

Memorializing Atrocities: The Problems of Censorship and Fleeting Memory within Eastern European Holocaust Sites

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Abstract

Since 1945, memories of the Holocaust have gradually faded around the world. Using a combination of firsthand accounts by Holocaust survivors and Soviet soldiers who liberated Auschwitz, as well as scholarly articles on the Holocaust and its memorialization, this paper investigates the factors that have contributed to the disappearance of memory during and after World War II in Eastern European areas formerly controlled by the Soviet Union. This research focuses on efforts to erase memories of the Holocaust carried out by Nazi officials who hid and destroyed memories of extermination camps such as Belzec. In addition, this research explores the Soviet government's censorship, which manipulated collective memory and memorialization efforts. This censorship included Stalin's fight to commemorate Russian victimization, the suppression of literature such as Ilya Erhenburg's *The Black Book*, and the handling of the memorialization at Babi Yar, one of the most notorious Holocaust sites. A third attempt to repress memories of the Holocaust occurred at the regional level after the war. In the Ukrainian towns of Tulchin and Pechora, for example, a lack of funds and a decline of Holocaust survivors and eyewitnesses led to a struggle over whether or not to maintain or completely abandon memorials. Even Auschwitz, the most well known of all Holocaust sites, has experienced a battle over the gradual loss and misconstruction of memory. There is an ongoing effort to present history to the public through survivors' experiences, organized trips, and documents and artifacts—each of which carry their own problems. My paper argues that, although the memory of the Holocaust may always stick with humankind, previous attempts to erase or manipulate evidence combined with the expanding amount of time between postwar and present day will make it increasingly more difficult to memorialize the truth of such a momentous event.

Introduction

On January 27, 1945, the Red Army marched through wind and snow to Auschwitz—one of the most notorious concentration camps in Holocaust history. By then, Soviet troops were aware of such camps, as previously liberated sites appalled them. Upon the first encounter with the ominous “Arbeit Macht Frei” sign at the entrance, many saw firsthand the horrors that officers had spoken of. Soviet officer Vasilii Davydov wrote of his experience:

[Soviet troops] saw many times the consequences of Nazi policy. But nothing can be compared with what we saw and heard at the well-known, massive death camp, Auschwitz. . . . Wherever one looked, he saw piles of human bodies. In some places, the former prisoners, looking like living skeletons, sat or lay around. . . . When we were there, the State Committee started to investigate the fascists’ terrible crimes. They opened huge ditches filled with human corpses, bones, and ashes (the fascists sold these ashes as fertilizer for five marks a pound).¹

Walking among the dead and dying, a fervor of hatred grew within many soldiers, some of whom belonged to the tortured and eliminated groups—Russian citizens, political dissidents, communists, as well as fellow Jews, Poles, and Soviet prisoners of war. One soldier, Pyotr Nikitin, ended a letter to his family, “We will forget nothing, and we will never forgive.”²

However, the Soviet government, led by Joseph Stalin, decided otherwise. News of Auschwitz hit Soviet newspapers on May 7, 1945, withholding any information about the nationalities of the victims and significantly omitting any hint of mass Jewish extermination.³

Prior to the Soviet offensive in the Second World War, the Nazi Party made considerable efforts to maintain a level of secrecy in its implementation of the Holocaust. After the war, the Soviets and the communist governments of Eastern Europe manipulated and censored Holocaust sites and the memories that remained from Nazi extermination efforts. Despite resistance from survivors, religious groups, citizens of the Eastern European states who had experienced the Holocaust, and the general public, efforts to alter or erase Holocaust memories continued throughout the Cold War and into the modern era.

In this paper, I will argue that although memories of the Holocaust will always remain, previous attempts to erase or manipulate evidence, combined with the passage of time and the struggle to transfer such knowledge to future generations, make it increasingly difficult to preserve the truth of the Holocaust. This investigation will begin with memory eradication through the Nazi construction and deconstruction of Belzec. Second, it will examine Soviet Era censorship of collective memory, Stalin’s fight for Russian victimization, the censorship of literature, and the memorialization of Babi Yar—one of the most iconic battles between the Soviet regime and the public. Third, it will focus on several Eastern European sites of the Holocaust that continue to struggle with memorialization in the current era in rural Ukraine. Finally, it will discuss Auschwitz and the question of proper remembrance and the unique issues that are faced in trying to preserve a fading history.

The Holocaust has long been fascinating to historians. Due to the inaccessibility of archival material to the West, primarily because of the Cold War, Holocaust literature lacked detailed material. Since the fall of the Soviet Bloc, new materials have opened up to Holocaust researchers. The discussion of Eastern Europe during the Holocaust has been one of the more recent historical advancements in the field. With new information, some have delved into deeper assessments of the story of memorialization and the effectiveness of exhibits and historical sites to portray specific narratives. Historian Tim Cole has proposed that memory itself can be utilized as a political tool to create monuments in which “constructing a memorial is a conscious act of choosing to remember certain people and events.”⁴ Holocaust historian Rebecca Golbert has examined the role of Soviet censorship in the struggle for public remembrance through physical or intellectual spaces, as Jewish survivors attempted to memorialize only to be censored in the Ukraine. However, when finally able to overcome past obstacles to commemorate what remains, issues arose in utilizing spaces and artifacts for educational purposes. German professor Jennifer Hansen-Glucklich discusses the technological issues of overexposing artifacts to desensitize its horror. However, Holocaust historian James E. Young was in favor of German “anti-monuments” that allow individuals to remember events within their own minds rather than viewing public spaces.⁵ This study will link together the ideas of scholars to examine the story of Holocaust memorialization as it continues to fade, while displaying the complex methods educational sites grapple with today.

The Construction and Deconstruction of Belzec

Among major Holocaust sites, the Polish extermination camp of Belzec remains ever-elusive due to its destruction well before the Soviets invaded. Under the title “Operation Reinhard,” actions taken by Nazi officials to exterminate German and Polish Jews came under the guise of resettlement to eastern sectors of Nazi-occupied Poland. The operation began on March 17, 1942, when Jews from Lublin ghettos entered Belzec station.⁶ Many Jews believed that the innocuous site in the southeastern corner of Poland was to be used for farther movement eastward. Even many Gestapo officials had no knowledge of the plan. For example, SS *Gruppenführer* Müller, chief of the Gestapo, arrested a camp official for removing traces of mass executions. However, the charges were dropped after he was notified that the actions were justified under a confidential “state secret.”⁷

Nazi intentions—as well as the reasons they were only stumbled upon by Soviets postwar—were simple: the site was intended to incinerate Jewish populations quickly before being completely dismantled. Since the Nazis claimed that Operation Reinhard was meant to relocate the Jews, local citizens did not bat an eye at the development of such camps. During the construction, no information was leaked to workers; although blueprints were made with eventual deconstruction in mind. Wooden huts were made so workers could fill “the empty space [between interior and exterior walls] with sand . . . walls were covered with cardboard and . . . sheet-zinc . . . the doors were very strongly built of three-inch-thick planks and were secured against pressure from the inside by a wooden bolt . . . water pipes were fixed at a height of 10 cm. from the floor.”⁸ The Nazis constructed huts with natural material so they would be easier to destroy when operations were completed by the end of 1942. Nearby, the

mock bathhouses were ditches for the remains. When the camp ceased all transports in mid-June, new methods of hiding evidence were needed. In November 1942, the Nazis began to burn bodies and dump them in ditches because wooden gas chambers were ineffective on such a large scale.⁹ After a month, production halted due to the successful eradication of Jews in the region and the beginning of more large-scale efforts in camps, notably Auschwitz. The operation continued until March 1943, when mass graves were dug up and evidence was either burned or transported for use in other camps. On the surface, Nazi officials had been successful. No physical evidence remained of their atrocities as they dismantled the railway that led directly to the camp and planted trees across the field.

However, enough original accounts and records of the site remained despite Nazi suppression efforts. Although reports differ, a small handful of prisoners survived the camp—only one, Rudolf Reder, provided a written testimony.¹⁰ Had it not been for these witnesses, personal narratives could have vanished. However, the accounts allowed Soviet officials to acknowledge Belzec without completely understanding how deadly the site had been. Although collective memory appeared to fade in postwar years due to Soviet Jewish suppression, the Polish Council of Protection of Memory of Combat and Martyrdom fenced off the area in the 1960s.¹¹ Aside from a monument erected in May 1961, nothing was done to preserve the site. The gruesome extent of the camp was finally uncovered in 1997. Five mass graves were unearthed, some of which included partially burned bodies likely indicating panic from workers as the Red Army advanced.¹²

Efforts to connect public memory to the Belzec site are important because of the destruction of physical evidence. Before there was time to fully assess the Holocaust, Nazi efforts to hide the site had almost eliminated the physical remains of Belzec, where an estimated 500,000 Jews perished.¹³ Though victims continue to be identified and an updated memorial was built at the camp in 2004, the precise number of victims will remain unknown. In contrast to other extermination camps, remnants of Nazi deeds at Belzec are mostly absent. There were no abandoned buildings like at Auschwitz nor any topsoil proof of charred bones and teeth as was found at Treblinka. At Belzec, such spaces were burned, buried, leveled, and planted over. Therefore, the memorial and burial sites are models of remembrance. The memorial was built into the ground; onlookers are surrounded by the earth that houses the victims and their lost stories.¹⁴

Soviet Approach to Postwar Memory

With the liberation of Eastern Europe by the Soviets in late 1944, evidence at Holocaust sites was discovered. As the Red Army moved into each camp, gas chambers, burial pits, and ponds filled with ashes acted as grim reminders of what had truly happened in these locations. What came with these discoveries, however, was a sense of victimization—something Joseph Stalin quickly realized he could use to his and his country's advantage.¹⁵ Because Berlin was doomed to fall, the spoils of war would soon be negotiated by the Allies. While American, British, and other Allied forces fought on the Western front, the Soviet Union stood as the lone opposition to the Nazis in the East and suffered disproportionate losses. Soviet casualties are conservatively estimated at 20 million—far greater than any other country, including

Germany. The Jewish community had lost a far greater percentage of its population, however, and was the primary victim group. Although the Jews had been protected and valued by the prewar Soviet government, the Soviets now began the process of erasing Jewish victimization from public memory.

Despite Soviet efforts to wipe nationalities from concentration camp reports, the Jewish community did not completely leave Eastern Europe. In fact, Jews did not fear communism. Instead, as Anca Oltean argues, they “perceived it as the only force capable to stop Nazism.”¹⁶ When the war ended, many Jews from communist countries left for Palestine, but a large number of survivors stayed in their home countries in the East in order to help the Soviet regimes that helped put a stop to the gas chambers. In the Soviets’ favor, the postwar period also saw the rise of cosmopolitanism—the belief that everyone, no matter what their race, religion or ethnicity might be, belongs to a single nation. After the Holocaust, international law began to recognize “crimes against humanity,” which set the bar for actions seen as dangerous to all people. In order to emphasize the victimization of Soviets and de-emphasize Jewish suffering, Stalin utilized the philosophical idea to suppress Jewish sympathy, which resulted in Jews being persecuted as a population of “cosmopolitans without roots.”¹⁷ As such, synagogues, schools, literature, and other forms of teaching religion were shut down, while the Jewish population was encouraged to stay within Russia and become “Russofied.” Throughout this period of anti-Semitism, partly due to Stalin’s desire to claim the position as the sole victim of the war for Russians, many works of literature and potential efforts to memorialize non-Russian sufferers were suppressed.

Another major factor that contributed to the censorship of Holocaust memories was the fear of being associated with fascism during the postwar period. In coming to terms with the Holocaust and the end of the Third Reich, both the Soviets and the Western powers tried to separate themselves from fascism. The epicenter of such conflicts was in Germany, as each side made a concerted effort to disassociate itself from the ideologies that made the Holocaust possible. According to Andrew Beattie, this created a battle between the two Germanies as West Germany claimed that the Soviet-controlled German Democratic Republic (GDR) was a “‘totalitarian’ dictatorship fundamentally similar to the Nazi regime,” while Eastern Germany associated Nazism with “a highly aggressive, chauvinistic version of imperialist ‘fascism,’” and condemning “incipient fascism of the capitalist Federal Republic.”¹⁸

With each side attributing to the other fascist or totalitarian characteristics, Stalin enacted his own anti-Semitic measures to ensure collective Russian victimization. Holocaust literature and research withstood serious fire from Stalin during and after the war in the Soviet Union. One major example was Ilya Ehrenburg and Vasily Grossman’s *The Black Book*, a chronicle of atrocities committed against the Eastern Jewish population with primary accounts (i.e., eyewitness, letters, diaries, etc.).¹⁹ While the central theory of the Soviet-Jewish authors was agreed upon in the West—as it centered around Nazism as a driving force in anti-Semitism—the Soviets rejected it outright, claiming it focused on a specific group rather than the collective. Instead, they eradicated such thought “to the point that in [initial postwar] history textbooks anti-Semitism was totally expunged from the record of Nazism.”²⁰ The Soviet government believed that focusing on the suffering of a selected group undermined the fight for collective suffering and was too dangerous to publish.

Armed with public concerns and Grossman's self-censorship—he initially omitted prior research on Nazi collaborators in the Eastern Bloc in the hope that his work would be published—the Soviet government never let the book see the light of day. Instead, a large portion of the 27 Russian contributors to the book were arrested and served prison sentences for taking action against the state. The texts, which were printed by the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee in 1946 but never distributed, were burned en masse in 1948, thus eliminating an important form of literary Holocaust memory.

It was through the force of remaining Jewish populations and those who stood with them that memories of the Holocaust continued to live on despite being weathered and partially erased by government intervention. An original manuscript was found in May 1965 and brought to the Israeli research center.²¹ *The Black Book* was eventually published by Israel's Yad Vashem, the premier research and study center on the Holocaust, in 1980.

Soviet Censorship at Babi Yar

Turning to the physical spaces of Holocaust memorialization, one discovers that Soviet intervention in public affairs also prevented memorialization that was not collective. One striking example of Nazi crimes comes from the site of the Babi Yar massacre—the mass burial ground of a single night of purging outside of Kiev, Ukraine. Nazi officials decided to execute any Jewish civilians in the town over the span of four days in retaliation to Soviet bombings, including a single night where nearly 33,000 deaths were recorded.

A monument has been built where over a third of the 100,000 Jewish victims were buried, though it took 35 years of struggle for victims to convince Soviet officials to permit the memorial.²² Immediately after the war, survivors and witnesses attempted to memorialize the site on their own. However, growing friction between intellectuals and the Soviet state caused production to cease and all discussions were stopped. Then, in 1961, the city of Kiev made preparations to erase the site by constructing a park and a sports stadium on it.²³ This direct threat to destroy a site that meant so much to the Jewish population infuriated intellectuals and writers, who began to organize. The Soviet government reacted by arresting countless intellectuals and poets who spoke against flooding the site. Similar to Belzec, Soviet censorship attempted to wash over major Holocaust sites and influence public memory. Rather than erase memories, however, Soviet pressures attempted to manipulate history into portraying a specific narrative to the world as well as its people.

After years of public outcry, the Ukrainian government gave in to public demands and erected a monument on the site; however, in Soviet fashion, the monument depicted historical Russian heroes—none of whom were Jewish. An inscription at the base of the monument stated, “Here, in 1941–43, the German Fascist invaders executed over 100,000 citizens of Kiev and Prisoners of War.”²⁴ The Ukrainian government, feeling the brunt of Soviet pressure, erased the memory of Jewish tragedy and replaced it with collective memorialization. Throughout Stalin-controlled lands, failure to acknowledge Jewish history was prevalent because people feared being accused of favoring a specific group instead of treating all as sufferers and survivors equally. Unfortunately, the intentional whitewashing prevented many memorials from being built and literature from being written, thus erasing parts of Holocaust history forever.

Regional Struggles and the Overall Loss of Memory

Though much could be said of larger Holocaust sites such as Belzec and Babi Yar, many other regional Holocaust sites, each sharing an equal amount of experiences, dotted the eastern landscapes. In the Ukraine, towns fought lesser standards of censorship but needed basic memorial essentials—notably money and survivor stories. Lesser-known places that had witnessed scenes of the Holocaust were in the greatest danger of being forgotten, as rural Jewish citizens fled either westward or to Israel during the Cold War era. Without survivors to shepherd the memorialization process, those who remained in the 1950s and 1960s quietly maintained sites, while Soviet-Ukrainian officials continued to censor in every way possible. For example, the Zionist organization in Korsun-Shevchenkivsky tried to collect funds for a monument to Jewish heroes who died, only to have the regional authorities seize the collection.²⁵

Nonetheless, small groups of survivors made efforts to memorialize sites at the regional level with limited budgets. An example of such a struggle is the Mogilev-Podolsky Jewish community in the Vinnytsia Oblast region of western Ukraine. Citizens there established their own sites out of pocket along the road from Tulchin to Pechora—the site of a march in early December 1941 where Jewish citizens died by the hundreds due to hypothermia and illness.²⁶ Initially, the two towns, both part of the Mogilev Podolsky Jewish community, secretly memorialized their own cemeteries. When cracks began to show in the Soviet regime during the 1970s however, both village councils agreed to link the two sites along the path of the march.

Money was also a problem for the memorialization. For the first 20 years, the project was funded by Pechora camp survivor and Tulchin resident Mikhail Abramovich Bartik.²⁷ Because of his financial investment, the community was able to begin construction on marking the path. The two factors of budgeting restrictions and survivors were strongly tied even into the 1990s and early 2000s, as Bartik and his wife emigrated to Germany in 1998 and the memorial upkeep was left to the community.²⁸ Moreover, this meant that financial responsibility was placed on patrons and citizens who had no recollection of the event. As a result, communications broke down between the two towns. Upon Bartik's visit in 2001, the Torkov memorial he helped fund—which stands between the two and marks where the march had stopped briefly—had become hidden behind vegetation growth.²⁹ With the earlier exchange of power from survivors to second-hand patrons, the small commemorative sites were left in serious jeopardy. This was the first step in the loss of memory.

Although budgetary concerns were a major issue, the lack of communal memory triggered the largest worry. Cracks in memory and legitimacy have continued to grow, as seen in the rise of Holocaust denial, which began as early as the late 1970s. To combat the slow-rolling wave of rejection, a bevy of firsthand accounts, such as the documentary *Kitty, Return to Auschwitz*, have been released.³⁰ The film observes a Holocaust survivor and her son walking around the site she lived in for a year and a half in an effort to gather stories and experiences to pass on to him and younger generations. Stories such as Kitty Hart's portrayed legitimate accounts of victims and survivors to provide narratives alongside the myriad of shoes, glasses, suitcases, and bones found in the camp.

The strength of witness accounts will continue to fade over time as the number of survivors decreases. Without these sources, public memory will only consist of

what can be taught from the remaining materials. The loss of firsthand accounts was problematic in small locations, such as Tulchin and Pechora, and is an even greater issue in the United States. A recent survey from the Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany found that over one-fifth of millennials “haven’t heard or are not sure if they have heard of the Holocaust,” while nearly a third of Americans believe that two million Jews or fewer were killed during the Holocaust.³¹ Even Kitty Hart has trouble conveying what happened. She admits “I open my eyes and there’s nobody. Open my eyes and see grass. Close my eyes and see mud.”³² Though Holocaust survivors are still alive to tell their stories, they are unable to truly encapsulate what they experienced. This, along with the small number of remaining survivors, creates difficulty in accurately representing the Holocaust.

Education at Auschwitz

Even a place as prominent as Auschwitz, which did not face the same level of monetary restrictions or historical accuracy questions as other sites, still struggles with presenting the history to the public. In 1945, the lower branch of Polish government passed a bill to “preserve the grounds and buildings of the former camp as a memorial to the international martyrdom of nations.”³³ As one of the most widely publicized camps, there were no qualms with placing Auschwitz at the forefront of Holocaust history. However, the sheer magnitude of the tragedy for groups other than Jews raised the question of how to memorialize the site, and this has become the most difficult and pivotal problem facing historians today.

Initially, Polish political prisoners who survived Auschwitz proposed the preservation of their hell just months after the camp’s liberation in 1945. Auschwitz had been remembered as a mass grave, a labor camp, and a place to mourn and learn. Due to the diversity of its prisoners, the site has a variety of meanings: Jews perceived it as the ultimate symbol of the Holocaust, Poles regarded it as a representation of the destruction of everyday life, and Soviet prisoners of war, Roma-Sinti, and homosexuals also held their own meanings. Even to those who were thousands of miles away, the site stood—and still stands—as an image of sinister thoughts and actions taken too far under the orders of a totalitarian regime.³⁴

By encompassing diverse histories of group suffering, the problem is further complicated when observed on an individual basis. Because of the diversity of individual memories, educating and deciphering the totality of the Holocaust becomes an immense and confusing task. Strong emotional ties to Auschwitz and other Holocaust sites caused a population to divide over the issue of memorializing the sites. For some, the concept of being able to enter and consequently leave such demonic places is enough—especially to visual theorist Griselda Pollock, who will never desire to visit a place such as Auschwitz.³⁵ The notion that one would want to visit a place of great tragedy can cause distress and can quickly and easily be judged as sick or twisted. Such beliefs have merit, as preserved Holocaust landscapes are considered by some as humanity’s most ruthless and horrid pieces of history. On the other hand, Pollock would oppose “dark tourism.” The term, coined by Dr. Phillip Stone, executive director of The Institute for Dark Tourism Research, refers to “the act of travel to sites associated with death, suffering, or the seemingly macabre.”³⁶ People choose to experience horrific sites not for masochistic pleasure, but to reflect on human history

and mourn lost lives. This contrast makes the portrayal of the Holocaust difficult to negotiate. However, the vast majority of visitors are not strongly opinionated. Some of those without a strong position include former prisoners, who visit the site to find closure or peace.³⁷ The designers behind Auschwitz as a memorial have attempted to appease as many parties as possible—though their decisions have angered some groups.

From a historian's perspective, people inherently associate Holocaust sites with the power to make the past present.³⁸ Such a belief allows visitors to educate themselves by visualizing what happened at the site. To maintain the link between past artifacts and experiences and the current generation, memorials are designed to place visitors as close to historical authenticity as possible; however, this poses additional problems for those with conflicting viewpoints.

Despite many difficulties in constructing memory, tours of Holocaust extermination camps have been successful, especially those sponsored by international organizations such as the British Holocaust Educational Trust (HET) and the March of the Living.³⁹ These groups arrange trips to sites that physically place young students in Holocaust venues—namely Auschwitz-Birkenau—to promote life-like experiences such as listening to audio clips, reading poems by survivors, and marching where prisoners once did. By placing themselves within similar bounds as victims, students can relate to the historical experience.

Although such tours have been effective, how museums and exhibits utilize artifacts alongside other visual material can also cause issues, especially if they are to be exhibited away from the actual sites. The display of *momentos*—such as shoes, prayer shawls, or victims' hair—at a site may not enhance the experience if their relationship to the Holocaust is unclear. Journalist Micheal Bernard-Donals highlighted problems in the exhibit of confiscated shoes found within the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum as he notes visitors' behaviors regarding the shoes.⁴⁰ Such tangible items are used to create metonymies to relate viewers to the historical moment. However, Bernard-Donals found that this widely used tactic was less effective at establishing connection to the Holocaust, and instead led visitors to reflect on their own mortality. As he stated,

... it isn't that Audria and other visitors like her don't understand the Holocaust by means of the display of shoes; it's that the object's relation to other objects—to her own shoes, to other objects in the museum, even to objects of her experience in the present—stands in the way of establishing a clear historical relation, a relation of authenticity, to the past, one that would (I think mistakenly) allow Audria to remark, 'I know this person's experience.'⁴¹

Misdirected reflection may not allow visitors to grasp the connection a museum is attempting to create.

Some scholars believe that physical sites hinder memory. Holocaust scholar James E. Young proposed such an idea by observing the work of Jochen Gerz, a German conceptual artist.⁴² In his creation of the invisible monument in Saarbrücken, Gerz created an anti-monument of sorts, as the project was largely unnoticed in physical

presence. His crew pried loose 70 cobblestones from the Saarbrücken Schloss, the former Gestapo headquarters. On those stones, they etched the names of over 2,000 Jewish-German cemeteries on the bottom and placed them back where they were originally. When a story was published about Gerz's work, citizens flocked to the square to see what had been constructed. They would "become part of the memorial" as they pondered where the stones were, realizing "such memory was already in them."⁴³ The project proved that memorials, lessons, and inherent historical warnings remain with individuals and not with the monuments themselves, as they depend on human memory to give them life. Teaching such events and maintaining the fleeting flame of memory as best we can is the best form of memorialization.

Conclusion

On my own visit to Auschwitz-Birkenau in the summer of 2017, I mentally prepared for one of the heaviest and most solemn experiences I would ever have. While the weather was fitting for the occasion—it rained for the better part of the morning and early afternoon—I expected the entire environment to match the heart-wrenching stories of the dead and those who liberated the camp in the winter of 1945. Despite the common thought that birds never sing at Auschwitz, I was taken aback by the life that teemed there after past horrors: birds sang in the trees and frogs swam in the ponds where the ashes of prisoners were dumped. Natural overgrowth also plagued much of Tulchin and Pechora. Even at the leveled field and subsurface memorial at Belzec, flora and fauna flourished. Considerable efforts have been made to remove the vegetation to maintain the monuments' emotional integrity.⁴⁴ Similar to time, nature has moved forward. However, educators and remaining survivors still seek to grasp the fleeting memories that remain to memorialize such places and events for future generations.

Due to the multi-layered destruction of information and evidence—first by the Nazi regime, and then by Soviet Russia—the history of humanity's most evil actions may never be fully uncovered. Likewise, decades of censorship suppressed public memory from forming. In addition, the growing distance from 1945 to the present combined with the diverse methods of educating future generations has caused a spectrum of issues for human memory down the road. The sites of Belzec, Babi Yar, Tulchin, Pechora, and Auschwitz may not fall from view for years thanks to remaining survivors, artifacts, and physical (or mental) memorials. Despite their immense importance today as markers of the darkest moment in human history, such remnants will continue to wither under neglect, manipulation, and the loss of witnesses regardless of the efforts of postwar memorialization.

Notes

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4. Tim Cole. "(Re)visiting Auschwitz: (Re) encountering the Holocaust in its Landscapes," *Cultural History* 2, no. 2 (2013): 272.
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8. *Ibid.*, 219–20.
9. *Ibid.*, 224.
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12. Robin O’Neil, “Belzec—The ‘Forgotten’ Death Camp,” *East European Jewish Affairs* 28, no. 2 (1998): 56.
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27. *Ibid.*, 229.
28. *Ibid.*
29. *Ibid.*, 233.
30. Cole, 235.
31. “New Survey by Claims Conference Finds Significant Lack of Holocaust Knowledge in the United States,” *The Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany*, <http://www.claimscon.org/study/> (accessed August 1, 2018).
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38. Ibid.
39. Ibid., 235–36.
40. Michael Bernard-Donals, “Synecdochic Memory at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum,” *College English* 74, no. 5 (2012): 418.
41. Ibid., 421–22.
42. Young, 415.
43. Ibid., 416.
44. Buntman, 431.

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