

**INTERPRETING HUMAN RIGHTS TRAGEDIES: A COMPARISON OF  
THE UNITED STATES HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL MUSEUM AND  
MANZANAR NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE**

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## Chapter One: Introduction

The sense of place at a historic site plays a vital role in visitor experience that cannot be duplicated in a museum setting. Museums must therefore use different techniques in order to allow visitors to connect with the event being interpreted. On the other hand, museums have complete control over the visitor experience, and a power unavailable to historic site managers. However, historic sites frequently have interpretive centers, and museums often seek to incorporate elements of historic sites in their interpretive plans. This study seeks to determine the differences between interpretation at historic sites their implication for interpreters and museums and their implication for interpreters by examining the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum and Manzanar National Historic Site, as well as other museum and historic sites with similar agendas.

The last half of the twentieth century brought the term “interpretation” to the forefront of the historic preservation field. The practice of heritage interpretation has existed at historic sites and museums since their inception, but Freeman Tilden’s *Interpreting Our Heritage*<sup>1</sup> made the term commonplace in the historic preservation field. It is a component of historic preservation that affects

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<sup>1</sup> “Interpretation: An educational activity which aims to reveal meanings and relationships through the use of original objects, by firsthand experience, and by illustrative media, rather than

the most vital aspect of interpreted historic sites and museums: the visitor. It is important to note that interpretation is not always practiced in the preservation field; it is often left out altogether. The role that interpretation plays in the visitor experience is crucial to his or her knowledge and understanding of the site.

Sites focusing on civil and human rights are relatively new, and therefore the interpretation of these sites is often more creative than at “typical” historic sites and museums. Staff at sites interpreting civil and human rights stories need to balance between educating the visitor, often using powerful and graphic information, and turning them off. The study of these sites has provided insight into the interpretive practices used today.

Much has changed in the half century since *“Interpreting Our Heritage”* was published in 1957. Historic sites and museums no longer commemorate only the heroic and celebrated aspects of our past, but have also begun to acknowledge the darker and more uncomfortable chapters in our history. For interpretation to be successful, it must adapt and conform to the sites and the stories that are being told. It must also be flexible enough to adapt to evolving knowledge and viewpoints, which frequently change with future generations. Additionally, different techniques must be used when interpreting museums and historic sites where the event being interpreted actually took place. Museums

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simply to communicate factual information.”, Freeman Tilden, *Interpreting Our Heritage* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1957), 7.



must rely heavily on artifacts to tell the story, while historic sites can use the site itself to convey what took place. Two properties that successfully interpret events with a darker history are the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum and Manzanar National Historic Site.

The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, DC and Manzanar Japanese Internment Camp in eastern California, which is now a historic site run by the National Park Service, are two properties interpreting similar stories in different ways. Each deals with the oppression of a group of people based on race or ethnicity, a relatively new form of historic site. Each deals with relatively recent events, enabling the voice of “the survivor” to be heard by site managers, a voice that may take precedence over the way in which site managers might to interpret the space. In both situations, the event being commemorated took place in the recent past, and many of the victims are still alive. Additionally, each of these sites has a mission that shapes the way in which interpretive decisions are made.

This research will also help to achieve a better understanding of how interpretation shapes the message of the site. It is important to note that the conclusions drawn can be applied to any historic site and museum; Manzanar National Historic Site and the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum were chosen to narrow the scope of research. However, the focus on human rights

does affect some aspects of how these sites are interpreted. While a comparison of these sites and events will demonstrate their similarities, it will also highlight the differences between both museums and historic sites and the events being commemorated. The fact that the Holocaust did not take place on American soil factored greatly into the curatorial decisions made about interpretation at the Holocaust Museum, while interpreters at Manzanar had a different challenge in being physically at the site, but having virtually no remaining built environment to interpret. Additionally, while both groups of people were targeted because of religious and racial factors, the story of genocide being told at the Holocaust Museum has a different impact than the story of racial fears resulting in the Japanese interment.

Chapter Two examines interpretation at museums and historic sites and why it is important in the field of historic preservation. It will focus on Freeman Tilden's principles of interpretation and their changing application as historic sites and museums begin to interpret darker periods in history. This chapter will also address how survivor expectations have had a significant influence over how sites are managed and how interpretative decisions are made. The issue of the role of museums in the field of historic preservation is also important. Though the building itself is not historic, it houses historic artifacts.

Additionally, museums are increasingly being used at historic sites as an interpretive tool, which is the case at Manzanar National Historic Site.

Chapter Three focuses on the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. The museum, located a short distance from the Mall in Washington D.C., opened in 1993 to nearly universal praise. It is one of the most popular tourist destinations in Washington, D.C., drawing nearly 20 million visitors since its opening. This chapter will address its interpretation of the Holocaust, an event that did not happen on the site, or on United States soil. The museum's social agenda, which plays an important role in interpretive decisions, will also be discussed. One main difference between a museum and a historic site is the controlled environment in which a museum is housed. The architect of a museum building makes conscious decisions about the design of the building that have a direct impact on the visitor experience. Museums are created to shape the visitor experience, using everything from the architecture of the building to the lighting.

This chapter will also briefly examine other museums that interpret similar events. The Museum of Jewish Heritage-A Living Memorial to the Holocaust in New York City, The Simon Wiesenthal Center and Museum of Tolerance in Los Angeles, and the Japanese American National Museum in Los Angeles all focus on human rights and directly explore either the Holocaust or

the Japanese American internment. The examination of these sites will further explore the interpretive techniques used at museums.

The Fourth Chapter examines the Japanese-American interment camp Manzanar. This chapter focuses on the interpretation of a historic site as compared to a museum. Manzanar, a publicly owned and managed site, has faced particular constraints that are not imposed at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, which is partially federally funded, but is run privately. Site managers at Manzanar must follow guidelines set forth by the National Park Service, and they must be sensitive to, if not guided by, public opinion about the management of the site, something that is not necessarily the case at the Holocaust Museum. The council at the Holocaust Museum had the liberty of allowing certain groups to provide input into the planning process, while the staff at Manzanar have to be more neutral when making interpretive decisions.

Manzanar, a former Japanese Internment Camp used during World War II, is interpreting a shameful piece of America's past, a blatant restriction of people's civil rights. Manzanar has a strong sense of place, but has posed an interpretive challenge because most of the buildings were destroyed when the camp was closed at the end of World War II. This has led to the issue of reconstruction at the site. The same situation occurred in Europe at the end of the Second World War. The Germans disassembled many components of the

concentration camps, but decided to rebuild them as an educational tool. An interpretive center was also recently opened at Manzanar, which continues the trend of historic sites in adding a museum element to their interpretive program.

This chapter will also briefly explore the interpretive techniques used at the Women's Rights National Historic Park, and the Lower East Side Tenement Museum in comparison to the interpretive practices used at Manzanar National Historic Site.

Both case studies will also address the administrative situation, which often has a direct role in how decisions are made. In the case of both the Holocaust Museum and Manzanar, survivors had important influence on interpretive programming results.

The final chapter will present the conclusions drawn from an evaluation of the interpretation of each of these sites. It will also include a summary of the conclusions that have been drawn in previous chapters.

## Chapter Two: Heritage Interpretation

This chapter will examine the emerging role that interpretation has played in the field of historic preservation. This includes the ways in which interpretation has adapted to accommodate sites with difficult histories, sometimes known as sites of social conscience.

Since the inception of historic sites and museums, interpretation has been constantly evolving. However, with the publication of Freeman Tilden's book *Interpreting Our Heritage* in 1957, interpretation began to be acknowledged as an asset to the historic preservation field. In Tilden's words, "Through interpretation, understanding; through understanding, appreciation; through appreciation, protection."<sup>2</sup> This mantra has been echoed at historic sites and museums ever since. Interpretation has been used as a means to establish a connection with the visitors, and enrich their understanding.

*Interpreting Our Heritage* was written at a time when historic sites and museums typically memorialized heroic people and events. As Paul A. Shackel stated in his book *Memory in Black and White: Race, Commemoration, and the Post-Bellum Landscape*:

For the first fifty years or so after Mount Vernon was saved, the preservation of place was limited largely to the homes of famous

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<sup>2</sup> Tilden, *Interpreting Our Heritage*, 38.

Americans: presidents, politicians, and patriots-all men, all white. Indeed, until the second half of the twentieth century, preserved places reflected a very limited slice of the American demographic landscape. This limited view of the American past or, more specifically, what was important to remember about the American past, was also largely in keeping with the manner in which American history was taught and studied in high schools and colleges and universities throughout the country....Beginning in the 1960s, this country's sense of its history began to change as it became more inclusive. This expanded vision of the past added the historical voices of women, minorities, and labor to the unfolding drama of American history.<sup>3</sup>

When interpreting sites that focus on civil or human rights issues, the subject matter is often difficult for the visitor and must be presented in a way that educates the viewer without overwhelming. The staff at these sites must strike a balance so that the emotional content of the story does not overwhelm the visitor, and ensure that the site does not become a tourist attraction solely because of the sensational content of the material being displayed. As John Lennon and Malcolm Foley contend, "Horror and death have become established commodities, on sale to tourists who have an enduring appetite for the darkest elements of human history."<sup>4</sup> Tilden's principles lay the groundwork for heritage interpretation as we practice it today:

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<sup>3</sup> Paul A. Shackel, *Memory in Black and White: Race, Commemoration, and the Post-Bellum Landscape* (Landham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2003), xi.

<sup>4</sup> John Lennon and Malcolm Foley, *Dark Tourism: The Attraction of Death and Disaster* (London: Continuum, 2000), 58.

- Any interpretation that does not somehow relate what is being displayed or described to something within the personality or experience of the visitor will be sterile.
- Information, as such, is not Interpretation. Interpretation is revelation based upon information. But they are entirely different things. However, all interpretation includes information.
- Interpretation is an art, which combines many arts, whether the materials presented are scientific, historical, or architectural. Any art is in some degree teachable.
- The chief aim of Interpretation is not instruction, but provocation.
- Interpretation should aim to present a whole rather than a part, and must address itself to the whole man rather than any phase.
- Interpretation addressed to children (say, up to the age of twelve) should not be a dilution of the presentation to adults, but should follow a fundamentally different approach. To be at its best it will require a separate program.<sup>5</sup>

While Tilden's six principles are the basis for interpreting most historic sites and museums, they must be modified when interpreting sites of uncomfortable history.

Interpretation of historic sites and museums has gradually adopted a more complex approach because "heritage sites and museums are not necessarily just places for the reconstruction of memories, but also settings where visitors

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<sup>5</sup> Tilden, *Interpreting Our Heritage*, 9.



come to negotiate cultural meaning.”<sup>6</sup> No longer content to simply display objects, many museums and sites today have specific messages that they relay to the audience through a variety of interpretive tools. In the case of the Holocaust Museum, part of the mission is to insure such an event never happens again. According to Harvey Meyerhoff, past Chairman of the US Holocaust Memorial Council, “this building tells the story of events that human eyes should never have seen once, but having seen, must never be forgotten...It is not sufficient to remember the past. We must learn from it.”<sup>7</sup>

In order to supply the visitor with the information to understand the mission statement, sites and museums use an array of interpretive tools. As author George B. Robinson stated, “Good interpretation, like good education, is both cognitive and affective. It is a fragile union of art and science. Any attempt to assess its effects must be considered in light of the disparate natures of those two pursuits.”<sup>8</sup> This union must allow for a range of tools to effectively tell the story. At historic sites, it is increasingly common to find an interpretive center along with the actual historic fabric.

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<sup>6</sup> David L. Uzzell, “Interpreting our heritage: a theoretical interpretation” in *Contemporary Issues in Heritage and Environmental Interpretation*, ed. David Uzzell and Roy Ballantyne (London: The Stationary Office, 1998), 16.

<sup>7</sup> United States Holocaust Memorial Museum website, [www.ushmm.org](http://www.ushmm.org).

<sup>8</sup> George B. Robinson, “Judgment of the Child: A Brief Polemic,” in *Interpretive Views: Opinions on Evaluating Interpretation in the National Park Service*, ed. Gary Machlis (Washington D.C.: National Parks and Conservation Association, 1986), 51.

The beginning of the preservation movement in the United States is 1859, the year Mount Vernon was saved from developers wishing to turn it into a hotel. The movement gained momentum throughout the 1880's and 1890's, when upper-class men and women established ancestral societies dedicated to saving old buildings, preserving battlefield sites, and erecting shrines and monuments. Beginning with Mount Vernon, museums enshrining heroic figures from American history became popular sites that led to illustrating ways of life during a certain time period, such as Colonial Williamsburg in Virginia and Old Sturbridge Village in Massachusetts.<sup>9</sup> Charles Willson Peale created one of the first museums to house artifacts in the United States. It contained a number of Native American relics, waxwork dummies, and specimens of natural history. "Peale faced three questions that all subsequent history museums would face: what to collect, how to display it, and how to teach."<sup>10</sup> Museums continued to evolve, with more precise planning going into interpretive exhibits.

The changes that took place in museums were reflective of larger social and political developments. By the middle of the twentieth century, a growing group of people, including social scientists, architectural critics, psychologists

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<sup>9</sup> Michael Wallace, "Visiting the Past: History Museums in the United States," in *Presenting the Past: Essays on History and the Public*, eds. Susan Porter Benson, Stephen Brier, and Roy Rosenzweig (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986), 139-149.

<sup>10</sup> Gary Kulik, "Designing the Past: History-Museum Exhibitions from Peale to the Present," in *History Museums in the United States*, eds. Warren Leon and Roy Rosenzweig (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1989), 3.

and journalists, concerned with the demolition of “material, cultural, and historical fabric”<sup>11</sup> throughout the country, argued that tearing down historical fabric “denied human needs for historical connectedness; suburbs and projects alike undermined individual and social identities by ripping people of out history.”<sup>12</sup> These same people argued that history museums displayed a similar one-dimensionality and historical detachment. In response, grassroots museums sprang up around the country to preserve local heritages.

By the 1960’s museums also began to employ exhibit designers, in addition to the curators and historians already on staff. They began to use methods other than artifacts to tell the story, and the story began to develop into something more versatile. “...The interpretive exhibit would, by the 1980s, be the principal form for the expression of ideas in history museums, and exhibitions and interpretive programs influenced by the new social history would come to exert a powerful presence from Oakland to Williamsburg.”<sup>13</sup> Exhibitions began to feature a variety of tools including photographs, video, audio, and first person accounts. Rather than being displayed in solely glass cases, these items were more creatively presented. According to Barbara Melosh,

This tendency to borrow and interpret rather than to present original findings has led many observers and some curators

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<sup>11</sup> Wallace, “Visiting the Past: History Museums in the United States,” 153.

<sup>12</sup> Wallace, “Visiting the Past: History Museums in the United States”, 154.

<sup>13</sup> Kulik, “Designing the Past: History-Museum Exhibitions from Peale to the Present,” 28.

themselves to think of museum exhibits as a kind of trickle-down from 'real' historical work done elsewhere. But exhibits are never simply mirrors of scholarly work. Even when they are based on scholarship conducted elsewhere, they are not translations but highly selective adaptations.<sup>14</sup>

Museums are controlled environments, and the story told to visitors is distilled from many different elements. The architecture of a building can be utilized to enhance the visitor experience, as is the case with the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. Museums have additional distinct differences when compared with historic sites. Melosh notes,

The museum has the advantage of engaging its audience with the visual enticements of video, film, and photography. In addition to the allure and immediacy of these media, they may also render exhibits more accessible because they provide a visual experience that is familiar to views from an electronic and image-saturated culture.<sup>15</sup>

Historic sites interpreters, though they do not employ the same tactics of museums, have distinct tools to educate visitors.

Traditionally, historic sites relied nearly entirely on the historic fabric that comprised the site. Visitors were educated about the history of the site through information supplied by guides who sometimes were first-person interpreters.

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<sup>14</sup> Barbara Melosh, "Speaking of Women: Museums' Representations of Women's History," in *History Museums in the United States*, eds. Warren Leon and Roy Rosenzweig (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1989), 184.

<sup>15</sup> Melosh, "Speaking of Women: Museums' Representations of Women's History," 185.

Artifacts were utilized to provide a “sense of place,” which remains the most important aspect of a historic site. To stand on the hallowed ground of Antietam or in the Edgar Allan Poe House in Philadelphia conjure up images of past events that may be of the most potent elements of a visit.<sup>16</sup> For example, a tour of the basement in which Poe’s story “The Black Cat” maybe have been set is a highly evocative experience.

The sense of place that a historic site offers cannot be duplicated in a museum, and it offers a completely different experience for the visitor. Gregory Ashworth described the sense of place in his article “Heritage, identity and interpreting a European sense of place”

...Heritage interpretation has an important spatial dimension. Simply, individuals and social groups endow their local environments with meanings that are not intrinsic to the physical forms themselves but are ascribed to them by people. Places thus both receive and convey identities. This is the sense of place, which is a powerful instrument in shaping and reinforcing feelings of identification with specific areas in individuals, who in turn, by their reaction, further strengthen such identities. These meanings are both expressed through the medium of heritage and become the perceived collective heritage of individuals and groups.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> The Poe House is facing an important interpretive decision. The house is currently not furnished, because no known furniture of Poe’s exists. Interpreters have debated whether furnishing the house in the way they think it might have looked at the time Poe lived there would add visual interest, or if the house as it looks today serves its interpretive purpose.

<sup>17</sup> Gregory Ashworth, “Heritage, identity and interpreting a European sense of place,” in *Contemporary Issues in Heritage and Environmental Interpretation*, 112.

In recent years, historic site managers have increasingly added museum elements to heritage sites. Visitor, or interpretive, centers can be found with greater frequency at Gettysburg National Battlefield, Independence National Historical Park, and the African Burial Ground in New York City, where planning for an interpretive center is under way. These interpretive centers include many of the same components as museums, including videos, photographs, interactive displays, and artifacts. Interestingly, some museums have incorporated historic site elements into their interpretive programming, such as reconstructed buildings or rooms inside the museum itself.

As a shift has been made to include less widely embraced parts of our past, historic sites and museums have had to adapt their interpretive programs accordingly. No longer content to commemorate only heroic and positive feats, sites began to emerge that also examined parts of our heritage that had been largely ignored. Sites such as the Gulag Museum in Russia and the Terezin Memorial in the Czech Republic examine exploitation and infringement on human rights. There has also been a reevaluation of the interpretation at long-existing sites to include assessment of the “darker” aspects of their story, especially slavery at some sites. There has been increased visitation to sites like these, as well as Nazi concentration camps, which reflect a growing interest on the part of the public to learn more about this aspect of our heritage, as noted by

John Lennon and Malcolm Foley in *Dark Tourism: The Attraction of Death and Disaster*. "It is clear from a number of sources that tourist interest in recent death, disaster and atrocity is a growing phenomenon in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries and that theorists have both noticed and attempted to understand it."<sup>18</sup>

The creation of The International Coalition of Historic Site Museums of Conscience in 1999 further emphasized the growing significance of these types of sites. It stated among its founding principles

We hold common the belief that it is the obligation of historic sites to assist the public in drawing connections between the history of our sites and its contemporary implications. We view stimulating dialogue on pressing social issues and promoting humanitarian and democratic values as a primary function.<sup>19</sup>

The social agenda at these sites has a direct impact on how the sites are interpreted. The International Coalition of Historic Site Museums of Social Conscience does not include all historic sites or museums that focus on civil or human rights issues. The Coalition expects a certain approach from the sites that are included in it.<sup>20</sup> They have a very didactic approach to the interpretation of

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<sup>18</sup> Lennon and Foley, *Dark Tourism: The Attraction of Death and Disaster*, 3.

<sup>19</sup> Ruth J. Abram, "Planting Cut Flowers," AASLH History News (Summer 2000): 9.

<sup>20</sup> The International Coalition of Historic Site Museums of Social Conscience currently includes thirteen sites from around the globe. They are: District Six Museum (South Africa), Eleanor Roosevelt National Historic Site (United States), Gulag Museum at Perm-36 (Russia), Japanese American National Museum (United States), Liberation War Museum (Bangladesh), Lower East Side Tenement Museum (United States), Maison des Esclaves (Senegal), Martin Luther King Jr. National Historic Site (United States), Memoria Abierta (Argentina), National Civil Rights

their sites. It is not neutral, and a site must be willing to take a very progressive approach to their interpretation. The sites tell the stories of slavery, genocide, people living in poverty, and people who lacked civil and human rights. Interpretation at all sites includes the issue of visitor emotions. As noted by David Uzzell and Roy Ballantyne, “Emotions color our memories and experiences and thus our selective attention to information. Our minds are not virgin territories and our past experiences and decisions influence our future actions.”<sup>21</sup> This must be taken into account in particular when interpreting sites of atrocity and horror. These sites have a unique emotional impact on visitors, and must also accommodate, in many cases, survivors.

Many of these sites interpret recent events, and the people directly affected by them or their children still survive. Interpreters at these sites have two distinct audiences: for one group these places are memorials, for another, they are learning centers. The voice of the survivor is something new to many interpreters and site managers. Survivors hold a “moral currency”<sup>22</sup> that is often the most valuable and important part of interpretive planning. In the initial stages of the creation of the United States Holocaust Museum, perhaps the

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Museum (United States), Terezin Memorial (Czech Republic), Women’s Rights National Historic Park (United States), The Workhouse (England). International Coalition of Historic Site Museums of Social Conscience website, [www.sitesofconscience.org](http://www.sitesofconscience.org).

<sup>21</sup> David L. Uzzell and Roy Ballantyne, “Heritage that hurts: interpretation in a postmodern world,” in *Contemporary Issues in Heritage and Environmental Interpretation*, 152.

<sup>22</sup> Kathleen Dilonardo and Joanne Blacoe, Interview by author, August 2004.



biggest challenge facing Council members was the question of “ownership” of Holocaust memory. The planning process saw “boundaries defined, attacked, defended, preserved, redrawn, and re-established. It is a story of the still-continuing negotiations over the boundaries of memory.”<sup>23</sup> The issue of ownership is common to many sites that commemorate difficult histories. Survivors justifiably feel they “own” the event being interpreted, and should therefore have the loudest voice in the interpretive planning process. Managers must balance survivors’ feelings, against the need to present material in a way that will educate future generations. This situation creates the need for flexibility in interpretation design. As events fade and survivors die, the ways in which the sites are interpreted may change, but “issues which involve personal values, beliefs, interests and memories will excite a degree of emotional arousal which needs to be recognized and addressed in interpretation.”<sup>24</sup> It is always imperative when interpreting a site or at a museum not to freeze the story at a certain point in history, and also to evolve the story as time goes on. Holocaust scholar Volkard Knigge described the need for recent interpretation at the Buchenwald Memorial in Germany, “This generation has grown up in a different culture, with different mediums. We need to attempt new ways of

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<sup>23</sup> Edward Linenthal, *Preserving Memory: The Struggle to Create America’s Holocaust Museum* (New York: Viking Press, 1999), 4.

<sup>24</sup> Linenthal, *Preserving Memory: The Struggle to Create America’s Holocaust Museum*, 152.

communicating with them, and give them the chance to formulate their own way of accessing the history here. Otherwise we're speaking a language they don't understand."<sup>25</sup> Flexibility by site managers allows interpretation to adapt to different expectations and experiences of people over time, something imperative to the longevity and success of a site or museum.

Roy Ballantyne and David Uzzell discussed this issue of the need for an interpretive plan that evolves over time. They stated,

The third factor that relates to our emotional engagement and response to heritage, and interacts with both time and abstraction, is distance. Both physical and psychological distance from people, places, events and artifacts can accentuate or moderate one's emotional involvement as well as one's knowledge, concern and, of course, action.<sup>26</sup>

They recognized the importance that time will play in an interpretive exhibit. The Battle of Gettysburg would probably have been interpreted differently by the generation that fought in it than by interpreters at Gettysburg today. This issue of emotional involvement with the event being interpreted was coined "hot interpretation" by Uzzell and Ballantyne. They used the example of the District Six Museum in Cape Town, South Africa, as a good example of achieving the aims of "hot interpretation."

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<sup>25</sup> Andreas Tzortzis, "At the Gift Shop: Souvenirs at Buchenwald," *New York Times*, 15 September 2004.

<sup>26</sup> Uzzell and Ballantyne, "Heritage that hurts: interpretation in a postmodern world," 162.

The establishment of the District Six Museum in Buitenkant Street, Cape Town, in 1992 has gone part of the way towards achieving some of the aims of a hot interpretive approach. It is truly a 'people's' museum and has been established through the goodwill of the community. Housed in the old Central Methodist Church, which in the days of Apartheid was venue for protest meetings, prayer vigils and a sanctuary for those physically and psychologically injured by police during protest actions, the museum has been very successful in attracting Cape Town community members and tourists through its doors. Exhibitions have focused upon community 'memories' of living in the area.<sup>27</sup>

This museum's interpretive program functions in much the same way as the U.S. Holocaust Museum and Manzanar, which both use survivor memories of events, a technique common to sites exploring civil and human rights issues.

The need to accurately depict a story is imperative because with education people may become involved in the protection of these sites. For sites of social conscience, the audience's engagement in the site's mission can be achieved through successful interpretation. George B. Robinson reflected on the importance of successfully interpreting a place:

Success depends on the *fundamental* purpose of interpretation. If the purpose is to entertain, then applause, laughter, handclaps, and other conventional expressions of approval may be considered indicative of success. If it is to inform, perhaps disturb, to invoke the child within, to generate love, understanding, and commitment, to help clarify values, to help ensure the long-term integrity of the planet and the quality of life on its surface, then thoughtful silence, expressions of concern, unabashed and unaffected interaction with

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<sup>27</sup> Uzzell "Interpreting Our Heritage: A Theoretical Interpretation," 167.

the earth and with others, are initial, and more definitive indicators of success.<sup>28</sup>

The following two sections are case studies of such interpretation at the United States Holocaust Museum and Manzanar National Historic Site.

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<sup>28</sup> Robinson, "Judgment of the Child: A Brief Polemic," 48-49.

### Chapter Three: The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

Historic preservation characteristically focuses on the rehabilitation, restoration or conservation of historic structures. However, when interpreting an event, rather than a historic site, different interpretive methods must be used in order to accurately portray the story. Interpretation is further complicated when the event occurred in another country, in another time, and with no structures to preserve at the location where the event is being depicted. This is true of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, and is a concern that has presented interpretive challenges for the staff of the museum. In addition to interpreting an event that did not happen on U.S. soil, the subject matter being represented at the Holocaust Museum presents additional issues. This was addressed in *Dark Tourism: The Attraction of Death and Disaster*.

Mass killing sites, particularly those associated with the Jewish Holocaust, present major challenges for interpretation and invariably questions arise concerning the nature of motivation for visitors. The enormity of the systematic destruction of the Jewish people is beyond understanding and constitutes an enormous task in the sense of 'interpretation' and 'explanation.'<sup>29</sup>

The same concerns are issues are also true for the museums attempting to interpret these events.

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<sup>29</sup> Lennon and Foley, *Dark Tourism: The Attraction of Death and Disaster*, 27.

The preservation and interpretation of memory require a delicate balance between remembering, commemorating, and educating. While most museums use similar interpretive techniques, regardless of subject matter, the interpretation of horrific events evokes emotional chords not found in typical history museums. The Holocaust has been memorialized in many cities throughout the United States and the world. The memorials vary widely from place to place, and some are more powerful than others. Holocaust historian James Young noted,

The reasons for Holocaust memorials and the kinds of memory they generate vary as widely as the sites themselves. Some are built in response to traditional Jewish injunctions to remember, others according to a government's need to explain a nation's past to itself. Whereas the aim of some memorials is to educate the next generation and to inculcate in it a sense of shared experience and destiny, other memorials are intended to attract tourists.<sup>30</sup>

The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum was created as the national memorial to the victims of the Holocaust, and attempts to address all of these issues.

The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum is one of the most powerful examples of how we remember a tragic event in a museum setting in the United States, and, for some, has become the benchmark by which

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<sup>30</sup> James E. Young, "Critical Issues in Public Art; Content, Context, and Controversy," *Holocaust Memorials in America; Public Art as Process*, (New York: Harper Collins, 1992), 57.

remembrance can be measured. The interpretation of the Holocaust at the museum is at times both disturbing and moving. A variety of techniques are used to educate the visitor in the events of the Holocaust, to ensure that such crimes will never happen again. Author James Young described the powerful experience visitors can have at museums as follows:

The museum is not the only site where subjectivities and objectivities collide, but it is a particularly evocative one for the study of historical consciousness. A museum is a cultural institution where individual expectations and institutional, academic intentions interact, and the result is far from a one-way street. A range of personal memories is produced, not limited to the subject matter of exhibits, as well as a range of collective memories shared among museum visitors.<sup>31</sup>

The museum has a lasting impact on most who visit it, because of the subject matter, but also because of the way in which that information is interpreted.

Visitation to the museum has remained relatively constant in the 12 years since it opened, with an average of 5,000 people per day, an overwhelming number of visitors for a relatively small museum. As one reporter noted shortly after the museum opened “the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum here has a problem most museums would envy. Since opening on the Mall eight months ago, the museum has literally been overwhelmed by the volume, and the

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<sup>31</sup> Susan A. Crane, “Memory, Distortion, and History in the Museum,” in *History and Theory* Vol. 6, No. 4 (December 1997), 46.

long attention spans, of its visitors.”<sup>32</sup> Only the United States Air and Space Museum received more visitors to the Mall (nearly 11 million in 2003), though it is worth noting that visitors to the Holocaust Museum spend roughly three times as long going through the exhibits than do visitors to the Air and Space Museum.<sup>33</sup> The duration of the visit can be explained in part by the sheer volume of information displayed-it takes the average visitor 3 hours to go through the permanent exhibit. Tours of the National Museum of the American Indian take far less time than tours of the United States Holocaust Museum, with visitors staying 90 minutes.<sup>34</sup> To compare the number of visitors to another widely popular destination, the Museum of Science and Industry in Chicago has had 160 million visitors since its opening in 1933,<sup>35</sup> but has 14 acres of exhibition space, compared to the Holocaust Museum exhibition’s 36,000 square feet.<sup>36</sup> A museum that interprets similar subject matter, the Museum of Jewish Heritage-A Living Memorial to the Holocaust in New York City, opened with only 30,000

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<sup>32</sup> , Roberta Smith, “Holocaust Museum Adjusting to Relentless Flood of Visitors,” The New York Times, 23 December 1993.

<sup>33</sup> Timothy Cole, *Images of the Holocaust: Myth of the ‘Shoah’ business*, (London: Duckworth, 1999), 146-147. The Air and Space Museum, though it receives more visitors, is also much larger and therefore better equipped to cope with the volume of visitors it receives.

<sup>34</sup> Smithsonian Institution Website, [www.si.edu](http://www.si.edu).

<sup>35</sup> Museum of Science and Industry website, [www.msichicago.org](http://www.msichicago.org).

<sup>36</sup> The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum has 265,000 square feet of space total. The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum website, [www.ushmm.org](http://www.ushmm.org).



square feet, but recently added an additional 82,000 square feet. The museum has had nearly half a million visitors since it opened in 1997.<sup>37</sup>

A national memorial to victims of the Holocaust was first proposed in 1978 during the Carter administration. A commission was formed, headed by Elie Wiesel, a leader in the Jewish community and an expert on the Holocaust.<sup>38</sup> Wiesel, a survivor of both Auschwitz and Buchenwald concentration camps, was the Chairman of the President's Commission on the Holocaust. He is a distinguished scholar and author, and has taught at the City University of New York, where he was a distinguished professor of Judaic Studies, as well as the first Henry Luce Visiting Scholar in Humanities and Social Thought at Yale University. He currently holds the position of Andrew W. Mellon Professor in the Humanities at Boston University, and has written more than forty books, many centered on the Holocaust.<sup>39</sup> Wiesel accepted the position, with the condition that: "the memorial would have to be educational in nature,

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<sup>37</sup> The Museum of Jewish Heritage-A Living Memorial to the Holocaust, is located in Battery Park, in Manhattan. The museum has a different mission than the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, which has impacted the approach to interpretation. It "goes beyond recounting the horrors of the Holocaust. Its mission is to educate people of all ages and backgrounds about the broad tapestry of Jewish life over the past century - before, during, and after the Holocaust. It transcends religious, ethnic, and denominational differences to raise to a new level of human comprehension the horror and tragedies of the Holocaust, while at the same time celebrating the richness of Jewish culture and the strength of the Jewish people." It is not focused solely on the Holocaust, but also on education about Jewish life over a broader span of time. The Museum of Jewish Heritage-A Living Memorial to the Holocaust website, [www.mjhnyc.org](http://www.mjhnyc.org).

<sup>38</sup> Linenthal, *Preserving Memory: The Struggle to Create America's Holocaust Museum*, 21.

<sup>39</sup> Elie Wiesel website, [www.eliewiesel.org](http://www.eliewiesel.org).

commission members would need to travel to Holocaust sites in Europe, and a national Day of Remembrance for Holocaust victims would have to be part of the commission's responsibility."<sup>40</sup> After the planning council for the museum formed, it still took many years to resolve conflicts before the museum opened. The committee struggled with how the subject matter within the museum would be interpreted, how much disturbing material to show and how to display it. The commission's charge included trips by commission members and the design team to concentration camps in Europe, the collection of artifacts for the museum's permanent exhibition, and the design of the building.

One of the most contentious issues during the planning phase was the inclusion of other groups who were victimized by the Nazis in the museum story. Many on the museum council felt the museum should be a monument only to the six million Jews, while others victims groups wanted to include the five million others who had perished, including Gypsies, homosexuals and political prisoners. In the end, the committee decided to focus on the story of the Jewish community, but included the stories of others targeted for genocide by the Nazi regime [Figure 1].<sup>41</sup> The museum has a specific social agenda, which is reflected in its mission statement:

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<sup>40</sup> Linenthal, *Preserving Memory: The Struggle to Create America's Holocaust Museum*, 22.

<sup>41</sup> Linenthal, *Preserving Memory: The Struggle to Create America's Holocaust Museum*, 240-246.

The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum is America's national institution for the documentation, study, and interpretation of Holocaust history, and serves as this country's memorial to the millions of people murdered during the Holocaust.

The Holocaust was the state-sponsored, systematic persecution and annihilation of European Jewry by Nazi Germany and its collaborators between 1933 and 1945. Jews were the primary victims-six million were murdered; Gypsies, the handicapped and Poles were also targeted for destruction and decimation for racial, ethnic, or national reasons. Millions more, including homosexuals, Jehovah's Witnesses, Soviet prisoners of war and political dissidents, also suffered grievous oppression and death under Nazi tyranny.

The Museum's primary mission is to advance and disseminate knowledge about this unprecedented tragedy; to preserve the memory of those who suffered; and to encourage its visitors to reflect upon the moral and spiritual questions raised by the events of the Holocaust as well as their own responsibilities as citizens of a democracy.

Chartered by a unanimous Act of Congress in 1980 and located adjacent to the National Mall in Washington, DC, the Museum strives to broaden public understanding of the history of the Holocaust through multifaceted programs: exhibitions; research and publication; collecting and preserving material evidence, art and artifacts relating to the Holocaust; annual Holocaust commemorations known as the Days of Remembrance; distribution of educational materials and teacher resources; and a variety of public programming designed to enhance understanding of the Holocaust and related issues, including those of contemporary significance.<sup>42</sup>

The mission statement, with its clear social agenda, greatly impacted the way in which the Holocaust would be interpreted. It would tell the victims' side of the story, with emphasis on the European Jewish community.

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<sup>42</sup> United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Mission Statement, [www.ushmm.org](http://www.ushmm.org)

The commission was initially composed of many Jewish community leaders, but excluded leaders of other victims groups, such as Polish citizens. Some of these groups were excluded because the commission believed they had colluded with the Germans (as was the case with Poland). Others, including Gypsies, eventually played a role in the planning process, and their story came to be seen by the commission as an important inclusion in the exhibition. Alan Mintz addressed this in his book *Popular Culture and the Shaping of Holocaust Memory in America*.

The journey from Carter's announcement in the White House rose garden in 1978 through the Reagan and Bush years into the Clinton presidency when the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum opened its doors in 1993 was a rocky one that threatened to break down at many points along the way. The problems had less to do with traditional Washington politics in a narrow sense than with the new 'identity politics' in which different ethnic groups in America contended for moral authority and prominence.<sup>43</sup>

All of these issues played an important role in the formation of the museum. The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum opened on April 26, 1993, on approximately two acres of federally-donated land adjacent to the Mall in Washington D.C. The museum was the recipient of \$168 million in donated funds, and is operated by the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Council, a federal agency.

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<sup>43</sup> Alan Mintz, *Popular Culture and the Shaping of Holocaust Memory in America*, (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2001), 27.

A total of 7,000 people attended the opening ceremony, and “the 1,125<sup>44</sup> visitors were a cross-section of America, from all over the country, every race and religion. They came, they said, to remember, to learn, to assure that such horrors never occur again.”<sup>45</sup> The building [Figure 2], designed by architect James Ingo Freed, houses permanent and temporary exhibit space, a research library and archives, two theaters, memorial spaces, classrooms, and an interactive computer learning center, all of which serve to support the museum’s mission as a place of contemplation, learning and commemoration. The building is situated next to the Bureau of Printing and Engraving. The original buildings that were designated for the museum on the site were deemed inappropriate and a new building was designed<sup>46</sup>.

The new building, which includes the 50,000 square foot permanent exhibition space, was designed by Freed with specific goals in mind. The Museum is divided into three spaces, a Hall of Witness to tell the story [Figure 3], a Hall of Learning [Figure 4] to educate the public about modern implications of

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<sup>44</sup> 7000 people attended the opening ceremony, whose guests included President and Mrs. Clinton and Vice-President and Mrs. Gore. 1125 people visited the museum on its opening day. Timothy J. McNulty, “Lessons of Holocaust survive the evil,” *Chicago Tribune*, 23 April 1993.

<sup>45</sup> Arthur J. Magida, “A Museum For Americans,” *Baltimore Jewish Times*, 30 April 1993.

<sup>46</sup> The original buildings designated for the museum were existing buildings known as Annexes 1 & 2, originally part of the Auditor’s complex. Attempts to fit memorial space, a library and an archive, administrative offices, and the permanent exhibition into the 50,000 square feet appropriated did not work. The buildings were on the National Register of Historic Places, and had to be delisted before they could be torn down. Linenthal, *Preserving Memory: The Struggle to Create America’s Holocaust Museum*, 61.

the Holocaust, and the Hall of Remembrance [Figure 5] to mourn those who were murdered.<sup>47</sup> Edward Linenthal stated,

Jim Freed didn't want people to look out at the Mall--he wanted the visitor to be immersed in the experience of the Holocaust. He brought large artifacts over to take people out of American soil and to immerse them in the experience of the camps in Europe, to immerse them in the Holocaust museum.<sup>48</sup>

Freed guided the interpretive process by using materials, lighting, and layouts to evoke the feeling of being in a concentration camp within the museum space [Figure 6]. An article in *The New York Times* describes the way in which Freed uses the building to enhance the exhibitions it houses.

In his museum...Mr. Freed has not literally reproduced these forms. Rather, he has absorbed them, tracing their contours as it he could distill their meaning in a ritual of recollection. The result is an architectural vocabulary that is partly symbolic, partly abstract. Images of confinement, observation, atrocity and denial surface and recede within the building's hard industrial forms: expanses of brick wall bolted with steel, floating glass bridges engraved with the names of devastated cities, lead pyramids clustered into sentry-box rooflines.<sup>49</sup>

Freed's use of the building to help shape the interpretive experience was fairly innovative at the time and caused the visitor to make an emotional connection with the space. *The New York Times* article added:

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<sup>47</sup> Linenthal, *Preserving Memory: The Struggle to Create America's Holocaust Museum*, 79.

<sup>48</sup> Edward Linenthal, interview by author, 2 March 2005.

<sup>49</sup> Herbert Muschamp, "Shaping a Monument to Memory," *The New York Times*, 11 April 1993.

While the building cannot be compared to the harrowing exhibitions it contains, it provides far more than a neutral background for the tale that must be told. The building invites interpretation but confounds analysis. Its monumental forms appear to be shaped not by architecture but by history. It is not a building about the past. It is about the historical present.<sup>50</sup>

By using materials to evoke concentration camps, dim lighting, and no clear route for the visitor to follow and few options of where to go, Freed's design seeks to evoke in the visitor the confusion and disorientation that the victims felt as they arrived at the concentration camps. Another reviewer described Freed's design as follows:

Within, Freed's design encloses all the menacing, grim functionalism, the history and the instruments, of bureaucratically enacted genocide: Hannah Arendt's 'banality of evil' done up in the Bauhaus of hell. Freed...has twisted the death factory to a surreal dimension. The roof is a procession of camp watchtowers. The enormous Hall of Witness is a sort of evil atrium with steel-braced brick walls reminiscent of crematoria. A staircase narrows unnaturally toward the top, crowding the visitors together, like a trick of perspective, like receding railroad tracks made abruptly real—the Final Solution machine. Angles are skewed, expectations thwarted and sight lines intolerably torqued. No exit.<sup>51</sup>

The integration of the building and its artifacts results in a powerful interpretive experience. Designing a building to evoke an emotional response in the visitor can also be seen at the Japanese American National Museum in Los Angeles

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<sup>50</sup> Muschamp, "Shaping a Monument to Memory."

<sup>51</sup> Lance Morrow Washington, "Never Forget," *Time*, 26 April 1993.

[Figure 7] and The Museum of Jewish Heritage-A Living Memorial [Figure 8] to the Holocaust in New York. Both architects used materials and shapes that are symbolic to the culture they are representing.<sup>52</sup> Like Freed's connection to the Holocaust, the Japanese American National Museum's architect was a Japanese-American who had a cultural connection to the museum.<sup>53</sup>

In his book *Museum Politics: Power Plays at the Exhibition*, Timothy Luke wrote that museums "possess a power to shape collective values and social

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<sup>52</sup> The Museum of Jewish Heritage-A Living Memorial to the Holocaust is designed to resemble a six-sided Star of David and the six points are also symbolic of the six million Jews who were murdered. Julie Salamon, "Walls that Echo of the Unspeakable," *The New York Times* 7 September 1997.

The interior is also designed much like the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, with three floors that divide up the chapters of history. The themes for the three floors are themes of *Jewish Life a Century Ago*, *The War Against the Jews*, and *Jewish Renewal*. The Museum of Jewish Heritage-A Living Memorial to the Holocaust website, [www.mjhnyc.org](http://www.mjhnyc.org).

<sup>53</sup> The original museum, which opened in 1992, was housed in a former Buddhist Temple in Little Tokyo, and was 15,000 square feet. An 85,000 square foot addition was added in 1999, designed by architect Gyo Obata. Obata narrowly avoided being sent to a Japanese internment camp in 1940. He wanted the museum to educate people about more than just the Japanese American experience. He said, "[The museum] is not just an ethnic museum, but a museum about the American Constitution and the need to defend its ideas. "[The museum] tells how one group of people through ignorance and prejudice were incarcerated (during the World War II relocation of Japanese-Americans). If this can be made visible we could be more aware of our freedoms. The building itself has to be very clear. The space and materials have to give the aura that this is an important institution." The new five-story C-shaped addition includes exhibition space, curatorial and educational offices, meeting rooms, exhibition space and the National Resource Center, where visitors have access to records and documents kept by the museum, go into the new building. The architecture of the new building will evoke traditional Japanese design. "Its strong horizontal and vertical granite forms will evoke elements of Japanese design, and some walls will be made of translucent white onyx, evoking shoji paper screens." Scarlet Cheng, "Another Chapter in a Quiet History: With its new wing opening Saturday, the Japanese American National Museum aims for universal appeal in its expanded offerings," *Los Angeles Times* 21 January 1999, Susan Moffat, "Museum to Link Japanese, U.S. Cultures: Design of expanded facility in Little Tokyo is aimed at outreach to other ethnic groups," *Los Angeles Times* 16 February 1993.



understandings in a decisively important fashion.”<sup>54</sup> The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum uses both permanent and temporary exhibitions to convey its message. The museum assumes no prior knowledge of the Holocaust, but instead aims to tell the story that best conveys its mission. The permanent exhibition, housed in the Hall of Witness, spans three floors and covers the years 1933 to 1945. Visitors enter the exhibition crammed onto elevators that evoke the cattle cars used to transport victims to the concentration camps. Each person is given an ID card with the story of someone who was persecuted by the Nazis [Figure 9]. This was an early use of a now common device to tell larger stories through the use of individuals. On the elevator, visitors are immediately assaulted with images of the concentration camps on a TV monitor. The exhibit is divided into three parts: the Nazi Assault 1933-1939, the Final Solution 1940-1945, and the Last Chapter [Figure 10].

Designer Ralph Appelbaum and his team encountered unique problems in crafting an exhibit dealing with such a horrific event. Author John Dorsey commented on the difficulty of designing the exhibit as follows:

The idea that the story of the Holocaust should be ‘designed’ would smack of artifice, so the hand would have to be concealed as much as possible. The story should seem to tell itself, with an inevitability precluding staginess. Yet it should be done in such a way that not only the facts but also the horror would be

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<sup>54</sup> Timothy W. Luke, *Museum Politics: Power Plays at the Exhibition*, (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 2002), xiii.

communicated. But it couldn't drive people away before the end, or it would defeat its own purpose.<sup>55</sup>

The exhibit, which was not designed for children under 11, is meant to assail the visitor's emotions. There is no rule prohibiting children from the exhibition, but the museum advises against it because of the graphic content. Another reviewer commented that "visitors were stunned and numb after seeing graphically explicit documentation of the worst genocide in history: barracks from Auschwitz, calipers Nazi scientists used to determine whether a German citizen was "Aryan", piles of shoes from Jews killed at a death camp, films of killing after killing after killing [Figures 11-12]."<sup>56</sup> Appelbaum and his design team started the design process in 1988 with the story line, blank floor plans, and a small list of artifacts. Members of his team went to Europe to find artifacts and returned with items including a casting of the original Warsaw ghetto wall, children's toys and paintings, and a Hollerith machine<sup>57</sup>, among other items. Appelbaum also put out a worldwide plea for donations of "documents, letters, diaries, original works of art, articles of clothing, photographs and other objects

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<sup>55</sup> John Dorsey, "Full of information and Full of horror," *Baltimore Sun*, 25 April 1993.

<sup>56</sup> Magida, "A Museum For Americans."

<sup>57</sup> Hollerith machines were data processing devices used during World War II. The Nazi regime employed thousands of people in 1933 to 1939 to record national census data onto Hollerith punch cards. The SS used the Hollerith machines during the war to monitor the large numbers of prisoners shipped in and out of concentration camps. Jewish Virtual Library, [www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org](http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org)

that were created in the camps, in ghettos, or in hiding [Figure 13].”<sup>58</sup> The curatorial staff amassed over 10,000 items, and a collection agreement was made with every Eastern European country except Albania.<sup>59</sup>

These artifacts are central to the exhibit, found while scouring Europe. Ranging from scissors taken from Auschwitz, inmates’ uniforms from concentration camps, and bunk beds from a camp, these objects are grim evidence to help the visitor identify with the story being told [Figure 14].<sup>60</sup> These artifacts are essential to the telling of the story, because in a museum setting, there is no better way to give visitors the experiences of the Holocaust.

Within the permanent exhibit, certain artifacts have a resounding emotional impact. Midway through the exhibit, visitors enter a room filled with shoes confiscated from victims by the Nazis [Figure 15]. Alison Landsberg described the room in her essay, “America, the Holocaust, and the Mass Culture of Memory: Toward a Radical Politics of Empathy.” She wrote,

Halfway through the permanent exhibit, in the middle of the second of three floors, a walkway leads you through the room of shoes. These shoes are not displayed in any strict sense, nor are they sorted into pairs. Rather, they are a chaotic, jumbled sea of shoes. The shoes, to your left and right, number into the thousands. What strikes me, as I stand in the middle of the room, is

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<sup>58</sup> Linenthal, *Preserving Memory: The Struggle to Create America’s Holocaust Museum*, 145.

<sup>59</sup> Linenthal, *Preserving Memory: The Struggle to Create America’s Holocaust Museum*, 147.

<sup>60</sup> Alison Landsberg, “America, the Holocaust, and the Mass Culture of Memory: Toward a Radical Politics of Empathy,” in *New German Critique: Special Issue on Germans and Jews*, ed. Ed Gillespie, (New York: Telos Press, 1997), 78.

that there is a smell. Hanging in the air is the stale smell of old shoes.<sup>61</sup>

These shoes, along with a cattle car used to transport Jews to camps, are some of the most powerful relics in the museum, providing an emotional connection to the victims of the Holocaust [Figure 16]. They connect visitors to the notion of the masses of people who were killed, whether that visitor is a survivor or someone who has come to learn. An article in the *Boston Globe* describes visitors' reactions to these artifacts the day of the opening.

For some, it was the boxcar that transported victims to the concentration camp. For others, it was the replica of the gas chamber. But for many who visited the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum yesterday, the first day it was open to the public, what brought the horror home was something simpler. Like the discarded shoes of concentration camp victims, sandals, boots, slippers, pumps in every size and shape imaginable. Or the name of their family's annihilated village.<sup>62</sup>

The cattle car in particular has proven to be a very powerful interpretive tool, especially for survivors who visit the museum. Landsberg's article went on to state,

Perhaps the most radical eradication of the dichotomy between our space and museum or object space occurs when we pass through a boxcar which was used to transport Jews from the Warsaw ghetto

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<sup>61</sup> Landsberg, "America, the Holocaust, and the Mass Culture of Memory: Toward a Radical Politics of Empathy," 79.

<sup>62</sup> Ana Puga, "A time to remember: As the Holocaust museums opens, varied object bring the horrors home," *Boston Globe*, 27 April 1993.

to Treblinka in 1942-1943. Inside it is dark and small and empty, and yet the thought that 100 bodies filled that very car haunts the space.<sup>63</sup>

By bringing elements that were found at the concentration camps into the museum, exhibit designers attempted to duplicate some of the “sense of place” found at historic sites. The museum designers recognized the need to give visitors an authentic experience. As Tim Cole pointed out,

...it is not that this is the kind of barracks that inmates at Auschwitz inmates lived in. The aim was ‘to create patches of Holocaust space within a building that has removed people from American space and has placed them in the artificial world of exhibition space. Within this artificial space, an authentic ‘Holocaust’ experience would be created through the use of authentic artifacts.<sup>64</sup>

Being at a historic site gives the visitor a context that cannot be replicated in a museum, but these artifacts, along with samples of the actual elements used to transport people to European camps bring pieces of the sites into the museums [Figure 17].

Other museums use artifacts and similar media to convey their message. Both the Japanese American National Museum and The Museum of Jewish Heritage-A Living Memorial to the Holocaust use techniques similar to the

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<sup>63</sup> Landsberg, “America, the Holocaust, and the Mass Culture of Memory: Toward a Radical Politics of Empathy,” 70.

<sup>64</sup> Cole, *Images of the Holocaust: Myth of the ‘Shoah’ business*, 164.

Holocaust Museum.<sup>65</sup> The Simon Wiesenthal Center and adjoining Museum of Tolerance in Los Angeles uses a slightly different approach to interpretation. It is dedicated to

Preserving the memory of the Holocaust by fostering tolerance and understanding through community involvement, educational outreach and social action. The Center confronts important contemporary issues including racism, anti-Semitism, terrorism and genocide and is accredited as an NGO [Non-governmental organizations associated with the United Nations] both at the United Nations and UNESCO [United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization].<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> The Museum of Jewish Heritage uses individual stories, artifacts, photographs, and filmed interviews to tell the story of Jewish culture. The exhibition consists of more than 2,000 historic photographs, 800 historical and cultural artifacts, and 24 original documentary films that have been gathered for nearly two decades. The Museum of Jewish Heritage website is, [www.mjhnyc.org](http://www.mjhnyc.org).

The Japanese American National Museum exhibition in the existing building focuses on the turn-of-the-century immigration experiences of first-generation Issei pioneers, displaying their wicker suitcases, plantation work clothes, boat tickets and labor contracts, the new wing will focus on the quintessentially American experiences of the Nisei." The museum contains 30,000 pieces of art, artifacts, photography, film and video, textiles and ephemera about the Japanese American experience. Cheng, "Another Chapter in a Quiet History: With its new wing opening Saturday, the Japanese American National Museum aims for universal appeal in its expanded offerings," *Los Angeles Times* 21 January 1999, Moffat, "Museum to Link Japanese, U.S. Cultures: Design of expanded facility in Little Tokyo is aimed at outreach to other ethnic groups," *Los Angeles Times* 16 February 1993.

<sup>66</sup> The Center, established in 1977, is headquartered in Los Angeles, and has offices in New York, Toronto, Miami, Jerusalem, Paris and Buenos Aires. The adjacent Museum of Tolerance, which opened in 1993, "contains few original 'objects' as its focus, rather, it uses a series of media images and communications technologies to both represent intolerances, such as racism, and to expose the individual intolerances of visitors themselves. Although strongly associated with the Jewish Holocaust and the monitoring of right-wing political groups, the theme of the museum is intolerance generally, with a view to encouraging participation by users which, in turn, leads to critical reflection upon personal values and behaviors. While not located upon a site of atrocity itself, it uses its combined database and information communication technologies to offer both a global (the starting point for analysis is Turkish persecution of Armenians in 1915) and local (e.g. the 'Rodney King' affair) perspective within a multi-ethnic, multi-cultural city." Lennon and Foley, *Dark Tourism: The Attraction of Death and Disaster*, 21, Simon Wiesenthal Center website, [www.wiesenthal.com](http://www.wiesenthal.com).

The Museum of Tolerance has exhibits that focus on the broader issue of civil rights and genocide throughout the world, while relating these issues back to the Jewish Holocaust.<sup>67</sup>

The towering “Wall of Photographs” that spans three floors of the museum is another distinctive element. Yaffa Eliach, a professor of history at Brooklyn College and a member of the President’s Commission on the Holocaust donated the photographs [Figure 18]. She survived the Holocaust as a child in Lithuania, and the photographs are of the murdered Jews of Ejszyszki, the town where Eliach grew up. Only 29 people in the village survived the German mobile killing squads that wiped out 4,000 Jews in 2 days in 1941. Rather than show the citizens of the town being persecuted, the images show the citizens going about their everyday lives in the decades before the war, and give a human face to the victims of the Holocaust.<sup>68</sup>

One element that became a source of controversy in the planning phase was human hair given to the museum from Auschwitz where mounds of human hair are displayed in one of the barracks [Figure 19]. Many members of the

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<sup>67</sup> Exhibits include “Ain’t You Gotta Right?,” a dramatic 16-screen video wall detailing the struggle for civil rights in America through archival footage and interviews from that period in time, and “In Our Time,” a powerful and gripping film on Bosnia, Rwanda and contemporary hate groups that pinpoints contemporary human rights violations going on throughout the world today. Museum of Tolerance website, [www.museumoftolerance.com](http://www.museumoftolerance.com).

<sup>68</sup> Linenthal, *Preserving Memory: The Struggle to Create America’s Holocaust Museum*, 13, 106.

Council felt that displaying the hair at the museum, away from its “home,” would be ghoulish. Council historian Sybil Milton said of the controversy,

It was human ‘matter’ out of place, registering differently from railcars or shoes. It must be assumed that objects such as hair, bones, and ashes will not be considered as potential accessions...They do not belong in an American setting, where no concentration camps stood and which was not the primary arena for the events now known as the Holocaust”.<sup>69</sup>

The debate over the hair illustrates the power that the survivors and Jewish members of the council carried. When one council member stated that “for all she knew, the hair displayed could be from members of her family,” the hair was kept out of the exhibit out of respect for such feelings.<sup>70</sup> Photographs of the hair at Auschwitz are displayed instead. In this case, the privileged voice of the survivor won out. Raul Hilberg, another Jewish council leader, 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.”<sup>71</sup> The hair, thought it may have proven to be a powerful exhibit, would have shocked and horrified many visitors, already pushed to their emotional limits by the contents of the existing exhibit.

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<sup>69</sup> Linenthal, *Preserving Memory: The Struggle to Create America’s Holocaust Museum*, 213.

<sup>70</sup> Linenthal, *Preserving Memory: The Struggle to Create America’s Holocaust Museum*, 215.

<sup>71</sup> Linenthal, *Preserving Memory: The Struggle to Create America’s Holocaust Museum*, 216.



Additional exhibit features include 5,000 artifacts, including photographs, uniforms, letters, and a Danish fishing boat used to transport Jews to safety in Sweden [Figure 20].<sup>72</sup> Visitors can also use computer stations to look up articles from their local papers to see what was being reported at the time, and there are theaters showing movies about various aspects of the Holocaust and a room featuring first person interviews with survivors. Though the exhibit is not intended for children under the age of 11, particularly graphic material is displayed behind privacy walls to shield any children that might visit.

While the museum is unflinching in its portrayal of the Nazis, exhibits also depict the reaction of other countries to the plight of the Jews, including the lack of response to the genocide by the United States government. Exhibits illustrate the situations in which America turned a blind eye. For example

Americans refused to take in the 'Ship of Fools' in 1939, the liner St. Louis, even though it sailed as close as Havana with its 1,128 refugees fleeing Hitler. The American military in 1944 declined to bomb the death camps or the rail lines leading to them. These decisions (documented in the museum) have a contemporary resonance: bureaucratic cowardice and fecklessness, indifference, appeasement, denial, tribal intolerance and fanaticism, racial hatred.<sup>73</sup>

This interpretive approach is neither neutral nor subtle, and further pushes the social agenda of the museum.

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<sup>72</sup> Lennon and Foley, *Dark Tourism: The Attraction of Death and Disaster*, 151.

<sup>73</sup> Washington, "Never Forget."

The temporary exhibits, the research center and the library also advance the social and educational agenda [Figures 21-23]. Temporary and traveling exhibitions are common tools museums use to advance the story being told.<sup>74</sup> Temporary exhibits include information about genocide today, such as the Darfur region of Sudan. The museum also educates about particular atrocities committed during the war. For example, a current exhibit titled “Deadly Medicine: Creating the Master Race” focuses on the racial cleansing techniques employed by the Nazis. The exhibit includes objects, photographs, documents, and historic film footage from European and American collections and displays them in settings evoking medical and scientific environments. Other temporary exhibits have addressed topics including the paths of American liberators and well-known victims of the Holocaust, including Anne Frank. Such temporary exhibits keep a museum from remaining static, and they add a contemporary element that historic sites often lack. This encourages visitors to make repeat

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<sup>74</sup> The Japanese American National Museum, The Museum of Jewish Heritage, and the Museum of Tolerance all use temporary and traveling exhibits that advance the mission of the museum and educate people who may otherwise not see museum exhibitions. The Japanese American National Museum has temporary exhibitions titled “Japan after Perry: Views of Yokohama and Meiji Japan,” which chronicles the city of Yokohama after Japan opened its ports to America and Europe. The Museum of Jewish Heritage has special exhibitions called “New York - City of Refuge, Stories from the Last 60 Years,” which goes beyond the Jewish story to embrace all underprivileged people in the city of New York, and “Kippur-Three Weeks in October,” to educate the public about the Jewish religious holiday. The Museum of Tolerance has various special exhibitions, including “Faces of Sorrow: Agony in the Former Yugoslavia” and “Stealing Home: How Jackie Robinson Changed America.” Japanese American National Museum website, [www.janm.org](http://www.janm.org), Museum of Jewish Heritage website, [www.mjhnyc.org](http://www.mjhnyc.org), Museum of Tolerance website, [www.museumoftolerance.com](http://www.museumoftolerance.com).

visits, and to connect the historic story being told to events happening in the world today.

One temporary exhibit proved to be so popular that it became permanent- “Daniel’s Place [Figures 24-25].” This exhibit for children, designed with the input of teachers, is intended to tell the story of the Holocaust in terms that children can understand. Daniel is a composite character, compiled from the diaries of many children during the Holocaust. As described by one reviewer,

...children walk through a series of interactive environments that illustrate what happened to Daniel and his family during the Holocaust in Germany, when they were sent from their home in Frankfurt, to the Lodz-ghetto in Poland and finally when they were taken to the concentration camp at Auschwitz...But Daniel is never pictured, nor is he given a last name.<sup>75</sup>

The goal of the exhibit, which is traveling to different cities, in the words of director of exhibitions Susan W. Morgenstein, “...is to engage children and tell the story of the Holocaust in a way that was real, without frightening them.”<sup>76</sup> Other interpretive techniques include exhibits on the museum’s website. Many historic sites and museums today employ a website component to enhance their interpretive program. The Holocaust Museum website has an extensive section on Holocaust education, including a Holocaust encyclopedia

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<sup>75</sup> Suzanne Slesin, “Through a Child’s Eyes, History and Tragedy,” *The New York Times*, 3 June 1993.

<sup>76</sup> Slesin, “Through a Child’s Eyes, History and Tragedy.”

and various other research tools relating to the Holocaust. This tool has proven successful at many historic sites and museums, because it reaches an audience beyond the site and creates educational opportunities beyond what staff can do on location. Both traveling exhibitions and the website are intended to reach an audience that may not be able to visit the museum. Exhibits include “Life in the Shadows: Hidden children and the Holocaust,” “Nazi Persecution of Homosexuals, 1933-1945,” and “Music of the Holocaust.”<sup>77</sup> Many temporary exhibits aim to be relevant to problems in the world today.

The final stop for many in the museum is the Hall of Remembrance. Situated at the end of the permanent exhibition, it is in stark contrast to the rest of the museum space. A *New York Times* article states:

The Hall of Remembrance, designed as a place where visitors can reflect after seeing the permanent exhibition, stands at the far end of abstraction. Housed in a six-sided, partly free-standing structure attached to the main building, the hall occupies a plaza facing Raoul Wallenberg Place.<sup>78</sup>

This space was purposely designed to be drastically different from the rest of the museum. Inscriptions on the walls further guide the visitor experience.

Quotations that were chosen from the Bible include:

Only guard yourself and guard your soul  
carefully, lest you forget the things

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<sup>77</sup> United States Holocaust Memorial Museum website, [www.ushmm.org](http://www.ushmm.org).

<sup>78</sup> Muschamp, “Shaping a Monument to Memory.”

your eyes saw, and lest these things  
depart your heart all the days of your life.  
And you shall make them known to your children  
And to your children's children. (Deuteronomy 4:9)

Another quote deals with the primal murder from Genesis 4:10, "What have you done? Hark, thy brother's blood cries out to me from the ground!"<sup>79</sup> These inscriptions were carefully chosen because they were reflective of the mission to never forget, and they illustrate the lack of choice Holocaust victims had.

The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum and its exhibits have one clear advantage that historic sites do not. A museum is a controlled environment, with everything from the architecture and lighting to the flow of visitors planned in advance. All museums have this advantage, and it directly impacts the visitor experience. This is especially true at the Holocaust Museum, where an entirely new building was designed to fit the theme.

Author Alison Landsberg commented:

While its layout may not sound radically different from that of other museums, some structural differences are worthy of note. First of all, the visitor is at the mercy of the museum and must submit oneself to its pace and its logic. There is no way out short of traversing the entire exhibit; one must wind one's way down all three floors. The architecture and exhibition design conspire to force each visitor to confront images and objects that might, in other museums, be willfully ignored. Secondly, there are only five

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<sup>79</sup> Linenthal, *Preserving Memory: The Struggle to Create America's Holocaust Museum*, 98.

places in the entire exhibit where visitors may sit down. The museum is physically and emotionally exhausting and yet insists that one persevere in the face of discomfort.<sup>80</sup>

Historic sites do not have the same complete control over the visitor experience.

Part of the power of the United States Holocaust Museum is the way in which interpretation is used to touch emotional and intellectual chords in visitors. Connecting with people on both levels helps ensure the mission of the site is successfully conveyed. Museums focusing on these issues are relatively new, and their interpretive programs are often very creative. Part of the key to the United States Holocaust Memorial Museums success is that it has included both commemorative and historical perspectives that are clearly delineated.

Holocaust survivors and historians both played a significant role in decisions about the permanent exhibition. For example, when it became clear that, out of respect for survivors' sensibilities, exhibits had not adequately portrayed Nazis "at work" murdering Jews-that, in effect, the displays seemed to depict Jews being murdered by an invisible evil-the exhibit was altered.<sup>81</sup>

Museums that can educate visitors and cause them to empathize the subject matter are more effective than museums that succeed only at one of those tasks.

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<sup>80</sup> Landsberg, "America, the Holocaust, and the Mass Culture of Memory: Toward a Radical Politics of Empathy," 70.

<sup>81</sup> Edward T. Linenthal, "Can Museums Achieve a Balance between Memory and History?" *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, 10 February 1995.

## Chapter Four: Manzanar National Historic Site

Traditionally, historic preservation has focused on parts of the past that celebrate heroic or distinguished chapters in history. In recent years, however, shameful periods of our history have begun to be recognized at historic sites.<sup>82</sup>

Anthropologist Paul Shackel stated

Since the 1960s, the stories of minority groups have increasingly taken their place in our national story. Many of these minority histories are about struggle, racism, and tragedy. One way to commemorate these stories and make them part of the national memory is to create a moral lesson from these misfortunes. Many Americans continue to struggle with the commemoration of minority histories, while minority groups see their commemoration as vital since it allows them to claim a part of the public memory.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> The Women's Rights National Historical Park in Seneca Falls, New York. On July 19, 1848, Elizabeth Cady Stanton led the first Women's Rights Convention in Seneca Falls, New York. The park consists of four major historical properties, including the Wesleyan Chapel, site of the convention, and a state of the art Visitor Center. Author Barbara Melosh notes "the Women's Rights National Historic Site is an important new departure, a significant commitment of public fund's to women's history....At the visitors' center, a good exhibit and slide show narrate the history of the 1848 Seneca Falls convention, where women excluded from public proceedings of the antislavery movement met to consider their conditions as women and to articulate the demands of a new women's-rights movement. A tour includes the restored Elizabeth Cady-Stanton house and Wesleyan Chapel, where the convention was held." Melosh, "Speaking of Women: Museums' Representations of Women's History," 196.

The Lower East Side Tenement Museum, located at 97 Orchard Street in New York City was created to tell the stories of nineteenth- and twentieth-century immigrants. The museum has 20 apartments that have been abandoned since 1935 when stricter housing codes prompted the closing of the building. The museum opened in 1988, and presents the stories of former inhabitants. The museum staff plans to leave two apartments in a state of ruin and restore two apartments on each floor. They left the entry hall and the hallways on each floor as they found them, since there was insufficient physical evidence of the original fabric. Lower East Side Tenement Museum, *A Tenement Story: The History of 97 Orchard Street and the Lower East Side Tenement Museum* (New York: Lower East Side Tenement Museum, 1999), 9, 15.

<sup>83</sup> Shackel, *Memory in Black and White: Race, Commemoration, and the Post-Bellum Landscape*, 199.

The previous chapter examined the issue of interpreting a profound event in the confined space of a museum. This chapter examines the interpretive techniques needed when the site of an event exists but lacks virtually any original historic fabric.

Manzanar National Historic Site was one of ten American Internment Camps holding a total of 120,000 Japanese-Americans during World War II. The majority of these people were American citizens who were forcibly removed from their homes following the attack on Pearl Harbor. Manzanar, located in eastern California at the base of the Sierra Nevada Mountains, was the first camp built and housed more than 10,000 Japanese-Americans at its peak in 1942, nearly two thirds of whom were American citizens.<sup>84</sup> After the last internee left the camp in 1945, nearly all of the buildings were destroyed or shipped away to be used somewhere else [Figure 26].<sup>85</sup> The few remaining structures steadily deteriorated in the nearly 50 years the site sat vacant. In 1972, Manzanar was

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<sup>84</sup> The first 82 internees arrived March 21, 1942. By April up to 1,000 Japanese-Americans were arriving each day and by mid-July the camp population had reached 10,000 people, a number that remained steady until the end of the war. "By the end of 1944 about 6,000 people remained, and those, for the most part, were the aging and the young. Whoever had prospects on the outside, and the energy to go, was leaving, relocating, or entering military service. No one could blame them. To most of the Nisei, anything looked better than remaining in camp. For many of their parents, just the opposite was true." Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston and James D. Houston, *Farewell to Manzanar* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1973), 104, Jeffrey F. Burton, Mary M. Farrell, Florence B. Lord, and Richard W. Lord, *Confinement and Ethnicity: An Overview of World War II Japanese American Relocation Sites* (National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior, 1999), 34.

<sup>85</sup> One of the mess halls was shipped to nearby Bishop Airport and is going to be returned to Manzanar.



officially recognized for its historic value, when the site became a California Registered Historic Landmark. The camp was designated a National Historic Landmark in 1985, although former prisoners were not offered a formal apology until 1988, when President Ronald Reagan signed into law the Civil Rights Act, which authorized a \$1.25 billion settlement to surviving internees or their heirs.<sup>86</sup> The camp was made a National Historic Site in 1992<sup>87</sup> after the National Park Service did an assessment of all ten war relocation centers and determined Manzanar to be “the best preserved and have the greatest potential as a national park unit.”<sup>88</sup> Despite the wholesale demolition after 1945, Manzanar was determined to be the best preserved because it still contains remnants of the camp, including paths and some streets, building foundations, and some garden features [Figure 27]. It is intended to be representative of all the War Relocation Centers, though Minidoka Internment National Monument in Idaho was created in 2001.

Executive Order 9066, signed by President Franklin D. Roosevelt on February 19, 1942, created the “War Relocation Centers.” This act authorized the Secretary of War to “exclude citizens and aliens from designated areas along the

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<sup>86</sup> Janice L. Dubel, “Remembering a Japanese-American Concentration Camp at Manzanar National Historic Site,” in *Myth, Memory, and the Making of the American Landscape*, ed. Paul A. Shackel (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2001), 91

<sup>87</sup> Manzanar National Historic Site under Public Law (P.L.) 102-248.

<sup>88</sup> National Park Service, *Manzanar National Historic Site General Management Plan and Environmental Impact Study*, August 1996.

Pacific Coast in order to provide security against sabotage and espionage.”<sup>89</sup>

Japanese-Americans were given 48 hours to pack what they could bring with them in two suitcases and report to a central location to be shipped to camps located in remote spots throughout the west. They were first sent on trains, some with blacked-out windows and patrolled by armed guards, to interim assembly camps, which were located at racetracks and fairgrounds, where they lived in horse stalls until their transfer to the permanent internment camps.<sup>90</sup> Within 3 weeks, the first internees had begun to arrive at Manzanar, to occupy the hastily built barracks made of wood and tarpaper.

Manzanar War Relocation Center was situated on 6,000 acres of land in the Owens Valley, approximately 230 miles east of Los Angeles. The 500-acre housing section was surrounded by eight guard towers with searchlights and barbed-wire fences patrolled by military police [Figure 28]. The camp was intended to be entirely self-sustaining, and thus included, outside the housing area , a reservoir, sewage treatment plant and agricultural fields which the internees farmed. The 504 barracks were arranged into 34 blocks, with each block generally consisting of 14 barracks, men’s and women’s public toilets and showers to be shared by the entire block, a laundry room and a mess hall. Each

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<sup>89</sup> Harlan Unrau, *The Evacuation and Relocation of Persons of Japanese Ancestry During World War II: A Historical Study of the Manzanar War Relocation Center* (Denver: U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 1996), 1:xxv.

<sup>90</sup> Dubel, “Remembering a Japanese-American Concentration Camp at Manzanar National Historic Site,” 88-89.

of the barracks was divided into 4 rooms, with eight individuals occupying a 20-by-25 foot room. The rooms were furnished with an oil stove, a single hanging light bulb, cots, blankets, and mattresses filled with straw [Figure 29].<sup>91</sup>

The camp also included a 250-bed hospital, Buddhist Temple, Catholic Church, cemetery, schools, police stations, barbershop, beauty parlor, general store, bank, auditorium, orphanage, and a newspaper known as the *Manzanar Free Press*. Internees built parks and gardens, an outdoor theater and recreational facilities including a nine-hole golf course [Figure 30]."<sup>92</sup>

Internees, most of whom came from California and Washington, were unprepared for the harsh desert conditions. Summer temperatures often approached 110°F, while the winters were frequently below freezing.

Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston's memoir of her years spent at Manzanar as a child, *Farewell to Manzanar*, described the living conditions detainees encountered when they first arrived at the camp:

After dinner we were taken to Block 16, a cluster of fifteen barracks that had just been finished a day or so earlier-although finished was hardly the word for it. The shacks were built of one thickness of pine planking covered with tarpaper. They sat on concrete footings, with about two feet of open space between the floorboards and the ground. Gaps showed between the planks and as the weeks passed and the green wood dried out, the gaps widened. Knotholes gaped in the uncovered floor. Each barracks

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<sup>91</sup> Manzanar National Historic Site brochure, 2003.

<sup>92</sup> Duane Noriyuki, "Stories in the Dust; Manzanar is a place of long ago many remember today. But preserving memories is no easy task," *Los Angeles Times*, 31 July 2002.

was divided into six units, sixteen by twenty feet, about the size of a living room, with one bare bulb hanging from the ceiling and an oil stove for heat. We were assigned two of these for the twelve people in our family group....We were issued steel army cots, two brown army blankets each, and some mattress covers, which my brothers stuffed with straw. It was bitter cold when we arrived, and the wind did not abate. All they had to use for room dividers were those army blankets, two of which were barely enough to keep one person warm... the entire situation there, especially in the beginning-the packed sleeping quarters, the communal mess halls, the open toilets-all this was an open insult to that other, private self, a slap in the face you were powerless to challenge.<sup>93</sup>

In addition to the humiliation and powerlessness internees felt, they also lost millions of dollars and most of their property as a result of the internment.<sup>94</sup>

Because Japanese-Americans were given little notice of the evacuation, some abandoned their property, and many hurriedly sold possessions at great losses.

Only a few were able to find non-Japanese American friends to care for their houses and businesses during the war. When many returned home after the war, the possessions they had stored were missing. While at the camps, internees were paid between \$ 12.00 and \$19.00 per month, depending on their skill level.<sup>95</sup> For most, their incomes while interned were insufficient to make payments on houses, car, and boats, which were then repossessed.

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<sup>93</sup> Houston and Houston, *Farewell to Manzanar*, 18-19, 29.

<sup>94</sup> Arthur G. Neal, *National Trauma and Collective Memory: Major Events in the American Century* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, Inc., 1998), 68.

<sup>95</sup> Manzanar National Historic Site brochure, 2003.

A number of stakeholders were involved in the planning of Manzanar, ranging from the Japanese-Americans to civil rights groups and the local community. Japanese-Americans who were interned were especially sought for their input on how the site should be interpreted. The National Park Service encountered intense animosity about development of the site from many different factions, including local residents and veterans groups; the first superintendent, Ross Hopkins, received death threats early in the development of the site.<sup>96</sup> According to the National Park Service, a concerted effort was made to listen to all sides involved so as to tell the complete story.

Opinions about the role of the NPS in managing and interpreting the site range from suggestions that the NPS needs to serve as the social conscience of the nation to cautions that the NPS not become a 'groveling sycophant' to the Japanese-American community. To address the issue, the park sought diverse forums to engage the public in the management of the site.<sup>97</sup>

This was different than the commission involved at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, which took a far more exclusionary approach.

One of the first and most contentious issues the National Park Service faced was the naming of the property. It has been variously called a war

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<sup>96</sup> Todd S. Purdum, "U.S. Starts to Dust Off a Dark Spot in History for All to See," *New York Times*, 20 June 1998.

<sup>97</sup> Frank Hays, "The National Park Service: Groveling Sycophant or Social Conscience: Telling the Story of Mountains, Valley, and Barbed Wire at Manzanar Historic Site," *The Public Historian: A Journal of Public History*, ed. Ann Marie Plane, (Santa Barbara, CA: University of California Press, 2003), 73.

relocation center, an internment camp, and a concentration camp. This last term caused an enormous amount of controversy.

The National Park Service declared that 'concentration camp,' the term most commonly used by Nikkei organizations such as JACL, the Manzanar Committee, and the Japanese-American National Museum, was unacceptable. In the words of then NPS Western Regional Director Stanley T. Albright, 'The term carries connotations of gas chambers for the extermination of people. The term clearly does not apply to the relocation camps in which Americans of Japanese ancestry were interned.'<sup>98</sup>

The Japanese-American community did understand that the term had taken on new meanings since World War II, conceding that "the use of the words 'concentration camps' may undermine the preservation of the unique memories of the Holocaust. Nisei<sup>99</sup> institutions have acknowledged this potential tension."<sup>100</sup> The term "concentration camp" is still on a plaque at the entrance to

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<sup>98</sup>JACL: Japanese American Citizens League, the nation's oldest and largest Asian American civil rights organization, was founded in 1929 to address issues of discrimination targeted specifically at persons of Japanese ancestry residing in the United States. Japanese American Citizens League website, [www.jacl.org](http://www.jacl.org), Milan Simonich, "Japanese-Americans Awaiting Memorial to Internment Camps," *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, 15 December, 1996.

<sup>99</sup> Issei were the first generation of Japanese to immigrate to America. The Issei were born in Japan. Most of them immigrated to the United States between 1890 and 1915. Nisei were the second generation; the children of the Issei. American citizens by birth, almost all Nisei were born before the Second World War. Sansei were the third generation of Americans with Japanese ancestry, most of them born during or after the Second World War. (Jeanne Watatsuki Houston, *Farewell to Manzanar: A True Story of the Japanese American experience during and after the World War Internment*, (New York: Bantam, 1974), xxii.)

<sup>100</sup> Robert T. Hayashi, "Transfigured Patterns: Contesting Memories at the Manzanar National Historic Site," *The Public Historian, A Journal of Public History*, ed. Ann Marie Plane, (Santa Barbara, CA: University of California Press, 2003), 58.

the camp although the Park Service has opted to use the term “war relocation center” in its publications [Figure 31]. The text on the plaque reads

In the early part of World War II, 110,000 persons of Japanese ancestry were interned in relocation centers by Executive Order No. 9066, issued on February 19, 1942. Manzanar, the first of ten such concentration camps, was bounded by barbed wire and guard towers, confining 10,000 persons, the majority being American citizens. May the injustices and humiliation suffered here as a result of hysteria, racism and economic exploitation never emerge again.

Site managers have also addressed the issue on the opening panel in the interpretive exhibit, where all terms for the camp are listed [Figure 32].

Other concerns facing the development of the site as a National Historic Site included funding and a lack of artifacts to interpret. When the camp was initially designated a National Historic Site in 1992, it lacked the funding needed for restoration. In 2000, four million dollars was allocated by the Clinton administration for the preservation of Japanese Internment internment sites, the majority going to Manzanar.<sup>101</sup> This is in stark contrast to the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, which was built using private donations although the museum is a public/private partnership, run by a commission created by a federal agency.

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<sup>101</sup> Hayashi, “Transfigured Patterns: Contesting Memories at the Manzanar National Historic Site,” 70.

The lack of physical fabric has presented an interpretive challenge for the National Park Service. Manzanar is a large historic site; the federal government originally leased 6,200 acres from the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power to create the internment camp, and it still owns the land. Today, the historic site includes only the 500-acre housing section of the original 6,200 acres, within which an interpretive center is located. The National Park Service catalogued what remains at Manzanar in its report *Confinement and Ethnicity: An Overview of World War II Japanese American Relocation Sites*

Only three of the over 800 buildings originally at the relocation center remain. However, there is abundant evidence of relocation center features, including walls, foundations, sidewalks, steps, manholes, sewer and water lines, landscaping features, ditches, and trash concentrations. Much of the relocation center road grid remains, but many of the roads in the western third are buried by alluvium or overgrown with vegetation. Other roads are cut by gullies and major portions of two roads (1<sup>st</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> Streets) have been destroyed by gully erosion. By far the most prevalent artifact types at the site are window and bottle glass fragments and wire nails. However, a tremendous variety of artifacts dating to the relocation center use are scattered across the central area.<sup>102</sup>

The Japanese-American community felt it very important to rebuild some of the buildings that had been here, “to ensure that visitors gain a sense of history and place.”<sup>103</sup> Though the National Park Service generally frowns on

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<sup>102</sup> Burton et al, *Confinement and Ethnicity*, chapter 8.

<sup>103</sup> Hays, “The National Park Service: Groveling Sycophant or Social Conscience: Telling the Story of Mountains, Valley, and Barbed Wire at Manzanar Historic Site,” 75.



reconstruction, believing it “represents the alternative with the least historic authenticity and is defined as ‘the depiction of one period in history using new materials based on archaeology and other research findings’,”<sup>104</sup> the Director of the Park Service, whose approval of reconstruction was in fact, required, agreed that certain elements should be built because they were essential to the telling of the story at Manzanar. The Park Service’s standards on reconstruction as stated in its 2001 Management Policies are:

No matter how well conceived or executed, reconstructions are contemporary interpretations of the past rather than authentic survivals from it. The National Park Service will not reconstruct a missing structure unless [four criteria are met]. These criteria are as follows: (1) there is no alternative that would accomplish the park’s interpretive mission, (2) there is sufficient data to enable an accurate reconstruction, (3) the reconstruction occurs on the original location, and (4) the NPS director approves the reconstruction.<sup>105</sup>

In the case of Manzanar, since very little fabric exists, it was determined in the planning process to be important to reconstruct certain elements so as to accurately portray the story of Japanese-American internment. The interpretive mission at Manzanar is:

Manzanar National Historic Site preserves the stories and resources of Manzanar for this and future generations. We will facilitate a

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<sup>104</sup> Hays, “The National Park Service: Groveling Sycophant or Social Conscience: Telling the Story of Mountains, Valley, and Barbed Wire at Manzanar Historic Site,” 75.

<sup>105</sup> Hays, “The National Park Service: Groveling Sycophant or Social Conscience: Telling the Story of Mountains, Valley, and Barbed Wire at Manzanar Historic Site,” 75-76.

park experience that weaves the stories of the various occupations of Manzanar faithfully, completely, and accurately. Manzanar National Historic Site will provide leadership for the protection and interpretation of associated sites. From this foundation, the park will stimulate and provoke a greater understanding of, and dialogue on civil rights, democracy, and freedom.<sup>106</sup>

Thus, the sentry posts at the camp entrance have been reconstructed, with the associated sign post [Figures 33-34]. The barbed wire fence surrounding the camp was also reconstructed, and reconstruction of the housing barracks is under way.<sup>107</sup> In the future, a latrine building and a guard tower will also be reconstructed.<sup>108</sup>

One problem interpreters encounter is that visitors see the beauty of the site and cannot understand why people minded being interned there.

Superintendent Frank Hays stated, “When visitors arrive at Manzanar today, they can be so inspired by the location’s beauty that they miss the important

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<sup>106</sup> Frank Hays, Superintendent, Manzanar National Historic Site, interview by author, 4 March 2005.

<sup>107</sup> The staff at the Lower East Side Tenement Museum in New York City faced a similar dilemma about reconstruction. The museum, a historic tenement structure, was in ruins when it was acquired to be used as a museum. The staff had to decide whether to leave the structure in its current state or restore the apartments to their original state. They decided to restore some apartments and leave others as they were found. The museum tells the stories of families throughout the history of the apartment complex. The Gumpertz family, immigrants from Germany, lived in the building in 1878; the Rogarshevsky family, Eastern European Jews, occupied their apartment in 1910; the Confinos, Sephardic Jews from Turkey lived there between 1913 and 1916; the Baldizzi family from Sicily, who lived in the tenement from the late 1920s until 1935 when the building closed, and the Levine family, who lived in the building at the turn of the twentieth century and operated a garment factory in their home. Site visit by author, July 2004.

<sup>108</sup> Hays, interview.

story told there.”<sup>109</sup> Site managers hope that reconstructing essential elements of the camp will help illustrate the conditions under which people lived. Because of the size of the original camp, visitors may still have trouble understanding the full scope of the camp with the few structures being reconstructed, though the Park Service has no intention to rebuild a significant portion of the camp.

Site managers felt that in addition to the reconstruction of certain buildings, an interpretive center was imperative to the telling of the story [Figure 35]. They worked with the exhibit planning firm Krister Olmon Design and at the National Park Service’s interpretive design center at Harper’s Ferry. The designers, working with the staff at Manzanar, felt that it was imperative to tell both the story of the Japanese interment, and the layers of history at the site. This aspect of the story was very important to the local community stakeholders because it illustrates a pattern of displacement that has occurred at the site. As a local resident stated:

...we believe the site should be interpreted in its entirety. Nobody has mentioned that Manzanar means ‘apple orchards’. There are apple orchards. They were a part of the county’s farming industry years and years ago, and it is a Native American site. So we would like to see that the site is interpreted in its entirety with Native Americans, the Japanese that were interned there, and the farming interests of the county.<sup>110</sup>

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<sup>109</sup> Hays, “The National Park Service: Groveling Sycophant or Social Conscience: Telling the Story of Mountains, Valley, and Barbed Wire at Manzanar Historic Site,” 74-75.

<sup>110</sup> Inyo County Assistant County Administrator Paul Morrison at a subcommittee hearing, in Robert T. Hayashi, “Transfigured Patterns: Contesting Memories at the Manzanar National Historic Site,” 53.

Though such insights, relocation emerged as an overriding theme at the interpretive center. Native American Paiute tribes originally settled the land nearly 10,000 years ago before they were forced off by white settlers. Manzanar then developed as an agricultural settlement, where farmers grew various products in the valley. The Los Angeles department of Water and Power uprooted these settlers when it began acquiring water rights in the valley for the city of Los Angeles in the early twentieth century. Finally, the abandoned settlement was leased to the government as a center to hold Japanese-Americans during World War II.<sup>111</sup> Though the story of the Japanese internment is clearly the story given the most weight, interpretive panels explain the other uses of the site and Park Service brochures also mention the other displaced groups [Figure 36].

The interpretive center is housed in the auditorium, the only remaining building from the internment camp. It was extensively renovated when the Park Service acquired the site and opened in April, 2004, and has met with near universal success. In 2004 site managers conducted a visitor survey, the results of which have not come back, but feedback appears to be positive.<sup>112</sup> The interpretive center uses objects to tell the story of Japanese-American internment,

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<sup>111</sup> Manzanar National Historic Site brochure, 2003.

<sup>112</sup> Hays, interview.

including reconstructed elements of the camp in the building (while the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum generally used originals, Manzanar relies on some reproductions), including a barracks with cots, blankets, and furniture, and a reconstructed watchtower. There is also a reconstructed barbed-wire fence and a scale model of the camp as it looked as a war relocation center [Figure 37]. The exhibit includes panels about the racism Japanese-Americans encountered before, during and after the war, together with pictures and artifacts. As is the case with the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum's approach to the history of Jewish people, an effort is made to tell a more complete story about the Japanese-American community, beyond the period of their internment. This was particularly important to stakeholders of Japanese-American descent.

The exhibit uses panels, photographs, and artifacts to tell the story of Manzanar. Photographs illustrate the lives people led while there, including working, schooling, and recreational activities such as dances. Internees were not allowed to take photographs while at the camp, though some internees smuggled cameras in, and photographers who visited, including Ansel Adams, were not permitted to show any negative aspect, such as guard towers and barbed wire, so photographs of these aspects of camp life are scarce.<sup>113</sup> This also led to a belief among some people that internees were not held there against their

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<sup>113</sup> Martin Forstenzer, "Bitter Feelings Still Run Deep at Camp," *Los Angeles Times* 4 August 1996.

will, as a letter to the local history museum in nearby Independence, California proves. The writer demanded that Manzanar be portrayed not as a prison camp, but as a guest housing center for the Japanese-Americans.<sup>114</sup>

The interpretive center also includes a large panel with the names of all the people interned at Manzanar, and flags from all ten war relocation centers [Figures 38-39]. There are also panels describing the Japanese-Americans who served in World War II, and artifacts including their uniforms [Figure 40]. The interpretive center contains individualized exhibits, describing particular detainees, to help visitors connect with the site on a more personal level, a technique also used by the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. The apology and redress issued to Japanese-Americans are covered in an exhibit panel. The interpretive center also features a movie about the internment. The exhibit also includes information about other civil rights issues, from the struggles of African Americans in the 1950s to the aftermath of September 11, 2001, which ties the struggle of Japanese-Americans to the fight for equal rights of other minority groups [Figure 41].

The interpretive center, while effective in telling the story of the Japanese-American internment is essentially the only thing for visitors to see because the site has little remaining physical fabric. Park Superintendent Frank Hays stated

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<sup>114</sup> Robert A. Jones, "Whitewashing Manzanar," *Los Angeles Times*, 10 April 1996.

The first challenge at Manzanar is to provide an adequate context within which the public can be engaged in a discussion of social issues related to the internment of Japanese-Americans. The Manzanar National Historic Site is characterized by an abundance of sagebrush and dust; only a few remnants of the camp are visible. Without physical reminders, it is difficult to explain to visitors that this was indeed an internment camp.<sup>115</sup>

Park staff acknowledged the problem, and understand that until pieces of the camp are reconstructed, they must rely on the interpretive center to tell the story.

A self-guided driving tour throughout the camp includes wayside exhibits showing where various buildings once stood. The visitor is free to walk around, and in some places remnants of the camp can still be seen. National Park Service historian Jerry L. Rogers noted: "You can very clearly see at Manzanar the outline of the camp within which people were interned. The street pattern is clear. There are remnants-foundations, sidewalks, and so forth-of buildings that once stood there."<sup>116</sup> A pond, steps, and the cemetery, with six remaining graves, still exist. The interpretive experience will be much more effective when all that is planned is in place. Park staff give guided tours to school groups, along with programs and a curriculum they have developed. The driving tour does help to give the visitor a sense of the size of Manzanar.

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<sup>115</sup> Hays, "The National Park Service: Groveling Sycophant or Social Conscience: Telling the Story of Mountains, Valley, and Barbed Wire at Manzanar Historic Site," 74.

<sup>116</sup> Hayashi, "Transfigured Patterns: Contesting Memories at the Manzanar National Historic Site," 58.

However, the beauty of the site is something park staff will always have to contend with. When standing at the base of Mount Whitney, it is hard to imagine why this place grieved so many people.

Creating a historic site that highlights a shameful chapter in America's past is something relatively new to the National Park Service. In 1935, the chief historian for the National Park Service described the organization's interpretive mission as "to recreate for the average citizen something of the color, pageantry, and the dignity of our national past."<sup>117</sup> The role that the Park Service plays has changed considerably in the past 70 years. Recently authorized National Park sites such as the Trail of Tears National Historic Trail, authorized in 1987, which runs through Alabama, Arkansas, Georgia, Illinois, Kentucky, Missouri, North Carolina, Oklahoma, and Tennessee; the Andersonville National Historic Site in Andersonville, authorized in 1970, Georgia; and the Brown v Board of Education National Historic Site, in Topeka, Kansas, authorized in 1992, all commemorate shameful periods in American history. The Park Service has also re-evaluated stories told at older sites, in particular accounts of slavery at places such as Independence National Historic Site. In interpreting Manzanar National Historic Site, the Park Service commemorates one of America's most shameful periods, the complete suspension of the civil liberties of American citizens and their

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<sup>117</sup> Michael Kammen, *Mystic Chords of Memory: The Transformation of Tradition in American Culture*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1991), 465.



families who were singled out solely because of their race. Addressing the National Park Service's commemoration of sites of shame, Professor Robin Winks of Yale University noted:

With the recent addition of Manzanar National Historic Site to the National Park System, the public has been introduced more dramatically than ever before to a fundamental debate. Should the national parks commemorate and protect only places and events in which we take pride, or should the parks strive to mark events and places that many agree represent shameful episodes in our national experience...?

Each of the 367 units of the National Park System...has a unique mission, and each is to be interpreted so that visitors may comprehend the mission and attain a better understanding of American heritage...Education is best done with examples. These examples must include that which we regret, that which is to be avoided, as well as that for which we strive...If this is correct, we cannot omit the negative lessons of history.<sup>118</sup>

With the creation of Manzanar, the National Park Service continues to fulfill its mission of civic engagement. The Park Service seeks to engage the public in its mission through "an institutional commitment to actively involve communities in our mission through the public planning process, in interpretive and educational programming, and directly in preserving significant resources."<sup>119</sup> The staff at Manzanar have involved the public in every part of the planning process, and continue to carry out civic engagement through a number

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<sup>118</sup> Robin Winks, "Sites of Shame," *National Parks* 68 (March/April 1994): 22.

<sup>119</sup> Director's Order 75A: Civic Engagement and Public Involvement, National Park Service, 17 November 1993.

of public partnerships. They work with the Japanese-American National Museum in Los Angeles, the Eastern California Museum in Independence, California, and the “Friends of Manzanar,” a non-profit organization raising funds for a capital campaign for the site. The staff also works with a group of inner-city students from Los Angeles who visit the park every 6 weeks to help clean the site. According to Frank Hays, this has helped these students, many of whom are minorities, connect with a range of civil rights issues.<sup>120</sup> This is an important aspect of the interpretation of the site, because “Interpretation cannot exist without a strong link to the publics it serves.”<sup>121</sup> The staff is engaging the public and encouraging them to make emotional connections to the story being told.

Though Manzanar has far fewer visitors than the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, both sites share similar visitor statistics; their visitors come from a broad range of backgrounds and are not restricted to people who have a direct connection to the story being told. The lower attendance numbers can be attributed in part to the lack of access to the site, as opposed to the prominent location just off the Mall in Washington D.C. Manzanar was purposely located in a remote area, and it takes just over 3 hours to reach the site from Los Angeles,

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<sup>120</sup> Hays, interview.

<sup>121</sup> Donald R. Field, “A New Mandate for Interpretation,” in *Interpretive Views: Opinions on Evaluating Interpretation in the National Park Service*, ed Gary E. Machlis (Washington D.C.: National Parks and Conservation Association, 1986), 115.

so visitors must go out of their way to get there. Manzanar, averaged 57,378 visitors in 2003<sup>122</sup>; they include school groups, people interested in the Japanese-American story, individuals just like National Parks, and people who are simply passing by.<sup>123</sup>

Interestingly, visitors stay far longer than the park staff originally anticipated. On average, people spend 45 minutes to one hour in the interpretive center alone. This phenomenon, which was also seen at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (visitors stayed an average of 3 hours), raises an interesting question. What is it about these sites that draws people in? Perhaps it is the subject matter and the individual stories told that creates such interest. The interpretation of human and civil rights struggles is relatively new, and the emotional content of the stories may allow people to connect in a very different way than they do to the stories of great men or heroic battles. David Uzzell has argued that "Interpretation is no more immune from the contradictions inherent in public attitudes and values than any other area of contemporary society. Emotion plays an important part in coloring our attitudes and actions and is

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<sup>122</sup> In contrast, Women's Rights National Historical Park receives seventeen thousand visitors a year, the usual attendance for parks in locations like Seneca Falls. Melosh, "Speaking of Women: Museums' Representations of Women's History," 197.

<sup>123</sup> Hays, interview.

central to the very human qualities of affection, conscience, humanity and compassion.”<sup>124</sup>

The impact of the Manzanar story has become more relevant in the wake of the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks in America. The national mood following the 2001 attacks echoed that following Pearl Harbor. More publicity was given to Manzanar and the possible loss of civil liberties for Arab Americans was compared to the plight of Japanese-Americans in the 1940’s. An article in the New York Times highlighted this issue.

The Bush administration’s proposals for increased law enforcement powers in fighting terrorism are provoking a debate about whether American courts would repeat the kinds of rulings that restricted the civil rights of Japanese-Americans during World War II....Among the most controversial of the administration’s proposals are several that would give immigrants who are detained in the terror investigation limited opportunities to get their cases heard in court....Though a blanket detention of Arab-Americans now appears politically implausible, some legal experts say the reasoning of the 1942 ruling could permit limits on civil liberties of Arab immigrants and even some Americans of Arab descent.<sup>125</sup>

Interpretation at Manzanar is made more successful because people can link the treatment of Japanese-Americans directly to something that is taking place today. This technique is also used at the Holocaust Museum when linking the genocide of European Jews to genocides that are taking place in other countries today.

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<sup>124</sup> Uzzell, “Interpreting our heritage: a theoretical interpretation,” 13.

<sup>125</sup> William Glaberson, “War on Terrorism Stirs Memory of Internment,” New York Times, 24 September 2001.

Like the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, the National Park Service has a website at Manzanar that includes an educational component, as well as an online “exhibit” showing images from the site. The park staff would like to improve on the educational component.

The staff at Manzanar has provided an interpretive experience that tells the complete story of Manzanar through a variety of techniques. Staff members felt that the story would not be complete without the addition of the interpretive center, just as staff at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum felt it necessary to include as many historic site elements (a recasting of the Warsaw ghetto wall, the railcar, the bunk from Auschwitz) as possible to transport people away from the Mall and into the camps of Europe. The trend of historic sites and museums to incorporate elements from each environment is increasing, and is often most effective to give visitors elements from both, as well as educational components, such as research facilities and libraries. Using different interpretive techniques can allow people from different backgrounds to ascribe their own meaning to the site, as Author Paul Shackel describes:

Memories can be public as well as private, and they serve to legitimize the past and the present. Public history exhibits, monuments, statues, artifacts, national historic parks, commemorations, and celebrations can foster myths that create a common history, allowing for divergent groups to find a common bond.<sup>126</sup>

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<sup>126</sup> Shackel, *Memory in Black and White*, 179.

By crafting environments where people create multiple paths towards their own connections to the story, the impact on visitors will be more lasting and profound.

## Conclusion

Historic sites and museums, particularly those memorializing less celebrated chapters in history, use a variety of techniques to convey their message. Increasingly these sites and institutions are “borrowing” interpretive elements from each other to give the visitor the most complete experience. Both historic sites and museums serve to educate people about important events in history, and they have gradually acknowledged the stories of underprivileged or minority groups. Psychologist David Uzzell noted, “the museum and interpretive center can be seen as a place where people come to understand themselves. If museums and other heritage sites are to be socially meaningful then they will be about the visitor.”<sup>127</sup> The public is clearly drawn to sites that memorialize these parts of our history. These stories connect with people on a level not often seen at typical historic sites.

Museums must tell a story relying mainly on artifacts, but many use large scale artifacts and even created environments for the visitor that resembles the site itself. Similarly, the same historic sites are increasingly relying on interpretive centers to give the visitor a better sense of the history that unfolded there. Both museums and historic sites serve to further public knowledge about

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<sup>127</sup> Uzzell, *“Interpreting our heritage: a theoretical interpretation,”* 16.

the story being interpreted and to engage the visitor on an intellectual and emotional level. Author George B. Robinson has stated “If one of the principal objectives of interpretation is the creation of perpetuation of environmentally sound cultural norms, and, if cultural norms are the collective expression of common values, then it can be said that interpretation is a process of values of clarification. It is concerned with making words and actions consistent with beliefs.”<sup>128</sup> A variety of interpretive techniques are used to inspire thought in the visitor, including artifacts, photographs, and first person accounts.

A museum is a controlled environment, and everything in it, including the building itself, can be used to guide the visitor. However, a historic site has an invaluable “sense of place” that allows people to connect to the site itself. Each can give the visitor a memorable experience through interpretation.

Interpretation that takes a less neutral approach is often more powerful, because it uses provocative material to capture the visitor’s attention.

Sites memorializing shameful histories have additional pressures. They run the risk of becoming sensationalized, as well as pressure from survivors as to how the site should be interpreted. Staff at these sites may also encounter visitors who do not even believe that the event took place. The stories told at these sites must be able to adapt to new generations who may not make the same

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<sup>128</sup> Robinson, *Judgement of the Child: A Brief Polemic*, 50.



emotional connection that current generations do. Authors David Uzzell and Roy Ballantyne noted: "As time separates us from past events our emotional engagement is reduced. Does the time period separating events affect our decisions regarding the presentation of information, emotional reaction and issues of taste?"<sup>129</sup> It is important that interpretation remain relevant long after survivors are gone.

Interpretation is an important component at historic sites and museums, because it is the basis by which visitors shape their experience. Sociologist Paul Shackel said "Frequently there is no one agreed-on interpretation for the historical landscapes and monuments of America. They have different meanings for different people, and it is the struggle for control over meaning that makes the American historical landscape so dynamic and interesting."<sup>130</sup>

The United States Holocaust Museum and Manzanar National Historic Site use interpretation to provide a powerful experience for the visitor. Through a variety of techniques, each site simultaneously educates and makes an emotional connection with people.

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<sup>129</sup> Uzzell and Ballantyne, -*"Heritage that hurts: interpretation in a postmodern world,"* 158.

<sup>130</sup> Shackel, *Memory in Black and White*, 173.

## Illustrations



Figure 1: Gypsy artifacts from Czechoslovakia. Photograph in *The Holocaust Museum in Washington*, by Jeshajahu Weinberg and Rina Elieli.



Figure 2: Entrance to the Holocaust Museum from 14th Street. Photograph in *The Holocaust Museum in Washington*, by Jeshajahu Weinberg and Rina Elieli.



Figure 3: Ground floor adjacent to the Hall of Witness. Photograph in *The Holocaust Museum in Washington*, by Jeshajahu Weinberg and Rina Elieli.





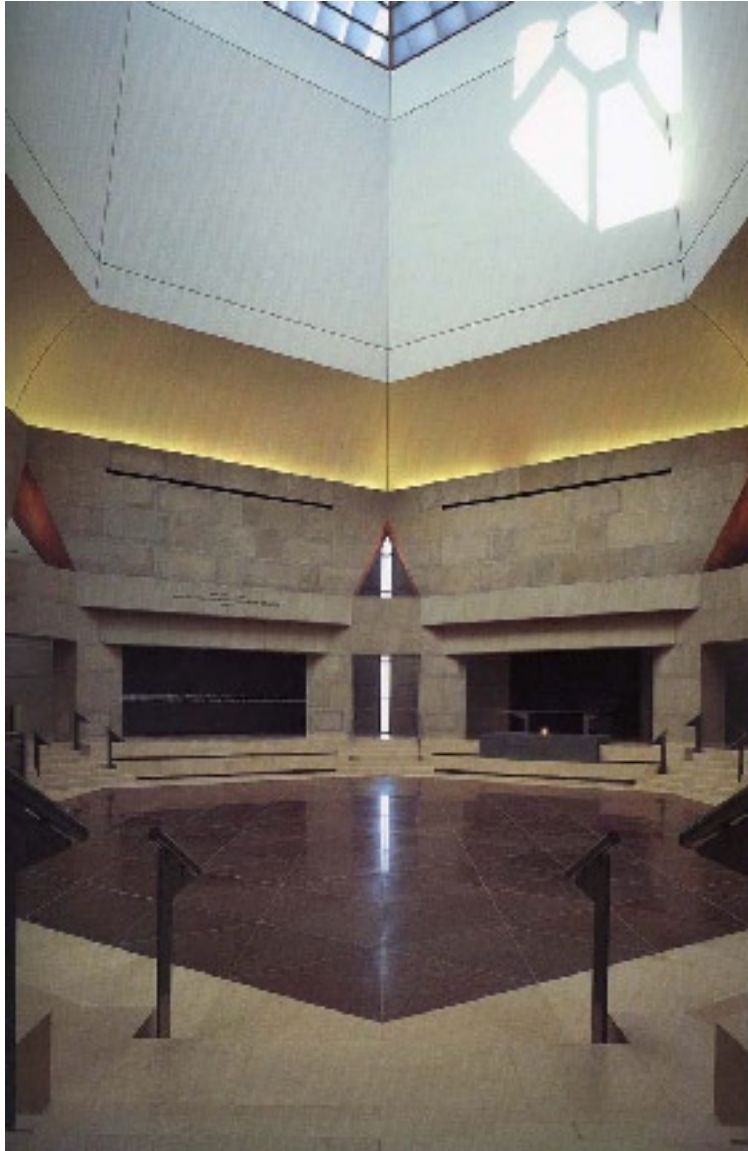


Figure 5: The Hall of Remembrance. Photograph in *The Holocaust Museum in Washington*, by Jeshajahu Weinberg and Rina Elieli.



Figure 6: Staircase in the Hall of Witness. Photograph in *The Holocaust Museum in Washington*, by Jeshajahu Weinberg and Rina Elieli.



Figure 7: Japanese American National Museum. Photograph from Starbulletin.com.





Figure 8: Museum of Jewish Heritage-A Living Memorial to the Holocaust. David Sunberg.

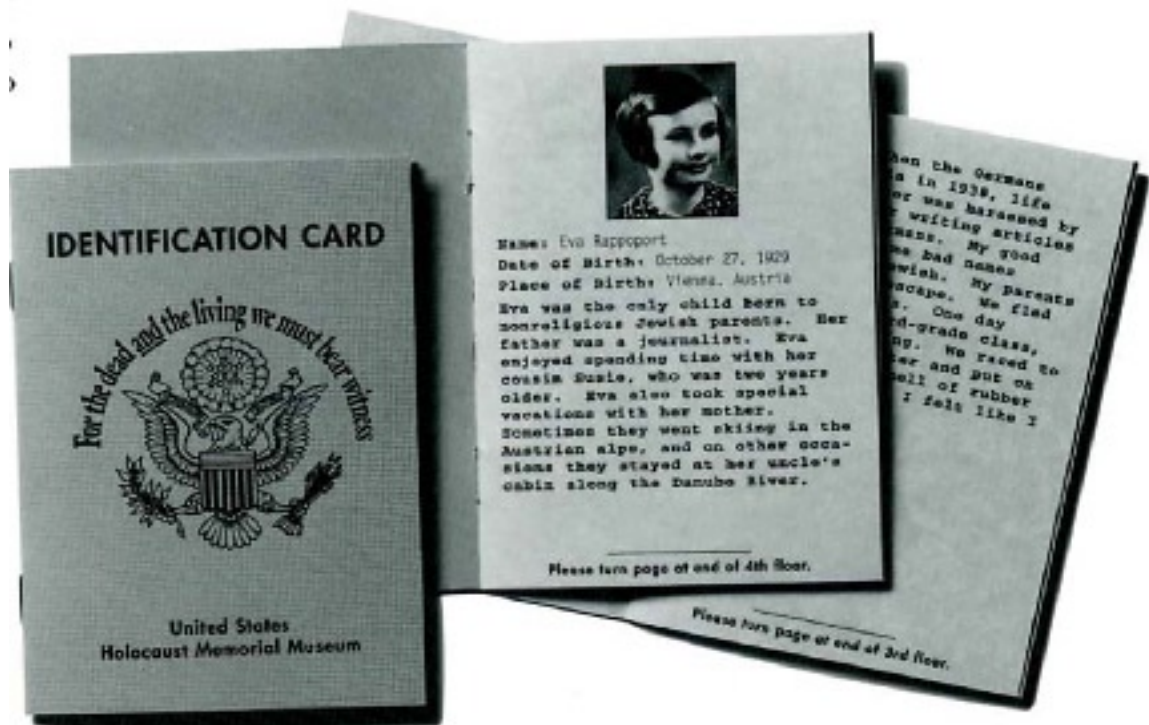


Figure 9: I.D. cards with stories of Holocaust victims and survivors, distributed at the entrance of the Permanent Exhibition. Photograph in *The Holocaust Museum in Washington*, by Jesha-jahu Weinberg and Rina Elieli.



Figure 10: Photograph at the beginning of the permanent exhibit of American soldiers viewing charred corpses at Ohrdruf concentration camp. Photograph in *The Holocaust Museum in Washington*, by Jeshajahu Weinberg and Rina Elieli.





Figure 11: An exhibit on displaced persons following the war in the permanent exhibition . Photograph in *The Holocaust Museum in Washington*, by Jeshajahu Weinberg and Rina Elieli.



Figure 12: Images from Poland, execution of a priest. Photograph in *The Holocaust Museum in Washington*, by Jeshajahu Weinberg and Rina Elieli.



Figure 13: Exhibits about the beginnings of Nazi rule in Germany. Photograph in *The Holocaust Museum in Washington*, by Jeshajahu Weinberg and Rina Elieli.





Figure 14: Reconstructed barracks from Auschwitz. Photograph in *The Holocaust Museum in Washington*, by Jeshajahu Weinberg and Rina Elieli.



Figure 15: Shoes from victims of the Majdanek Concentration Camp. Photograph in *The Holocaust Museum in Washington*, by Jeshajahu Weinberg and Rina Elieli.





Figure 16: Railway car used to transport Jews to concentration camps. Photograph in *The Holocaust Museum in Washington*, by Jeshajahu Weinberg and Rina Elieli.



Figure 17: Replica of a crematorium in Mauthausen Concentration Camp. Photograph in *The Holocaust Museum in Washington*, by Jeshajahu Weinberg and Rina Elieli.



Figure 18: Tower of Faces from the Yaffa Eliach Collection. Photograph in *The Holocaust Museum in Washington*, by Jeshajahu Weinberg and Rina Elieli.



Figure 19: Human hair from Auschwitz Concentration Camp. Photograph in *The Holocaust Museum in Washington*, by Jeshajahu Weinberg and Rina Elieli.





Figure 20: Danish boat used to smuggle Jews to Sweden. Photograph in *The Holocaust Museum in Washington*, by Jeshajahu Weinberg and Rina Elieli.



Figure 21: Special exhibition "Assignment Rescue: The Story of Varian Fry and the Emergency Rescue Committee." Photograph in *The Holocaust Museum in Washington*, by Jeshajahu Weinberg and Rina Elieli.



Figure 22: Special exhibition "Assignment Rescue: The Story of Varian Fry and the Emergency Rescue Committee." Photograph in *The Holocaust Museum in Washington*, by Jeshajahu Weinberg and Rina Elieli.

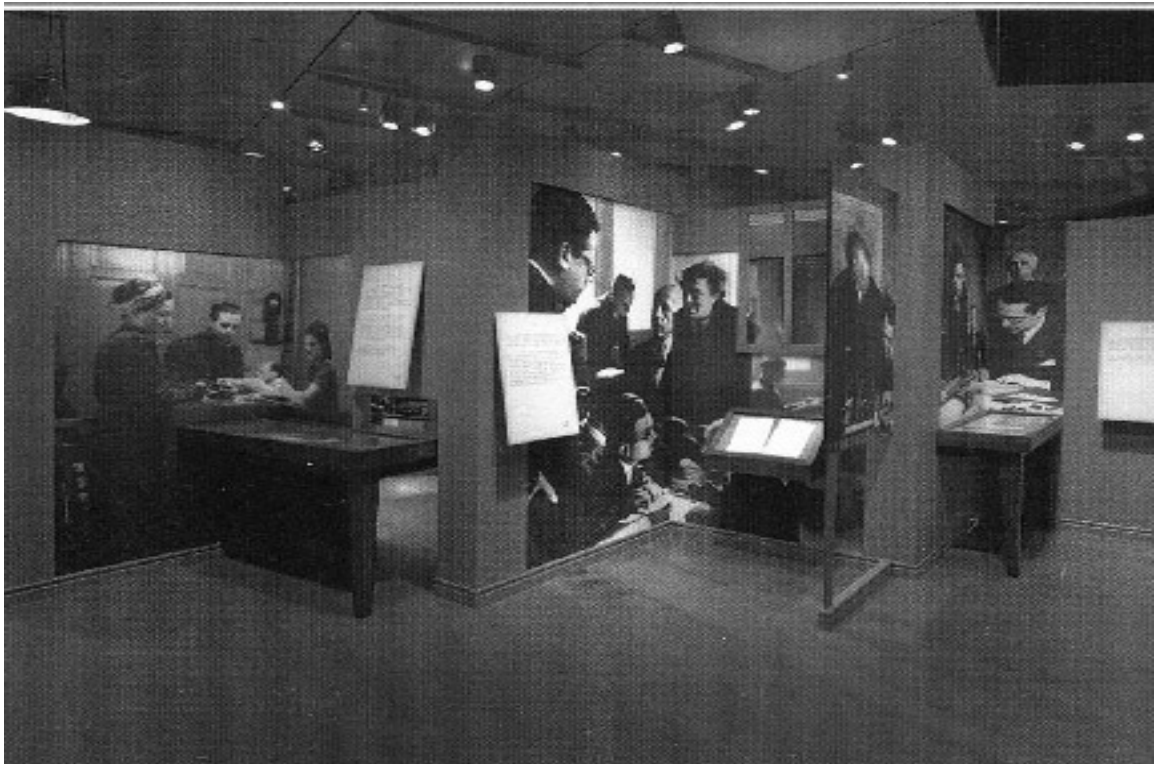


Figure 23: Special exhibition "Assignment Rescue: The Story of Varian Fry and the Emergency Rescue Committee." Photograph in *The Holocaust Museum in Washington*, by Jeshajahu Weinberg and Rina Elieli.





Figure 24: The exhibition "Remember the Children: Daniel's Story." Photograph in *The Holocaust Museum in Washington*, by Jeshajahu Weinberg and Rina Elieli.



**Figure 25:** The exhibition “Remember the Children: Daniel’s Story.” Photograph in *The Holocaust Museum in Washington*, by Jeshajahu Weinberg and Rina Elieli.



Figure 26: Remains of Manzanar National Historic Site. March 2005.





Figure 27: Remains of internment camp at Manzanar National Historic Site. March 2005.



Figure 28: Reconstructed guard tower located in interpretive center. March 2005.



Figure 29: Cot used by internees in interpretive center. March 2005.





Figure 30: Wayside exhibit at site where Catholic Church was located. March 2005.



Figure 31: Plaque referring to Manzanar as a “concentration camp” at entrance. March 2005.



## **WELCOME TO MANZANAR**

**Ever since the U.S. Army enclosed this one-square mile with barbed wire in 1942, people have debated how to accurately describe Manzanar. During World War II, it was officially called a "War Relocation Center," while newspapers and some locals referred to it simply as the "Jap Camp." President Roosevelt and other officials on occasion referred to it as a "concentration camp."**

**Every person whose life was affected by Manzanar has their own story, in their own words. We invite you to discover some of these stories, and to ask yourself:**

***What does Manzanar mean to history?***

***What does Manzanar mean to me?***

Figure 32: Exhibit in interpretive center explaining terminologies used to describe Manzanar. March 2005.



Figure 33: Reconstructed sign at entrance to Manzanar. March 2005.



Figure 34: Rehabilitated sentry post at entrance to camp. March 2005.



**Figure 35: The only remaining structure from the internment camp, the auditorium, now serves as the interpretive center. March 2005.**

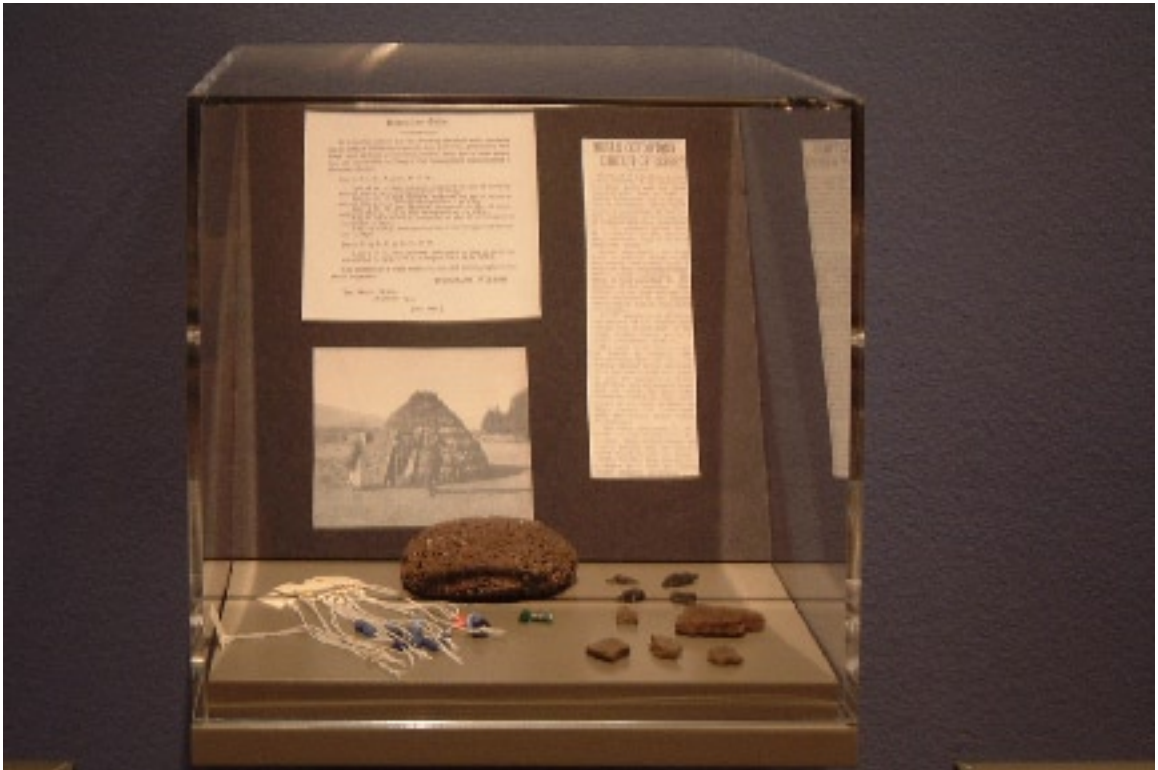


Figure 36: Artifacts from early settlers to Owens Valley. March 2005.





Figure 37: Scale model of Manzanar Japanese Internment Camp. March 2005.



Figure 38: List of names of people interned at Manzanar. March 2005.



Figure 39: Flags from all ten Japanese Internment Camps. March 2005.





Figure 40: Uniform of Japanese soldier who served in World War II. March 2005.



Figure 41: Exhibit about terrorism in the United States. March 2005.

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