

“The Bitter Truth Must Be Spoken”

Holocaust Memory and Memorialization in Germany

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So this story will not finish with some tomb to be visited in pious memory. For the smoke that rises from crematoria obeys physical laws like any other: the particles come together and disperse according to the wind, which propels them. The only pilgrimage, dear reader, would be to look sadly at a stormy sky now and then.

--Andre Schwarz-Bart

In the aftermath of World War Two, the world was faced with a haunting reality, a reality so devastating and unimaginable that few were able to comprehend its extent or face its horror. For the survivors, however, the truth and memory of what they had experienced was not something that could be escaped or forgotten. Under the cover of war, Hitler and his leaders in the National Socialist Party conceived a plan to achieve world domination not only through the destruction of their enemies, by military force, but through the creation of a “master” Aryan race. In the mind of Hitler, the latter could only be achieved by purging Europe of all Jews, gypsies, homosexuals, those with mental handicaps, and other peoples deemed to be undesirable. These thoughts, which ultimately led to the calculated mass extermination or “evacuation” of more than ten million people, is known today as the Holocaust. In order to carry out this process, Hitler assigned many of his top men, including Heinrich Himmler, Reichsführer of the SS and head of the Gestapo, and Reinhard Heydrich, Deputy Reich-Protector of Bohemia and Moravia and head of the Reich Main Security Office, to implement efficient and effective measures for what would ultimately become widespread genocide. These measures included the creation of concentration and extermination camps all over central and Eastern Europe and perfected measures of transport, exploitation, and murder. In addition, the Nazis were very precise in the

ways in which they documented their crimes and kept detailed records of each of their prisoners. These perpetrators took great care to preserve records of their acts so that after they had won the war, they would be able to demonstrate the extent of their power and dedication to their cause. It was only when it was clear that they had lost the war that the SS made every effort to erase their actions. Only then did they no longer wish for the memory of their crimes to remain. For the Nazis, the Holocaust was no longer a period of time to be proud of, but one to deny and forget.

As the atrocities that the Nazis committed became clear, many realized that steps towards memorialization had to be taken so that future generations could never forget the pain and suffering that took place all across Europe and to honor those who lived and died courageously at the hands of these criminals. The memorialization of any such atrocity, however, is not a simple task of creating monuments and plaques and placing them in locations of significance; rather, it is a process of conveying a history, stating facts, and preserving the memory of what has passed. During this process, great care must be taken to present information sensitively and appropriately while not glossing over the true nature of what was done. While there are memorials and museums dedicated to the memory of the Holocaust all over the world, those that are located within Germany and other territories occupied by the Nazis are faced with a much more complicated and sensitive situation. These are the places where the crimes of the Holocaust were committed, a fact which adds a new dimension of understanding and emotion to the study and memory of the subject. These sites have served a variety of purposes: political, educational, and commemorative¹

¹ Schulze, Rainer. "Documentation or Edutainment?" *The Holocaust in History and Memory* 1 (2008): 10-12. Print.

During my summer of study, I examined the ways in which Germans have chosen to memorialize the Holocaust and their subsequent methods and practices of education. I looked not only at current efforts, but also the way in which memorialization has developed over the past 65 years in both East and West Germany. In addition, I traveled to Oswiecim, Poland, to visit the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum, which also houses The International Center for Education about Auschwitz and the Holocaust. My intent was to form a base of comparison and to explore the methods of education and memorialization that the center has employed to inform people all over the world about the atrocities that occurred in this tiny Polish village and throughout Europe. In order to understand how the memorialization process of the Holocaust has evolved, however, one must first look at the factors and concerns that are a part of the creation of such memorials or museums.

Unlike typical historical museums, when broaching the subject of the Holocaust, museums must be sure to handle all documents, testimonies, artifacts, and information with the utmost sensitivity. It is not a period in history that can by any stretch up the imagination be made glamorous or exciting, like other darker times in history can be made to seem. Unlike the Crusades or even the American Civil War, there is simply nothing glorious about it. How then do these museums create an atmosphere where people can feel comfortable enough to come and learn without being unduly overwhelmed with the reality of the horror that took place? Although many of the visitors to these sites and museum are aware of what they will experience and have specific reasons for visiting, many simply go at the suggestion of a friend or because they read about it in a guidebook. People are drawn to these museums for a variety of reasons, but

ultimately each site must address the facts without sensationalizing them simply to draw visitors.²

Furthermore, in 1998, the British Museums Association chose to define the purpose and responsibility of a museum as an institution that should “enable people to explore collections for inspiration, learning and enjoyment. They are institutions that collect, safeguard and make accessible artifacts and specimens, which they hold in trust for society.”³ With this being said, it becomes clear that museums dedicated to the Holocaust are of the utmost importance when in regard to the preservation of memory and the pursuit of memorialization. While the sites themselves provide a powerful memorial to those who suffered at the hands of the Nazis and leave a permanent scar on the landscape of Europe, museums and documentation centers allow visitors to take a step back and process the facts without being overwhelmed by the reality of what took place on the ground that they stand on.

Many such memorials and museums, however, face the challenge of finding artifacts, original documents, and other information from the site being memorialized.⁴ Much of this material was either destroyed by the Nazis or discarded after the war. Furthermore, in the beginning stages of memorialization, large portions of the sites were destroyed in an effort to erase the memory of such devastation from the landscape. The absence of original buildings and structures on these sites also alters the tone and atmosphere of the memorial. These changes, however, demonstrate the evolution of the Holocaust memorialization process and document the sentiment of the time.

² Schulze, 15-17.

³ Schulze, 12.

⁴ Wiedemann, Wilfried.. “‘Earth Conceal Not The Blood Shed on Thee’: The New Documentation and Information Center at Bergen-Belsen” *The Holocaust in History and Memory* 1 (2008): 43. Print.

The memory of the Holocaust is one that many people have tried to avoid or even cover up, and for decades much of Europe succeeded in doing just that. Immediately following World War Two Germany was divided into two sections, East and West. While in West Germany the western Allied powers began their fight against communism and their work towards building a new Germany, the Soviets approached matters very differently. Their goal can be summed up in one phrase that was repeated in museums over and over throughout my studies this summer: “Fascism, never again!” The Soviets adopted a policy of isolationism that allowed them to manipulate the memory of the war into a political platform against fascism. The communist victory over fascism, as it would come to be remembered in East Germany, was a memory that would not soon be erased. The leaders of the newly constructed German Democratic Republic ensured that “as much of the debris of Germany’s destruction as possible would remain visible for decades to come.”⁵ This was to remain not only as a reminder of the communist victory, but also to memorialize the retaliation, resistance, and courage of those persecuted by the Nazis. The sites of former concentration camps in the east became centers of persecution for Nazis and other sympathizers, soldiers, civilians, and politicians alike. The tables had been turned and the tradition of hatred continued. In the west, however, camps were converted into internment sites for those SS officers convicted of war crimes, housed trials, became aid stations, and ultimately served as refugee camps for the millions of displaced persons throughout Europe.⁶ It would not be until much later that the secrets, memory, and history that these sites held would be fully revealed and memorialized.

⁵ Young, James E. "The Sites of Destruction." *The Texture of Memory*. New Haven and London: Yale UP, 1993. 72. Print.

⁶ Young, 61.

In order to understand the full history of the memorialization of the Holocaust in Germany, it was important for me to travel to former camp sites, memorials, and museums in both former East and West Germany. These sites included: Sachsenhausen, Ravensbrück, and Buchenwald in the former East Germany and Bergen-Belsen, Neuengamme, and Dachau in the former western half. While each memorial site and museum is unique, in its own right, the characteristics that developed based on their geographic location after the war can still be seen today.

My research first took me to Germany's capital city, Berlin, a booming metropolis steeped in rich culture and history. When planning my trip, many people often asked, "Why start in Berlin? There couldn't have been any camps near there, could there?" A common misconception regarding the Holocaust is that concentration camps were hidden out of sight and mind, and were always situated in remote areas. More often than not, however, these camps were positioned near large railway junctions or in areas desperately in need of labor for agricultural and factory production. Two of the largest concentration camps near Berlin, Sachsenhausen and Ravensbrück, are located roughly one and two hours, respectively, outside of Germany's capital city. Each was easily accessible by train and situated within sight of a small town.

Ravensbrück concentration camp for women was opened on 15 May 1939 and is widely known for housing some of Germany's most famous prisoners, known to SS guards of the camp as a "special prisoner." While Ravensbrück was designed as a women's camp, a men's and children's camp were also located on site, although little to no contact took place between the divisions of the camp. After it was liberated by the Red Army, the Soviets, along with liberated prisoners, began work to amass evidence of the crimes that were committed at the Ravensbrück camp. Detailed documentation was compiled and parts of the camp, including the cell building

where many of these “special prisoners” were imprisoned, were restored based on the testimony of former prisoners. Although the jail bunker was most likely used by the Soviets to house German and Soviet prisoners, on 27 November 1956, the Commander-in-Chief of the Soviet Army in Germany ordered the bunker to be cleared so work could begin on a museum.⁷ The slogan agreed upon by former prisoners was, “War—Never Again! Fascism—Never Again!”⁸ In line with the desire of the GDR to promote the spread of communism and stamp out the presence of fascism, the government’s Ministry for Culture chose to focus the museum’s exhibits on not only the history of the site, but also on the “anti-fascist struggle” of women from all parts of the world. When the museum was opened on 12 September 1959, sections of the detention block were reconstructed and a history was provided. It was not until the mid-1980’s that the museum was re-designed.⁹ To this day, artwork, artifacts, keepsakes of prisoners, official SS documents, and photographs can be found within the exhibits. In addition to the museum exhibits, the bunker houses many memorial rooms dedicated to the memory of prisoners of various countries throughout Europe. Each country or organization that sponsors a room is able to design its contents to its own specifications. While some of these rooms provide a simple memorial to those who died at Ravensbrück and display the names, photographs, and some personal effects of former prisoners, others are more elaborate and even project a strong political tone that is often seen to overshadow their main purpose of memorialization. Most importantly, however, “the national memorial rooms at Ravensbrück provide us with...an opportunity for reflection.”¹⁰

⁷ Bessmann, Alyn. "The Camp Prison at The Ravensbruck Women's Concentration Camp." *Ravensbruck. The Cell Building. History and Commemoration*. Berlin: Metropol, 2008. 45-47. Print.

⁸ Bessmann, 49.

⁹ Bessmann, 49.

¹⁰ Eschebach, Insa. "Preface." *Ravensbruck. The Cell Building. History and Commemoration*. Berlin: Metropol, 2008. 11. Print.

In addition to the memorial rooms and museum, parts of the camp still stand in testimony to the atrocities that occurred there. Visitors today are equipped with a map and handout to guide them through the site. Although the camp barracks have long since been demolished, the crematorium, warehouses, and SS barracks still stand. Situated alongside the lake are several memorials to those who were imprisoned and died at Ravensbrück. In front of a statue of a mother and child, roses are scattered across the steps that lead down to the water. One cannot help but think of all those who remember loved ones lost as they stand looking out over the water, the waves of memory rushing over them. It is there, standing on the lakeside that one realizes that memorialization is not only about buildings, exhibits, or memorials, but also about the simple act of remembering, of a conscious and deliberate memory of times past.

Sachsenhausen was built in 1936 outside of the Reich capital as a model for subsequent camps. Created immediately following Reichsführer-SS Heinrich Himmler's appointment to the position of Chief of German Police, Sachsenhausen was used to house thousands of political prisoners and other enemies of the state. Between 1936 and 1945, the camp expanded to include prisoners from all over Europe, including Jews, homosexuals, and other groups, and became a center for medical experiments conducted by doctors of the Nazi regime. The camp was evacuated by the SS guards in light of the imminent Soviet advance in late April 1945. The prisoners and staff that remained in the camp, roughly 3,000 sick and dying prisoners, doctors, and nurses were liberated by the Soviet Army in conjunction with Polish soldiers soon after. In August 1945, the camp was turned into what was known as Soviet Special Camp Number 7, and was changed in the summer of 1948 to Camp Number 1. It was in this camp, situated just outside of the former camp wall, that more than 60,000 people were held and no fewer than 12,000 died due to malnourishment, mistreatment, and disease. In short, the Soviets continued the pattern of

aggression and oppression begun by the Nazis. Most of the prisoners held in the Special Camp were former Nazi functionaries and were not high-ranking officials or military leaders. Arrests were often made and trials conducted with little or no evidence or proof of crime.¹¹

This was the way in which the Soviets chose to memorialize the history of the site, by continuing the brutality conducted by the SS between 1936 and 1945. While the Special Camp was finally closed in 1950, not all prisoners were set free. Many were sent to prisons in East Germany. Moreover, former Soviet prisoners of war who awaited a repatriation that more than likely would never come were sent to camps in the USSR. Today, the atmosphere of the memorial and museums are haunted by the history of the not only the Nazi crimes, but those of the Soviets as well. In an effort to erase the memory of the crimes of the NSDAP, the Soviets made every effort to destroy what was left of the camp, including the crematoriums and killing chambers. Although these structures were mostly destroyed by heavy explosives, the rubble of the area still remains and has been preserved protected from the elements by a protective ceiling and floor. The official Sachsenhausen national memorial was not opened until 1961, due to continued military use. The memorial was limited, including only a “museum of the resistance fighters and the suffering of Jewish citizens.” The memory of all other prisoners was largely excluded from the camp memorial, and only two barracks were reconstructed for display. Additionally, the landscape and design of the camp was changed, and only a small portion of the former camp grounds were included in the memorial site. The GDR’s memorialization under the direction of the Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands was extremely one-sided and carried a heavy political message. According to architects Ludwig Deiters, Horst Kutzat, and Kurt Tausendschön, who helped develop the memorial site, "to entirely overcome the SS regime ... it

¹¹ York, Nancy. Research Notes. June 2010.

is necessary to clear away the remains and to undertake a systematic redesigning of the memorial sites on Germany territory." This not only changed the appearance of this camp, but in essence began to change the memory and history of the site itself.¹²

In response to concerns about how the site was interpreted, the memorial underwent a major redesign and renovation in 1993 after the fall of the Berlin Wall and the union of East and West Germany. The goal of the new memorial and museum is to accurately represent the history of the events that took place on the site and to carve Sachsenhausen into the memory of the Holocaust. The memorial is now controlled by the Brandenburg Memorials Foundation, which is a public trust funded by both the Federal Republic of Germany and the state of Brandenburg. Additionally, however, the redesign of the memorial included the memorialization of the history of the site in the post-war years, while under Soviet control. Above all, the directors of the site wish to accurately represent the history of the site and further the memory and memorialization of the Holocaust in Germany.

Also under the control of the Soviets, in the aftermath of the war, was Buchenwald, located just north of the town of Weimar. Although the camp was liberated by the Western Allied forces in 1945, this memorial site more than any other was created to honor the resistance and sacrifice of the socialist movement during the war and specifically at Buchenwald, and to solidify the legitimacy of the newly founded GDR. According to James Young,

From its inception, therefore, the state museum and memorial at Buchenwald were not intended to mark the loss of life so much as to illustrate the glories of resistance—and celebrate the socialist victory over fascism. As a result, the Buchenwald National Memorial, the most gargantuan complex of memorial sculpture and edifices located at any of the German camps, is striking for its largely triumphal scenes of uprising and self-liberation. In the sheer size of the sculpture and by virtue of the spectacular landscape, the

¹² York, Nancy. Research Notes, June 2010.

state hoped to monumentalize beyond question its own reason for being, to create a site that would remember definitively the state's own birth.¹³

At Buchenwald, I met with volunteer and history student Sandra Greuel, who spent the day with me walking around the expansive site, answering questions and explaining the history and significance of the site and its memorialization. Sandra emphasized the site's commitment to telling the history of the events that happened there and additionally to memorialize the people who were imprisoned at Buchenwald. She confirmed that with all of the former GDR memorials, a great emphasis was put on the socialist and communist resistance that occurred in the camp, often at the expense of the stories of the many other prisoner groups. The first memorial erected at the Buchenwald site was dedicated only ten days after the camp was liberated by General George S. Patton's Fourth Armored Division, and the service was conducted by members of the communist resistance fighters that had largely controlled the prisoner politics and leadership of the camp throughout the war.¹⁴ For the first three years that the camp was occupied by American soldiers, "memorial tours" were conducted through the camp grounds and citizens of Weimar were forced to visit the camp in order to "view the wretched conditions, to hear descriptions of their crimes, and often to bury victims of their Reich—all of which forcibly created German memory of the victims."¹⁵ Thereafter, the former camp site was handed over to the Soviets, where it once again was used for the purpose of housing special camps.

It was not until September of 1958 that the Buchenwald National Memorial was opened. Most prominent in the memorial is the presence of a great wall, surmounted by Romanesque stone torches, that leads between two great burial grounds that have been stylized in a way that gives the perception of artwork. Even today, to the visitor, the presence of such burial sites is

¹³ Young, 77.

¹⁴ Greuel, Sandra. "Buchenwald." Personal interview. 26 June 2010.

¹⁵ Young, 75.

almost unnerving and is in no way discrete. As Sandra and I made our way around the wall, she warned me about the final section of the memorial monument that overlooks the magnificent Ettersberg Valley. As we rounded the corner and began to walk up the steps, I was bombarded with a view of a massive 160-foot-tall bell tower and statuary entitled *Revolt of the Prisoners*. All of the figures, with the exception of one on bended knee, stands erect and seem to call out to those looking on to follow their lead. It is a moving sentiment, but one that does not accurately represent the history of the camp. Once again, the message is one sided. The bell tower, which rings out across the valley on days of remembrance, seems to cry out to those who remember and tells the story of liberty and victory over fascism.¹⁶

The 1980's, however, brought about a new sense of obligation to tell the true story of Buchenwald, and many of the methods and design aspects of the memorial were called into question. With the fall of the GDR in 1989, and beginning in 1990, the site began to undergo a redevelopment fueled by plans to redefine and expand the memorial site with these changes in mind:

Both the Nazi concentration camp and Soviet Special Camp No. 2 are to be commemorated; the concentration camp is to be the primary focus; The commemoration of Special Camp No. 2 is to be subordinate; The commemoration of sites are to be separated spatially; The permanent exhibition, strongly influenced by the partiality of GDR historiography, must be newly conceived and designed on the basis of the present state of research; further elucidation and long-term research work is required for the planning of a memorial to Special Camp No. 2, as well as for an exhibition on and documentation of that camp; The commission recommends the illumination of the political background and history of the National Buchenwald Memorial of 1950-1990, its conception by the GDR its exploitation for the purposes of state propaganda and its political instrumentalisation in a larger context.¹⁷

Ultimately, today the Buchenwald memorial site is one that works to convey the facts and history of the camp without adding interpretation to the exhibits, monuments, and site itself. In addition, the creation of the International Young People's Center located on the site itself allows students

¹⁶ Greuel, Sandra. "Buchenwald." Personal interview. 26 June 2010.

¹⁷ "The History of Buchenwald Memorial." *Buchenwald Memorial*. The Buchenwald and Mittelbau-Dora Memorials Foundation. Web. 03 Sept. 2010. <http://www.buchenwald.de/index_en.html>.

from all over the world to come and see, understand, reflect, and communicate about the factors that are involved in commemoration of the Holocaust and to “learn by researching rather than sermonizing.”¹⁸ In 1999 and again in 2007, former SS quarters were renovated to create a facility that would allow for such study to take place. A youth hostel is also located within this area. Programs for teenagers, students, and adults are offered that emphasize the study of not only historical memory but additionally the aspects of work that go into the memory and memorialization of such a site.¹⁹

During my research, as I began to look at camps that fell in West Germany after the war, I noticed that although there were some major differences in the memorialization process, a consistent purpose emerged: destroy, cover up, forget. Bergen-Belsen, a camp near Celle, a town roughly two hours from Hamburg, is one that served a special purpose during the war. Constructed first as prison camp for captured Soviet soldiers, the concentration camp became known as an exchange camp, one that would hand over prisoners at a price agreeable to the Nazis. It is because of this that many people consider the conditions of the camp to have been less harsh and the chances of survival to be greater. This, however, was not the case. Bergen-Belsen is most famously known as the final resting place of the young Anne Frank, whose diary has inspired many to study the Holocaust and has demonstrated the power the written word generation after generation. For those who have visited the former camp site over the past sixty years, however, the memory of place centers around that of a vast burial ground--one that leaves hardly a trace of the hell that was Bergen Belsen. As I made the trek to the site, I wondered how I would feel, what I would experience, and how I would react to the great mounds of earth that

¹⁸ International Young People's Centre The Buchenwald and Mittelbau-Dora Memorials Foundation. *Seeing, Understanding, Reflecting The Historical-Political Education Work at The Buchenwald International Young People's Centre*. International Young People's Centre The Buchenwald and Mittelbau-Dora Memorials Foundation. 8-9. Print.

¹⁹ International Young People's Center. 13-17.

contain the ashes of the thousands of innocent men, women, and children, whose lives were cut short by the members of the SS who held them captive. I also pondered what their lives might have been like before they arrived at the camp, and what they felt as they traveled, crammed in a cattle car, toward what would be for many their final resting place.

As I stepped onto the bus, I handed the driver a piece of paper with the words Gedenkstätte Bergen-Belsen. He nodded as if to say he understood. I asked him, in broken German, if he would tell me when to get off the bus and he assured me that he would. According to my guide book, the bus ride would take approximately forty-five minutes, so I sat back and enjoyed the beautiful view of the countryside around Celle. Before I knew it, the bus came to a stop and the bus driver motioned to me that this was my stop. It had only been about twenty-five or thirty minutes since our departure, but, trusting the driver, I got up and made my way out of the bus. I began walking in the direction of the others who got off the bus with me, hoping that we were all going to the same place. Something told me, however, that we were not. Before I knew it I was lost and I had to stop at a run-down gas station to try and see if I could get directions. When I explained to those in the station that I was looking for the Bergen-Belsen memorial, they stared at me as if they were trying to figure out why I would want to go there. Fortunately, a kindly looking woman behind the counter spoke English and she informed me that I was roughly 12 km from the Bergen-Belsen memorial site. It was at this point that I began to wonder whether the bus driver had intentionally told me to get off at the wrong stop. Had he not wanted me to find the camp? For the first time since I began my work, I felt completely and totally alone.

I made the only decision that I could at that point and began to make the trek to Bergen-Belsen. The walk took me through fields, across highways, down winding dirt paths, and around

the perimeter of one of the largest military bases in Germany, and gave me plenty of time to remind myself of the reasons why this was so important, why I just had to go. Although I had managed to find signs pointing me in the direction of the site, I had no concept of how far I had walked or how much further I had to go. Blisters had turned into sores as my sandals rubbed my aching feet with each step. It was beginning to get dark and I knew that the museum would soon be closing. Panic started to set in as I continued through the countryside. Just as I felt as though I could go no further, the memorial appeared just around a bend in the road. I had found it. It was only later that I would learn that I had just walked the same route that thousands of people had been forced to march as they made their way to the camp with everything they owned in the world strapped to their backs and piled in their arms.

When I arrived at the former camp site, I checked the bus schedule and realized that I had just missed the last bus for the day. I had no idea what I was going to do. It was then that something extraordinary happened. A woman, who had been watching me from a distance, came and introduced herself to me. She explained that she was a volunteer with the museum and asked if she could be of any assistance. I told her my purpose for visiting the memorial and museum and explained that I had gotten lost along the way and would now not have time to undertake any studies at the site. Astonished that I had walked all the way from Bergen, she insisted that I stay with her for the night and told me that she would introduce me to the staff and bring me back the next morning so I could conduct interviews. I was amazed at her kindness and overjoyed that my seemingly disastrous day had turned into something miraculous.

When I returned the next day, I learned that in the aftermath of liberation, the British Military Government spent approximately four years, from 1945 to 1949, clearing away the debris of the camp and in essence eliminating all traces of the structures that stood there. After

the completion of this cleanup a tall white obelisk was erected on the former campsite to commemorate the dead. In addition, the British hired a landscape architect, who had been commissioned to create a cemetery where the former concentration camp had been located. Ten years prior to this, he had been approached by Himmler to “realize a similar park landscape for the SS’s Sachsenhausen ritual site near Verden, which he designed in accordance with the aesthetic tastes of the Nazi era.” In light of this, many believed that the British should have realized that the architect was still too attached to the Nazi party and its ideology to undertake such an important task. The entire camp site was turned into a picturesque, park-like area that left no trace of the horrors that had taken place there.²⁰ Starting in 1952, however, the memorial was passed into the hands of the West German State of Lower Saxony and it is important to note that the state has been in control of the site ever since.²¹

The memorial at Bergen-Belsen remained simply a burial ground until the mid-1980’s, when a movement to develop educational programs and maintain memorials spread across Germany. This trend helped to spur camps such as Bergen-Belsen to re-think and re-shape these memorials. By the early 1990’s the government of Lower Saxony had provided the means for the memorial to begin an expansion. One of the first and most significant problems that the memorial site faced was the lack of any original structures on the site itself. Additionally, there appeared to be no remaining documents from the time when the concentration camp was in use. Through the hard work and diligence of a dedicated staff, the Bergen-Belsen memorial site slowly began to acquire materials and documents from former prisoners and international Holocaust museums, which at one time were assumed to be lost forever. After the artifacts were acquired, however, the staff was forced to determine the best way to present the history of the

²⁰ Unrepresentable 41-42

²¹ Texture, 56-58.

site. Ultimately, a committee decided upon the heavy use of survivor testimony to create a picture that could be built upon with tangible evidence, of the history of Bergen-Belsen. Within the walls of the new museum, completed late in 2007, visitors will now find a comprehensive historical look at the history and memory of the Bergen-Belsen site, beginning with its establishment as a prisoner-of-war camp in 1940 and ending with the liberation of the camp in 1945. According to the educational coordinators of the memorial today, the main goal of the memorial and museum is to present the facts to the public so that they may walk away from the site with an understanding that can lead to their own interpretation of what they saw, experienced, and discovered. There is no message or underlying sentiment other than the desire to memorialize the history of the site and remember and honor those who suffered at Bergen-Belsen.²² Still today, the cry from the Book of Job, engraved on the Jewish monument at the memorial, accurately represents the sentiments that the memorial site is designed to convey: “Earth Conceal Not the Blood Shed on Thee.”

When Hitler came to power in 1933, little time was wasted before his master plan for European domination began to unfold. On 21 March 1933 just outside of Munich, Dachau, the first concentration camp, was opened for the purpose of imprisoning those who posed a political threat to Hitler and his Nazi regime. Like many other concentration camps built between 1933 and 1938, Dachau was not known for its racial discrimination, but for discrimination based on political grounds. This was not to say, however, that if you happened to be a political dissenter and a Jew or homosexual that you would not be treated twice as badly. After Kristallnacht, which took place on 9 November 1938, however, the tone of imprisonment became much more racially biased and inevitably created a system of hierarchy among prisoners. In addition to political and

²² Educational Coordinators. “Bergen-Belsen.” Personal Interview. 22 June 2010.

religious prisoners, thousands of Soviet Army officers were imprisoned and executed at Dachau.²³ This diverse prisoner population would create a tension after the war that would lead to much debate over the most appropriate method of memorialization at Dachau, with political prisoners almost always being the most vocal.²⁴

When the camp was liberated on 29 April 1945 by the Forty-second Division of the U.S. Army, the camp was quickly turned into a “military stockade.” SS officers, imprisoned while awaiting trial, were housed in the camp, which would also serve as their place of trial. The Americans wanted there to be no question of the guilt of these officers, and conducting these trials on the site where the war crimes were committed removed all such doubt. Dachau also served as a temporary refugee camp for the thousands of displaced persons in the region. It was not until the 1950’s that sections of the camp were turned into memorials. While the barracks and camp fell into disarray, the crematorium, in the words of Terrence Prittie, was “‘perfectly preserved, with a well-kept two-acre garden around it and a single American sentry at the gate.’ This was the ‘Garden of Remembrance,’ landscaped by the Americans and maintained by the Bavarian State, part of what was then called the ‘Dachau Detachment.’”²⁵ In 1955, however, after the Americans installed the first exhibit of documentary photographs depicting the crimes committed at the camp, the town leaders became unsettled at the idea of having their dark past displayed for all to see and petitioned to have the museum closed. Not willing to create international problems, the Americans closed the exhibit until “further notice.”²⁶ It was not until 1965 that a new memorial was dedicated, mostly through the initiative of former prisoners. Before the dedication, the camp was almost entirely demolished, with only concrete foundations

²³ Young, 61.

²⁴ Burger, Waltraud. “Dachau.” Personal Interview, 8 July. 2010.

²⁵ Young, 62.

²⁶ Young, 63.

put in place to show where the former barracks had been. Two replicas of the barracks were created, but all that remained was now sterile. Nothing, except the crematorium, was as it had been originally. Sculptures and monuments were also created to honor the dead and those who suffered at Dachau. All stand as a chilling reminder of the heinous crimes that were committed under the cover of Hitler's regime.²⁷

With the support of prisoners and the continued efforts of the government to foster the evolution of Holocaust memorialization, the Bavarian state in the mid- 1990's allocated funds to help develop an extensive permanent exhibit at the memorial. Opened in 2003, the exhibit, entitled "Path of Prisoners," allows for visitors to walk away with an understanding of the history of the site, in addition to a broader view of the effects of the Nazi regime on Europe as a whole. Today, visitors are able to explore all sections of the camp, aided by formal tours, audio guides, printed literature, and an extensive exhibit. Additionally, the Dachau Memorial staff are dedicated to ensuring that visitors receive accurate, unbiased information, and work diligently to train all guides and other educators to treat the study of the Holocaust and the education of others with the utmost care and respect. As the history of the Holocaust continues to evolve and new information comes to light, the Dachau memorial stands ready to continue to evolve and embrace the pursuit of an accurate and complete study of the history of the site.²⁸

After some time in Munich, my studies took me to Krakow, Poland, the largest city near the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum in Oswiecim. Auschwitz, is a name that needs no explanation. Its history has been immortalized in history books and stands in infamy as the largest extermination camp created by the Nazis. Simply the mention of its name can cause one

²⁷ Young, 63.

²⁸ Burger, Waltraud. "Dachau." Personal Interview, 8 July. 2010.

to grimace or send chills up and down the spine. Unlike concentration camps in Germany or even similar extermination camps in eastern Poland, the history and memory of what happened at Auschwitz has not been easily forgotten. Or has it? Thanks to the Hollywood film industry much of the basic facts regarding the design and structure of the camp have been simplified. Many people do not realize that there was not only one Auschwitz, but three: Auschwitz I, Auschwitz II (Birkenau), and Auschwitz III (Monowitz). Although films can make most events seem unnervingly real, there is nothing like being there for yourself, overwhelmed by the history and the story of the ground you are standing on.

As I waited for the train to pull in to the Krakow Główny station I couldn't help but quiver a little as I looked ahead on the rest of my day. This had been one of the most anticipated parts of my summer research and it had finally arrived. As the train lurched to a halt in front of me, my stomach did a little lurching of its own. As much as I wanted to visit the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum, I was unsure as to how I would react to the intensity of what I was about to experience. Fortunately I had a two hour train ride to prepare myself. The train was cramped and rickety and looked as though it had come out of a documentary about living behind the Iron Curtain. Adding to the already uncomfortable atmosphere was the unfortunate fact that the windows were sealed shut and temperatures were due to reach the upper nineties. Somewhere a few rows back, I heard an American teenage boy tell his mother that he felt as though he was on a train bound for Auschwitz. His mother, in a very matter of fact way, replied that that was exactly what was happening. Although mother and son had two respective points, it made me think about how right he truly was. I had hardly even made the connection between my morning trek to Oswiecim and the route that millions of European Jews and others under Nazi persecution had taken to their death at Auschwitz. My stomach lurched again. Fortunately, we had almost

arrived at the rail station. After a short walk, I arrived at Auschwitz and was immediately shocked to discover that in order to enter the Auschwitz I site, I would have to be escorted by a tour guide. This, however, would be the perfect opportunity to see how the history of the camp was being represented to the millions of people who visit each year. My tour guide a very matter of fact Polish woman with a bit of an edge to her whisked us through the camp site and called out fact after fact regarding its history. I could hardly keep up with all of the information. I was astounded by how intact and pristine the former camp site was. It was certainly a far cry from the sterile topography of Dachau. After our visit to Auschwitz I, we were taken to Birkenau where we were given an overview of the sites history and were given free time to walk around and explore the grounds for ourselves. There were no restrictions like there had been at Auschwitz I. While much of the camp had been destroyed, visitors are still able to grasp the vastness and extent of the camp and are often blown away by the number of people that were forced to live together in such small quarters. While the tour was fast paced and packed with information regarding the history of the Holocaust and the sites themselves, I still felt as though I was leaving for the day with a much deeper understanding of the horror of Auschwitz, simply because I had seen it with my own eyes.

Unfortunately, my plans to meet with the head of the director of The International Center for Education about Auschwitz and the Holocaust never came to fruiting. After many attempts to make contact, I finally gave up and set my sights on collecting as much literature about the memorialization of the site as I could. The first memorial of Auschwitz-Birkenau came in to being in 1947 after the “Polish Parliament passed an Act on the preservation ‘for All Time of the Site of the Former Camp’ and called into being the Oswiecim-Brzezinka State Museum.” It was not until 1999 that the name of the site became Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum in Oswiecim.

Like all other former concentration camp memorials, there was much concern about how to appropriately create a museum that would provide not only the history of the site but an understanding of the meaning and methods behind the killing machine of the Nazis. While some believed that the site should be flattened and destroyed, others understood the importance of preserving it in order to keep the memory of its gruesome history alive.²⁹ One of the most important reasons for preservation at Auschwitz, however, is to educate the world about the Holocaust. The Programme Council for the International Centre for Education about Auschwitz and the Holocaust was created in 2005 as part of the museum. Its purpose is to inform younger generations about the importance of memory and of the history of Holocaust. Additionally, the council works to provide educational programs to instruct teachers on the best way to develop a course of study on the subject.³⁰

While my studies at Auschwitz were not all that I had hoped they would be, I did learn that there is not a distinct difference between the way that Polish sites have been memorialized versus those that are located within German borders. The methodology is for the most part the same, meaning that the history of the site comes first and foremost. It is important to note, however, that a distinction in Germany is made between the Holocaust, which is mainly considered to be the persecution and murder of the Jews and does not include the mass extermination of other ethnic, religious, and social groups of Europe. German memorial sites are not considered to be memorials to the Holocaust, they are memorials to those who suffered and died on each individual site. At Auschwitz, however, this specific distinction is not made. They not only teach the history of the site, but chronicle the history of the Holocaust as well.

²⁹ Auschwitz-Birkenau. The Past and the Present. 13.

³⁰ Auschwitz-Birkenau. The Past and the Present. 15.

Throughout my research, I came to realize that the memorialization of the Holocaust is not only significant as a way to honor the dead and those who suffered, or to accurately document a time in history, but because it reminds us of our responsibility as human beings to keep the peace in our world today and to avoid the presence of hatred in our thoughts and actions. Although it may seem that one could study the memorialization of the Holocaust in Germany by simply reading books, this is absolutely false. As I stood on each memorial site, viewed the landscape and took in the information in each museum, I was able to make connections between sites that I otherwise would have missed. Each memorial site is a now a product of the transformation that it made after the war, and this truth makes each one very different. One common thread, however, runs through each site, the power of memory. Over sixty years after the creation of these camp sites, foundations and organizations are working to ensure that each individual site continues to grow as new information is uncovered and as the historical process of uncovering memory continues to develop. Most importantly, it is critical to understand the importance of place in the memorialization of German sites. Not only are many of these memorials situated on the actual sites where the atrocities of the Holocaust took place, but they are created by the German people themselves. This establishes a deep emotional bond that runs through each and every memorial site across Germany. As time continues to pass and new generations are born, the memory of the Holocaust will remain. While the sting of regret, guilt, and disillusionment may fade more with time, the power of memory and of the history of each site will remain grounded in the work of the German people to memorialize the darkest time in their nations history. While memorials and museums stand as a testament to history, the legacy of those who perished and of those who survived will live on in the memories of those who choose to remember them. Even here at the end, Andre Schwarz-Bart's words still echo in my

ear: “the only pilgrimage, dear reader, would be to look sadly at a stormy sky now and then,” and remember. Always remember.