes of tens of millions of Americans via the television screen.

It is important to note, however, that *Holocaust* did not present audiences with new facts, nor did it present stories that were unlike those found in memoirs. It was the combination of television and narrative, I argue, that made the miniseries so consequential in the development of Holocaust memory. From the perspective of Mink's ideas, for example, it is clear that *Holocaust* synthesized a wide array of "things which are not experienced together," creating some kind of understanding of the Holocaust that may have been absent previously. Using Ricoeur's language, the Holocaust became an event through Green's narrative. *Holocaust* brought cohesiveness to the history.

This 'creation of the event' of the Holocaust takes on additional significance when considering the difficulty of distinguishing fictionalized narratives with nonfictional ones, as

White explained. Consider for a moment segments of an American public that were, on April 15, 1978, largely uninformed about the details of the Holocaust but spent the next four evenings watching the miniseries. This narrative—which started a public discourse about the Holocaust—became the only point of reference for some American audiences.[38] For many, there was no other narrative against which the miniseries could be compared. Herein lies one of the clearest dangers of narrativization: the fictional narrative becomes the nonfictional narrative because the fictional narrative is the only familiar one present. Of course, there were, and are, thousands of other narratives about the Holocaust. But none, except perhaps Anne Frank's, were quite as popular and well known as that of *Holocaust*.

The issue of the blurred line between popular Holocaust narratives as they are presented in film and nonfictional narratives becomes more complicated when considering Steven Spielberg's *Schindler's List*. In a similar fashion to the *Holocaust* series, *Schindler's List* was critically acclaimed and won over audiences with a historically accurate, moving, emotional narrative. The film presented the horror of the Final Solution in Poland, as well as the possibility of goodness to prevail against evil. Two aspects of the film are critical to this discussion. First, the film, though fictionalized with artistic license, follows the story of Oskar Schindler, a Nazi industrialist, during World War II. In this sense, Spielberg argued that he created a historical "document."[39] So, unlike *Holocaust*, *Schindler's List*, a work of historical fiction, claimed a level of historical accuracy that pure fiction cannot. Second, the film has reached a huge audience in the twenty-plus years since its release and has been met with an extremely positive critical reception. Spielberg narrativized with artistic license while attempting to stick to what he

[38] Shandler, *While America Watches*, 170–171.
[39] Noa Gutow-Ellis, "On Writing and Righting History: The Stakes of Holocaust Interpretation and Remembrance in Poland and the United States" (bachelor's thesis, Colby College, 2019), 39, https://digitalcommons.colby.edu/honorstheses/917.

believed to be an accurate history. Within White's framework, the film's use of narrative makes it particularly difficult to make any determination about whether it is fictional or nonfictional (if such a distinction ever exists). It narrativizes like fiction, yet it is based on a 'true' story.

To further complicate the issue of the film's reception, the film focuses on the story of a specific individual during the Second World War rather than attempting to include as much of what could potentially constitute the Holocaust as possible, as Gerald Green's miniseries did. Again, returning to Ricoeur's writing is useful. Although the film is ambitious in its attempts to cover a range of Holocaust-related topics, such as ghetto life and the horrors of concentration camps, its focus is relatively narrow in scope. But again, consider any viewer of the film who did not know much about the Holocaust before seeing the film (*Holocaust* had appeared fifteen years before the time *Schindler's List* was released and had been popular with a different generation of Americans). For this viewer, the events of the Holocaust might not exist without Spielberg's narrative. Further, the film's narrative became events of the Holocaust. In other words, the film, with a narrow scope, became the story of the Holocaust as a whole, which of course consisted of events far beyond those covered in Spielberg's script.

While *Holocaust* and *Schindler's List* won over audiences and brought new attention to the Holocaust in a way that previous works had not done, some harsh criticism of the accuracy of the narratives remained. For example, on April 16, 1978, the day the first episode of *Holocaust* was set to air on NBC, the *New York Times* published an editorial written by Elie Wiesel, titled "Trivializing the Holocaust: Semi-Fact and Semi-Fiction." As the title suggests, Wiesel denounced the miniseries for its improper representation of (his perception of) historical truth. In the article, Wiesel presented two distinct critiques. First, he argued that the narrative was offensive to those who lived through the Holocaust, both those who perished and those who

survived. He wrote, "In spite of its name, this "docu-drama" is not about what some of us remember as the Holocaust…. It tries to show what cannot even be imagined. It transforms an ontological event into soap-opera."[40] As others have done, Wiesel claimed that the Holocaust was an event beyond imagination; therefore, Gerald Green's melodramatic depiction of events in *Holocaust* could not accurately portray true experiences, trivializing the past.

Wiesel's second argument, focusing on which narrative the miniseries was attempting to tell, is additionally pertinent to the discussion in this chapter. Wiesel took aim at the scope of the narrative. He wrote, "It tries to tell it all: what happened before, during, and after…. Too much is there. The film is too explicit, too all-encompassing. The story of one child, the destiny of one victim, the reverberations of one outcry would be more effective."[41] Wiesel was not explicit about what "would be more effective" by having a singular focus, but it is clear that an attempt at an "all-encompassing" narrative does not do justice to each particular experience. Here, Wiesel hinted at other significant questions that arise when trying to tell a narrative about the Holocaust or any other past event: which story do we tell, why do we tell it, and who gets to tell it? The term "Holocaust," of course, refers to a vast array of seemingly connected events across the European continent that spanned an ambiguously defined timeline. From a Ricoeurian perspective, for anyone without other reference points, the simplified narratives that reach public audiences become indistinguishable from the entirety of the Holocaust. For critics such as Wiesel, this is a danger which cannot be tolerated in the name of historical accuracy and a commitment to honoring the memories of victims and survivors.

[40] Elie Wiesel, "Trivializing the Holocaust: Semi-Fact and Semi-Fiction," *New York Times*, April 16, 1978, https://timesmachine.nytimes.com/timesmachine/1978/04/16/139847462.pdf.
[41] Wiesel, "Trivializing the Holocaust."

However, this thesis is not a polemic against the creation of popular narratives about the Holocaust.[42] This thesis is simply a reckoning with the reality that narratological choices are made when writing a history about the Holocaust. This is not inherently harmful. As Mink and Ricoeur both explained, the creation of a narrative is what allows for the understanding of meaning. Extracting meaning from historical narratives can be useful in moral instruction in the present. Indeed, if the Holocaust is the amalgamation of a series of human events—perpetrated and experienced by humans—there is a natural desire (and perhaps necessity) to give voice to these experiences and draw moral lessons from them. This desire is part of active remembrance––the morals of historical narratives and their applications are based on careful considerations of the past in relation to the needs of the present.

As mentioned, Holocaust narratives (like all historical narratives) simplify the pasts they represent. The issue in question is that both filmmakers mentioned above, for example, made choices about what to include and what not to include in their films. The same is true for anyone creating a Holocaust narrative, including those crafting narratives for museums and memorials. These narratological choices are critical to understanding the processes of active remembrance. For one thing, the omissions and inclusions in the narrative shape the kind of remembrance that will occur at a memorial or museum exhibition—different events will be mentioned and, more importantly, different moral lessons will be extracted. At the same time, though, the process of making such narratological choices itself is a part of the active remembrance, and it can be studied as such. The way a particular Holocaust narrative is crafted—by particular individuals at a particular place and time—offers a starting point for exploring how the Holocaust is remembered at that particular place and time. The later chapters of this thesis study public and

[42] For an actual polemic against cinematography and the Holocaust, see Norman Finklestein's *The Holocaust Industry*, which greatly criticizes the Hollywood takeover of the Holocaust.

educational forms of remembrance. The way the creators of the memorials and museum exhibitions mentioned in this thesis included and omitted parts of the past for their narratives illuminate how they believed the Holocaust remains significant.

Conclusion

Holocaust narratives are high-stakes simplifications of past events that often attempt to extract and convey meaning from the genocide. As Paul Ricoeur argued, though, the events of the Holocaust cannot exist without the narratives that explain them. As such, the Holocaust, along with other historical periods and moments, is understood not as a whole but rather through specific stories. In the latter chapters of this thesis, I will explore these specific narratives. How these stories are chosen and why the narratives emphasize particular perceived lessons of the Holocaust are questions worth considering. The moral lessons that the narratives present are critical to active remembrance. Further, who gets to decide which narratives are told? Sites of remembrance are public locales of education. The narratives they present must be investigated to understand why they present the history of the Holocaust as they do.

The narratives at each site of remembrance I have studied in this thesis are incomplete, not unlike Kellner's, Green's, and Spielberg's respective narratives. While each case is different and deserves individual attention, the narratives at these sites are incomplete for many of the same reasons that the cinematographic and artistic narratives in this chapter were incomplete. They simplify to make the past more approachable. They draw moral conclusions from the history so that it is teachable and applicable. They redefine the parameters of the Holocaust based on present-day circumstances. They moralize. And by doing each of these things, the memorials and museums studied here simultaneously engage their visitors in a form of active

remembrance and illuminate why the Holocaust is understood to be important at a particular moment in time.

2 Local Memory and Identity: The New Castle Holocaust Memorial

We erect monuments so that we shall always remember, and build memorials so that we shall never forget.

–Arthur Danto, "The Vietnam Veterans Memorial"

On April 10, 2019, the Town Supervisor of New Castle, New York, Robert Greenstein, wrote to town residents about the passing of a local Holocaust survivor, Jacob Breitstein. Following a tribute Breitstein's daughter wrote was a three-sentence section of the report entitled "April is Genocide Awareness Month." The report read, "New York is one of eight states that have laws requiring schools to teach about the Holocaust or genocide. I am recommending that we create a Holocaust Memorial somewhere in town."[1] Seven months later, Greenstein and the newly formed New Castle Holocaust and Human Rights Committee opened the memorial to the public on November 6, 2019.

The New Castle Holocaust Memorial is located on South Greeley Avenue in downtown Chappaqua, one of two hamlets that comprise the town of New Castle.[2] The community had erected a few memorials dedicated to notable events prior to the construction of the Holocaust Memorial. Some local historic sites, many of which were Quaker properties dating back to the colonial period or part of Horace Greeley's Chappaqua home, dot the town.[3] A plaque in downtown Chappaqua honors residents who fought in the First World War, while the names of

[1] Robert Greenstein, "New Castle Supervisor's Report – April 10, 2019," *New Castle Supervisor & Administrative Reports* (newsletter), April 10, 2019, https://mailchi.mp/town/midweek-newsletter-4-10?e=9b13ecfa07.
[2] The hamlets of Chappaqua and Millwood together make up the town of New Castle.
[3] The New Castle Historical Society dedicates most of its efforts to the preservation of Quaker settlements and just about anything relating to Horace Greeley, founder of the *New-York Tribune* and politician, who lived in Chappaqua for nearly a decade. The house Greeley built is now in downtown Chappaqua and houses the New Castle Historical Society.

residents who died serving in various other conflicts are etched into a small monument near the town's train station. Local residents built a 9/11 memorial in Gedney Park, the town's largest public park.

Of course, the sites dedicated before 2019 are distinct from the Holocaust Memorial in several critical and clear ways. The war monument memorializes residents who fought overseas, serving their nation and fighting to preserve American democracy. It connects with Chappaqua via time and place. So, too, does the 9/11 memorial—New Castle is a short train or car ride away from downtown Manhattan, and a great number of town residents work (and worked in 2001) near the World Trade Center. The memorial remembers an event that closely touched town residents in the recent past.

The New Castle Holocaust Memorial, on the other hand, lacks the obvious connections of time and place with the events it memorializes. Most events that constituted the Holocaust occurred over four thousand miles away, and no town residents from the time were involved in the Holocaust. Yet the memorial stands. These facts do not necessarily surprise a student of Holocaust memory in the United States. Americans have erected memorials across the country; the memorial in downtown Chappaqua is far from the first American Holocaust memorial and will not be the last. So, why 2019, and why Chappaqua?

There are some simpler answers to these questions, as well as a few that are more complicated and, frankly, more interesting. The simpler answers offer a good starting place for this discussion. Chappaqua has a relatively large Jewish community, making the town as likely a place as any for housing a Holocaust memorial.[4] Some town residents are descendants of

[4] Pearl Beck, Steven M. Cohen, Jacob B. Ukeles, and Ron Miller, *Jewish Community Study of New York 2011: Geographic Profile* (New York: United Jewish Appeal Federation of New York, 2013), 376, https://www.ujafedny.org/api/assets/785690/. Although this source is now seven years old, I conjecture that the data more or less still accurately reflect the current demographics.

survivors, while some other Jewish residents who are not direct descendants have a different familial connection to the Holocaust. Some of the answers to the question of timing are also straightforward. First, the number of remaining Holocaust survivors were (and are) dwindling, and the Holocaust appeared to be receding from popular awareness and memory.[5] Erecting a memorial is one way to try to keep the memory alive and honor the experiences of all victims of the Holocaust by fighting historical forgetting. Second, antisemitism in the United States had been on the rise, and for some American Jews, there is a direct line between modern antisemitism and failing to learn from the horrors of the Holocaust.

In contrast to New Castle's other memorials, the Holocaust Memorial seems out of place. The other memorials honor residents who fought to maintain American democracy; they are odes to the suffering and sacrifices of the town's residents. However, these are not the only reasons for memorialization. The other memorials in the town remember events with which town members, both at the time the memorials were erected and current residents, closely identify. For many town residents, the Holocaust is similarly critical to their historical identities.[6] The Holocaust Memorial, then, encapsulates a critical component of the identities of residents in a way similar to the town's other memorial sites.

The New Castle Holocaust Memorial and its construction offer an example of the intersection of local historical identities and a certain type of active remembrance, namely the use of moralizing narratives of the past to address present issues. This chapter discusses the way histories of the Holocaust have been remembered (and re-remembered) by a local community as

[5] Maggie Astor, "Holocaust Is Fading From Memory, Survey Finds," *New York Times*, April 12, 2018, https://www.nytimes.com/2018/04/12/us/holocaust-education.html; http://www.claimscon.org/study/.
[6] Becka A. Alper, "70 years after WWII, the Holocaust is still very important to American Jews," FactTank: News in the Numbers, Pew Research Center, August 13, 2015, https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2015/08/13/70-years-after-wwii-the-holocaust-is-still-very-important-to-american-jews/.

expressed through its memorial. Of course, the context in which a site of remembrance is built or conceived of is critical for understanding what the site's creators hoped (and still hope) to accomplish. This context serves as the backdrop for active remembrance—it is one of the primary reasons for remembering. It is of equal importance to the Holocaust, the event being memorialized.[7] Additionally, this chapter explores the relationship between local memorials and the identities of residents. How does a local Holocaust memorial in the United States, far removed geographically and chronologically, capture local identities? How do such memorials, in turn, interact with, and even influence local identities?

The New Castle Holocaust Memorial is not simply a site meant to remember the past as it was. Rather, it symbolizes a devotion to active remembrance, an application of the past to the present. Historical narratives, as Hayden White explained, offer "moralizing judgments" of the past. Particularly, historical narratives that are critical to historical identity, as the Holocaust is for so many Jewish Americans, are full of moral lessons. By providing a space for critical contemplation of these moral lessons, the Memorial draws a line from the past to the present and is perhaps more about the present than the past it remembers. Memorializing the Holocaust with the aims of educating future generations and slowing a reemergence of modern antisemitism requires a conscious form of memory, one that appeals to local identity.

Why 2019? A Snapshot of Modern American Antisemitism

While there has been an increase in antisemitic incidents worldwide over the past several years, this chapter will focus on those which occurred in the United States since they pertain

[7] Dan Stone, "Holocaust Memory, Memorials and Museums," in *History, Memory and Mass Atrocity: Essays on the Holocaust and Genocide* (London: Vallentine Mitchell, 2006), 157.

more closely to the creation of the New Castle Holocaust Memorial.[8] According to the Anti-Defamation League (ADL), the number of antisemitic-related incidents in the United States spiked in 2016, 2017, and 2018, in comparison to preceding years.[9] The large increase in reported incidents from 2016 to 2017, though, does not necessarily indicate a similar increase in total incidents (reported and non-reported). Not all incidents are reported, and the nature of particular incidents can prompt an increase in the rate of reporting. For example, the ADL pointed out in its 2018 Audit that the large increase of reported incidents in November and December of that year likely was "the result of increased reporting rates in the aftermath of the October 27, 2018, massacre of Jewish worshippers in Pittsburgh."[10] However, while it is important to keep this potential skew in the data in mind, the number of reported incidents was already on pace to surpass the 2016 marker before the mass shooting in Pittsburgh. Even more important, though, is that regardless of whether the number of incidents actually increased, the perception—including the perception for the creators of the New Castle Holocaust Memorial—was that antisemitism was, indeed, on the rise.

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[8] I must make a quick note about terminology. Various organizations, institutions, and individuals differ in their spelling of what I refer to here as "antisemitism." For example, the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C. uses the spelling "antisemitism," while the Anti-Defamation League and some popular news outlets such as *The New York Times* employ the spelling "anti-Semitism." Effectively, the two spellings refer to the same phenomenon of discrimination against Jews, particularly from a non-religious perspective. For clarity in this thesis, I will use the "antisemitism" spelling when writing my arguments, quoting sources that use that spelling, or paraphrasing sources that use other spellings. I will use alternate spellings only when quoting sources that use them. For a more detailed history of the term "antisemitism," as well as a summary of why one should refer to the phenomenon as "antisemitism" rather than "anti-Semitism," I direct the reader to the chapter "Targets: Why the Jews?" in Peter Hayes's book, *Why?: Explaining the Holocaust*.

[9] According to the ADL, the number of antisemitic-related incidents in the United States over the ten years from 2009 to 2018 reached its nadir in 2013 at 751 incidents. A significant spike in antisemitic incidents occurred in 2016: Americans reported a total of 1,267 incidents, nearly 300 more than in 2015. However, an even larger increase occurred in 2017. That year saw a total of 1,986 antisemitic incidents, which was the largest such number over the ten-year period. While the total number of incidents decreased in 2018, the number dipped only slightly. With 1,879 incidents, the occurrence of antisemitic incidents in 2018 was the second most of the period in question. Further, the 2018 amount is the third largest over the four-decade-long period since 1979 during which the ADL tracked antisemitic incidents in the United States. Center on Extremism, *Audit of Anti-Semitic Incidents: Year in Review 2018* (New York: Anti-Defamation League, 2019), 13, https://www.adl.org/media/13144/download.

[10] Center on Extremism, *Audit of Anti-Semitic Incidents*, 17.

Displays of antisemitism, which range from vandalism to harassment to assault (including murder) have become more commonplace in the United States over a short period. Of course, this may indicate the surfacing of antisemitic sentiments that Americans already held rather than a genuine national rise in antisemitism. Additionally, the ADL explained that not only was there an extraordinarily high number of reported antisemitic incidents in 2018, "known extremist groups or individuals inspired by extremist ideology were responsible" for a greater portion of the reported incidents than was the case in any year since 2004.[11] The antisemitic ideologies represented in these incidents had both explicit and implicit references to Nazism and the Holocaust.[12] The prevalence of organizations willing to espouse such hate-filled viewpoints was of particular note for the ADL considering the greater danger that organized groups pose as compared to antisemitic individuals.[13]

The rise in reported antisemitic incidents was met with condemnation. I refer to this response to antisemitism as anti-antisemitism. Anti-antisemitism has taken various forms over the past few years. Newspaper and magazine articles condemning antisemitic incidents and the forgetting of the dangers of antisemitism have become staples across the print media industry.[14] Organizations and institutions such as the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum insist upon turning to the Holocaust to learn from the mistakes of the past.[15] Such educational efforts

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[11] Center on Extremism, *Audit of Anti-Semitic Incidents*, 25.
[12] Center on Extremism, *Audit of Anti-Semitic Incidents*, 26.
[13] There is an important historical note I must make here. Many are quick to point out the similarities in the antisemitic hate-speech between late nineteenth and early twentieth century Germany and present society. Such an analogy is certainly not entirely inaccurate. However, Nazi ideology indoctrinated a widespread German *antisemitismus* and brought the ideology into state policies. On the other hand, antisemitism today is widely condemned (in large part because of the Holocaust), and acts of antisemitic violence are often committed by individuals acting alone. Their actions are usually met with strong opposition and condemnation.
[14] I encourage the reader to go onto the website of a popular publication, such as *The New York Times*, and search for "antisemitism" or "anti-Semitism." The number of results from the few years before this thesis was written is astounding, and a testament to the response of journalists to antisemitic incidents and their apt characterizations of such incidents.
[15] United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, "Museum Outraged at Deadly Jersey City Attack," Press Releases, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, December 11, 2019, https://www.ushmm.org/information/press/press-

are becoming commonplace. And, as was the case with the New Castle Holocaust Memorial, individuals and communities have taken it upon themselves to resist antisemitism in the United States by creating reminders of the horrors of the Holocaust and the dangers of indifference and inaction.

As mentioned, the increase in antisemitic incidents has been compounded by an increase in violent antisemitic incidents. This change, even more than the shrinking population of remaining Holocaust survivors, is the fundamental answer to the question of "why now." Of particular note was the aforementioned mass-killing of Jewish worshippers at the Tree of Life synagogue in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania on Saturday, October 27, 2018. Robert Bowers murdered eleven congregants and injured several others in what immediately became the deadliest antisemitic attack in US history.[16] In the weeks leading up to the killing, Bowers had made antisemitic and hate-filled internet postings, using language that echoed that of the Nazis, such as referring to Jews as the "enemy of white people."[17] Exactly six months later on April 27, 2019, gunman John Earnest murdered one and injured three more Jews at a Synagogue in Poway, California, just north of San Diego.[18] For the American Jewish community, the horrifying events of October 2018 and April 2019—legitimate dangers in contemporary society—recalled memories of the Holocaust.

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releases/museum-outraged-at-deadly-jersey-city-attack; United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, "Letter from Holocaust Survivors to Pittsburgh Jewish Community," Press Releases, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, November 8, 2018, https://www.ushmm.org/information/press/press-releases/letter-from-holocaust-survivors-to-pittsburgh-jewish-community.

[16] Christopher Mele, Campbell Robertson, and Sabrina Tavernise, "11 Killed in Synagogue Massacre; Suspect Charged With 29 Counts," *New York Times*, October 27, 2018, https://www.nytimes.com/2018/10/27/us/active-shooter-pittsburgh-synagogue-shooting.html.

[17] Kevin Roose and Julie Turkewitz, "Who Is Robert Bowers, the Suspect in the Pittsburgh Synagogue Shooting?" *New York Times*, October 27, 2018, https://www.nytimes.com/2018/10/27/us/robert-bowers-pittsburgh-synagogue-shooter.html?action=click&module=Intentional&pgtype=Article.

[18] Jennifer Medina, Christopher Mele, and Heather Murphy, "One Dead in Synagogue Shooting Near San Diego; Officials Call It Hate Crime," *New York Times*, April 27, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/04/27/us/poway-synagogue-shooting.html?searchResultPosition=1.

The New Castle Holocaust Memorial: A Brief Overview

The Memorial was first mentioned publicly on April 10, 2019, seventeen days before the synagogue attack in Poway. Town Supervisor Robert Greenstein sent out an update in his May 1 report, revealing the planned location of the proposed memorial in downtown Chappaqua next to the town's municipal offices, as well as a basic description of what the memorial would contain: "We're thinking along the lines of a rock with an engraved plaque, tree plantings & some perennial flowers."[19] In July, Stacey Saiontz and Alexandra Rosenberg, the New Castle residents who initially proposed the memorial and oversaw the project, wrote to Greenstein with their selection of the site of the memorial. The location was chosen for its central location, accessibility for older visitors, and its placement next to a covered gazebo (figure 2-1). All three of these features will make hosting events on *Kristallnacht* and Yom HaShoah more convenient.[20] In September 2019, the Town Council determined that the Memorial would be unveiled on November 6.[21] There were no public forums to discuss the creation of the Memorial or its design. The straightforwardness of the creation of the Memorial and the lack of resistance in the town point to the extent to which Holocaust memorialization has become normalized and accepted.

[19] Robert Greenstein, "New Castle Supervisor's Report – 5/1/2019," *New Castle Supervisor & Administrative Reports* (newsletter), May 1, 2019, https://mailchi.mp/town/midweek-newsletter-4-976963?e=9b13ecfa07.
[20] Stacey Saiontz (Chair, New Castle Holocaust and Human Rights Committee), email message to New Castle Town Supervisor Robert Greenstein and New Castle Town Board, July 18, 2019, Town of New Castle Town Clerk.
[21] Resolution Accepting Donation to Create Holocaust Memorial in the Town of New Castle, resolution 5, September 24, 2019 resolutions, Town of New Castle Town Board (2019), Town of New Castle Town Clerk.

Figure 2-1: New Castle Holocaust Memorial, Chappaqua, New York. Photograph taken by author, 2020.

In addition to the creation of a memorial, Saiontz and Rosenberg helped create a town Holocaust and Human Rights Committee, as well as a student organization at Chappaqua's Horace Greeley High School, Educate Now On Understanding Genocide and Hate (ENOUGH). The Committee, which is to consist of twelve members, was authorized by the Town Council on October 29, 2019. The resolution that approved the Committee explained, "there is a need in the Town of New Castle for the organization of a Holocaust and Human Rights Committee… to effectively educate our children and create community awareness about the Holocaust, other genocides, and human rights violations."[22] Exactly what this "need" was, however, the Council did not explain. The resolution also explained the Committee's commitment to education, stating the goals of the Committee as "to educate the children of the community to never forget the

[22] Authorization to Establish the New Castle Holocaust and Human Rights Committee, resolution 14, October 29, 2019 resolutions, Town of New Castle Town Board (2019), Town of New Castle Town Clerk.

horrors of the Holocaust and other genocides, and to promote the teaching of Human Rights in our schools."[23] Indeed, the goal of the Committee and the creation of the Memorial was to foster continuous education about the Holocaust and other human rights violations.

The purpose of the Memorial was to educate about the Holocaust specifically at a time when the dangers of antisemitism have reemerged. As Saiontz and Rosenberg wrote in their invitation to local veterans to attend the opening of the Memorial, "Given the recent increase of anti-Semitic incidents and other hate crimes, it is important for our town to demonstrate our commitment to educate and empower the next generation to reject the hate that has become acceptable in our world."[24] Although the Memorial memorializes the Holocaust—which, of course, took place over seventy years before its construction—the Memorial symbolizes resistance to contemporary oppression and a commitment to goodness, using the Holocaust as a period in history from which everyone can learn. For Saiontz in particular, who has been active in Holocaust remembrance for years, the Memorial was part of a wider effort to fight the receding of Holocaust memory around the world.[25] The Memorial, then, is an attempt at active remembrance. It is an application of the past for present purposes and consequently is as much about the present as it is about the past.

Located directly adjacent to the New Castle Town Offices on South Greeley Avenue, Chappaqua's main thoroughfare (figure 2-2), the New Castle Holocaust Memorial consists of a

[23] Authorization to Establish the New Castle Holocaust and Human Rights Committee, Town of New Castle Town Board.
[24] Stacey Saiontz, email message to Robert Greenstein and New Castle Town Board, July 18, 2019.
[25] Saiontz was honored in 2019 by the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum for her work in advancing Holocaust Remembrance. Her grandfather is a Holocaust survivor, and she played a role in creating the HBO documentary *The Number on Great-Grandpa's Arm*, which is about her grandfather's transmission of his Holocaust experiences to her children. Inside Press, "Chappaqua Resident Stacey Saiontz to be Honored at a U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum Benefit," *The Inside Press* (Westchester, New York), September 19, 2019, https://www.theinsidepress.com/chappaqua-resident-stacey-saiontz-to-be-honored-at-a-u-s-holocaust-memorial-museum-benefit/.

weeping cherry tree and a small plaque (figures 2-3 and 2-4). The plaque contains the following dedication:

> In memory of the six million Jews and millions of other victims who were persecuted and murdered simply because of who they were and what they believed. In honor of those who survived the Holocaust, and those who risked and gave their lives to save them.[26]

Following the dedication is the memorial's motto, written in capital letters: "NEVER AGAIN."[27] Finally, the plaque includes a quote, chosen from a submission contest among students at Horace Greeley High School. It reads, "Although no one can change the hate that has occurred, to not acknowledge it and understand it would be forcing it upon our future."[28] The chosen quote showed the Memorial's educational and forward-looking purposes. The tree and plaque are accessible via a circular walkway lined with a few benches.

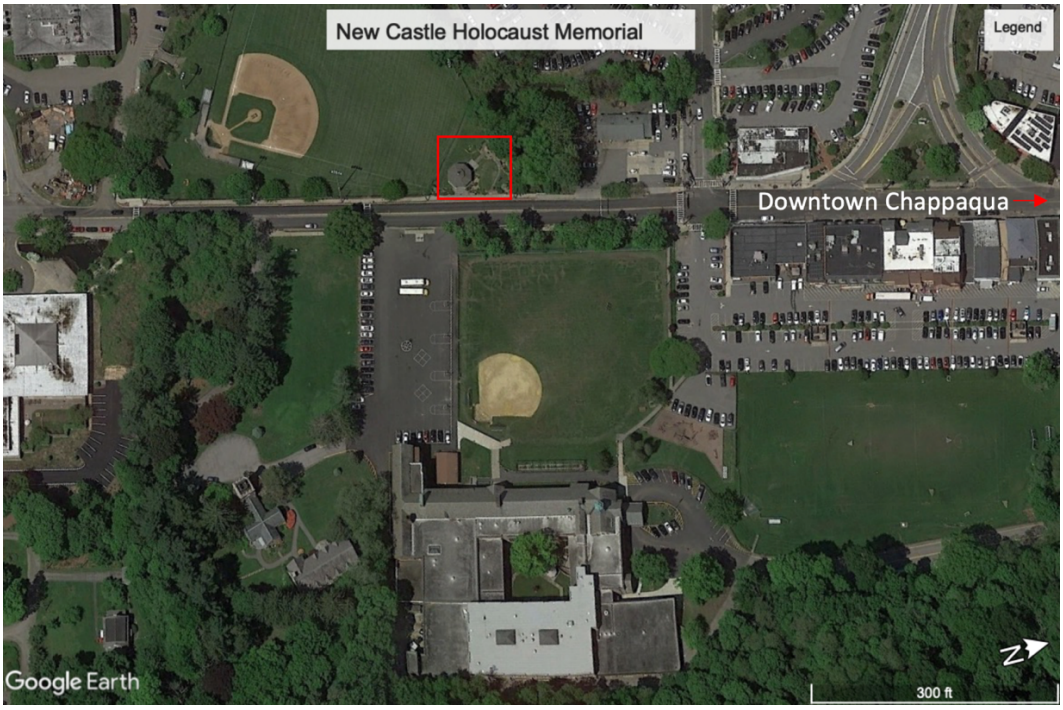

Figure 2-2: Aerial photograph of New Castle Holocaust Memorial in downtown Chappaqua, New York. Google Earth, 2020.

[26] New Castle Holocaust and Human Rights Committee, *New Castle Holocaust Memorial*, inscription, New Castle Holocaust Memorial, Chappaqua, NY, visited January 4, 2020.
[27] New Castle Holocaust and Human Rights Committee, *New Castle Holocaust Memorial*.
[28] New Castle Holocaust and Human Rights Committee, *New Castle Holocaust Memorial*.

Figure 2-3: New Castle Holocaust Memorial, Chappaqua, New York. Photograph taken by Melissa Kogan, 2020.

Figure 2-4: New Castle Holocaust Memorial informational plaque, Chappaqua, New York. Photograph taken by author, 2020.

In addition to the main focus of the Memorial, the Memorial's designers included a flowerbed surrounding the weeping cherry tree where residents have planted daffodils as part of the Daffodil Project (figure 2-3). The Project "aspires to build a worldwide Living Holocaust Memorial by planting 1.5 million Daffodils in memory of the children who perished in the Holocaust and in support for children suffering in humanitarian crises in the world today."[29] The flowers have a symbolic purpose—as perennials, their purpose is to inspire continual, consistent remembrance, even as the Holocaust itself moves further into the past. The shape of the yellow flowers is meant to recall the image of the yellow Star of David that the Nazis made Jews wear during the Holocaust, while also symbolizing remembrance, "hope, renewal and beauty."[30] An Elie Wiesel quote, included at the New Castle Memorial, states the purpose of the Project: "How can a person… not be moved by compassion? And above all, how can anyone who remembers remain silent?"[31] Together, the components of the Memorial are unified by the phrase "never again" and show the commitment to continued remembrance.

"Never Again": The Opening of the Memorial

A close study of the Memorial's opening ceremony shows the clearest connection between the Memorial's purpose and the identities of residents and resurgent antisemitism. The ceremony was held on the evening of November 6, 2019, a date chosen to coincide with *Kristallnacht*, an event often associated in American Jewry with the beginning of the Holocaust.[32] Although the widespread pogroms of the night of November 9–10, 1938—known as

[29] "Mission and History," The Daffodil Project, visited January 18, 2020, https://www.daffodilproject.net/about/.
[30] "Mission and History," The Daffodil Project.
[31] Worldwide Daffodil Project, inscription, New Castle Holocaust Memorial, Chappaqua, NY, visited January 18, 2020.
[32] There are three things to note here. First, a background on *Kristallnacht*: on the night of November 9–10, 1938, *Sturmabteilung* (SA) forces raided Jewish homes and shops throughout Germany in pogroms. Synagogues were burned, tens of thousands of Jews were arrested and sent to concentration camps, and nearly one-hundred Jews were

Kristallnacht—were by no means the definitive beginning of the Holocaust, *Kristallnacht* was a critical moment in the development of Nazi anti-Jewish policy. Because of violence and oppression against Jews in 1938 and 1939, Jews fled Germany in far greater numbers than during the preceding years under Nazi rule.[33] *Kristallnacht* marked the point at which Jews became aware of the dangers they faced by remaining in Germany; it represented the amalgamation of years of rhetoric and building antisemitic sentiment into a tangible, violent threat. In popular remembrance, *Kristallnacht* retains this identity.[34]

Kristallnacht's significance in Jewish American memory is precisely why the town of New Castle chose the anniversary as the opening date of the Holocaust Memorial. The Memorial was a response to violent antisemitism. The Memorial, then, is partially meant to show symbolically that Jewish Americans living in the early twenty-first century have learned to accurately recognize and stand up against dangerous antisemitism. The Memorial does not directly confront antisemitism but rather it is a sign of the community's commitment to solidarity with the memory of Holocaust victims. This symbolic nature of the Memorial offers a starting point from which to begin a conversation about the narratives and identities it represents and contains.

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murdered. Secondly (and this is covered in the first comment), *Kristallnacht* took place November 9–10, not November 6. In other words, the opening of the Memorial was held close to the anniversary of the pogrom, but not actually on the correct date. Thirdly, it is important to note that there is, of course, no specific date to which one can point as the beginning of the Holocaust. Other important milestones, such as Hitler's appointment as chancellor in 1933, the passing of the Nuremberg Laws in 1935, or the beginning of the Final Solution in 1942 come to mind, as well. However, *Kristallnacht* does stand out as a turning point in the use of violence against Jews under the Nazi regime and has thus become the symbol of the beginning of the Holocaust.

[33] Avraham Barkai, "Aryanization," in *How Was It Possible? A Holocaust Reader*, ed. Peter Hayes (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2015), 168.

[34] For example, *Kristallnacht* is the critical moment of change in *Holocaust: The Story of the Family Weiss*, referenced in Chapter 1. In a drastic change of the series' tone, the Weiss family becomes fully aware of the true threat that Nazism poses. Synagogues are burned, storefronts are smashed, homes are looted. Heinrich Palitz, Berta Weiss's father, is beaten in the streets by rioters. Additionally, the event marks a change for the Dorf family, as Erik Dorf is depicted as one of the organizers of *Kristallnacht*. Together, these two storylines make clear that *Kristallnacht* is remembered as a moment after which nothing would be the same for either perpetrators or victims of the Holocaust.

At the Memorial's opening ceremony, a range of speakers addressed the audience: then-Town Supervisor Robert Greenstein, a few New York State elected officials, President (and Chappaqua resident) Bill Clinton, organizers Stacey Saiontz and Alexandra Rosenberg, and Holocaust survivor Peter Somogyi, among others. The evening followed a predictable scheme of Holocaust remembrance: residents took part in a candle-lighting ceremony backgrounded by another resident's playing of the main theme from *Schindler's List* on the violin. Each speaker and event of the evening focused on the ceremony's and memorial's theme: "Never Again." The predictability of this particular scene further showed the normalization of the Holocaust in contemporary American life. The theme from *Schindler's List*—an exceptionally popular, award-winning Holocaust movie—essentially took the place of the theme music of the Holocaust. Lighting candles is traditional on Yom HaShoah, the Israeli Day of Holocaust Remembrance. Together, these components are the 'usual' ways that Jews (and specifically Jewish Americans) remember the Holocaust.

Greenstein, who first announced the plan to build the memorial, began the evening's processions by placing the building of the Memorial into a context of antisemitism and widespread forgetting of the Holocaust. He began by referencing notable recent incidents: "In a Pittsburgh Synagogue, we were reminded that we can never forget. Earlier this week, when the FBI… stopped a white supremacist from bombing a Colorado synagogue, we were reminded that we can never forget."[35] Greenstein's references to specific violent antisemitic incidents made clear that the Memorial's construction was not randomly-timed. The Memorial was a response to contemporary antisemitism, not simply to the Holocaust. Neither incident, particularly the

[35] Robert Greenstein, speech at New Castle Holocaust Memorial opening ceremony, November 6, 2019, recorded by Melissa Kogan; Julie Turkewitz, "White Supremacist Plotted to Bomb Colorado Synagogue, F.B.I. Says," *New York Times*, November 4, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/11/04/us/pueblo-colorado-synagogue-richard-holzer.html.

planned bombing in Colorado, was directly related to the Holocaust. Instead, it was the town's residents who made the connection, essentially implying that all modern antisemitism is, in some way, inseparable from the Holocaust.

Greenstein and the evening's other speakers showed throughout their speeches that one of the focuses of the ceremony (and of the Memorial) was to slow, if not end altogether, the slippery process of forgetting history, particularly those moments that might offer moral lessons. He explained, "Modern-day antisemitism takes on many forms. Conspiracy theories, verbal abuse, hate speech, and hate crimes. Sadly, in America, antisemitism is on the rise. Yet, we are forgetting."[36] Greenstein continued by referencing an oft-cited study produced by the Claims Conference in 2018 which detailed the pervasive lack of knowledge about the Holocaust.[37] The Claims Conference's report, which reached a wide audience with the help of an April 2018 *New York Times* article, startled many in the Jewish community.[38]

Greenstein's speech succinctly brought together the two major driving forces that led to the creation of the Memorial: an increase in violent antisemitic incidents which coincided with an awareness of the extent to which the Holocaust had been forgotten. Indeed, as the building of the Memorial testifies, the two developments are understood to be linked: the rise in antisemitism is a sign in itself that the Holocaust has been forgotten, and the forgetting of the horrors of the Holocaust has enabled the emergence of a modern antisemitism that once seemed toothless. This perceived relationship between antisemitism and the forgetting of history showed that for the Memorial's creators, an active remembrance of history—or, conversely, the absence of historical memory—has consequences in the present. Greenstein stated his support for the

[36] Greenstein, speech at the New Castle Holocaust Memorial opening ceremony.
[37] Schoen Consulting, "Holocaust Knowledge and Awareness Study" (New York: Claims Conference, 2018), http://www.claimscon.org/study/; Greenstein, speech at the New Castle Holocaust Memorial opening ceremony.
[38] Astor, "Holocaust is Fading From Memory."

connection of the two trends: "While an increasing portion of the population is unfamiliar with the Holocaust, now more than ever it is essential that we educate all Americans about the dangers of hatred and the vital importance of standing up to evil."[39] The Memorial is at once a symbol of the choice to remember and not to forget, as well as a starting point for an educational conversation about how to understand the past in such a way that its darkest periods are not repeated in any form.

Continuing the theme of comparing contemporary antisemitic developments and the antisemitism of the 1930s, Alexandra Rosenberg, one of the directors of the project, explained the need for the town's new Memorial and Holocaust-related organizations. As explained above, one of the foremost reasons for the Memorial was education. Specifically, the Holocaust is difficult to teach, in part because it is extraordinarily difficult for a twenty-first century student in the United States to understand and contextualize the Holocaust in human terms.[40] But, as the increase in recent antisemitism suggests, there is a great need to teach children about the Holocaust. In recognition of this challenge, Rosenberg spoke about the events of 2019 and related them to the events of the 1930s, grounding the Holocaust as a real, and not theoretical, phenomenon. She stated:

> The Holocaust is not only a Jewish story—it is a human story and one that didn't begin with gas chambers and the killing of six million Jews and millions of others. It began with hate. Over these last several years, hate has crept back into our world, our children's world, and specifically our children's schools. Hate crimes in schools have increased by twenty-five percent for the second year in a row. Collectively, it is time that we all say enough of the reactionary response to hate. It is time to be proactive.[41]

[39] Greenstein, speech at the New Castle Holocaust Memorial opening ceremony.
[40] I deal with this issue in greater depth in the first chapter of this thesis.
[41] Alexandra Rosenberg, speech at the New Castle Holocaust Memorial opening ceremony, November 6, 2019, recorded by Melissa Kogan.

The Memorial, though significant, has a mostly symbolic role in educating students and adults about the Holocaust. The real difference, Rosenberg explained, would be made by the educational efforts of the New Castle Holocaust and Human Rights Committee and the student organization ENOUGH. The groups would be "a platform to teach our children and our community the lessons of the Holocaust and the dangers of hate, the perils of indifference, and the importance of taking action."[42] Rosenberg concluded her address by returning to the topic of *Kristallnacht*, which, she stated, "symbolized the final shattering of the Jewish existence in Europe."[43] The Memorial and the town's supplemental educational programs, she explained, were meant to ensure that antisemitism, at least in the local Chappaqua community, would never rise to the level that allowed for such a shattering to occur in the first place.

Next up to the dais were two local representatives of the state government who stated that the Memorial would stand as a "permanent recognition" of local community values.[44] Following their brief remarks, President Bill Clinton, though not a local government official, assumed his role as a community leader in Chappaqua.[45] Clinton, who has lived in Chappaqua since the end of his second term as President of the United States, had spoken at the opening of other Holocaust-related sites of remembrance. As President, he delivered remarks in 1993 at the opening of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum on the National Mall in Washington, D.C.[46] He was also the keynote speaker at the reopening of the Illinois Holocaust Museum and

[42] Rosenberg, speech at the New Castle Holocaust Memorial opening ceremony.
[43] Rosenberg, speech at the New Castle Holocaust Memorial opening ceremony.
[44] David Buchwald, speech at the New Castle Holocaust Memorial opening ceremony, November 6, 2019, recorded by Melissa Kogan.
[45] Bill and Hillary Clinton are frequent attendees at public events in New Castle, such as Memorial Day parades. Mark Lungariello, "Andrew Cuomo, Clintons march in New Castle Memorial Day Parade; what they said," *Westchester Journal News*, May 27, 2019, https://www.lohud.com/story/news/local/westchester/2019/05/27/andrew-cuomo-clintons-march-new-castle-memorial-day-parade/1249625001/.
[46] Edward T. Linenthal, *Preserving Memory: The Struggle to Create America's Holocaust Museum* (New York: Viking Penguin, 1995), 266.

Educational Center, near Chicago.[47] There was, as Stacey Saiontz stated, "no more fitting honoree for this occasion."[48]

President Clinton's address was short and somber, yet full of calls to action. He reiterated the present need for actions such as the building of the New Castle Memorial and its associated educational efforts during a time "driven by divisions." He explained, "It is very important to never forget the Holocaust, especially now, [when] there are people again in the world who seem to be in the business of denying the Holocaust."[49] Forgetting, denying, misunderstanding, or diminishing the importance of the Holocaust does damage to the memory of those who suffered, he explained. He insisted that the memory of the Holocaust be passed from one generation to the next, as there will always be situations in the future in which lessons from the Holocaust could be applied. For example, he referenced events of two decades prior, namely the genocide in the Balkans: "You know what [Elie Wiesel] asked me to do? Save the people being slaughtered in Bosnia…. He said, 'the lesson of the Holocaust is using the power of humanity we all share.'"[50] By referencing the war in Bosnia, Clinton indicated to his audience that they hold a special responsibility both as Jews—and therefore likely holders of knowledge of the Holocaust—and as Americans who could potentially have the ability to help those in need around the world. He indicated that the residents of Chappaqua who took the steps to create a permanent memorial and

[47] Illinois Holocaust Museum & Education Center, "Clinton, Wiesel, Over 12,000 Guests Celebrate Grand Opening," in *Inside the Museum* 8 (Summer/Fall 2009): 1, https://www.ilholocaustmuseum.org/filebin/PDF/782_IHM_TRI.pdf.
[48] Stacey Saiontz, speech at the New Castle Holocaust Memorial opening ceremony, November 6, 2019, recorded by Melissa Kogan.
[49] William J. Clinton, speech at the New Castle Holocaust Memorial opening ceremony, November 6, 2019, recorded by Melissa Kogan. I take President Clinton's reference to "denying the Holocaust" to take on a wider meaning than simply claiming that the Holocaust did not happen. As he likely knows, such Holocaust deniers are not in the majority, although their presence is alarming. Rather, I understand his use of the term "denying" to include forgetting, omitting from historical narratives, and diminishing the importance of the Holocaust.
[50] Clinton, speech at the New Castle Holocaust Memorial opening ceremony.

establish educational programs to prevent future genocides recognized their role in combatting violence and hate in contemporary society.

While President Clinton's role at the opening of the New Castle Holocaust Memorial was as a symbolic leader in the community and as a voice which could eloquently make the lessons of the Holocaust appear even more relevant, two of the final speakers with ties to both the community and the Holocaust showed the importance of the Memorial to local identity. Following a brief remark from Westchester County Legislator George Latimer, who spoke about the danger of indifference to oppressive governmental policies, Holocaust survivor Peter Somogyi stepped up to the dais. Somogyi, a resident of nearby Pleasantville, was, in many respects, the keynote speaker of the ceremony.[51] He was the living, physical connection between the present and the past which the Memorial was remembering. He was a local, a community member for whom the Holocaust was not a theoretical part of the past deserving collective condemnation, but rather a part of his *personal* past which is inextricable from his identity.

Peter Somogyi's speech was part personal narrative and part historical contemplation, as he stressed the importance of remembering stories like his. Somogyi and his twin brother Thomas were among the over 400,000 Hungarian Jews deported to Auschwitz.[52] They arrived at Auschwitz in 1944 at the age of eleven.[53] Upon arrival, the brothers, as twins, were selected by Doctor Josef Mengele to be subjects of medical experiments while they were separated from their sister and mother, whom they never saw again (Somogyi's father had been sent to Dachau

[51] Saiontz, speech at the New Castle Holocaust Memorial opening ceremony; New Castle Holocaust and Human Rights Committee, *Never Again*, New Castle Holocaust Memorial opening ceremony pamphlet, November 6, 2019.
[52] Saul Friedländer, *The Years of Extermination: Nazi Germany and the Jews 1939–1945* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2007), 619.
[53] "Peter Somogyi," Holocaust Encyclopedia, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, visited December 28, 2019, https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/id-card/peter-somogyi.

earlier in 1944).[54] After over five months of imprisonment and experimentation, the twins were liberated, along with the rest of the prisoners at Auschwitz, on January 27, 1945.

While Somogyi related his story to the audience at the Memorial's opening ceremony, he included a clear message in his narrative, emphasizing the importance of and need for memory. He began: "It took me years before I could talk about [my experience during the Holocaust], and even today after many decades, I still find it difficult. While it is still very painful to tell the story, it is unthinkable that I should not be talking, and with the years passing, all the more urgent."[55] Somogyi needed his story to be told, heard, and listened to. His presence at the ceremony was not only a symbolic one but also a dire message to stand up against hatred by paying close attention to the lessons from the past. He closed his speech by explaining the extent to which the world knew of the Holocaust while it was occurring, marking what he understood as "a breakdown of western civilization."[56] The great question contemporary society faces, he indicated, is how to avoid a similar breakdown. He stated:

> It makes me ask, what will it take to make the future different from the past? It takes education from our lesson to the dangers of intolerance and the perils of indifference and inaction. This is why I am honored to be here to dedicate the New Castle Holocaust Memorial. This Holocaust memorial has given a voice to those who perished, not only to preserve their memories but to educate the world about this tragic moment in our history and to make a better future.[57]

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[54] Peter Somogyi, speech at New Castle Holocaust Memorial opening ceremony, November 6, 2019, recorded by Melissa Kogan. There are two relevant notes of historical context here. First, there is the issue of surviving in the concentration camps: in almost all cases, those who survived the camps were specifically chosen for survival. In other words, Nazi prison officials and guards chose specific prisoners for survival based on their apparent usefulness. Most frequently, those who survived were selected for appearing able-bodied. After the initial selection, prisoners had to continue to prove their usefulness, often having no choice but to perform critical camp functions (for a discussion of the moral implications of surviving, see Primo Levi, "The Gray Zone," in *The Drowned and the Saved*). Secondly, twins occasionally survived as a result of their being specifically chosen for medical experiments. Dr. Josef Mengele was the infamous prison doctor at Auschwitz who performed horrific experiments on children that often damaged them for life. Saul Friedländer, *The Years of Extermination*, 505.

[55] Somogyi, speech at the New Castle Holocaust Memorial opening ceremony.

[56] Somogyi, speech at the New Castle Holocaust Memorial opening ceremony.

[57] Somogyi, speech at the New Castle Holocaust Memorial opening ceremony.

The Memorial, then, is more than a physical representation of collective historical memory. It is also a symbol of the community's commitment to making the past useful in improving society, at least in the most local sense.

The penultimate speaker of the evening offered a different aspect of personal identification with the Holocaust than Somogyi's speech did, one that epitomized the Holocaust's role in the historical identity of Jewish Americans. Grace Bennett took the podium to speak about her father, Jacob Breitstein, whose passing in April 2019 was one of the inciting forces behind the building of the Memorial. Rather than speaking about her father's experience during the war, Bennett told the audience of Breitstein's active and happy life in the United States after the war. Bennett's address was lighthearted, eliciting laughs from the audience on multiple occasions. However, her message, like those who spoke before her, was clear: memories of the Holocaust, and of those like her father who were its victims, are a part of her and always will be. Consequently, she is alarmed by the rise in antisemitism, as it is both an affront to her identity and her father's memory, as well as a danger to society. She stated, "I am very concerned about [the rise of antisemitism] every day and I try to make it my business to fight it as his daughter and in his memory."[58] In a sense, what Bennett described as her mission was the very mission that was on display in the creation of the Memorial itself. For many Jewish Americans, the Holocaust is a critical component of historical identity which must be not only remembered but honored through an appropriate application of its moral lessons.

Together, the speakers who dedicated the opening of the New Castle Holocaust Memorial showed the Memorial's role as a symbol—a physical memorialization of the past and of current memory, a promise to future remembrance, and a commitment to educating about the dangers of

[58] Grace Bennett, speech at the New Castle Holocaust Memorial opening ceremony, November 6, 2019, recorded by Melissa Kogan.

hatred. Local leaders and residents explained the Holocaust's role in their lives, both past and present.

The Memorialization of Local Identity

It is clear from both the context in which the Memorial was created and the narrative on display at its opening ceremony that the New Castle Holocaust Memorial has everything to do with the present. The speakers at the opening ceremony referenced contemporary antisemitism far more often than they mentioned the Holocaust. They reflected on their present identities. In this sense, the Memorial's presence indicates that the question of "why now" is not only worth considering, but it is critical to understanding the Memorial and its purpose. If the Memorial still stands decades from now, it may appear to a visitor as an attempt in 2019 to remember events of the 1930s and 1940s. But that is not the entire story. By attempting to memorialize the past, the Memorial captures elements of present-day identities and values. It reveals more about the people who created it than it does about the past it remembers. When analyzing this identity that is on display, some questions arise: with what is the Memorial associated, what other events are memorialized in the town and where is it located? Does the present's influence in the remembrance delegitimize the extent to which the Memorial truly honors the past?

The lineup of other memorials in New Castle—which remember the World Wars, the Korean War, the Vietnam War, Operation Enduring Freedom, and the 9/11 terrorist attacks—show a commitment to remembering locals who defended classical American ideals and honoring those who died in events that touched the lives of community members. Each of these memorials enshrines moments critical to the identities of New Castle residents past and present.

The New Castle Holocaust Memorial lacks some of the criteria of the other memorials—no town residents died in the Holocaust, and residents only came to associate with the Holocaust after Jewish individuals settled in the town. Yet, the New Castle Holocaust Memorial is a physical manifestation of the importance of the Holocaust in Jewish American identities. A memorial created soon after an incident may capture the sentiments surrounding the incident itself. In this sense, the town's other memorials, most of which were erected closer in time to the events being memorialized than the Holocaust Memorial was, likely capture quite a bit about the town during the moments in question. However, the passage of time between the Holocaust and the Memorial's creation means that the Memorial shows more about the identities of the town's present-day residents than it does about the Holocaust itself. As such, the Holocaust Memorial goes further than New Castle's other memorials in capturing a particular local identity. The very fact that the Holocaust Memorial was built so many decades after the events it memorializes, in contrast to some of the other memorials which were erected sooner after their respective historical counterparts, shows the longevity of the Holocaust in the identities of community members.

The establishment of the Holocaust and Human Rights Committee and the Horace Greeley High School club ENOUGH further suggests the Holocaust's magnitude in local identity. While some states have mandatory Holocaust education, educational efforts like those made in the Chappaqua Central School District are far less common.[59] Indeed, Holocaust-related educational movements may well be least urgent and significant in the districts and schools most likely to implement them. Students in Chappaqua schools, for example, likely know more about the Holocaust than those in other districts with smaller Jewish populations and percentages of

[59] "U.S. States Requiring Holocaust Education in Schools," Jewish Virtual Library, visited January 31, 2020, https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/u-s-states-requiring-holocaust-education-in-schools.

highly educated parents. Instead, the educational efforts in New Castle show the importance of the Holocaust in the individual and communal identities of many of the town's residents.

Finally, the intended narrative of the New Castle Holocaust Memorial—as expressed at the Memorial's opening ceremony—relates to historical identity. The message of the ceremony was "Never Again," the motto of this particular memorial as well as numerous groups and sites committed to Holocaust remembrance. These words often appear hollow, as Dan Stone explained: "For remembrance to be meaningful it must have an effect on the politics of the present, and not merely be the mounting of empty slogans – 'never again!' – or enactment of self-righteous, platitudinous, 'official' rituals."[60] The ceremony's theme, though, was to find some way to ensure, at least on the local level, that the words "never again" would inspire active remembrance. The words would hopefully not be an "empty slogan." The idea was to extract meaning from the Holocaust, to take away specific lessons from the past by recognizing elements of past events in the contemporary world. History museums, memorials, and other historic sites almost always try, in some way, to instruct visitors by using the past as the ultimate teacher. What is striking about the New Castle Memorial, though, is that the Memorial itself—the small plaque, the weeping cherry tree, the daffodils—do not present much information to visitors. If a visitor knew nothing about the Holocaust before visiting the Memorial, that visitor would not know much more than a simple definition upon departure. This simplicity makes it difficult to argue that the Memorial's creation was more than one of the empty, symbolic gestures to which Stone alluded. Stone's analysis, though, has a narrow definition of "meaningful" remembrance. What the New Castle Holocaust Memorial does is symbolize an ideal of memory. It captures something critical to the identities of many town residents. The

[60] Stone, "Holocaust Memory, Memorials and Museums," 150.

actual instruction of the moral lessons of the Holocaust, the "effect on the politics of the present," is meant to take place in the classroom. Perhaps most importantly, the Memorial offers a space for thoughtful recollections of the past, as all memorials do.

Regardless of what exactly the Holocaust-related education in New Castle and the Chappaqua Central School District includes, the opening ceremony of the Memorial made clear that the new educational focus is not to try to make students understand every intricacy of the Holocaust or come to 'true' understandings of the experiences of the Holocaust, as many Holocaust narratives attempt to convey. Such aspects of Holocaust narrativization are not necessary for the implementation of educational programs that emphasize learning about the dangers of bigotry and hate, which the New Castle efforts plan to address.

The way the Holocaust is ingrained in the identity of the members of the town who came together to make the Memorial possible is not simply about an association with the past. The collective memory of past events is not fixated on remembering for its own sake. Instead, as the New Castle Holocaust Memorial shows, memory of the Holocaust takes up a part of Jewish American identity that is focused on the future, imparting a sense of responsibility upon those who hold the burden of historical knowledge.

Conclusion: Actively Memorializing Present Memories of the Past

The New Castle Holocaust Memorial offers a reciprocal relationship between the past being memorialized—the Holocaust—and the re-remembering of past events in light of contemporary issues—the attribution of an increase in antisemitism as result of a decrease in Holocaust awareness. Sites of remembrance are always tied to the context in which they are built, and the Memorial in Chappaqua was and is no different. The Memorial drew upon moral

lessons of the past with the hopes of positively influencing the future. The Memorial encourages active remembrance—the past is recalled for a moral purpose in the present. In this respect, building the Memorial was a convenient response to contemporary antisemitism. It is difficult to imagine the legitimate societal change the Memorial will bring about. But the Holocaust is also a part of local identity. So, it was natural to call upon the town's collective memory of the Holocaust—rather than another event from history that is less relevant to local identities—to respond to a present-day phenomenon, even in a merely symbolic nature.

The New Castle Memorial enshrines ideals and collective values. The building of the Memorial in itself—as well as the normalized nature with which it was accepted—shows the importance of the Holocaust in present-day identities. It memorializes the historical identity of the people who built it and those for whom it was built. The New Castle Holocaust Memorial was not meant just to memorialize the past, but enable an active, moral remembrance of it that influences the present. This active remembrance is both personal and political. It provides a place for residents to reflect upon the past and its continued significance in their own lives, and it is a symbol of efforts against modern antisemitism. Yet, the Memorial also showcases the limits of active remembrance. What observable significance the Memorial will have in serving its purpose in combatting modern antisemitism is entirely questionable—this goal is more likely achieved through the corresponding educational efforts. Active remembrance, then, is not merely a process through which individuals and communities attempt to reconsider the past for present purposes, because sometimes those present goals simply are not met. Rather, analyzing active remembrance serves as a mechanism of understanding present-day identities. In sum, the New Castle Holocaust Memorial may or may not have an impact on contemporary antisemitism, and critics might suggest that it is little more than a hollow gesture. But the ease with which it was

created and accepted definitively shows the importance of the Holocaust in the identities of the town's Jewish residents. It shows that for some residents, the Holocaust continues to occupy a significant enough place in their identities that it demands a public space for its recollection.

3 The Holocaust as American History: Active Remembrance in Boston, New York, and Washington, D.C.

What man has nerve to do, man has not nerve to hear.
–Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*

Memorials are meant to be places of reflection. Often, visitors go to memorials and monuments to recall the past and perhaps contemplate their relationships with that past. Memorials encourage active remembrance, insofar as they push visitors to continue to remember, reflect, and simply not forget. Museums, though, embody a different form of active remembrance, one that instructs and seeks applications of lessons of the past based on the changing circumstances of the present.

Of course, memorials embody the presents in which they are built, as well. The New Castle Holocaust Memorial, for example, was intentionally built at a time of increased antisemitic violence, decreased Holocaust awareness, and a shrinking population of Holocaust survivors (Chapter 2). One difference between memorials and museums, though, is that museums change. Memorials do not. The politics and social situations surrounding the initial building of a museum often mirror those that lead to the building of a memorial. The idea to build the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C. was formally announced by the President's Commission on the Holocaust in 1979. President Jimmy Carter created the Commission a year earlier in November 1978 at a moment of increased popular

Holocaust awareness.[1] But while the New Castle Holocaust Memorial will still be comprised of a plaque and a weeping cherry tree in ten years, the USHMM will house new exhibitions throughout time, and curators will restructure the museum's main exhibition to more accurately reflect new research or the museum's mission at that particular moment.

The Museum of Jewish Heritage—A Living Memorial to the Holocaust (MJH) and the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM), the two largest Holocaust museums in the United States, exemplify the commitment to offer a place of eternal reflection while continuously looking to find new ways of remembrance in light of changes in contemporary society. Moreover, the two museums are conscious attempts to place the Holocaust alongside significant moments in American history, history significant to American national identities. They stand in locales meant to signify the Holocaust's presence in US history. The MJH sits on the Hudson River in Battery Park, across the water from the Statue of Liberty and Ellis Island; the USHMM is situated on the National Mall, steps away from the Washington Monument in Washington, D.C. The New England Holocaust Memorial in Boston, Massachusetts—situated on Boston's Freedom Trail—offers a starting point for investigating such an implantation of the Holocaust into the landscape of significant moments in American history.[2]

Of course, like most museums, both the MJH and the USHMM install temporary exhibitions that respond to the societal contexts in which they are conceived. The USHMM and MJH each opened a new exhibition in 2018 and 2019, respectively, both of which remain open at

[1] United States, *President's Commission on the Holocaust, Report to the President*, ([Washington, D.C.]: Reprinted by the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 2005), 20, https://www.ushmm.org/m/pdfs/20050707-pres-commission-79.pdf.

[2] See chapters devoted to the memorials at the two museum's book in Natasha Goldman's *Memory Passages*. Natasha Goldman, "Memorial Functions: Shapiro, Kelly, LeWitt, and Serra at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (1993)" and "Conclusion: Andy Goldsworthy; Nature and Memory at the New York Museum of Jewish Heritage—A Living Memorial," in *Memory Passages: Holocaust Memorials in the United States and Germany* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2020).

the time of writing.[3] Through a careful study of the MJH's *Auschwitz. Not long ago. Not far away.* and the USHMM's *Americans and the Holocaust*, this chapter uses the New England Holocaust Memorial as a lens for analyzing how present-day American Holocaust exhibitions extract moral lessons from the Holocaust by placing the Holocaust into the context of American history. These temporary exhibitions, which are already geographically located alongside significant places from American history, reshape and reconfigure Holocaust narratives, thus changing the understanding of what the 'Holocaust,' as a historical phenomenon, is altogether.[4] Why is such a reconfiguring of Holocaust narratives necessary in the first place, and what did the exhibitions' curators hope to accomplish by changing the perspectives from which viewers learn about the Holocaust? Finally, what is the relationship between the types of active remembrance which these temporary exhibitions encourage and American historical identity, particularly since they are housed in the nation's most prominent Holocaust museums?

The curators of both *Auschwitz* and *Americans and the Holocaust* asked their visitors to reflect critically upon the Holocaust as the end result of a complicated series of contingent events. In simple terms, the Holocaust was not inevitable by any means. Both exhibitions take this straightforward notion, place the viewer into the years prior to the Holocaust, and strip away hindsight. Through their narratives, the two exhibitions encourage viewers to identify with the experiences on display, enabling a kind of active remembrance that instructs and affects. As the USHMM explained in the official museum book, "A well-constructed narrative exhibition affects visitors not only intellectually but also emotionally; it arouses processes of identification."[5] By attempting to use empathy to tap into identity, the two exhibitions

[3] While the exhibitions have not yet permanently closed, they are not currently open to the public at the time of writing due to the COVID-19 pandemic.
[4] See the discussion of Paul Ricoeur's work on narrative and the creation of the historical event in Chapter 1.
[5] Rina Elieli and Jeshajahu Weinberg, *The Holocaust Museum in Washington* (New York: Rizzoli, 1995), 49.

encouraged personal reflection and reconciliation with the past—such exhibitions bring the history to life and confront visitors with the morality of the histories with which they identify. The exhibitions instruct by drawing applicable moral lessons from the Holocaust. They give their viewers contemporary meaning to the Holocaust, and the Holocaust becomes more than a mere abstraction. To do so, both exhibitions, like the memorial in Boston, place their narratives in a particularly American context. Their narratives are attempts at national ones. *Auschwitz* and *Americans and the Holocaust* show both museums' powers and limitations in taking a difficult-to-understand past and making it relevant. They are attempts at reaching American audiences through national narratives. Each site connects a narrative of the Holocaust with some narrative of the United States—narratives of US history, narratives of American values, narratives of contemporary America. The narratives at the three sites show the prominence of the Holocaust in American national consciousness (to the extent that such a concept exists) by connecting the Holocaust to American values and history to draw moral meaning in the present.

Boston's New England Holocaust Memorial and American Historical Identities

The New England Holocaust Memorial in Boston, Massachusetts epitomizes the connections between American Holocaust remembrance and American historical identities. Opened in 1995, the New England Holocaust Memorial is situated in downtown Boston, steps away from historic landmarks such as Faneuil Hall and the Old State House, directly adjacent to the Freedom Trail.[6] The Memorial consists of a narrow walkway in Union Street Park, a small (fewer than 100 feet) patch of land which separates Union and Congress Streets. The most striking features of the Memorial are six tall, chimney-like pillars through which a visitor walks

[6] "History," New England Holocaust Memorial, visited January 26, 2020, https://www.nehm.org/the-memorial/history/.

to move from one end of the Memorial to the other, which evoke the imagery of concentration camp crematoria (figures 3-1 and 3-2). Steam rises from beneath the ground upwards through the pillars. The columns themselves are glass, covered in numbers from 0000001 to 6000000, one to six million, each signifying one of the six million murdered Jews (figure 3-3).[7] The six towers have various meanings: "the millions of Jews killed in the Holocaust; the names of the six main death camps; a row of memorial candles; and the six years, 1939-1945, during which the infamous 'Final Solution,' the most deadly phase of the Holocaust, took place."[8] Quotes from survivors and victims are plastered onto the glass columns. Along the walkway are even more quotes from survivors, as well as bits of historical information about the Holocaust. The names of the six major killing centers—Auschwitz-Birkenau, Treblinka, Sobibor, Chelmno, Belzec, and Majdanek—are etched into the walkway next to each pillar (figure 3-4).

[7] I have read both praise and criticism for this aspect of the memorial. The numbers on the glass pillars show the sheer volume of those murdered in the Holocaust. At the same time, however, the design associates each victim with a number. This is denigrating in two ways: it is reminiscent of the tattooing of concentration camp inmates and reduces each individual to a statistic rather than understanding the true life that was lost. Heidi Landecker, "New England Holocaust Memorial opens," in *Architecture* 84, no. 12 (December 1995), https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/A17843677/ITOF?u=brun62796&sid=ITOF&xid=d7e05996.

[8] "Design of the Memorial," New England Holocaust Memorial, visited January 26, 2019, https://www.nehm.org/the-memorial/design-of-the-memorial/. One should note that the Final Solution—mass extermination, usually by gas, at killing centers in eastern Europe—did not begin in 1939, as the Memorial's website indicates. Rather, the Final Solution began in 1942.

Figure 3-1: New England Holocaust Memorial, Boston, Massachusetts. Photograph taken by author, 2020.

Figure 3-2: The Memorial separates Union and Congress Streets in downtown Boston. Photograph taken by author, 2020.

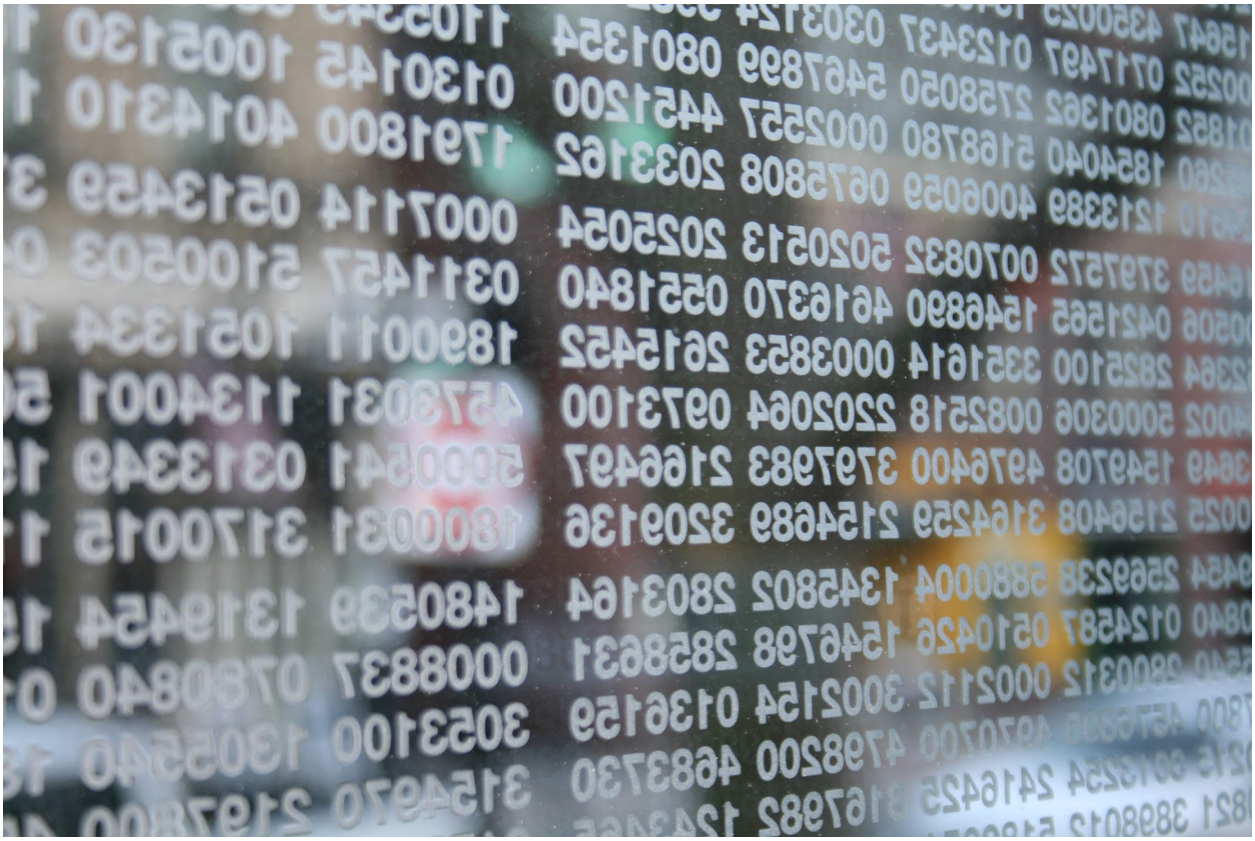

Figure 3-3: Numbers 0000001 to 6000000 line the columns. Photograph taken by author, 2020.

Figure 3-4: Steam rises through metal grates. The names of concentration camps are etched into the ground. Photograph taken by author, 2020.

More relevant to the question of American historical identity is the Memorial's location. Unsurprisingly, the positioning of the Memorial next to historically significant sites was, and is, intentional. As then Massachusetts Governor Bill Weld expressed in his dedication of the Memorial in 1995, the Memorial's positioning next to the Freedom Trail is far from coincidental.[9] Walking along the Freedom Trail from Boston Common to Bunker Hill, a visitor encounters a series of sites intimately related to the history of Boston, to Massachusetts, and to the United States, as a whole. By being on the Trail, the Holocaust Memorial is meant to remember an important moment in American history and do so in a manner not entirely different from the other sites on the Trail. Yet, there are, of course, significant differences between the events, people, and sites memorialized by the rest of the Freedom Trail and those which are memorialized by the Holocaust Memorial.

As characterized by the National Park Service, which operates and maintains the sites along the Freedom Trail, the Trail's sites "speak eloquently" of Revolutionary Boston.[10] The Freedom Trail takes visitors across the city to sites important to the formation of the United States, memorializing places, people, and ideals: "Bostonians and other colonists shared a notion of liberty as something precious and worth fighting for. The Freedom Trail sites include the scenes of critical events in Boston's and the nation's struggle for freedom."[11] The Freedom Trail memorializes events taught to children in schools, associated with the Founding Fathers, and with liberty at (or near) the exact locations where the events occurred. The stops along the

[9] Governor's Press Office Speech files, William Weld, box 24. Holocaust Memorial Dedication, October 22, 1995, GO 11/series 10, Massachusetts Archives, Boston, Massachusetts.
[10] National Park Service, "Boston National Historical Park, Massachusetts," United States Department of the Interior, map and pamphlet, 2018.
[11] National Park Service, "Boston National Historical Park, Massachusetts."

Freedom Trail capture what are often understood as moments fundamental to US history. The sites relate closely to common and popular American historical identities.

With this characterization in mind, where does the New England Holocaust Memorial fit among the other sites on the Freedom Trail? From one perspective, the Memorial does not belong. First, every other site on the trail memorializes a place or event in the location at which the past events unfolded. The Holocaust Memorial, though, memorializes events that occurred thousands of miles away in Europe. Second, the other events the Freedom Trail remembers each unfolded during the Revolution in the eighteenth century. The Holocaust was a mid-twentieth century phenomenon. The sites traditionally associated with the Freedom Trail are each easily categorized as part of US history. The Bunker Hill Monument, for example, memorializes the Battle of Bunker Hill, a chapter of US history. But what about the Holocaust? Does it, too, qualify as a part of the history of the United States? For some, the answer to this question is yes. But it is reasonable to write a history of the United States without any mention of the Holocaust.

The New England Holocaust Memorial's presence on the Freedom Trail alongside some of the most well-known sites from revolutionary times associates the Holocaust with critical moments in the formation of the United States. It physically places the Holocaust alongside momentous events of the national past. Further, the sites on the Freedom Trail symbolize ideals central to American historical identities, such as liberty. In this sense, the Holocaust Memorial fits among the other sites on the Trail, as it, too, is an attempt at capturing these ideas. One of the various plaques at the Memorial reads: "The New England Holocaust Memorial is placed in Boston, near the Freedom Trail, surrounded by important symbols of American history and human rights, to be used by generations to witness history and reaffirm the basic rights of all

people."[12] The Memorial's location among the other sites on the Freedom Trail reaffirms the values that the Freedom Trail's other sites were meant to enshrine. As James Young explained in "The Art of Memory," the Memorial is "located both spatially and metaphysically in the continuum of American revolutionary history, integrated into the very myth of American origins."[13] The Memorial, like the rest of the Trail, encourages viewers to commit to notions such as freedom from oppression and the willingness to do what is necessary to maintain that freedom.

By placing the Memorial on the Freedom Trail alongside places that memorialize moments of the past which are part of American historical identities, the Holocaust Memorial, too, is meant to memorialize a part of these American historical identities. Through the Memorial's placement, the Holocaust shares a place alongside events of the American Revolution. The Memorial places the Holocaust into a familiar context for an American audience; its narrative and placement relate the Holocaust to American national identities. The Memorial entwines the narratives of the Holocaust and US history by expanding each individual narrative to contain the other.

"An Auschwitz may occur again": New York's Auschwitz-Centered Exhibition

Press play, and the audio guide introduces Auschwitz, the place and the symbol. It was first a Polish town, Oświęcim, then later "a dot on the map" near the eastern edge of the Greater German Reich under the new name of Auschwitz.[14] Although the Auschwitz concentration camp

[12] Inscription, New England Holocaust Memorial, Boston, Massachusetts, visited January 9, 2020.
[13] James E. Young, "The Art of Memory: Holocaust Memorials in History," in *The Art of Memory: Holocaust Memorials in History* (Munich and New York: Prestel-Verlag, and New York: The Jewish Museum, 1994), 34.
[14] Robert Jan van Pelt, Luis Ferreiro, and Miriam Greenbaum, eds., *Auschwitz: Not long ago. Not far away.* (New York: Abbeville Press Publishers, 2019), 22.

was established in 1940, the name "Auschwitz" did not take up the identity for which it is known today—as the notorious site of mass extermination of around a million and a half people—until 1942.[15]

At the end of the audio guide's introductory monologue at *Auschwitz: Not long ago. Not far away.* in New York's Museum of Jewish Heritage, the brief overview of the history of Auschwitz abruptly changes from simple fact-stating to a series of thought-provoking questions. The narrator asks, "Where does responsibility begin and end? Is it only those who ordered these crimes?... In a sense, the challenge for us today is the same that faced the Soviet soldiers [who liberated Auschwitz]: how was this possible?"[16] The implication here is clear: the weight of responsibility of the injustices of Auschwitz—and the Holocaust as a whole—falls upon the shoulders of 'ordinary people' across Europe and beyond.[17] Through a thorough contemplation of the question of responsibility, visitors of the museum are meant to consider the following: "what does [the process that led to Final Solution] mean for us today?"[18] The purpose of the exhibition, then, is not merely to relay information about the past to a twenty-first century audience. Rather, the exhibition's curators use the history to instruct. And though the instructions are not explicit, *Auschwitz* speaks directly to its present audience in a way that only a museum can. The exhibition presents a narrative that shows its viewers that the creation of Auschwitz did not occur in a vacuum and that if we—society as a whole—are not careful, the horrors of Auschwitz could emerge again.

[15] Robert Jan van Pelt, *Auschwitz*, 22.
[16] Robert Jan van Pelt, audio guide, *Auschwitz: Not long ago. Not far away.,* December 29, 2019, Museum of Jewish Heritage—A Living Memorial to the Holocaust, New York City.
[17] Van Pelt, audio guide.
[18] Robert Jan van Pelt, *Auschwitz*, 22.

The full name of the Holocaust museum in Battery Park, New York is The Museum of Jewish Heritage—A Living Memorial to the Holocaust. On its own, the first half of the museum's name, "The Museum of Jewish Heritage," presents the museum's contents as central to the identity of Jewish people. Simply, the museum presents Jewish heritage. Of course, "Jewish heritage" is a vague term which, in its entirety, would likely refer to vast topics: ancient history, religious practices, the Jewish diaspora, contemporary Judaism, and, yes, the Holocaust. However, the fact that the museum is explicitly a Holocaust museum—and not a museum dedicated to telling Jewish history from ancient times or explaining religious practices—is surprising given the museum's name. The fact that the museum's subtitle is "A Living Memorial to the Holocaust" implies the Holocaust's centrality in the vague concept of "Jewish heritage." The Holocaust is not merely a part of Jewish heritage as the museum presents it. It is the core component.[19]

The museum's name, though, is not the only name worth mentioning. Far more relevant to the discussion of the Auschwitz exhibition is its full name: *Auschwitz: Not long ago. Not far away*. First, consider the subtitle. It implies that what happened at Auschwitz, and during the Holocaust as a whole, is recent history that is relevant both here and now.[20] What happened there cannot simply be written off as irrelevant because it happened a long time ago and in a place whose history is not relevant to most of the exhibition's visitors. In short, the argument is that there is something contemporarily relevant to learning the history of Auschwitz. By connecting a

[19] See the discussion of the museum's name in Rochelle G. Saidel, *Never Too Late to Remember: The Politics Behind New York City's Holocaust Museum* (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1996), 10.
[20] *Auschwitz: Not long ago. Not far away.* is a moving exhibition, curated by Musealia, a company that curates moving exhibitions around the world. It was first opened in Madrid in 2017, and likely will find a new home after its planned closing in New York during the summer of 2020. My point here is that the concepts of "here and now" are not set in stone for this exhibition.

narrative of the Holocaust with a narrative of the present, the exhibition's viewers are meant to recognize the always-looming potential of genocide if indifference is not replaced by vigilance.

Auschwitz is currently the main, and largest, exhibit at the MJH, housed in the location that was previously reserved for the museum's permanent exhibit on the Holocaust.[21] In this sense, the new exhibit takes not just the physical place of the previous one, but the symbolically and metaphorically central place, as well. *Auschwitz* presents the story of a single location, yet at the same time, it presents a history of the Holocaust, at large. The exhibition is advertised as "the most comprehensive Holocaust exhibition ever presented in [the United States]."[22] Auschwitz, then, stands in for 'the Holocaust.' So, what is the significance of centering the main exhibition at the world's third-largest Holocaust museum—in the city with the single largest Jewish population—on Auschwitz? There are three main outcomes, all of which deserve significant consideration: focusing on Auschwitz (1) inherently omits other events of the Holocaust that simply occurred somewhere else, (2) allows the Holocaust to be better symbolized by a single, horrible place, and (3) creates a narrative of the Holocaust that can easily be adapted to fit alongside narratives of the present.

The exhibition is far from the only example of the use of Auschwitz as *the* symbol of the Holocaust.[23] As historian Timothy Snyder explained in his book *Black Earth*,

> The word 'Auschwitz' has become a metonym for the Holocaust as a whole. Yet the vast majority of Jews had already been murdered, further east, by the time that Auschwitz

[21] Robert Jan van Pelt, *Auschwitz*, 12.
[22] Bruce C. Ratner and Michael S. Glickman, "Long Shadows: New York Remembers," in *Auschwitz: Not long ago. Not far away*, ed. Robert Jan van Pelt (New York: Abbeville Press Publishers, 2019), 7.
[23] Images of Auschwitz are commonly used when referring to the Holocaust, as a whole. Examples are quite varied. The main photo on the Wikipedia page for the Holocaust is a photo of Auschwitz (and it includes the entrance gate to Birkenau): https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Holocaust. I also recently took a Sporcle quiz that asks, "Can you name the 20th century events shown in these pictures?" One of the images is of the entry gate to Auschwitz, and its corresponding answer is "The Holocaust": https://www.sporcle.com/games/lupin/20th_C_Pic_Quiz.

> became a major killing facility. Yet while Auschwitz has been remembered, most of the Holocaust has been largely forgotten.[24]

A Holocaust narrative that solely focuses on Auschwitz will invariably omit a wide array of significant events, events that constitute a far greater amount of what the Holocaust actually was, as a historical term, than just Auschwitz. The Nazis murdered approximately one million Jews at Auschwitz, an astonishing statistic that perhaps warrants the special attention the camp receives in popular memory of the Holocaust.[25] However, that leaves the stories and fates of around five million murdered Jews—and millions of non-Jewish victims—who are not included in a Holocaust narrative that squares on Auschwitz. Indeed, Auschwitz has also come to symbolize the network of concentration and extermination camps at which gassing, random shooting, and mass starvation occurred. Yet, even if a narrative that focuses on Auschwitz is meant, symbolically, to also include the experiences of those who perished in other camps—Treblinka, Sobibor, Belzec, Chelmno, and Majdanek in particular—the narrative still excludes another three million Jewish victims.[26] Recalling the argument of Paul Ricoeur from Chapter 1, a narrative of the past creates the event in question altogether. So, from a Ricoeurian perspective, simplifying all of the Holocaust into a narrative about Auschwitz simplifies all of the Holocaust, as a historical event, into Auschwitz. Simply put, an Auschwitz-centered Holocaust narrative runs the risk of not engaging with the other aspects of what constitutes the Holocaust, such as forced emigration, ghettoization, mass shootings, and other forms of oppression under Nazi rule, and stripping them from historical understanding. This is not to say that these elements are

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[24] Timothy Snyder, *Black Earth: The Holocaust as History and Warning* (New York: Tim Duggan Books, 2015), 207.
[25] United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, "Documenting Numbers of Victims of the Holocaust and Nazi Persecution" (web page), Holocaust Encyclopedia (website), accessed March 5, 2020, https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/documenting-numbers-of-victims-of-the-holocaust-and-nazi-persecution.
[26] United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, "Documenting Numbers of Victims."

necessarily omitted from such a narrative—*Auschwitz* does, in fact, explain each of these subjects in varying detail. But each of these other aspects of the Holocaust become pieces of the story of the concentration camp. Auschwitz is the centerpiece, the dominant part of the narrative.

To further problematize the centrality of Auschwitz, narratives that focus on concentration and extermination camps can simplify what it meant to be a perpetrator of the Holocaust. The *Schutzstaffel* (SS) operated Auschwitz and most of the other camps.[27] This fact made it easy to relieve those who contributed to the Holocaust in other ways of responsibility. This was true for both individuals and entire nations. For example, Snyder explained:

> …Auschwitz was a convenient symbol in the postwar Soviet Union and today in post-communist Russia. If the Holocaust is reduced to Auschwitz, then it can easily be forgotten that the German mass killing of Jews began in places that the Soviet Union had just conquered. Everyone in the western Soviet Union knew about the mass murder of the Jews, for the same reason that the Germans did: In the East the method of mass murder required tens of thousands of participants and was witnessed by hundreds of thousands of people.[28]

Such omissions of historical realities are, perversely, what makes Auschwitz-centered narratives appealing in the first place. They exonerate, placing the blame on a group that is easily written off as inhuman. Perhaps most importantly, as Snyder wrote in *Black Earth*, using Auschwitz as "the standard shorthand of the Holocaust" distances the Holocaust from its human perpetrators altogether, making the event seem at once particularly catastrophic and inimitable.[29] He wrote, "Insofar as the Holocaust is limited to Auschwitz, it can be isolated from most of the nations it touched as well as from the landscapes it offered."[30] Such a narrative would be a problematic one for a museum to present, particularly if that museum is attempting to instruct behavior and avoid

[27] Saul Friedländer, *The Years of Extermination: Nazi Germany and the Jews 1939–1945* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2007), 346.
[28] Snyder, *Black Earth*, 208.
[29] Snyder, *Black Earth*, 208.
[30] Snyder, *Black Earth*, 209.

indifference. If the exhibition does not show the human elements of the creation of Auschwitz, visitors could easily not understand the contingency of events, controlled entirely by human actions, that lead to genocide.

At the same time, though, the focus on Auschwitz has the potential to expand the understanding of responsibility. A narrative that shows the role of complicity in the creation of Auschwitz—like the narrative at the MJH's exhibition—complicates the question of responsibility. If there is anything particularly unique about the Holocaust as a genocide, it was the existence of extermination camps like Auschwitz-Birkenau. So, by showing how Auschwitz grew out of less shocking acts of oppression, the narrative of one of the most iconic places of the Holocaust connects with a more relatable narrative. Auschwitz is not simply the result of extreme Nazi ideology and policies. It is a result of complicity. Auschwitz would be, in such a narrative, "not far away."

There are other legitimate reasons to build a Holocaust narrative around Auschwitz, as such a narrative could maintain greater coherence than one that attempts to piece together vast events that, today, make up the Holocaust. As Hayden White explained, "narrativizing discourse serves the purpose of moralizing judgments."[31] Narratives about the past—histories—can be useful in their ability to glean some kind of meaning from that past (Chapter 1). Auschwitz as the symbol of the Holocaust brings universal condemnation and, more importantly, remembrance, something that other genocides often lack. In this sense, an Auschwitz-centered narrative is one of the most useful kinds of Holocaust narratives, as it enables the narrative to do exactly what White claimed narratives do best: provide "moralizing judgments." For a museum whose goal is to instruct and extract morals and lessons from the past, such a narrative is quite appealing.

[31] Hayden White, "The Value of Narrativity in the Representation of Reality," in *The Content of the Form* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), 24.

Auschwitz: Not long ago. Not far away. presents a narrative that shows the extremes of the Holocaust while consistently reminding its viewers of the human role in creating such an abominable place. The exhibition is organized so that visitors enter on the first of three circular floors of the museum, progressing both chronologically and thematically through the story of Auschwitz. Although the exhibition takes the visitor directly to Auschwitz, the narrative quickly rewinds to the late nineteenth and early twentieth century in Europe, mostly abandoning the camp itself until the second floor of the exhibition. For a while, the visitor walks through an Auschwitz exhibition without Auschwitz. In short, the story of Auschwitz does not begin with Auschwitz. It begins somewhere else, in a world that more closely resembles the present than the world of the concentration camp. Rather than focusing explicitly on the horrors of the camp throughout, the exhibition shows the long, complicated, contingent—and never inevitable—process that led to the implementation of the Final Solution. It is not until visitors learn about the emergence of *antisemitismus* in late nineteenth century Germany (distinct from previous forms of anti-Judaism), Jewish life at the turn of the century, Jewish-gentile relations in pre-World War I Europe, and the significance of WWI and the treaty of Versailles that they encounter the rise of Nazism and events more commonly associated with the Holocaust.[32] Of course, such a narrative of the Second World War, or of the Holocaust specifically, is not groundbreaking—comprehensive histories of the period often begin the narrative at a similar moment in time to

[32] Modern antisemitism emerged in late-nineteenth century Germany. The term, *antisemitismus*, was created by journalist Wilhelm Marr in the 1870s. Antisemitism was a political reaction to the emancipation of Jews in the middle of the nineteenth century that accompanied the writing of constitutions, the abolition of the Holy Roman Empire (and the subsequent establishment of the Austro-Hungarian Empire), the Unification of Germany, nationalism more generally, etc. The new antisemitism, which was distinct from religiously focused anti-Judaism, was part of the resistance against the assimilation and integration of Jews into gentile society. Anti-Judaism, on the other hand, is a much older form of discrimination against Jews which began, essentially, with the formation of organized Christianity. Robert S. Wistrich, "Antisemitism," in *How Was It Possible?: A Holocaust Reader*, ed. Peter Hayes (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2015), 6.

where *Auschwitz* begins.[33] However, it is noteworthy that an exhibition that focuses on a single location that occupies a special place in popular memory of the Holocaust would spend quite so much time explaining developments elsewhere. For one thing, this indicates that *Auschwitz* does not simply tell a story of the camp but rather one of the entire Holocaust. The choice to structure the narrative in this way, though, holds greater significance in Holocaust historiography, remembrance, and memorialization.

In Holocaust historiography, historians have long debated the origins of the Holocaust. Specifically, historians have been concerned with the question of whether the systematic genocide of Europe's Jewish population—culminating in the Final Solution—was a primary goal of Nazism from the outset (intentionalism), or if the Holocaust occurred because of situational developments and was, at best, a secondary aim (functionalism).[34] Intentionalists often focus on the statements and ideological beliefs of Nazi leaders (and of the German people at large), particularly those of Adolf Hitler, while functionalists often cite the lack of specific orders to carry out the Final Solution in the ways it occurred, significant opposition to Nazism, and the prioritization of other goals during the war. The development and existence of the concentration camps play an important role for both groups. For intentionalists, the camps, epitomized by Auschwitz, are evidence in themselves of the centrality of the eradication of European Jewry to the Nazi vision—only a group that had planned to annihilate the Jews from the outset could have imagined and created such a place. For functionalists, though, the camps represent the end of a complicated road to the Holocaust, one filled with contradictions, obstacles, and improvisation.

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[33] For example, the main exhibition at the USHMM, *The Holocaust*, begins the narrative long before 1933, the year Nazism took power in Germany.

[34] For an example of an intentionalist argument, see Saul Friedländer, *The Years of Extermination: Nazi Germany and the Jews 1939–1945* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2007); for an example of a functionalist argument, see Christopher Browning, *The Origins of the Final Solution: The Evolution of Nazi Jewish Policy, September 1939–March 1942* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2004).

The Final Solution is evidence of functionalism insofar as it was the 'final' in a series of 'solutions' to the so-called Jewish question. As Raul Hilberg explained in his seminal *The Destruction of the European Jews*, "Since the fourth century after Christ there have been three anti-Jewish policies: conversion, expulsion, and annihilation. The second appeared as an alternative to the first, and the third emerged as an alternative to the second."[35] Auschwitz—and the rest of the camps—was not the goal, simply the option chosen for its viability of the implementation of Nazi ideology. A critical component of this argument, one that is specifically relevant to this discussion about contemporary education in museums, is that Auschwitz existed because of—not despite—the indifference of bystanders who did not desire the Holocaust.

Auschwitz's narrative is neither definitively functionalist nor intentionalist, though it significantly leans functionalist. It extensively explains the other "solutions" to the Jewish question, such as the 1933 boycott of Jew-owned businesses and 1935 Nuremberg laws—both of which were part of the campaign to expel the Jews from the Reich, rather than murder them—as well as the Madagascar Plan.[36] Notably, the narrative includes little mention of attempts or desires, Nazi or otherwise, to annihilate the Jewish population outright. As the exhibition's companion book explains, "Before June 1941… the German government that carried responsibility for the persecution had not yet formulated the concept that the so-called Final Solution to the Jewish Question was to be genocide."[37] A corresponding panel in the museum titled "Fatal Inventions" states that this policy evolved such that German leaders *eventually* "resolved not just to expel the Jews from Europe but to wipe them off the face of the earth."[38]

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[35] Raul Hilberg, *The Destruction of the European Jews*, vol. 1 (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1985), 8.
[36] The Madagascar Plan was one of the various plans to exile Europe's Jewish population to a specific territory, in this case Madagascar; *Auschwitz: Not long ago. Not far away.*, December 29, 2019, Museum of Jewish Heritage—A Living Memorial to the Holocaust, New York City
[37] Robert Jan van Pelt, *Auschwitz*, 114.
[38] Exhibit Description of "Fatal Inventions," *Auschwitz: Not long ago. Not far away.*, December 29, 2019, Museum of Jewish Heritage—A Living Memorial to the Holocaust, New York City.

So, Auschwitz, the place for which the exhibition was named, is not at the center of attention for much of the visitor's experience. Why place Auschwitz at the center of focus of the exhibition as a whole but leave it absent from much of the narrative?

The importance of the functionalist narrative presented at *Auschwitz* lies in the curators' goal to encourage a particular type of active remembrance of the Holocaust among the exhibition's visitors. The exhibition is meant to present a pre-war Europe to which viewers can relate. The narrative of the Holocaust is one that is "not far away" from a narrative of the present. At first, relations between minorities and majorities were more or less peaceful, towns and cities were known for their communities and landmarks and not for their hate. Then, tensions increased and bigotry arose, but life had not yet totally transformed. Finally, catastrophe occurred when citizens from politicians to businesspeople to shopkeepers—individuals not so different from the museum's visitors—could have acted and prevented it. The narrative of the Holocaust is placed into a narrative that closely resembles the present. As Dr. Piotr Cywiński, director of the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum, explained in the exhibition's book:

> Today, anxiety should be aroused by the fact that the postwar road out of Auschwitz may paradoxically have come full circle. An Auschwitz may occur again, since none of the initial stages of the road that led to Auschwitz have disappeared once and for all. The escalation of populism, xenophobia, antisemitism, and other racist ideologies is discernible in many parts of our world.[39]

The exhibition, as Cywiński explained, depicts the context out which Auschwitz emerged as a familiar one for the visitor. The same societal ills that perhaps should have been addressed in the leadup to the Holocaust—"populism, xenophobia, antisemitism, and other racist ideologies"—exist in the present. The exhibition both explains a period from the past and shows similarities between that past and the present. *Auschwitz* encourages reflection upon the current world and

[39] Piotr M. A. Cywiński, "We All Need Peace. Memory, Meanwhile, Breeds Unrest," in *Auschwitz: Not long ago. Not far away.*, ed. Robert Jan van Pelt (New York: Abbeville Press Publishers, 2019), 9.

instructs visitors to take action rather than dither in the face of a seemingly banal and harmless strain of evil. *Auschwitz* is an application of the past for a present which it resembles.

The *Auschwitz* narrative does not end on an altogether negative tone, as it attempts to relate some of the moral lessons of the Holocaust by encouraging a look toward the future. The story of the camp ends with its liberation on January 27, 1945 by the Soviet Red Army. A brief statistical summary of the Holocaust is plastered on a wall. The story of Auschwitz is over, yet it is not, as quotations on the walls and videos playing from projectors warn of the dangers of not heeding the past. A 1971 poem by Auschwitz survivor Charlotte Delbo is printed on a pillar outside of the exhibition, directly confronting the visitors: "You who are passing by / I beg you / Do something / … For so many have died / While you live / Doing nothing with your life."[40] Delbo's poem is an answer to the question of what a visitor of the museum should do with the burden of historical knowledge: identify similarities between the present and a darker past, and act. The past may be shameful, but the future need not be.

While Delbo's poem has universal relatability—all people, in all situations, must act against evil if they can—the museum's physical geography and intentional design connect the Holocaust narrative to American values and identities. Located in Battery Park, the Museum of Jewish Heritage sits on the eastern bank of the Hudson River, facing two of New York's—and the nation's—most iconic symbols of freedom: the Statue of Liberty and Ellis Island. The location is particularly significant in Jewish American identity, as Ellis Island was one of the major sites at which millions of Jewish immigrants arrived in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.[41] Both landmarks are visible from the museum. Visitors who exit *Auschwitz*

[40] Charlotte Delbo, untitled poem, 1971, *Auschwitz: Not long ago. Not far away.*, December 29, 2019, Museum of Jewish Heritage—A Living Memorial to the Holocaust, New York City.
[41] Melissa R. Klapper, "20th Century Jewish Immigration" (web page), teachinghistory.org (website), National History Education Clearinghouse, http://nhec.gmu.edu/history-content/beyond-the-textbook/25059.

emerge from the exhibition into a walkway whose fully-glass wall allows for a view of both landmarks. A door leads outside to a terrace upon which visitors can reflect upon their surroundings and their experiences in the exhibition. As was the case with the New England Holocaust Memorial, the MJH's creators deliberately placed the museum in the close vicinity of places fundamental to local and national historical identities, places whose histories are connected to the collective commitment to liberty. The museum "completes the cultural and educational landscape it shares with the Statue of Liberty and Ellis Island."[42] The museum, and *Auschwitz*, are placed amid locales rich with American history. *Auschwitz* ends with a discussion of liberation, and Lady Liberty provides the context for why the exhibition would end with such a topic. In part, the museum encourages Americans, whose national identities may include a devotion to liberty (and, for some, the opening of the nation's doors to those in need), to study the history of the Holocaust, because that is the only way to avoid a repeat of catastrophe. The museum's (and exhibition's) placement is a direct attempt at connecting the Holocaust with American national historical narratives. It implicitly places the Holocaust into the national historical identity.

The exhibition does not readily present an 'American version' of the Holocaust, and it did not seem to be the curators' intention to make one. There is no mention of the relationship between the Holocaust and the United States apart from a brief mention of the decision not to bomb Auschwitz. There is no reference to restrictive immigration policies and little about the American role in liberating concentration camps. Yet, the narrative, by virtue of its being housed in an American museum purposefully positioned next to American landmarks, is an American one. It engages with an American audience and draws connections between a foreign past and an

[42] Ratner and Glickman, "Long Shadows," 7.

American present by encouraging reconciliation with the immorality of complicity. The exhibition's narrative, by creating a concept of an Auschwitz that is "not far away," combines with the museum's symbolic placement of the Holocaust into a narrative of US history. The narrative is fused with narratives of the present.

Americans and the Holocaust: Toward an American *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*

On April 23, 2018, the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C. opened a temporary exhibition meant to transport a mostly American audience back in time and think critically about the moral quandaries Americans faced in the lead up to and during the Holocaust. *Americans and the Holocaust* walks visitors through the 1930s and 1940s in the United States, mapping American sentiments toward going to war, helping Jews, and admitting refugees. While the New England Holocaust Memorial and MJH only symbolically connect narratives of the Holocaust and of US history, *Americans and the Holocaust* presents a specifically American Holocaust narrative.

The exhibition attempts to answer two questions, both posed in the museum's informational handout about the exhibition: "What did Americans know?" and "What more could have been done?"[43] The first question suggests the exhibition will be informational and will bridge a knowledge gap. As the museum explains in the handout, *Americans and the Holocaust*

> is a portrait of American society that shows how the Depression, isolationism, xenophobia, racism, and antisemitism shaped responses to Nazism and the Holocaust. It reveals how much information was available to Americans at the time and asks why rescuing Jews did not become a priority, except for a few individuals who took the risk to help.[44]

[43] Rebecca Erbelding and Daniel Greene, *Americans and the Holocaust*, Washington, D.C.: United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 2018.
[44] Erbelding and Greene, *Americans and the Holocaust*.

The exhibition uses a wide array of presentation methods, including interactive screens, short videos, newspaper clippings, and official communiques to present the American landscape during the Holocaust. The exhibition, which supplements the museum's main exhibition, *The Holocaust*, presents a Holocaust story that is not often included in general Holocaust narratives, specifically America's relationship with the Holocaust. *The Holocaust* explains what happened and how it happened. At *Americans and the Holocaust*, visitors are meant to confront the extent of American indifference and potential culpability, particularly with respect to the US government's immigration and refugee policies. This is where the handout's second question comes into play. Created in an American environment in which isolationism, xenophobia, racism, and antisemitism were (and still are) noticeably present, the exhibition connects a narrative about the past to one about the present, encouraging critical thinking about that present. As *Auschwitz* makes visitors look around them in their lives for reminders of the road to the extermination camp, *Americans and the Holocaust* similarly presents a Holocaust narrative that promotes action over indifference in contemporary times. With hindsight, visitors know the significance of anti-refugee policies—most Jewish refugees not admitted to the United States likely died. This narrative simply states that in the absence of hindsight about the present, contemporary society could make the same mistakes all over again, but this should be avoided at all costs.

The exhibition focuses squarely on the question of responsibility. The USHMM's main exhibition is unequivocal about who the principal perpetrators of the Holocaust were: Nazis and their closest allies and collaborators. *Americans and the Holocaust*, though, indicates that the entirety of responsibility for the genocide cannot simply fall upon Nazi Germany—suggesting that the most obvious perpetrators were the only people and groups culpable is convenient and

misleading. As the eventual winners of the Second World War and co-liberators of much of Europe from the grip of fascism, the United States has largely avoided popular criticisms for actions during the war. Perhaps the most notable exception to this tendency is the reconsidering of whether the United States should have used atomic bombs against Japan during the summer of 1945. *Americans and the Holocaust* calls into question the narrative of a heroic America that saved Europe. By tracking American responses to developments in Europe, the exhibition pushes back against the heroism myth. The exhibition chronicles the statements and sentiments of American leaders and an American public which were prepared to watch European democracy disappear altogether until being dragged into war by Japan in 1941.

In postwar West Germany, the nation went through the process of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*—or, coming to terms with the (Nazi) past, usually in a public and collective manner. *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* has taken the form of museums, monuments, memorials, legislation, literature, politics, and education.[45] The trend has been so significant that some argue that the guilt, shame, and a commitment against indifference are a part of the modern German, if not European, identity.[46] The process amounts, at the very least, to an acceptance of the responsibility for past wrongdoings and a continuation of remembrance as part of an effort toward atonement. In practical terms, it meant holding war crimes tribunals, the de-Nazification of the government, historical debates about responsibility for the Holocaust, the publication of thorough histories of the Third Reich and the Holocaust based on mountains of Nazi

[45] C. K. Martin Chung, *Repentance for the Holocaust: Lessons from Jewish Thought for Confronting the German Past* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2017), 1.
[46] Helle Porsdam, "Human Rights and European Identity since World War II: *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* through Law," in *European Identity and the Second World War*, ed. Menno Spiering and Michael Wintle (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 23.

documentation, and more.[47] Simply put, (West) Germans, both individually and collectively, accepted responsibility for the atrocities of the Holocaust. This may seem an obvious statement. Of course, Nazi Germany was *the* perpetrator of the Holocaust, so the nation eventually had no choice but to accept responsibility in the wake of defeat in the war. However, coming to terms with the past was a process—it did not occur immediately and was not a natural process. Rather than condemning the actions of the past, many Germans wanted either to glorify the past or distance themselves from it. True reconciliation with the past required conscious effort on behalf of the German population. Now, the Holocaust is a part of German consciousness. It is a stain from history, a moment that evokes great shame, inseparable from German identity.[48]

The darkest moments in US history, though, often remain entirely absent from historical narratives and national identities. Slavery, for example, is often omitted from American historical identities—it is seldom part of what makes Americans American. Writers such as Thomas McCarthy in his essay "*Vergangenheitsbewältigung* in the USA: On the Politics of the Memory of Slavery" and Susan Neiman in her book *Learning from the Germans: Race and the Memory of Evil* have suggested that perhaps through studying German responses to the Holocaust, Americans can correct this failure in the American historical identity and embrace the more embarrassing and shameful moments of their history.[49] This is precisely the goal of *Americans and the Holocaust*: begin the process of reconciliation with the past by including American complicity during the Holocaust in a history of the United States.

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[47] Thomas McCarthy, "*Vergangenheitsbewältigung* in the USA: On the Politics of the Memory of Slavery," in *Political Theory* 30, no. 5 (October 2002): 624–625, https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/3072496.pdf?refreqid=excelsior%3Ad0a9d6c8f59c0365ffcd31a959090571.
[48] Susan Neiman, *Learning from the Germans: Race and the Memory of Evil* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2019), 25.
[49] Susan Neiman, *Learning from the Germans: Race and the Memory of Evil* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2019).

When it comes to the Second World War, the triumphalist narratives of US heroism entirely overshadow the questions of American responsibility for any aspect of the Holocaust. Of course, the United States was not responsible for the genocide, and ultimately American troops did liberate various concentration camps. Yet, as the curators of *Americans and the Holocaust* pointed out, there are aspects of the American relationship with the Holocaust that demand consideration and, potentially, reconciliation. In this sense, the exhibition's curators created *Americans and the Holocaust* as an attempt at an American version of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*. As the *Washington Post* reported about the exhibition, the exhibition places special attention on both the sentiments of the American public and leadership, most notably that of Franklin Roosevelt.[50] Roosevelt is a mostly shining figure in US history, and his role in guiding the United States through the war was one of his most renowned achievements. With regard to the Holocaust, many scholars have defended Roosevelt's decisions to refuse to accept a greater number of Jewish refugees, his unwillingness to do more than condemn the Nazi regime, and so on.[51] *Americans and the Holocaust* neither condemns nor glorifies Roosevelt. Instead, it presents his words and actions and places them in the context of the contemporary debates of how the US government should have acted. The exhibition explains that Roosevelt denounced the Nazis, as millions of other Americans did. It also questions the morality of his inaction, noting Roosevelt's opposition to admitting a greater volume of Jewish

[50] Menachem Wecker, "Holocaust Museum rethinks FDR's World War II refugee legacy," *Washington Post*, April 22, 2018, https://www.washingtonpost.com/entertainment/museums/holocaust-museum-rethinks-fdrs-world-war-ii-refugee-legacy/2018/04/20/b5fc96fa-369b-11e8-acd5-35eac230e514_story.html.

[51] See Barry Trachtenberg, *The United States and the Nazi Holocaust: Race, Refuge, and Remembrance* (London: Bloomsbury, 2018); Verne W. Newton, ed., *FDR and the Holocaust* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1996); William Rubinstein, *The Myth of Rescue: Why the democracies could not have saved more Jews from the Nazis* (London: Routledge, 1997); Rebecca Erbelding, *Rescue Board: The Untold Story of America's Efforts to Save the Jews of Europe* (New York: Doubleday, 2018). For a more balanced perspective of Roosevelt's position on the Holocaust and antisemitism, see Richard Breitman and Allan J. Lichtman, *FDR and the Jews* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013).

refugees. For example, the exhibition includes facsimiles of a 1939 telegram exchange between Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt about the proposed child refugee bill (Wagner-Rogers Bill). In the telegrams showcased at the museum, Eleanor urged Franklin to state his public support of the bill. Franklin replied, writing "It is all right for you to support [the] child refugee bill but it is best for me to say nothing."[52] A twenty-first century visitor may well be alarmed by this particular exchange. But the revelation of Roosevelt's opposition to refugees is juxtaposed with his opposition to Nazism. This way, the exhibition enables the careful criticism of famous historic figures in context through a reexamination of their actions.

Yet, while the exhibition challenges Roosevelt's decisions, the curators recognized that forcing all responsibility of American indifference toward the treatment of Jews in Europe onto a central figure could unintentionally exonerate the American public and inhibit the coming to terms with the past that the exhibition is meant to promote. Instead, the exhibition focuses in part on the sentiments of the American public at large to show that responsibility for inaction lay far beyond Washington. As co-curator Rebecca Erbelding stated, "FDR and the State Department are not the entirety of the government. There hasn't been as much attention paid to what Americans by and large were thinking and feeling about this."[53] The exhibition showed that Americans "were thinking and feeling" that the nation should focus on domestic issues and not involve itself further with the emerging European situations in the 1930s. Interactive public opinion polls placed throughout the exhibition show popular sentiment on a variety of issues

[52] Erbelding and Greene, *Americans and the Holocaust*.
[53] Wecker, "Holocaust Museum rethinks FDR's World War II refugee legacy." While Erbelding was correct in saying that the actions of the State Department do not necessarily represent the sentiments of the people, the implication that the State Department did the best it could against the will of the people is incorrect. Look no further than Breckinridge Long, who, while serving as an assistant Secretary of State, restricted the number of refugees admitted to the United States and deliberately misled the House Foreign Affairs Committee by indicating that the United States had admitted far more Jewish refugees than it had.

throughout the 1930s and 1940s.[54] The data, which were supplemented with detailed descriptions of multiple sides of each issue in question, attempts to transport visitors back in time to understand how members of the American public thought about moments and issues that are now part of history. In this way, the exhibition uses the polls to disconnect visitors from their personal opinions on some of these issues, such as should the United States go to war with Germany, which are influenced heavily by historical hindsight. The polls also make the history of Europe––including the Holocaust—inseparable from American history. Americans had opinions on European affairs. They had opinions on the treatment of Jews. Divorcing the Holocaust from American history altogether does not make sense when considering that American experiences during the 1930s and 1940s included opinions on the Holocaust.

The placement of these public opinion polls throughout the exhibition has multiple effects. At the most basic level, they do exactly what the curators said they should: explain to visitors how Americans felt about a wide variety of Holocaust-related issues through a presentation of the facts. But more significantly, the exhibition was meant, as Erbelding explained, to make viewers think critically about the extent to which their principles align with their actions. The juxtaposition between some of the polling data is jarring, and visitors are meant to notice that. For example, a panel that asks if Americans approved of the treatment of Jews in Germany (6% responded "yes," 94% responded "no") is immediately adjacent to the panel that asks if the United States should allow Jewish refugees from Germany (21% responded

[54] In 1936: Will there be another depression? (67% responded "yes," 33% responded "no"). 1935: Should the United States refuse to participate in the 1936 Olympic games in Berlin? (43% yes, 57% no). 1937: Was it a mistake for the United States to enter the First World War? (70% yes, 30% no). 1939: Should the United States admit 10,000 refugee children from Germany? (26% yes, 66% no). 1938: Do you approve of the treatment of German Jews? (6% yes, 94% no). 1938: Should the United States admit any of these German Jews as refugees? (21% yes, 71% no). 1940: Have Nazi spies already infiltrated the United States? (71% yes, 7% no). 1940: Should the United States declare war on Germany? (7% yes, 93% no). 1942: Should the United States relocate Japanese aliens away from the Pacific coast? (93% yes, 1% no). And, 1944: Do you believe the Germans have murdered people in concentration camps? (76% yes, 12% no). Erbelding and Greene, *Americans and the Holocaust*.

"yes", 71% responded "no"). With hindsight, the disconnect between the fact that most Americans resoundingly stated their disapproval for the treatment of Jews but mostly felt that the United States should not accept Jewish refugees is striking. To be sure, the degree to which these polls—and, by extension, the exhibition—accurately and completely capture the sentiments of the 1930s and 1940s is unclear. Surveys, of course, are limited in nature, both in terms of whose perspectives they capture and in terms of accurately capturing any one individual's nuanced opinions on an issue. But this is how the exhibition's curators chose to present the data. The narrative is that Americans, though aware of some of the early aspects of the Holocaust, did not seek to go to war or even let in a greater number of refugees. This narrative seemingly cuts against the heroism of the American role in the war that is now heralded in American society, and it implicitly criticizes the policies of appeasement toward the Third Reich that have since been condemned. The narrative depicts a more shameful America during the war.

The exhibition's narrative expands traditional popular narratives of the Holocaust to include the American relationship to the genocide. *Americans and the Holocaust* does not allow for the distinction between the Holocaust and the American role in the war, forcing a reconciliation of the morally questionable positions Americans took. This is similar to the way the New England Holocaust Memorial does not readily offer a distinction between the Holocaust and American history. Like the Boston Memorial, the exhibition fuses previously disparate narratives. The exhibition encourages a coming to terms with the past, an American form of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung.*

Americans and the Holocaust does not merely encourage a recognition of wrongs Americans committed in the past. Instead, the potentially upsetting revelations about American opposition to helping Jews who eventually likely perished in the Holocaust is an encouragement

of active remembrance and a critical way of thinking about contemporary society. The curators hoped to engage viewers in a thought experiment about what they would have thought at the time and what they should do now concerning modern issues. Erbelding explained, "There's a space for all of us to look at the history and figure out what part is in it, because every day is a day in history. It will be when we look back on it. Do we feel like we are doing the right thing?"[55] Every individual has the potential to be an active historical agent, and the exhibition encourages using a conscious consideration of the past as a lens through which to consider the world today. Though the exact circumstances of the 1930s will never be replicated, the exhibition's narrative is relatable—refugee and immigration crises, isolationism, and nativism are ever-present fixtures in American politics. This was certainly the case in 2018 when the USHMM opened the exhibition, and it remains true in 2020. By incorporating a somewhat culpable and extremely indifferent United States into a narrative of the Holocaust at an exhibition at the *national* Holocaust museum, the exhibition's curators and the museum's directors advanced a shifting in the national identity as it relates to the Holocaust. The resemblance with the present, like the narrative at *Auschwitz*, further connects a narrative of the Holocaust with a narrative of the present.

The curators may have been wrong in simplifying the past by connecting narratives of the past and present in this way. In the end, the context of the 1930s and 1940s is distinct from the context of today. The world is a different place. Nonetheless, the exhibition is a clear example of what Hayden White explained as the use of a historical narrative to "moralize judgments." In the USHMM's companion book, which was published not long after the museum opened in 1993, the authors explained the museum's educational mission: "The Museum believes that one of the

[55] Wecker, "Holocaust Museum rethinks FDR's World War II refugee legacy."

Holocaust's fundamental lessons is that to be a bystander is to share in the guilt."[56] *Americans and the Holocaust* is a continuation of that educational theme. The exhibition challenges its mostly American audience to reconsider the possibility of American responsibility during the Holocaust. Such a reconsideration of the past would enable the museum to achieve another of its goals: "help visitors apply the metaphoric meaning embedded in Holocaust history to their contemporary experience as individuals and as members of society."[57] The exhibition is a clear attempt at using an expanded history of the Holocaust to enable viewers to recognize similarities between the past and the present in which they find themselves. In this way, the museum instructs, and it moralizes. The history becomes a lesson in its usefulness in navigating the contemporary world.

Conclusion

In his letter to Jimmy Carter prefacing the President's Commission on the Holocaust's Report to the President, Elie Wiesel made clear that any act of Holocaust remembrance in the United States must include a critical view of American indifference despite the nation's role in liberating Europe. He wrote:

> Our country was also involved, Mr. President. The valiant American nation fought Hitler and Fascism and paid for its bravery and idealism with the lives of hundreds and thousands of its sons; their sacrifices shall not be forgotten. And yet, and yet, away from the battlefield, the judgment of history will be harsh. Sadly but realistically, our great government was not without blemish. One cannot but wonder what might have happened had the then American President and his advisors demonstrated concern and compassion by appointing in 1942 or 1943 a President's Commission to prevent the Holocaust. How many victims, Jews and non-Jews, could have been saved had we changed our immigration laws, opened our gates more widely, protested more forcefully. [sic] We did

[56] Elieli and Weinberg, *The Holocaust Museum in Washington*, 18.
[57] Elieli and Weinberg, 19.

> not. Why not? … The decision to face the issue constitutes an act of moral courage worthy of our nation.[58]

Here, Wiesel encouraged "moral courage" to reconsider and reconcile with the past. Doing so would require an acknowledgement of the immorality of inaction and indifference. Such a reconciliation would allow for the extraction of moral lessons from the past which could make the past more relatable to the present, effectively connecting narratives of the past with those of the present. The New England Holocaust Memorial, *Auschwitz: Not long ago. Not far away.*, and *Americans and the Holocaust* capture this commitment to encouraging Americans to reconsider the Holocaust in relation to other well-known narratives. The two museum exhibitions confront twenty-first century audiences with simple realities: all roads did not necessarily lead to Auschwitz, and the vast majority of people could have—and should have—done more to prevent genocide. Like the Boston Memorial, they both place the Holocaust in the context of American history. For one thing, they expand narratives of the Holocaust to include the United States, and they expand histories of the United States to include the Holocaust. But more subtly, all three sites inject the Holocaust into national American identities to draw moral lessons from the Holocaust for present-day use.

The three sites are distinct and focused on different aspects of the Holocaust. Yet, they each present audiences not necessarily attuned to the nuances in Holocaust historiography with altered and expanded Holocaust narratives. In Ricoeurian terms, the sites redefine for their audiences what constitutes 'the event' of the Holocaust. The ways in which the new definitions that the three sites promulgate differ from those presented by simpler Holocaust narratives are

[58] United States, *President's Commission on the Holocaust, Report to the President*, ([Washington, D.C.]: Reprinted by the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 2005), iii–iv, https://www.ushmm.org/m/pdfs/20050707-pres-commission-79.pdf.

meant to challenge a viewer to partake in a particular kind of active remembrance: reflect upon the past, reconcile with it, analyze it, and look around to see how its lessons can be applied.

The curators of both museum exhibitions reflected present conditions in their narratives. For the creators of *Auschwitz*, a worldwide surge in antisemitism, combined with the commonplace growth of totalitarian regimes out of democracies, necessitated a reminder that another Auschwitz is never far away. The USHMM, meanwhile, determined that the reemergence of xenophobia, isolationism, and anti-immigration sentiments in popular and political discourses had to be met with a careful reconsideration of American history, one that actually comes to terms with that past rather than brushing over the most shameful chapters. Together, the exhibitions force viewers to reevaluate their relationship with the Holocaust by showing similarities between narratives of the past and of the present.

For non-Jewish Americans, the Holocaust may only be a part of their historical identities insofar as they are familiar with the term itself and the importance of the American triumph over fascism. For many, even such a basic familiarity with the facts is a stretch.[59] The Second World War as a whole, though, sits next to the American Revolution and the Civil War as critical components of American identity. So, by expanding the definition of the war—and not just the definition of the Holocaust—at the three sites, the viewers' national identities have the potential to change. The sites encourage a reassessment of what those national identities are. The myth of the American identity is that it is inseparable from liberty; to be American is to be devoted to liberty and justice. Of course, the meaning of 'liberty'—and to whom this liberty should be extended, how far it goes, what it consists of—varies person to person. But by placing the Holocaust within the framework of this American liberty and value-based narrative, the

[59] Maggie Astor, "Holocaust is Fading From Memory, Survey Finds," *New York Times*, April 12, 2018, https://www.nytimes.com/2018/04/12/us/holocaust-education.html.

Holocaust takes on a new position. The sites of remembrance show that though there were moments in the past where this devotion was absent, an expansion of American historical identities to include more shameful moments can instruct and promote moral actions in the present.

Conclusion: The Voices of the Holocaust

Present-day Holocaust memorialization and museology often has more to do with those remembering than those being remembered. This is particularly true when it comes to museum exhibitions that insist there is something about the Holocaust that is teachable and relatable to present-day audiences. Such an exhibition implies that the Holocaust should matter to everyone alive today. It is true that communities and nations often dedicate memorials to certain individuals and create them as places to reflect upon the lives of lost loved ones. But memorials built so long after the Holocaust may also have as much to do with those who build them as they do with those whom they remember, insofar as such a memorial—like the New Castle Holocaust Memorial—is likely a response to present-day societal phenomena and identities rather than a response to the Holocaust itself. This is the point of active remembrance: as conscious humans, we should remember the past and remember our ancestors because we believe that there is something from that past that is relevant to the present. A narrative about the past is created in the present, and it is the present that shapes and reshapes that narrative. Thus, the narrative is, at least in part, about the present.

Of course, by remembering the past, memorialization remembers the lives of those who lived it and made it what it was. It honors the lives and memories of those who perished—and those who survived—by telling their stories and making them relevant in the present. In this way, memorials and museums are about the past, and any suggestion that they are simply about the present ignores the very substance on display. A narrative of the past must also be, in some part, about the past.

Memorials and museums (disregarding, for a moment, temporary museum exhibitions) are also meant to have lasting meaning. They are meant not to say something that was simply true in the past or is true in the present, but something universal, something timeless. So, how does a narrative of the past capture that past and all subsequent presents? How can a narrative of the Holocaust remain both timeless and timely, relating to any person at any moment by recalling the incidents of the past?

The answer to this question for many memorial creators and museum curators: quotations. Let the dead, or the living, speak of their own experiences for themselves. Allow the obviousness of their claims to permeate. Help the viewer understand that something true today was also true then by relating to the words of those of the past.

Quotations are everywhere at Holocaust memorials and museums around the world. Permanent installations and temporary exhibitions alike employ a generous use of quotations to narrate, teach, and explain the purpose of remembering altogether. At the Museum of Jewish Heritage's *Auschwitz* exhibition, quotations tell of the experiences of the Holocaust from a range of perspectives. They attempt to bring the viewer directly into the past and into conversation with those who lived it. Goethe explains pleasant relations between Jews and non-Jews.[1] Survivor and author Viktor Frankl tells of a bartering system inside of Auschwitz.[2] Rudolf Höss, the commandant of Auschwitz, grumbles that the extermination process at the camp is unappreciated. Various other survivors—Primo Levi, Livia Bitton-Jackson, Sonia Landau, Elie Wiesel, Franciszek Gajowniczek, Rudolf Vrba, and more—chronicle the misery of life in the

[1] Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, 1811, *Auschwitz: Not long ago. Not far away.*, December 29, 2019, Museum of Jewish Heritage—A Living Memorial to the Holocaust, New York City.
[2] Viktor Frankl, 1946, *Auschwitz: Not long ago. Not far away.*, December 29, 2019, Museum of Jewish Heritage—A Living Memorial to the Holocaust, New York City.

camps.[3] At the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, quotes dominate the walls not only in the museum's exhibitions, but also the walls near the museum's entrances and in the main hall. The quotes are from survivors, presidents, artists, scripture, the dead. These particular quotes are meant to speak to the ever-present need for remembrance. The museum explains, "The words teach us that out of memory, we might kindle the flame of conscience. Out of conscience, we might forge a shared commitment to responsibility and action."[4] The words are meant to teach, but also to affect and in turn inspire.

Consider this oft-cited portion of a famous quote by German pastor Martin Niemöller[5]:

> First they came for the Communists, and I didn't speak up because I wasn't a communist. Then they came for the Jews, and I didn't speak up because I wasn't a Jew. Then they came for the trade unionists, and I didn't speak up because I wasn't a trade unionist. Then they came for the Catholics, and I didn't speak up because I was a Protestant. Then they came for me, and by that time no one was left to speak up.[6]

Niemöller's words are a narrative. They tell an abbreviated version of his experience of the Holocaust, set in a particular time. But they are also timeless words of warning. They speak to the dangers of indifference and inaction. They indicate the importance of standing up to injustice and immorality. There is something deemed to be so universally significant, both about the Holocaust itself and the lessons the Holocaust offers, present in Niemöller's quotation that versions of it are enshrined at each site of remembrance in this thesis. The quote hangs in both the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum and the Museum of Jewish Heritage.[7] The quote

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[3] Rudolf Höss, 1946, *Auschwitz: Not long ago. Not far away.*, December 29, 2019, Museum of Jewish Heritage—A Living Memorial to the Holocaust, New York City.
[4] United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, *Museum Quotations* (Washington, D.C.: United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 2017), v.
[5] There are many versions of this quote, as Niemöller stated these words as part of an anecdotal narrative about the Holocaust on many occasions during the latter half of the twentieth century. He often changed the exact lines.
[6] This particular version comes from the New England Holocaust Memorial.
[7] Robert Jan van Pelt, *Auschwitz: Not long ago. Not far away.,* December 29, 2019, Museum of Jewish Heritage—A Living Memorial to the Holocaust, New York City; *The Holocaust*, January 6, 2020, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Washington, D.C.

is engraved in stone at the New England Holocaust Memorial in Boston.[8] A local reverend read it aloud at the opening ceremony of the New Castle Holocaust Memorial in Chappaqua, New York.[9] The quote—and the fact that it appears in relationship to each of these sites—speaks to the use of the words of those who experienced the Holocaust to create a moralizing narrative, to use Hayden White's terms. Yet, the quote is evoked for varying purposes. In Boston, the quote's presence on the Freedom Trail connects to 'traditional' values in American history—action, liberty, justice, rebellion. At the Museum of Jewish Heritage, it helps to explain how a place as horrible as Auschwitz could exist. At the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, its presence at the end of the museum's main exhibition mirrors the sorrow of the exhibition as a whole. And at the New Castle Holocaust Memorial, it was a call to action in the present, the drawing of a direct line from the past. The words are (nearly) the same each time, yet their meaning and power changes depending on the narrative of which they are a part.

Of course, each of the memorials and museums in this thesis—the New Castle Holocaust Memorial, the New England Holocaust Memorial, the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, and the Museum of Jewish Heritage—are more than the homes of quotes. They are places of solemn reflection and education, tributes to the dead, and markers of present-day identities. They are, in short, places of active remembrance. But it is each site's use of quotations in creating moralizing narratives that epitomizes this active remembrance.

The Holocaust is no different from any other historical phenomenon insofar as truly understanding the entirety of the human experiences that it consists of is impossible. But in the sense that the Holocaust often represents the extremes of humanity, from intense suffering to

[8] Stanley Saitowitz, New England Holocaust Memorial, Boston Massachusetts, visited January 9, 2020.
[9] Reverend Canon Alan Dennis, speech at New Castle Holocaust Memorial opening ceremony, November 6, 2019, recorded by Melissa Kogan.

brutal savagery to remarkable courage, it is particularly unrelatable for those who did not experience it. The experiences of the concentration camp, of the ghetto, of the deportation in a crammed cattle car, are foreign to those who did not live them, perhaps more foreign than the experiences of other historical periods. This is not to say that the Holocaust is any more or less unique as a historical event than any other, simply that it is, like other genocides, extremely unrelatable and difficult to understand for outsiders.[10] It is these extremes of the human experience, though, that make the Holocaust, in the eyes of many writers, museum curators, and memorial creators, especially important to remember. The belief is that there are moral lessons to extract through active remembrance. We recall the voices and stories of the victims because through learning their stories we seek to learn universal truths about humanity. This is how we honor their memories.

A history of the Holocaust could reasonably omit any mention of the United States, and a history of the United States could similarly omit any mention of the Holocaust. Yet, Holocaust memorials and museums that connect the Holocaust to past and present American narratives are scattered across the United States. At the very least, the mere existence of such a large quantity of sites of Holocaust remembrance suggests the importance of the Holocaust in the identities of Americans, insofar as individuals tend not to memorialize events that are insignificant to their identities. But the narratives at these sites show that the Holocaust's place in the American historical identity is not stagnant. The definition of the Holocaust continues to evolve as new applications of its perceived moral lessons emerge. Narratives at memorials and museums remind the American public that the Holocaust, though unrelatable in its extremes, had relatable beginnings and moral quandaries. The narrative of the Holocaust is fused with the narrative of

[10] I, for one, feel that even after learning about and studying the Holocaust for years—both informally and formally––I am no closer than anyone else to understanding the experiences of the Holocaust.

the individual's present. Such narratives actively connect the Holocaust to individual identities to reinforce the significance of not forgetting. Holocaust narratives in the United States simultaneously show and expand the Holocaust's presence in American historical identities.

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