A STORY TO BE TOLD: HOW AMERICAN HOLOCAUST MUSEUMS PORTRAY THE UNIQUE EXPERIENCE OF SOVIET JEWRY DURING THE HOLOCAUST

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ABSTRACT

The Holocaust in the Soviet Union was a unique experience for Jews. They were not rounded up into concentration camps and gassed, like Jews in the rest of Europe. They were killed in mass shootings and left in ravines, ditches, and mass graves on the outskirts of towns. The few Soviet Jews to survive these horrific events were marked forever by the unique violence they experienced. These experiences gave Soviet Jews and non-Soviet Jews in America a desire to never forget what had happened during the Holocaust. Beginning in the 1960s Jews in America began to see a need to commemorate the events of the Holocaust which culminated in the 1990s.

The rise in Holocaust popularity in the 1990s led to a number of Holocaust museums being opened including a government funded museum in Washington, DC. These museums provide visitors with information pertaining to the Holocaust through visits and online presence. This study examines the unique experience of Soviet Jews during the Holocaust, the rise in Holocaust museums and Jewish collective memory in America, and provides case studies of how visitors encounter the experience of Soviet Jews during the Holocaust in six museums across the United States. The six museums studied, Museum of Jewish Heritage, Holocaust Museum Houston, Virginia Holocaust Museum, Florida Holocaust Museum, Museum of Tolerance, and United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, were all opened in the 1990s and they all receive good visitorship and have a web presence today.

This thesis examines the ways that visitors encounter the experience of Soviet Jews in the Holocaust through visits to the museums and on their websites. The experience of Soviet Jews is often insufficiently represented in these institutions and this thesis attempts to find out why in the
over twenty years since the opening of the Soviet archives there has not been more effort to commemorate the unique experience of Soviet Jews within these museums.
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To Dr. Russell Martin at Westminster College I thank you for instilling in me the belief that History does not have to be popular to be important. Without your example as a fine historian and your encouragement of my writing skills at an early stage I do not know that I would have become the student of history that I am today.

Thank you to my co-workers at the Washington County Historical Society. You provided me with laughter and an escape from the pressures of writing.

Finally, my friends and family deserve more thanks than I can express here. Without their encouragement and support this thesis would still be an unformed idea somewhere. You provided me a push when I thought I couldn’t go further, a laugh when I really needed it, and your love. I am forever grateful.
DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my parents, Ken and Karen West for always encouraging me to follow my dreams and reminding me that I have all of the power inside of me that I need to succeed. Your love and support has meant more to me than I can express.

I also dedicate this thesis to the memory of the Soviet Jewish victims of the Holocaust, may your unique story never be forgotten.
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INTRODUCTION – REMEMBERING THE HOLOCAUST IN THE SOVIET UNION

The Holocaust is considered to be one of the most horrific events of modern history. Between 1939 and 1945 6 million Jews and approximately 5 million other people deemed “undesirable” were murdered in Europe at the hands of the Nazis. The Nazi party, led by Adolf Hitler, believed in a pure German nation that would encompass all of Europe. To accomplish this goal the Nazis had to eliminate Roma and Sinti (gypsies), homosexuals, Jehovah’s Witnesses, Communists, political prisoners, and, most important to the Nazis plan for total elimination, the Jews. No other group of people was targeted so completely by the Germans for total extermination based on their “race”. The Roma and Sinti were in fact the only other groups that were targeted for total extermination, but even they did not experience annihilation on the same scale as the Jews.

Jews from across Europe were rounded up, ghettoized, and sent to concentration (labor and death) camps. The Nazis established thousands of these camps, but twenty-two camps became major operations. Of the twenty-two there were six camps designated as centers of annihilation. This list of six includes Auschwitz-Birkenau, Belzec, Chelmno, Majdanek, Sobibor, and Treblinka, names that have become synonymous with the Holocaust.

All phases of Nazi persecution resulted in the deaths of Jews. Ghettos, closed communities of only Jews, quickly became insufficient in size and food supply for the populations they carried, which caused disease and death. The Jews sent to labor camps often died from being overworked. The camp Mauthausen, located in Austria, had what was known amongst the prisoners as the “Stairs of Death” which was a set of stairs that prisoners would spend their days carrying rocks up and down. At Ravensbruck, an almost entirely female camp, the women spent their days in a variety of forced labor including clearing rubble from bombed
cities. And if the work did not kill them, the lack of food, rampant disease, or a bullet from a guard who no longer found someone useful, did. Those sent to death camps rarely lived more than a few hours after arrival. The exception was at death camps that were attached to labor camps, like Auschwitz-Birkenau. Upon arrival at these camps Jews were selected. Those who were considered capable of work were sent to one side and the rest, including the elderly, sick, children, and some women were sent to their deaths in the gas chambers. The gas chambers initially used carbon monoxide and then switched to Zyklon – B which would be poured into a sealed room until everyone inside was dead. Gold teeth were removed from the bodies and the bodies were burned in crematories.

This same sequence of events happened throughout Europe, except in German occupied territories of the Soviet Union. The Holocaust took a different form in this region. Very few Soviet Jews were deported to concentration or labor camps. Most of the ghettos that were formed in this region were only temporary. The majority of the Jews killed in the Soviet Union met their death at the hands of the Einsatzgruppen, Nazi mobile killing squads. These squads eliminated entire towns over two day spans by rounding up the Jews and driving them to ravines, ditches, and mass graves at the edge of town and then shooting them. The Nazis also implemented the use of gas vans in the Soviet Union. Instead of taking the time to construct death camps and gas chambers, they used vans and pumped them full of carbon monoxide. From the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union in 1941 to the liberation of German-occupied Soviet territories about 2.5 million Soviet Jews were annihilated at the hands of the Nazis.2

Since the end of World War II, Soviet Jews have made their way to America. This migration was slow during the years immediately following the end of the war, but large-scale migration began in the 1970s. By the mid-1990s half a million Soviet Jews came to call America home. They settled in cities like New York, Los Angeles, and Chicago. Within these urban settings Soviet Jews created close-knit communities. It was within these communities that Soviet and non-Soviet Jews living in America began to commemorate the Holocaust. Initially, commemorations were community memorial services of specific events (i.e. the mass killing that took place at Babi Yar) and a yearly commemoration of all Jews who died in the Holocaust. Eventually, these community celebrations were not enough to honor and sustain the memory of the Holocaust.

Holocaust memorials, museums and education centers had been slowly emerging in America since the announcement of the President’s Commission on the Holocaust in 1979, with the Holocaust commemoration movement reaching a high point in the 1990s. Author Tim Cole agrees that “Nonetheless, what is beyond dispute is that in the 1990s the Holocaust is being made in America.” The Holocaust that was being made in America was a combination of museum theory and survivor experience. The museum theory involved in many of the Holocaust museums being constructed was determining how much of the museum should be the voice of the survivor and how much should be the voice of the historian, whether the museum should be artifact or text driven, and how to create a balance between museum and memorial space within the building. Museum professionals were attempting to make sense out of a tragedy that most of them had no direct relation to and to create museums that both honored Holocaust survivors and

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Jews living in America, and informed non-Jews about the atrocities enacted against the Jews in Europe during World War II.

Public Historian Michael Frisch, emphasizes that it is important to share authority of the museum’s voice with the people that the museum is about. The theory of shared authority is impressively at work in Holocaust museums. Much of the information gathered for the museums is based off of oral history interviews and the formation of a collective memory amongst Jews concerning the Holocaust. Most important for these museums was simply the willingness of survivors to participate and to share their stories. Participation was crucial to creating a cohesive collective memory that was translated into the formation of a museum. People who were interviewed for oral histories wanted their children to know what came before so they can appreciate all they have. And in the case of the Holocaust, interviewees wanted their children to learn about the Holocaust, so that it never happens again. While this approach provides a wealth of information, issues can arise when the museum professional relies too much on the voice of the survivor without taking into account the often biased and sometimes inaccurate memories that emerge from oral histories, especially those concerning traumatic events. “For, as Raul Hilberg remarked, one of the problematic ‘rules’ of Holocaust speech is that any survivor, no matter how inarticulate, is superior to the greatest Holocaust historian who did not share in the experience.” While this voice of the survivor can sometimes hinder a museum, it is mostly

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helpful. In a museum, “representations by definition are historically situated, and therefore partial”\(^9\) and the voice of the survivor helps to make the representation complete.

Americans view museums as trustworthy sources of information. They serve to connect average Americans to history in an informal setting. Through the balance of survivor voice and historian voice in Holocaust museums, visitors are able to experience the tragedy of the Holocaust in a way that not only connects them with history, but also leaves them feeling that they can trust the accuracy of the information they have been given.

Though Holocaust representation in America has become impressively expansive and encompassing in the material it covers and the number of museums, monuments, and memorials that span the country, there are still some issues with how Americans are being educated about the Holocaust. Most high school age children have heard of the Holocaust and would recognize Holocaust related vocabulary such as Auschwitz, gas chamber, and concentration camp. Many adults have also had encounters with, and would be able to recognize these keystones of the Holocaust. But how many of those same students and adults would recognize the vocabulary of the Holocaust in the Soviet Union? How many would have heard of Babi Yar and Einsatzgruppen? Since the history of the Holocaust in the Soviet Union is often glossed over, if it is even discussed at all, there is a serious lack of awareness that there was any difference in what took place there as opposed to what took place in Austria and Western Poland. One of the main reasons for this glossing over is that most curriculum and museum narrative have not undergone significant revisions since the early 1990s. This limits the use of information about the Holocaust in the Soviet Union because the Soviet archives were not opened until the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991. Even after the opening many were closed again in the mid-1990s limiting access

\(^9\) Ibid., 183.
to information crucial to explaining the Holocaust in the Soviet Union.\textsuperscript{10} This lack of information is compounded by the fact that the soldiers freeing Soviet territories during the war were Soviet and so no American soldiers witnessed the unique atrocities that took place during the Holocaust in the Soviet Union. Soviet Jewish survivors in America had only other survivors to rely upon and this caused a desire for others to know what they had suffered. Survivors wanted others to hear their stories and “witness” what had happened to them so that the new generations in America would be able to perpetuate those stories and bear witness to future generations of awareness.

This thesis will argue that the Holocaust in the Soviet Union was a unique event in comparison to the rest of Europe and that, as such, it should be commemorated in Holocaust museums across America in a manner that distinguishes it from other parts of Europe during the Holocaust. For a population of immigrants that make up about 10 percent of the American Jewish population, which means there are between 500,000 and 750,000 Soviet Jews in America\textsuperscript{11}, why isn’t there more commemoration of what they suffered at the hands of the Nazis during World War II?

Chapter One examines the Holocaust in the Soviet Union. A thorough understanding of the experience of Soviet Jews during the Holocaust is necessary to understand what made their experience unique. A full picture of Jewish life in the Soviet Union between 1941 and 1944, reveals how during those years massive numbers of Soviet Jews and entire communities were eliminated. This chapter also examines ways that Soviet Jews defied the Nazi agenda, including escapes, uprisings, and partisan groups.

Chapter Two focuses on how Holocaust museums came to be such a common site in American cities. Holocaust memory has evolved from a time of relative silence amongst Jews, concerning the events of the Holocaust, to a national museum that sees two million Jewish and non-Jewish visitors per year. What occurred in America to make the Holocaust such a prominent feature of the cultural landscape, especially when the event was European in origin? Was it the development of a Jewish collective memory concerning the Holocaust? Was an official act, like the formation of the President’s Commission on the Holocaust, the push that Holocaust memory needed? Or was it simply that Americans felt guilty for not aiding Europe’s Jews during the Holocaust? All of these factors played a role in the Holocaust becoming a major focal point in America and this chapter explains the how and why.

Chapter Three is a case study of six Holocaust museums across America. The museums were chosen based on their varied locations and the fact that they all opened in the 1990s. The six museums were evaluated for how they are displaying and preserving the history of the Holocaust in the Soviet Union. The core idea of the museum evaluations is to examine all the ways that visitors are being exposed to the experience of Soviet Jewry during the Holocaust. Each museum was visited and the permanent exhibitions (what visitors see in person), gift shops (what visitors have available for purchase), and availability of access to archives (what visitors can use to research for themselves) were observed and evaluated. In addition to visiting each museum in person, each museum was also visited digitally. Public Historians and proponents of the use of digital media, Roy Rosenzweig and Daniel Cohen encourage museums to use online history projects to engage the audience in critical analysis and to make historical materials accessible to a wider range of people.\(^\text{12}\) Each museum’s website was evaluated for its archive

accessibility, historical information about the Holocaust in the Soviet Union available through a search option or on informational pages, and other presentations. The other presentations often included articles about past exhibitions mounted at the museum, lists of programming, and curriculum material available for students and teachers. Some of the museums fared better in their representation of the Holocaust in the Soviet Union online and others were better with a visit to the museum, but there were two elements that almost all of the museums used that were effective in conveying the history. The first of these elements is temporary exhibitions, which were examined for their content and frequency of appearance within the museums. The second element, used by all of the museums, is photography. German-occupied Soviet territory was under orders from General Keitel to not photograph any actions taken, except in the case of an official sanction. However, there were a large number of photographs that surfaced post-war showing the atrocities of the Holocaust in the Soviet Union, many of which were taken by the Soviets. All of the Holocaust museums examined in this study have made use of these photographs in their collection and in many cases in their permanent exhibitions, making them an invaluable witness to the Holocaust in the Soviet Union.

The experience of the Soviet Jews during the Holocaust is unique. Though Soviet Jews are represented in some form, in person or online, in each of the six museums that were evaluated, their commemoration is insufficient. The Holocaust in the Soviet Union claimed such a large number of victims that just a brief mention of their experience in the narratives of America’s Holocaust museums will not suffice to tell their story. Maybe a rethinking of the representation of Soviet Jews in America’s Holocaust museums would create a fuller and more

dynamic picture of the Holocaust in the Soviet Union. As H.G. Adler said: “History without tragedy does not exist, and knowledge is better and more wholesome than ignorance.”

CHAPTER ONE – THE HOLOCAUST IN THE SOVIET UNION

“Fierce anti-Semitism dates back to the tsars and has outlived the Communists. To be a Soviet Jew is to be the inheritor of that legacy.”

The history of violence against Jews in Russia is long and sordid. Before World War II, anti-Semitism in Russia was manifested through violent pogroms, segregation, and discrimination. In order to understand the unique form of violence against Soviet Jews during the Holocaust a brief history of violence before World War II is important.

In the 18th century Russia partitioned Poland and through this action added half a million Jews to its population. These Jews practiced an old religion and had more education than the average Russian, but largely worked within the lease holding system. The introduction of such a high number of educated Jews living in rural areas led the government to fear the influence these Jews might have on Russian peasants, including giving the peasants a desire to become educated. This fear led the government to attempt to confine the Jews to the Pale of Settlement, an area of Russia where Jews were allowed to establish permanent residence.

In the 19th century a massive Jewish emancipation swept through Europe, but skipped over Russia. The Jews were considered a problem in Russia. Over the course of the century, the Tsars employed various methods to deal with the “problem” of the Jews, including Christian education of Jewish children and Jewish military personnel, alienation and segregation, and cultivation of an inherent distrust of Jews to encourage citizen enacted pogroms. “Pogrom is a Russian word meaning ‘to wreak havoc, to demolish violently.’ Historically, the term refers to violent attacks by local non-Jewish populations on Jews in the Russian Empire and in other

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countries." In 1882 the May Laws were enacted which restricted work for Russian Jews and placed quotas on Jewish admittance to educational institutions. As part of these laws 20,000 Jewish artisans were expelled from Moscow. During the reign of Nicholas II (1894 – 1917), the last tsar of Russia, anti-Semitism took a new form. Nicholas used anti-Semitic propaganda to incite violence.

In 1905 the Russian edition of the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* published by Dr. Nilus was widely circulated in Russia. *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* is a book claiming that there is a global conspiracy by Jews to take over the world. The book also claims that Jews perform blood libels which are the kidnapping and murder of Christian children, usually boys, so that their blood can be used by Jews to make unleavened bread. The most famous blood libel case happened in 1913 in Kiev when Mendel Beilis, a Jew, was accused of abducting and mutilating a thirteen-year-old boy. The book became a popular form of propaganda and spread throughout the world.

In 1917 the February Revolution signaled the end of the reign of the tsars when Nicholas II abdicated. Following the revolution, until October 1917, Jews experienced a time of relative freedom in Russia. They were emancipated, but there was still a war raging in the country. After the October Revolution of 1917 the Bolsheviks took power. Under Bolshevik rule, feelings of anti-Semitism resurfaced and cruel pogroms enacted by citizens broke out. Leading up to the Stalinist purges of 1937-1938, Jewish religious culture was destroyed and instead the Soviet government promoted a secular Jewish Identity. Though the Jews religion was abolished, they

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22 Ibid., Chapter 1.
received social and political mobility. They had the option to assimilate into Soviet life or participate in a secular Soviet Jewish culture.23 Izrael K. Tsibulovo, born in Ukraine on August 2, 1893, notes the difference between anti-Jewish measures during tsarist rule and the type of anti-Jewish actions enacted by non-Jewish citizens, which would follow. “Anti-Semitism in tsarist days had limits. Jews were cut up and killed, but the religion was not touched. Jewish schools kept on functioning. Jewish newspapers in Yiddish and Hebrew were published.”24

On August 23, 1939 Germany and the Soviet Union signed the Treaty of Non-aggression between Germany and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, more commonly known as the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact. In this agreement Germany and the Soviet Union divvied up the territories of Eastern Europe and agreed to avoid aggressive actions towards one another. In the treaty the Soviet Union acquired West Belorussia, West Ukraine, the Eastern Half of Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Bessarabia, Northern Bukovina, and Finland. Within these acquired countries lived between 2.12 and 2.15 million Jews. On the eve of World War II, before the Germans occupied Soviet territories, there were between 4.1 and 4.2 million Jews living in the Soviet Union.25 Germany invaded Poland in September 1939, beginning World War II.26

26 Ibid., Preface.
On June 22, 1941 Germany broke the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact and invaded the Soviet Union. The annexed Soviet territories were occupied by Germany within the first ten days of the invasion. Adolf Hitler’s minister of propaganda, Joseph Goebbels, set to work to make the Soviet people believe in the need to destroy the Jews. German radio and pamphlet propaganda spread the message that Stalin was in league with the Jews. This propaganda gave German administrators in the Soviet territories the ideological basis for a plan of annihilation though total extermination was not yet a policy. A combination of propaganda and the advancing

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27 Ibid., Chapter 6.
Einsatzgruppen (mobile killing forces) led to a wave of pogroms in German-occupied Soviet territory.\textsuperscript{28} Though the pogroms were citizen enacted, most Soviet citizens did not become Nazi collaborators.

Between June 30 and July 3, 1941, 4,000 Jews were killed in a pogrom in Lvov. In Latvia, officials recognized that the people of their region had “liquidated the Jews in a spontaneous outburst of hatred.”\textsuperscript{29} But not all territories of the Soviet Union felt the need to take the murder of Jews into their own hands. In Belorussia, the populace approved of Germany’s plan for the Jews but felt no need to act on that plan on their own. The Germans quickly achieved their goal of turning the non-Jews of the Soviet Union against the Jewish population with the use of propaganda. When this goal was achieved the pogroms mostly ceased and the Einsatzgruppen, mobile killing squads, commenced systematic and planned exterminations of Soviet Jews.\textsuperscript{30}

The actions of the Einsatzgruppen would not have taken place if not for Reinhard Heydrich, the mastermind of the death camps where millions of Jews met their deaths. As a young child Heydrich’s father used anti-Semitism to help dispel rumors about his own Jewishness. As a teen, Heydrich was a member of the Offensive and Defensive League of German People which held a firmly anti-Semitic mission.

The league strives to bring about the moral rebirth of the German people by awakening and fostering their healthy nature . . . The league undertakes to explain the nature and extent of the Jewish danger and threats from other non-German races, and to combat them with all legal means at its disposal.\textsuperscript{31}

The ideology of the Offensive and Defensive League of German People and of a history teacher who discussed the Protocols of the Elders of Zion helped to solidify Heydrich’s anti-Semitism.

\textsuperscript{28} Ibid., Chapter 8.
\textsuperscript{29} Ibid., 94.
\textsuperscript{30} Ibid., Chapter 8.
After being dismissed from the Navy in winter 1930, Heydrich became the head of the Nazi party’s secret service and was put in charge of restructuring the police force. At this point in time the Nazi party’s main focus was to overthrow the Weimar Republic and get Hitler named Reich Chancellor. Hitler did eventually become chancellor and Heydrich was instrumental in helping to garner that position for him.

Heydrich quickly became indispensable to Hitler’s plan by establishing concentration camps and helping to mastermind Kristallnacht, a pogrom enacted against Jews throughout Germany and parts of Austria. However, the most influential piece that Heydrich added to the Nazis effort was to mastermind the Einsatzgruppen, mobile killing units – an effort that had been developing since the 1938 occupation of Czechoslovakia. Heydrich suffered an assassination attack ordered by the Czech government on May 27, 1942 and died from his injuries on June 4, 1942.

In preparation for Operation Barbarossa, the invasion of the Soviet Union, Hitler explained to his forces that Bolshevism needed to be destroyed and that the Jews were the main proponents of Bolshevism.\(^{32}\) With this ideology in place, the Einsatzgruppen, which possessed a large number of high-ranking officials and members of the intelligentsia including doctors, lawyers, and clergymen, were formed in four groups. Einsatzgruppen A, including smaller units of Einsatzkommandos 1, 2, and 3, was assigned to the Baltic States with their end objective to reach Leningrad. Einsatzgruppen B, including Einsatzkommandos 7, 8, and 9, was assigned to Belorussia and parts of Central Russia with their end objective to reach Moscow. Einsatzgruppen C, including Einsatzkommandos 5 and 7 and Sonderkommandos 4a and 5b, was assigned to Kiev and East Ukraine. Einsatzgruppen D, including Einsatzkommando 12 and Sonderkommandos

10a, 10b, 11a, and 11b, was assigned to Bessarabia and South Ukraine with an end objective to reach Crimea and the Caucuses region.\textsuperscript{33}

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\textbf{Figure 1.2} Einsatzgruppen Routes, Yitzhak Arad, Shmuel Krakowski and Shmuel Spector, \textit{The Einsatzgruppen Reports}

Initially these units cleared towns only of non-essential Jewish men. The Einsatzgruppen gathered the men in a town and brought them to ravines or ditches at the edge of the town where they were killed, usually in smaller groups and over the course of a few days. The remaining Jews in the town would be ghettoized, which meant that they were gathered into a small portion of town, often too small for all involved, closed in, and forced to live in appalling conditions of filth and starvation. On July 28, 1941 Himmler sent out orders for Polesie, located in Southern Belorussia, which informed the Einsatzgruppen located there that they were to carry out the first mass murder of Jewish women and children by driving them into a swamp to drown. This order signaled a change in operation, which meant the Nazis had officially adopted the policy of total liquidation of the Jews in their efforts to overtake the Soviet Union. At the peak of the exterminations, on September 12, 1941, General Keitel who was head of the Supreme Command

\textsuperscript{33} Yitzhak Arad, \textit{The Holocaust in the Soviet Union}, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2009), Chapter 10.
of Armed Forces issued an order concerning how the conflict in the Soviet Union should be conducted.

The struggle against Bolshevism demands ruthless and energetic action, and first of all against the Jews, as the main bearers of Bolshevism. Therefore, there will be no cooperation whatever between the Wehrmacht and the Jewish population, whose attitude is openly or secretly anti-German, and no use is to be made of individual Jews, for any preferential services for the Wehrmacht. Under no circumstances are papers to be issued by Military Offices to Jews confirming that they are employed for purposes of the Wehrmacht. The only exception to be made is the use of Jews in special labor columns, which are only to be employed under German supervision.34

Less than two weeks after this order was issued, an entire Lithuanian community was destroyed at the hands of the Einsatzgruppen. The shtetl of Eishyshok was founded in the 11th century and was a strong Eastern European community from its founding until World War II. On June 23, 1941 Einsatzgruppen A moved into Eishyshok. They moved all of the Jews into the Horse Market in the center of town. Beginning on September 25, 1941 the men were taken in waves from the Horse Market and shot at the old cemetery. The following day the women and children were murdered. The Jews’ Polish Christian neighbors largely perpetrated the massacre. Though a few people managed to escape, over the course of two days the Jewish community of Eishyshok was destroyed. Most of those that managed to escape made their way to the Rodun ghetto that was almost completely liquidated on May 10, 1941.35

Only two days after the destruction of Eishyshok, one of the largest mass murders of East European Jews during the war took place in Kiev. On September 29, 1941 all Jews were ordered to appear at a certain place by 6 o’clock. After the Jews were gathered a two-day aktion (another name for liquidations) began. Jews were led to a ravine, Babi Yar, outside of Kiev, where

34 Ibid., 213.
Einsatzgruppen C, two Kommandos of the police regiments south, and Sonderkommando\textsuperscript{36} 4a shot 33,771 Jews.\textsuperscript{37}

![Figure 1.3 Sites of Mass Murder in Lithuania versus Ghettos in the Baltic Countries, Photograph by Author, Virginia Holocaust Museum, April 5, 2013](image)

It was not until October 12, 1941 that Report No. 111 was issued, giving more details about the targets of the Einsatzgruppen. This report was meant to provide further clarification of a memorandum issued by Heydrich dated July 2, 1941. The report read: “The principal targets of execution by the Einsatzkommandos will be: political functionaries, . . . Jews mistakenly released from POW camps, . . . Jewish sadists and avengers, . . . Jews in general . . .”.\textsuperscript{38}

Ultimately when this report was released, the Einsatzgruppen and their auxiliary units were well

\textsuperscript{36} While Sonderkommando was traditionally used to refer to special work units of Jewish prisoners in concentration camps, the word is defined in German as special unit and was sometimes used in reference to non-Jewish units, as was the case when it is used in reference to Einsatzgruppen actions.


\textsuperscript{38} Ibid., viii-ix.
aware that Jews were their targets. The order issued by General Keitel, the destruction of Eishyshok and Babi Yar and countless other acts of violence against the Jews in the Soviet Union happened before the report was distributed.

Though the Nazi officials considered the mass shootings effective, after Himmler witnessed an execution he ordered that a more “humane” method be developed so that the soldiers could preserve a more stable mental state. As a solution to the “lack of humanity” of the mass shootings, gassing vans were developed using carbon monoxide to kill the Jews. Even with the gas vans as an option, shootings were usually more efficient in the Soviet Union especially in winter. In winter 1941 the Nazis realized that there were issues with moving the gas vans across the thoroughly frozen Soviet terrain. In addition to transit issues the ground was often too frozen to dig mass graves so the killing of Jews often slowed during the winter months.  

The slow winter of 1941 led into a relatively slow year in 1942. While it was a slow year, the killings did not stop entirely. In addition to some mass murders taking place, the Grodno ghetto was liquidated between January 18 -22, 1943 and as a result 11,500 Jews were sent to Auschwitz and Treblinka concentration camps. This was a rare move. Grodno was one of the only ghettos in the Soviet Union to have liquidations to the camps. Most of the Jews in the Soviet Union were not ghettoized and those that were only remained in the ghettos for a short time until they were executed.

Soviet forces between early 1943 and summer 1944 liberated the German occupied territories of the Soviet Union. With Soviet liberation on the horizon, Einsatzgruppen 1005 was tasked with covering up the murders of Jews throughout the Soviet Union. However, with the Soviet forces pushing forward and a lack of documentation and knowledge of all aktions carried on.

40 Ibid., Chapter 15.
out by Nazi forces, Einsatzgruppen 1005 largely failed to hide the evidence of the Nazi atrocities. Following the liberation some Jews attempted to return to their former homes and were met with violence by their neighbors. Pogroms broke out in many cities when Jews attempted to return to their homes. The Holocaust in the Soviet Union claimed the lives of approximately 2.5 million Jews.

![Figure 1.4 Table of Estimated Deaths of Jews in the Soviet Union](image)

Figure 1.4 Table of Estimated Deaths of Jews in the Soviet Union, Yitzhak Arad, *The Holocaust in the Soviet Union*

Though the vast majorities of Soviet Jews were murdered at the hands of the Nazi Einsatzgruppen, many fought desperately for their lives. Some Jewish communities were spread out enough that by the time the Einsatzgruppen made it to these areas many of the Jews were evacuated or had escaped. These Jews were intelligentsia or Jews who had fled to the forest and

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41 Ibid., Chapter 26.
had not returned to areas where the Einsatzgruppen was active. According to Operational Situation Report USSR No. 73 by Einsatzgruppen B; “This proves that the activity of the security police has become rather well known in Jewish Circles, It is, therefore, hardly possible at present to continue the liquidations on the same scale as before, since the Jewish elements are to a great extent missing.”

While ghettoization was rare in the Soviet Union, some ghettos were constructed. Most of these were temporary because aktions liquidated them quickly. Within the few ghettos that were long term Jews employed various methods to preserve their own lives. Many built Malinas, or hidden chambers, in which they hid themselves and their family in order to escape aktions. Others solicited help from non-Jews to gain Aryan documents or Scheinen – work papers – which, as long as the workers were still considered useful, would temporarily save the worker and his family from execution. Still others would join underground groups in the ghetto and become part of armed resistance.


Figure 1.5 Map of Jewish Partisan Groups in Eastern Europe, The Bielski Partisans, www.fold3.com
One of the most impressive efforts of defiance was the formation of partisan groups in the forests of the Soviet Union. Escapees from both liquidated towns and ghettos formed these groups. Many early ghetto occupants had the opportunity to escape the ghetto, but they had nowhere to go. It was not until 1942 that most of the larger partisan groups were really starting to take shape. One of the most famous of the partisan groups was the Bielski *otriad* (another word for an official partisan group) headed up by brothers, Tuvia, Zus, and Asael Bielski and operated in the forests of Western Belorussia.

Tuvia, Zus, and Asael Bielski lived in a small town called Stankiewicze, which was located between Lida and Nowogrodek in Western Belorussia, where their family owned a mill and farmland. In a town of six families, the Bielski’s were the only Jewish one.

The Germans invaded Belorussia in July 1941. At the end of 1941 the Nowogrodek ghetto was established which encompassed Jews from the surrounding area. The first *aktion* in the Nowogrodek ghetto resulted in the deaths of 4,000 Jews, including Bielski family members. After the Nowogrodek ghetto *aktion*, the brothers began to seriously consider their options for life in the forests. In early 1942, Tuvia began to explore the idea of partisan groups, but quickly realized that groups made up of all Jews would fare better because they had common needs and goals. By mid-May 1942 Tuvia and Asael had joined together in the forest and by that summer they had decided to form into an official partisan group, also known as an *otriad*. They were officially named Zhukov *Otriad*, but were always unofficially known as the Bielski *Otriad*.

The first major disagreement in the *otriad* was whether they should accept only friends and family of current partisans or if they should accept all Jewish fugitives including those who

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45 Ibid., 43.
came without weapons or ties to current *otriad* members. Tuvia, Asael, and Malbin, the *otriad*’s Chief of Staff, agreed that all Jewish lives were worthy of being saved and expressed a national compassion towards Jewish fugitives. In keeping with the teaching of the Talmud that whoever saves one life, saves a world\(^{46}\); Tuvia believed that to save one Jew was better than killing twenty Germans.\(^{47}\)

With this practice in effect, by the winter of 1943 the Bielski *otriad* had over 200 members in the forest. The Bielski *otriad*’s numbers continued to grow as more refugees of towns found their way into the forest. Also, many Jews that had joined Russian partisan groups were finding difficulty in their position due to rising anti-Semitism. All of these dismissed and dismayed, former Russian partisan group members found a new home with the Bielskis and by mid-1943 the Bielski otriad numbered 700.\(^{48}\)

As the group continued to grow, Soviet directives put Soviet officials in charge of the *otriad* and they split the group into two divisions, fighters and families. In the fall of 1943, the family portion of the *otriad* attempted to become more stable and created and impressive settlement in the Nalibocka forest that was essentially a shtetl. The *otriad* lived in this location from the fall of 1943 until the summer of 1944 when the Red Army reached the otriad on its liberation path to Germany. The Soviets were amazed to discover 1,200 Jews alive and well in the forest.


\(^{48}\) Ibid., 106.
In his final speech to the otriad in the forest on July 10, 1944 Tuvia Bielski told his people,

My dear brothers and sisters, we have suffered through very hard times together. We have been attacked and blockaded. We have been cold and hungry. We have been in constant fear for our lives. Now we are going to tell the world that we, a tiny remnant of people, have been struggling to save ourselves and our tortured brethren. We are witness to the murder and destruction, to the suffering that the Nazis brought upon the Jewish people.\(^{49}\)

In an effort to bear witness to what had happened in the forests of Western Belorussia, Dr. Amarant, a member of the otriad, recorded wartime stories of his comrades. After the war ended he and his wife were on their way to Palestine and the documents were confiscated by the Soviets and thus lost to future generations.\(^{50}\)


In the years following the Holocaust in the Soviet Union, many of the surviving Jews made their way to Palestine or America. These two destinations seemed to be the most desirable for Soviet Jews, Israel was the promised land and America was becoming a new world center for Jewish life. There were four major waves of immigration from Russia to America. The first took place between 1880 and 1920 (2 million Jews), the second in the 1940s after World War II (100,000 Jews), the third in the 1970s during the campaign to free Soviet Jewry, and the fourth in the 1990s after the dissolution of the Soviet Union (400,000 Jews since 1970s).  

The campaign to free Soviet Jewry was an effort made by American Jews to help Soviet Jews immigrate. The Soviet Union was effectively eliminating Jewish culture by prohibiting the open practice of Jewish traditions. The Soviet Union also had a ban on Jewish immigration. American Jews campaigned for immigration bans to be lifted by pairing Soviet Jewish children

with American Jewish children for Bar and Bat Mitzvahs, holding rallies and protests, and petitioning the government. 52

The switch for major immigration of Soviet Jews to the United States as opposed to Israel came in the late 1970s. Immigrants saw a greater chance for economic stability and success in America. There was an increase in Jewish immigrants being allowed out of the Soviet Union in the 1970s. 53 By 1979, 65,000 Soviet Jews called America home. 54 In 1982 immigration out of the Soviet Union was once again closed. 55 In 1991 the Soviet Union dissolved and Soviet Jewish immigrants (fourth wave immigrants) were leaving the former Soviet republics in large numbers because of a rise in anti-Semitism and a desire to reunite with family. 56

The number of Jews leaving the Soviet Union following the end of the Cold War (1988-1993) was astronomical. 57 By the end of the 1990s half a million Jews had immigrated to America. Most of the people that left were ordinary people who saw no future in the Soviet Union. They had children and elderly parents and saw an opportunity to seek better fortunes in America. 58

The promise of a better life in America could not have prepared Soviet Jewish immigrants of the 1990s for the ideological disagreements that they would have with Soviet Jews of earlier immigration waves who were already in America. Jewish identity was the biggest point of disagreement between Soviet Jews who immigrated before World War II and directly

53 Ibid., 52-58.
55 Annelise Orleck, The Soviet Jewish Americans, (Hanover, NH: Brandeis University Press, 1999), 64-68.
56 Ibid., 73.
58 Ibid., 528-535.
following the Holocaust (first and second wave immigrants) and Soviet Jews who immigrated in the 1970s and 1990s (third and fourth wave immigrants). A lack of intense religiosity amongst new immigrants caused older immigrants to say that they were not really Jewish. Many new Soviet Jewish immigrants struggled with being religiously Jewish because that was what, for so long, had caused them to be persecuted. This lack of religiosity did not sit well with American Jews either because for them the campaign to free Soviet Jewry had biblical connotations.  

Even though there were many portions of life that various waves of Soviet Jewish immigrants to America disagreed upon, there was one point on which they were united, the need to commemorate the Holocaust. They developed a community commemoration day in 1980 in Brighton Beach in New York for the Babi Yar massacre. And many communities held yearly commemorations for an overall remembrance of the atrocities of the Holocaust, which helped bond communities through commemoration of the dead.  

“For them (Soviet Jews and American Jews who aided them), a second exodus meant a second chance. In many ways, it was a final chapter to the chaos wrought by World War II.” These immigrants and communities that were influential in the need for Holocaust memory in the United States. Their commitment to never forget what had happened to their friends and loved ones in the Soviet Union was a signal to Americans, Jews and non-Jews, that commemoration needed to be taken out of small communities and made available for larger numbers of people so that America would never forget the unique and horrific suffering of Soviet Jews at the hands of the Nazis.

60 Ibid., 101-103.  
CHAPTER TWO - THE RISE OF HOLOCAUST MEMORY IN THE UNITED STATES

Holocaust memory in the United States has seen a progressive rise in prominence since the end of World War II. Today there are Holocaust museums, research centers, or memorials in most major cities and many smaller cities throughout the country.\textsuperscript{62} Most universities and colleges employ a professor dedicated to the teaching of Jewish history or at the least offer a course on the Holocaust. While Holocaust memory enjoys a favored position in American consciousness now, it was not without hard work, unearthing of painful memories, and a collective desire amongst American Jews that all people bear witness to the atrocity of the Holocaust and that they should never forget.

The years directly following World War II are largely considered a time of silence, in terms of commemoration, amongst Holocaust victims. This is to some extent true. There were no large-scale efforts being made to memorialize the Holocaust in America. This was largely because survivors that were living in America were trying to cope with their own emotions and work on building a new life for themselves in a country where few people spoke their native language. “For the first 20 years or so after World War II the Holocaust was ‘hardly talked about’; survivors were encouraged not to look back but to look forward to building new lives.”\textsuperscript{63} Holocaust survivors were discouraged by Jewish community officials from public discourse on the Holocaust in the years directly following the end of World War II. With the onset of the Cold War there was a major effort to keep the stereotype of Jews as Communists from surfacing in America. The silencing was encouraged by Jewish communities, especially established American Jewish communities with no Holocaust survivors.\textsuperscript{64} Even though no large-scale efforts

\textsuperscript{62} In 2010 there were 16 Holocaust museums in America which were the largest of approximately 150 Holocaust centers across the country.


for commemoration were being generated, the Jews in America were not remaining entirely silent about the Holocaust. There was a disconnect within Jewish communities over how and when it was appropriate for a public history and public memory of the Holocaust to emerge.

Author Hasia R. Diner states in *We Remember With Reverence and Love: American Jews and the Myth of Silence after the Holocaust, 1945 – 1962* that the idea of post-war silence among American Jews is unfounded. Diner argues:

> American Jews in the years from the end of the war into the 1960s responded to the Holocaust in ways that fit their place in American society and in the Jewish world. Communal critics and later historians notwithstanding, postwar American Jews built public culture that they considered to be the fitting memorial to the Holocaust. They could do no less. But since they operated within the context of a specific time and place they could also do no more.  

The public culture to which Diner refers was built initially through “articles, sermons, radio shows, and speeches” which both accused American Jewry of forgetting and helped to perpetuate memory through guilt. These small pieces of remembrance helped to form a collective memory amongst American Jews, which as it grew to include more people and more avenues of expression, allowed for the perpetuation of Holocaust memory on a large-scale. However, physical commemoration would not become a viable option for American Jews until the 1970s.

Jeffrey Alexander, co-author of *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity*, cites that one of the reasons for this inability to form large-scale commemoration was that the Jews were seen as a large group that had been subjected to an atrocity, not as individuals. It would not be until the Jews in America figured out how to create memories within smaller social groups that a

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66 Ibid., 368.

cohesive, yet individual and unique story of the Holocaust would emerge and become usable in wider cultural commemoration.

According to the theory on collective memory developed by Maurice Hallbwachs, French philosopher and sociologist, “It is in society that people normally acquire their memories. It is also in society that they recall, recognize, and localize their memories”.68 Holocaust survivors who immigrated to the United States post-liberation established themselves in communities of other Jews and specifically other survivors, which allowed them to express memories of what had happened to them in Europe during the Holocaust and from those memories to develop a collective memory. However, what the American Jews ended up forming was not just a collective memory, but also a cultural trauma. Cultural trauma is “when members of a collectivity feel they have been subjected to a horrendous event that leaves indelible marks upon their group consciousness, marking their memories forever and changing their future identity in fundamental and irrevocable ways”.69 The Holocaust presents a trauma so great that without a collective identity to interpret what happened, non-Jews and American Jews who did not experience it first hand, cannot hope to understand the atrocity. The understanding is that there is a need for the past to be incorporated into the present, there is a need for a second person witness to a painful past which confirms that memory is not confined to individual psyche but also to the culture in which the person lives, and witnessing is an active choice which consists of memory being passed between first and second person which in turn sets in motion the emergence of narrative.70 “To preserve the Holocaust in history, it must first be preserved in memory.”71


Before a Holocaust narrative could be set in motion in America, certain events had to take place in other parts of the world. The first of these events was the Eichmann Trial, which took place in 1960. The trial of Adolf Eichmann, a high-ranking German SS officer who worked closely with Reinhard Heydrich in efforts to deport Jews to ghettos and concentration camps, was held in Jerusalem. Israel along with the United States had become one of the main destinations for the Jews post-liberation. This trial provided Jews in Jerusalem with the opportunity to testify against one of the men who had wrought terror on their lives and the lives of their families and neighbors. This was one of the first opportunities that Holocaust survivors had to publicly tell their stories of atrocities, deaths, and survival in Nazi occupied Europe. Tim Cole, author of *Selling the Holocaust: From Auschwitz to Schindler – How History is Bought, Packaged, and Sold*, argues that the Eichmann Trial was a turning point in overall Jewish consciousness of the Holocaust post-1945, but that American consciousness did not begin until 1967. In 1967 the Six-Day War broke out between Israel and Egypt, Jordan, and Syria. This war led to a widespread fear amongst Jews in Israel and America that a second Holocaust loomed on the horizon. With that fear in their minds, American Holocaust survivors decided that it was time to speak out about the atrocities that they faced in World War II Europe. The Six-Day War moved Israel to the top of the agenda of organized American Jewry. Many American Jews had been seeking a theological reason for why God had broken his covenant by allowing the Holocaust to happen until they found that reason they could not begin to explain the Holocaust. The victory of Israel in the Six-Day War gave them that reckoning of “Holocaust and

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71 Alison Landsberg, “America, the Holocaust, and the mass culture of memory: Toward a radical politics of empathy,” *New German Critique* No 71, Summer 1997.
73 Ibid., Introduction.
Redemption.” The open discussion of the Holocaust that was sparked by this war was not just the work of individuals, but was helped through massive investments by Jewish communal organizations in promoting “Holocaust Consciousness”.

The need for conscious recognition of the Holocaust began to gain ground in America as early as the 1950s with the publishing of Anne Frank: The Diary of a Young Girl in 1952 and the premiere of the Anne Frank play in New York City in 1955. Consciousness continued to gain ground throughout the 1960s and 1970s. In 1960 Elie Wiesel’s famed memoir, Night, was published for the first time in English. While overall consciousness did not strike American Jews until the Six-Day War in 1967, accounts like Wiesel’s continued to surface. The time came when the United Stated government found that it was important to launch an official effort for commemoration of the Holocaust which took the form of the President’s Commission on the Holocaust enacted by President Carter in 1979. The committee was tasked with figuring out the best method for commemorating the Holocaust in America. Committee members argued over whether a monument would suffice or something more permanent and expansive needed to be constructed. Even through the disagreements, the committee members never forgot the need to keep the collective memory of Holocaust survivors in America at the center of the commemoration decision. Committee members recognized that collective memory accommodates a wide range of uses. “At times it is used to describe heritage of the whole of humanity, at times, it becomes a national property, at still other times it is said to bond

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75 Ibid., 152.
American Jews began to define themselves around the Holocaust and thus gave way to non-Jewish Americans beginning to define American Jews within the same constructs. Author Peter Novick states, “Some of those who, from the sixties on, urged the Jews ‘confront’ the Holocaust did so because they had been dismayed by the relative silence in the post-war years, when many Jews seem ashamed of it. Years later, they were often equally dismayed when many Jews seem proud of it.”

Author Iwona Irwin Zarecka makes observations about memory work noting that once suffering recedes into the past (i.e. the memory belongs now to the next generation and not the one that actually experienced the event) an increased need for active memory work exists and also that communities of memory bonded by traumatic experience are often absorbed by a wider national or ethnic community. These observations became concrete in the 1990s when Holocaust memory in America began to take shape in Holocaust museums. There were some small museums and learning centers cropping up across the country as early as the 1970s and 1980s especially in Los Angeles where, “because of a lack of traditional Jewish geography and the presence of money, creativity, and a desire to innovate, in the 1970s and 1980s, Los Angeles became the West Coast anchor of American Jewish museum culture”. However, these centers could not hope to compete with those that would come about in the 1990s, specifically 1993 which has been touted as the year of the Holocaust and the culmination of memorialization. It was in 1993 that the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, the culmination of almost a

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decade and a half of work on behalf of the President’s Commission on the Holocaust, was opened. That same year the West Coast also opened a Holocaust Museum, The Simon Wiesenthal Center’s Beit Hashoah – Museum of Tolerance. As the decade progressed, museums began to open in other large cities such as New York City and Houston, Texas.

Since this thesis is an examination of Soviet Jews, this chapter would not be complete without examining the unique circumstances that surround the perpetuation of Soviet Jewish memory in America. One of the most important factors to consider when examining Soviet Jewish memory work in America after the Holocaust is that there was no homogenous ‘Holocaust’ at the end of the 20th century. There were different meanings for the Holocaust in every country that was involved. “In the Soviet account, the genocide of the Jews lost its ethnic specificity and simply became part of the story of the Nazi suppression of international communism in general to the extent which now requires a rewriting of the narratives of East Europe and Soviet memorial sites”. 83 This is one of the largest issues concerning representations of Soviet Jews in American Holocaust memory. Defining an ethnically specific memory for Soviet Jews becomes difficult because immigrant memory saw the world of Russian Jewry in dark terms and Westerners mostly saw Eastern Europe as a vast distinction between the vibrant pre-war communities to the desolated aftermath of the Holocaust. It was not only American Jews who were trying to reconstruct Soviet Jewish memory. Historians were also trying to construct a balanced history of Eastern European Jews and they feared that the rising interest in the Holocaust might undermine those efforts by creating a popular view of the Holocaust which favored certain elements of Holocaust history over others. 84

84 Steven J. Zipperstein, Imagining Russian Jewry: Memory, History, Identity, (Seattle, University of Washington Press, 1999), 95.
In the 1950s the greater distance between American Jews and Eastern European Jews encouraged sentimentality, but made it difficult to assess the impact of the Holocaust on attitudes towards Eastern Europe.

In the absence of fresh historical work, in the wake of fierce, definitive immigrant memories of what life back there was like, and in the aftermath of the Shoah, pervasive premonitions of horror regarding Eastern Europe were conflated and granted a grim presence: Nazi horrors and tsarist pogroms meshed in the often sparse, repetitive narratives that Jews tended to tell about this vast, complex region. The distance between life in Vilna and death in Treblinka tended to narrow in such accounts, as if these were mere differences in detail, not substance.\(^{85}\)

It is this grim presentation of Soviet Jewish life, by author Steven Zipperstein, often perpetuated by Soviet Jews who had immigrated to America, that scholars and memory workers have sought to rewrite. These professionals recognized that the Holocaust in Eastern Europe was bleak, but that there were also vibrant communities that thrived pre-war and those communities should be remembered for their time in the light as well as in the darkness. “The Russian Soviet Jewish Community was looking to connect to its Jewish roots and traditions in informal ways – it was less about believing and more about belonging for this cohort.”\(^{86}\) One of the best recommendations to emerge from a 2002 Jewish Community Study was that Russian Soviet Jews need to be recognized as equal partners in the larger Jewish Community while still honoring a unique Russian identity.\(^{87}\)

The eruption of Jewish collective memory and museum construction left the unanswered question of why. Why had museums been chosen as the appropriate medium to portray a collective memory of cultural trauma? And why were Jews, a people

\(^{85}\) Ibid., 94.


\(^{87}\) Ibid.
traditionally known for being in a permanent state of diaspora, willing to help establish permanent memorialization that would require constant maintenance and supervision?

“Monuments, museums and memorials are . . . attempts to make statements and affirmations [to create] a materiality with a political, collective, public meaning [and] a physical reminder of a conflictive past”.

While these three cultural constructions all serve the purpose of promoting meaning through physical representation, it is the museum that stands above the rest as a place of not only meaning, but also learning. The museum offers an element that monuments and memorials cannot. The museum is a building that can be visited. Inside the building there are staff members who can answer questions, documents to attest to the validity of the information being displayed and the knowledge that historians had a hand in creating these exhibitions, whether through direct participation or the influence of their published works. “Americans believe they uncover ‘real’ or ‘true’ history at museums and historic sites”. Visits to museums are often incidental, but they rank highly in leaving visitors feeling extremely connected to history.

“As a legitimizing institution, the museum affirms the continuity of past and present and stands firmly in the space of tradition.”

Museums are legitimizing institutions for the reasons listed above and also for how they interact with visitors. Holocaust museums specifically provide an opportunity for what Michael Frisch refers to as shared authority. In his opinion it is the job of the museum to create projects that involve people in exploring what it means to remember and how to use memories in a way

90 Oren Baruch Stier, *Committed to Memory: Cultural Mediations of the Holocaust*, (Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 2003), 113. While this statement is largely true for history museums and, from what I have experienced, science center type institutions that become labeled as museums, I cannot affirm its validity for institutions like Ripley’s Believe It Or Not (often listed in the museum category as well).
that makes them active and alive and allows for them to be more than objects. 

John Kuo Wei Tchen, a founder of Chinatown History Museum in New York City, echoes Frisch’s idea when he says, “reclaiming a ‘neglected past’ . . . ‘must be done in tandem with the people the history is about’ so that ‘personal memory and testimony inform and are informed by historical context’.” Frisch’s work was written before the opening of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum but it is this call that the USHMM and other Holocaust museums answer. Museums are able to find a happy medium between memory driven exhibits and object driven exhibits which possess little to no context. This balance is achieved by the museums’ ability to progress objects from keepsakes to mementos to souvenirs to reminders to evidence and similarly move their presentations from celebration to memorial to exhibition. Museums are able to negotiate the murky waters of Holocaust memory for visitors, Jews and non-Jews, who may or may not be intimately familiar with the events of the Holocaust. “Representing the Holocaust is about making the Holocaust concrete and thinkable.” There is a level of safety for visitors encountering this sensitive material. The ability of a museum to turn an object into an artifact somehow makes them “safer” to view for the visitor. Edward T. Linenthal, member of the President’s Commission on the Holocaust, suggests that “Americans could ‘touch’ the reality of the Holocaust through a museum whose use of artifacts would shrink the geographical distance between Poland and America and make permeable the boundaries between Holocaust

94 Alison Landsberg, “America, the Holocaust, and the mass culture of memory: Toward a radical politics of empathy,” New German Critique No 71, Summer 1997.
and American space”.

The negotiations of the past that the Holocaust museums provide visitors allows for the visitors to open up emotionally to the Holocaust within a space that they feel is safe, a space that is intimate yet distanced. After all, isn’t the goal of Holocaust museums to “favor strategies to arouse strong emotions and particular immersion of the visitor into the past” while still maintaining an environment that encourages learning and participation in the collective memory of American Jews. “Maybe there is not a literal truth to the Holocaust in America. It is not like slavery and the slaughter of native Americans, one of the atrocities that happened here; and yet there certainly is a larger truth.”

A Sioux truck driver interviewed for Roy Rosenzweig and David Thelen’s book, The Presence of the Past: Popular Uses of History in American Life, noted experiencing feelings of “what could I have done if I were there?” on a trip to the Wounded Knee memorial site. It is this same reaction that is elicited in America’s Holocaust museums. As a non-Jewish American visiting Holocaust museums I often found myself wondering what I would have done in the situation of a German peasant or a Soviet artisan faced with the knowledge that my neighbors were being carted off and killed by the thousands just for being Jewish. I can only imagine that the response of a Jew touring one of these museums would be a more intense wondering.

The question of why Jews, a people traditionally in a perpetual state of diaspora, would chose to invest their time and money into a museum, a form of commemoration that requires continued support, can be best answered by Caryn Aviv and David Shneer in their book New

97 A. Baer cited in Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity, Jeffrey C. Alexander, et al. (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 2004), 255.
98 Alison Landsberg, “America, the Holocaust, and the mass culture of memory: Toward a radical politics of empathy,” New German Critique No 71, Summer 1997.
Jews: The End of the Jewish Diaspora. Their explanation is simple. Shneer and Aviv argue that Jews are no longer in a state of diaspora. The authors believe that post World War II Jews became rooted in their countries of post-war immigration. They even go so far as to state that many Jews began to shift their focus from Israel, as the promised land, to America as their new promised land. Some Jews even endeavor to make yearly (or more frequent) pilgrimages to New York, the center of Jewish life in America. The shift in rootedness amongst American Jews allowed for them to make a life in many cities across America.

Just because the “New Jews” were not longing for a return to their homelands or a resettlement in Israel does not mean that they forgot where they came from. “In a post-Holocaust world, many American Jews came to see Eastern Europe no longer as the real place from which to draw roots but as a mythic home, not one that they want to return to but one that they want to bear witness to.” It was this desire to bear witness that led American Jews into the field of commemoration and collective memory. Initially in the 1980s and 1990s there were Jews who sought a secular Jewish identity as an alternative to Zionism and Israel and they bore witness to Eastern Europe by turning to resurrecting Yiddish culture, which had been destroyed by the Holocaust. However, the majority of Jews in America who wished to bear witness in their newly rooted communities did so through participation in and support of their local Holocaust museums. The support of these local Holocaust museums is from local Jews in large part because these museums represent themes or artifacts from their own lives, including religious artifacts and items used in daily life by the Jews of Europe. And the museum collections include, in display or archive, objects belonging to local Jews or to people they know, which includes

101 Ibid., 8.
102 Ibid., 18.
survivors and their descendants.103 These Jews are also participatory in the development and sustaining of Holocaust museums because they are charged with the awful task of remembering to not forget. Victims and inheritors of Holocaust memory are constantly reminded that the Holocaust is a horrifying experience to remember, but it is an atrocity and a betrayal to forget what happened.104 The “new Jews” were tasked with a seemingly impossible and horrifying burden that they could not afford to not carry.

Historical geographer David Lowenthal reminds those reconstructing history that “the past as reconstructed is always more coherent than when it happened. We have to interpret the ongoing present as we live through it, whereas we stand outside the past to view its more finished forms, including its now known consequences for what was then the unknown future.”105 It is through the lens of the present that Soviet Jewry can truly be appreciated for what it was, what it became, and what it can be rewritten as by Soviet–American Jewry through memory work within museums and other cultural institutions.

CHAPTER THREE - VISITING THE HOLOCAUST

In choosing which museums should be included in this case study several factors were considered including location and good web presence, but most importantly the museum had to be opened in the 1990s. Since the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum was opened in 1993 and that year is often considered the year of the Holocaust and a critical year for Holocaust memory in America, an examination of museums opened in this decade is crucial. The 1990s were also a time of increased Soviet Jewish immigration to America. This immigration added to the already booming Soviet Jewish community in America and added more voices to its collective memory. How this voice impacted the institutions being built to commemorate the atrocity of the Holocaust varies. The six museums that are evaluated in this study are the Museum of Jewish Heritage (New York, New York), the Holocaust Museum Houston (Houston, TX), the Florida Holocaust Museum (St. Petersburg, FL), the Virginia Holocaust Museum (Richmond, VA), the Simon Wiesenthal Center’s Beit-Hashoah Museum of Tolerance (Los Angeles, CA), and United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (Washington, D.C.). Each museum was evaluated for how visitors encounter the experience of Soviet Jews during the Holocaust through visits to the museum, the museum’s web presence, and literature available to visitors whether through gift shop offerings or museum publications.

The Museum of Jewish Heritage

The Museum of Jewish Heritage – A Living Memorial to the Holocaust located in the Battery Park neighborhood of New York City was opened in September 1997. The museum had been in the works for over a decade by the time it was opened. The New York City Holocaust Memorial Commission was formed in 1981 by former Mayor Edward J. Koch, but the

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commission did not invest in a piece of land until 1986 and did not begin work on the actual museum until 1994.\textsuperscript{107} While a physical building was not constructed until 1997, “the museum began its collection in 1984, obtaining many artifacts by donation from the survivors, in and out of New York City”\textsuperscript{108} and housed them in a Madison Avenue office tower. Author Rochelle G. Saidel argues in her book, \textit{Never Too Late to Remember: The Politics Behind New York City’s Holocaust Museum}, that the museum had to be built in New York City because the city serves as the center of Jewish life in America and as such was the only place that a truly Jewish perspective could be achieved.\textsuperscript{109} Robert M. Morgenthau, co-chairman of the New York Holocaust Memorial Commission recognized that there was a large question as to the need for a Holocaust museum in New York when there was already a large Holocaust museum in Washington, D.C. But Morgenthau ultimately sided with Saidel on the need for such a museum by asserting, “Washington’s got a National Gallery but we have museums up here. Ninety-five percent of all New Yorkers will never get down to see the one in Washington.”\textsuperscript{110} Saidel suggests that the inclusion of too many wealthy Jews who attempted to push their own personal agendas with their money led to disagreement amongst members of the New York Holocaust Memorial Commission. She notes that it is no coincidence that the commission came to a consensus only one year after the opening of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in

\begin{footnotesize}

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\item \textsuperscript{108} Ibid.
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Washington, D.C. and that perhaps members of the commission were simply waiting for an example to follow.\textsuperscript{111}

The Museum of Jewish Heritage may have needed the USHMM to serve as an example in a number of respects, but the structure of the museum’s permanent exhibitions was not one. The Museum of Jewish Heritage is structured so that visitors are able to gain a complete picture of European Jewish life before, during, and after the Holocaust. The first floor of the museum is dedicated to life before the Holocaust and is broken down thematically into sections on topics such as marriage, school, religious traditions, etc. This floor includes objects from Jews in who lived in areas that would become Soviet territory after the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact. In the religious traditions section there are a number of candlesticks that originated in the Ukraine. There are also a series of Kiddush cups and a prayer shawl, both from the Ukraine. In the section on weddings there is a unique wedding gift given to a Ukrainian Jewish girl by her father. It is a bottle and inside there is a small wooden table, a small wooden Star of David, and two photos of family members. The bottle was buried at the start of World War II and retrieved by the young woman afterwards. On display with other household items is also a knife made in Eishyshok, an area of Poland that fell under Russian control during the war and was liquidated by the Nazi Einsatzgruppen forces. This knife was made by a blacksmith there for his daughter who brought it with her when she immigrated to America in the early 20\textsuperscript{th} century. Since the objects are displayed according to significant life events, there is no division between locations of the objects’ origin. Items belonging to Soviet Jews are only designated as such by the label they receive.

The second floor of the permanent exhibition focuses on the Jews during the Holocaust and is chronological in nature. The items belonging to Soviet Jews on display on this floor of the museum are largely items of resistance. Shirts worn by Tuvia Bielski and Chaya Porus, both partisan fighters, during their time in the forests are on display. Also on display are cooking implements used in the Vilna ghetto, including a chopping knife, a cleaning knife, and a pot used to cook kosher food (a forbidden practice). A toy loom used by a child in the Vilna ghetto stands as a testament to the effort to keep children busy in the worst of times. The liberation of concentration camps by Soviet soldiers is also featured in this section. While the focus of this information is the Soviet soldiers, some of the camps they were liberating had Soviet Jewish prisoners. And some of the Soviet soldiers were Jews. The museum has a map showing a line of travel through Soviet territories that was carried by a Jewish soldier in the Soviet Army.

The third floor of the museums focuses on the renewal of Judaism. The main artifacts concerning Soviet Jewry featured on this floor, including a board game about liberating Soviet Jewry, which is American in origin, revolve around the efforts to free Soviet Jewry, which took place in America in the 1970s. While visitors do receive some information specifically about the experience of Soviet Jews during the Holocaust on the second floor, overall they receive general information about modern Jewish life before, during, and after the Holocaust which happens to feature some artifacts that belonged to Soviet Jews.

Visitors to the museum will find the bookstore devoid of any Soviet specific material. The archives house a number of important photographs and documents but most concern the American efforts to save Soviet Jewry in the 1970s. Perhaps the proliferation of this subject matter is due to the easy access to American sources or perhaps it is because the desire of both

112 Tour of Museum of Jewish Heritage: A Living Memorial to the Holocaust, 2013.
American Jews and Soviet American Jews to tell the story of freedom has provided a larger amount of information, but either way it is largely an American story and is told from that point of view.

While “the story told by its exhibitions is thoughtful, nuanced and tuned to the key of life”\textsuperscript{113}, overall the amount of information available to the visitor is highly increased in the museum’s web presence. Visitors to the Museum of Jewish Heritage’s website have access to a searchable database of the museum’s collections, including both objects and documents. They also have the opportunity to access educational programming, which includes some information on the experience of Soviet Jews during the Holocaust. However, the biggest addition to Soviet Jewish representation is the online store. The store on the website hosts a section of books concerning the Soviet Union and a section of Yiddish literature, the traditional language of Russian Jews.\textsuperscript{114} So for the Museum of Jewish Heritage: A Living Memorial to the Holocaust, visitors encounter more information on the experience of Soviet Jews during the Holocaust on the museum’s website than in the museum itself. The museum’s goal is to tell stories of Jewish life in Europe from the Jews who actually lived there. They aim to frame the Holocaust within the larger picture of modern Jewish life.\textsuperscript{115} In order to do this they have to have objects that correspond with the stories being told and with limited objects from Soviet Jews there are limited stories that can be told within the museum.


Holocaust Museum Houston

Siegi Izakson founded the Holocaust Museum Houston, located in Houston, Texas. Izakson noticed, after a survivor’s reunion in Israel in 1981, that the generation of Holocaust survivors that he belonged to was aging and Izakson was filled with a fear that the story of the Holocaust would disappear unless efforts were made to create a record of survivor experiences. With this goal in mind Izakson returned to Houston where he formed the Houston Council of Jewish Holocaust Survivors. The council offered community outreach opportunities such as speaking engagements in schools and other community settings, but the council was also making a push to receive recognition and assistance from Houston’s Jewish Federation. However, it was not until 1990 that a director of the Jewish Federation of Greater Houston took notice of the council’s efforts and granted them not only recognition, but also helped them to found the Holocaust Education Center and Memorial Museum located in the federation’s offices. This was a huge step for Izakson’s initiative, but the council did not want to stop there. In September 1992 they began a fundraising campaign to raise money for a building in Houston’s Museum District and just over a year later, in October 1993, the groundbreaking for the museum was taking place. The Holocaust Museum Houston officially opened on March 3, 1996.116

The layout of the permanent exhibition is a single floor, which weaves visitors through images and artifacts of the Holocaust, including banned books and camp uniforms, none of which are Soviet specific, presented in a chronological fashion. Within this portion of the exhibition the experience of Soviet Jews is represented mainly through images, chiefly the image of bodies in the ravine at Babi Yar which has become a staple in most Holocaust museums. In the panel of partisan and resistance groups the Kalinin Brigade located in Belorussia is

specifically mentioned. Aside from these references, the experience of Soviet Jews is part of a larger narrative of an overall Jewish experience of the Holocaust. Images of the atrocities in the Soviet Union are displayed side by side with images of the atrocities of the rest of Europe.\textsuperscript{117}

In addition to the main exhibition area, the museum hosts several memorial sections within and outside the building. This distinction between museum and memorial space was an important and much debated decision within many councils and committees during the development phase of Holocaust museums across America. In many cases survivors argued for a memorial space within the museums that would exist almost as a separate entity. Museum professionals wanted incorporated memorials within the overall structure of the museum exhibition. In the end, however, it was the voice of the survivor that won out and the creation of a specific memorial space is dedicated in most of the museums in existence.\textsuperscript{118} The museum in Houston has three memorial spaces, including an outdoor memorial to children victims, an indoor Remembrance Room, and a concrete Destroyed Communities Memorial slope outside that serves as part of the building’s façade. The Remembrance Room and the Destroyed Communities Memorial slope both include specific references and remembrances of the destruction of Soviet Jewry at the hands of the Nazis. The Remembrance Room is a bright room with benches meant for reflection and within the room there are small samples of dirt from the largest concentration camps in German-occupied Europe. Included with these sites of atrocity is a sample of dirt from Babi Yar, a ravine located outside of Kiev, Ukraine where the largest mass murder of Soviet Jews took place. There are no written interpretive panels in this room. It is meant to stand as a testament to lives lost and serve as a place for reflection. The Destroyed Communities Memorial slope is another stoic reminder of the destruction of European Jewry at

\textsuperscript{117} Tour of Holocaust Museum Houston, 2013.
the hands of the Nazis. As visitors enter the museum they pass the slope, which simply lists the names of towns in Europe, many in the Soviet Union, where the entire Jewish population was destroyed.¹¹⁹

Patrons of the Holocaust Museum Houston can also encounter an, albeit limited, representation of Soviet Jews on the museum’s website. The education portion of the museum website hosts resources including a timeline, which lists important events of the Holocaust. On this timeline are the invasion of the Soviet Union and the beginning of the mass murders enacted by the Einsatzgruppen. The only other instance of Soviet specific information being provided on the website is a listing of some past programming offered by the museum, which includes only seven programs that specifically mention Soviet Jews since 2003. The online store, like the in museum store, features nothing that is Soviet specific. There is no digital archive access and the link to search the library seems to be stuck in a perpetual state of loading. However, visitors can reach a librarian or archivist through email contact and the museum itself does provide daily access to the library for visitors.¹²⁰ For the visitor to encounter the plight of the Soviet Jews at the Holocaust Museum Houston it is more beneficial for them to make the trip to the actual museum. However, even that experience may leave the visitor wanting more.

**Florida Holocaust Museum**

The Florida Holocaust Museum, originally named the Tampa Bay Holocaust Memorial Museum and Education Center, was founded in 1992 by Walter P. Loebenberg. Loebenberg had escaped Nazi Germany in 1939, immigrated to the United States, and joined the US Army during World War II. In 1992 Loebenberg, a St. Petersburg, Florida businessman, gathered support from a group of other businessmen and community leaders. Some were Holocaust survivors, some

¹¹⁹ Tour of Holocaust Museum Houston, 2013.
were related to Holocaust survivors and others had no personal tie to the event but simply wanted to make sure no other atrocity like the Holocaust ever happened again. This group opened a one staff member, one exhibit museum in the Jewish Community Center of Pinellas County in Madeira Beach, Florida. However, this site quickly became too small for the museum. After incorporating outreach efforts, educational programs, archives and a research facility, in addition to facilitating 125,000 visitors in its first five years, the founding group purchased a larger building to house the collection. The museum, one of the foremost research facilities in the country at the time, opened the doors to its current building on February 28, 1998. The museum was instrumental in helping Florida to become one of the first states to mandate Holocaust education in public schools. In 1999, the Tampa Bay Holocaust Memorial Museum and Education Center officially changed its name to the Florida Holocaust Museum.\footnote{Florida Holocaust Museum, “About: History,” Florida Holocaust Museum, http://www.flholocaustmuseum.org/about/history.aspx, (accessed March 5, 2013).}

The Florida Holocaust Museum has three floors for visitors to explore. The first floor tells the narrative of the story from pre-war Jewish life through the liberation of European Jewry. The story is told in a chronological manner and circles around a central exhibition piece of a World War II railcar used to transport Jews to the concentration and death camps. Unlike other museums this railcar is not set up for visitors to go inside, but instead is displayed like an artifact that is set apart from personal experience and touch. The first floor’s circular design leads visitors around to a meditation center and the museum store. The second floor of the museum houses three galleries, each of which can support a temporary exhibition. The third floor of the museum is home to the museum’s teaching gallery, learning center, library, offices and event space.
In the permanent exhibition of the Florida Holocaust Museum visitors encounter the experience of Soviet Jews in the Holocaust at multiple points in the narrative. The World Response section of the Permanent Exhibition features sections on Deportation and Ghettos and includes a quotation about Babi Yar and a photograph of the bodies in the ravine. This section also features information about the actions of the Einsatzgruppen in the German invasion of the Soviet Union. As the exhibition continues there are panels that present information of Resistance and Liberation. In this section the museum provides information about the Bielski Brothers who formed a partisan group in the forests of Belorussia.\footnote{Tour of Florida Holocaust Museum, 2013.}

If patrons want to examine what information the Florida Holocaust Museum has to offer via its website, on Soviet Jews, they would be sorely disappointed. While the Florida Holocaust Museum offers a much wider range of information on Soviet Jews in museum than the Museum of Jewish Heritage and the Holocaust Museum Houston, it falls behind in its online offerings. The education sections on the website lack any information beyond broad definitions of what happened during the Holocaust, none of which refers specifically to Soviet Jews. There is no ability to view previous programming and none of the programming for the rest of the year has any mention of Soviet Jews. The online store shows a selection of about five books that are recommended but has no feature for searching what the store has in stock. However, a search option would be futile for the purpose of this study as the physical bookstore held nothing specifically related to Soviet Jews. Where this website does not fail Soviet Jewry is an incredibly easy to search online library catalogue which turned up approximately fifty results of books containing a reference to Russia or the Soviet Union and an additional seventy five books.
containing a reference to Ukraine, Latvia or Lithuania. A searchable archive catalogue and/or artifact listing would also be beneficial, but the library catalogue is a great step.123

**Virginia Holocaust Museum**

Mark Fetter, Al Rosenbaum, and Jay Ipson, one of Richmond’s youngest survivors of the Holocaust, founded the Virginia Holocaust Museum, located in Richmond, Virginia, in 1997. The museum quickly outgrew its original home in Temple Beth El’s former Brown Education Building and by the end of the decade the museum had found a new home in the abandoned “Climax” American Tobacco Company Warehouse.124

Upon entering the Virginia Holocaust Museum, patrons are ushered into a room to view an introductory film. This room is actually the first encounter that visitors have with Soviet Jewry in the museum, but it is not in the film. The walls of the film room are lined with posters from past events held at the museum and one advertised a Yiddish Film Festival held in December 2011. After the film ends visitors are encouraged to follow the railroad tracks on the floor, guided by either audio tour or guidebook, through the permanent exhibition. The exhibition begins with a recreation of men’s concentration camp barracks complete with mannequins and then goes back to tell the story that leads up to deportation and murder. Visitors pass in front of a recreated, smashed storefront where they learn about Kristallnact, the Nazi enacted pogrom where Jewish storefronts were destroyed and stores and synagogues were burned. Upon circling around an exhibit on the St. Louis, the ill fated ship carrying Jews to what

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they thought would be freedom in Cuba only to be turned away upon arrival, visitors are faced with a large portion of the museum dedicated to the Holocaust in the Soviet Union.

The first piece of history they encounter is a radio playing the Russian radio broadcast announcing the German invasion. Next to the radio visitors can view a series of four photographs showing German invasions in Lithuania, a territory acquired by the Soviet Union following the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact. On the opposite wall maps show places of mass murder in Lithuania and ghettos in the Baltic Countries from 1941 – 1943. After viewing all of this documentary evidence guests are ushered into a partial recreation of the Kovno ghetto in Lithuania where the story becomes that of the family of Jay Ipson, one of the museum’s founders. Visitors pass by a recreation of a kitchen, a synagogue and then turn a corner where they encounter SS Sergeant Helmut Rauca, the sergeant in charge of determining life and death in the ghetto. The mannequin dressed as Rauca is attached to a motion sensor that when triggered sets him to shouting in German. After this encounter and some more basic information passed to the visitor through

Figure 3.1 Translation of Russian Radio Broadcast, Photograph by Author, Virginia Holocaust Museum, April 5, 2013
traditional text panels, the visitors find themselves on the run with the Ipson family. They wait for a gate to open, crawl through a tunnel, and are barked at by an invisible dog, which creates and atmosphere in this portion of the museum that threatens to give way to kitsch. As author Mike Wallace argues when history becomes uncomfortable there is a tendency to “Mickey Mouse” that history, which is a combination of dulling down sensitive material and invoking “edutainment”. The Disney parks made the process of creating “edutainment” popular when they created areas like Frontier Land, which while it has some historical implications, is mostly intended for fun. After visitors exit the Kovno section they immediately encounter the more somber side of the Holocaust that finishes up the museum including recreated gas chambers and crematory ovens. There is a good focus on the Holocaust in the Soviet Union, but it loses out to edutainment when the information is presented in such a physically interactive manner. However, the visitor’s guide provides a well-researched and informative accounting of the Kovno ghetto including general information about ghetto life as well as a Kovno specific timeline. While this is beneficial, by prefacing the Kovno ghetto section of the museum with the invasion of the Soviet Union, visitors are not given a true picture of the Holocaust in the Soviet Union. Though the Kovno ghetto is in Soviet territory, visitors are not made aware in the museum narrative that while some ghettos did exist, ghettoization in the Soviet Union was not a common practice.

Visits to the museum’s library and gift shop are the other interactions with the experience of Soviet Jews available to visitors to the Virginia Holocaust Museum. The Virginia Holocaust Museum’s Carole Weinstein Holocaust Research Library is open for research by appointment only. The link on the website to search the collection is temperamental at best. However, the

Director of the Library and Archives is easy to reach via email and the collection is worth the extra effort. In resources pertinent to Soviet Jewry alone the library boasts 240 published books or films that come up in a search using six different countries as subject heading searches.\textsuperscript{127} In addition to an impressive book and film collection:

the archives contains photographs, documents, and oral histories from survivors from Russia. In addition, we have the Syndor Collection, which is a large collection of documents on Ukrainian collaborators that were used in OSI trials over a 23 year period. The vast majority of these men were trained in Trawniki and used in various camps throughout Eastern Europe.\textsuperscript{128}

The abundance of information on the experience of Soviet Jews is impressive for what would be considered a regional museum. Its origin, however, with a founder willing to share his own experiences of the Holocaust in the Soviet Union makes this situation unique amongst Holocaust museums.

As for the gift shop in the museum the story of the Ipson family is available for purchase in DVD form, \textit{The Ipson Saga}, and book form, \textit{Izzy’s Fire: Finding Humanity in the Holocaust}. The availability of both items is listed on the museum’s website as well. Other encounters of Soviet Jewry on the Virginia Holocaust Museum’s website includes links to Flickr featuring images of the collection and exhibitions, and links to Vimeo featuring a 32:15 minute film, \textit{The Ipson Saga}. In addition to readily available resources, the website also provides information for obtaining one of the acceptance suitcases created by museum educators. These suitcases provide educational programming that can travel to schools. There are a variety of programs available

\textsuperscript{127} Timothy Hensley, email to author, September 12, 2013. Breakdown of books available by specific country subject heading: Soviet: 125, Ukraine: 39, Estonia: 2, Latvia: 2, Lithuania: 64, and Belorussia:1.

\textsuperscript{128} Ibid.
that cater to different age ranges. *Izzy’s Fire* is included in the “Learning the Lessons of the Holocaust” acceptance suitcase, which is aimed at educating middle school students.\(^{129}\)

The Virginia Holocaust Museum provides a unique experience for visitors through its thought provoking yet visually stimulating permanent exhibition. Though portions of the exhibition lean to the side of kitsch, the abundance of information on Soviet Jewry during the Holocaust is invaluable. Coupled with an impressive research facility, the Virginia Holocaust Museum is a must see for all visitors concerned with seeing a more complete picture of the experience of Soviet Jews during the Holocaust.

**Museum of Tolerance**

The Museum of Tolerance in Los Angeles, California stands as a testament to the battle against prejudice and racism in America. The museum was founded in 1993 by Simon Wiesenthal, famed Nazis hunter, concentration camp survivor, and advocate of Holocaust Education. In the 1980s The Simon Wiesenthal Center gathered with representatives from leading museums around the world to discuss the best way to promote tolerance and understanding. Wiesenthal was worried that the new generation of young people in America was beginning to question whether or not the Holocaust had really happened. In February of 1993 the Simon Wiesenthal Center’s Beit Hashoah Museum of Tolerance opened its doors and quickly garnered high accolades and global recognition. The museum receives 250,000 visitors per year; just over half of those visitors are students.\(^{130}\)

The museum serves as the education arm of The Simon Wiesenthal Center so while the institution officially maintains “The Simon Wiesenthal Center” in its title it has long since

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dropped Beit Hashoah, the reference to the Holocaust. The facility is now simply known as the Museum of Tolerance. The museum is designed so that visitors have two distinct but related experiences. The first portion of the permanent exhibition is designed around racism and prejudice. This section, called the Tolerancenter, features a number of visually stimulating, multimedia, and interactive exhibitions. The main purpose of the first of the permanent exhibition display is to promote tolerance for all people. Using examples of the Rodney King riots (which specifically appeals to Los Angelenos), the civil rights movement in America, and various genocides around the world, visitors are thrust into a brightly colored and visually engaging experience that forces them to question their own prejudices and to think about just how tolerant they really are.\footnote{Tour of the Museum of Tolerance, 2013.}

In the second half of the museum visitors encounter a structured and chronological accounting of the Holocaust. The second portion of the museum seems to avoid some of the more flashy multimedia elements that the Tolerancenter uses but, it still manages to invoke multimedia in its telling of the Holocaust. In this section, visitors are moved along through a series of vignettes that use lighting and voice overs to portray the journey of three museum exhibit designers as they attempt to navigate the murky waters of Holocaust research and create a comprehensive exhibition on the atrocity. Located in the Holocaust section is also an impressive room called the Hall of Testimony, fashioned out of concrete and resembling a gas chamber, visitors are invited to sit on cement blocks and watch videos of survivors retelling their horrific experiences during the Holocaust. The Holocaust section is well done and is created in a way that is appealing to school age students which is ultimately the museum’s main audience. However, in an attempt to make the Holocaust stand out as a unique event in history, the
museum essentially disconnects the atrocity from the larger narrative of prejudice.\textsuperscript{132} “The intention, said Rabbi Marvin Heir, dean and founder of the Wiesenthal Center Los Angeles, is to show that the Holocaust was not a historical aberration, ‘We’re talking to an American audience,’ he said, ‘We want the museum to be relevant to them, so we begin by talking about racism and prejudice’.”\textsuperscript{133} By beginning the museum this way and not making sure there is appropriate representation of the Holocaust in the prejudice section and prejudice in the Holocaust section something gets lost in translation for the visitor coming specifically for the Holocaust. The leaders of the Wiesenthal Center worry that everything will be seen as “an Auschwitz” and that people will not recognize the need for action to be taken against prejudice until it is too late.\textsuperscript{134}

The representation of Soviet Jewry within the permanent exhibition is limited. Video monitors display photographs at different points throughout the exhibition, however, the photographs have no identifiers so they may include Soviet Jews, but the visitor would never know. The visitor encounters brief mentions of Russia having a large population of Jews, Einsatzgruppen work during the German Invasion of the Soviet Union, and the resistance that took place in the Bialystock Ghetto. Aside from these brief mentions there are no other opportunities for visitors to encounter the experience of Soviet Jewry within the permanent display.\textsuperscript{135}

As far as online presence, gift shop, and archives there is another drought of information on Soviet Jews. The collection of the museum began in 1977 with just Holocaust related materials and expanded to include materials relating to prejudice. However, there is no

\textsuperscript{132} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{134} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{135} Tour of the Museum of Tolerance, 2013.
searchable online catalogue so it is difficult to understand exactly what the museum holds in its collections. The gift shop, online and in house, does not sell any Soviet specific material.

Prejudice and racism have a long history in America and the Museum of Tolerance does a good job navigating the history of these practices, examining their results, and charging visitors to not perpetuate them. However, as the museum that was seen by many as the West Coast rival to the USHMM, opening in the same year and both declaring that they perpetuate the memory of the Holocaust, the Museum of Tolerance has faded in its spot in the Holocaust limelight by choosing to turn its focus increasingly toward the general issues of prejudice and racism.

**United States Holocaust Memorial Museum**

The final museum that the author examined is the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM) in Washington, D.C. This museum had the most tumultuous start of all of the museums examined in this project. In 1979 President Carter created the President’s Commission on the Holocaust, a group of people dedicated to the preservation of the Holocaust, in order to decide the appropriate national memorialization for the Holocaust in America. After many disagreements over location (Washington, D.C. or New York City) and type of commemoration (memorial/monument structure or museum) the commission finally came to a decision. They had decided on a museum and told President Carter that “a memorial unresponsive to the future would also violate the memory of the past.” The commission pushed for the development of the USHMM to be a permanent “living memorial”. After deciding what type of commemoration was called for the commission had to agree on a location. They eventually decided on Washington, D.C. and then came the task of deciding where in D.C.

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the museum would be located. Even with great disagreement behind the decision the museum finally found a home right off the Mall, the area of grass that houses some of the nation’s most recognizable monuments. While the decision was highly debated amongst commission members the opening of the USHMM on the mall paved the way for other museums that represent a different view of the American identity to open on the Mall including, the National Museum of the American Indian and the National African American Museum.\(^{138}\)

Once the location and type of commemoration was established the next step was to establish the content of the museum. The content was determined by a committee who researched and traveled and argued about questions of interior ownership – who had the right to what space – and how to create a space that would be both museum and memorial and commemorate non-Jewish victims, but keep a Jewish center to the museum’s story.\(^ {139}\) What the council ultimately decided was that witness, remembrance, and education should be the basis of the museum plan. As the first chairman, Holocaust survivor and world renowned author, Elie Wiesel felt the “museum needed to be a place where the impossibility of knowing existed alongside the traditional ways of ‘knowing’ in a museum.”\(^ {140}\) With these goals in mind the museum celebrated its groundbreaking on October 16, 1985 where soils from the concentration camps at Auschwitz, Bergen-Belsen, Dachau, Theresienstadt and Treblinka and the Jewish Cemetery in Warsaw were mixed with the soil on the site of the USHMM.\(^ {141}\) On October 6, 1988 President Reagan unveiled the cornerstone for the museum. Reagan’s chief arms negotiator, Max Kampleman, felt that in light of the issues that continued between Jews and the Soviet Union in


\(^{139}\) Ibid., Chapter 2.

\(^{140}\) Ibid., 122.

\(^{141}\) Ibid., Chapter 2.
the 1980s that Americans had to remember the Holocaust because there was a European tendency to forget.\textsuperscript{142}

While these groundbreakings and public declarations were taking place there was still a council that was trying to create a permanent exhibition that defines, tests, and adjusts the boundaries of Holocaust memory.\textsuperscript{143} In the course of this process Anna Cohn had served as director because she was experienced in museum planning, but survivors were reluctant to trust their memories to a non-survivor. Cohn believes that between her time “and Shaike Weinberg’s coming on board in 1988 as director, museum people and survivors learned about each other”.\textsuperscript{144} Through this learning experience museum professionals and survivors were able to work in tandem to create a museum that in its display is a “conceptual museum” rather than a traditional, object – oriented one.\textsuperscript{145}

The museum officially opened its doors in 1993. As visitors enter the museum they are given an Identification Card of a Holocaust victim, a tactic also used in the Museum of Tolerance. This card has information that visitors receive on each level of the three level museum. After exiting the elevator on the third floor visitors begin their journey of Holocaust learning where they learn first about the Nazi Assault – 1933 to 1939. On the second floor visitors learn about The “Final Solution” – 1940 to 1945. The first floor, entitled Last Chapter, is where visitors learn about resistance, liberation, and life for Holocaust victims after the war. The

\textsuperscript{144} Ibid., 127.
permanent exhibition space weaves visitors in a way that there is really no way to exit the experience except by descending through all three levels of Holocaust information on display.\textsuperscript{146}

The representation of Soviet Jews during the Holocaust is the most impressive in the USHMM. Information includes images of Soviet Jewish life before the war, panels on the Kovno Ghetto (includes video), the invasion of the Soviet Union (includes video), Einsatzgruppen efforts in the Soviet Union and Babi Yar (includes video), and trees from the forest around the Vilna ghetto. However, the most impressive and visual piece of Soviet Jewish representation in the museum is the Tower of Faces. The tower spans two floors of museum space and its walls are covered in pre-war photographs of the Jews who lived in Eishyshok (formerly located in Poland, but became Soviet territory under the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact). Yaffa Eliach, member of the Holocaust Commission was born in Eishyshok, a community eliminated by the Einsatzgruppen. Her grandmother had been the town’s photographer and Eliach felt that the best way to honor her community was to collect photos of the people in the town as they were in life. Eliach realized:

\begin{quote}
During my travels I had been struck by the fact that, insofar as the world knew anything about the Jews of Eastern Europe, it knew them as skeletal concentration camp survivors and huge piles of corpses, ashes in crematorium ovens, pitiful targets of history’s most astonishing epidemic of mass genocide. What kind of memorial could possibly transcend those images of death and do justice to the full, rich lives those people had lived.\textsuperscript{147}
\end{quote}

Having gathered an impressive collection, Eliach set to finding a home for the photographs and though she was on the Holocaust Commission she approached the Museum of Diaspora in Tel Aviv, Museum of Tolerance, Museum of Jewish Heritage and Yad Vashem who all turned her down. She finally turned to the USHMM where representatives of the museum found the

\begin{footnotes}
\item[146] Tour of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 2013.
\end{footnotes}
photographs to be not only a wonderful memorial but also the missing piece to the
Einsatzgruppen question. Ralph Applebaum, museum designer, stated (of the photographs),
“There was a very inadequate response . . . in our museum to the activities of the Einsatzgruppen
. . . We couldn’t quite capture how to handle what happened in the shtetls of Europe as the
Germans advanced into the Soviet Union.”\textsuperscript{148}

Also in the museum itself visitors can peruse the gift shop where they are able to find a
book published by the museum’s publishing company on the reports being sent in by the
Einsatzgruppen and also an entire section dedicated to books about the Holocaust and World
War II in the Soviet Union.\textsuperscript{149} While this amount of information is impressive and certainly
desirable there could always be more included. Jeshajahu “Shaike” Weinberg explains: “Scarcity
of space inevitably led, however, to a somewhat selective approach. So, too, did insurmountable
difficulties obtaining displayable documentary material about some aspects of the Holocaust.”\textsuperscript{150}
Visitors and staff would have to rely on Special Exhibitions and the Wexner Learning Center to
fill in the gaps that were left by the museum’s permanent exhibition.

With the rise of Internet usage, the USHMM was able to fill in the gaps more completely
and for more patrons, including those who only ever encountered the museum’s offerings online.
The entire collection of the museum is in an easily searchable database online. Hundreds of
thousands of resources available online and in the museum ensures that the researcher looking
for information on Soviet Jews will not be disappointed. A simple subject search of “Soviet

\textsuperscript{149} Tour of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 2013.
Jews” returns 7,120\textsuperscript{151} results and an additional 219 accessible sources from the USC Shoah Foundation Visual Archive, Claims Conference International Holocaust Documentation Archive, and Jeff and Toby Herr Testimony Initiative.\textsuperscript{152} The website also provides a listing of past Symposia, Conferences, Academic Publications, and Occasional Papers. Of those listed 1 Symposia, 5 Conferences, 5 Academic Publications, and 4 Occasional Papers have covered topics directly related to the Holocaust in the Soviet Union. In addition one of the most recent Emerging Scholars sponsored by the USHMM for publishing focused on Belarus.\textsuperscript{153}

With the availability of these abundant resources the museum truly meets the needs of visitors whether they visit in person or online. By helping to endow visitors with access to the largest possible amount of information about the atrocity of the Holocaust, including the experience of Soviet Jews, the museum is truly achieving the goal set forward by Miles Lerman, former chairman of the museum council’s committee on international relations. The belief of Lerman was, “This is a teaching museum, and we need to make all people understand that they have a choice, even under the most horrible conditions, to remain human.”\textsuperscript{154}

All six museums examined show some level of commitment to displaying the history of Soviet Jews in the Holocaust. While most methods, displays, and collections vary in focus there are two approaches that are most commonly used to disseminate information, temporary exhibitions and photographs. One of the largest reasons for the museums to use temporary exhibitions as a main way of conveying the history of Soviet Jews in the Holocaust is monetary. Most of these museums were largely planned out by the time the Soviet Union fell in 1991 and

\textsuperscript{151} Breakdown of collection by number of objects: Photographs-4,051; Publication-736; Object-632; Oral History-574; Oral History Transcript and Note-559; Names Source-208; Document-196; Moving Image-163; Collection-1
subsequently opened its archives. To rework the narrative of these museums would cost time and money. Also, access to the Soviet Archives was not immediate for all institutions, as access required a trip to Russia, and many archives were closed again by the mid-1990s.  

**Temporary Exhibitions**

The number of temporary exhibitions dealing with the experience of Soviet Jewry at Holocaust museums in America has been on the rise. In the last decade, the Museum of Jewish Heritage has hosted three temporary exhibitions; the Holocaust Museum Houston has hosted two; the Florida Holocaust Museum has hosted only one and the USHMM has hosted at least one exhibition in the museum and one online exhibition. The lack of temporary exhibitions at the Virginia Holocaust Museum has to do largely with a lack of display space and with the already Soviet heavy exhibition that is included in the museum narrative. The Virginia Holocaust Museum, as I noted earlier, has included programming such as the Yiddish Film Festival in its museum’s activities showing a commitment to the story of Soviet Jewry. The lack of temporary exhibitions at the Museum of Tolerance has more to do with the push of the museum to first interpret issues of prejudice and racism and then the Holocaust. In fact of the exhibitions listed only 1/3 deal with issues concerning the Holocaust.

Of the temporary exhibitions on display in these museums two stuck out the most upon viewing them in person. First, the Florida Holocaust Museum has an exhibition currently mounted, which also resides in the museum’s traveling exhibition collection and was probably influenced by the popularity of the movie *Defiance*, entitled, “Courage and Compassion: The Legacy of the Bielski Brothers”. The exhibition examines the lives and efforts of three brothers, Tuvia, Zus, and Asael Bielski, who escaped Nazi persecution by seeking refuge in the forests of

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Western Belorussia. What started out as a simple hide out became a partisan group, led by the brothers, who ended up saving over 1,200 Jews. The effort is cited as the largest rescue effort of Jews by Jews during the war. The exhibition is a comprehensive look at the lives of the brothers before, during, and after the war. A visually stunning exhibition using multimedia introduces visitors to a not often told story of defiance by Soviet Jews, in the face of undeniable horrors.156

The other temporary exhibition that is currently traveling around the country and has found a home in both the Museum of Jewish Heritage and the Holocaust Museum Houston, is “Through Soviet Jewish Eyes: Photography, War, and the Holocaust”. The exhibition is a series of black and white photographs taken during World War II by Soviet Jewish photographers. This traveling exhibition stemmed from a book by the same title by author David Shneer. The prevalence and power of the images has made this exhibition popular amongst Holocaust institutions.157

Photographs

The frequent usage of photographs to explain the Holocaust in the Soviet Union is the one element that all six museums share. For many of the Jewish communities in the Soviet Union after being totally decimated the only physical reminders of the communities are photographs. Many of these photographs were taken by perpetrators and thus miss the opportunity to show any piece of Soviet Jewish life before the war or they were taken by liberators and show only a dismal aftermath. “Under this exhibitionary regime, all that survives of Jewishness are the artefacts of a past life, the salvage and exhibition of which are predicated upon the extinction of life”.158 Images of Babi Yar, Ukrainian killing pits, and other

156 Tour of the Florida Holocaust Museum, 2013.
Einsatzgruppen *aktionen* lead visitors to believe that no forms of positive photography exist in the display of Soviet Jews during the Holocaust. Andrea Liss, scholar on Holocaust photography asserts,

> Given the challenge to understanding representation that the Holocaust presents to documentary forms of witnessing, the cruel paradox of Holocaust-related photographs is situated precisely in the demand that they perform as history lessons (“never forget”) and provide sites for mourning. However, it is partially due to the utter horror of these photographs that the contemporary viewer’s approach to these indispensible documents is made so difficult.  

The horror of Holocaust images is all too real in museums displaying images of the atrocities, whether those images are Soviet in nature or not. However, two collections in the six museums featured, offer glimpses of Holocaust images of Soviet Jewry that are not confined to the realm of horror. The groundbreaking images in David Shneer’s “Through Soviet Jewish Eyes” show horrors to be sure, but equally important to the subject matter is who is behind the camera. During the time after the Russian Revolution (post-1917) Lenin realized the power of images in propaganda and proceeded to make photography and film points of pride in Soviet culture. During this era many Jews entered the field of photojournalism, developed in 1905. This relatively new profession was free of the anti-Semitism that existed in many of the more developed practices and allowed for Jews to enter the field in substantial numbers. One of the largest draws to this field was with many Jews migrating; photography gave them the chance to “maintain memory across long distances”. This type of photography was quickly set aside

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160 Most Holocaust museums have a section on life before the Holocaust where visitors would also encounter images of a vibrant European Jewish culture. However, there are only two examples in the six museums that I encountered that show images once the war has started that do not immediately elicit a reaction of horror.


162 Ibid., 15.
when in 1941 Soviet Jewish photojournalists were on the frontlines of the war with state support for their work.

These same Jews were the photographers at Kerch, a site of Nazi mass murder in January 1942. Soviet Jews were the first to photograph the aftermath of an Einsatzgruppen mass murder of Jews on Soviet soil. The nature of the photographs taken by these Soviet Jewish photojournalists is groundbreaking in not only their content but also because of the people taking them. So while the images are horrific, the stories of the photographers are not and so the images are not confined entirely to the realm of horror.

The second collection of images of Soviet Jewry during the Holocaust that is not confined to the realm of horror is Yaffa Eliach’s collection of images from Eishyshok, which is displayed in the Tower of Faces in the USHMM. The collection’s photographs were taken pre-war, but their placement in the museum places them directly in between images of horror. “The sense of loss is potentially compounded when the museum visitor compares photographs of atrocity found elsewhere in the museum with the familial photographs in the Tower of Faces”. The images in the Tower of Faces are displayed in a way that is meant to evoke a family photo album.

The conventionality of the family photo provides a space of identification for any viewer participating in the conventions of familial representation; thus the photos can bridge the gap between the viewers who are personally connected to the event and those who are not. They can expand the postmemorial circle. Photographs of the world lost to genocide and to exile can contain . . . the particular mixture of mourning and recreation that characterizes the work of postmemory. The photographs allow for visitors from all walks of life and all perspectives to experience a connection to images that evoke a sense of family and life instead of destruction and death. And

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163 Ibid., 100.
165 Marianne Hirsch cited in Rick Crenshaw, “Photography and Memory in Holocaust Museums,” Mortality 12, No 2, (May 2007), 188.
though the images are certainly infused with a layer of sadness, knowing that the town was liquidated in an Einsatzgruppen killing *aktion*, the Tower of Faces is not confined to the realm of horror.

The images, exhibitions, and museums of the Holocaust represented by these case studies show a definite effort to display the reality of the Holocaust in the Soviet Union. There is room for improvement. Resources are not being utilized. Stories are left untold. And websites are severely lacking in sufficient information. Luckily these six museums strive to be living museums so change and greater understanding are always options for these institutions.
CONCLUSION: FINAL THOUGHTS ON THE INCLUSION OF SOVIET JEWRY IN AMERICA’S HOLOCAUST MUSEUMS

The peak of Holocaust memorialization in America is over. In the 1990s a resurgence of interest in family history led to American Jews searching for and preserving materials of their lives in Europe, materials that had been largely discarded by the first generation of children of Jewish immigrants.166 This push to find documents and artifacts of their former homes and lives allowed for immigrants, including survivors and their descendants, to connect to Holocaust history and begin examining ways that they could keep the memory of the Holocaust alive. In addition to simply preserving their own history, survivors wanted to make sure that younger generations of both Jews and non-Jews were able to learn about the Holocaust in order to ensure that it would never happen again.

This desire that the Holocaust is never forgotten led to the formation of institutions ripe with information gleaned from documents and oral histories and in some cases objects that belonged to survivors of the Holocaust. But even with an increase in interest by survivors to preserve the Holocaust and to tell their story, there were still some issues surrounding the perpetuation of Holocaust memory in America. In many cases, what had been preserved would not become part of Holocaust museums because those who lost family members in the Holocaust often found it too painful to part with what they had preserved.167 In other cases, specifically concerning Soviet Jews, many post-War immigrants did not bring anything with them concerning their time during the Holocaust. During the war, Soviet territories were freed by Soviet soldiers and the lack of American GIs in these regions did not allow for the story of the Holocaust in the Soviet Union to be spread to American citizens by returning soldiers. The

167 Ibid., 694-697.
Soviet archives were largely closed until 1991, which made access to information difficult as well.

This lack of physical representation created a number of issues for Holocaust museums when determining who gets represented and how much museum space is designated for each group. In many cases museums simply found it easier to use a majority of their space for representing the Jews who had lived in areas like Western Poland and Austria, where there were more available resources. But, with the abundance of Soviet Jewish immigrants in America and the Soviet Archives having been open for 22 years, why has there not been a push to create better representation for Soviet Jews in America’s Holocaust museums?

The installation of temporary exhibitions based on Soviet Jews is a stepping stone for further interpretation. But why is it that in the two decades that have followed the opening of the Soviet archives, there have not been more efforts to revise permanent exhibitions to include a fuller picture of the Holocaust in the Soviet Union? A reliance on temporary exhibitions conveys the message that the unique experience of Soviet Jews during the Holocaust is one that only deserves temporary recognition. Once these exhibitions have run their display time visitors to Holocaust museums are once again given only a fleeting glimpse of what happened in the Soviet Union.

Museums spark associative processes amongst visitors.168 Visitors are able to locate the stories and objects of the museum in their own lives. But for many Soviet Jews they have difficulty with the associative process in Holocaust museums because their story is largely absent. Esther Brumberg, Senior Curator for Collections at the Museum of Jewish Heritage in New York City has noted that Soviet Jews who visit the museum are well aware that their history

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is largely lacking. Many times these visitors leave the museum asking “Where are we?”
Unfortunately, Brumberg often has to tell them that the museum cannot exhibit what it does not
possess. The lack of objects pertaining to Soviet Jewry in the Museum of Jewish Heritage is
evident largely because the museum is object driven. Brumberg recognizes this deficiency and
has even put out a call for objects pertaining to Soviet Jewry. However, the flyer, printed in
English and Russian, garnered little response, which left the museum in the same position it has
been in for years.\footnote{Esther Brumberg, interviewed by author, New York, NY, March 11, 2013.}
In the case of the Museum of Jewish Heritage, their impressive archives
even pose a roadblock to the representation of Soviet Jews during the Holocaust. With an archive
that is heavy in material relating to the effort to free Soviet Jewry during the 1970s, the museum
does not lack in information on Soviet Jews, but it is certainly in a deficit concerning information
on Soviet Jews during the Holocaust. Therefore the museum cannot even properly display
documentary evidence of the unique atrocity of the Holocaust in the Soviet Union.

Lack of documents and artifacts is not the only problem plaguing the ability to represent
Soviet Jews in America’s Holocaust museums. In many cases limited funding is a major issue in
Holocaust museums and it plagues museums of all sizes. “We just had a meeting in December in
New York City, and we all talked about the dwindling funds,” said Susan Myers, executive
director of the Holocaust Museum Houston and vice president of the Association of Holocaust
Organizations, referring to her fellow museum directors, “We’re all competing for the same
of whether or not to maintain regional Holocaust museums. With limited funding, do they serve
a purpose when there is a national museum that possesses a larger collection and more funding,
provided largely by the federal government, to provide greater interpretation? But these regional museums provide an important link to smaller communities of Jews and also provide a link to the Holocaust for people who cannot travel to Washington D.C. to learn from the USHMM.

Even Sara Bloomfield, director of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum – the institution that, by most accounts, would have to bear the burden of the future of caring for the collections of any museums that can no longer support themselves – agrees that these local museums are important. “The national museum is becoming so national and global in our work that we now depend on these smaller, local organizations to be on the ground everyday in their communities because we can’t be in all 50 states at once” 171

The smaller museums that are vitally important to the everyday memory making of the Holocaust were started by survivors who simply wanted to make sure the memory of the Holocaust did not die when they did. The unfortunate truth is that this generation of survivors is dying out. Holocaust historian Michael Berenbaum shows concern about how this dying out will affect the future of the regional Holocaust museums in America. “The generation that would give huge money to create that is moving on. The survivor who was 18 when he survived is now 82. The survivor who was 30 is now 94. That generation is unfortunately going the way of all flesh, therefore the question for every institution is how do you create for the future.” 172 Journalist Joseph Berger offers a solution. “And it is the children – most of them accomplished professionals . . . – who have effectively declared that they will pick up the reigns of leadership from their aging parents and keep the memory and culture of the slaughtered six million.” 173

While monetary donations are important to the survival of the regional Holocaust museums, the other issue that is raised by the not so distant loss of the survivor generations is what stories have yet to be told. The lack in representation of Soviet Jews is troubling, but why is

171 Ibid.
172 Ibid.
there not a bigger push to collect memories and potential mementos of the Soviet Jewish survivors that are still living in America? For regional museums, which do not have the expansive archives that the USHMM possesses these efforts would provide depth to the archives and material for the further inclusion of Soviet Jewry in the institutions.

In the light of decreased funding a full remodel of museums is not feasible. However, the addition of a panel dedicated to the Holocaust in the Soviet Union or a consolidation, of the information that is presented into one area would help visitors to better understand what happened in the Soviet Union during World War II. Visitors would see that compared to concentration camps and gas chambers: the mobile killing squads, mass executions, and complete decimation of communities over two day spans in the Soviet Union were completely different types of persecution. They were just as horrible as the more traditionally known forms of extermination. The Soviet Jews who suffered at the hands of the Nazis deserve to have their unique story told and to not fade into the larger Jewish narrative of the Holocaust. The story of the Holocaust in the Soviet Union is part of a larger story of Jewish suffering in the Soviet Union and Russia. Ongoing Jewish persecution before World War II in addition to specialized killing methods during the war and the decimation of Jewish populations, makes this story unique.

In an age where government shutdowns prohibit visitors from experiencing the Holocaust story told by the USHMM, the development of collections in smaller museums becomes even more crucial. While the USHMM holds the largest collection of Soviet Jewish material of any of the museums that were evaluated in this study, it is within these smaller museums that the story of Soviet Jews in the Holocaust can begin to be formed and molded into a story that honors victims and survivors, and educates both Jews and non-Jews. The Holocaust is largely considered by survivors and many Holocaust scholars to be a uniquely Jewish event. Maybe it is
time that we break down that uniqueness even further and explore that the Holocaust was unique in each of the places that it happened. The time to recognize the uniqueness is now, before there is no longer anyone alive to tell the stories, before regional Holocaust museums can no longer afford to support operations, before the Holocaust in the Soviet Union disappears entirely into the fabric of an overarching story of Jewish suffering during the Holocaust.
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