

THE VIRGINIA HOLOCAUST MUSEUM: A CONTINUATION OF THE
AMERICANIZATION OF THE HOLOCAUST

by

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December 2017

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This thesis examines the significance and effectiveness of Holocaust memory and remembrance in the United States with a closer look at the Virginia Holocaust Museum in Richmond, Virginia. It analyzes the role of the Holocaust in our society's public consciousness by observing the function and impact of Holocaust museums and memorials in the United States. It evaluates the motives and intentions in the creation of the Virginia Holocaust Museum and its impact on genocide awareness, education, and prevention. It also explores the effectiveness of the Virginia Holocaust Museum's mission statement. It assesses the duration of the Americanization of the Holocaust in our communities and institutions.

The methodology is to examine primary sources such as the board minutes of the Virginia Holocaust Museum, newspaper articles, laws and legislation, and interviews. This thesis also examines literature published about the Virginia Holocaust Museum, The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, the Holocaust in the United States, and Holocaust Memory.

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AMERICANIZATION OF THE HOLOCAUST

A Thesis

Presented To the Faculty of the Department of History

East Carolina University

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Arts in History

by

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DEDICATION

To my family and to Jacob for believing that I can do whatever I set my mind to.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Thanks to my thesis director and committee for all of their help throughout this process.

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CHAPTER ONE INTRODUCTION

The Holocaust, defined as the “systematic, bureaucratic, state-sponsored persecution and murder of six million Jews by the Nazi regime and its collaborators,”¹ has in recent decades been expanded to include other victims of the Nazi regime. The Nazi party “targeted other groups because of their perceived ‘racial inferiority’: Roma (Gypsies), the disabled, and some of the Slavic peoples (Poles, Russians, and others). Other groups were persecuted for political, ideological, and behavioral reasons, among them Communists, Socialists, Jehovah's Witnesses, and homosexuals.”² Historians, students, and the public often use both definitions of the Holocaust. While the traditional definition is used less often in more recent years, both definitions are correct.

Although the Holocaust did not occur on American soil, the event is widely remembered in the United States. In 1979, Congress designated “Days of Remembrance of the Victims of the Holocaust.” Hollywood has produced *Schindler's List* and dozens of other films about the Holocaust. More than forty million people have visited the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM) since it opened in Washington, DC, in 1993.³ Approximately fifty Holocaust memorials and museums are spread throughout the United States today, ranging from small museums and monuments to large institutions such as the USHMM. This paper examines a lesser-known institution, the Virginia Holocaust Museum (VHM), which opened its doors in 1997, just four years after the USHMM. Located in Richmond, the VHM is one of many smaller Holocaust museums spread throughout the United States.

¹ “Introduction to the Holocaust,” United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, accessed October 20, 2015, <http://www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/article.php?ModuleId=10005143>.

² *Ibid.*

³ “About the Museum,” United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, accessed June 25, 2017, <https://www.ushmm.org/information/about-the-museum>.

Scholars have increasingly turned their attention to the “Americanization” of Holocaust memory, defined by Hilene Flanzbaum, an American scholar and professor of English at Butler University, as “the pervasive presence of representations of the Holocaust in our [American] culture.”⁴ As Joseph Massad, Columbia’s professor of modern Arab politics and history, notes, “in recent years, and after a long academic and political silence about the rise of the Jewish [H]olocaust to public and media attention and popular consciousness, a number of books have appeared that attempt to historicize the process through which we came to know of the holocaust and how it was transformed into an American memory.”⁵

Why does the Holocaust resonate so strongly in the United States? What role does historical memory of the Holocaust play in American life? Several scholars, including Edward T. Linenthal, Michael Berenbaum, and Peter Novick, have addressed the “Americanization” of the Holocaust. Immediately after the Second World War, there was an overall silence about the horrors of the Holocaust that lasted for decades. Scholars cite several possible reasons for the lengthy postwar silence: Jewish survivors were trying to assimilate in America, many were still repressing years of pain and trauma from the war, and there was no one to listen to their stories even if they had wanted to talk about their experiences. Yet geopolitics may have been the most important factor behind the silence, or so historian Peter Novick argues:

By the late 1940s and throughout the 1950s, talk of the Holocaust was something of an embarrassment in American public life. This was not, as many have claimed, because of any shame or guilt on the part of Americans concerning their response to the Holocaust. Rather, it was a consequence of revolutionary changes in world alignments. These changes required far reaching ideological retooling in the United States, after which talk of the Holocaust was not just unhelpful but actively obstructive.⁶

⁴ Hilene Flanzbaum, “Introduction,” in *The Americanization of the Holocaust*, ed. Hilene Flanzbaum (Baltimore, Maryland: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), 8.

⁵ Joseph Massad, “Review Essay: Deconstructing Holocaust Consciousness,” *Journal of Palestine Studies* 32, no. 1 (2002): 78.

⁶ Peter Novick, *The Holocaust In American Life* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1999), 85.

During World War II, Nazi Germany had been the main European enemy of the United States, with the Soviet Union serving as a key U.S. ally. The situation reversed not long after the fall of the Third Reich in 1945, however. With the dawn of the Cold War, the Soviet Union became America's chief enemy and the Federal Republic of Germany emerged as an ally. How could Americans talk of the crimes against humanity committed by the Third Reich at a time when the United States relied on West Germany to serve as a Cold War bulwark against communism?

Henry Greenspan, one of the authors in Flanzbaum's book, argues:

The general lack of American interest in the Holocaust and in survivors during the first decades after the war is now well known. What is perhaps less known, however, is that this was not simply an absence, a vacuum of responsiveness, but an active process of suppression and stigmatization. Perhaps also less known is the response of survivors themselves to the silencing they experienced.⁷

Survivors were repeatedly suppressed from expressing their emotions and reliving their experiences during the war. Survival is composed of contradictions and inconsistencies that are hard for non-survivors to understand and accept, which is what quieted the topic of the Holocaust in the years following 1945. Greenspan recalls a quote from Nobel Peace Prize winner and Holocaust survivor, Elie Wiesel:

As they reentered the world, they found themselves in another kind of exile, another kind of prison. People welcomed them with tears and sobs, then turned away. I don't speak of parents or close friends; I speak of officialdom, of the man in the street. I speak of all kinds of men and women who treated them as one would sick and needy relatives. Or else as specimens to be observed and to be kept apart from the rest of society by invisible barbed wire. They were disturbing misfits who deserved charity, but nothing else.⁸

⁷ Henry Greenspan, "Imagining Survivors: Testimony and the Rise of Holocaust Survivors," in *Americanization of the Holocaust*, ed. Hilene Flanzbaum (Baltimore, Maryland: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), 50.

⁸ Elie Wiesel, "A Plea For Survivors," in *A Jew Today*, trans. M. Wiesel (New York: Random House, 1978), 193-94.

It was a difficult time for many survivors in the years directly following the end of the Second World War, and whether the survivors wanted to talk about their experiences or not, they were not given the chance to speak about their experiences until many years later.

According to Novick, the term Holocaust was not common in America until the 1960s with the Six-Day war in Israel in 1967 and the trial of Adolf Eichmann, a major figure in the Nazi party and one of the main organizers of the Holocaust. The Eichmann trial was “shown on television in the United States and around the world” for everyone to see and to learn about the events of the Holocaust that may have not been previously known.⁹ His trial was televised for four months and ultimately “Eichmann was charged by the Israeli government with crimes against the Jewish people as well as against humanity, and his trial was staged, in part, as an effort to demonstrate the singular nature of Nazi persecution of European Jewry and the central role that anti-Semitism played in Nazi ideology.”¹⁰

There were many mixed reactions to the arrest and conviction of Adolf Eichmann. Many believed that he needed to be on trial in Europe where these war crimes were committed. Others believed that by letting Israel hold the trial and conviction of Eichmann in Israel, that they were only acting in a manner of revenge or vengeance for the millions of Jews who died at the hands of the Nazis. There was also a “...widespread reluctance to seeing Jews portrayed as victims, a fear that parading atrocities might spark anti-Semitic incidents,” and the “uncertainty about how the trial would be received in America led to a nervous ambivalence in how leading Jewish groups responded to Eichmann’s capture and trial.”¹¹ The Eichmann trial was a pivotal event in

⁹ Jeffrey Shandler, “Aliens in the Wasteland: American Encounters with the Holocaust on 1960s Science Fiction Television,” in *Americanization of the Holocaust*, ed. Hilene Flanzbaum (Baltimore, Maryland: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), 36.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 38.

¹¹ Novick, *American Life*, 131.

the rise of Holocaust consciousness in America, and it brought the horrors of the Holocaust and the concentration camps to those who knew nothing about the tragedies that occurred there.

The Eichmann trial also gave the American public the chance to hear the term “Holocaust” for the first time from German-born American political theorist and author Hannah Arendt. Novick states, “In the end, for our purposes, the most important thing about the Eichmann trial was that it was the first time that what we now call the Holocaust was presented to the American public as an entity in its own right, distinct from Nazi barbarism in general.”¹² The term is construed as the mass murder of the European Jewish community during the Second World War in the traditional definition, and has provoked some controversies. Novick points out that some believe “the word is hatefully inappropriate because its original meaning was a religious sacrifice consumed by fire; it thus represents a pernicious Christianization of Jewish suffering,” and that the term *Shoah* would be a better description for what happened during the war since it is a “purely Jewish and purely secular term.”¹³

During the Eichmann trial, American journalists translated the Israeli word ‘Shoah’ into ‘Holocaust’ in English. The term became largely popular for this reason, as “what had formerly been one of a variety of terms came, in the early sixties, to be (still usually uncapitalized) the most common one; by the late sixties (usually capitalized), it had become clearly dominant.”¹⁴ Alvin H. Rosenfeld, Director of the Institute for the Study of Contemporary Anti-Semitism, also credits Elie Wiesel for popularizing the term. Wiesel used it to describe the Nazi crimes against the Jews. But Rosenfeld said people, such as President Jimmy Carter, broadened the term:

Others however have widened the application of this word, in the first instance to include all of those who perished under the Germans and their allies. Following Simon Wisenthal, for instance, President Jimmy Carter, speaking on Holocaust Remembrance

¹² *Ibid.*, 133.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 133-134.

Day in Washington in 1979, referred to eleven million victims, among them six million Jews and five million non-Jews. And more recently, the language of “Holocaust” has been widened still further; now it is regularly invoked by people who want to draw public attention to human-rights abuses, social inequalities suffered by racial and ethnic minorities and women, environmental disasters, AIDS, and a whole host of other things.¹⁵

After Eichmann’s trial and Wiesel’s public speeches on his experiences, the term Holocaust became more common in our society and the survivors’ experiences were brought back into the conversation.

Greenspan argues that, “before survivors became ‘the survivors’ they were known by other names,” such as, “the refugees, the greeners, [and] the ones who were there.”¹⁶ When the Holocaust became a topic in American society, there was “a certain looseness of the cold war culture.” Stalin was dead, McCarthy’s reign had ended, but the Cold War was not over yet. Americans were not as hesitant to talk about the horrors committed by the Nazis because they were not so worried about their Cold War Atlantic Alliance at this point. Greenspan believes it was “the passage of time itself, the evolving self-confidence and self-consciousness of the American Jewish community, the changing political climate in Israel, and the general American self-questioning after Vietnam” that brought about the end of the silence. Greenspan also argued that a broader “preoccupation with public and private disaster, destruction and victimization, surviving and survivalism, that became pervasive in America in the 1970s,” helped bring the silence to an end as well. During the 1970s America entered a period when survival was a popular topic: Public interest turned to movies depicting the survival of “mass disaster[s]-natural and nuclear, environmental and genocidal,” accounts of “rape survivors, domestic violence

¹⁵ Alvin H. Rosenfeld, “The Americanization of the Holocaust,” *Commentary*, June 1995, <https://www.commentarymagazine.com/articles/the-americanization-of-the-holocaust/> (accessed January 24, 2016).

¹⁶ Henry Greenspan, “Imagining Survivors,” 50.

survivors, survivors of childhood incest and abuse,” formation of survivalist groups, and “How to Survive” guides.¹⁷ The 1970s had become the end of the “decades of silence.”

In *Preserving Memory*, Linenthal argues that 1978 was the “crucial year in the organization of Holocaust consciousness” in the United States. The year saw President Jimmy Carter call for a national Holocaust museum and a four-part miniseries, *Holocaust*, premier on network television. According to Novick, “more information about the Holocaust was imparted to Americans over those four nights than over all the preceding thirty years.”¹⁸ After many years of silence regarding the violations of human rights during the Holocaust an awakening began American’s interest in this event. Novick believes that the Holocaust was “the only common denominator of American Jewish identity [that] filled a need for a consensual symbol...well designed to confront increasing communal anxiety about ‘Jewish continuity’ in the face of declining religiosity, together with increasing assimilation and a sharp rise in intermarriage, all of which threatened demographic catastrophe.”¹⁹ The Holocaust was a common denominator for the Jewish community, and it was a way in which they could maintain their religious identity in the mixing pot of American culture.

The Americanization of the Holocaust continued for the next two decades, giving rise to an abundance of Holocaust-related media, memorials, and museums. Without question, the most important such institution was the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. The USHMM’s mission statement speaks to why the Holocaust became Americanized and also what role the memory of the event played in post-civil rights America. According to the statement, the museum sought to historicize the Holocaust in relation “to the nation’s own ideals, its pluralist

¹⁷ Novick, *Holocaust In American Life*, 127-152; Henry Greenspan, “Imagining Survivors,” 57.

¹⁸ Edward T. Linenthal, *Preserving Memory: The Struggle to Create America’s Holocaust Museum* (New York: Viking, 1995), 11; Novick, *Holocaust In American Life*, 209.

¹⁹ Novick, *Holocaust America*, 127.

tenets.” “In being defined as the ultimate violation of America’s Bill of Rights and as the persecution of plural groups,” the statement continued, “the Holocaust encompasses all the reasons immigrants – past, present, and future – have for seeking refuge in America.”²⁰ In sum, museum leaders insisted that the memory of the Holocaust belonged “at the center of American life because as a democratic civilization America is the enemy of racism and its ultimate expression, genocide. An event of universal significance, the Holocaust has special importance for Americans: in act and word the Nazis denied the deepest tenets of the American people.”²¹

Charles Krauthammer, the columnist and political commentator, believed that a national Holocaust museum would be best for remembrance since it did not take place on American soil, but since America liberated much of Europe from the Axis powers, we do have a part in Holocaust memory and memorialization:

Yes, there are Holocaust memorials in Poland and elsewhere. But these are not to be trusted. Who knows what Europe, birthplace of the Nazi plague, will one day say of or do with these monuments....Yes, there is a memorial in Israel. One might say that Israel itself is a memorial to the Holocaust. But there will be those in generations to come who will not trust the testimony of Jews. With this building, America bears witness. The liberators have returned to finish the job. First rescue, then remembrance. Bless them.²²

While Krauthammer put a rather idealist spin on the USHMM’s founding, critics such as the *Washington Post*’s Benjamin Forgey retorted that the institution of a national Holocaust museum in America was the United States way of claiming and using the memory of the tragic event for the country’s own self-serving purposes. The 1990s saw the fiftieth anniversary of World War II, which brought about celebrations and memories of triumph and victory, including memories of the Holocaust and of Europe’s liberation.

²⁰ James E. Young, “America’s Holocaust: Jewish American Fiction and the Double Bind of the Second-Generation Survivor,” in *Americanization of the Holocaust*, ed. Hilene Flanzbaum (Baltimore, Maryland: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), 73.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² Charles Krauthammer, “Holocaust Museum: Where Infamy Achieves Immortality,” *The Washington Post*, April 23, 1993.

The term *Americanization* has been used quite frequently to deal with the Holocaust in the United States, but it is not always met with approval. Flanzbaum argues:

Even the term *Americanization* is under fire. For some it automatically signals America at its worst: crassness, vulgarization, and selling out. Rosenfeld uses the term this way in his article “The Americanization of the Holocaust,” in which he “wonders how any story of the crimes of the Nazi era can remain faithful to the specific features of those events and at the same time address contemporary American social and political agendas.”²³

The term has been used with positive and negative associations by different authors, academics, and journalists for their own personal reasons. Michael Berenbaum defends the use of the word with reference to the mission of the USHMM. The museum’s mission is “to tell the story of the Holocaust in such a way that it would resonate not only with the survivor in New York and his children in San Francisco, but with a black leader from Atlanta, a Midwestern farmer, or a Northeastern industrialist.” He concludes that Americanization “is a necessary, and noble, evolution of Holocaust remembrance.”²⁴ Rosenfeld also mentions that:

There are obvious benefits to such a way [Americanization] of remembering the Holocaust. Religious faith may revive for some, and the tenor of Jewish-Christian dialogue may improve for others. But for most, this exaltation of the “righteous,” together with the sentimentalized celebration of survivors, and the eager extension of victim status to any and all comers, may well serve to foster a great complacency about the most harrowing history of this century.²⁵

Rosenfeld is suggesting that Americans have been using the Holocaust for our own purposes and that we have become complacent about such a horrible event.

The current historical literature addresses the Americanization of the Holocaust writ large, examining memorialization on a national scale and such major institutions as the USHMM. Holocaust museums and memorials have played an important role in our society, our memories, and our public consciousness. The extent of Americanization and the relevance of the Holocaust

²³ Flanzbaum, *Americanization*, 5; Rosenfeld, “Americanization,” *Commentary*.

²⁴ Michael Berenbaum, *After Tragedy and Triumph: Essays in Modern Jewish Thought and the American Experience* (New York, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

²⁵ Rosenfeld, “Americanization,” *Commentary*.

have been studied previously but not often through the lens of the Virginia Holocaust Museum. As such, it presents an opportunity to explore more closely at the production and reception of Holocaust memory in the United States.

CHAPTER TWO JAY M. IPSON AND THE HOLOCAUST



Figure 1. “A Young Jewish boy poses on his scooter near his home in Kaunas, Lithuania.”

Jay M. Ipson (image above), the youngest Holocaust survivor in Richmond, Virginia, is one of the co-founders and creators of the Virginia Holocaust Museum. Born Yacob Ipp to Eta (Edna) and Isroel (Israel) Ipp in Lithuania, on June 5, 1935. Ipp lived in the Villiampole (Slobodka) district of Kaunas, Lithuania during his childhood and up until the war.²⁶ Isroel Ipp was a prominent attorney in their district while Jay was growing up. The Ipps lived a normal life in Lithuania, and Isroel was well known among his community. After the Kristallnacht pogrom of

²⁶ “Biography of Jay M. Ipson,” United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, accessed March 1, 2017. <https://collections.ushmm.org/search/catalog/pa1151027>.

November 9-10, 1938, Isroel was no longer allowed to practice law according to new racial laws. While barred from practicing law, Isroel opened up a motorcycle shop. Just two years later, Lithuania was captured and annexed by the Soviets, and Isroel's shop was sequestered. On June 22, 1941, Kaunas was taken over by Nazis after they led an attack on the Soviet regime. In August, the Jewish population of Kaunas were confined in a ghetto in the Villiampole district. Over 27,000 Jewish families were confined in the Kovno ghetto.

The Ipp family moved in with Eta's parents along with other relatives who needed a place to stay once they were inside the Kovno ghetto. Both of Ipp's parents were assigned to forced labor: Eta worked in a women's brigade loading and unloading coal, and Isroel worked outside of the ghetto at a repair shop. Life inside the ghetto was difficult for the Ipp family and for anyone forced to live in those horrible conditions. On October 28, 1941, the Germans began to line up all of the families in the ghetto for a selection. There were two choices: to go to the left or to the right. To go to the right meant you and your family were safe for the time being. To go to the left was deportation to Riga. Israel Ipson, who had been a lawyer up until his move into the ghetto, heard that any man who worked in a professional job (lawyer, doctor, etc.) was sent to the left and all others to the right. Israel felt in his gut that he should lie and say he was an auto mechanic. He and his family were then sent to the right. The Ipsons later learned that 16,500 people were sent to the left and had been killed that very night. Israel's deception saved his life and the lives of his family. Israel explained:

Something inside me said to do this. That is why I am here today. If I had said I was a lawyer I would have been dead...I was scared to death the next day when the Germans began looking for an auto mechanic and picked me...I knew nothing about automobiles.²⁷

²⁷ *Ibid.*

This choice was a crucial one for the Ipp family. If Isroel had told the truth about his career and education, the Ipson family may not be alive.

Life was difficult inside Kovno with little food, filth and disease rampant throughout the ghetto, and small living quarters. The Ipson family was there for another two years before Israel decided they needed to escape. The German soldiers had begun their liquidation of the camp, and now was the time for the Ipsons to get out if they hoped for a chance at survival. Israel contacted his wife's uncle, Yitchak Kalemitzkas, who was a farmer, and he contacted other neighboring farmers for help. On the November night of their escape, Israel cut the wire surrounding the ghetto, and made his way to the woods with his wife and son, Jay. "It was a painful moment in my life," Israel said as "He kissed the rest of his family goodbye[e], never to see them again."²⁸ The rest of the Ipson family was killed when they were sent to concentration camps from Kovno.

On the night of their escape, Israel believed that he and his family walked about five miles until they met a farmer who drove them in his hay wagon the remaining 50 miles. "Through other contacts, [Israel] Ipson went to a 'very old and religious Catholic man who saved my life.' The Catholic family, Vaclovas and Ona Paskauskas, allowed the Ipson family to live in his winter storage potato pits until the liberation, a year later."²⁹ The 9-foot by 12-foot potato pit held Jay and eleven other people, including his family, for nine months. The most exciting way for Jay to pass his time was to take off his shirt and to see how many lice he could find; it was how he learned to count.³⁰

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ Alberta Lindsey, "Holocaust Museum Planned," *Richmond Times Dispatch*, December 14, 1996.



Figure 2. Chelsea Head. "Recreation of the Ipson Family Hideout." 2015. Personal Digital Image.

The Ipp family lived in the potato pits until the Red Army liberated them in July 1944. After the Ipsons were liberated, they returned to Kovno where Israel managed five cooperatives for the Soviet Union. Shortly after, Israel was declared an enemy of the state and had to bribe a KGB truck driver to help them leave the country. The family left Lithuania and made their way to the American zone of Munich, Germany. Israel joined the American Joint Distribution Committee and the Ipp family resided in Munich for the next two years.

LIFE IN RICHMOND, VIRGINIA AS A HOLOCAUST SURVIVOR

After the war, Ipson's father joined the American Joint Distribution Committee in Munich, and then through the United Nations Relief Organization, the Ipson family came to Richmond, Virginia. Carolyn McCulley wrote a story about the Ipson family for the newspaper *Style Weekly*:

The [Ipsons] survived four years of trauma during the Holocaust, living in a Jewish ghetto in Lithuania and then in hiding underground – literally. After the war was over, they fled the former U.S.S.R. to Poland to Czechoslovakia then to West Berlin and to Munich, before coming to Richmond in 1947. “What we went through in our life — the ghettos, the running from one place to another, the killings — by coming here, nothing was hard for me to do,” Edna [Jay’s mother] says. She tells of when she was whipped when they lived in the ghetto for having two slices of bread in her pockets.³¹

Starting a new life in America was nowhere as difficult for the Ipson family as surviving the horrible ordeals they experienced in Europe. In Lithuania, Isroel was a well-educated man with a prosperous career. In America, his knowledge of the law and of six languages was not a benefit to him. Isroel relied on the lie he told the Nazi guards that saved his life: his backhanded knowledge of cars and mechanics. In 1948, Israel started a gasoline station in the 1900 block of West Cary Street. His wife Edna worked at the station as well. Life progressed for the Ipp family. As his business grew, Israel added a used car lot to his station and in 1955 it became the American Auto Parts store.³² Israel told a local newspaper, “I am very happy here. Here, I found freedom for every human being and unlimited opportunities. That is why I have a big business and am active in the community.”³³

Along with owning and running his own auto shop in Richmond, Israel played a large part in his community. By giving back to his community, it gave him the chance to thank his new city and new home for giving him a chance at a happy, prosperous life. Israel was the president of Temple Beth-El, the leader of their Hebrew school, and served on the board of the directors of the Jewish Community Center and Beth Sholom Home.³⁴

³¹ Carolyn McCulley, “Remember Always,” *Style Weekly*, April 15, 1997.

³² Lynne Robertson, “Fib Leads Jew to Prosperous Life Here,” *The Richmond News Leader*, May 31, 1975.

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ *Ibid.*



Figure 3. Gary Burns. “Israel Ipson and Wife, Edna, with son Jay and his wife, Elly.”
The Richmond News Leader. 1975.

Israel’s involvement in the community and the temple meant the Ipsons were not themselves quiet while others were complicit in the years of silence that followed WWII. With Israel largely involved in their local temple and community, the Ipps, now Ipsons, were never afraid to let people know they were Jewish. His son, Jay, told *The Richmond Times Dispatch* that he “neither hid nor broadcast his Holocaust experience” while his children were growing up. “When they asked questions, we answered them at a level they could understand. It’s only recently now that they’re in their 30s that they ask more about it.”³⁵ Jay’s daughters Ethel and Esther spoke about how they did not feel that their family had any secrets while they were growing up. The sisters explained

We didn’t feel like we had anything in common with the Second Generation. I can’t understand why they have bitterness and anger. They were crying that they missed something, they lacked something in their heritage. They knew nothing about their past...We grew up in a very open, loving family. We don’t feel we’ve missed something or have a missing link or that we don’t know about our background or family members. The only thing I remember being told is never be scared to say who you are, never be afraid of being Jewish.³⁶

³⁵ Betty Booker, “So Many Secrets,” *The Richmond Times Dispatch*, April 28, 1997.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

Not one family who had parents, grandparents, or aunts and uncles in the Holocaust felt the same way about their family. Most survivors of the Holocaust kept their stories and their horrors to themselves, not wanting to burden their children with their problems. This helped further the perpetual years of silence surrounding WWII and the Holocaust. Survivors did not want to talk about their stories, and everyone else did not want to ask.

It is commonly noted that the American public received most, if not all of their information about the Holocaust from the American entertainment network, not from survivors and noted historians. According to Alvin H. Rosenfeld:

The term ‘historical memory’ is in common usage, but, as previously noted, for most people a sense of the Nazi crimes against the Jews is formed less by the record of events established by professional historians than by individual stories and images that reach us from more popular writers, artists, film directors, television producers, political figures, and the like...we live in a mass culture, and much of what we learn about the past comes to us from those forms of communication that comprise the information and entertainment networks of this culture.³⁷

Rosenfeld’s statement accurately describes American culture because in general the American public likes to receive information in the easiest way possible and that is through popular entertainment such as TV, film, and the Internet. This makes Holocaust education a challenge to educators and museum professionals alike.

When the war ended, there was no such thing known as the Holocaust. The events of WWII were not separated from the genocide of the Jews. Linenthal notes that following the war there was an “equally passionate public desire to ignore the unforgettable images that had greeted the troops when they encountered the camps.”³⁸ Just as it was hard for the troops to describe and understand what they saw, it was tremendously harder for the survivors to wrap their heads around what had happened to them during the war. Even if one wanted to talk about

³⁷ Alvin H. Rosenfeld, *The End of the Holocaust* (Indiana University Press, 2011), 53.

³⁸ Linenthal, *Preserving Memory*, 5.

their experiences, how does one put those horrors into words? Survivor Benjamin Meed believed the first few years in America were difficult to adjust to a normal life. Meed said,

Our first few years were hard. Everytime we heard car tires screeching, we froze... We even had to adjust to the ringing of door bells. For us the echo of the old world of fear and death reverberated many times a day... For years we were alone. Our fellow Jews regarded us as 'green' –the newest immigrants. Americans treated us as refugees. 'Forget the past,' we were told, 'it can only hurt you.' So we reached out to each other and remembered alone.³⁹

The Ipsons were among those who experienced similar problems as other survivors coming to Richmond. They wanted to forget their old lives and the horrors that they had experienced, and build a new, happy, better life in the U.S. European Jews wanted to “blend in,” not “stick out” among their neighbors and communities. Historian Deborah Lipstadt argues, “The American Jewish suburban community was concerned with manifestations of unity and not diversity, universalism and not particularism. They were more concerned about acting as Americans than as Jews.”⁴⁰ The Ipson family seemed to exist in both worlds: the survivor with the proud Jewish heritage, and the new American family. The fact that Israel and Jay were heavily involved in their local community and temple further encourages this idea. The Ipson’s wanted to be a part of American culture, but they also wanted to remember their past. This is another way to look at the term Americanization of the Holocaust: taking the topic of the Holocaust and making it a part of American culture.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 6.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

THE BEGINNINGS OF THE AMERICANIZATION OF THE HOLOCAUST

According to Hilene Flanzbaum, the term “Americanization of the Holocaust” is “the pervasive presence of representations of the Holocaust in our [American] culture.”⁴¹ When Flanzbaum used this term in her book in 1999, it was not the first time the phrase “Americanization” had been used. She points out that the term had been used in two other instances. In Australian academic Jon Stratton’s review of Flanzbaum’s work, he notes,

Lawrence Langer, the trenchant discussor of Holocaust literature and testimony, was perhaps the first to use the term as long ago as 1983, in a piece entitled ‘The Americanization of the Holocaust on stage and screen’ in Sarah Blacher Cohen’s book, *From Hester Street to Hollywood*. The other use identified by Flanzbaum is by Alvin Rosenfeld in 1995 who, as Flanzbaum notes, employs it to indicate how the Holocaust is being degraded by American popular culture.⁴²

Stratton and Flanzbaum both discuss that while the “Americanization of the Holocaust” may not have become a common phrase used by historians until the 1990s, the act of “Americanization” had been occurring since the mid-1980s, despite the overall decades of silence that followed World War II. But, if one looks closely, the Americanization of the Holocaust began as early as the 1950s with the release of *The Diary of Anne Frank*.

The first glimpse of the “Americanization” [that Americans saw] was the publication and release of *The Diary of Anne Frank* in 1952. While it was a heavily edited version of Frank’s diary, it gave Americans the first real indication of what life was like under the Nazis reign during WWII. *The Diary of Anne Frank* is now one of the most popular books about the Holocaust in the U.S., but in the early 1950s it had very few readers. In 1996 a survey was conducted at the University of Michigan that determined Frank’s diary was the “predominant

⁴¹ Hilene Flanzbaum, “Introduction,” in *The Americanization of the Holocaust*, ed. Hilene Flanzbaum (Baltimore, Maryland: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), 8.

⁴² Jon Stratton, “Thinking Through the Holocaust: A Discussion inspired by Hilene Flanzbaum (ed.), *The Americanization of the Holocaust*.” *Continuum* 14, no. 2 (2000): 231.

source of Holocaust education...[as the text] was required in high school reading for over half the students surveyed.”⁴³ Since Frank’s diary has been published numerous times over the years with new information that was previously omitted, Americans now know more about the Holocaust than they did in the 1950s. The Holocaust of the 1950s is different than the Holocaust of the 1990s or even today in the 2010s. Novick states, “Between the end of the war and the 1960, as anyone who has lived through those years can testify, the Holocaust made scarcely any appearance in American public discourse, and hardly more in Jewish public discourse – especially discourse directed to gentiles.” Even though the *Diary of Anne Frank* had been published in the United States, it garnered little attention and many Jews did not speak about the events that transpired during World War II.⁴⁴ Today in 2017 historians, academics, and the public know more about the Holocaust than anyone could fathom during the 1950s. With such a wide variety of sources to receive news and information, Americans confront new knowledge on a daily basis. Whether the information is true or not is another matter entirely.

As briefly mentioned above, Americans routinely receive their historical and factual information through entertainment sources. Flanzbaum notes “our knowledge of the Holocaust has rarely been delivered by direct witness; it comes to us by way of representations, and representations of representations, through editors and publishers, producers and directors.”⁴⁵ These representations of history are exactly what Flanzbaum is describing with the term Americanization. Americans took the Holocaust and produced a multitude of representations of the actual historical event. There are books, films, television shows, museums, monuments, plays, websites, articles, etc. all about the Holocaust in a country where it did not take place. Has

⁴³ Flanzbaum, “Introduction,” *Americanization*.

⁴⁴ Novick, *American Life*, 103.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 4

this avalanche of Holocaust material come out of survivors' wishes to memorialize a horrible event and hope that it will never happen again? Is it the American Jewish population who felt they needed to make America remember what happened? Or is it the American government who felt guilty for their lack of involvement during the war? These are many of the questions and issues involved with Holocaust studies in the United States.

Another two issues that Flanzbaum notes are that the Holocaust has never been a static event as it “has evolved in concert with larger social, cultural, and political movements,” and that the “American responsibility to remember bears a distinctive national character.”⁴⁶ Flanzbaum points out that the American Jewish community did feel the need to remember and educate the American public on the events of the Holocaust and “it did so in the face of special challenges – a society that has at times encouraged assimilation and one that is always, in the words of Graver, “governed by money, popular taste, media hype, democratic optimism and a susceptibility to easy consolation.”⁴⁷ All of these issues often conflict in the world of Holocaust studies. For example, television executives may like the newest series on the Holocaust because it is informative not just entertaining, whereas a group of survivors and their families think its crass and misleading. These are the types of problems associated with the Americanization of the Holocaust. How does one remember and memorialize a horrible event in a way that is not hurtful, distorted, and exploitive?

It took many years for Americans to be able to commemorate and remember the victims of the Holocaust in a way that was respectful and educational, and even still there are often times where the Americanization of the Holocaust is met with criticism. The 1970s is when Americanization really started to take shape. The tension that had come about with the Cold War

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

had dissipated, and Americans now felt it was acceptable to talk again about the Second World War. American Jews felt they could rightly claim their Jewish history and culture, and Holocaust remembrance was at the center of their identity. While the Holocaust was now a prevalent topic among American Jews, it did not suddenly occur. As Novick says,

More than anything else, it was the consequence of decisions made by communal leaders in response to their appraisals of current communal needs...that the end result of these decisions would be to put the Holocaust at the center of how Jews understood themselves and wanted others to understand them was neither foreseen nor intended by most of those who set the process in motion.⁴⁸

The Ipson family was one who saw the first touches of the Americanization of the Holocaust. When they arrived to Richmond, Virginia after the end of the war, they experienced many emotions and conflicting images of self-identity. With so many Jews and gentiles alike avoiding the subject of the horrors of the war and the pressure to assimilate to their new home and culture, the Ipson's could not have lived their lives in an absence of Holocaust discussion. But, given his interviews and newspaper articles, the Ipson family was never one to shy away from discussing their experiences and suffering during the war.

⁴⁸ Novick, *American Life*, 202-203.

CHAPTER THREE

THE CREATION OF THE VIRGINIA HOLOCAUST MUSEUM

BEGINNING CONCEPTS AND CREATION

Following the end of World War II a period of silence about the horrors of the Holocaust lasted decades up until the 1990s. Survivors no longer felt the stigmas attached to being a victim, and as they were getting older, they felt the need to tell their stories. An “Americanization” of the Holocaust culminated in the mid 1990s with American citizens wanting to have their own part in the history of the Holocaust. Towns all across America created museums and memorials to remember and preserve the memory of the Holocaust. Richmond was one of those towns that wanted to have a part in memorializing the Holocaust.

The Virginia Holocaust Museum opened May 1, 1997 after a long period of planning, creating, and fundraising by founders Al Rosenbaum, Mark Fetter, Devorah Ben-David Elstein, and Jay M. Ipson. Before opening the VHM, Jay Ipson was the founder of the Ipson Holocaust Education Fund in Richmond and had been involved with Holocaust education for many years. The Ipson Holocaust Education Fund supplied grants through the Richmond Jewish Foundation to programs and organizations that provide services and education to the Jewish community.⁴⁹ Jay Ipson had spoken about the Holocaust to approximately 3,000 schoolchildren regionally between the years 1990-1997 before he got the idea for the museum at the end of November 1997.⁵⁰ Ipson’s father, Israel Ipson, was heavily involved in the community and the temple for much of his adult life in Richmond. With Israel’s ties to the community and the temple, creating a museum about the Ipson story seemed to the family like a logical step in local Holocaust

⁴⁹ “Grantmaking,” Richmond Jewish Foundation, accessed June 26, 2017, <http://www.rjfoundation.org/grants/>.

⁵⁰ Fay Kranz, “Labor of Hate Leads to Labor of Love,” *The Richmond Jewish News*, November 22, 1996.

memory and education. The museum was a way for the Ipson family to personally remember and commemorate their own family history but left out many other Holocaust victims and survivors' stories. The Ipson's could have created a museum memorializing local Holocaust victims and survivors without having a majority of the museum's exhibits focused on the Ipson family, which would show that there was no bias or detachment when creating the museum. Having the Ipson family story play such a large part in the museum's foundation and exhibits brings in a personal connection for visitors, but it leaves many stories of other victims of the Holocaust ignored and overshadowed.

Founded by local artist Al Rosenbaum, local publisher Mark Fetter, local journalist Devorah Ben-David Elstein, and Holocaust survivor Jay M. Ipson, the museum makes "an effort to preserve and educate people on the atrocities of the Holocaust."⁵¹ The museum's exhibits do educate the public on the atrocities of the Holocaust, but mainly on what happened to the Ipson family. When creating the museum, Ipson wanted to incorporate his own story into the exhibits while still focusing on educating the public about the Holocaust and tolerance. In addition to his own story, Ipson wanted to make sure that the survivors' stories were heard by current and future generations. Ipson is a firm believer in Holocaust education and survivor testimonies through oral history. Ipson gave a few words about the importance of oral history and why he wanted to create such a museum:

There are fewer than 19 survivors in Richmond, and they are growing old. "We're shrinking and shrinking rapidly, which is why it's important to do this now," says Ipson. "It's history that hopefully will never repeat".⁵²

⁵¹ "About," Virginia Holocaust Museum, accessed October 15, 2015, <http://www.va-holocaust.com/content/about>.

⁵² Fay Kranz, "Labor of Hate Leads to Labor of Love," *The Richmond Jewish News*, November 22, 1996.

Oral history is an important part of any history or remembrance, because without it, we would not have as accurate information as we do with oral histories. With Ipson strongly believing in the importance of Holocaust education, the VHM was sure to showcase the significance of oral history and remembrance. In Ipson's and the other museum founders' opinions, oral history and Holocaust remembrance go hand-in-hand. Both concepts can exist independently, but are often dependent to fully memorialize and remember the victims of the Holocaust. As of 2017, the VHM has a collection of 230 digitized oral histories for visitors, students, and historians to view either online or at the museum.⁵³

Journalist Fay Kranz from the *Richmond Jewish News* wrote a story about the creative process of opening a Holocaust museum in Richmond, Virginia:

Devorah Ben-David, Mark Fetter, Jay Ipson and Al Rosenbaum all worked together on the Holocaust committee of the Federation. All four were deeply interested in preserving the memory of the Holocaust for future generations and were impressed with the work Jay Ipson was doing privately... The four wished there was some way Ipson's talks could be concentrated in one location where there would be visuals to complement his words.⁵⁴

From the very beginning, the other founding members focused on the Ipson story as the foundation of the museum. In their opinion the Ipson family was the perfect story to showcase since Ipson was a prominent and vocal supporter of the memorialization of Holocaust victims. Ipson was never shy about his story and would have no problem with the museum being focused on him and his family. Between the years of 1996-1997, Ben-David was talking to Fetter about how the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum gets a lot of donations, and she wondered what they often did with the items that they didn't use. After talking to the USHMM, Ben-David and Fetter received permission to use some of the unused items. Jacek M. Nowakowski, Director of Acquisitions at the USHMM, was vital in securing artifacts for the VHM to display. A few

⁵³ The VHM's oral history collection will be discussed further in later chapters.

⁵⁴ Fay Kranz, "Labor of Hate Leads to Labor of Love," *The Richmond Jewish News*, November 22, 1996.

important artifacts that Nowakowski helped procure for the museum were pieces of a train track to a concentration camp and a few cobblestones from Auschwitz. The next problem the group had to solve was where to display these artifacts?

Through brainstorming, the quartet came to the conclusion that they were all members of the Temple Beth-El, and that the Temple's old school building would be a logical place to display these artifacts and items. Fetter said, "Basically, I asked my aunt Bea (Fine), who is president of the Temple, about the building. She invited us into the executive board meetings and as soon as it was presented, it was unanimously and instantaneously approved."⁵⁵ In January 1997, Temple Beth-El in Richmond, Virginia gave their approval for the opening of Virginia's first Holocaust museum. Al Rosenbaum and Jay Ipson supported the museum financially, and Ipson's personal experience was also vital to the creation.

The museum's archival documentation about the creative process makes clear that without donations, hundreds of volunteers, and help from the USHMM, the museum would not have been possible. The early years of the museum's existence relied on volunteers as the museum had no paid employees. The VHM partnered with the Jewish Federation of Richmond, and with Jewish and non-Jewish non-profits in the Richmond area. Support came in the form of monetary donations, exhibit and artifact donations, and volunteers to put the museum together. An initial "mission statement" was drafted when the museum was in planning stages. A few excerpts from the statement are as follows:

The Holocaust Museum was created to educate, inform, and enlighten the general public and middle school children about the causes and effects of the period in world history known as The Holocaust. The museum will provide a living memorial to those who perished during The Holocaust and will promote awareness through programming to deter the repetition of history. Tours of the Museum and lectures accompanying the tours are geared to middle school students and include background information on the period

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

from 1911 to 1948. Older students and adults are given personal tours by trained docents, some of whom are survivors of The Holocaust themselves.⁵⁶

From the beginning, the museum was focused on educating the public, children and adults, about the horrors of the Holocaust and helping history to not repeat its mistakes. The main reason for the museum was education, and that is something that remained a core value of the VHM. It can be seen through the VHM's traveling exhibits, it's 2017 renovation project, and all of their educational programs for the community.

The museum's exhibits include Holocaust education and oral history by drawing "together two narratives: the broader historic realities of the Holocaust, and the specific account of the Ipson family's ordeal and survival." Moreover, the museum "strives to educate the public and to promote tolerance towards all, regardless of nationality, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation or creed."⁵⁷ The VHM's main purpose in Richmond is to promote tolerance and peace for all of its citizens. The museum does this through different educational programs, such as the workshop "Facing History and Ourselves: Choices in Little Rock."⁵⁸

No matter the size of a museum, it must have a board of trustees that makes decisions and is in charge of day-to-day and long-term operations. The original board of trustees was made up of 27 people, including Jay Ipson, Mark Fetter, and Al Rosenbaum. Dr. Charles W. Sydnor, Jr., current Senior Historian at the museum, was also on the board of trustees in 1997. Sydnor who is heavily involved in the history and education of the Holocaust "provided the United States Department of Justice and its Office of Special Investigations with expert testimony in twenty-one court cases involving former SS concentration camp guards and Nazi death camp

⁵⁶ "Mission Statement from 1997," from the Archives of the Virginia Holocaust Museum. Accessed November 2015.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ The museum's workshops, particularly this one, will be discussed in further details later on in Chapter Four.

collaborators. Dr. Sydnor has also served as the Virginia Holocaust Museum's Executive Director from 2013-2015."⁵⁹ People heavily involved in the Holocaust remembrance field, such as employees from the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Holocaust Academics, and Holocaust survivors, were involved with the opening of the museum, along with the local community.

News articles reported that volunteers from Richmond worked tirelessly to meet the deadline for the museum's dedication on May 1, 1997. The original museum building was a 10,000 square foot former religious school at 213 Roseneath Road, which was adjacent from the Temple Beth-El.⁶⁰ The museum had planned on opening in April to occur at the same time as the Holocaust Remembrance Days, but ran into delays along the way. On the day of the Dedication Ceremonies, Dr. Charles W. Sydnor, Jr. gave these words:

In the living gift of the survivors among us – our survivors – who are represented for all who enter the Museum, we are reminded that their lives are a living lesson. Their histories are symbolized by the miracle of the Ipson family's escape from the Kovno Ghetto and survival through the long night of terror and mass murder in Lithuania. The desperate courage, resourcefulness, and extraordinary combination of instinct and ingenuity employed by Israel and Edna Ipson, brought out of the Holocaust a miracle within a miracle—the survival of a small child, the little boy from the Kovno Ghetto—the moving force behind the creation of the Virginia Holocaust Museum.⁶¹

Dr. Sydnor's speech gives all of the credit of the museum's creation and existence to the Ipson family. This shows that once again, this museum was solely created for the Ipson family as they are the "moving force" behind the museum's creation. Should a museum have all of its focus on one family and one story, or should it try to encompass as many of the stories from the Holocaust as it can? Because the museum is mainly focused on the Ipson family's story, it prevents visitors

⁵⁹ "Dr. Charlie Sydnor," Virginia Holocaust Museum, accessed March 10, 2017. <https://www.vaholocaust.org/?team=charlie-sydnor>.

⁶⁰ Eric Rozenman, "Holocaust Museum Planned," *Washington Jewish Week*, January 23, 1997.

⁶¹ Dr. Charles W. Sydnor, Jr., *Dedication Ceremonies of the Virginia Holocaust Museum at Temple Beth-El*, May 1, 1997. Transcript.

from remembering and commemorating their own family's history since there is no room for anyone else's past.

One of the questions frequently received by the museum is why is there another Holocaust museum so close to the one in Washington, D.C.? Dr. Charles Sydnor, Jr. offers us an insight:

The Holocaust in history transcends the capacity of any single institution, however great, to embrace its entirety. Millions of victims were persecuted through thousands of points in many places and in countless communities along the path that lay beneath the lengthening shadow of destruction. The crimes of the Nazis, and the murderous activities of the SS and all those who assisted them, were so vast and so hideously inhumane precisely because they were localized and de-centralized acts of persecution across the entire continent of Europe that collectively forced victims into the vast machinery of industrialized mass murder. Because so few communities escaped, every community should remember...In my view, the best way, indeed perhaps the only way, to preserve and to teach what the Holocaust was like...is in a Holocaust Museum locally created in community conviction, specifically reflecting individual community spirit...And although we are not the first, we are among the earliest of what undoubtedly will be hundreds of American cities and communities creating Museums and learning centers dedicated to the Holocaust in the years ahead.⁶²

Sydnor is suggesting that every community, every city should establish a museum or memorial to the Holocaust because thousands of communities and people were affected by the Nazi's crimes. There is truth in what Dr. Sydnor is saying, but if every community in every city had a Holocaust memorial/ museum, the importance of memorializing the Holocaust would diminish. When visiting the USHMM in Washington, D.C., visitors are often left feeling overwhelmed by the museum itself and the exhibits inside. One of the USHMM's strengths is that the museum evokes an array of emotions as visitors walk from one room to the next.

⁶² Dr. Charles W. Sydnor, Jr., *Dedication Ceremonies of the Virginia Holocaust Museum at Temple Beth-El*, May 1, 1997. Transcript.



Figure 4. Don Long. "Museum Dedication is Emotional." In *Richmond Times-Dispatch*. Richmond, Virginia, 1997

Visitors are not presented with these images and texts on a daily basis but only when they visit the museum. If every community in every city had their own museum, visitors would not have such a strong reaction to the content as they would have had more opportunities to come in contact with the information. The proximity between the VHM and the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum does not matter, as each museum is different in their approach to memorializing and commemoration. The VHM focuses on one survivor's story to look at the Holocaust, whereas the USHMM relies on its architecture and its content to take the visitor on an emotional journey. Both museums can exist in close proximity because both are doing the important job of memorializing and remembering the Holocaust, and they are furthering the education of future generations of Americans in a time when tolerance and diversity should be celebrated.

RELOCATION AND AN EXPANDING FUTURE



Figure 5. Chelsea Head. “Current Location of Virginia Holocaust Museum.” 2015. Personal Digital Image.

In 1999, it was clear to the museum’s board and staff that they had outgrown their current space and that they were not able to fulfill their mission statement. With two or more groups of 50-200 people visiting each day, staff often had to turn people away because there was not enough space. In 2003, the Virginia Holocaust Museum moved to a new location; an old tobacco warehouse on East Cary Street in Richmond. In the *Richmond Times Dispatch*, Ipson wrote about the museum’s transition to its new location on Tobacco Row:

The warehouse was full of tobacco dust and hundreds of storage cubicles. It had no heat, air-conditioning, or bathroom facilities. We did not have the funds for a clean-up or for construction. Yet again the community pulled together. Church and synagogue groups, youth groups, retired persons and executives, and men's and women's civic groups all

came to clean, scrub, and make the building ready for construction. This community showed, with its efforts, that it wanted the Virginia Holocaust Museum to thrive.⁶³

This old tobacco warehouse was the perfect location for the VHM as its interior and exterior were ideal for the image and feeling the museum's staff was hoping to achieve. When the museum's staff first walked inside the warehouse, the lack of air-conditioning, heat, and bathroom facilities conjured images of concentration camps. The outside of the building also gives visitors the feeling of being in a camp as Nazi's often used these types of industrial buildings. Another feature that helped seal the deal as the museum's new location is the fact that it is located near the train tracks in Richmond. Concentration camps also used to be situated on train tracks for easy transportation. Ipson said that as they were touring the new building, "a train went by and you could feel a vibration. A chill went through everybody. At that moment, I knew this was the right place for us."⁶⁴

The Virginia Holocaust Museum took over the lease on the new building in July 2000 and the renovations took three years to complete. The new building and all of the renovations cost around \$10 million and was once again possible by donations and volunteers in the community.

In September 2003, the museum acquired a century old cattle car to its artifacts. The car came from Duesburg, Germany and cost around \$20,000, which was acquired through donations. The museum had been looking for a cattle car for years, as the curators believed that it would be a good artifact for the VHM's exhibits.⁶⁵ Alex Lebenstein, a local Holocaust survivor who lived through multiple concentration camps, said, "It will give people a true feeling of what

⁶³ Jay M. Ipson, "Local Holocaust Museum Teaches Truths," *Richmond Times Dispatch*, January 23, 2005.

⁶⁴ Janet Caggiano, "A Healing Place; Holocaust Museum Aims to Teach Tolerance," *The Richmond Times-Dispatch*. April 23, 2003.

⁶⁵ "Museum Gets German Cattle Car Holocaust Display in Richmond A Reminder of WWII Horrors," *The Daily Press*, September 11, 2003.

inhumanity took place during that time.”⁶⁶ Ipson wanted the cattle car to be a “quiet area where visitors can reflect after visiting the museum.” He also noted “there are so many people who come through the museum who have an emotional experience. They need a place to sit and be alone with their thoughts.”⁶⁷ The acquisition of the cattle car was a piece for the museum to allow visitors to be transported to the time of WWII where they can just possibly feel and empathize with t a victim of the Nazis. But by allowing visitors to step inside one of these cattle cars, it belittles the reality that many faced during WWII.



Figure 6. “Cattle Car.” Photograph courtesy of TripAdvisor. Digital Image. Accessed March 2017.

In the new location, the museum was able to expand and add new artifacts to its permanent collection and library. The cattle car was one of the new additions, along with recreations of the

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

Ipson's potato pit, the Eichmann trial (with a full courtroom and mannequins), and other recreations of important moments in the history of the Holocaust. The museum's permanent exhibit strives to place the visitors in the event that the exhibit is displaying and detailing. The museum wants the visitor to feel emotion and make connections with the material presented to them.

During the summer of 2012, president and co-founder of the VHM, Jay Ipson, was forced out of his positions by the museum's executive board. The dismissal of Ipson from the VHM was a controversial choice, and there were protests outside of the museum for many weeks. Ipson was originally told by the museum board in 2011 that he would be replaced as executive director, and that he would be allowed to keep his office on the premises. Then in June 2012, Ipson was told to pack his belongings and to vacate his office. Co-founder Mark Fetter spoke about losing Ipson, "It's tragic that Jay's not going to be a part of the museum, because his family, his energy, his intelligence have made the museum what it is. It's hard for me to even fathom not having Jay at the museum."⁶⁸

The reason for Ipson's removal was his newsletter that had been posted on the museum's website. Ipson's newsletter complained of the lack of progress in Holocaust survivors receiving restitution from the International Commission on Holocaust Insurance claims. The request for Ipson to vacate his office came after he sent a letter to museum supporters apologizing for his words in the spring newsletter. The *Richmond Times-Dispatch* reported that Ipson apologized for "errors in research and judgment in the piece about Holocaust survivors' attempts to seek restitution from the International Commission on Holocaust Insurance Claims."⁶⁹ Ipson wrote in his apology letter "he feared he had created the impression that Randolph Bell, a museum board

⁶⁸ Kristen Green, "Virginia Holocaust Museum co-founder Jay Ipson forced out," *Richmond Times-Dispatch*. June 7, 2012.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

member and former special envoy for Holocaust issues for the State Department, was possibly responsible for impeding restitution.”⁷⁰ These unfounded rumors were negatively affecting the museum, so the executive board decided to get rid of Ipson. Ipson blamed director Marcus M. Weinstein for wanting to get rid of him because they did not see eye to eye on the future direction of the museum. There is no evidence to support this claim, but the museum’s staff was, and is currently, in a phase of renovation as they are trying to keep up with other more modern museums. Ipson did not want to remodel and change direction, as he had been directly responsible for the museum’s direction and exhibits from the time of creation. The decision to have Ipson leave the museum in such a way caused controversy in Richmond. Many people protested the museum calling for the board to reinstate Ipson or at least let him remain on in some capacity. Ipson himself was involved in the protests for a few short weeks, before coming to terms with his exit. He told reporters in November 2012 that he had been back to the museum twice since his removal from the board. Ipson said:

They treat me like anybody else. Like any visitor. I don’t ask for anything more or less. I just come in the front door like everyone else does. They changed the locks. I don’t have a key.⁷¹

After leaving the VHM, Ipson decided to head to Washington, D.C. to help with a project he is passionate about. Ipson went to Congress to get a bill, known as the Holocaust Insurance Accountability Act, passed. This bill would have allowed “Holocaust survivors to take insurance companies to court for claims long denied.”⁷² According to news sources, the bill has still not passed. Alongside working on this bill, Ipson still gives talks to local Virginia schools and other

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

⁷¹ Melissa Scott Sinclair, “After Ugly Split with Holocaust Museum, Jay Ipson Heads to Washington,” *Style Weekly*, November 27, 2012.

⁷² *Ibid.*

groups about his experiences during WWII and the Holocaust, and recently went to speak at Fort Lee on May 2, 2017.⁷³

Year	Number of Visitors
1997	1,899
1998	4,618
1999	Unavailable
2000	Unavailable
2001	Unavailable
2002	Unavailable
2003	8,530
2004	17,261
2005	27,246
2006	24,935
2007	30,653
2008	19,587
2009	51,183
2010	50,505
2011	50,712
2012	40,417
2013	35,884
2014	37,649
2015	42,777
2016	48,159

Figure 7. “Virginia Holocaust Museum Attendance Totals.”

The Virginia Holocaust Museum attendance numbers have fluctuated over the years, with obvious increases during their first few years and again when the museum relocated to its new location. The attendance records from 1999- 2002 are unavailable, but according to the museum’s Director of Collections Timothy Hensley, they had such large amounts of visitors and positive feedback to warrant their expansion and relocation. Numbers are high in the last few

⁷³ John Adam, “ Holocaust Survivor Jay Ipson Speaks to Soldiers at Fort Lee,” *The Progress-Index*, May 4, 2017.

years, which has given the museum the opportunity to expand and update their museum once again. The VHM, as of 2017, is currently undergoing a renovation:

The museum began an extensive ongoing exhibition renovation project in 2015. Much of the permanent exhibition had never been updated since opening in 2003, and the renovations serve to both update the information contained with newly uncovered facts and figures, as well as update the core exhibition space to professional standards. The VHM hopes these renovations will be completed by 2020.⁷⁴

Timothy Hensley said that the museum is planning on bringing all of their exhibitions up to professional standards in the next few years. As of 2016 the museum's exhibit panels were made on cardstock and cut out by hand. The text panels looked sloppy and amateurish. Hensley said, "The VHM is working on a comprehensive plan to update all of our permanent exhibits. It will likely take years to accomplish but we intend to modernize everything in the museum. There will be new sections that are currently missing – Deportation, Open Air Killing, Death Marches – but the majority of exhibit themes will remain much the same as they are now."⁷⁵ With the museum updating their permanent exhibition, it will bring the museum up to a professional standard that other museums, such as the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, are at.

If one has visited the VHM in the recent years, one could tell that the museum was done more simply than other museums. Since the VHM had no paid employees when they first opened, volunteers and donations put the museum together, which means they were lacking professional looking exhibits. While there has been a lack of quality displays, the museum still does a competent job of teaching visitors about the Holocaust and educating the public on tolerance and diversity. Now that the VHM has a steady influx of visitors and better financial

⁷⁴ "History," The Virginia Holocaust Museum. Accessed March 21, 2017. <https://www.vaholocaust.org/visiting-the-museum/history-of-the-museum/>.

⁷⁵ Timothy Hensley, e-mail interview by author, March 13, 2017.

stability, museums executives are implementing plans to stay relevant in the community and to further their mission statement.

EXHIBITS OF THE MUSUEM

Choosing what to display in an exhibit is an important decision museum curators have to make when opening a museum. Various questions go into the decision making process: what artifacts do you already own? What artifacts can you acquire? What is the message or theme you are trying to convey with your exhibits? What will the style of the museum be? What kind of story are you trying to tell? Other factors can include money, donations, acquisitions, the museum board, and time frame.

The Virginia Holocaust Museum has no formal records of the creative and decision-making process of their exhibits and displays. There is merely a binder with images and a list of the decided upon exhibits. There are no notes from board meetings or any kind of communication about the process. The binder lists the number of exhibits that were involved (in the new and current location) and their order. It is as follows:

- 1) DP Camps, 2) Kovno Ghetto and Democratic Square, 3) Kristallnacht, St. Louis, Paskovsky's Farm, 4) Dachau, Buchenwald, and train station, 5-8) Hyde Farmland, 9) Children's remembrance, children's memorial, boxcar, final solution, crematory (images from Jewish museum in Prague and Ghetto Fighters' House), 10) 19th street schul, police program, 11) Liberation, 12) Partisans, 13) Cyprus, Israel/Palestine, Survivors' Room, Hall/Tower of Remembrance, 14) Final photos in the Palace of Justice Nuremburg Exhibit, and 15) Move to Cary street.

This list of exhibits is about the new relocated museum, not the original exhibits. There is no information in the museum's archive about the original exhibits in the original museum location. This may be because there was no formal staff at the time of the museum's original opening, and since there were so many volunteers who put the museum together, some of the creative details were not recorded or were lost.

When visitors access online the Virginia Holocaust Museum in 2017, one sees an imposing brick warehouse down by the train tracks. In front of the doors lies a large cattle car and a tall black wire fence, invoking the feeling of being herded off a train onto a loading dock like many victims of the concentration camps. When visitors come inside of the building, they walk into a large foyer with train tracks painted on the floor leading you to the exhibits, a gift shop to the left, and a hallway with a memorial sculpture to the right. Above the train tracks is a large sign with the words "Friedrichstrasse Reichsbahn," which is a replica train station sign from Germany that many Jews passed through on the way to camps. The museum's exhibitions take you through important events of the Holocaust and World War II. The first of the exhibits is a brief introduction to the Nazi regime and the Holocaust. You follow the tracks into a room with rows and rows of mannequins dressed as camp victims laid upon "bunk beds."



Figure 8. Joe Mahoney. “Virginia Holocaust Museum Display.” 2015. Digital Image.

The image above sets the tone for the rest of the museum’s exhibits. Visitors will experience many scenes such as this that “recreate” the event. The museum uses many murals, replicas of artifacts and buildings, mannequins, and texts to get their message across to their visitors. The museum certainly has fewer artifacts than the USHMM, but they have respectable amounts that are quality items. With the way the museum is set up, it is not necessary to have a mass of artifacts displayed to get their message across. Since the VHM’s main goal is Holocaust education, the museum is concerned that the visitor is learning previously unknown facts and stories about the Holocaust. Events such as the *St. Louis*, the *Exodus 1947*, Displaced Persons camps on the Island of Cyprus, and about the partisan fighters, are not stories one often hears when learning about the Holocaust. The involvement of these lesser known events are an important addition to the museum’s permanent exhibit and give visitors a sense of what a victim and/or survivor may have experienced.

The rest of the museum’s permanent exhibit follows important dates and events in Holocaust history. The exhibits can be broken down into three categories: the first, what the

Ipson family experienced during WWII; the second, about the victims and those who fought against Nazism; and third, what happened after the camps were liberated. Following the concentration camp room there is a room about Kristallnacht, the story of the *St. Louis* (a ship that departed Europe carrying over 900 passengers, mostly Jewish, that was turned away from Cuba and the United States and forced to return to Europe), life in the Kovno ghetto, and the farm where the Ipson's survived during the last few years of the war. This first section deals with what the Ipson family experienced during the war and the story of the St. Louis, which is not a commonly known story of the Holocaust.

Following these exhibits is the Hall of Righteous, an exhibit about individuals and groups who stood up to Nazism, an exhibit on partisan fighters, a Children's Remembrance wall featuring children's artwork from Theresienstadt Ghetto, a children's memorial with names of some of the children who were killed during the war, and a replica of a crematorium. This section of exhibits features those who fought bravely, and often alone, against Nazism, and those who were mercilessly killed. For visitors, this is often a difficult section to walk through as the topics and emotions in these rooms are uncomfortable.

The next group of exhibits is about what occurred after the war ended in 1945. There is an exhibit on the camp liberations, the Nazi trophies that American soldiers brought home, Displaced Persons Camps, the voyage of the Exodus 1947, the detention camps on the island of Cyprus, an exhibit about Palestine and Israel and the amount of immigrants they received after 1945, and a recreation of the Nuremberg Trials. This last section features exhibits on relatively unknown events that occurred after WWII, but dealt with the survivors and their mass exodus of Europe.

Upstairs, the VHM has visiting exhibits on display in the large conference room. In January 2015, for example, there was an exhibit titled “Auschwitz/Oswiecim” which was a commemorative exhibit to local survivors who survived Auschwitz camp. The exhibit that was in the space from June 6-October 2, 2016 was “Deadly Medicine” which discussed eugenics and genetic manipulation. Other traveling exhibits have included, “Survivor Portraits,” “Perpetrators,” “Trial of Adolf Eichmann,” “Paintings of Margot Dreyfuss Blank,” “Women of Ravensbruck,” “Lessons from Rwanda,” and the “Ongoing Armenian Genocide,” to name a few.

One of the interesting things that the VHM does is to include events and stories from the Holocaust that are relatively unknown to most visitors. While the USHMM is known for displaying well-known events and facts about the Holocaust, the VHM chooses to show its visitors a different side to the Holocaust that is usually never heard about. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the VHM displays exhibits about the Hyde Farmlands, the *St. Louis*, and the voyage of the *Exodus 1947*. The inclusion of these relatively unknown events from the Holocaust sets the USHMM and the VHM apart. Visitors to the VHM learn more about the Holocaust than they might have previously known. When visiting the USHMM, one visits with the intent on seeing their displays and their artifacts. The fact that the Virginia Holocaust Museum includes unknown events in their permanent exhibit furthers their mission statement of educating their local community on topics related to the Holocaust and genocide.

The Hyde Farmlands is a story about a farm in the town of Burkeville, Virginia, that housed over 30 European Jewish students during the Second World War. This story started with the creation of a Jewish community called Gross Breesen that was a non-Zionist agricultural training institute for students. This agricultural community training was to prepare them for

possible emigration from Nazi Germany by teaching them how to live and survive on a rural farm. One of the exhibits in the museum states:

Dr. Curt Bondy, a renowned social psychologist, was appointed director of the school. Of the Institute's roughly 200 students, 150 ultimately emigrated from Germany to points across the world. Thirty of them found their way to the United States. Most of those who remained in Gross Breesen were eventually killed by the Nazis.⁷⁶

Of the thirty students who made their way to America, twenty-one of the students found their way to the farm, Hyde Farmlands. William B. Thalhimer and Morton Thalhimer purchased the farm in 1938 and fought the State Department for two years in order to win visas for the twenty-one students to reside on his property.

The farm held thirty students between the years of 1939-1940, but with "life-threatening health problems, the economic burden and the curtailment of a flow of new immigrants, the farm was eventually sold in 1941."⁷⁷ After America joined the war, any student who was able, joined the war effort and some were involved in liberating the camps that they themselves had been rescued from years earlier. After the war ended, the group of students, Dr. Bondy, and the Thalhimers stayed in contact and often had reunions here in the United States. The group even reunited for a tour of the Virginia Holocaust Museum and they were able to see the exhibit on the Hyde Farmlands.

Another event that the VHM includes is the story of the *St. Louis*. On May 13, 1939, a German-American ship left Hamburg with 937 passengers, with over 900 of them being Jewish. The ship was heading for Cuba and all of its passengers purchased the necessary Cuban landing certificates. But, while on their voyage, the Cuban government revoked the certificates and only 28 people were allowed to disembark once they arrived in Cuba. When the *St. Louis* left Cuba,

⁷⁶ Chelsea Head. "Hyde Farmlands Exhibit Plaque," The Virginia Holocaust Museum. Digital Image. Accessed 2015.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

they headed for Miami in hopes of disembarking in the United States, but once again they were denied.

On June 6, 1939 the ship returned to Europe, with 214 passengers disembarking in Belgium, 287 in Great Britain, 224 in France, and 181 in the Netherlands. The display at the museum reads, “The Nazis used this incident to promote their anti-Semitic policy and to prove to the world that nobody wanted the Jews. The free world had turned its back on their plight, and two out of every three passengers perished at the hands of the Nazis.”⁷⁸ This was not a rare occurrence during the time of World War II and the years leading up to it. Many countries denied immigrants from entering their country, as they believed that nothing as bad as what did happen would occur.

The final story that the VHM includes is the story of the voyage of the *Exodus 1947*. The voyage of *Exodus 1947* is a tragic tale about a passenger ship destined for Palestine only to be attacked and its passengers held captive on the open seas for more than three weeks only to be taken back to its original location. On July 11, 1947, the previously named *U.S.S. President Warfield*, now the *Exodus 1947*, left the displaced persons camps of France with 4,554 refugees crammed into a ship that was designed to hold only 600 people. Following the *Exodus 1947* were British warships who demanded that the ship turn back. On July 18, 1947, British destroyers killed 4 people and injured 150 while mercilessly attacking the *Exodus 1947*. The ship was towed into Haifa, Palestine where the refugees were sent back to France in cages aboard freighter ships. After three weeks aboard these caged ships, the prisoners were sent back to Hamburg, Germany where they were once again placed in displaced persons camps. The plaque of the exhibit reads, “The *Exodus 1947* odyssey changed history; her tragedy became the turning point

⁷⁸ Chelsea Head. “St. Louis Exhibit Plaque,” The Virginia Holocaust Museum. Digital Image. Accessed 2015.

in international support for the State of Israel.”⁷⁹ There were plans to turn the ship into a floating museum, but in 1952 the ship caught fire and burned down along the coast of Israel.

The inclusion of these events, which are mainly unknown to most visitors of the VHM, educates Richmond’s community and visitors alike. When one visits a museum, one expects to learn something, and the VHM does not disappoint. Their inclusion of these unknown events brings a story about local involvement in the Holocaust to museum visitors. The VHM certainly emphasizes the locality of the Holocaust whereas the National Holocaust Museum does not include any exhibits or information about the local history of the Holocaust. This is one of many differences between the two museums.

AMERICANIZATION IN FORM

When looking at the topic of the Americanization of the Holocaust, one of the largest examples of Americanization would be the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. The USHMM was built to be the center of American Holocaust memory and remembrance. Even though the Holocaust did not occur on American soil, the American government and its citizens decided to produce a large monument and museum to the victims and survivors of the Holocaust in the nation’s capital.

The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum opened its doors on April 22, 1993 after fifteen years of committees discussing and planning.⁸⁰ According to Linenthal the days leading

⁷⁹ Chelsea Head. “Exodus 1947 Exhibit Plaque,” The Virginia Holocaust Museum. Digital Image. Accessed 2015.

⁸⁰ Linenthal, *Preserving Memory*, 1.

up to the museum's opening were filled with Holocaust symposiums, moments of silence, and concerts:

The annual Days of Remembrance ceremony was held as usual in the Capitol Rotunda on April 20, marking the 50th anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto revolt...a tribute to liberators and rescuers was held in the Arlington National Cemetery...various Washington museums contributed to the capital's focus on the Holocaust.⁸¹

The nation's capital and the whole country were engulfed in the waves of Holocaust events and news. The location of the museum confirmed the Holocaust's presence in the "official memory of the nation."⁸² On the day of opening, the museum began its existence as the main point of Holocaust memory in the United States, not just for American Jews but for everyone.

The idea of Holocaust memory in the United States is a complex topic to handle, and it was difficult for those involved to decide how to proceed with creating a national Holocaust museum. "According to Elie Wiesel and others, the museum would be a sacred institution, entrusted with containing and expressing the mystery of the Holocaust, a mystery available only through the witness of the survivors; for some others, the museum would be a symbol of the deft use of Holocaust memory to advance ethnic power..."⁸³ There are many ways Holocaust memory is interpreted and used. Some use the topic of the Holocaust for their own gain, and others wish to memorialize and remember the victims. The topic itself is highly debated and there is always discord when Holocaust memory is involved. Linenthal sums up the topic of memorializing the Holocaust:

The more volatile the memory, the more difficult a task to reach a consensual vision of how the memory should be appropriately expressed, and the more intense become the struggles to shape, to "own" the memory's public presence.⁸⁴

81 *Ibid.*, 1-2.

82 *Ibid.*

83 *Ibid.*, 3.

84 *Ibid.*, 52.

Everyone involved with the creation and building of the USHMM had differing opinions on how to proceed with the museum and monument. Such a horrible event with many different groups of victims was going to be a difficult topic to memorialize.

The idea of taking something and making it one's own is a way of American life and the USHMM is no different. From the President of the United States, to the Holocaust council, to the museum's academics and employees, and to Holocaust victims such as Elie Wiesel, who was heavily involved in the museum's creation, everyone had a different idea about how to proceed with the museum. Wiesel was a strong advocate for keeping the museum's exhibits strictly to the Jewish victims and survivors. Many people, including Wiesel, believe the Holocaust was strictly a Jewish event and the other victims did not suffer as much as they did. This idea is highly contested between Jews and other victims of the Nazis, as many people think the victim total is near eleven million, including Jews and other minority groups. Wiesel believes the Holocaust should be remembered as the six million Jews who suffered at the hands of the Nazis. The museum eventually decided to include all groups who suffered by the Nazis in their museum and Wiesel said, "Our remembering is an act of generosity... a generosity extended to all others."⁸⁵ Ultimately the USHMM decided to include all victims of the Nazis in their museum but kept the Jewish victims at the front of the story by "grammatical separation...and in formal definition."⁸⁶ One example of such a separation was that "Jews were Holocaust victims, others were victims of Nazi terror."⁸⁷ This small distinction kept committee members such as Wiesel satisfied that the USHMM was still going to be mainly about the Jewish victims of the Holocaust. This is another example of democracy and Americanization, since everyone who suffered at the hands of the Nazis during WWII, not just the Jews, are included.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 53.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 54.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

The Virginia Holocaust Museum also keeps the Jewish victims of the Holocaust at the front of their exhibits, displays, and story. The majority of the exhibits are about the Ipson family, a Jewish family who were victims of the Nazis. This proves that this museum is focused more on the story of the Ipson family than on other Nazi victims. The VHM's mission statement tells visitors that they strive to educate the public about tolerance and diversity, but the museum's exhibits tell a different story. The museum's exhibits focus on one family's experience instead of on the experiences of many,

CHAPTER FOUR

HOW THE MUSEUM INTERPRETS THE PAST

HOW A MISSION STATEMENT DEFINES A MUSEUM

The Virginia Holocaust Museum's mission statement shows visitors what to expect from the museum's goals and aspirations for their visitors and for the local community. In the years prior to 2015, the museum's leaders sought "Tolerance through Education." That is, by "educating the world-wide community about the historical and personal realities of the Holocaust," the VHM seeks "to combat intolerance, anti-Semitism, racism, prejudice, fear and hatred with knowledge, understanding, compassion and acceptance."⁸⁸ In mid-2015, the VHM began a massive overhaul on their museum, including, their exhibits, outreach, and their mission statement. The newly updated mission statement is, "The Virginia Holocaust Museum preserves and documents the Holocaust in exhibits and its archival collections. Through the permanent exhibit, educational programming, and outreach, the museum employs the history of the Holocaust and other genocides to educate and inspire future generations of Virginians to fight prejudice and indifference."⁸⁹ What caused the VHM to redesign their mission statement?

According to Timothy Hensley, Director of Collections, this has been the only time the museum has changed its mission statement.⁹⁰ Hensley said the museum updated the statement to be more concise, as their previous one was several paragraphs long. In order for a museum to fulfill its mission statement, it needs to be concise and direct. In their previous statement, the museum focused on educating the "world-wide community," but now focuses on inspiring

⁸⁸ "Mission," Virginia Holocaust Museum, accessed October 15, 2015, <http://www.va-holocaust.com/content/mission>.

⁸⁹ "Mission," Virginia Holocaust Museum, accessed January 16, 2017, <https://www.vaholocaust.org/visiting-the-museum/>.

⁹⁰ Interview with Timothy Hensley, January 2015.

“future generations of Virginians.” The VHM will never see the attendance numbers that the USHMM sees yearly, but the VHM offers a closer look at the Holocaust and its victims by telling the story of the Ipson family. What are the reasons the museum is now more community oriented instead of reaching the entire world? The museum may be focusing more on local education in Virginia about tolerance instead of looking to teach the world, as was stated in their previous mission statement which was lengthy and difficult to achieve.

Has the VHM refocused their mission statement because they feel they can better reach their local community with messages of tolerance and peace? Richmond is no stranger to a difficult history with discrimination against race, ethnicity, and culture. As Richmond was once the capital of the Confederate States of America, which held significant symbolic and strategic importance, and was also the largest interstate slave market in the south, Richmond has always seen struggles with race and bigotry. Richmond was also heavily influenced by the Jim Crow laws state during the mid-nineteenth century that came with a plethora of racial problems. During the Civil Rights movement, Richmond had a hard time desegregating and even to this day, Richmond is still largely segregated and continues to have issues with race and bigotry.

A transcript from a Richmond town hall meeting in May 2015 notes the local community, along with John Moeser, a senior fellow at the Bonner Center for civic engagement at the University of Richmond and eminent professor of urban studies, looks at how and why Richmond is still so largely segregated. Moeser states:

The reason we're more segregated today is because of what happened in the 20th century. Blacks were no longer slaves, at least in the legal sense. They were hemmed in...by Jim Crow laws that for many amounted to slavery. Richmond was the second city in the United States to adopt a race-based zoning code... In 1910, the city of Richmond zoned neighborhoods by race...It was not long thereafter that the United States Supreme Court ruled that zoning law unconstitutional...In the 1920s, Richmond tried again to zone neighborhoods by race. But instead of referring to people by race, which they couldn't do

under that Supreme Court ruling, the zoning code referred to Virginia's Racial Integrity Law that forbade interracial marriage.⁹¹

This public square or town hall meeting brings attention to the fact that Richmond, despite it being over 50 years since the Civil Rights Movement and the end to segregation, is still highly segregated throughout the town. Moeser believes that old zoning codes are the reason for this still prevalent segregation. These zoning codes forced people to divide into different neighborhoods by race and these neighborhoods still have not changed much to this day. Despite newcomers and people who move to new houses, most people tend to stay in the same area in which they were born and raised. Families will live next door to each other for generations in the same neighborhood on the same street. That Richmond is so highly segregated today is no surprise because old zoning laws and the Racial Integrity Act forced people to live in certain areas based on their skin color. This is local history that needs to be included in the Virginia Holocaust Museum to teach future generations about tolerance and loving your neighbor, despite their differences.



Figure 9. Chelsea Head. "Richmond's Train Station Bench." 2015. Personal Digital Image.

⁹¹ "Public Square: Why is Richmond still segregated?" *The Richmond Times-Dispatch*, May 2, 2015.

The image above is of a wooden train station bench that once resided in Richmond's train station. The bench was used during the Jim Crow era and now resides in the Virginia Holocaust Museum. When Tim Hensley, Director of Collections, was asked why the bench is in the museum now, there was no real explanation given.⁹² When looking at the bench, visitors do not know of its history. The railway bench has no markers or plaques to show its history. Why then include a bench in a Holocaust museum that was used during the racial segregation era, if there is no reference to the item's past?

The city center of Richmond had a population of 221,679 people in 2016.⁹³ In 2010, at 50.6%, over half of the population was African American. How is it possible that a museum that commemorates the Holocaust would ignore its state's history of racial problems? The VHM's mission statement is about educating their community to fight prejudice and indifference. Bringing in more history and exhibits about Richmond's racial segregation would help tie the two groups together.

Laurence Mordekhai Thomas, Professor of Philosophy and Political Science, points out that there are many similarities between Jews and African Americans:

Jews and blacks are two peoples with entirely different histories of suffering. In the former case, there was an explicit aim to exterminate a people; in the latter, an explicit aim to render one people utterly subordinate to the will of another. These facts are undeniable. Unfortunately, there is another undeniable fact, namely, that there is enormous tension between blacks and Jews – a competition, if you will, over who has suffered the most, blacks or Jews.⁹⁴

⁹² Timothy Hensley, interview by Chelsea Head, January 15, 2016, Virginia Holocaust Museum, Richmond, VA.

⁹³ <http://www.grpva.com/data-and-downloads/demographics/>.

⁹⁴ Laurence Mordekhai Thomas, "Suffering as a Moral Beacon: Blacks and Jews," in *Americanization of the Holocaust*, ed. Hilene Flanzbaum (Baltimore, Maryland: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), 198.

Thomas suggests that these two groups of people believe that the other's suffering is not as great as their own, which is difficult to believe as both groups suffered greatly and differently. This disagreement does not diminish the fact that the other group suffered, but the argument is about which group has the higher moral ground based on their suffering. Both groups suffered greatly at different points in time, but in no way should the two sufferings be compared. Thomas states,

In various ways and to varying degrees, then, Jews and blacks have each embraced America's conception of the other...It was on American soil that these two groups first met in great numbers, that they became conscious of one another. And the reigning ideology in America was that neither Jews nor blacks were fit to be moral beacons unto white America, and that the suffering of neither group counted. Blacks and Jews embraced this American ideology of the other; blacks and Jews looked at one another and discounted each other's suffering...each group sought to prove first of all to white America and then to the other that its suffering counted.⁹⁵

American ideology has at one point in time, told these two groups that their suffering was not worthy of remembrance. This is the years of silence following WWII and the fact that slavery is still not widely talked about in America today. Both of these groups have experienced suffering, and both groups of people should be honored and remembered for their pain. The VHM's exclusion of African Americans in their museum further perpetuates this rivalry. Both groups have been affected and shaped by their suffering, and both groups have a "profound comprehension of some aspect of the nature of evil."⁹⁶ When the museum includes more about Richmond's racial past and suffering, the two groups can come together and be moral beacons for all of their community.

If the museum decided to include more about their town's local history, it would be a way 1) to talk about discrimination and standing up for what is right in a local setting where people could relate, and 2) to educate the local community and show how discrimination and

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 207.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.* 209.

violence can happen without a breaking point. It could teach future generations to be tolerant of everyone no matter his or her race, religion, gender, or ethnicity. It would show the community that Richmond and the VHM are tolerant of everyone and it would help put their mission statement into action.

The Virginia Holocaust Museum also heavily features the Jewish victims of the Holocaust, with a slim focus on the other victims of the Nazis. The museum chooses to use the definition of the Holocaust that describes it as an event that killed over six million Jews. The other definition of the Holocaust believes that it was the extermination of the European Jews and other minority groups the Third Reich believed were inferior. They tend to diminish the fact that many other minorities (Africans, gypsies, homosexuals, mentally handicapped, prisoners of war, Soviets, and any other deemed unfit to the Third Reich) were also discriminated and exterminated.

The museum chose to focus on the more widely accepted definition of the Holocaust, which was a discrimination and extermination of the European Jewish population. Another reason is the fact that Jewish individuals and a Jewish Holocaust survivor, Jay Ipson, created the museum. When Ipson met with other members of Temple Beth-El, they wanted to give Richmond a museum that focused on Holocaust remembrance and memorializing the Jews who were victimized and killed. With the museum's first opening at a Jewish temple, it makes sense that the museum would choose to highlight their own history more than other groups. But just because the museum features more about the Jewish victims, it does not mean that the other groups, who suffered by the hands of Nazism, suffered any less.

Below is one of the display signs in the museum that mentions the Non-Jewish victims of the Holocaust. This singular sign is one of the few instances that other Nazi victims are mentioned throughout the permanent exhibit.

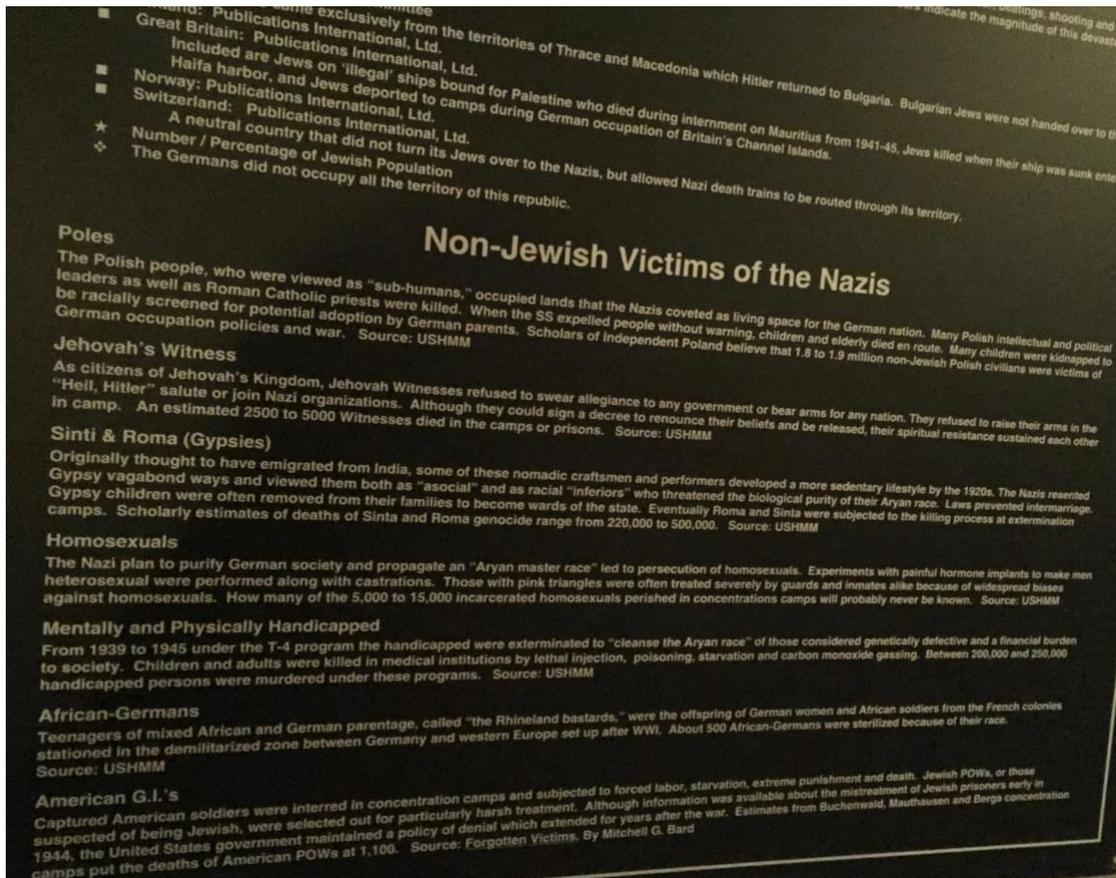


Figure 10. Chelsea Head. "Sign of the Victims of the Holocaust." 2015. Personal Digital Image.

How the VHM chooses to display their artifacts and information is their choice, and they want the museum to focus more on the Ipson family story and other Jewish victims. However, this is something that the USHMM does better. The USHMM features more exhibits and information on the other victims that suffered at the hands of the Third Reich. There is room for all groups who were victimized and exterminated in Holocaust memory and remembrance. There is never justification for violence and genocide, and the more examples one has to show, the more there is a chance to prevent global genocide.

Throughout the years, the VHM has received positive and negative feedback from their visitors, local community and nationally. The museum mainly receives positive feedback about how the museum and its exhibits have had positive impacts on students and visitors lives. Positive feedback lets the museum know that what they are doing is making a difference in someone's life and even for the community. Feedback keeps the museum employees motivated to continue their endless pursuit of educating the world about the horrors of the Holocaust.

One letter the museum received back in March of 1998 praised the museum for its professional manner:

I've enjoyed the opportunity to visit several well known Holocaust commemorative sites— namely the Holocaust museums in Jerusalem and Washington, D.C., and also more experiential sites such as Dachau and the Anne Frank House in Amsterdam. I feel strongly that the Virginia Holocaust Museum deserves inclusion with these memorials for the professional manner in which it presents this tragic chapter in our human history. In my opinion, this museum relates the Holocaust better to children than the other sites...because it is shown through a child's eyes.⁹⁷

Letters like the one above certainly give the museum pride in the fact that they knew their work has reached people from the community and it taught them about the Holocaust from a new and fresh perspective. For example, students from Amelia Middle School wrote letters to the museum after their 1998 visit. Some of the children mention that they are “much obliged that you took the time to put together this museum so that we could experience what horrible things that you went through and that racism is wrong,” and that it “really makes me think of how outstanding I have freedom today, and the fact that I didn't have to go through it.”⁹⁸ One child wrote, “Thanks so much for sharing your life story with my fellow classmates and me. I think you are doing the right thing in teaching school students about your past because it is part of our history too. I really liked that we could interact – kinda feel like we were there. I have a whole

⁹⁷ Jim Gosney, letter to the Virginia Holocaust Museum, March 15, 1998.

⁹⁸ Amelia Middle School Students, Letters to the Virginia Holocaust Museum, 1998.

new perspective on things.”⁹⁹ Jay Ipson wanted to make sure that children that come to the museum learn something about the past and about their future too.

While most of the feedback was positive, there was some that was negative. Many colleges in the Virginia area ran Holocaust denial ads during the winter and spring of 1998. Holocaust denial ads do not help the museum advocate for tolerance and acceptance, as Holocaust denial spreads hate and judgment. An example of the anonymous negative feedback is, “You people are sick, sick, sick. All you want is money. Get a life!” Another said, “It has been over 50 years. Give it a rest. You get off on trying to make everyone feel guilty over it.” One of the more eloquently written, but still negative feedback was from a man in New York named Ralph Harvard:

If the Virginia Holocaust Museum is a museum devoted to promoting the suffering of one particular group of victims of one horrifying event, I feel it has no place in today’s society. Certainly your logo has suffering Jewishness written all over it and gives no remote nod to “Catholics, Jehovah’s Witnesses, Seventh Day Adventists, Gypsies, homosexuals, the disabled, political dissidents or any others.” Will your museum include education on the above as well as the “Black Holocaust,” or the tragic and buried “Turkish Holocaust,” or the current situation in Africa on equal terms with the so called Jewish Holocaust?¹⁰⁰

The problem that Harvard had with the VHM was that it mainly featured the horrors that affected the Jewish population during WWII. Harvard noted that the museum should include all of the victims of the Nazi reign, and not just the Jewish population. Negative feedback will always be a common occurrence when one has a museum devoted to a subject many still claim did not happen. The VHM continues their pursuit of tolerance and diversity in the community, and they continue to educate visitors about the horrors of the Holocaust, in hopes that a thing like that will never happen again.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁰ Ralph Harvard, III. Letter to the Virginia Holocaust Museum. January 10, 1998.

REMEMBERING THE PAST THROUGH EDUCATION

The Virginia Holocaust Museum has always held the belief that educating the public is the number one reason for their existence. The museum holds lectures, traveling exhibits, and workshops to help educate the public about the Holocaust. The teaching of the Holocaust is implemented widely across the United States, not just in Virginia. Every state has its own rules and recommendations about its curriculum, and most states feature Holocaust education in one form or another. Virginia has its own Holocaust Education bill that was passed which states that all schools have to include curriculum about the Holocaust. In the article “Teaching the Holocaust in America’s Schools: Some Considerations for Teachers,” Ruth Shoemaker addresses the variables involved in teaching the Holocaust to students:

Educators and Holocaust education experts widely accept Holocaust education as a morally significant addition to America’s middle and secondary classrooms. The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum states explicitly in its resource guide for educators that a “structured inquiry into Holocaust history yields critical lessons for an investigation of human behavior... [and] addresses one of the central tenets of education in the USA, which is to examine what it means to be a responsible citizen”.¹⁰¹

Educators use the Holocaust to teach many other things besides the history of the Nazis and WWII. The topic of the Holocaust brings up morals, ethics, tolerance, diversity, and philosophical and religious matters.

Teaching the Holocaust to young children helps them become better people who are more tolerant and more accepting of others who are different than they are. It teaches them to stand up for what is right even if it is difficult to do and in the face of adversity. Shoemaker says, “They

¹⁰¹ Ruth Shoemaker, “Teaching the Holocaust in America’s Schools: Some Considerations for Teachers,” *Intercultural Education*, 14, no. 2. (2003): 1.

learn that even unintentional indifference and silence to the sufferings and human rights infringements of others perpetuates their victimization.”¹⁰² The large amount of anti-Semitism that was in Europe long before the Second War even began, shows students that the Holocaust was the outcome of a volatile climate.

Holocaust education was another thing that did not exist until after the lengthy decades of silence following WWII. Since it was not being talked about publicly, there was no need for it in our education system. When the Eichmann trial brought the Holocaust to the forefront of American society, citizens began to talk about the Holocaust and decided to include its history in our school systems. Shoemaker points out that the first Holocaust curricula was developed in the early 1970s, “based on commemorative anniversaries and events of for instance Kristallnacht (which took place in November 1938, the invasion of Poland (in September 1939), the Warsaw Ghetto uprising (April-May 1943), and the liberation of the concentration camps (in 1945).”¹⁰³ These types of curricula commemorated the horrific events of the Holocaust without going too far into the motives and ethical repercussions. Again, the current political and wartime climate (the Arab-Israeli War of 1973) shaped the American public’s interest in WWII and the Holocaust. This renewed interest in the Holocaust sparked many museums, memorials, and an updated Holocaust curriculum.

When looking at what to teach students about the Holocaust, one needs to look at the “whys” behind the ‘whats.’”¹⁰⁴ Children need to know the history and the political climate at the time of WWII and the Holocaust. Author and Holocaust educator Samuel Totten points out that “it is critical for them to learn about the history of traditional Christian anti-Semitism through the

¹⁰² *Ibid.*

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 2.

¹⁰⁴ Samuel Totten, *Holocaust Education: Issues and Approaches* (Boston, Massachusetts: Allyn and Bacon, 2002), 41.

ages, the advent of political anti-Semitism in the nineteenth-century, and the influences of traditional Christian anti-Semitism and political anti-Semitism on the Nazis' virulent and deadly strain of racial anti-Semitism."¹⁰⁵ Lucy Dawidowicz, a popular American historian, author, an academic scholar who focuses on Jewish history, writes that:

In studying prejudice or any other generic substitute for anti-Semitism, most curricula focus on individual attitudes, beliefs, and opinions rather than their embodiment in public policy and law. This approach conceives of prejudice as a psychological or mental-health problem, a disease that can be cured: if only every bigot could be put on the analyst's couch, prejudice would be eliminated from society. The failure to distinguish between individual behavior and state policies may be attributable to the relatively benign American experience of anti-Semitism, which, with few exceptions, has been a history of individual prejudices expressed through words and acts in the private sector of society. Yet anti-Semitism as public policy is an essential aspect of what the Holocaust was about, and it too has a history. Whenever anti-Semitism has become the instrument of authority, and been incorporated in the very structure of government, Jews have been deprived of their rights, their property, and ultimately their lives.¹⁰⁶

Both Totten and Dawidowicz argue that students need to know that there was anti-Semitism in Europe long before Hitler and the Nazis came to power. This is important for students to know when learning about the Holocaust in order for them to understand how a mass killing like this can occur. This is one of the more prominent aspects of Holocaust education and educators need to be mindful of this fact when teaching their students.

Governor Tim Kaine visited the Virginia Holocaust Museum in 2009 and signed the new Holocaust Education bill into law, mandating Holocaust education in Virginia. This law requires teachers in middle and high school history classes to teach certain Holocaust topics and lessons. Governor Kaine signed the Holocaust Education bill into law in the hope that the curricula would not focus exclusively on the past but that "our youth will be wholly taught the painful and tragic history of the cause and consequences of the Holocaust and will come to understand lessons that

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁶ Lucy Dawidowicz, "How they teach the Holocaust," in *What is the use of Jewish History?* ed. Lucy Dawidowicz (New York: Schocken, 1992), 65-83.

are important lessons not just about history but about today and tomorrow.”¹⁰⁷ Since there is no nationwide curriculum for America’s schools, each state and county’s curricula can range from formal to informal and the material can widely differ. Because Virginia signed a Holocaust Education bill into law, the teachers of Virginia are required to include specific topics and content about the Holocaust in their lessons.

Education has always been the backbone of the Virginia Holocaust Museum. Before the museum opened, Ipson often toured different cities, schools, and churches to tell his testimony of his experiences during the Holocaust. Remembrance is the main reason for Ipson’s and the museum’s push for education. Without the stories of the victims, the history of the Holocaust and its violence would be forgotten. When the museum was in its creation stage, Mark Fetter said, “The major need for this museum is to educate non-Jews. There are still about 25% of the American public who do not believe the Holocaust happened. We’re losing our survivors and soon there will be no one left to say ‘yes, it did happen’.”¹⁰⁸ Director of Education, Megan Ferenczy believes that “teaching Holocaust and genocide history allows for greater understanding of tolerance, and furthermore helps individuals to recognize the importance of civic engagement and the need for action to prevent future atrocities.”¹⁰⁹ When we teach and remember the past, it helps to prevent us from repeating our history.

Another important aspect of Holocaust education is oral history. Without the voices and stories from victims and survivors, one loses the ability to empathize and understand the impacts and repercussions of the Holocaust. The Virginia Holocaust Museum is largely involved with recording oral histories from local survivors of the Holocaust. Over the years they have collected

¹⁰⁷ “Richmond, VA- Governor Signs Holocaust Education Bill,” *Vos Iz Neias?* June 24, 2009. Accessed March 20, 2017.

¹⁰⁸ *Reflector*

¹⁰⁹ “Education,” www.vaholocaust.org/education. Accessed Feb. 20, 2017.

many testimonies, and they continue to seek out other local survivors to give their testimony to the museum to record for future historians and generations. The museum staff began collecting oral history testimonies in 1997. Originally, the museum only had testimonies from survivors and liberators, but it has now expanded to incorporate other survivors' stories of genocide. As of 2017, the archive, located in the Carole Weinstein Holocaust Research Library at the Virginia Holocaust Museum, held more than 230 digitized testimonies. Their oral history testimonies include: Rwandan Survivors, Holocaust Survivors, Holocaust Partisans and Resistance Fighters, Cambodian Fighters, Holocaust Liberators, and Armenian Survivors. Oral history testimonies digitized and available for public use are helpful for historians, educators, and students who want to hear first hand accounts of the Holocaust. The VHM's website offers a number of testimonies to view online, but if one visits the museum's archives, one can access all of the museum's oral histories.

In his book *The Social History of Jews in the Holocaust: The Necessity of Interviewing Survivors*, Steve Hochstadt mentions that "In the study of the Holocaust, oral history contributes to a transformation already in process for several decades: the shift from a history told by the perpetrators to one told also by the victims. Testimonies both oral and written have, for example, begun the work of recovering the myriad forms of resistance by Jews all over Europe, whose traces lie only in memories."¹¹⁰ Oral history is important for the victims and for everyone else who was not involved. It is important for the victims because they are able to talk about their experiences and they are able to leave their story behind to help future generations understand the Holocaust and to prevent it from happening again. It is beneficial for everyone else who hears a survivor's testimony. Listeners are able to hear a first hand account of the horrors of the

¹¹⁰ Steve Hochstadt, "The Social History of Jews in the Holocaust: The Necessity of Interviewing Survivors," *Historical Social Research*, 22. No. 83. (1997), 258.

Holocaust and they are able to learn to be more tolerant and to never pursue violence against one who is different than you. “Only oral testimony can enable us to understand the actions and reactions of Jews faced with harassment, expropriation, exile, and murder.”¹¹¹ Oral history of Holocaust survivors will always be important because it gives a deeper, more personal look at what happened during World War II. The Virginia Holocaust Museum will continue to expand their oral history collection to make sure that victims feel that their story has been heard and for future generations to understand what happened during the Holocaust.

It certainly is difficult for teachers to be able to teach such an emotional and complex topic. To help them, the Virginia Holocaust Museum has resources widely available for educators. One of the ways that the museum connects with its community is by partnering with local schools and colleges. In 2001, the VHM partnered with the Virginia Commonwealth University to form an educational partnership. This partnership allows VCU students to come to the museum and have access to books, computers, videos, and photographic records. The partnership does three things 1) it allows more flow of people into their museum; 2) it enables the museum to further educate future generations about the atrocities of the Holocaust, and 3) it gives the VCU students access to materials that may not be available to them at their school. Jack Spiro, director of VCU’s Center for Judaic Studies said, “A university is the most appropriate vehicle I can imagine for keeping the memory alive through all the educational resources and research tools available to an institution of higher learning.”¹¹² The partnership with VCU gives the students the opportunity to use a museum archive and it gives them access to oral history testimonies.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 254.

¹¹² Stuart Squier, “VCU Joins Holocaust museum for Educational Partnership,” *The Commonwealth Times*. March 26, 2001.

The museum has many educational tools on hand to help teach the local schools and communities about the Holocaust. On the VHM's website, there is a section titled Education, separated into four categories. One category is resources for teachers, such as lesson plans, acceptance suitcases (which are suitcases available for classrooms filled with books about the Holocaust and the Civil Rights Movement), suggested reading lists, and opportunities for teacher education. This is a great tool for a teacher who needs or wants more Holocaust related material for the classroom. There are two lesson plans available for teachers: rescue and resistance. Rescue "examine[s] individuals who were rescuers during the Holocaust as well as individual decision making and the factors for choosing to act or not to act during a difficult time in history. By examining decision making during the Holocaust, students will be able to reflect on decision making in their own lives."¹¹³ The other lesson plan, Resistance "allow[s] students to define and explore that resistance took on many different forms during the Holocaust, armed and unarmed, Jewish and non Jewish."¹¹⁴ Both of these lesson plans are in accordance with Virginia education rules and are good resources for anyone who wants to encourage their students to learn more about the Holocaust.

There is also a section just for students. It includes a frequently asked questions list, a timeline of Holocaust history, and a list of survivor biographies from Virginia. The page with local survivor biographies is a valuable tool for students who are doing research or are learning more about their community. As of 2017, the website has thirteen short biographies of local Holocaust survivors along with pictures. The timeline of Holocaust events is another important tool for students to use in research and to understand how the Holocaust and the extermination of the Jewish population did not just happen overnight; it took many months and many years. There

¹¹³ "About our Lesson Plans." Virginia Holocaust Museum. Accessed on March 23, 2017. <https://www.vaholocaust.org/resources-for-teachers/lesson-plans/>.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*

is also a list of recommended books if students want a more in-depth study of the Holocaust. There are three nonfiction and three fiction books listed: *Salvaged Pages*, *Beyond Courage*, *They First Killed My Father*, *Emil and Karl*, *Something Remains*, and *Black Radishes*. These are helpful books for students, in the middle to high school age group, to read if they are interested in learning more about the Holocaust. The availability of these tools to students, local and global, is a positive step in the VHM's Holocaust education outreach.

The VHM often hosts workshops on topics of the Holocaust, race, gender, tolerance, and diversity. In March 2017, the museum hosted the workshop "Facing History and Ourselves: Choices in Little Rock."¹¹⁵ Facing History and Ourselves is a non-profit educational group that was formed in 1976. The group's mission statement is, "Our mission to engage students of diverse backgrounds in an examination of racism, prejudice, and anti-Semitism in order to promote the development of a more humane and informed citizenry." The VHM, Facing History and Ourselves, and the Moton Museum came together to host:

This year's topic will focus on the efforts to desegregate Central High School in Little Rock, Arkansas in 1957. Participants will explore the importance of civic choices. Those decisions, both then and now, reveal that democracy is not a product by a work in progress. Although those choices may not seem important at the time, little by little, they define an individual, delineate a community, and ultimately distinguish a nation.¹¹⁶

Given the museum's exclusion of exhibits on race, especially in the U.S., it is interesting that the VHM would hold a workshop on this topic. It is possible that even though the VHM may not want permanent exhibits about racial relations, the idea of hosting workshops about such a topic is an easier task to accomplish. The museum staff would not have to change any of their exhibits to feature racial relations, but a workshop would help the museum fulfill their mission statement

¹¹⁵ "Special Events," Virginia Holocaust Museum, accessed May 16, 2017. https://www.vaholocaust.org/?event=facing-history-and-ourselves-choices-in-little-rock&event_date=2017-03-21.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*

of promoting tolerance and diversity. A lesson of Holocaust education and memorialization is teaching tolerance for others who are different than you, and race relations in Richmond is another topic that would help push tolerance on the local community.

THE CURRENT STATUS OF THE AMERICANIZATION OF THE HOLOCAUST

In looking at the United States in 2017, tolerance and diversity are not words that quickly come to mind. The year 2016 saw the election of President Donald Trump (a president not known for his tolerance towards minorities), a rise in anti-Semitic attacks, and a lack of tolerance between American citizens and government. “In the first three months of this year, the number of anti-Semitic incidents in the US was 86% higher than the same period last year.”¹¹⁷ The Anti-Defamation League reported 541 anti-Semitic attacks and threats in the first three months of 2017. Jonathan A. Greenblatt, CEO of the Anti-Defamation League said, “There’s been a significant, sustained increase in anti-Semitic activity since the start of 2016 and what’s most concerning is the fact that the numbers have accelerated over the past five months.”¹¹⁸ The rise of anti-Semitism is disturbing not just to Jewish Americans but also to anyone who believes in tolerance and diversity.

How is it possible that the Americanization of the Holocaust is still occurring when anti-Semitic attacks are on the rise and America is openly blasé about their intolerance for others who are minorities? Americans are visiting sacred sites such as Auschwitz to take “selfies” and use

¹¹⁷ Doug Criss and Carma Hassan, “Anti-Semitic incidents rose a whopping 86% in the first 3 months of 2017,” CNN, April 24, 2017. Accessed July 1, 2017. <http://www.cnn.com/2017/04/24/us/antisemitic-incidents-reports-trnd/index.html>.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*

the location and event for their own personal gain.¹¹⁹ Representative Clay Higgins recorded a message in a gas chamber at Auschwitz in the summer of 2017. Higgins recorded:

This is why homeland security must be squared away, why our military must be invincible...The world's a smaller place now than it was in World War II. The United States is more accessible to terror like this, horror like this. It's hard to walk away from the gas chambers and ovens without a very sober feeling of commitment - unwavering commitment – to make damn sure that the United States of America is protected from the evils of the world.¹²⁰

Even if Higgins was paying his respects to the victims of the Holocaust, he should never have used this location as a platform for his political opinions, especially those about the United States homeland security. Auschwitz and other concentration camp sites should be held in the utmost respect for the victims of the suffering that occurred on those grounds. American politics have no place in Holocaust memorial sites. Higgins behavior is an example of Americanization; he took the topic of the Holocaust and used it for his own personal gain.

How are Holocaust museums, memorials and education staying relevant in a time where violence and intolerance abound? Museums such as the VHM and the USHMM are utilizing social media to their advantage to teach younger generations about the Holocaust and to garner their interest in museums. The VHM regularly posts about their recent workshops, Holocaust related news stories, information about new exhibits and artifacts, and general Holocaust facts. These posts are engaging and informative and allow people from all over the world to see what the VHM stands for. The VHM and the USHMM also post the anniversary of a fact related to the

¹¹⁹ Caitlin Dewey, "The other side of the infamous "Auschwitz selfie," *The Washington Post*, July 22, 2014. Accessed June 20, 2017. https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-intersect/wp/2014/07/22/the-other-side-of-the-infamous-auschwitz-selfie/?utm_term=.d425d6b83a38; Tom Porter, "Auschwitz Memorial Criticizes Representative Clay Higgins For Filming Video inside Gas Chamber," *Newsweek*, July 5, 2017. Accessed July 7, 2017. <http://www.newsweek.com/auschwitz-memorial-representative-clay-higgins-holocaust-631858>.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*

Holocaust during WWII. This is an interactive way for visitors to related to an event that happened over seventy years ago.

Holocaust memorials and museums are also finding new ways to attract new visitors. As of 2017, the VHM is undergoing a renovation that will bring its permanent exhibits up to date and on the same level of quality as the USHMM. Some Holocaust memorials have been damaged by anti-Semitic attacks and need to be rebuilt or repaired. In the summer of 2017, the Boston Holocaust Memorial was vandalized with a windowpane being smashed in. But despite the rise of anti-Semitic attacks in this country, the Boston Holocaust Memorial committee decided to repair the broken window to show just how important a memorial like this is to the world today. Massachusetts Governor Charlie Baker paid his respect for the memorial and the Holocaust victims. "It's very important to remember what this memorial stands for, who it represents and the horrific events that it speaks to, events we should always remember and never forget."¹²¹ Holocaust memorials and museums are now important than ever as the United States experiences turmoil and intolerance. These memorials hold a place in our society as a way to pay our respects to the victims of the Holocaust. With the current political situation in the country, one must garner the lesson from the past to push back against hate now and in the future. The Virginia Holocaust Museum strives to continue being a beacon for tolerance, education, and diversity in its community and nation.

¹²¹ Bob Salsberg, "Vandalized, repaired Boston Holocaust Memorial Rededicated," *The Washington Post*, July 11, 2017. Accessed July 20, 2017. https://www.washingtonpost.com/national/boston-holocaust-memorial-to-be-rededicated-after-vandalism/2017/07/11/08014efc-65f3-11e7-94ab-5b10ff459df_story.html?utm_term=.ed3407d66346.

CHAPTER FIVE CONCLUSIONS

THE FUTURE OF THE AMERICANIZATION OF THE HOLOCAUST

The Americanization of the Holocaust started as early as 1945 when the war ended, and has been an ongoing process since that day. American citizens are still very much intrigued and interested in the topic of the Holocaust. In 2016 the Virginia Holocaust Museum had over 48,000 people visit their museum. Since the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum opened in 1993, it has had over 41 million visitors. People are still very much fascinated in the Holocaust, and there are always new generations of children that have never heard of the Holocaust or what happened during World War II. Education and remembrance are the main reasons that these museums and others continue to exist and succeed in our country, and around the world.

Peter Novick writes in *The Holocaust in American Life* that the “original momentum behind the museums and the programs is likely to decrease, Holocaust institutions, like all institutions, generate their own momentum; at a minimum, are dedicated to their own continuation. The opening of these institutions required great effort and resources, but their establishment were generally uncontroversial.”¹²² Novick is saying that this does not necessarily prove that these institutions will always be a part of our culture, but it proves that it holds a place in our education and memory permanently.

There is nothing so controversial about the Holocaust that lawmakers and historians would wish in good conscious to prevent the teaching of the Holocaust. In Samuel Totten’s

¹²² Novick, *American Life*, p. 277.

Holocaust Education: Issues and Approaches, Totten talks about the future of Holocaust Education. Totten points out that:

The twentieth-century has been deemed “the century of genocide” and with good reason. Since the conclusion of World War II, decade after decade, one genocide after another has been perpetrated somewhere in the world: Tibet, mid-to late 1950s; Indonesia, 1965; Equatorial Guinea, 1968-1979; Bangladesh, 1971; Burundi, 1972; East Timor, mid-1970s; Cambodia, 1975-1979; Chittagong Hill Tracts in Bangladesh, mid-1980s; Rwanda, 1994; former Yugoslavia, various points in the 1990s. And that is true despite the fact that the shock of the devastating horror of the Holocaust “provided the impetus for the formal recognition of genocide as a crime in international law, thus laying the basis for intervention by judicial process.”¹²³

What Totten is arguing, is that we as a culture have not had time to live in a period where genocide is a thing of the past. Since the end of the war, there have been many other genocides, that are no less important or horrible, but they are often overlooked in favor of the Holocaust. People do not want to think that genocide is a current problem, something that they could put a stop to now. They want to live in the mindset that genocide only happened years ago, and we need to remember it to prevent it from happening again. But the problem is, that despite all of the education and memorialization, genocide is still occurring.

In Alvin H. Rosenfeld’s book *The End of the Holocaust*, Rosenfeld mentions a quote by Imre Kertez:

The expression has been so often repeated that it has become almost a cliché: it is necessary to preserve the memory of the Holocaust so that it can never again come to pass. But since Auschwitz, nothing has happened that makes a new Auschwitz possible. On the contrary. Before Auschwitz, Auschwitz was unimaginable. That is no longer so today. Because Auschwitz in fact occurred, it has now been established in our imaginations as a firm possibility. What we are able to imagine, especially because it once was, can be again.¹²⁴

¹²³ Samuel Totten, *Holocaust Education: Issues and Approaches* (Boston, Massachusetts: Allyn and Bacon, 2002), 151.

¹²⁴ Rosenfeld, *End of Holocaust*, 279.

The fact that we have seen, witnessed, and even experienced such horror as the concentration camps, proves that history can always look back and reproduce such a horror again.

The Virginia Holocaust Museum in Richmond, Virginia will always have a place in American Holocaust memory and remembrance. With their focus on educating the public, locally and nationally, the events of the Holocaust will be taught to thousands of people each year. The museum is doing everything they can to continue to be relevant in our culture and community, and they are focusing on the future with their current renovations and remodeling. The expansion of their permanent exhibit will show visitors that they are determined to have a place in Holocaust studies and memorialization no matter the current political climate. With all of their work in the local community and education, the museum will always be involved in Richmond, teaching future generations about the Holocaust. The VHM, being a smaller museum whose creation was possible by donations and volunteers, does not have as much to lose as the national Holocaust museum in Washington, D.C., which relies on national funding. The political climate of 2017 shows there is a possibility that the USHMM could lose funding, and the museum could no longer be the center of the Americanization of the Holocaust.

Linenthal gives a good reason for one to continue teaching the future generations about the Holocaust: “We continue to hope that the consequences of official Holocaust memory will not end with mere observation or acts of commemorative respect. Perhaps official Holocaust memory will serve individuals and communities as a stark reminder that extreme situations begin modestly, and so too do attempts to stop them.”¹²⁵ There is always the chance that with education, the world will become more tolerant and will honor the horrific events of the Holocaust by putting a stop to all violence and genocide. The Virginia Holocaust Museum is Richmond’s attempt to teach their community about tolerance and Holocaust memory. As long

¹²⁵ Linenthal, *Preserving Memory*, 269.

as the museum can continue to keep up with new information and new museum methods, then they will have a place in American Holocaust remembrance. Whether the Americanization of the Holocaust will continue is another matter entirely. The lack of respect and tolerance for the Jewish community's hardships from the current national government shows that America's "obsession" with the Holocaust may be nearing its end.

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