

Lisa Mahlum, "The Similarities of Difference: A Comparative Analysis of the New England Holocaust Memorial in Boston and the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe in Berlin," *intersections* 10, no. 1 (2009): 279-308.

## ABSTRACT

As generations become further removed from the Holocaust, the process of memorialization becomes increasingly important for understanding the significance of the Holocaust, as memory is the tool through which the past becomes immortalized. In this essay, I compare the way in which the United States and Germany memorialized the Holocaust in the late 20th century by comparing the New England Holocaust Memorial in Boston to the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe in Berlin. Both Boston and Berlin have used memorials not only to publicly portray their involvement with the Holocaust in the past, but also to solidify their current remembrance of the Holocaust for the future. By looking at the historical and social debate that shaped the creation of each memorial and by examining the physical symbols and structures used to represent Holocaust memory, I use this essay to draw a historically unprecedented comparison between these two memorials to show how these two seemingly different memorials are fundamentally similar in their purpose to create a collective memory.

[http://depts.washington.edu/chid/intersections\\_Winter\\_2009/Lisa\\_Mahlum\\_Analysis\\_of\\_Holocaust\\_Memorials.pdf](http://depts.washington.edu/chid/intersections_Winter_2009/Lisa_Mahlum_Analysis_of_Holocaust_Memorials.pdf)

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# The Similarities of Difference

## A Comparative Analysis of the New England Holocaust Memorial in Boston and the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe in Berlin

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### Holocaust Memorialization: The Need to Remember and Never Forget

It's not for my parents that I pursue this endeavor... This Memorial will be for me. Because I was not there, and did not suffer, I cannot remember. There-fore, I very much need to be reminded. This memorial will be for my six-month-old daughter who will need to be reminded even more. It will be for her children who will need to be reminded still more. We must build such a memorial for all of the generations to come who, by distance from the actual events and people, will depend on it to activate [memory].<sup>1</sup>

The sky is black and night has come. In the distance, six glowing glass towers displace the darkness and a smoky haze fills the hollow chambers to create a cloudy luminescence. Reflecting on the site before him, Holocaust survivor Elie Wiesel writes, "Look at these towers, passerby, and try to imagine what they really mean - what they symbolize - what they evoke. They evoke an era of incommensurate darkness, an era in history when civilization lost its humanity and humanity its soul."<sup>2</sup> Dedicated in November of 1995, the New England Holocaust Memorial in Boston is located on the Freedom Trail in downtown Boston. Architect Stanley Saitowitz designed the Memorial with six glass towers, each standing fifty-four feet high, lined up vertically on black granite. Along the black granite are carved various quotes about the victims, heroes, and perpetrators of the Holocaust. At one entrance, there is a granite timeline delineating significant events that lead to the Holocaust. Each glass tower is hollow and illuminated, so at night, the towers become radiant and create a stunning contrast to the daytime effect. On each of the glass panels are etched six million numbers from 000001 to 6000000 arranged in an orderly fashion. At the bottom of each tower is a six-foot deep chamber with one of six death camps engraved on the wall: Majdanek, Chelmno, Sobibor, Treblinka, Belzec, and

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<sup>1</sup> Alex Krieger, Speech at the Founders' Dinner of the New England Holocaust Memorial Committee, November 29, 1989. Quoted in James E. Young, *The texture of memory: Holocaust memorials and meaning* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 285.

<sup>2</sup> Elie Wiesel, "Introduction", <http://www.nehm.org/intro.html> (accessed January 6, 2009).

Auschwitz-Birkenau. Smoldering coals illuminate the names of the death camps and create a smoky fog that fills the columns with a haunting opacity.<sup>3</sup>



Figure 1. New England Holocaust Memorial (Boston, Massachusetts)

A concrete vision—an ebbing field—an architectural anomaly—all are possible ways to describe the tombstone-esque site that blankets central Berlin in a field of stone. Passersby wonder what, wonder how, and wonder why this structure is before them. As historian Lawrence Langer observed when walking past the site, “the shapes represent blank invitations to visitors to decide where they have been summoned and what direction their sense of uneasiness should lead them in.”<sup>4</sup> Dedicated in May 2005 and built on nearly a 20,000 square meter plot, the Berlin Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe consists of 2711 concrete stele arranged in a grid pattern on uneven ground that gently slopes up and down, thus creating the illusion of a field. Each concrete stele is 0.95 meters wide, 2.38 meters long, and range randomly in height from a 0 meter flat slab to a 4 meter tall stele.<sup>5</sup> While walking through the Memorial, visitors are positioned within the stele in a variety of different ways and gain a unique sense of perspective

<sup>3</sup> “Memorial Design”, <http://www.nehm.org/design/> (accessed January 14, 2009)

<sup>4</sup> Lawrence Langer, *Using and abusing the Holocaust*. Jewish literature and culture (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006), 141.

<sup>5</sup> “Figures on the Memorial,” from the *Official pamphlet for the memorial for the murdered Jews of Europe*, 2.

since some stele stand taller than the visitor's height and some are shorter. Visitors can enter from all four sides, with each entrance offering a different viewpoint of the wave-like creation. The Memorial is a concrete masterpiece that has no landscaping except the 41 pine and Kentucky coffee trees that line the west side.<sup>6</sup> Designed by architect Peter Eisenman, the Memorial is supposed to connote a feeling of overwhelming confusion when visitors walk through the concrete maze, forcing them to embrace their feeling of uneasiness. With no beginning and no end, there is no right way to view this sparse and lifeless Memorial.



Figure 2. Monument to the Murdered Jews of Europe (Berlin, Germany).

Both Boston and Berlin have used memorials not only to publicly recount their involvement with the Holocaust in the past, but also to solidify their current remembrance of the Holocaust for the future. Despite the obvious differences in appearance between the New England Holocaust Memorial and the Memorial for the Murdered Jews of Europe—the size, the design, and the location—the two memorials are nonetheless quite similar in their purpose for

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

memorialization and their method for creating public memory. By placing these two monuments within the historiographical framework of memorialization and by considering the processes of creation that surrounded each memorial in their respective nations, one can see how the juxtaposition of these two Memorials not only tells a distinct national story of American and German Holocaust memory, but also reveals a common international story of suffering and survival. The Boston Memorial and the Berlin Memorial both capture the dynamic and interactive processes of memory creation that influenced the development of each memorial through the stages of its ideological inception, its physical construction, and its eventual completion. By uncovering the historical and social debate that shaped the creation of each memorial and by examining the physical symbols and structures used to represent Holocaust memory, one can see how these two seemingly different memorials are fundamentally similar in their purpose to create a collective memory.

I chose to compare the New England Holocaust Memorial to the Monument to the Murdered Jews of Europe because they formed a parallel comparison based on the following criteria: time frame of construction, purpose and scope of commemoration, type of structure created for memorialization, location both of the city in general and of the monument within the city, and level of public involvement with memorial selection and process of construction. Because both memorials had plans underway for construction by the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, they were both built with the same historical distance from the Holocaust and can therefore be compared within the same context of international political influence. Also, since both memorials were constructed specifically to memorialize the loss of 6 million Jews during the Holocaust, the scope of victimization between the two memorials is the same and thus allows for an analogous comparison.

**I**n the years since the end of WWII, the Holocaust has arguably become one of the most internationally cited events of the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries. With references appearing nearly daily in newspapers around the world, the Holocaust still captures the attention of the international community sixty-four years after it ended. A proliferation of monuments dedicated to the victims of Hitler's genocide has sparked an international debate about how much memory is too much and what type of commemoration is appropriate. Creation of remembrance days, international conferences, research databases, museums, and even popular films have prompted historians to wonder, "Why has the Holocaust received so much attention, and why do we care?" Although several historians have posited various theories for analyzing the importance of the Holocaust and

placing it within the framework of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, I personally espouse Norman Naimark's assertions for analyzing the Holocaust as a "dominant metaphor of our time."<sup>7</sup> Rather than viewing the Holocaust as an event to mark the hoped-for end of genocide or the moment of absolute truth when people would cease to embrace genocidal violence, Naimark instead establishes the Holocaust as a framework for historical reference and analysis, around which nations and individuals can forge an identity within the context of the Holocaust. Memorialization of the Holocaust is particularly important to understanding the significance of the Holocaust, as memory is the tool through which the past becomes immortalized. As generations become further removed from the Holocaust, the ability to contextualize oneself within the framework of the Holocaust becomes increasingly dependent on memorialization.

The process of Holocaust memorialization reflects a delicate balance between giving credence to the horrors of the past, engaging the visitors in the context of the present, and inspiring a memory for the future. In the post-Holocaust years, physical constructions created as monuments and memorials have taken on a variety of forms and meanings. As the production of memorials has become a proliferating international phenomenon over the past fifty years, historians have debated the nature of Holocaust memorials, constantly deliberating what constitutes the most correct and respectful way to memorialize something as sensitive as the Holocaust. According to James E. Young, arguably one of the most informed experts on Holocaust memorialization, the purpose of Holocaust memorials:

[is] not to console but to provoke; not to remain fixed but to change; not to be everlasting but to disappear; not to be ignored by its passerby but to demand interaction; not to remain pristine but to invite its own violations; not to accept graciously the burden of memory but to throw it back at the town's feet.<sup>8</sup>

For Young, Holocaust memorials should remain sensitive to the history of genocidal victims and employ symbolism and architecture that provoke memory creation through visitor interaction with the structure. Defining such memorials as "counter-monuments," Young promotes an ideology of Holocaust memorialization that acknowledges the "void" left behind from the Holocaust and

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<sup>7</sup> Norman M. Naimark, *Fires of hatred: ethnic cleansing in twentieth-century Europe* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2001), 58.

<sup>8</sup> James E. Young, *At memory's edge: after-images of the Holocaust in contemporary art and architecture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 7-8.

emphasizes more than the memory of terror and destruction.<sup>9</sup> Both the Boston Memorial and the Berlin Memorial are examples of counter-monuments. For generations of the post-Holocaust era who have no tangible memory of the Holocaust, memorials play an increasingly important role in solidifying the presence of the Holocaust within the minds of individuals and also within the framework of society at large. Holocaust historian Lawrence Langer also reflects a similar view to Young, believing that “when memory imprints on us the meaning of the presence of ‘absence’ and animates the ghost that such a burden has imposed on our lives, then the heritage of the Holocaust will have begun to acquire some authenticity in our post-war culture.”<sup>10</sup>

The “void” and “absence” to which Young and Langer speak respectively, refer not only to physical emptiness created by the loss of Holocaust victims, but also to the way in which the memorial brings this absence into a physical presence. This transformation occurs across two dimensions: through the architectural design of the memorial and through the process of human interaction by which the memorial was imagined and eventually constructed. Holocaust memorials should not use overt symbolism or gross structures to loudly call attention to the devastation of the Holocaust. Instead, Young argues, they should use suggestive subtleties and abstractions to prompt the visitor to create his or her own interpretation from the absence of the structure.<sup>11</sup> By inviting viewers “to establish an organic relationship to a past that one can never really inhabit,” Holocaust memorials use architecture and aesthetics to inform a body politic about the truths of the past while simultaneously imbuing them with an authentic sense of emotion, of caring, and of acceptance.<sup>12</sup> While the physical structures and design of Holocaust memorials remain static and unchanging, the process through which memorials were created reflects a social debate of the politics and culture of the era.<sup>13</sup> Only by looking at both the physical structure of a memorial and the process that led to a memorial’s construction can one understand the context and meaning of Holocaust memorialization.

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 198.

<sup>10</sup> Lawrence Langer, “Introduction”, in Charlotte Deblo, *Auschwitz and after* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1995), xviii.

<sup>11</sup> Young, *At memory's edge*, 175.

<sup>12</sup> Langer, *Using and abusing the Holocaust*, 141.

<sup>13</sup> Young, *The texture of memory*, 4.

## The Process of Memorialization: Uncovering the Debate over Memory Creation

A memorial's shape is determined as much by its own coming into being as by the ideals that first inspired it.<sup>14</sup>

James E. Young

As a process initially started by Holocaust survivors after the unveiling of Norman Rappaport's *Liberation* statue in New Jersey, the proposal to build a Holocaust Memorial in Boston was at first rejected. However, after the formation of a committee spearheaded by honorary chair person Kitty Dukakis, Jewish wife of then-Governor Michael Dukakis, the memorial became a defined project whereby the committee members decided to embrace all forms of argument and dissent by turning public debate into one of the very reasons for the memorial's inception. Finding a place within the community would be the memorial's primary function, and if the community could agree, then the memorial would be built on principles of self-justification; if not, then the memorial's fate would remain unrealized by the same principle.<sup>15</sup> At the behest of Harvard Professor Alex Krieger, the committee decided to solicit memorial designs from the general public in the form of an international competition that began in 1990. In the "New England Holocaust Memorial Competition Program," the purpose of the memorial was defined as such:

This will be a memorial to the Shoah—the Holocaust—in which the Nazi Third Reich systematically murdered six million Jewish men, women, and children... The Memorial will be for the six million—a place to grieve for the victims and to mark the loss of their culture to history. The Nazis and their collaborators victimized many other groups, murdering countless other people, each of equal worth and importance. Still others, including survivors, those who aided them, and those who liberated them, were caught up in this great tragedy and carry the burden of that memory throughout their lives. In seeking a universal understanding of the Shoah, we acknowledge the place of each experience in the horror of that collective history. To remember this suffering is to recognize the danger and evil that are present whenever one group persecutes another. The Holocaust was the ultimate act of prejudice—in this case, anti-Semitism. Wherever prejudice, discrimination and victimization are tolerated, evil like the Shoah can happen again.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 324.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 327.



From this text, one can discern the carefully constructed intent of the memorial as proposed by the committee. Even though the scope of commemorated victims was limited to the six million Jews, the committee consciously reminded the potential architects that other victims and perpetrators were involved in the Holocaust, and their experience is included through the universality of the monument. Five hundred and twenty people submitted designs and after much internal debate within the carefully chosen jury of experts of national and international fame, the committee selected seven finalists to be revealed to the public to receive their input.<sup>17</sup>

Visitors to the finalists' exhibit were asked to assess their likes and dislikes according to questions like, "What do these memorial designs help us to remember about the Holocaust? How do these designs and the Freedom Trail location help us see the relevance of the Holocaust in today's world? What sort of experience can a Holocaust memorial provide to the individual and to the community?"<sup>18</sup> There was a wide range of responses, many of which were reported in the *Boston Jewish Advocate* along with a tallied response of visitors' favorite models. Some wondered about the significance of the Freedom Trail location and the role the Holocaust played in the context of the American Revolution, hoping memorial supporters would remember that Holocaust remembrance is an "oh so Jewish experience,"<sup>19</sup> and recognize that "the Freedom Trail is what the Freedom Trail is; let us not conflate and confuse our rememberings."<sup>20</sup> Others wanted to extend the scope of victims to include non-Jews; still others drew upon memorials in other cities to offer specific suggestions; there were even those who denied that the Holocaust even happened. As the public became a part of the memorialization process, the memorial became an example of a counter-monument—"a great fingerprint on society."<sup>21</sup>

When considering the seven finalists' designs, the jury was impressed by the breadth of memory response and various types of symbolism employed to convey such memory. However, six of the final designs failed to inspire the jury as much as the design by well-known architect Stanley Saitowitz. By looking at the

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<sup>17</sup> Young writes that "Members of the jury include Marshall Berman, a cultural historian; Rosemarie Bletter, an architectural critic and historian; Henry Friedlander, a modern German historian and survivor; Frank Gehry, world renowned architect; Katy Kline, an art historian, critic, and curator; Michael Van Valkenburgh, a renowned landscape architect; and Elyn Zimmerman, a sculptor and environmental artist" (*The texture of memory*, 326).

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 328.

<sup>19</sup> Leonard Fein, "Why Boston Needs a Holocaust Memorial," *The Jewish Advocate*, June 10, 1993.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>21</sup> Young, *The texture of memory*, 328.

reasons for the jury's rejection of the other designs, one can gain a deeper understanding of what sort of memorialization the jury hoped to capture in the anticipated Boston memorial. Nancy J. Locke and Jan Langwell's proposed "endless meadow" lacked the ability for further provocation and resonated too closely with the Germans' planting of grain fields over mass grave sites; both the judges and public viewers feared this design would simply console visitors rather than provoke thought.<sup>22</sup> Two other proposed designs integrated the haunting symbolism of the Holocaust and used the memorial to evoke a sense of past brokenness in need of future mending. For example, Chung Nguyen and Chuong Nguyen proposed cutting a scar into the park to act as a path; Troy West, Anker West, and Ginidir Marshall proposed a great, glass Star of David bisected by a concrete path and railroad rails.<sup>23</sup> Two other proposed designs integrated the haunting symbolism of the Holocaust and used the memorial to evoke a sense of past brokenness in need of future mending. For example, Chung Nguyen and Chuong Nguyen proposed cutting a scar into the park to act as a path; Troy West, Anker West, and Ginidir Marshall proposed a great, glass Star of David bisected by a concrete path and railroad rails.<sup>24</sup> Ultimately, the design by Saitowitz would become the winning model.

Intrigued by the audacious design of Saitowitz and his team of architects including Ulysses Kim, Tom Gardner, and John Bass, the jury believed the design would attract visitors from a distance and become "unavoidable, filling the empty park with light and life, pits of fire and pillars of ice."<sup>25</sup> The jury was also intrigued by the abstract symbolism of the design and subtle references to Jewish culture, feeling moved by the memorial's ability to include rather than exclude other victim groups—an important part of the intent of this memorial. Using poetic prose to describe his own vision of the memorial, Saitowitz submitted the following text to the competition along with his memorial design:

Some think of it as six candles, others call it a menorah. Some a colonnade walling the civic plaza, others six towers of the spirit. Some six columns for six million Jews, others six exhausts of life. Some call it a city of ice, others remember a ruin of some civilization. Some speak of six pillars of breath, others six chambers of gas. Some think of it as a fragment of Boston City Hall,

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 329.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 329-332.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 332.

other call the buried chambers Hell. Some think the pits of fire are six death camps, others feel the shadows of six million numbers tattooed on their flesh.<sup>26</sup>

By looking at Saitowitz's own description of his memorial, one can see how the design on one hand wielded suggestive symbolism to prompt thoughts about Jewishness, but on the other hand, remained abstract enough to allow for personal interpretation as people attached their own symbolic meaning to the memorial. When compared against the intents of memorialization as recorded in the call to competition, one can see why Saitowitz's memorial seemed so attractive to the jury. In retrospective analysis twelve years after the Memorial's dedication, the truth behind Saitowitz's words resonate as his memorial now stands erect as a compelling counter-monument in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Located between steel skyscrapers on one side and colonial brick architecture on the other side, the scale, the design, and the material of Saitowitz's memorial mediates nicely between the two worlds of urbanization and history. Some jury members worried about the delicacy of the memorial's materials, believing that it would attract vandalism from rock throwers, chisels, and hammers.<sup>27</sup> Despite the threat of vandalism, cultural historian Marshall Berman remarked, "If all the skinheads in New England come and throw rocks at [the monument], it will only become more eloquent. It will then be like a representation of the Kristallnacht of the 30s."<sup>28</sup> Although Berman's remarks may seem insensitive or even offensive to some, one must understand them within the context of public memory creation. For Berman, the greater importance of the memorial is that it finds a place within the functioning of the community, even if that means undergoing defacement at the hand of vandals. Such vandalistic treatment, albeit disrespectful of the memorial and the victims commemorated by the memorial, would only increase public awareness, and bring the Memorial even more into the public eye. After years of construction, approximately one thousand men, women, and children gathered on October 22, 1995 to witness the product of years of struggle and debate at the dedication and unveiling of the New England Holocaust Memorial.

Overall, the public response to the dedication of the Boston Memorial was overwhelmingly positive and welcoming despite public tensions surrounding the Memorial's construction in previous years. Taking its place amidst "testimonials to patriotism, the American Revolution and religious freedom," the Boston

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<sup>26</sup> "Architect", <http://www.nehm.org/design/architect.html> (accessed January 26, 2009).

<sup>27</sup> Young, *The texture of memory*, 334.

<sup>28</sup> Robert Campbell, "Rich Images Enhance Holocaust Memorial," *The Boston Globe*, June 25, 1991: 56.

Memorial touched the hearts of those who attended the dedication and drew many to tears.<sup>29</sup> Scott Frank, a reporter for the *Jewish Advocate*, witnessed one man cross himself, read a quote off the glass, and cross himself again as he stared into the glowing embers; another man, seemingly homeless and dressed in raggedy clothes, threw a paper-wrapped bouquet of flowers at the ground, covered his face, and left the premises.<sup>30</sup> Struck with emotion, visitors of varying religious denominations, ethnic backgrounds, and socio-economic statuses all paid somber homage to the Jews lost under Nazi rule. Even a year later, after the initial hype of the Memorial's opening had settled down, people were still touched by their memorial experience and were drawn to learn more. Holocaust survivor Steve Ross, who was on the founding committee for the Memorial's construction, spent some time giving tours at the Memorial and witnessed viewers coming to commemorate the Jewish victims; "some cry," he said, "some don't ask questions. Most of them do ask questions and they want to know more."<sup>31</sup> In its inception, supporters of the Memorial hoped it would spark interest in the community and increase awareness as it propagated shared memory. After a year standing, the Memorial seemed to fill its role as a success.

In Berlin, the construction process of the Memorial for the Murdered Jews of Europe reflected a serious political debate that began before the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1988 and lasted until the dedication of the Memorial in May 2005. On January 30, 1988, the citizens' action group 'Perspective Berlin' called for the construction of a Holocaust Memorial in Berlin under the leadership of journalist and talk-show personality Lea Rosh and WWII historian Eberhard Jackel. On 30 January 1989, the 47<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Hitler's ascension to power, Lea Rosh took out the following advertisement to be printed in German newspapers: "A half a century has passed since the Nazis came to power and since the murder of the Jews of Europe. But on German soil, in the country of the perpetrator, there is still no central site of remembrance to recall this singular genocide, and no memorial that remembers the victims. This is shameful."<sup>32</sup> Although there were some monuments created in Germany to memorialize the victims of the Holocaust, none of them explicitly accepted blame for the genocide or acknowledged the death of six million Jews. In 1963, there was a memorial built to the Jews of Berlin on the site of a former Jewish Synagogue on Munich Street,

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<sup>29</sup> Scott Frank, "Holocaust Memorial Becomes a Reality," *The Jewish Advocate*, November 5, 1995.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Michael Gelbwasser, "Holocaust Memorial Anniversary Marked," *The Jewish Advocate*, October 24, 1996.

<sup>32</sup> Quoted in Caroline Alice Weidmar, *The claims of memory: representations of the Holocaust in contemporary Germany and France* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999), 143.

but its scope of memorialization was narrow and hardly accounted for the widespread loss of European Jewry during the Holocaust.<sup>33</sup> After a disastrous wreath-laying visit by President Ronald Reagan at the military cemetery in Bitburg, where Waffen SS Soldiers were buried alongside Wehrmacht conscripts, Chancellor Kohl decided to take matters into his own hands. By honoring Germany's war dead, international dignitaries who paid respect to Germany's cemeteries were partaking in a self-contradictory memorial whereby those being honored were those who perpetrated the Holocaust.<sup>34</sup> Kohl decided to construct an appropriate monument after the fall of the Berlin Wall.

Consequently, Kohl picked a location and built a monument called the Neue Wache, or "new guard." He believed that with the reunification of Germany, he could create a "central monument to all the victims of war and tyranny and thus provide a common site for the unification of a people, as well, a reconciliation of victims and perpetrators, east and west, all united now in their hatred of the tyranny of war."<sup>35</sup> For the monument's central display, Kohl selected one of his favorite statues—a bronze modern pieta with a mother holding a dead child by German artist Kathe Kollwitz. However, his memorial was not received well for several reasons. First, the pieta was a Christian figure—a somewhat contradictory choice for memorialization when the largest number of victims of the Holocaust were Jewish. Second, critics thought it was inappropriate to commemorate the loss of victims alongside the loss of their perpetrators. Even though the Neue Wache memorial sustained criticism until and even after its dedication in 1993, Kohl continued to support his monument.<sup>36</sup>

Such disastrous encounters with Germany's memorials, as with the Neue Wache, further fueled Rosh's push for an appropriate Holocaust memorial in Berlin. In an early pamphlet distributed to solicit support for the proposed memorial, the following was printed regarding the spirit of the monument: "until now, there has been no central monument in the land of the perpetrators that recalls and warns about the deed."<sup>37</sup> Drawing explicitly on the need for the nation of perpetrators to accept responsibility for the past and to publicly commemorate the largest targeted group of the Holocaust, supporters of the proposed Memorial made this a theme through the next 11 years of public struggle and

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<sup>33</sup> William John Niven, *Facing the Nazi past: united Germany and the legacy of the Third Reich* (London: Routledge, 2002).

<sup>34</sup> Young, *At memory's edge*, 186.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 186.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 186-87.

<sup>37</sup> Michael Wise, "Monuments to Victims, Not Heroes", *Capital Dilemma*.

political scrutiny. Those who opposed the construction of a Holocaust Memorial specifically dedicated to the memorialization of lost Jews believed it would become a “wreath dumping place” where international dignitaries would come to fulfill duties of protocol.<sup>38</sup> Others claimed the singular focus on Jewish victims would create a hierarchy of victimization, therefore creating a national position on who suffered the most. Historian Heinrich August Winkler rejected the memorial, describing in an article in *Der Spiegel* how the German “fixation on the Holocaust [represented] negative nationalism,” thus bringing down the morale of a unified Germany by dwelling on Hitler’s past regime.<sup>39</sup> A politically charged process, the debate surrounding the memorialization of the Holocaust itself became its own unique memorial.

During the first round of the 1994 competition, the committee received 528 entries that reflected a broad range of memory interpretation. Some entries were crass and disrespectful, connoting a nearly sacrilegious interpretation of Holocaust memory. One such entry was a Ferris wheel designed by Richard Gruber that had freight cars resembling those used for deportation in place of the traditional basket. In an attached explanation, the designer said his memorial design captured “the tension between hope and hopelessness, between a carnival and genocide.”<sup>40</sup> Another proposed memorial design consisted of a giant sixty foot tall oven modeled after those used in the death camps that would burn twenty-four hours a day in remembrance of Jews who suffered at the hands of the Nazis; the other shocking proposal was a large 130 foot vessel intended to represent all the blood lost by the six million Jews who died in the Holocaust.<sup>41</sup> All three of these proposals were exceedingly graphic and focused on the death, destruction, and terror of the Holocaust. Gruesome commemoration was not the purpose of the proposed memorial, which was actually intended to represent Germany’s gesture of responsibility and national commemoration. In response to these disrespectful memorial propositions, Lea Rosh reportedly reminded the jury: “This is not a playground for artists and their self-absorbed fantasies.”<sup>42</sup> While none of these models even made it past the first round of the competition, a brief exploration of them illustrates the scope of perspective coming from the actively participating public. For those who thought such a memorial would be obscene, there were also those who thought that such memorials were appropriate and even necessary.

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Niven, *Facing the Nazi past*, 216.

<sup>40</sup> Wise, “Monuments to Victims, Not Heroes”.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Young, *At memory's edge*, 189.

The winning entry selected in March 1995 by the jury of 15 members (including experts and laypeople appointed by the Bundestag, the Berlin State, and the original citizens' group) was a design proposed by Christine Jakob-Marks. Her proposed memorial was a twenty-three foot thick tombstone that covered almost an entire block of land bearing the names of all the known Jewish victims. However, within hours after the announcement of the winning entry, Jakob-Marks' design faced harsh criticism from significant political figures including Ignatz Babbis, a prominent Jew, Mayor Eberhard Diepgen, and even Chancellor Kohl.<sup>43</sup> Many decried the 'tilted gravestone' as "too big, too heavy handed, too diverse, and finally just too German."<sup>44</sup> The only mainstream support of the mega-tombstone was Lea Rosh, whose support was practically insignificant amidst the proliferation of criticism. Columns and op-ed pieces appeared in *Der Spiegel* as experts and laypeople alike castigated the failure of the Berlin Memorial. One *Der Spiegel* columnist, Henryk Broder, wrote that the collection of 528 designs should be regarded as a "quarry [where] anthropologists, psychologists, and behaviorists could examine the condition of a confused nation wanting to create a monument to its victims in order to purify itself."<sup>45</sup> After a few weeks of this media outcry against the Berlin Memorial, an entire volume of objections was published, which bore the following text on the back cover: "If the aim is to remember the perpetuity that this great nation once murdered nearly six million human beings solely for having been Jews, then this monument must remain uncompleted and unbuilt, an unfinishable memorial process."<sup>46</sup> Even though the public outcry seemed to discourage the nation's attempt to memorialize the Holocaust, the committee remained dedicated to the cause and embarked on a second round of competitions, public scrutiny, and ultimate success.

Hoping to further encourage the memorialization process and elicit continued public support, the committee organized a series of public colloquia in January, March, and April 1997 in which prominent artists, historians, critics, and curators would publicly address the ways in which the plans for the Berlin Memorial might be rectified. Even though the first two colloquia attracted public attention and encouraged amicable relations between the speakers and organizers, a dark cloud seemed to settle over the process as speakers began questioning the rationale behind even having a memorial.<sup>47</sup> For example,

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<sup>43</sup> Wise, "Monuments to Victims, Not Heroes"

<sup>44</sup> Young, *At memory's edge*, 190.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 191.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 178.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 192.

historian Jürgen Kocka thought a memorial dedicated to solely Jewish victims was unnecessary in light of the other groups who fell subject to Hitler's persecution; Michael Stürmer, a speaker at the first colloquium, thought the large dimensions of the Memorial's location would encourage the creation of an inappropriate monstrosity rather than the subtle memorial supported by the commission.<sup>48</sup> Asked to speak during the third colloquium about the international context of Holocaust memorialization, James E. Young found himself confronted by a public audience increasingly frustrated with the spectacle of the abject failure of the proposed memorial.<sup>49</sup>

Sensing the palpable anxiety emanating from the committee and general public alike, Young discarded his carefully prepared lecture and instead spoke from the heart in an effort to reassure the audience of the memorial's need within the context of Berlin's history. He told the audience, "you may have failed to produce a monument, but if you count the sheer number of design hours that 528 teams of artists and architects have already devoted to the memorial, it's clear that your process has already generated more individual memory-work than a finished monument will inspire in its first ten years."<sup>50</sup> Young's speech reminded the crowd that although the finished memorial was the ultimate goal, the individual memory and awareness already created through the memorial's debate was an intrinsic part of the process. By turning overwhelming skepticism into a renewed sense of purpose, Young's speech reignited the committee's dedication to the memorial and provided the momentum needed to launch the project into its final phase.

After Young's speech, Speaker of the Berlin Senate Peter Radunski asked Young to join a Findungskommission of five members to pick an appropriate memorial design in what the committee now called an extension to the original process started in 1995.<sup>51</sup> Stressing the importance of a counter-monument, Young encouraged the committee to adopt a concept of memorialization rather than a specific mode of design. The artists' designs should incorporate the following: a clear definition of the Holocaust and its significance; mention of Nazi Germany's role as the perpetrator of the Holocaust; the current role of unified Germany as a

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 191-93.

<sup>50</sup> Young, *The texture of memory*, 193.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid. The four other members include Christoph Stozl, director of the German Historical Museum in Berlin; Dieter Ronte, director of the Museum of Contemporary Art in Bonn; Werner Hoffmann, a preeminent 20<sup>th</sup> century art historian in Germany; and Josef Paul Kleihues, one of Berlin's most respected arbiters of postwar architecture (195).



rememberer of the Holocaust; the contemporary generation's relationship to creating Holocaust memory; and the aesthetic debate about the memorial's physical structure.<sup>52</sup> As newly appointed arbiters of German Holocaust memory, the members of the Findungskommission asked a dozen or so world-renowned architects and designers to submit memorial designs in addition to inviting the nine finalists from the 1995 competition to submit revisions of their plans.<sup>53</sup> After a process of conducting interviews, hearing architects' presentations, and evaluating designs against the stated purpose of the memorial, the Findungskommission picked four finalists whose designs would be previewed and screened by the public: Jochen Gerz's "Warum?," Daniel Libeskind's "Stone Breath," Peter Eisenman and Richard Serra's "Waving Field of Pillars," and Gesine Weinmiller's "Eighteen Scattered Sandstone Wall Segments."<sup>54</sup>

These four proposals were selected for their abstract design and ability to encourage a unique interpretation of memory creation from each visitor who passed through the memorial—an essential goal for members of the Findungskommission who, largely due to Young's influence during the colloquia, envisioned the creation of a counter-monument.<sup>55</sup> Not long after the finalists were chosen, consensus was reached around Eisenman and Serra's design, and Chancellor Kohl invited them to Bonn to further explain their design and consider the possibility of implementing a few changes to the original plan. As an architect, Eisenman saw the requested revisions as an inherent part of his job; as an artist however, Serra thought the suggested changes rendered his original design nearly obsolete and decided to withdraw from the process.<sup>56</sup> After Eisenman incorporated the proposed changes into his revised design, Eisenman II, the Findungskommission unanimously proposed it to the chancellor and memorial commissioners.

Even though the Memorial finally had a concrete design in 1998 with Eisenman II, it took years before Germany saw its completion. With the elections of summer 1998, the Memorial underwent a series of politically charged debates that almost halted the completion of the memorial. The most contentious part of the debate surrounded the proposed addition of an Information Center to further explain the history and context of the Holocaust. However, on 25 June 1999, the Bundestag met in the public eye to debate Berlin's "Memorial for the

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<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 197.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 200.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 205-11.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 204-07.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 209.

Murdered Jews of Europe” and to take a final vote on the approval for construction. After a heated but civil deliberation, the Bundestag approved the memorial in a vote 314 to 209, with 14 abstentions.<sup>57</sup> The following three parts were the Bundestag’s stipulations for the Memorial’s construction:

- 1) The Federal Republic of Germany will erect in Berlin a memorial for the murdered Jews of Europe on the site of the former Ministerial Gardens in the middle of Berlin;
- 2) The design of Peter Eisenman’s field of pillars will be realized, as well as a small place of information that will detail the fate of victims and the authentic sites of destruction; and
- 3) A public foundation will be established by the Bundestag to oversee the completion of the memorial [...] The foundation will begin its work with the memorial’s groundbreaking in the year 2000.<sup>58</sup>

Over the next six years, the Memorial underwent construction with the final stele erected in December 2004 and the public dedication presented in May 2005.<sup>59</sup>

In the aftermath of the Memorial’s dedication, the German public responded with a variety of mixed reactions. For many Germans, the production of a Holocaust memorial that accepted culpability for the Nazi past and acknowledged the distinct Jewish component of Holocaust victims was inherently surreal. Even Eisenman, when reflecting in December 2004 on the completion of the Memorial’s construction, revealed a skeptical undertone in his own work when he said, “I never at many moments thought we would build this and here it is.”<sup>60</sup> The speeches at the Memorial’s inauguration ceremony reflected a mixture of skepticism and excitement surrounding the Memorial’s much awaited unveiling. Paul Spiegel, president of the Central Council of the Jews in Germany, opened the ceremony by expressing his concern for the Memorial’s exclusion of non-Jews saying that the Memorial consequently suggested an unnecessary “hierarchy of victimization.”<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 222.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 223.

<sup>59</sup> “Chronology,” from *The official pamphlet for the memorial for the murdered Jews of Europe*, 2.

<sup>60</sup> Barbara Miller, “Berlin Builds Holocaust Memorial,” *BBC News*, December 15, 2004, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/4099183.stm>, (accessed January 26, 2009).

<sup>61</sup> Richard Bernstein, “Holocaust Memorial Opens in Berlin,” *New York Times*, May 11, 2005, <http://www.nytimes.com/2005/05/11/international/europe/11germany.html> (accessed January 25, 2009).

In response to Spiegel's remarks, Eisenman, who spoke next in the program, explained that architecture cannot be a "panacea for evil" and act as a solution to all problems.<sup>62</sup> Wolfgang Thierse, president of the German parliament, expressed great hope for the future of the memorial as it "acts on the limits of our comprehension [of the Holocaust]" and serves "as a place of memory [to help the public] face up to the incomprehensible facts [of the Nazi past]."<sup>63</sup> Even in its completion, the highly debated Memorial still resonated with of the controversy surrounding the process of construction that had lasted for more than a decade.

In an NPR *Morning Edition* broadcast on the Memorial's opening, reporter Emily Harris used interviews to capture the general public's perception of the new Memorial, which much like the authorities speaking at the inauguration were torn between support, impartiality, and dislike of the Memorial. In her own observations, Harris recorded the variety of ways visitors interacted with the Memorial—a teenager skateboarding across the stele, an elderly gentleman and one-time supporter of the Nazi regime quietly sobbing, and parents with children trying to articulate the significance of the Memorial — a juxtaposition that demonstrated in actuality the variety of visitor responses anticipated during 17 years of the debate about Memorial.<sup>64</sup> A now permanent fixture in Berlin's landscape, the Memorial for the Murdered Jews of Europe will continue to elicit a wide range of memory creation in the next phase of German history.

#### Physical Structure of Memory: Location, Architecture, Symbolism, and Meaning

By themselves, monuments are of little value, mere stones in the landscape. But as part of a nation's rites or the objects of a people's national pilgrimage, they are invested with national soul and memory.<sup>65</sup>

James E. Young

Just as memorials draw upon the significance of the landscape and location on which they are built to construe their own meaning, the very construction of a memorial in turn changes the meaning of the landscape. For Young, "a monument becomes a point of reference amid other parts of the landscape, one node among others in a topographical matrix that orients the rememberer and

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> Emily Harris, "Berlin's Holocaust Memorial Opens to the Public," *NPR*, May 13, 2005, <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=4650754> (accessed January 21, 2009).

<sup>65</sup> Young, *The texture of memory*, 2.

creates meaning in both the land and our recollections.”<sup>66</sup> For the two memorials considered in this paper, the landscape for construction plays a central role in the type of memory created through the memorials. In Boston and Berlin alike, the location engages the visitor in a certain way that not only involves them with the design and symbolism of the memorial itself, but also draws them into the immediate meaning of the nation’s history.

Placed along the historic Freedom Trail in Boston, the New England Holocaust Memorial resonates with the spirit of American democracy as it reflects America’s role not only as a nation founded upon the principles of liberty, but also as one of the nations that liberated the Jews from Hitler’s control in 1945. A stop that attracts nearly sixteen million tourists a year,<sup>67</sup> the Freedom Trail is located in central Boston and has, according to its official website, “16 nationally significant historic sites, every one an authentic American treasure.”<sup>68</sup> Although not one of the official sixteen stops on the Freedom Trail,<sup>69</sup> the Boston Holocaust Memorial in effect becomes an added stop on the Freedom Trail as it sits along the red brick path when walking from the Boston Common to the Bunker Hill Monument specifically located two stops after the Boston Massacre site, one stop after the Fanueil Hall site, and one stop before the Paul Revere House.<sup>70</sup> This location positions the Holocaust within the framework of American democracy and freedom—the essence upon which our country is so proudly founded. The Holocaust was the antithesis of freedom, a moment of terror and genocide, but by placing the memorial for the murder of six million Jews on the Freedom Trail, the visitor experiences the tension between liberation and victimization. As liberators from the Holocaust, Boston’s decision to place its Holocaust memorial along the Freedom Trail resonates very closely with our nation’s own ideals of freedom both domestically and internationally.

The location of the Berlin Memorial suggests a historical relationship to Berlin’s role in the Holocaust as well as its role as a modern city that publicly acknowledges its past. Berlin was the capitol city where Hitler and his leaders met to discuss, plan, and legislate the process of WWII and the Holocaust. The north-eastern part of the Berlin Memorial site is situated directly on top of Goebbel’s bunker and office villa, which was left untouched by construction;

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<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 324.

<sup>68</sup> “Welcome to the Freedom Trail!” <http://www.thefreedomtrail.org/> (accessed January 25, 2009).

<sup>69</sup> “For Visitors Information Page.” <http://www.thefreedomtrail.org/visitor/visitor.html> (accessed January 25, 2009).

<sup>70</sup> Young, *The texture of memory*, 324.

Hitler's "fuhrerbunker" is only 200 meters south of the Memorial site near Vosstrasse.<sup>71</sup> With such close proximity to the very sites where Hitler and Goebbels executed their plans against the Jews, the Berlin Memorial prompts visitors to consider an interesting juxtaposition of perpetration and victimization, culpability and responsibility. Memorializing the death of the Jews at the site where their death was planned presents visitors with a deeply reflective memory experience. In contrast to the historical relevance of the site is the modernized, urban space that surrounds the Memorial. Located at the heart of Berlin, the Memorial expresses public life because it is near embassies, cultural institutions, businesses, residential areas, and the Tiergarten; since the memorial is integrated into the historic urban space as well as the government district, it uses its spatial location to build a relationship with civil society.<sup>72</sup> By placing the Memorial at the heart of every-day life, Germans demonstrate their willingness to publicly accept responsibility for the Holocaust amidst their political and business culture.

Boston and Berlin as cities allow for a parallel comparison because both cities are central representations of their nations' broader ideals: Boston for its symbolic relation to the spirit of American democracy and its importance as a crucial colonial city, and Berlin for its relation to German values as a central city for government action prior to, during, and after the Holocaust. Even though Berlin is a national capital and Boston is not, both cities play a central enough role in their countries' past history and present politics to provide a microcosmic representation within a broader, national analysis. Because neither Boston nor Berlin were cities that housed concentration camps, they are also similar because neither city was directly involved in the murder of the Jews. By first understanding the symbiotic way in which the location infuses the Memorial with meaning and the way in which the Memorial shapes the landscape, one can then look at how the architecture acts as a tool of memory creation.

Both the Boston Memorial and the Berlin Memorial use physical structures to engage visitors in the present, connect them with the historical truths of the past, and instill a memory of the Holocaust for the future. Enriched with symbolism, the New England Holocaust Memorial uses a meaningful architectural design to evoke within the visitors a sense of Holocaust remembrance. In his own words, architect Saitowitz described his vision for the memorial's reception: "I hope that visitors to the Memorial take away with them the ungraspable nature of the Holocaust, the completely overwhelming, inexplicable dimension of dimension.

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<sup>71</sup> "FAQ" from *The official pamphlet for the memorial for the murdered jews of europe*, 5.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

And coupled with that, a sense of hope that survival and the building of this memorial make possible.”<sup>73</sup> By creating a Memorial that combines distinct symbols with abstract architectural designs, Saitowitz hoped to overwhelm visitors with a sense of sadness and incomprehensibility—a moment of silence where the visitor turns to the memorial for inspiration, comfort, and understanding. One symbol used in the Memorial is the number six million; by etching six million numbers on the glass panels of the six columns, the Memorial becomes symbolically suggestive of the tattoos emblazoned upon the six million Jews who died under the Nazi regime. The names of death camps engraved at the base of each tower prompt the viewers to remember the horrors of death that befell the European Jewry.<sup>74</sup> Although the architectural design calls directly upon significant symbols of the Holocaust, the design remains subtle enough to be suggestive instead of literal and to inspire therefore, a countless number of personal interpretations, memories, and understandings.<sup>75</sup> Through architecture, design, and symbolism, the Boston Memorial becomes “a [physical] marker—a place to grieve for the victims and for the destruction of their culture—a place to give them an everlasting name.”<sup>76</sup>

In contrast to the Boston Memorial, which uses subtle symbolism in its architectural design, the Berlin Memorial does not use any suggestive symbolism to reference the Holocaust. Rather, architect Peter Eisenman preferred to leave the symbolic invocation of the Holocaust to the discretion of the viewer. When asked about the rationale of his design, Eisenman said, “the enormity and scale of the horror of the Holocaust is such that any attempt to represent it by traditional means is inevitably inadequate... Our memorial attempts to present a new idea of memory as distinct from nostalgia... We can only know the past through a manifestation of the present.”<sup>77</sup> For example, the number of 2711 stele bears no significance in relation to the number of Jewish victims; they are simply the number that mathematically fit onto the given area. With entrances on all sides of the grid-like structure, the Memorial encourages the visitor to determine his or her own way to explore the architecture, allowing for a highly personalized experience of memorialization. The absence of symbolism also grants much room for personal interpretation because there is no suggestion, even slight, for

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<sup>73</sup> Stanley Saitowitz quoted in “Memorial Designs”, <http://www.nehm.org/design/> (accessed January 21, 2009).

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> “Dedication Statement” <http://www.nehm.org/contents/dedication.html> (accessed January 21, 2009).

<sup>77</sup> Peter Eisenman, Press Conference, 1998.

how to interpret the Memorial. Some viewers interpret the stele as tombstones for the Jews who died; others interpret the Memorial as a maze intended to elicit a sense of confusion similar to the experience felt by Jews as they were deported from their homes and placed in Camps; others do not attach any Jewish symbolism to the Memorial and view it as a space for contemplation and reflection. A true counter-monument, the Berlin Monument uses its architectural structure to recognize that remembering what was lost is as important as remembering how it was lost.<sup>78</sup>

Despite slight differences in the usage of architectural symbolism, both memorials are linked by the common purpose of inviting visitors “to establish an organic relationship to a past that one can never really inhabit [...] and implicate its audience in the difficult but essential tasks of imagining an absent pain and mourning an unending loss.”<sup>79</sup> With both Memorials striving to provoke the visitor to define his or her own memory based upon his or her interaction with the architecture, both Memorials fulfill their role as counter-monuments and represent a growing trend towards abstract and interactive Holocaust memorialization in the late 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> centuries.

While the Memorials use abstract architecture to promote a variety of emotional responses and personalized memory, they also rely on passages of text to guide the viewer through the historical context and explain the universality of Holocaust remembrance. By looking at the text and historical information contained within the physical design of the Memorials, one can see how the designers of each memorial strove to create a delicate balance between singling out the Jews as the specific victims of commemoration and framing them within the broader history of the Holocaust at large. Also, each Memorial relies on text (as opposed to architecture or symbolism) to create a broader sense of tolerance inspired by reflections to the Holocaust—a sense of tolerance for others’ differences and of intolerance for genocide.

The Boston Memorial places textual references throughout the Memorial to show the visitor broader Holocaust history, to expand the scope of remembrance to include other victims, and to inspire a more complete awareness of universal suffering. At the entrance to the first tower the word “Remember” is inscribed in the pathway in English and in Hebrew; at the exit from the last tower, the word “Remember” is inscribed in English and Yiddish.<sup>80</sup> By book-ending the Memorial

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<sup>78</sup> Young, *At memory's edge*, 198.

<sup>79</sup> Langer, *Using and abusing the Holocaust*, 141.

<sup>80</sup> “Contents”, <http://www.nehm.org/contents/> (accessed January 24, 2009).

with these inscriptions in English, Hebrew, and Yiddish, the Memorial acknowledges the scope of Jewish victimization by including translations in the dominant Jewish languages. To recount the process by which the Jews were targeted under the Nazi regime, the Memorial has a black granite time line on the Fanueil Hall side entrance of the Memorial delineating the chronology from the beginning of Hitler's reign in 1933 until the end of WWII in 1945.<sup>81</sup> Focusing on the events that led to the ultimate destruction of the Holocaust, the time line provides visitors with the information needed for him or her to start understanding the gradual process of Nazi persecution that ultimately resulted in the Final Solution.

On each of the glass towers bearing the name of one of the six concentration camps is inscribed personal quotes from survivors of each death camp. The following is a quote etched on the tower of Sobibor from survivor Gerda Weissman Klein, who was rescued by a U.S. army soldier whom she later married:

ILSE, A CHILDHOOD FRIEND OF MINE,  
 Once found a raspberry in the camp  
 And carried it in her pocket all day  
 To present it to me that night on a leaf.  
 IMAGINE A WORLD in which  
 Your entire possession is one raspberry and  
 You give it to your friend.<sup>82</sup>

Every number etched in the glass represents an individual who has a personal story like the girl's experience cited above. Even though every story cannot be accounted for, the Memorial's placement of personal narratives in contrast to the six million numbers etched on the glass provides the viewer with an organic image around which he or she can form his or her memory. By giving the visitor a way to relate to the person rather than just the number, the Memorial captures the delicate "interplay of historical and personal narrative, encourage[ing] visitors to understand the history of the Shoah, while never forgetting the individual lives devastated by it."<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> "Chronology", <http://www.nehm.org/contents/chronology.html> (accessed January 24, 2009).

<sup>82</sup> "More Personal Statements: Sobibor", <http://www.nehm.org/contents/personal2.html> (accessed January 24, 2009).

<sup>83</sup> "Contents", <http://www.nehm.org/contents/> (accessed January 24, 2009).



The final forms of text included in the Memorial are factual statements inscribed into the granite walkway at various points throughout the memorial. These statements aim to encourage a universal understanding of the Holocaust experience and highlight other victim groups targeted by the Nazis, as well as moments of heroism and shame. One statement reads, “THE NAZIS ALSO TARGETED THE ROMANI PEOPLE, commonly called Gypsies, as ‘racially undesirable.’ Hundreds of thousands of them were imprisoned or murdered.”<sup>84</sup> By recognizing the victimization of the Gypsies, the Memorial, while dedicated to the victimization of the Jews, avoids a hierarchy of victimization by acknowledging other targeted groups. Other groups mentioned in the factual statements include homosexuals, Poles, Slavic peoples, and Catholic priests.<sup>85</sup> To capture a moment of heroic resistance, one statement reads, “AFTER THE GERMAN ARMY INVADED DENMARK, the Danish people mobilized to ferry 7,800 Jews to safety in neutral Sweden. At the end of the War, 99% of Denmark's Jews were still alive.”<sup>86</sup> The Memorial includes reference to survival to recognize that despite the terror and evil that prevailed throughout the Holocaust, there were moments of heroism that should not be overlooked. Finally, the Memorial includes a statement invoking a sense of guilt or shame: “BY LATE 1942, THE UNITED STATES AND ITS ALLIES were aware of the death camps, but did nothing to destroy them.”<sup>87</sup> With this statement, the Memorial makes a bold gesture to recognize that the allies were not blind to Hitler’s evils and were even at fault ignoring signs of genocide. Even though the Memorial is situated in the heart of the Freedom Trail and celebrates the role Americans played in liberating victims from the Holocaust, it also humbly recognizes, if only briefly, the imperfections of a redeemer as noble as the United States. By comparing the usage of text in the Boston Memorial to the Berlin Memorial, one can start to see similarities emerging in the Memorials’ over-arching purpose of memorialization.

Because of the architecture of the Berlin Memorial, the text for the viewer to read is contained in the Information Center, which serves as a “portal”<sup>88</sup> to the diverse sites of German Holocaust memorialization and attempts to contextualize the Memorial within a broader history while offering the visitor a sense of the universality of the Holocaust. Located underground on the south-eastern corner

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<sup>84</sup> “Factual Statements”, <http://www.nehm.org/contents/facts.html> (accessed January 24, 2009).

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

<sup>88</sup> “Information Center”, <http://www.holocaust-mahnmal.de/en/thememorial/informationcentre> (accessed January 26, 2009).

of the Field of Stele, the Information Center was designed by Dagmar von Wilcken and provides information on Holocaust victims, places of extermination, and other memorial sites.<sup>89</sup> With five different rooms containing various types of information relating to the Holocaust, the Information Center is a crucial component to the Memorial because it connects the concrete facts of the Holocaust to the abstract representation of the Memorial.<sup>90</sup> The first room is called the Room of Dimensions where there are fifteen autobiographical accounts of Jewish men and women written during their persecution by the Nazis. This personal account is supplemented by a video explaining the broader historical context of the persecution of the Jews since 1937.<sup>91</sup> In the second room, or the Room of Families, the Center tries to give the visitor a portrait of the various milieus of Jewish religion and culture before, during, and after the Nazi occupation. Focusing this discussion around the personal accounts of fifteen families, the Center strives to capture a broad exploration of Jewish culture while grounding its discussion in specific examples.<sup>92</sup> Throughout the exhibit, the Information Center tries to find the balance between the broad and specific to convey to the visitor a sense of the scope of Jewish suffering without making it seem ethereal or un-relatable.

Room three, or the Room of Names, represents the “dramaturgical climax of the exhibit” where testimonies of Jews who were persecuted or lost under the Nazi regime are read aloud in an attempt “to dissolve the incomprehensible abstract number of six million murdered Jews and to release the victims from their anonymity.”<sup>93</sup> Also in this room are the names of all known Jews who died in the Holocaust, which were placed in the care of the Memorial Foundation by the memorial Yad Vashem in Israel.<sup>94</sup> In the fourth room, or the Room of Sites, the Center tries to present the process by which the Nazis persecuted the Jews by using historical film and photo clips to highlight 200 localities where Jews were persecuted and destroyed.<sup>95</sup> In the final room, there is a database that tracks current events at historical sites and research institutions throughout Europe.

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<sup>89</sup> “Architecture and Architect”, *Official Pamphlet for the Memorial for the Murdered Jews of Europe*, 7.

<sup>90</sup> “Information Center”, <http://www.holocaust-mahnmal.de/en/thememorial/informationcentre> (accessed January 26, 2009).

<sup>91</sup> “Room of Dimensions”, <http://www.holocaust-mahnmal.de/en/thememorial/informationcentre/dimensions> (accessed January 25, 2009).

<sup>92</sup> “Room of Families,” <http://www.holocaust-mahnmal.de/en/thememorial/informationcentre/familyfates> (accessed January 26, 2009).

<sup>93</sup> “Room of Names”, <http://www.holocaust-mahnmal.de/en/thememorial/informationcentre/names> (accessed January 24, 2009).

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>95</sup> “Room of Sites”, <http://www.holocaust-mahnmal.de/en/thememorial/informationcentre/sites> (accessed January 24, 2009).

Visitors are allowed to access these databases to conduct their own research.<sup>96</sup> Once again, the visitors now have the chance to explore the broader scope of the Holocaust and further tailor their experience with the Memorial to reflect their own interests.

Perhaps one of the most important features of the “Information Centre for the Commemorated Victims and the Historical Sites of Remembrance where Atrocities were Committed” is the role it plays in situating itself with respect to the other Holocaust memorials in Berlin including The Topography of Terror, the Jewish Museum of Berlin, the House of the Wannsee Conference, and other memorials in the near vicinity.<sup>97</sup> The Berlin Memorial places itself not only in the historical context of the Holocaust at large, but also within the broader context of memorialization, thus maintaining the sites’ “own specific remit [while] not compet[ing] with the other sites of remembrance.”<sup>98</sup> The Information Center also integrates discussion about other victims of Nazi persecution to avoid creating a victim hierarchy and to recognize that the scope of victimization extends beyond the Jews. Finally, the Center provides a database where visitors can explore a chronological account on the process of memorialization from the Memorial’s inception in 1988 to its dedication in 2005. With over 500 press articles about the public debate surrounding the Memorial, the Foundations Board of Trustees “gives the visitor an insight into the seriousness and the variety of problems which had to be solved during the realization of the project.”<sup>99</sup> By placing the discussion of the process of memorialization in the Information Center, the Foundation for the Memorial recognizes that the process behind memory creation is just as important as the finished memorial itself.

In both Boston and Berlin, the Memorial uses text to provide the viewer with a richer understanding of the Holocaust as a significant historical event. Even though the specific mechanisms by which historical information is presented to the visitor differ between the Boston Memorial and the Berlin Memorial, with Boston’s text being directly incorporated into the architecture of the Memorial and Berlin’s text being contained away from the Field of Stele in the Information

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<sup>96</sup> “The Holocaust Memorial Database”, *The Official Pamphlet for the Memorial for the Murdered Jews of Europe*.

<sup>97</sup> “Resolution Passed by the German Bundestag,” June 25, 1999, <http://www.holocaust-mahnmal.de/en/thememorial/history/resolution> (accessed January 26, 2009).

<sup>98</sup> “Portal”, <http://www.holocaust-mahnmal.de/en/thememorial/informationcentre/portal> (accessed January 25, 2009).

<sup>99</sup> “The Discussion on the Memorial”, <http://www.holocaust-mahnmal.de/en/thememorial/informationcentre/discussion> (accessed January 21, 2009).

Center, the motivation behind historical contextualization and the effect it has upon the visitor remains the same. Beyond the more immediate historical context that explains the events that produced the Holocaust, the memorials also strive to situate the Holocaust within an international discourse of meaning and tolerance—a universal recognition of the atrocities of the past and a need for tolerance in the future. In the New England Holocaust Memorial, the introductory panels at the entrance of the Memorial bear the following text that reveal a message of universality:

To remember their suffering is to recognize the danger and evil that are possible whenever one group persecutes another. As you walk this Freedom Trail, pause here to reflect on the consequences of a world in which there is no freedom - a world in which basic human rights are not protected. And know that wherever prejudice, discrimination and victimization are tolerated, evil like the Holocaust can happen again.<sup>100</sup>

In Berlin, the official Resolution passed by the German Bundestag on June 25, 1999 offers a similar vision of universality with the following statement of purpose:

With the memorial we intend to honour the murdered victims, keep alive the memory of these inconceivable events in German history, and admonish all future generations never again to violate human rights, to defend the democratic constitutional state at all times, to secure equality before the law for all people and to resist all forms of dictatorship and regimes based on violence.<sup>101</sup>

Even though both Memorials acknowledge the universal applicability of Holocaust memory and tolerance, they place their statements within the framework of their own nation's history of the Holocaust, thus producing an interesting interplay between national and international memory. The Memorial in Boston invites the viewer to pause along the Freedom Trail, within the context of American democracy, and think about the universal need for protecting people against human rights violations. In Berlin, the statement from the Bundestag places German's acknowledgement for the protection of the democratic state and admonition against violent dictatorships against the backdrop of German culpability for Nazi atrocities. Even though the historical discourse for each nation remains strikingly different, their need for memory

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<sup>100</sup> "Dedication Statement: October 22, 1995," <http://www.nehm.org/contents/dedication.html> (accessed January 24, 2009).

<sup>101</sup> "Resolution passed by the German Bundestag".

reflects an inherent similarity that transcends past differences of politics and instead recognizes present similarities of humanness.

#### Conclusion: The Formation of Collective Memory from Boston to Berlin

The crucial issue in the history of memory is not how a past is represented but why it was received or rejected. For every society sets up images of the past. Yet to make a difference in society, it is not enough for a certain past to be selected. It must steer emotions, motivate people to act, be received; in short, it must become a socio-cultural mode of action.<sup>102</sup>

Alan Confino

As the ramifications of the Holocaust have reverberated internationally to create an increased awareness against the atrocities of genocide, the process of memorializing the Holocaust has become an international phenomenon. In the late twentieth century as the number of living Holocaust survivors gets smaller and smaller, the responsibility for preserving the past becomes increasingly bestowed upon the hands of the present. Holocaust Memorials become “collective frameworks used by the collective memory to reconstruct an image of the past which is in accord with the predominant thoughts of the society.”<sup>103</sup> The Memorials in Boston and Berlin are the lenses of the present through which two nations view the past and allow for the formation of a collective memory that crosses national and international boundaries.

Through the dynamic process of memory creation, two counter monuments in contrasting cities of liberation and perpetration embraced similar techniques to situate the Holocaust within the discourse of the present and create a symbol from which future memory will emanate. In America, the Holocaust became an issue of remembrance for the entire American nation rather than just for the American Jews. In addition to commemorating the loss of European Jewry, American Holocaust memorials became a ‘moral compass’ for the nation<sup>104</sup> as Americans rallied behind the opportunity to decry Hitler’s genocide and to support the democratic tolerance that founded their nation. The construction of the New England Holocaust Memorial cannot be separated from this historical context; the six glass pillars themselves will remind us of the decades of stories, experiences, and ultimately memories of a nation and a people that allowed for such a public statement of collective memory to be made. The Memorial for the

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<sup>102</sup> Dan Stone, “Memory, Memorials, and Museums”, In *The historiography of the Holocaust*, Ed. Dan Stone (Houndmills [England]: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004).

<sup>103</sup> Maurice Halbwachs, *The collective memory* (New York: Harper & Row, 1980), 50.

<sup>104</sup> Peter Novick, *The Holocaust in American life* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1999), 234.

Murdered Jews of Europe was a hallmark achievement in light of Germany's post war historiography because it represents both the German willingness to accept responsibility for the perpetration of the Holocaust as well as the public recognition of the victimization of European Jewry. The field of stone has become an important international symbol for Germany because it was the first national effort to recognize the systematic murder of European Jewry. Both the Boston and Berlin Memorials fulfill their role as counter monuments by representing the dynamic process of political and social memory creation that underlies the static façade of the finished structure.

Since the Boston and Berlin Memorials are rooted in the politics and culture of the present, the remembrance of the Holocaust becomes a negotiation between the historical records of the past and the political agenda of the present.<sup>105</sup> The creation of a collective memory is a constant interplay between the past and the present, the state and the people, and the community and the individual. The presence of the Boston and Berlin Memorials prompts individuals to cultivate their own Holocaust memories; as enough people visit the Memorials and become aware of the past, the scope of memory creation expands to include more and more people until their combined memories form a collective memory. The tenets of memory differ from person to person, but the source of inspiration remains the same. In a way, the Memorials become the arbiter between the past and the future—a structure in present that simultaneously embodies the historical truth and perpetuates its commemoration in the future.

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<sup>105</sup> Iwona Irwin-Zarecka, *Frames of remembrance: the dynamics of collective memory* (New Brunswick [N.J.]: Transaction Publishers, 1994), 18. See also Oren Baruch Stier, *Committed to memory: cultural mediations of the Holocaust* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press), 11.