Changes in German Holocaust Memorials

Stephanie Bergeson
Brigham Young University

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Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe, Berlin

Photo by Stephanie Bergeson
Changes in German Holocaust Memorials

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Since World War II, Holocaust memorials have been built in many countries for a variety of reasons. Many memorials have been erected as places to remember and mourn the loss of those who were its victims. Some are built mainly to raise difficult but important moral and ethical questions in a world of increasing globalization and relativism. Others have been built to distance a country's association with the Holocaust and the Nazi government. Still others, as was the case with early Holocaust memorials in West Germany, were built in an attempt to forget or bury the past.

Germany's desire to be rid of this part of the past is understandable. The relationship Germany has to the Holocaust is complicated because it is the land of the main perpetrators. The question of memorialization is, therefore, a very difficult one. Attitudes about this problem as well as its accepted solutions have changed markedly since the early postwar period. By following these changes from Germany's earliest monuments to the completion of the Memorial for the Murdered Jews of Europe in 2005, it becomes clear that German Holocaust memorials have transformed in appearance and purpose from obscure and marginal attempts at escaping the past toward a bold and personal preservation of memory. This shift has largely been due to changes in individual, national, and international factors affecting Germany and its citizens. The Memorial for the Murdered Jews of Europe located in Berlin represents a culmination of a variety of influences and epitomizes the change in focus from escaping the past to one of keeping the difficult issues and questions of the Holocaust alive. An analysis
of the ideas and trends which led to the creation of the Berlin memorial and an examination of the debate surrounding its creation makes it clear what a significant change this monument represents and how this change was possible.

**Theoretical Background**

In order to understand the significance of the changes in Holocaust memorials in Germany, it is important to understand the general purposes and importance of memorials. Memorials are generally seen as a way of keeping the people and events of the past an extant part of the present. They often become a very important part of both collective memory and cultural or national identity. According to the widely accepted theories of Maurice Halbwachs, memory is normally triggered by something outside ourselves which we associate with the memory, rather than by our own thoughts. Memory is recalled and preserved through these outside triggers, such as people, places, and objects. Halbwachs further explains that there are two ways one comes to associate an outside trigger with a particular memory. Autobiographical memory, the first process, occurs through personal experience, which comes to be associated with an outside trigger. The second process occurs through some form of social construction, such as a monument or a holiday, and this is usually how historical memory is created and perpetuated. Based on this theory, outside triggers, such as monuments and other commemorative events, are very useful and important in constructing and preserving public memory, as well as creating a cohesive national identity, because, as Halbwachs also points out, sharing similar memories with others promotes unity within a nation or group.

In light of this idea that memorials are critical in promoting national identity and unity, the problematic nature of Holocaust memorials in Germany can more easily be seen. Normally the memorialization of victories and sacrifices, or even the injustices suffered by a nation, can become rallying points, inspiring unity, pride, and patriotism; a memorialization of past crimes, however, does not promote these same feelings. As James Young, an expert on Holocaust memorials put it, "in effect, the initial impulse to memorialize events like the Holocaust may actually spring from an opposite and equal desire to forget them." Through

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3 Ibid, 5.
memorialization, events and issues can, in some ways, be confined to the past. Once something is memorialized there is a sense of resolution; the event as well as the question of how to remember the event is taken care of once a memorial is built. In this way it can also become a storage compartment for memory, so that people do not have to feel responsible for remembering. James Young also cautions against this possibility, arguing that the building of a monument or memorial alone is not enough to ensure memory.5 In order to become an important part of collective memory, it is important for a memorial to be located, designed, and used in such a way as to keep its function as a reminder of the past.

Along with this desire to use memorials to forget the past, there can also be a temptation to use memorials to distort the past, making it more favorable or conducive to promoting national unity as well as shaping a desirable identity. This distortion can include exaggerating strengths exhibited or injustices suffered, and ignoring or down-playing involvement in shameful or immoral situations. This can be seen in some of the memorials in the countries surrounding Germany where there were both collaborators and resisters or victims of the Nazi regime. In these countries, like France, Hungary, and Austria, memorials tend to focus on those who suffered or resisted rather than focusing on those who collaborated.6 This desire to remember positive contributions to history, especially while creating collective memory and national identity is understandable; however, it is also one-sided and therefore inaccurate. Thus, memorials, which are generally thought of as tools of preserving historical memory, can also be used to distort history or enable forgetting. The idea of creating this kind of a memorial can be very appealing when a country is expected to create a memorial for something the majority of its citizens are not proud of.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND: EAST GERMANY

Not surprisingly, both of these trends can be seen in the memorials of post-World War II Germany. Although there were many good reasons to remember the Holocaust, other than inspiring national unity, the threat that memorialization posed to national identity and unity put both East and West Germany in a difficult position in confronting this part of their history, especially in the public sphere. Caroline Wiedmer explains that there was a trend during the post-war era among some of the Holocaust memorials in Germany to “down-play

5 Ibid, 2.
the trauma inflicted on others by crafting the cracked figure of a hero from the shards of national defeat." 

This was especially true of the Holocaust memorials constructed in the East by the German Democratic Republic (GDR). From the 1950s through the 1990s, there was little development or change in memorials under Communist rule in East Germany. As a rule, monuments created under Communist rule were monuments to anti-Fascists; they helped to construct a history where the East Germans saw themselves as the heroes, the resisters of the Nazis. Such memorials are an excellent example of how the past can be distorted in order to promote national unity and pride. They became rallying points for the new Communist government, while responsibility for the crimes and the suffering of the victims of the Holocaust were forgotten to the collective memory.

One example of an anti-Fascist memorial built in Eastern Germany is the Sachsenhausen memorial tower. It was built by the GDR in 1961 in what remained of the Sachsenhausen concentration camp. It was originally designed as a national “memorial site that would symbolize the victory of anti-Fascism over Fascism.” This memorial tower consists of a pillar 35–40 meters tall with orange triangles near the top, symbolizing the political prisoners of the Nazis, who were identified with this mark. Interestingly the decision to memorialize the political prisoners exclusively, which included many Communists, also meant that those prisoners who were defined by the National Socialists as racially or biologically inferior were ignored. In this way, the government of the GDR distorted the history of the camp, memorializing Communist suffering and resistance to the Nazis while avoiding any responsibility for other victim groups. The memorial also features a 4–5 meter sculpture by René Graetz at its base, known as “liberation.”

The base of the sculpture has a list of the countries of origin of the prisoners who were held in that camp, including Germany. This aided East Germany in cultivating a collective memory in which East-German citizens were also the victims and resisters to the Nazis, despite the fact that no such regional differences had existed at the time. This sculpture, through its name and content, also celebrates the “liberation” of the camp by the Soviet Union. This is also a distortion of history. One of the reasons the monument was not built until the 1960s is because the Communist government of the GDR was still using the camp for political prisoners as

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7 Ibid, 9.

8 Ibid, 80.


Changes in German Holocaust Memorials

well as arbitrarily arrested citizens. These facts certainly do not fit well with the heroic image the GDR used the memorial to create. Such distortions for the sake of national image and unity were fairly typical of Holocaust memorials in the East for the duration of the GDR, which began to collapse in 1989.

Historical Background: West Germany

While in the East they dealt with the problems of German identity and the Holocaust by distorting Holocaust history, the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) chose a different approach, that of using memorials to inspire or allow forgetting. Jürgen Dittberner argues that the trend in the West was to build much more historically accurate monuments, but to create them on the fringes of society, not attaching much public significance to them. These memorials could be visited by those who wanted to mourn the loss of family and friends, and those who took special interest in the topic. For the typical German however, a school trip might bring them there, but for the most part these places functioned as unvisited storage compartments for uncomfortable memories. This attitude toward initial early memorials in the West can be seen not only through the lack of public significance attached to them, but also through the building process and design of each monument. Some of the earliest examples of this include a Jewish memorial erected by survivors in Belsen in 1946, a memorial in Neuengamme built by the city government in 1953 to appease requests made by survivors for a memorial, and a 1946 memorial in the town of Flossenbürg. There are a few things these as well as most early memorials had in common. First of all, most early memorials in Germany were built by survivors, or at least at the request of survivors. They were also usually classical forms such as pyramids, obelisks, or tall pylons used to classify a site as meaningful, without specifying what that meaning was. The fact that the form chosen was often so unspecific is evidence of the general desire in Germany to forget the Holocaust. A non-specific memorial could allow for the appeasement of survivors without providing a constant reminder to the German people of the crimes of the past. This idea that the memorials were really created by and for the survivors is also evidenced by the fact that the 1946 Belsen memorial is inscribed with Hebrew on the side where visitors would enter

13 Marcuse, 65,67,70.
the area. These memorials were also usually located in remote areas, usually close to the camps where prisoners had been held. Such locations are evidence of their place in German society, on the fringes. This also contributed to their isolation and inspired forgetting among those who were not driven to go a great distance out of their way to remember the Holocaust.


During the 1960s, global awareness of and preoccupation with the Holocaust rose somewhat, inspiring an increase in the building of memorials in a variety of countries. The '60s marked some changes to Holocaust memorials in Germany as well. One of the main changes in Holocaust memorials at this time occurred in the size and design of memorials. More memorials were built and they were usually larger in size. In 1965 the 7.5-meter-high-pillar in Neugamme was replaced with a 27-meter-high pillar and included a sculpture at the bottom. Large monuments were completed in Dachau and Birkenau in 1968 and 1967, respectively. The memorials also began, in some cases, to change somewhat in style, becoming more abstract. This is especially the case with the Dachau memorial. Part of the reason for this change was that some artists and even some cities began to feel that the classical style of memorials that were normally built resembled too closely the classic style that had been so frequently idolized and employed by the Nazis. A style with such suggestive connection to Nazi values was certainly not appropriate for memorialization of the Holocaust. Despite these changes, there was still a tendency to build even these larger memorials in remote and unpopulated areas, allowing them to remain somewhat marginal within collective memory.

This trend began to change somewhat in the 1980s, at least in some isolated cases, among individual artists and cities. Memorials began to be erected, which more boldly challenged previous ideas and styles; James Young calls these Holocaust memorials counter-monuments. These monuments departed from traditional monuments in many ways including style, location, and use. Instead of the old serious or dramatic styles, antiheroic, ironic, and self-effacing styles and

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14 Ibid, 69.
17 Young, The Texture of Memory, 27.
Changes in German Holocaust Memorials

Techniques began to be used. These new styles were typical of the post modernist movement in art at the end of the twentieth century. Individual artists and groups began to experiment with such forms and techniques within the realm of Holocaust memorials, creating a new style and genre of Holocaust memorials. These memorials were better able to prevent the feeling of resolution previous memorials had often embodied, which had been one of the main factors which led to forgetting. They worked instead to raise the difficult questions of the Holocaust and leave the viewers with an unresolved feeling, which would increase the likelihood of continued thought and remembrance in the viewer. On a smaller, more individual scale, artists in Germany began to use these changes in style along with changes in location and use of the memorials in order to achieve this goal of remembrance.

One such counter-monument was designed by Berlin-born Jochen Gerz and his wife Esther Gerz. They had been invited by the city of Hamburg to create it in 1986. "I was particularly impressed by what the city wanted," commented Jochen in an interview with Stephan Schmidt-Wulffen, "they wanted something that brought social issues into play and displayed them." The Gerzes were determined to give the city of Hamburg just that, and had some ideas of their own about how this would best be accomplished. "The city wanted to erect the monument in a 'creative corner,' in a park somewhere," explained Gerz, but the Gerzes had an "ugly spot" in mind. This ugly spot is located in an area "packed with buildings, a heavily trafficked central crossing." The Gerzes wanted the memorial to reach the people and utilized this location to help facilitate their objective. Aside from using a central location to promote the perpetuation of memory, this monument was also designed to invite participation of the individual viewers. It was a simple, aesthetically dull pillar coated in a layer of soft lead on every side. Viewers were invited to inscribe their name on the pillar as a statement against Fascism. This design was used to emphasize the importance of individual responsibility in active remembering. As the reachable part of the monument filled up with signatures, the monument was sunk into the ground bit by bit, until it eventually disappeared leaving only a memory with its viewers. This goal was achieved in 1993 as it was lowered for the last time. The structure of this monu-

18 Young, At Memory's Edge, 93.
19 Young, The Texture of Memory, 28.
21 Ibid.
22 Ibid, 70.
ment challenged the permanent nature of a monument and was supposed to help prevent it from becoming a storage compartment that would hold people's uncomfortable memories for them. Its disappearance, along with the personal experiences of the viewers' interactions with it, was hoped to encourage them to take the responsibility for remembering upon themselves. 23

Another example of a counter-monument is Horst Hoheisel's Aschrott-Brunnen Memorial in Kassel. It was built in 1987 to remember a forty foot high fountain which had been donated in 1908 to the city by Sigmund Aschrott, a local Jewish entrepreneur. It was then destroyed by the Nazis.24 Hoheisel determined that the best way to remember the destruction and absence of this fountain was to construct a negative space version of it that would be sunk below the ground where the old one stood, upside-down. He explained: "I have designed the new fountain as a mirror image of the old one, sunk beneath the old place in order to rescue the history of this place as a wound and as an open question, to penetrate the consciousness of the Kassel citizens so that such things never happen again."25 This idea of using memorials to reflect upon and represent the absence and loss as consequences of the Holocaust for Germany is one way in which the attitude toward memorials changed. This showed a change toward more serious reflection on the Holocaust's effect on the country as well as a greater focus on regret about the losses of the Holocaust. This became a way to look at the past which condemned but still acknowledged some responsibility for the tragedy. These changes in focus and attitude about Holocaust memorials in Germany, brought about by individual artists within their own spheres of influence, paved the way for later representations of such absence and loss to be erected on a much larger scale.

THE BERLIN MEMORIAL: CASE STUDY

Despite the innovations of counter-monuments, Holocaust monuments in the West were generally still very limited when it came to national scope and influence. At the same time, monuments in the East remained relatively unaltered and continued to be distorted reflections of the past used as rallying points for the Communist government. Shortly after the reunification of Germany, the planning and creation of a central national Holocaust memorial became a large priority, as East and West came together for the first time in nearly fifty years. This has largely been attributed to the national politics of the time, especially

23 Ibid, 69.
24 Young, At Memory's Edge, 99.
25 Ibid, 98.
the international pressures which accompanied the reunification of Germany. And while it is true that these circumstances greatly facilitated the planning and construction of the Memorial to the Murdered Jews in Europe, as will be discussed in greater detail later, this limited view of linear cause and effect is too simplistic. It does not account for the fact that the original idea and plan for the monument began even before reunification occurred, or the ten years of controversy and debate that preceded the memorial’s creation. It also fails to provide a good explanation about how the seeds which were planted by individual artists came to have such a large effect on final design and purpose of the monument in Berlin. If the memorial had been solely planned and motivated as a response to international pressures on the newly unified Germany, it could have easily taken on a purpose and form similar to those of the early monuments in the west, something nonspecific that could serve to appease demands for a memorial without becoming an effective reminder of the crimes of Germany's past. As the country was united again for the first time in years, a memorial that could serve as a storage compartment for uncomfortable memory—providing a feeling of resolution—was very tempting. There were some who argued for such a monument during the debate surrounding the monument's completion. Through a careful examination of the planning of the project and the way the controversial issues surrounding it were resolved, however, it becomes clear that the monument follows more closely the design and purpose of the counter-monuments, trying to raise the difficult questions of the Holocaust, prevent resolution, and keep the memory alive among individuals. Its creation therefore effectively projected the ideas and innovations discussed earlier to a national level. Through looking at the many factors which influenced the creation of the memorial in Berlin, the great changes the monument embodies and how these changes occurred, can be seen more accurately and completely.

The roots of this memorial project began with the dream and efforts of a German television journalist from West Berlin, Lea Rosh. After visiting Yad Vashem, the Holocaust memorial in Israel, Rosh began to push for a national Holocaust memorial for the Federal Republic of Germany to be built within West Berlin. Rosh’s first appeals on this subject were made as a part of her involvement in another site in Berlin called Topography of Terror. She first suggested the

26 Wiedmer, 142.
idea in one of their meetings on August 24, 1988. She later became leader of the
group Perspektive Berlin, which was organized to promote and plan the memo-
rial project and included prominent members of German society such as Günter
Gras, Willy Brandt, and herself.29 These initial phases of the Holocaust memorial
in Berlin show that the motivation behind building a central memorial was much
more complex than merely a political desire to appease international pressures
and improve the country’s image, as is often argued. Some motivation to build
the memorial existed among individual citizens even before these pressures arose.

Some of these motivations resulted from less direct international pressures
which already existed and affected German citizens individually. In a public state-
ment Rosh made advocating the project, she displayed some evidence of this.
Undoubtedly influenced by her trip to Yad Vashem in Israel, she argued that
many other countries have national Holocaust memorials, including Israel and
the United States, and that it is shameful that Germany does not have a simi-
larly centralized monument.30 Through this statement it becomes clear that there
were international pressures felt by individuals in Germany, such as herself, to
recognize and remember the Holocaust in similar ways to other countries. Even
though some people in Germany felt that there were already enough memorials,
in the form of the actual historical sites like the concentration camps or burned
down synagogues, there was still a pressure to remember the Holocaust with a
memorial similar to those in other countries, in both style and purpose.31 The
central memorials in Israel and the United States were built in a new, experiential
style. The experiential style of the monuments generally involved a large area
that the viewer was invited to enter and experience. Such memorials were usually very
large and promoted memory through creating specific emotional responses and
memories in the viewer through their interaction. This style had recently become
popular among Holocaust memorials in many countries. It is somewhat remi-
niscent of the Gerzes’ desire to encourage individual participation and thereby
inspire lasting memory in the individual viewers instead of storing it away.

29 Perspektive Berlin. “Erster Aufruf.” Frankfurter Rundschau, Jan 30, 1989. in Der Denkmal-


CHANGES IN GERMAN HOLOCAUST MEMORIALS

This international artistic influence is coupled, however, with a perhaps even more powerful internal pressure. Again, evidence of this motivation is also present in Rosh’s newspaper article. In the article she mentions the importance of German citizens finally going through “Vergangenheitsbewältigung” or the process of coming to terms with one’s past. This particular pressure is complex and has a couple of different possible meanings. In its mildest forms it includes the idea that German citizens need to acknowledge and remember what happened in the past, just like the rest of the world remembers, so that it will not happen again. There is also another more complicated side to it, which demands that Germans recognize their responsibility for the tragedy of the Holocaust and work through this past, allowing it to be a part of German identity, rather than moving on and leaving the past behind them. Although the question of responsibility and guilt for the Holocaust is a controversial and difficult problem to deal with, especially when it concerns German identity, this idea also lends itself to the kind of memorial that will ensure the Holocaust is remembered, and not stored away on the outskirts of the city and subsequently the outskirts of collective memory.

According to these pressures evidenced by her article, Lea Rosh’s goals and attitudes about Holocaust memorials do fit in with the continuation or at least a complement of the changes that the independent artists had been experimenting with previous to her vision for a central monument. Her influence on this project is therefore a key component in understanding the reason for the resemblances between the counter-monuments and the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe. The fact that the memorial gained support from other German citizens, like the members of Perspektive Berlin and those who donated money so that it could be built, also shows that she was not the only one who felt these pressures and motivations to carry out the project.

Fortunately for Lea Rosh and this project, the political events and international pressures combined at an opportune time to create a wider demand for the completion of the project. The project, which had already gathered some momentum and stirred some controversy by the time of German reunification, became very important to the government of freshly united Germany for a few reasons. The fall of the Berlin Wall and the subsequent unification of Germany, although met with much rejoicing because of its highly symbolic connection to the decline of Iron Curtain and Communist power, was met with some apprehension. The way European history had generally been told at that time portrayed Germany as traditionally expansionist. This image placed the guilt for both world wars on

32 Rosh, Vorwärts Nr. 45 in Der Denkmaistreit—das Denkmal, 27.
33 Wiedmer, 150.
Germany. Thus, in its relatively short history as a united country, it had been seen to be quite aggressive and powerful. Many in the international community were nervous about whether or not this identity would be changed or perpetuated as the country was united again. It did not help alleviate this situation that the fall of the Berlin Wall came very close to the fifty-year anniversary of the fall of the Third Reich and marked the first time Germany had been unified since it had been ruled by Hitler, also headquartered in Berlin.\textsuperscript{34} The sentiments raised by these circumstances led to a pressure on the new German government to prove that it was a changed country, that it condemned its predecessors, and that it was determined to pursue a new and better direction as a country. As violence against minorities broke out in cities such as Rostock, Hoyerswerda, and Solingen, the pressure on Germany increased further.\textsuperscript{35} This brought German identity and its relation to its Nazi history into greater question. The government, desperate to prove itself and start out on the right foot as nation, as well as in the eyes of the international community, needed a project such as Lea Rosh’s—a national memorial that showed its determination to prevent the past from repeating itself because the new Germany was a changed nation.

The memorial project moved forward with increased importance and publicity. A competition to design the monument garnered hundreds of submissions.\textsuperscript{36} The specifications for this competition were published and remained true to the original goals set out first by Rosh in her article. As such, the specifications for the competition also reflected the shift in focus toward perpetuating the memory of the Holocaust. While leaving the form of the monument quite open for artistic creation and interpretation, the specifications outlined in the competition made important goals and focal points clear to the artists involved. They first described the historical significance of the site chosen for the memorial, stressing its closeness to the Reichskanzlei, Hitler’s headquarters, and former location of part of the Berlin Wall which had separated Germany for forty years.\textsuperscript{37} The artists were then given instructions that artistic power should be used to symbolically incorporate mourning, unsettledness (Erschütterung), and a warning not to reflect shame and guilt. They were also instructed that it should encourage the ideals

\textsuperscript{34} Ibid, 142.
\textsuperscript{37} “Wettbewerbsaufgabe” in Der Denkmalstreit—das Denkmal?: die Debatte um das “Denkmal für die ermordeten Juden Europas”: eine Dokumentation, ed. Ute Heimrod (Berlin: Philo Verlagsgesellschaft mbH, 1999), 215.
of peace, freedom, equality, and tolerance—now and in the future. In effect the artists were asked to incorporate the horrible, shameful nature of the Holocaust, as well as the enormous and individual tragedy of the victims, all while warning against such events in the future. This certainly is evidence of the desire to communicate and proliferate awareness of the societal issues and questions raised by the Holocaust instead of trying to cover it up, downplay it, or hide it away.

The winning submissions of the competition, chosen by the panel of judges, also support this idea. Even though the two designs, which were chosen in the initial competition, were rejected by the government due to a few symbolic difficulties and a lack of popular acceptance, the choice of the council members and their rationale for their choice does reveal a great deal about the goals and motivations of the project. One of the winning submissions consisted of a very large, off-center, rectangular platform. This design was chosen for a variety of reasons, one of which was the way it prevented the anonymity of previous memorials through the inscription of names of Jewish victims who died in the Holocaust. This was supposed to make it more emotionally stirring and personal. The design is also praised because of its off-centeredness. The rectangular form was to be raised well off the ground on one side and sunk into the ground on the other. This was to represent and cause a feeling of unsettledness, preventing the feeling of resolution that could lead to forgetting. The entry it was to be combined with also incorporated another similarly large and square design which was praised for its inclusion of the names of concentration camps and for the freedom viewers would have to interact with it and forge their own path through it. This was more typical of the experiential style mentioned earlier and therefore was also designed and praised for its ability to create personal memories in the viewers, increasing the perpetuation of memory.

The increased importance of the competition, as well as the plans and goals outlined for the project, spurred much discussion and controversy as the German people had many varying opinions. Some questioned and argued about the goals themselves, and others debated how best to achieve the goals outlined. These varying opinions are well documented both through newspapers and a variety of essays written during the almost decade-long debate. An examination of the

40 Unfortunately this was one portion of the design which was rejected because of the difficulty of getting accurate records of all of the victims.
41 "Wettbewerbsbeiträge," in Der Denkmalstreit—das Denkmal, 275.
42 Ibid, 274.
43 Hemrod, Ute. Der Denkmalstreit—das Denkmal.
issues that the monument faced, using these sources, reveals a lot about the attitude of German citizens and scholars at the time. There is evidence of both the desire to use the memorial to help forget or resolve the Holocaust and move on, as early Holocaust memorials had done in Germany, as well as the desire to carry forward the goals of counter-monuments, keeping Holocaust memories and issues present in Germany. Through an examination of these debates, it becomes clear that the decisions about style, location, and purpose were made very consciously, in favor of creating a monument that would perpetuate the goals and ideas of counter-monuments, thus carrying forward this smaller-scale movement to the national level.

One aspect of the proposed memorial project, which was widely and hotly criticized, was the narrowness of its subject. It was to be dedicated to only the murdered Jews of Europe, despite the many other groups and individuals murdered by Nazi Germany. Konrad Schuller argued in a newspaper article for the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* that the Roma and Sinti victims should be included in the memorial.\(^4^4\) He stated that, as a percentage of the Gypsy population, their casualties were just as significant. Others, such as Reinhart Koselleck, who wrote about it in an essay titled "Die falsche Ungeduld" (false impatience), saw the exclusively Jewish nature of the memorial as an attempt to hierarchize the victims, giving Jewish victims greater worth and preferred status.\(^4^5\) This, aside from being terribly offensive, would weaken the monument’s credibility as a symbol of peace and equality.

The responses to these criticisms, however, help shed new light on the advantages dedicating the monument solely to the Jewish victims could have for German collective memory. Lea Rosh, as well as other proponents of the idea (like Jakob Schulze-Rohr), responded to these criticisms with assurances that it was not an attempt to hierarchize the victims, but that the experience of the Jewish victims was different from that of the other groups, and it is therefore fitting that they are remembered with their own unique monument.\(^4^6\) The Jews were targeted in a manner and intensity that was unique throughout Hitler’s reign. They were attacked very publicly both through Nazi propaganda and discriminatory

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CHANGES IN GERMAN HOLOCAUST MEMORIALS

laws right from the beginning of the Third Reich, and later forced into ghettos.47 The desire to memorialize Jewish history separately from that of other groups is evidence of a desire to portray the complexities and problems of history as accurately as possible, instead of trying for a generic, one-size-fits-all kind of memorial, which would be more prone to distortion of the history.48 The specifications for the second competition to design the monument also brought up the point that the more the memorial is supposed to represent, the less likely it becomes that it will be able to achieve its goals of representation successfully.49 By no means does the monument to the Jewish victims of the Holocaust prevent the building of other monuments to other groups. In fact, another advantage to this idea of making the monument specific is the avoidance of building an "absolute" Holocaust memorial that Salomon Korn, an architect involved in the Holocaust memorial debate, warned against.50 The fact that it only memorializes one group, and therefore inspires the creation of other memorials, ensures that it does not give the whole issue the feeling of resolution which can quickly lead to forgetting. Because of this decision, national memorials continued to be built in Germany to other victim groups. A memorial to the gays and lesbians targeted by the Nazis was completed in 2008, and one for the Roma and Sinti was inaugurated in 2012.51 This design and goal therefore can be seen as an extension of the strategy of using memorials to portray history more accurately, while inspiring continued memory.

Another debate centered on the size of the monument set forth in the specifications of the competition. Some argued that it was too large and reminiscent of the kind of monuments favored under National Socialism.52 Although it is true that, according to the specifications of the competition, the monument was to be much larger and more permanent than most of the counter-monuments already discussed, this does not necessarily signify a regression toward the style of monuments built by the Nazis. There was a lot more to the Nazi style of monument than its size. More importantly than the size was the attitude portrayed in the form and style. The monuments of the National Socialist era were based upon classic style and were built to aggrandize Germany.

48 Ibid., 55–56.
50 Korn, 60.
Although the monument was intended from the outset to be large and very permanent, these qualities do not necessarily lead to forgetting. There is a clear trend in the evaluation of possible designs by the judges to value and favor monuments which invite more active interaction and experience by the viewer. Both of the first-place monuments of the initial competition as well as some of the runners-up involved entering the monument in some way, and this entry was often also accompanied by either ascending or descending. The fifth-place proposal was to have names of victims cut into the ceiling of the monument, which would then cast the names in light and shadow on to the bodies of the visitors below. These designs were favored by the judges because of their ability to help the viewers experience the monument more deeply and personally, which would inspire the absorption of memory into the viewer. The experiential idea is reminiscent both of the Gerzes' monument in Hamburg, which invited its viewers to sign it, therefore participating personally in the act of remembrance as well as the experiential monuments which inspired Rosh initially, like Yad Vashem.

Eike Geisel, a journalist, also voiced a similar concern, although it was focused on another aspect of the project. In an article published in the Tagespiegel in January of 1995, Geisel argued that the memorial project was an attempt to inspire a renewed German nationality out of the ashes of the Holocaust. His main concern was the way the project was to be financed. Half of the sixteen million marks originally budgeted for its construction were to come from donations collected by the “Förderkreis zur Errichtung eines Denkmals für die ermordeten Juden Europas” (Society for the Promotion of Raising a Monument to the Murdered Jews of Europe). The idea that the building of this monument was a duty of the German nation reminded Geisel too much of the national effort to exterminate the Jews in the first place. In his opinion this project was just another tool to encourage German nationalism, which would be an extremely inappropriate, and a distorting use of Holocaust memory, just as had been the trend in East Germany before reunification.

However, there are a few problems with this argument. In order to understand the reason for the idea that half of the funds be raised through donations from the German people, it is important to look at how the project developed.

54 “Künstlerischer Wettbewerb: Kurzdokumentation,” in Der Denkmalstreit–das Denkmal, 279.
As mentioned, it initially came as a grassroots movement, led by Rosh, and supported by others, such as historian Eberhard Jackel. Rosh lobbied for the government's support of the project and as plans were being negotiated each side agreed to pay half. Given the way this developed, it is extremely unlikely that ulterior motives came into play. The very debate regarding the creation of the memorial is another powerful piece of evidence against the idea that it was being used as a tool to create national unity. In fact, the questions the project raised about how best to portray the nation's own guilt and shame as well as its victims was criticized by others as having a divisive influence on the nation. Konrad Schuller, writing for the Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, observed regretfully that, despite the usual function of a monument or memorial to stand for unity and reconciliation, this memorial that was to stand in the heart of the capital city occasioned new disputes and divisions.

The very existence of this debate was, in the opinion of James Young, a great force in accomplishing the goals set forth by the monument—promoting the proliferation of Holocaust memory. The unsettled nature of the question of how to represent the Holocaust as a memorial in the heart of the capital city encouraged contemplation of the Holocaust and the social and moral issues it raises. Young even felt in the early stages of the debate that the indefinite perpetuation of the controversy would be preferable to any final solution, because it would prevent the feeling that the Holocaust had been resolved. He did later concede, however, that this was not a realistic option. He began to feel that if the monument could be created to embody the difficult issues as best as possible, embodying the controversy physically instead of resolving it, then the monument could, in fact, effectively keep the memory alive. The experience of the debate could also be seen as a force facilitating the development of collective memory in regard to the issues of the Holocaust, which would then be triggered by the actual monument, a process outlined in Halbwachs' work and generally accepted as effective.

The debate finally did come to a close when the Findungskomission (of which Young had been invited to be a member), charged with choosing an appropriate design after the first competition proved inconclusive, was able to agree

57 Wiedmer, 145.
58 Schuller in Der Denkmalstreit—das Denkmal, 226.
60 Young, "Germany's Holocaust Memorial Problem," 71.
61 Ibid, 71.
62 Halbwachs, 38.
upon a winner of the second competition. This time they had made it clear in the description of the competition that the memorial was to “embody the intractable questions at the heart of German Holocaust memory rather than claiming to answer them.” This would help to ensure the encouragement of memory, and the prevention of a feeling of resolution of the issue, despite the resolution of the memorial debate, just as Young had hoped. In the end, Peter Eisenman’s design, which he had revised somewhat, was chosen and built. It was completed in 2005. There are many aspects of this design that were seen as true to the intended goals of the memorial project, to perpetuate memory and raise the complicated social and moral issues of the Holocaust, thus carrying forward this change, seen initially in isolated instances, to the national level.

Eisenman’s design resisted the redemptory nature of answering the questions of the Holocaust in one form. Instead he used a field of thousands of pillars to symbolize its complexity. Because of this design, each viewer has to navigate the memorial, and with it the memory of the Holocaust and its inherent questions. This idea is further facilitated by the undefined nature of the pillars. They are unmarked, and although obviously somewhat reminiscent of tombstones, they can also be read differently by different viewers. This idea of tombstones is somewhat reminiscent of Hoheisl’s fountain monument, as it reflects upon the loss and absence of the victims. The large field of closely placed pillars is also thought to create a possible sense of danger in the viewers, a feeling of being lost, or surrounded. This not only embodies, to a small degree, some of the emotions that are associated with the memory of the Holocaust, but also helps the viewer internalize the memory through the experience. There is also enough space planned in the Plaza for public commemorative activities, an important part of extending collective memory. As Young wrote years before this memorial was designed, “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.” This design is very much a continuation of the kinds of designs and goals of artists like the Gerzes and Hoheisel, to keep the memory of the Holocaust alive.

63 Young, “Germany’s Holocaust Memorial Problem,” 73.
64 Ibid, 71.
65 Ibid, 76.
66 Young, “Germany’s Holocaust Memorial Problem,” 78.
67 Ibid, 76.
68 Ibid, 76.
69 Young, The Texture of Memory, 2.
Through a combination of individual, artistic, and political forces, Holocaust memorials in Germany were drastically changed in style, location, and function. International pressures clearly played a role in each of these forces, placing varying degrees of pressure on artists and other individuals in Germany as well as on the German government. The influence of all of these forces and pressures can be seen in the creation of a the large, central Holocaust memorial in Berlin. Despite the many reasons Germans had to build a memorial that could have attempted to reconcile, distort, or quietly store memory, the way Holocaust memorials initially had done in Germany, they built a very different memorial. The standard for Holocaust memorials changed on a national level with this project toward the type of memorial that would help Germany remember the uncomfortable past. Through the Memorial for the Murdered Jews of Europe, the self-conscious effort to make the difficult questions and realities of past crimes can be seen, keeping the Holocaust an extant part of the German identity.

Stephanie Bergeson is currently in her senior year of studies at BYU. She will be graduating with an undergraduate degree in history with a secondary major in German studies in August 2013. This paper was written for the History 490 Capstone Research Seminar, taught by Professor Craig Harline. Stephanie is particularly interested in German history as recently she was able to spend a year and a half there as a missionary. She is also very interested in the way history remembered publicly through public history projects such as memorials and national holidays. To some extent, both of these subjects are dealt with in this paper. Outside of her studies, Stephanie loves to read and sketch portraits. She also enjoys any time she can spend outdoors hiking or jogging with her husband. She is an avid rock climber both outdoors and in the gym.