

Holocaust Museums: Three Continents, Three Generations

Dr. Stephanie Shosh Rotem

Course Number:

Office Hours: by appointment

Semester: Spring 2015

Location:

Class Time: Sunday, 12:00-15:00

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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.

Throughout the semester we will host museum practitioners from around the world who will present their work and point of view, and lead discussions concerning the most pressing issues and dilemmas of Holocaust commemoration in museums.

Course Requirements

- Class participation: 80% attendance at least.
- Reading assignments according to the schedule that will be posted on the course's website.
- Independently visit a Holocaust museum (coordinated in advance) and fill out a questionnaire.
- Seminar essay: The subject of your essay must be approved by the end of the semester. The essay will be 15-20 pages in length (double spaced, font 12) and adhere to accepted academic standards

or

- "referat": a short essay of 8-10 pages that reflects on your museum visit/s – specific instructions will be discussed in class.

Final Grade

- Attendance and participation – 20%
- Museum visit questionnaire – 20%
- Seminar essay or "referat" – 60%

Course Outline

- **What are museums and why have they become so central to Holocaust commemoration?**

We will briefly review the history of museums in general; changing definitions of the museum, exhibition architecture and design, museum, museums in the 20th century.

Reading:

Alexander, Edward P. *Museums in Motion* (Nashville: The American Association for State and Local History, 1979), pp. 5-15; 79-95.

Rotem, Stephanie S. "The Holocaust Taught and Commemorated in Museums", *World War II and the Holocaust in History and Memory*. Edited by Nancy Rupprecht (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Press, 2013), pp. 306-328.

- **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 *Beth Hatefutsoth* (Diaspora Museum); *Beit HaPalmach*, and others.

Reading:

Ben-Amos, Avner. "The Palmach Museum in Tel Aviv: History between Fact and Fiction", *AJS Perspectives: The Magazine of the Association for Jewish Studies*, 2010,

<http://www.bjpa.org/Publications/downloadFile.cfm?FileID=5482>

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>

- **Museums in Israel**

A presentation of the foundation of both Yad Vashem and the Ghetto Fighters House, from their inception until their most recent developments: the deliberations before their establishment, their choice of site, architecture, and changing exhibitions. In addition to these two prominent museums we will discuss lesser known museums, such as Yad Mordechai, Martef HaShoah, and Massuah.

Reading:

Harel, Dorit. *Facts and Feelings. Dilemmas in Designing the Yad Vashem Holocaust History Museum* (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 2010).

Porat, Dina. "The Holocaust and Jewish History: A Poem in Stone", *The Fall of a Sparrow: The Life and Times of Abba Kovner*, translated by Elizabeth Yuval (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010), pp. 271-294

Stauber, Roni. *The Holocaust in Israeli Public Debate in the 1950s: Ideology and Memory* (London: Vallentine Mitchell, 2007).

Young, James Edward. "Kibbutz Lohamei Hagetaot", *The Texture of Memory: Holocaust Memorials and Meaning* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), pp. 237-241.

- **The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum and subsequent American museums.**

This 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. Regarding American Holocaust museums in general, we will question: What purpose/audience do they serve? Who do they cater to? Are these museums "Jewish" or "American"?

Reading:

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>

Linenthal, Edward T. *Preserving the Memory. The Struggle to Create America's Holocaust Museum* (New York: Viking Press), 1996.

Saidel, Rochelle. *Never Too Late to Remember: The Politics behind New York City's Holocaust Museum* (New York: Holmes & Meier), 1996.

Shandler, Jeffery. "Museum of Jewish Heritage – Memorial to the Holocaust", *Public Historian*, 21 (1), 1999, pp. 73-86.

- **The Jewish Museum Berlin; Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe**

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.

Following the JMB, Berlin has developed numerous memorial sites and museums. We briefly review some of these, and focus on the prominent Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe.

Reading:

Young, James. "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), pp. 132-183.

- **Post-Communist Holocaust museums.**

Following the decline of the Communist regimes in East Europe, Holocaust memory and commemoration began to reemerge. 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.

Reading:

Ostow, Robin. "Remusealizing Jewish History in Warsaw", *(Re)Visualizing National History. Museums and National Identities in Europe in the New Millennium*, edited by Robin Ostow (Toronto, Buffalo & London: University of Toronto Press), 2008, pp. 157-180.

- **The politicization of Holocaust museums.**

Following our exploration of museums from around the world and over three generations, we will be able to discuss and compare their social, cultural, and political messages. What is the ideology of their founders? How are values conveyed in the museums' contents and design?

Reading:

Chizuko, U., "The Politics of Memory: Nation, Individual and Self", *History and Memory*, 11 (2), 1999, pp. 129-141.

Cole, Tim. "Nativization and Nationalization: A Comparative Landscape Study of Holocaust Museums in Israel, the US and the UK", *The Journal of Israeli History*, 23 (1), 2004, pp. 30-145.

Rév, István. "The Terror of the House", *(Re)Visualizing National History. Museums and National Identities in Europe in the New Millennium*, edited by Robin Ostow (Toronto: Toronto, Buffalo & London: University of Toronto Press, 2008), pp. 47-89

- **What is 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?

Reading:

Cole, Tim. *Selling the Holocaust. From Auschwitz to Schindler: How History is Bought, Packaged and Sold* (New York: Routledge), 2000.

Reading, A., "Digital Interactivity in Public Memory Institutions: The Uses of New Technologies in Holocaust Museums", *Media Culture & Society*, 25, 2003, pp. 67-85.

Wollaston, I., "Negotiating the Marketplace: The Role(s) of Holocaust Museums Today", *Journal of Modern Jewish Studies*, 4 (1), 2005, pp. 63-80.

* General Required Reading:

Halbwachs, Maurice. "Introduction", in *On Collective Memory*, translated by Lewis A. Coser (Chicago: University of Chicago Press), 1992.

Nora, Pierre. "Between Memory and History: *Les lieux de mémoire*", *Representations*, 26, 1989, pp. 7-24.

Rotem, Stephanie S. *Constructing Memory. Architectural Narratives of Holocaust Museums* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2013).

Young, James Edward. *The Texture of Memory: Holocaust Memorials and Meaning* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993).

An extensive bibliography will be posted on the course's website.