

Holocaust Museums: Three Continents, Three Generations

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Course Number: 8036 B01

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Course Description

Holocaust museums have become one of the most popular mediums of Holocaust commemoration over the past years. This course will explore the history, exhibitions, and design of various Holocaust museums around the world, and study their social, cultural and political agendas. This examination will reveal their role and responsibility in Holocaust commemoration.

Required Reading:

In each subject in the moodle site there are 2-3 articles that you are required to read before we begin discussion on it. These articles are marked with *** and will be at the head of the list.

Course Requirements

- Class participation: 80% attendance at least.
- Reading assignments according to the schedule.
- 10-15 minute oral presentations following an independent visit to a Holocaust/history/Jewish museum in groups of 2-3 students. The list of museums and instructions of preparation will be presented within the first few weeks of the course.
- Referat: Visit an additional museum (this time on your own) and write an essay comparing the two museums you visited.
- Seminar essay: The subject of your essay is open, but related of course to Holocaust museums and to the theories discussed in class. You must submit a short proposal (max. 1 page) for my approval for the subject you chose by the end of the semester.

Final Grade

- Attendance and participation – 20%
- Oral presentation – 20%
- Seminar essay/referat – 60%

Course Outline and Reading List

I

History of museums

We will begin the course by briefly reviewing the long and complex history of museums: from temples of muses in the ancient world to the diverse cultural institutions they are today. This will serve as a basis to understand Holocaust museums in a broad cultural, historical, social and political context.

Required reading:

- Schubert, Karsten, *The Curator's Egg - The Evolution of the Museum Concept from the French Revolution to the Present Day* (London: One-Off Press, Christie's Books, 2000), 7-61.

II

Narrative Museums

What are story-based museums? How do they differ from object-based museums? We will look at the development of "narrative museums", in which the story rather than the artifacts is the core of the museum. Case studies will include *Beit Hatefutsoth* (Diaspora Museum) and the *Los Angeles Museum of Tolerance*.

Required reading:

- Bedford, L. "Storytelling: The Real Work of Museums", *Curator: The Museum Journal*, 2001, 44 (1), 27-34.
- Marcuse, Harold, "Experiencing the Jewish Holocaust in Los Angeles: The *Beit Hashoah* Museum of Tolerance", *Other Voices*, 2 (1), 2000, 2-15. <http://www.othervoices.org/2.1/marcuse/tolerance.php>
- Stier, O.B. "Virtual Memories: Mediating the Holocaust at the Simon Wiesenthal Center's Beit Hashoah – Museum of Tolerance", *Journal of American Academy of Religion*, 64 (4), 1996, 831-851.

III

Holocaust Museums, Collective Memory and National Identity

Museums are tools of memory construction. What is collective memory? How is it constructed and to what aim? We will read some of the fundamental texts written and discuss them in relation to Holocaust museums.

Required reading:

- Halbwachs, M. *On Collective Memory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992 [1925]). Preface pp. 37-40; Chapter 3, pp. 46-51.
- Nora, P. "Between Memory and History: *Les Lieux de Mémoire*", *Representations*, 26, 1989, 7-24.
- Macdonald, S. "Museums, National, Postnational and Transcultural Identities", *Museum and Society*, 1 (1), 2003, 1-16.

IV

Holocaust Museums in Israel

Yad Vashem.

The foundation of Yad Vashem, the first national Holocaust museum, from its inception in 1942 until its most recent developments today: the deliberations before its establishment, the choice of site, its architecture, and its changing exhibitions.

Beit Lochamei HaGetaot – The Ghetto Fighters House.

Although GFH was the first “Holocaust Museum” ever, its mission and goals were clear from the start - commemorating the heroism of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising. We will learn the fascinating story of a small group of Holocaust survivors who even before building their own homes founded a museum to memorialize their comrades.

Additional Israeli Holocaust Museums.

Aside from Yad Vashem and GFH additional Holocaust museums have been founded in Israel over the past decades. What stories do they tell? Who do they represent? Case studies will include Yad Mordechai, Massuah, the Chamber of the Holocaust on Mt. Zion, and others.

Required reading:

- Rotem, S. *Constructing Memory. Architectural Narratives of Holocaust Museums* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2013), 31-78.
- Brog, M. “Victims and Victors: Holocaust and Military Commemoration in Israel Collective Memory”, *Israel Studies*, 8 (3), 2003, 65-99.
- Yad Vashem Law (on moodle)

V

American Holocaust Museums.

The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum opened to the public in 1993. Its tremendous popularity and success became the prototype of all subsequent Holocaust museums around the world. We will discuss both the museum itself, and its influence not only on Holocaust museums but on all history museums, particularly those that exhibit tragic events.

Subsequently, dozens of Holocaust museums were built in the US, ranging from large prominent institutions to small, private displays. What purpose/audience do they serve? Who do they cater to? Are these museums “Jewish” or “American”?

Required reading:

- Linenthal, E. T. “The Boundaries of Memory: The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum”, *American Quarterly*, 46 (3), 1994, 406-433.
- *Report of the President’s Commission on the Holocaust*, September 27, 1979.

<http://www.ushmm.org/research/library/faq/languages/en/06/01/commission/#functioning>

- Rotem, Stephanie S. “Jewish Empowerment or Universal Values – New Directions for American Holocaust Museums”, *Dapim Journal: Studies on the Holocaust*, 27, 2013, 129-153.

VI

Berlin: Museum and Monument.

The first “Holocaust Museum” in Europe is actually defined as a “Jewish Museum”. We will follow the tortuous path that led to its transformation from a planned annex of the museum of Berlin's history to an independent museum that has become the leading European institution of Jewish memory. JMB will also serve to demonstrate the increasingly central role of the museum's architecture to its success and its role in conveying values and messages.

Required reading:

- Young, J. “Daniel Libeskind’s Jewish Museum in Berlin”, *At Memory’s Edge. After-Images of the Holocaust in Contemporary Art* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000, 132-183.

OR

- Young, J. “Daniel Libeskind's Jewish Museum in Berlin: The Uncanny Arts of Memorial Architecture”, *Jewish Social Studies*, 6 (2), 2000, 1-23.

AND

- Mügge, M. “Politics, Space and Material: The ‘Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe’ in Berlin as a Sign of Symbolic Representation”, *European Review of History*, 15 (6), 2008, 707-725.
- Huyssen, A. “The Voids of Berlin”, *Critical Inquiry*, 24 (1), 1997, 57-81.

VII

European Holocaust Museums.

Following the decline of the Communist regimes in East Europe, Holocaust memory and commemoration began to remerge. This process has been accompanied by the establishment of museums, beginning with a national museum in Budapest and followed by others, including “Menorah Center” in Dnepropetrovsk, and the Jewish Museum and Tolerance Center in Moscow.

Required reading:

- Blutinger, J. “An Inconvenient Past: Post-Communist Holocaust Memorialization”, *Shofar*, 29 (1), 2010, 73-94.
- Miles, W. F. S. “Post-communist Holocaust Commemoration in Poland and Germany”, *The Journal of Holocaust Education*, 9 (1), 2000, 33-50.

VIII

The Future of Holocaust Museums

We will conclude with debate and speculation over the future of Holocaust museums. What will be their role in Holocaust commemoration? Will they narrate universal or particular stories? What messages will they deliver?

Required reading:

- Reading, A. “Digital Interactivity in Public Memory Institutions: The Uses of New Technologies in Holocaust Museums”, *Media Culture & Society*, 25, 2003, 67-85.
- Wollaston, I. “Negotiating the Marketplace: The Role(s) of Holocaust Museums Today”, *Journal of Modern Jewish Studies*, 4 (1), 2005, 63-80.
- Levy, D. and N. Sznajder. “Memory Unbound. The Holocaust and the Formation of Cosmopolitan Memory”, *European Journal of Social Theory*, 5(1), 2002, 87–106.