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MUSEUMS AS PUBLIC MEMORY TEXTS: A COMPARISON OF HOLOCAUST MUSEUM
NARRATIVES AND THEIR IMPLICATIONS

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ABSTRACT

This research project explores the topics of public and collective memory within the realm of rhetoric in relationship to the Holocaust, and, more specifically, in relationship to the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C. The research is particularly focused on the rhetoric of space and place and helps to further the claims made about the implications of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. Separated into three chapters, the project first contextualizes the landscape of two museums presenting information on the Holocaust: the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington and the Museum of Jewish Heritage in New York. The second chapter analyzes, in detail, the specific aspects of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum that are 'rhetorical' and do some type of persuasive work for visitors. Finally, the third section presents itself as an ethnography to show an example of one visitor's perceptions of remembering the information in the USHMM.

The discussion of the influence the museum has on visitors through its work dealing with remembrance-- especially analyzing the Hall of Remembrance, Days of Remembrance, and the museum's mission statement that promotes the act of "never forgetting" works to establish evidence necessary for the argument that the museum itself *wants* visitors to remember this period in a certain way. This provides convincing proof that museums, but, more specifically, the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, act in rhetorical ways and promote or encourage certain factors or aspects of a particular event, person, object, or place. The research questions mainly address the ways museums and their content affect visitors. Does the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum only focus on the act and importance of "remembering" because it would be frowned upon by society to do otherwise? Does society frown upon 'forgetting' these

events BECAUSE of the continual pressure of the museum and other memorials to not do so? Do the museum's rhetorical strategies (images, set-up, architecture, and focus) provoke collective feelings about this time period, or is it the actual content provided that does this type of work? Does society trust the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum more than other venues because of its legitimate reputation? This culminates in an argument that society remembers specific messages from the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum instead of coming away with only a broad knowledge base and educational foundation. Furthermore, this project seeks to show the implications of understanding that each individual may have different perceptions of the same event.

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Researching the Holocaust seemed impossibly immense to me before actually delving into this thesis. However, realizing my specific interest in the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum narrowed my topic slightly. The foundational research necessary for the writing of this text was enhanced so much by the willingness of the staff at the USHMM to work with me on specific questions and areas of interest. I had no idea any one museum staff, particularly at such a highly-esteemed museum, would be so helpful. I am very thankful for their insights and directions.

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Chapter 1 Introduction

History demands to be remembered. If a particular aspect of history is not remembered, can that subject even be considered history? If society does not acknowledge a specific event, person, or place in history, how would its members know of that matter's existence? By forgetting or originally failing to accept and deem important a certain concept, it becomes lost and irrelevant in the scope of a group's collective memory and identity. The massive repercussions of this phenomenon permeate through numerous societies—without history, communities are unable to form cohesive identities that keep themselves together.

The implications of asking these fundamental and arguably basic questions about the ways in which societies form and reform themselves are serious when attempting to understand the *events* that rupture and restore particular populations. If events have the ability to so easily change the scope of a society's collective memory, it becomes imperative, then, to place the utmost importance on those specific events. We can see this “deeming of importance” throughout our nation's, and the world's, history. We study the American Revolution, the Civil War, World War I, and countless other so-called “turning points” in the ways in which we shape the stories and memories of nations and groups. Perhaps, though, we can see one of the most important examples of tragedy and remembrance in international history through the events of the Holocaust. According to the official website of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM), “the Holocaust was the systematic, bureaucratic, state-sponsored persecution of six million Jews by the Nazi regime and its collaborators.” Mass killings such as the Holocaust create the opportunity for a “call to action” in some way for memorialization;

examples of these actions include constructing monuments, building museums, or teaching classes on the subject matter.

According to James Edward Young, author of The Texture of Memory: Holocaust Memorials and Meaning, "... we might also remind ourselves that public memory is constructed, that understanding of events depends on memory's construction, and that there are worldly consequences in the kinds of historical understanding generated by monuments" (15). The 'art of public memory' does not simply include a memorial's aesthetics or locations, but also encompasses the actual ways that they were brought about. Viewer responses allow for changes to be made to these specific venues— whether it be a museum, memorial, or commemorative statue, the representation of certain memories are shifted due to *people*. Public memory is the way in which members of society, the public, chooses or is forced to 'remember' events, people, or things in a particular way.

The term "public memory," more traditionally known as 'collective memory,' was first coined by the sociologist Maurice Halbwachs. His work is considered to be the foundation for understanding the idea of societal remembrance. Halbwach argued that collective memories are formed by groups of people in certain contexts, and furthermore that these groups of people construct memories. Once memories themselves are formed by groups, he posited that individuals do the actual work of 'remembering.'

Public memory is important to the study of rhetoric in numerous ways. Memory can be constructed—making it rhetorical in nature. When discussing the rhetoric of spaces and places, including memorials or museums, public memory is a significant factor because the creators of these venues have rhetorical power. The actual choices of the creators to build a museum, how to build it, where to build it, and what information to include in it are all rhetorical. Furthermore,

the extensive legitimacy that museums hold make the information that is included in them even more pertinent. If creators and curators only include certain aspects of whatever that museum is attempting to educate about, visitors can form “memories” and knowledge that may be skewed or incomplete. Public memory on a specific subject matter is based on what others have constituted as important—thus making it a major aspect of rhetoric.

The purpose of this research project is to examine and illuminate the ways in which remembering the Holocaust is an active choice that is affected by the differences in information presented to individuals. The act of remembering this time period will be different for each person based on pre-conceived notions, foundations of knowledge, and external influences. Furthermore, this text seeks to show that differing portrayals of the same event, the Holocaust, are active rhetorical strategies used by the portrayers—the museums—with a purpose and motivation. This thesis works to highlight one specific example of this phenomenon by focusing on the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C. As visitors enter the USHMM, they are like “blank slates”—surely they have differing levels of Holocaust knowledge and education, but, by the time they leave the museum, they have totally new perceptions of the events of this tragedy. How could that work? The answer is found by looking at the information presented at the museum. What is deemed “important?” What is left out? The following chapters address these issues.

It would be seemingly impossible to tell the exact same “story” about the Holocaust across all times and places due to the interpretations of so many different Holocaust memory “receivers.” For example, a victim and his or her family will certainly have, and pass down, different memories than those of a perpetrator. Similarly, a member of the general public will surely recreate the events of the Holocaust in their minds differently than would a World War II

historian. The list of differing perceptions based on situation and context goes on, however, the important notion to understand is that there is no *one way* to remember the Holocaust.

This thesis project is separated into three sections that work to cohesively discuss the aforementioned topics in order to provide enough information required for the understanding of the implications of acts of remembering the Holocaust. The first chapter will compare and contrast the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington D.C. and the Museum of Jewish Heritage in New York City. Though this project primarily focuses on the USHMM, we cannot adequately understand the work of this museum without juxtaposing it to that of another museum of similar nature. Highlighting that indeed differences *do* exist between the two museums provides contextual evidence of my thinking that museums have the ability to shift perceptions and memories of the same event. Through then actually describing the differences between the USHMM and the Museum of Jewish Heritage, a successful set-up of the necessary background information for the second chapter is achieved: a detailed discussion of the specific rhetorical strategies implemented by the USHMM.

The second section goes through the USHMM with a fine-toothed, rhetorical comb. It first sets up readers with background information on the museum itself, confirming the basis for the argument that the USHMM is considered the most “legitimate” form of Holocaust education. With that foundation laid, the rest of the chapter seeks to present readers with analyses of aspects of the museum that can be seen as rhetorical in nature. Analyses of the “Americanized” permanent exhibition, Hall of Remembrance, and mission statement help to provide examples of how the museum’s presentation of this subject matter has selective and purposeful. By discussing the content of the museum, this chapter’s goal is to argue that the USHMM, and its creators,

have particular aims in mind when establishing collective Holocaust memory—particularly one that is Americanized and memorialized.

The third section, then, works to provide “on-the-ground” evidence for the claims made in the two previous sections. Instead of remaining purely abstract and hypothetical, an ethnographic walk-through of the USHMM is detailed, providing an in-depth description of one individual’s understanding of the museum’s contents. This section aims to show that one person’s memories and understanding of the Holocaust are shaped by how she perceives the museum’s information and set-up. Furthermore, these perceptions, then, may not be the same as another individual’s thoughts and memories.

In any research project, the questions of “so what?” and “who cares?” remain ever-present in the writer’s mind. As the thesis comes to a close, the conclusion seeks to not simply answer, but also *ask* important questions about the discussed phenomenon of collective memory and the Holocaust. What are the consequences of remembering the Holocaust in different ways? Should museums attempt to portray the Holocaust in similar lights, or is setting up its history in varied ways a positive addition to societal knowledge? What are the implications of then, in turn, *forgetting* the Holocaust? The conclusion of this text should not only be seen as a ‘wrap-up’ of previous sections, but instead be considered a lens for understanding Holocaust memory in a greater context of future, mass tragedy and collective perception.

Chapter 2

Two Holocaust Museums and the Meanings of their Differences

As in any historical field or subject, each act of remembering is, in turn, also an act of forgetting. By nature, whenever one attempts to remember certain aspects of an event or a specific event in a particular manner, he or she allows that same event to be forgotten in other ways. Whether discussing the formation of a nation, the history of a war, or the heroism of a certain figure, this phenomenon is ever-present. Memory studies with regards to the Holocaust exemplify this principle in numerous aspects. Memorializing this time period becomes extremely difficult due to the severity of the events. Are any modes of representation actually up to the task of remembering the atrocities of the Holocaust?

Our society has attempted to represent memory of the Holocaust in many ways. Memorials, statues, and museums are just a few of the tangible ways that this time period is remembered. There are also numerous forms of remembrance that are less concrete. Examples of these include the national Days of Remembrance in the United States and the official “pause of life” for two minutes by all people in Israel to commemorate those killed during the Holocaust. In the United States, there stand several Holocaust museums and memorials. Museums work in various ways and attempt to perform an array of tasks, including but not limited to the preservation of artifacts, the education of younger generations, the remembrance of those affected, and the conservation of potential lost identities.

Though a widespread and common phenomenon in our society, memorializing the Holocaust remains controversial in our nation as well as in others. Questions regarding

Holocaust denial laws, contests regarding ownership of the word “holocaust,” problems with using this time period as a rhetorical tool, and issues of “branding” and therefore trivializing the events continue to be important aspects of discussion. In addition, each country has particular issues regarding the ways time period is remembered. This fact shows the unrequited nature of question that considers the best ways to remember the Holocaust. An example stems from Arthur Krystal’s discussion in his text “My Holocaust Problem.” In his opinion, the United States has issues dealing with remembrance of the Holocaust due to the nation’s widely accepted culture of specifically commemorating the heroic and victorious. He does not see this conventional method fit for such tragic events, because if we only pay tribute to the victims, we are then forgetting to remember the hateful actions of the perpetrators. Instead, he argues, we should remember the victims in their humanness rather than in a perfect and virtuous light along with those responsible (1).

The presence of Holocaust museums in our nation is not only common but also different. Each museum attempts to represent these events in a way its curators and donors see fit. Among the many, two that are prominent in the Northeast are the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum and the Museum of Jewish Heritage: A Living Memorial to the Holocaust. Located respectively in Washington, D.C. and New York City, both attract thousands of visitors and work diligently to remember this time period and those affected. However, no two museums can represent the same events in exactly the same ways. Though both museums deal with the Holocaust, the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum focuses more on education regarding this time and remembering the victims while the Museum of Jewish Heritage: A Living Memorial to the Holocaust focuses on Jewish life and pays tribute to the greatness of the religion

as a whole. These museums portray the same time period in different ways, encouraging viewers to remember the Holocaust using two diverse narratives.

This opening chapter explores the ways in which these two museums depict and represent the Holocaust. Through showing the events in different lights, each museum makes rhetorical choices by attempting to leave lasting impressions on visitors that focus on certain aspects of this time period and not others. The first chapter will discuss the focus on Jewish life at the Museum of Jewish Heritage: A Living Memorial to the Holocaust. The second chapter will detail the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum's attempt to educate citizens about the history of the Holocaust. The third chapter will, ultimately, bring together these two rhetorical strategies and explain how they fit into the context of the entire Holocaust memory narrative.

Section 1: Focus on Jewish Life at The Museum of Jewish Heritage: A Living Memorial to the Holocaust

According to the official website of the Museum of Jewish Heritage: A Living Memorial to the Holocaust, the museum states its goal as, "The mission of the Museum is to educate people of all ages and backgrounds about the broad tapestry of Jewish life in the 20th and 21st centuries—before, during, and after the Holocaust." Understanding the goals of a museum is at the forefront of understanding that museum's content. By simply grasping the name of the Museum itself, one can assume that its exhibitions will cover not only the Holocaust, but also consider Jewish life, culture, and religion as a whole.

After visiting the Museum of Jewish Heritage: A Living Memorial to the Holocaust,

it became obvious that this space was more than a teaching tool utilizing dates and numbers to describe historical events. Rather, this museum is spread across three floors, where only one is dedicated to outlining the events of the Holocaust. The other two floors, perhaps holding even more evidence through artifacts, explain important facets of Jewish life as a religion and a culture. As explained in “Heritage and Holocaust on Display: New York City’s Museum of Jewish Heritage—A Living Memorial to the Holocaust”:

While Jewish experience is of great importance in all three museums, it is definitive for the MJH. Placing Jews ‘center stage’ was fundamental to the museum’s agenda from the beginning, according to Yitzchak Mais, who served as chief curator and project director from the MJH’s core exhibition from 1995 through its opening and continues to serve as a consultant to the museum. (Shandler, 76)

Shandler continues to describe the arrangement of the exhibitions on each of the floors, as they move in chronological order. The first floor is used to provide an understanding of the history of Jewish religion and life for both members of the Jewish faith and non-Jews alike. The second floor is used as a representation of the events of Nazi Germany’s control over Jews and gives an overview of the events of the Holocaust. The third floor, then, depicts scenes of “Jewish Renewal” and aims to show that Jewish life was not extinguished after the Holocaust, particularly in the United States and in Israel (“Heritage and Holocaust on Display: New York City’s Museum of Jewish Heritage—A Living Memorial to the Holocaust”).

This specific arrangement of exhibitions into three floors is not only for organizational purposes, but rather a rhetorical choice. Through setting up the exhibitions in this way, the museum aims for visitors to understand not only Jewish hardship during the Holocaust, but also the way members of this religion live as whole. The author continues to describe in his piece:

The MJH's three-tiered arrangement does not merely periodize twentieth-century Jewish history into before, during, and after the Holocaust; this structure also situates the Holocaust in a larger narrative of modern Jewish experience that progresses from its emergence from traditional origins, through the endurance of a brutalizing ordeal, toward an affirmation of Jewish continuity (Shandler, 78).

Instead of using the entire museum to depict events of the Holocaust and attempt to remember each victim specifically, the Museum of Jewish Heritage tries to connect with the culture and lifestyle of Jewish people, especially today, to ensure the continuation of the heritage.

Additionally, the museum's most prominent rhetorical strategy may even lie in the placement of the building itself. Located in lower Manhattan, the museum overlooks the Upper New York Bay. Once visitors finish exploring the third and top floor of the museum, they retreat out of the exhibit and into a lounge-like area with wide windows. This space, although not glamorous, provides a stunning view of the Statue of Liberty, the most prestigious symbol of American hope. A purposeful and discussed element of the museum's establishment, its location works in many ways to provide an understanding for visitors of the difficult journey that Jewish people were forced to overcome.

The Museum of Jewish Heritage focuses on numerous elements of Jewish life as a whole rather than only providing a history of the Holocaust. The museum's rhetorical strategy stems from the goal to remind visitors that Jewish people are not totally equivalent to the Holocaust—their lives offer much more. The museum's set-up works to incorporate the Holocaust into Jewish memory as an aspect of the religion's narrative rather than the entire narrative itself. As Shandler states, "The MJH's wealth of artifacts and stories of modern Jewish life provide

manifold opportunities for visitors to consider how this abundance and diversity fit together- and don't- and in what ways they are part of larger narratives of the twentieth century" (83).

Section 2: Education and Personalization at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

In contrast to the aforementioned goals of the Museum of Jewish Heritage: A Living Memorial to the Holocaust, the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum is one that attempts to provide detailed historical knowledge of each aspect of the Holocaust. As described in "A Narrative History Museum":

The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM) is generically different from most history museums. Its uniqueness lies in the fact that, although it has the world's largest collection of Holocaust-related artifacts, the point of departure for its core exhibition is not the collections. Rather, the point of departure is the story line of Holocaust history. (Weinberg, 231)

The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, similar to the Museum of Jewish Heritage, is arranged into a separation of floors. Though used as another rhetorical strategy for meaning, the messages these museums work to send are quite different from one another. While the Museum of Jewish Heritage uses floor separation to show the broad spectrum of Jewish life *including* the Holocaust, the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum uses it to provide an extensive account of the story *of* the Holocaust.

Furthermore, the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum aims to educate visitors about the events that took place during this tragic time period. While focusing on how those members of Jewish communities were affected, the museum also includes information regarding other groups. As Weinberg continues, “From my own perspective, the most important lessons for visitors to take away from their museum experience... and that the Holocaust was a historical event of universal, rather than exclusively Jewish, significance” (231). While the Museum of Jewish Heritage does note that the Holocaust affected others besides Jews, the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum tries to paint a more cohesive picture of the history rather than culture.

Additionally, it is quite apparent that the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum wishes to invoke a sense of urgency in visitors. Not only does the museum outline a framework of events, but it also instills a great feeling of uneasiness as one walks through the disturbing exhibitions. By the end, is it inevitable to feel somber and beg the question, ‘how could this happen?’ due to the shocking history. Not only is a visitor witnessing the narrative of the Holocaust, but he or she is engaging in the narrative because the museum attempts to persuade visitors that events like the Holocaust can never happen again. As Weinberg states, “This collaboration of varying skills and orientations was focused on a primary common goal: to create an exhibition that would compel the emotional involvement of the visitor” (232).

The aforementioned rhetorical choices of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum are visible through the clearly upsetting inclusion of artifacts and pictures throughout the exhibition. Pictures of thousands of bodies strewn across lands of concentration camps, actual tools used to kill people through gas chambers and ovens, and a room full of shoes belonging to countless dead are just three examples of the ways in which the museum attempts to invoke a

sense of sadness among visitors. Furthermore, the many photographs of individual and families that lost their lives throughout the entire museum instill a great understanding of what the number “six million” truly means. Through personalizing victims, a visitor finds it more reasonable to identify with those affected. This sadness works rhetorically because it forces a visitor to consider the massively detrimental effects that another atrocity like this would have on the world.

While the Museum of Jewish Heritage aims to show the impact of Jewish life as a whole with the Holocaust as a major factor, the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum focuses on the Holocaust for educational and moral purposes. Weinberg writes:

As noted earlier, one of the primary objectives of the USHMM is to help visitors understand that, although most of the victims of Nazi tyranny were Jewish, the Holocaust was an event of great universal human significance. The exposure of the universal significance inherent in the Holocaust experience is critical to the museum’s ability to fulfill its educational mission, and is, in fact, a precondition for any deeper identification of the non-Jewish visitors with the victims. (235)

The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum remains an extremely prevalent rhetorical tool in the study of this time period because of its immense amount of information and critical presentation choices. Not only does it work to teach, but it attempts to show an urgent need for further prevention of similar events.

Section 3: The Holocaust as a Narrative: Utilizing Rhetorical Strategies and Comparisons

Through examining the ways in which both the Museum of Jewish Heritage: A Living Memorial to the Holocaust and United States Holocaust Memorial Museum work to impact visitors, it is important to distinguish the aspects of memory each is imprinting on society. These museums both engage in and create a narrative of Holocaust remembrance. Through focusing on Jewish life, the Museum of Jewish Heritage does not instill, as prominently, a sense of urgency and upset in visitors. Meanwhile, through focusing so narrowly on the history of the Holocaust, the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum does not provide a significant differentiation between Jews and the Holocaust.

Holocaust narratives tell different stories of the same time period. These museums engage in the narrative differently from one another. Though similar in many respects, it is important to focus on their differences in order to comprehend the ways in which visitors, and therefore society as a whole, are affected. As described in “Contexts of Commemoration: A Comparative Study of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum and the Museum of Jewish Heritage- a Living Memorial to the Holocaust”:

However, if we position the two museums within the context of the history of Holocaust memory in the U.S. it seems to be possible to view them as representatives of two major trends, operating in a dialectical manner. The D.C. museum represents the appropriation by the general American discourse of Holocaust memory as a major moral paradigm, and its appropriation from its ‘original possessor’—in the American context, at least—the Jewish community.

In contrast, the NYC museum represents a trend of reclaiming the Holocaust story by the Jewish community, while aiming to incorporate it into a narrative of Jewish endurance. (Meyers, 4)

Narratives are inherently stories that connect us to our own identities and to others. They construct history and memory in certain ways and are told and retold to enhance the collectivity of a group. Therefore, narratives are of utmost importance when discussing Holocaust history and memory. Not only do these museums work to construct a certain memory of this time period, but they work to *fit into* an already existing narrative. While the Museum of Jewish Heritage attempts to set up the Holocaust as an aspect of Jewish life, the United States Memorial Museum sets up the same event as equivalent to who Jews are as a group. Through positioning the Holocaust as a factor of life, the Museum of Jewish Heritage lends itself to imprinting a weakened sense of urgency and importance onto its visitors. Similarly, by using rhetorical tools to affect visitors' emotions, the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum makes itself vulnerable to the irrational assumption that Jews are simply equated to the Holocaust.

When contextualizing this massive memory narrative, it is necessary to consider the ways in which museums attempt and wish to educate about the history of the Holocaust. As stated in "Negotiating the marketplace: The role(s) of Holocaust museums today," "Part of the purpose of Holocaust education should be to point to the complexity of these prevailing categories, of what is meant by "the Holocaust," of understanding why it happened and of the relationship between the Holocaust and genocide" (Wollaston, 75). Without understanding the goals of the Museum of Jewish Heritage and the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, it is impossible for scholars to comprehend their significant differences. The first tries to fit the Holocaust into the greater narrative of Jewish life as an entity to remind society that Jews are more than their tragedy. In

contrast, the latter attempts to put the atrocities of the Holocaust on the main stage and instill a sense of moral obligation for future generations.

Section 4: Implications

The study of the connection between memory and rhetoric cannot be fully discussed without an exploration of the history of the Holocaust. This time period not only poses a great threat to common rhetorical memory techniques, but also poses difficult questions regarding the “right” ways to remember such tragic occurrences. Memorials dedicated to the Holocaust are prevalent around the globe, however, are there some that help society contextualize these events in a ‘better’ way than others? Two examples of memorializing the Holocaust have been shown through this textual analysis. By creating a separation between what could be considered ‘similar’ museums, one may understand the ways in which Holocaust narratives are set up in American discourse. The Museum of Jewish Heritage: A Living Memorial to the Holocaust and the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum are two fundamentally important ‘texts’ that are used to engage in the history of this time period.

As previously discussed, differences between the two museums include goals, focuses, and exhibition set-ups. While the Museum of Jewish Heritage attempts to provide an overview of Jewish life and culture, the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum works to educate about the history of the Holocaust. Not only are these differences monumental to understanding the history of this time period and beyond, but they work to show that narratives are shifted greatly through memorials and can affect societal viewpoints drastically. As described by Shandler:

Museums provide an especially rich opportunity to consider how this relationship with the Holocaust is realized in the American public sphere. The major museums in Washington, New York, and Los Angeles are among the nation's most elaborate responses to the Holocaust; these as well as smaller institutions provide insight into how the subject has been "Americanized" and "localized." All these museums draw on a wide variety of representations—artifacts, vintage images, texts, oral testimonies, films, artworks, architecture, graphic design—and explore a range of approaches to the art of exhibition. (74)

The Holocaust, thus, becomes not only a narrative to which museums fit themselves, but also becomes a new narrative created by the ways in which museums depict them.

Chapter 3

The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum as a Statement of Memory Importance and Influence

The concept of public memory with regards to spaces and places can be applied to thousands of monuments, museums, or memorials. Focusing on the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum is just one avenue to consider when attempting to understand how public memories are constructed. The museum is world-famous, and considered to be one of the most factually accurate and impressive accounts of the events of Holocaust. Due to its remarkable reputation, trusting visitors come from all over the world to learn about this horrific time in history from the museum's contents. The museum chooses to focus more heavily on particular aspects of this time period than others—making it a rhetorical landmark. Museum visitors learn and remember the information presented to them in the ways that the exhibits there allow and promote. The way the Holocaust will be remembered by society for years to come is based on the structures put into place that represent the time period itself. Representation can always be shifted, and rhetors have the ability to shift how and what society remembers about the Holocaust.

The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum acts a rhetorical landmark to advocate public memory as it hosts visitors from around the globe each day and attempts to influence their thoughts about this time period. As Marouf Hasian states, "...the USHMM planners and curators invite visitors and educators to never forget about the Holocaust, but they do so in ways that

simultaneously bracket out or elide other Holocaust memories” (Remembering and Forgetting the “Final Solution”: A Rhetorical Pilgrimage through the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum, 66). Through the ‘Hall of Remembrance,’ Days of Remembrance, and the museum’s mission statement, promoting the idea that ‘what you do matters,’ the public is shown a specific representation of this time period. The museum works rhetorically by encouraging society to believe that ‘remembering’ is the most important part of the history of the Holocaust.

Each step in the process of one’s individual learning about the Holocaust is an active decision he or she makes. Inherently, individuals *choose* to visit the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. By electing to visit the USHMM, individuals are already beginning to form memories of the Holocaust—if they had instead decided not to visit, they would have fewer thoughts about this time period. Perhaps, instead, they did not deem it necessary to learn about the events. Regardless of their reasoning for deciding *not* to visit, it seems that doing so is an act of “forgetting.”

Once individuals decide to go to the USHMM, they enter and leave with differing notions, about the same time period. Each person has his or her own perception of the Holocaust. At first glance, we may not validate this thought as true. How could people understand the history of such a thoroughly researched time period differently? Are the facts not presented clearly throughout the museum? The answer to these questions lies in understanding the idea that each person has preconceived notions before coming to the museum and processes the contents using those preconceived thoughts. As the USHMM’s architect, James Freed, comments in “America, the Holocaust, and the Mass Culture of Memory: Toward a Radical Politics of Empathy”:

As he explains, “Everybody I talked to has reconstructed yet another memory that never was, but it can act as a resonator for the memories of others.” He constructs “memory that never was.” His polemical statement is not intended to justify or to sanction revisionism, but rather to underscore the negotiation between an individual’s own archive of images and experiences and the archive presented at the museum. (Lansberg 83).

As visitors attempt to learn about the Holocaust by going through the USHMM exhibitions, they are subconsciously incorporating any predispositions with which they came into the information they are seeing. The following sections describe *how* numerous elements within the USHMM may affect this incorporation and advance that argument that the museum attempts to persuade visitors to remember the Holocaust through a certain lens.

In order to conceive the immensity of effects of the USHMM and validate the claims made throughout the following subchapters, it is necessary to first lay a foundation of background information regarding the museum itself. According to the USHMM’s website, the museum stemmed from President Jimmy Carter’s 1978 *Commission on the Holocaust*, a report requiring directions for erecting a suitable memorial to the victims, the reality of creating such a memorial via the help of the American people, and advice regarding the ways in which the United States would honor the perished annually. Once Congress voted to establish the United States Holocaust Memorial Council in 1980, a land grant of 1.9 acres was provided by the federal government for the building’s site. Through the private donations adding up to \$200 million, along with contributions of Elie Wiesel, the museum site was constructed over a four-year time period. The USHMM officially opened to the public on April 26th, 1993. Presidents Carter, Reagan, and Clinton had involvement with the creation and opening of the museum, and

the first official visitor was the Dalai Lama of Tibet (*History of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum*). Why does this matter? The museum's creation would not have been possible without the participation and contribution of three United States presidents, the United States Congress, an honored religious leader, and even one of the most recognized Holocaust survivors. It is placed in our nation's most esteemed city, amongst monuments commemorating our most famous leaders. As a scholar of rhetoric, these facts cannot be ignored: legitimacy levels of the USHMM, even from the very beginning, are quite high. As evidenced in *The Texture of Memory: Holocaust Memorials and Meaning*:

Of all Holocaust memorials in America, none can begin to match in scope or ambition the national memorial and museum complex nearing completion in the heart of the nation's capital. Situated adjacent to the Mall and within view of the Washington Monument to the right and the Jefferson Memorial across the Tidal Basin to the left, the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum will be a neighbor to the National Museum of American History and the Smithsonian Institute. (Young 335).

At the time of the writing of Young's book, the USHMM had not been completed in its entirety or had grown to the massively scholastic institution it is today. However, the author noted the immeasurability of this site in a book totally *dedicated* to Holocaust memorials. Time and time again, we see this museum holding the highest form of authority in the landscape of Holocaust museums.

The aforementioned history of the USHMM leads us to consider a pertinent aspect of gaining a holistic understanding of how memories are created through communication by the museum: the USHMM has incredible high levels of ethos. If our nation, and the world, did not

consider the USHMM a legitimate—*the most* legitimate—form of Holocaust education and memorialization, would so many visitors frequent the establishment and form memories of the Holocaust because of the information included in it? This seemingly two-fold foundation leading to analysis of individual sects of the museum is important: Visitors must first deem the Holocaust significant enough to learn about, and, secondly, must deem the museum itself a credible source for that knowledge base.

Section 1: The Permanent Exhibition: An Americanized and Memorialized Version of the Events of the Holocaust

Knowledge of the Holocaust is incredibly vast—extensive record-keeping activities on the part of the Nazi Party, oral and written survivor accounts, newspaper articles, journals, photographs, and books are just a few ways that the history of this time period is learned and studied. With so many available sources and numerous viewpoints to consider, how does the museum create a cohesive ‘text’ of the mass atrocities that occurred so far from Washington, D.C.?

The task of any museum is to decide upon and advance a certain ‘angle’ for portraying events, people, or places. If a museum does not progress with some form of narrowed angle on a subject matter, it will have difficulty including and exhibiting the information it wants to display in a manner that makes logical sense. The USHMM chooses an angle of memorialization. On a rudimentary level for understanding this concept, we may ask the fundamental question, “Couldn’t the museum only be focused on educating the general public about the events of the Holocaust?” It *could*, but does it? The author of *Preserving Memory: The Struggle to Create*

America's Holocaust Museum does not seem to think the work of the USHMM stops at simply educating:

During my work on the Holocaust Museum, I thought of it as a significant addition to the worldwide memorial landscape of the Holocaust: for example, sites of concentration camps and killing centers, and an ever-increasing number of major Holocaust educational centers and museums in Israel, Europe, and the United States. I understood it as a revealing example of a growing emphasis on memory of the Holocaust in American culture, noting, for example, how contentious an idea this was within the Jewish community and how proponents of the museum had to develop an articulate justification for the memorialization of a European event adjacent to the center of the nation's most prized memorial space: the Washington Mall. (Linenthal ix).

Numerous aspects of the USHMM become evidence for advancing the argument that it not simply a tool for Holocaust education, but rather a way to commemorate those affected by this tragedy. Included in the list of these elements are the following: the name of the museum, the requirements and reasoning for the museum's building, and the permanent exhibition's contents.

The naming and building of the museum, in themselves, were inherently memorial acts. According to *The Texture of Memory: Holocaust Memorials and Meaning*, the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Council was given the task of "fostering Holocaust remembrance in American in three fundamental ways" (Young, 335). This direction alone impacted the naming, building, and content-framing of the USHMM. This council was formed *specifically* to remember the Holocaust, not simply to educate about the Holocaust. It is strategically named the "United States

Holocaust **Memorial** Museum” rather than something like the “Washington, D.C. Holocaust Museum.” Through this line of thinking, rhetorical strategies of the USHMM begin with its title. However, *could* it correctly be named simply a “Holocaust Museum?” The Holocaust did not take place in America—making many quite uneasy about the establishment of such a memorial amidst so many other strictly American traditions. According to *The Texture of Memory: Holocaust Memorials and Meanings*, “Before such a museum could be built on the Mall in Washington, explicitly American reasons would have to be found for it. The official American justification for a national memorial in the nation’s capital was also provided by President Carter in his address....” (Young, 336). Taking a step back from this information makes us consider the numerous components of the establishment of the USHMM.

Proponents of the museum had to provide a justification for its building. When providing a rationale is necessary, rhetorical strategies are implemented in order to persuade a particular group. In this case, the proponents has “ethos” on their side in the form of the president of the United States. By utilizing President Carter as the spokesperson for why this museum had a role in America, credibility levels increased and critics began to believe the notion that this museum was the start of an ‘Americanized’ understanding of this tragedy. Beyond their understanding, President Carter also instilled the impression that it was *necessary* to Americanize the Holocaust:

Not only would this museum depict the lives of “new Americans.” But it would reinforce America’s self-idealization as haven for the world’s oppressed. It would serve as a universal warning against the bigotry and antidemocratic forces underpinning such a catastrophe and call attention to the potential for such slaughter in all other totalitarian systems. For, as a national landmark, the national Holocaust

museum would necessarily represent the Holocaust according to the nation's own ideals, its pluralist tenets. (Young 336).

Though the USHMM works to educate visitors about tragedies that happened overseas, it is also important to consider the ways in which the permanent exhibition is actually a perspective on American life. By remembering this time period, America is proving its dedication to the idea of "exceptionalism." Our nation did not *have* to pay tribute to the victimized—it was not part of our immediate history. However, choosing to do so was a strategic rhetorical move. Placed among American historical landmarks, this museum is a symbol of our nation's care and generosity to those who are less fortunate.

By Americanizing the events depicted at this site, Americans feel that visiting the USHMM is a valid way to show their support of the oppressed. As Americans, we feel that is our duty to respond to hate by acting like a "city on the hill" for those who do not enjoy similar freedoms. As evidenced in "The Holocaust and American Public Memory, 1945-1960":

Novick expresses puzzlement at the extent and persistence of American interest in the Holocaust. Unlike the European countries that were implicated in its perpetration or that had contained the Jewish populations that were targeted, the United States was geographically removed from the scene of the crime and admitted only a small fraction of survivors and immigrants. (Baron 64).

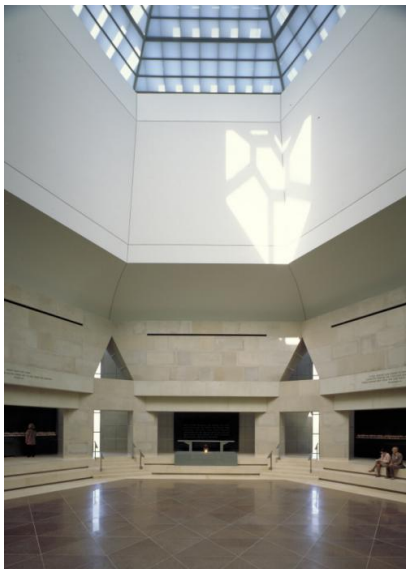
The above statement advances that argument that Americans are deeply invested in being the country unlike any other—that we must remain exceptional and show the rest of the world that, indeed, we are. We do this by commemorating events that are not even in our own immediate history or narrative to show our care and concern for those who suffered. By visiting the museum, we rationalize in our heads that we have completed our responsibility as "good

Americans;” we have learned about the time period, we have remembered the victims and paid tribute to them, and we have shown our willingness to be the “helping people.” Through rhetorically angling the permanent exhibition’s contents in a memorialized and Americanized lens, the USHMM works to gain ethos by using our typical, American perspective.

Section 2: The Hall of Remembrance and the USHMM’s Mission Statement as Rhetorical Strategies

The two most prominent examples advancing the idea that the USHMM works to influence us to *remember* as well as to learn about the Holocaust are the Hall of the Remembrance and the museum’s mission statement. By focusing on two aspects of the museum that are not content-based, we can see that the USHMM utilizes pathos to enhance visitor experiences in more personal and emotional ways. Below is a photograph of the Hall of Remembrance:

Figure 1 Hall of Remembrance, USHMM



This room, although quite simple in aesthetic nature, is used for personal reflection and remembrance by visitors, survivors, and families. On each of the walls circling the room, death camp names are written with candles underneath to be lit by visitors if they wish. In the front of the room, pictured in the center of the photograph above, is an ‘eternal flame’ that burns near a quote regarding our ‘responsibility to remember’ from the Bible. If visitors look closely, the two small openings allow views of both the Washington Monument and the Jefferson Memorial (*The Interior: The Hall of Remembrance*).

The elements of this room are specifically rhetorical. Did the USHMM need the Hall of Remembrance to be an adequate representation of the events of the Holocaust? Our education about the history of this time period would not differ if this room did not exist, but our perceptions on this time period would. This room promotes reflection, sympathy, sadness, and introspection on the mass tragedies that happened during the Holocaust. It forces us to think about how horrible the events truly were—instilling in us that it is our duty to remember in order to prevent future genocides. Each of the walls represents a different death camp—solidifying what visitors just learned in the permanent exhibition: endless atrocity. This room enhances those feelings of horror by separating each of the camps by wall sections and allowing candles to be lit in honor of the perished. By viewing all the lit candles, visitors immediately attribute a high number of deaths with the Holocaust.

Perhaps the most impactful aspect of the Hall of Remembrance is the eternal flame marked by an inscription from the book of Deuteronomy. The quote reads: “Only guard yourself and guard your soul carefully, lest you forget the things you eyes saw, and lest these things depart your heart all the days of your life. And you shall make them known to your children, and to your children’s children.” The eternal flame, paired with a quote about our duty to remember

what happened during the Holocaust, symbolize the goal of the USHMM to influence emotional states during a museum visit. The ever-burning fire represents the endless memorialization of this time period, while the quote works to indirectly tell visitors that *forgetting* is the worst choice they can make.

While the Hall of Remembrance is one example of the museum's aim to be something more than simply a tool for education-- a reminder to remember-- the mission statement also aids in this understanding. According to the USHMM website, the mission statement reads:

The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum is America's national institution for the documentation, study, and interpretation of Holocaust history, and serves as this country's memorial to the millions of people murdered during the Holocaust. The Museum's primary mission is to advance and disseminate knowledge about this unprecedented tragedy; to preserve the memory of those who suffered; and to encourage its visitors to reflect upon the moral and spiritual questions raised by the events of the Holocaust as well as their own responsibilities as citizens of a democracy (USHMM: Mission Statement).

Dissecting the pieces of the USHMM's mission statement gives us rhetorical insight into the reasoning behind the aforementioned strategies that influence us to remember. While the first hope of the museum is to provide knowledge about the Holocaust, it immediately brings into play the insistence on preserving the memory of the time period, as well as learning from the tragedies that occurred.

The mission statement is also evidence of the Americanization of the Holocaust in the USHMM. The last part of the statement, "...as well as their own responsibilities as citizens of a democracy" show the USHMM's role in the continuation of the notion in American citizens that

we are a people unlike any other—that we have a duty to remember how, when, and why others have suffered. These rhetorical strategies, though at first glance small and irrelevant, actually have massive implications for museum visitor perceptions of this time period. Could the USHMM function without the Hall of Remembrance or the broad and tri-fold mission statement? It *could*, but it would not have the same meaning or consequences. By promoting the idea that the Holocaust is important to remember and care about, the USHMM is persuading Americans to instill the time period in our collective memory and make it part of our people’s ‘exceptional’ narrative.

Section 3: Implications

American public memory of the Holocaust is one avenue to consider when attempting to understand the overarching American narrative. Through matching broad goals and rhetorical strategies, the USHMM works to create one of the most legitimate and convincing forms of American exceptionalism. The museum accomplishes these goals in numerous ways. Its placement, aesthetics, definition, and objectives work together to create a holistic account of not only Holocaust history, but also a memorial to the victims of this time period.

The museum’s placement in America, and furthermore, on the National Mall in Washington, D.C., juxtaposes what America is with what America is not—this choice has allowed for the USHMM to become a part of the story that advances American exceptionalism. The museum actually helps to define what America is by showing the most horrendous example of what America is not because our nation is democratic. Its location rhetorically legitimizes the

Holocaust as an event in history by placing it among landmarks that commemorate the most important figures in our nation. As discussed in *The Texture of Memory: Holocaust Memorials and Meaning*, “Finally, putting the memorial on the National Mall will also set a national standard for suffering. It will formally monumentalize the Holocaust, hold it up as an ideal of catastrophe against which all other destructions will be measured” (Young, 338). Through becoming the most credible source for Holocaust history in the country, the USHMM legitimizes not only itself, but the time period as well.

Our public memory of the Holocaust is constructed and deemed “important” by the USHMM through its placement. While the National Mall is a place showing the “great” American experiences and abilities through monuments to historical figures and museums, it is also a place for consideration of human capability for evil. Though this does not seem to directly “fit” with the rest of the Mall’s objectives, the strategies of the USHMM’s location should not go unnoticed; the placement of the USHMM works to instill in Americans that even the most tremendous form of suffering can help us to create a more exceptional country by being “different” than those who caused the injustices.

Rhetorical strategies of the museum, such as the inclusion of personal stories upon entering the permanent exhibition, the room filled with shoes of the dead, and the way in which the permanent exhibition descends downward, all work to promote a certain feeling of closeness and relatable identity for visitors. Through personalizing the exhibition, the museum allows for a connection to be made between the visitor and the victim. This increases visitors’ pathos levels, as they feel sympathy for the victim’s life. These feelings are only increased when entering areas such as the entire room filled solely with pairs of shoes. By filling an empty room with shoes of those who perished, visitors imagine their victim as one of the people whose shoes are in the

immense pile before them. By beginning the permanent exhibition at the top of the building and descending downward throughout the museum, visitors feel as though they are ‘sinking,’ along with those who have perished into the earth.

By pairing even small rhetorical nuisances with major, obvious attempts of persuasion, such as the Hall of Remembrance and the museum’s mission statement, the USHMM achieves its goals of not only Americanizing the Holocaust to fit our narrative, but also memorializing the Holocaust in a way that shows sympathy for the victims. Our collective memories of the Holocaust, then, are shaped and constructed by the museum’s legitimacy and content. By putting such an immense emphasis on the importance to remember, the museum is showing visitors that even the less memorable aspects of this time period are worth remembering because they are part of the whole story.

Chapter 4

Personal Perception as Example: Ethnographic Walk-Through of the USHMM

According to “Being There... and there... and there! Reflections on multi-site ethnography”:

The idea of such a thorough, formative, exclusive engagement with a single field is of course at the base of the enduring power in anthropology of the prospect, or experience, or memory, or simply collectively both celebrated and mystified notion, of ‘being there’ (Hannerz 202).

When discussing the concept of public memory, the aforementioned quote is important for grasping how individuals perceive and form memories. While researching and reading help to solidify foundations of how people *may* remember a particular event, place, or person, an ethnography actually allows for a hands-on account of that person’s memories. An ethnography of a USHMM visitor provides an account of the feelings, perceptions, and thoughts of that particular individual while he or she is going through the museum’s exhibitions. In order to substantiate the claims made in the previous two chapters, the following personal ethnography was created as a ‘formalized’ stream-of-consciousness through numerous visits to the USHMM. The following ethnography will be separated into four sections for analysis: the exterior, the interior, the permanent exhibition, and the Hall of Remembrance.

Section 1: The Exterior

Located on the National Mall in Washington, D.C., I was immediately struck by the somber feeling I had as I arrived at the 14th Street entrance of the USHMM. Though the museum is surrounded by institutions of learning and achievement, such as the numerous Smithsonian museums, as well as monuments and memorials of esteemed historical figures in American history, I automatically recognized differences as I approached the USHMM. One of the most resonating aspects about the museum's location was the physical name of the street nearby: Raoul Wallenberg Place. From reading history books, I knew that Wallenberg was a Swedish man who rescued and helped many Jewish people find safety during the Holocaust. However, my first thought was 'do people know who Raoul Wallenberg is? Does this street name actually *do* something?'

Thinking rhetorically about the situation, as I could not help but do throughout my visit to the museum, I wondered about societal reactions had the street been given a different name. For example, had the street been named "Anne Frank Place," would the area surrounding the museum accomplish more rhetorical work? Naming the street after a historical figure of this period that is, in general, well known, could create an atmosphere of the importance of memory for visitors before even entering the building.

Since I knew some history on Raoul Wallenberg, I began thinking about the importance of celebrating those who helped the victims of the Holocaust. By naming the street after someone who rescued Jews, I believed that the museum wanted to use the street as a symbol of thanks to all those who helped. Additionally, I was actually *outside* the museum when my first notion of the importance of remembering, not simply education, came to mind. The museum accomplished

this by naming the street nearby “Raoul Wallenberg Place.” Its rhetorical influence was massive on my immediate impression of the museum’s contents.

The first aspects of the building itself that I noticed were the large signs hanging from openings on the structure’s exterior, stating, “20 Years | 2013; the Power of Truth.” As I learned upon entering the museum, these signs signify the 20th anniversary of the USHMM’s establishment. These signs seemed quite important to me due to their size and statement. I immediately wondered what “the power of truth” was implying and wanted to learn more as I moved inside.

However, these signs were not all I noted about the exterior of the building itself. It seemed as though the architecture was simplistic and rigid, and it made me feel prepared to enter the USHMM with a feeling of stoic sadness. One aspect of the building, though, stuck out to me as different than the rest. As shown in the photo below, an aerial view of the museum, there is a six-sided structure that looks somewhat detached from the rest of the building.

Figure 2 Exterior, USHMM



The hexagonal structure is the Hall of Remembrance—a room dedicated to never forgetting those who perished in the Holocaust. From the outside, the structure looked unassuming, and I wondered for what aspect of the museum the oddly shaped area would be used. Completely immersed with a feeling of solemn grief, I entered the USHMM using the 14th Street entrance.

Section 2: The Interior

Upon entering the USHMM, I was first confronted with an inscription on the wall that read:

This museum will touch the life of everyone who enters and leave everyone forever changed – A place of deep sadness and a sanctuary of bright hope, an ally

of education against ignorance, of humility against arrogance, an investment in a secure future against whatever insanity lures ahead. If this museum can mobilize morality, then those who have perished will thereby gain a measure of immortality. –William J. Clinton.

As I read this, I was surprised that President Clinton had not only commented on the USHMM, but that his quote was presented to viewers as soon as they walked through the doors to the lobby, also referred to as the “Hall of Witness.” His quote, and the placement of it, resonated with me because I felt as though legitimate and credible people were validating the museum’s contents on the basis of both education and memory. The implications of his quote stood out to me; President Clinton had posited that by visiting this museum and acknowledging its contents, viewers begin to fulfill their duties as citizens of a democracy by memorializing the victims. By inscribing his words on the wall upon entering the museum and making them the first aspect of the USHMM that visitors see, it is attempting to persuade them to believe that the museum achieves the necessary goals—preserving memory, providing education, and enhancing civic duty.

After passing President Clinton’s quote, I proceeded to the first floor—the Hall of Witness. Walking into a well-lit area due to an expansive, glass-paneled roof, I noticed the juxtaposition between architectures and atmospheres as I transitioned from outside to in. Instead of feeling disoriented, I felt peaceful and reserved. However, I noticed the uneven and skewed nature of the glass paneling on the roof that shot light in all different directions. Things seemed somewhat awry; the light was interspersed, an eerie feeling of being watched was present, and things looked disconnected. I wondered if this was a purposeful statement on the part of the USHMM. After numerous visits, I researched the architectural choices and found that, indeed,

this was strategically planned to make viewers feel that something was wrong—a symbol of the entire series of events of the Holocaust.

Perhaps the most overwhelming feeling that stayed with me throughout my time at the museum, but particularly while in the Hall of Witness, was one of separation. Being in a space filled with contrasting elements and many different architectural features that seemed to contradict each other provided a sense that this museum is one that exemplifies a holistically and profoundly *wrong* time period in history. It provoked in me a wave of emotion as I prepared to enter the permanent exhibition.

Section 3: The Permanent Exhibition

Figure 3 The Permanent Exhibition, USHMM



The permanent exhibition, separated into three floors, provides a comprehensive history of the Holocaust. One enters the exhibition by first choosing a card presenting an affected person's information. This card is meant to stay with the visitor throughout his or her time in the

permanent exhibition, and, at the end of the visit, he or she finds out the fate of the person on the card. As I stepped into the elevator bringing me up to the opening floor of the permanent exhibition, I examined my card and noted that the person was a young, Jewish girl from Germany, only a few years younger than myself. I immediately felt some sort of personal connection to her, and realized that the reasoning behind the card distribution is to personalize the exhibition for the visitor.

Once I left the elevator, I continued on to the opening floor of the exhibition, entitled “Nazi Assault- 1933 to 1939.” I wondered, as I got off the elevator, how the exhibition could possibly *begin* to tell the story of this mass tragedy. It did so, however, by first providing photographs of concentration camps nearing the end of the war in 1945. At first, I questioned why these photographs were placed at the beginning of the Holocaust timeline. However, once I proceeded, I realized that these were placed at the beginning as a rhetorical strategy to provide a basis for just *how* horrifying this time period truly was. The rest of this floor, then, examined and provided information on the ways mass genocide could have become a possibility and progress. I felt overwhelmed with the amounts of information presented, including two films, examples of anti-Semitic propaganda, documents showing governmental racism presented through the media, and overall totalitarianism during this time period.

This floor left me with an understanding of how mass murder came about due to stereotyping, persecution, and racism. Furthermore, however, it made me recognize the museum’s attempt to show how *bad* these phenomena are. I felt knowledgeable about the historical facts, such as Hitler’s appointment as the chancellor of Germany, but also about the deliberate attempt on the museum’s part to separate an “us” from a “them.” By discussing American reactions to the Holocaust, the USHMM juxtaposes American democratic systems to

totalitarian states. By including American responses, I recognized that the museum works to give evidence for the necessity of a Holocaust memorial in the United States, as well as advances the argument that America is exceptional because of its lack of genocide.

The middle floor, entitled “The ‘Final Solution’—1940 to 1945,” left me with an incredible feeling of emptiness and sincere sadness. It provided both a historical timeline as well as many artifacts that discuss and show the ways in which the Nazi regime controlled and exploited Jews, political prisoners, homosexuals, Gypsies, and many other minority groups. The statistics of death were shocking, but even more resonating were the artifacts, including experimental tables, concentration camp oven tools, and an entire room full of shoes, depicted below.

Figure 4 Room of Shoes, USHMM



A profound silence overwhelmed the floor while I roamed and learned. Visitors were solemn and not speaking loudly, and it seemed as if they were attempting to be respectful of the perished in some way. The area full of shoes was the most striking aspect of the floor, as it was incredibly emotional to realize just how many pairs of shoes of murdered people it takes to fill an entire room. Seeing the room of shoes made me inherently consider the victims. It did not provide me with any specific knowledge base, but instead affected my memory of the exhibition as a whole. It elicited an emotional response and I remembered how I felt throughout the rest of my time at the museum.

The final floor, also called “The Last Chapter,” felt quite ‘real’ to me in the sense that in order to get there, I had to descend down a ramp and staircase. While doing so, I contemplated the museum’s purposeful strategy of beginning the exhibition at the ‘top’ and forcing visitors to move to the ‘bottom.’ It seemed to me that the structure and format of the exhibition was just as telling as the contents themselves. Was the USHMM attempting to insinuate that visitors were following along the same pathway as the victims once did? While they were at the ‘top’ before the Holocaust—mostly living normal lives—they quickly spiraled downward into the hell of the events of this mass tragedy.

The contents of the “Last Chapter” focused on the liberation of camps by the Allied forces, victory over Nazi Germany, resistance endeavors, and life after the Holocaust. One of the most reoccurring feelings I had while examining the contents of this floor was the attention to one’s own duty in the face of genocide and hatred. Though the contents themselves were focused on a narrative of what actually happened during the years following the World War II’s end, the USHMM tries to instill in viewers a responsibility of all citizens to help those persecuted and in peril. The exhibition separated bystanders, perpetrators, and rescuers, and, by doing so, advanced

that argument that being a bystander—quite a common occurrence—was violating a duty to act well toward a fellow human being.

Leaving the permanent exhibition was difficult for me, as I was inundated with factual information, memories, as well as certain cognitive perspectives on the Holocaust, the separation of good and evil, and personal responsibility. I was conflicted, not about the facts presented or the historical narrative given throughout the exhibitions, but rather because I now perceived the Holocaust as so much more relevant to my own life than I had previously. Reading books and hearing stories about the Holocaust do not compare to picturing the young girl on my card perish in a gas chamber, never to see her family again. The exhibition was incredibly effective in that way—it personalized the narrative in addition to educating. It made me want to memorialize the victims of this tragedy, and, most importantly, it made me believe that preventing genocide in the future is the duty of those fortunate enough to live in democratic societies.

Section 4: Hall of Remembrance

Figure 5 Hall of Remembrance Sketch, USHMM



After leaving the permanent exhibition, I felt disoriented and solitary. Wandering aimlessly about the Hall of Witness, I entered the Hall of Remembrance. As shown by the architect's sketch pictured above, this hexagon-shaped room was quite different than the permanent exhibition. Not a necessary facet of the history of the Holocaust or Holocaust education, the Hall of Remembrance acts as a place of individual reflection, mourning, and memorializing.

I circled the outer-most areas of the room, looking closely at how many candles were lit under each concentration camp's inscription. Seeing so many candles lit provoked in me a sense of loss, as it showed just how many families were affected by this tragedy and still wanted to commemorate the dead in an attempt to achieve some form of justice. Looking at the Biblical inscription near the 'eternal flame' made me recognize the heightened importance the museum

places on memory and the Holocaust. Through the contents and structure of the exhibitions, building, mission statement, and this room, I finally connected the aim of the museum to be a lesson for visitors.

The Hall of Remembrance is used a tangible symbol for visitors. It shows that remembering is the most important aspect of the Holocaust, that it is the first step in preventing genocide in the future. It instills in visitors the notion that by remembering, and, in turn, by visiting the museum, they are taking the initiative to “not forget” and be the good rather than the evil.

Chapter 5

Conclusion

When attempting to understand the association between the Holocaust, collective memory, and rhetoric, looking through the lens of a museum as an evidential “text” provides an example of differing perceptions and meaning. Comparing two museums as Holocaust “texts” to show the numerous rhetorical presentations on the same topic, discussing the goals and strategies of one museum as Americanized and memorialized, and providing a visitor’s holistic understanding and memory from a personal perspective each work together to assert an argument. Through examining each one of the aforementioned topics in depth, an argument can be made that the Holocaust is remembered through personal narratives and understandings based on arrangement and presentation.

Yet, is an explanation of this argument enough? Public memory of the Holocaust provides insight into the thoughts and perceptions of museum content and strategy. But why is this phenomenon important? Why do the ways in which memories are formed based on presentation matter for societal change? They matter because the Holocaust is not simply a historical event from the past. Genocide, persecution, stereotyping, and racism all exist today. How we perceive the past affects our actions in the future. The implications of understanding the Holocaust in a particular way are massive.

Through researching and creating this project regarding memory and the Holocaust, I argue that the USHMM is a particularly effective mechanism for advocating a specific way of

thinking about the Holocaust. By dedicating an entire museum to actually remembering this time period, the USHMM sets itself up to become one of a kind in the United States. When met with critique about its placement and location, the museum justified itself by appealing to the American narrative of exceptionalism—that our nation is unlike any other and has the responsibility to act as such. The museum accomplishes this through its blatant Americanization of the Holocaust; While the events may not have taken place on our nation’s soil, we responded and have the duty to protect innocent victims who are subject to persecution due to a lack of democratic governments.

Every aspect of this museum is rhetorical. One can hardly assume that the contents of the USHMM solely focus on the education of this historical event. Its placement on the National Mall in Washington, D.C., one of the most symbolically “positive” areas in the nation by way of celebrating achievement and greatness, makes the USHMM stand out. The museum provides insight into one of the most serious and devastating acts of human injustice to visitors on perhaps the same day they commemorate achievements by American presidents, rights activists, and countless others. The obvious contrast allows for the museum to accomplish what it hopes: that visitors are struck by just how serious and clearly *un-American* the Holocaust was.

As evidenced by a comparison of the USHMM in Washington D.C. and the Museum of Jewish Heritage in New York City, the former works to supply a two-fold understanding of the Holocaust, while the latter designates the Holocaust as one aspect of many with which the Jewish culture identifies. These two museums provide clearly different memories of the same event in time, showing the importance of multiple interpretations of its meaning. Then, as the second chapter describes, the USHMM places utmost importance on the “memorialization” interpretation of the Holocaust—it *wants* us to remember, to care, to prevent genocide in the

future. Through incorporating emotional and personal aspects to the educational contents and exhibits, the USHMM subtly puts visitors in tune to the notion that doing anything less than deeming the time period important would violate their personal responsibilities to human life and American citizenship. Finally, as provided through a personal ethnography, the perceptions provided in the first two chapters are substantiated by the third. Why was doing an ethnography necessary? It allowed for a prime example that each person's interpretations of presentations of the Holocaust are different based on the construction of his or her own memories.

When these aspects are combined, we are left with a comprehensive understanding of how memories of the Holocaust are constructed and changeable based on rhetorical strategies of who presents the information to us. It is our responsibility, then, to decide what we do with this newfound understanding of how the formation of public memory works. If rhetorical strategies can so easily shift our understanding of the same event, is it safe to assume that all of these individual and separate presentations are legitimate and accurate? Though the USHMM is massively effective in providing not only a historical narrative of the Holocaust, but also a desire to remember it and care, is it lacking in any way? By enticing and persuading visitors to remember, is it *forgetting* to include other perspectives or lenses for thinking about this time period?

The answers to these questions depend on the individual visitor. However, knowing that each act of remembering is, in turn, also an act of forgetting, visitors can apply this theory of memory to their understandings and feelings about the Holocaust. Though that genocide occurred in the mid-20th century, other genocides are occurring right now around the world. Through using the numerous modes of thinking about Holocaust memory, society can adapt and work to prevent genocide by bringing those memories to the forefront. When seeking to

understand why public memory on mass tragedy is important, one can decide how he or she wishes to actively engage. Viewers of the USHMM are called to not only read and look at the information presented in the exhibitions—they are actually expected to engage in the act of remembering as citizens against human injustice.

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ACADEMIC VITA

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Education

Pennsylvania State University, Schreyer Honors College, College of the Liberal Arts, University Park, PA

Anticipated Graduation Date: May 2015 ▪ B.A. Communication Arts and Sciences

- Minors: Sociology, Italian
- Dean's List, 2011-Present
- Writing a thesis regarding the rhetoric, communicative practices and strategic presentation of Holocaust memory via museums and memorials
- Pursuing an 'Excellence in Communications' Certificate regarding the importance of an education in the humanities and effective communication skills throughout the lifespan

Academic Honors & Awards

- The Adma Hamman Shibley Scholarship in Communication Arts and Sciences Recipient, 2014
- The Michael Hodes Merit-Based Scholarship in Communication Arts and Sciences Recipient, 2014
- The Schreyer Honors College Conference on Academic Advising Student Presenter, 2014
- The Harold J. 'Pat' O'Brien Memorial Award in Communication Arts and Sciences Recipient, 2014
- The Evan Pugh Scholar Award Recipient, 2014
- The Doris and Walter Goldstein Fund in Jewish Studies Award Recipient, 2014
- The Michael Hodes Merit-Based Scholarship in Communication Arts and Sciences Recipient, 2013
- The President's Freshmen Award Recipient, 2012

Study Abroad Experience

- 'Reggio Calabria, Italy: Language and Culture' Penn State Program, Summer 2013

Leadership Experience

- *Phi Eta Sigma Undergraduate Honor Society*
 - President, 2014-Present
 - Manage and collaborate with an eleven-person executive board to plan an annual induction ceremony for new members, fundraise, promote effective team communication, and host bi-weekly general meetings and bi-weekly officer meetings.
 - Organize and participate in more than ten community service events, including Penn State's 46-hour dance marathon ("THON") to raise money for pediatric cancer, volunteering at retirement homes, and volunteering at children's carnivals.
 - Vice President, 2013-2014
 - Implemented many activities to increase member involvement such as creating academic groups, organizing networking opportunities with alumni, and attending campus-wide events as an honor society.
 - Increased member participation from 30 active members to over 45 active members in one academic year through the creation of new academic opportunities.
 - THON Chairperson, 2012-2013

- Organized and managed 30 students in a year-long effort to raise money for pediatric cancer through hosting bi-weekly meetings, planning overnight fundraising trips, and coordinating shift schedules for THON weekend.
- *Phi Alpha Delta Law Fraternity, International*
 - Vice President, 2014-Present
 - Plan five yearly events to help students decide whether or not law school is their most beneficial educational pathway through hosting law school representatives, LSAT preparatory course teachers, and creating law school question-and-answer panels.
 - Advise and communicate with students in both group and individual settings regarding potential law school options.
 - Contact and work closely with the graduate chapter of Phi Alpha Delta at Penn State's Dickinson School of Law to enhance knowledge about legal education through a mentoring program for members.
 - Treasurer, 2013-2014
 - Worked to ensure the stability of all monetary issues within the organization by collecting annual dues, keeping payment records, and setting up an initiation for new members.

Other Campus Involvement

- *Schreyer Honors College, Shadowing Experience; the Associate Dean for Academic Affairs, 2014*
 - Observe Dr. Nichola Gutgold, Professor of Communication Arts and Sciences and Associate Dean for Academic Affairs, in order to gain a holistic understanding of the communicative practices within the academic affairs realm at an institution of higher education.
 - Join staff meetings, attend presentations and lectures, and participate in panels and discussions.
- *The Italian Student Society, Photography Chair, 2013-Present*
- *The Student Philanthropy Council, Events Committee, 2012-2014*

Work Experience

- *Congressional Communications & Press Intern, The Honorable Patrick J. Toomey of the United States Senate, May-August 2014*
 - Worked with the press staff members of Senator Toomey's Washington, D.C. office to assist with writing daily reports, preparing letters to the editor, and compiling listings about the senator in the news and throughout social media venues.
 - Gave more than ten tours of the United States Capitol to constituents of Pennsylvania and guests after learning about the history of the area.
 - Attended policy briefings and congressional hearings to educate myself about current events.
 - Responded to constituent issues via phone and mail by answering constituent phone calls, filing constituent mail, and completing other administrative tasks.
- *Lead Undergraduate Teaching Assistant, Penn State Sociology Department, Fall 2013-Spring 2014*
 - Oversaw and worked closely with four other teaching assistants to grade and provide feedback on student assignments, such as reaction papers regarding in-class material.
 - Attended class lectures, prepared teaching plans, and took notes in order to assist students who missed class or had trouble with course concepts, as well as to train new teaching assistants.
 - Tutored and assisted students before exams by meeting with them to review concepts from class notes, scholarly articles, and other readings required for class.
- *Assistant Manager, Brant Beach Yacht Club, May-August 2012*

- Worked as the assistant to the general manager by manning the front desk, handling phone calls, helping to plan club events, run official regattas, and organize programs for children.
- Gained extensive knowledge and experience in using Microsoft Word, Microsoft Excel, and Microsoft PowerPoint to do inventory and create advertisements while managing other numerous secretarial duties and practicing strategic communication skills.