

THE *Judaic* *Studies* *Review*

AN UNDERGRADUATE JOURNAL IN
TOPICS ACROSS THE FIELD AT THE
COLLEGE OF WILLIAM & MARY

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EDITED BY DR. RANDI RASHKOVER & JACK BOYD

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NOTE FROM THE EDITORS



DEAR READERS,

Welcome to the fall 2022 issue of The Judaic Studies Review! We hope everyone had a wonderful summer and is enjoying the return to campus.

The spring and summer of 2022 has been an exciting time for Judaic Studies at William & Mary. The reviews and essays presented here offer an excellent glimpse into the brilliant work produced by students both on campus and abroad as supported by the Judaic Studies program.

Throughout the spring, Judaic Studies hosted a series of scholarly lectures on topics as diverse as, "The Rabbis and the Fathers," "Women, Sexuality and Judaism," "Modern Jewish Philosophy and Legal Theory," "The Holocaust," and "The Museum of the Bible". In this issue you can find detailed reviews of these events by undergraduate students in our program including J.R. Erskine, Ryan Ferreiras, Evelyn Aponte, Aiden Weinhold, Mark Smith, George French, Veda Pal and Lulu Dawes.

Also, throughout the spring and summer, William & Mary students produced their own rigorous and reflective work in Judaic Studies, and we are excited to share this work with the wider William & Mary community. In this issue you will enjoy history Ph.D. candidate, Tyler J. Goldberger's essay, "Shaping Holocaust Memory," which develops work he presented this past summer at Yad Vashem in Jerusalem, funded by the Judaic Studies program. You will also find excerpts from Jack Boyd's "Reflections: Memorializing, Disposing, Forgetting," a journal essay devoted to Boyd's analyses of public memory representations of European authoritarianism documented by Boyd as he traveled throughout Europe this summer as a recipient of William and Mary's 1693 Scholar's Program. Last, you will find an essay by J.R. Erskine entitled, "The Jewish Presence in the Iberian Peninsula" devoted to Erskine's research on the history of Jewish communities in the Iberian Peninsula since the time of the Spanish Inquisition. Erskine developed his research while traveling through Spain this past summer with the support of the Judaic Studies program.

Enjoy the issue! We are grateful to all of our contributors and are thrilled to present their work!

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Dr. Randi Rashkover". The signature is fluid and cursive.

Nathan and Sofia Gumenick Chair in Judaic Studies
Professor of Religious Studies
Director of Judaic Studies

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jack Boyd". The signature is fluid and cursive.

Murray Family 1693 Scholar
William & Mary Class of '23

Undergraduate

Event Reviews

Elissa Altman: "Jewish Motherhood and Memoirs"

March 31st, 2022

By Evelyn Aponte

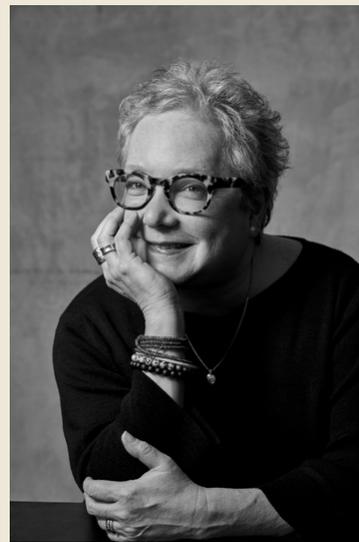
"Women, Sexuality, Family, and Judaism" (RELG 327, GSWS 391)

Professor Kirsh's RELG 327 class welcomed guest speaker Elissa Altman to discuss the making of her book, *Motherland: A Memoir of Love, Loathing, and Longing*, which the class read prior to her virtual visit. Altman first addressed the nature of the meeting over Zoom and forewarned that her small herd of animals may walk into the room at any moment and interrupt. She laughed as she said this from her home in Connecticut, where she lives with her wife Susan and their many animal companions. Connecticut wasn't always Altman's home, however; she reminded the class that she grew up in 1970's New York in a Jewish household with her father and mother, a former TV singer.

Altman described her mother, Rita, as a "hyper heterosexual woman" whose self-worth comes from her physical appearance. Rita's precarious relationship with food, due to her body dysmorphia, profoundly affected Altman's own relationship with food as an adult, she recalled. Inspired by the way food not only sustains life but how it brings people together, she became a food writer. Consequently, Altman had become the complete opposite of her mother: "I am my mom's worst nightmare: a lesbian food writer." In a 2015 column, Altman wrote about her experiences feeding an older, body-dysmorphic parent and the "great disconnect" it created with her mother, which inspired her to write the memoir, *Motherland*. Rita's illness raised many questions that challenged the stereotype of the overbearing Jewish mother who expresses her eternal love for her children through food—and lots of it.

"How can I be a good Jewish daughter even if my mother is abusive and won't let me feed her?" Altman asked aloud as she retold the painful and life-altering moment when her mother called her to tell her that she fell. Now her full-time caregiver, Altman affirmed that the experience of having to help Rita in every way unraveled

both women's stories and forced her to confront who they are to each other outside of the Jewish stereotype. Faced with the decision to cling to stereotypes or to reject them, Altman chose the latter, stating, "Motherland is an evocation of desire to be something that I am not but to accept it and to heal." Shame and love, two feelings that are inextricably tied to the moral and religious obligation to honor thy mother and father, create a thread throughout the memoir which traces Altman's process of forming boundaries while being perceptive to how her culture perceives it. Although her childhood home was secular, the weight of "ancient issues," as she referred to them, translated into seeing herself as free game for her parents, until she later realized how unhealthy that kind of dynamic was.



Elissa Altman is an award-winning author and food-blogger who focuses on how family storytelling is wrapped in and around our food.

Given the tumultuous relationship with her mother, Altman felt compelled to share that she doesn't believe in revenge writing. Every memoirist must ask themselves what their motivation is for writing, and Altman's response reveals the ethical considerations of the project as well as the emotional release of her trauma: "I wrote *Motherland* to transcend an extraordinary amount of pain that I carry in my own soul." The journey of writing the memoir empowered Altman to heal and understand and to have more compassion for her mother. As the conversation came to a close, Altman expressed her hope to visit Professor Kirsh's students in-person at William & Mary in the near future.

Azzan Yadin-Israel: "The Rise of Rabbinic Midrash and Its Christian and Pagan Context"

April 12th, 2022

By Ryan Ferreras

"Rabbis and Fathers" (RELG 316)

Dr. Azzan Yadin-Israel, from the Department of Jewish Studies, Rutgers University, delivered a lecture on 'The Rise of Rabbinic Midrash and Its Christian and Pagan Context'. He began his lecture by reminding the class that the emergence of Rabbinic Judaism was not a foregone conclusion. Today rabbis are heavily identified with Judaism, but after the fall of the Second Temple, Judaism as a religion was thrown into flux and Rabbinic Judaism competed with rival models of Judaism. In his lecture, he examined what constituted rabbinic authority and its context in classical antiquity.

Nowhere in the Hebrew Bible does the word 'rabbi' appear, Yadin-Israel told the class. The Second Temple-era priests could point to manifold passages in the Torah that established priestly authority and duties to justify their position in

Jewish religious life. Yadin-Israel talked about two different ways the rabbis claimed authority. In *Pirkei Avot*, a tractate of the Mishnah, the text states,

'Moses received the Torah at Sinai and transmitted it to Joshua, Joshua to the elders, and the elders to the prophets, and the prophets to the Men of the Great Assembly'. In other words, there is a Torah separate from that of the Hebrew Bible passed down via oral-traditional transmission to the rabbis. This tradition grants rabbis authority as possessors of esoteric

knowledge that not even the Levite priests knew. He contrasted this claim to authority with that of midrash, a type of scriptural interpretation. Midrash accepts the authority of the Hebrew Bible as scripture and seeks to interpret it. Yadin-Israel claims that these two modes of rabbinic authority cannot be reconciled. After all, the rabbi as possessor of esoteric knowledge and the rabbi as scriptural interpreter are two diametrically opposed figures. He says that midrash became the dominant mode of rabbinic authority because in the Talmud even the Oral Torah is debated and justified through the midrash methodology, i.e. scriptural interpretation.

Yadin-Israel ended the class by pointing out two parallel processes in classical antiquity. Christianity began with a coalescence of scripture collection and henceforth Christian intellectuals stepped in to interpret those scriptures. Similarly, Homeric tradition saw the rise of interpreters such as Cassius Longinus who sought to reconcile texts such as the *Odyssey* and *Iliad* with



Dr. Yadin-Israel is a professor of Jewish Studies and Classics at Rutgers University where he researches Rabbinic legal hermeneutics, the origins of midrash, and biblical interpretation.

contemporary physics. His lecture brought to the forefront of the class's mind the distinction between claims to authority through received tradition and that of scriptural interpretation.

Cavan Concannon and Jill Hicks-Keeton: "The Museum of the Bible, A Symposium"

April 21st, 2022

By Aiden Weinhold

A Symposium hosted by Professor
Andrew Tobolowsky

In this riveting symposium, Jill Hicks-Keeton, an Associate Professor of Religious Studies at the University of Oklahoma, and Cavan Concannon, an Associate Professor of Religion at the University of Southern California go into details about the inner workings and aims of the Museum of the Bible, located in Washington D.C.

Initially they touch on different bibles through history and how people used them, such as Thomas Jefferson's bible, and how he cut out pieces he didn't agree with. These sorts of examples were later touched on again to point out how the Museum of the Bible does the same thing, trying to only show a history of the bible that is wholly good, supporting causes such as women's suffrage and anti-slavery throughout history. They claim that there is a distinction between 'Bible Devotees' and 'Bible Interpretists', with Interpretists being the ones who have supported negative causes in history. (as seen by out current social lens).

They also touch on the makeup of the museum and the exhibits in it, mainly how it tries to frame itself as a smithsonian-type museum, with a children's exhibit, a gift store, a 'bible of now' exhibit, a movie, a historical recreation of a village of the time, and a walkthrough of the Hebrew Bible. There is controversy regarding each exhibit and the museum as a whole, and the main points can be boiled down to how each exhibit tends to push a non-Jewish narrative, with anti-Judaism and pro-Christian sentiments, especially in regard to white evangelical sentiments. In addition, the museum as a whole is criticized for pushing the narrative of their interpretation of the Bible being the meaning of the bible. Finally, Hicks-Keeton and Concannon ended their presentation with a brief Q&A, talking briefly on why they wrote their book, how the museum whitewashed a biblical narrative, and how they wish they could've touched on some of the banners in the building with quotes that sounded like they came from the bible but were made up. Overall a very interesting and enjoyable talk, and we thank Professor Hicks-Keeton and Professor Concannon for their time and knowledge.



Dr. Concannon is an associate professor of religion at the University of Southern California. He is co-director of the Mediterranean Connectivity Initiative and has excavated at Corinth and Ostia Antica. Dr. Hicks-Keeton is Associate Professor of Religious Studies at the Univ. of Oklahoma. Her first book, *Arguing with*

Aseneth was awarded the 2020 Lautenschlaeger Award for Theological Promise. Their book, *Does Scripture Speak for Itself? The Museum of the Bible and the Politics of Interpretation*, will be released by Cambridge University Press in October 2022.



Sarah Cramsey: A Cosmic Struggle?: How Historians Grapple with Religion as a Casual Force

April 28th, 2022

By Mark Smith

"The Holocaust" (RELG 309)

Dr. Sarah Cramsey, Assistant Professor in Judaism and Diaspora Studies at Leiden University, visited the College of William & Mary and delivered a lecture entitled "A Cosmic Struggle?: How Historians Grapple with Religion as a Casual Force."

An alum of the College, Dr. Cramsey holds masters degrees from Oxford University and University of California, Berkeley, as well as a doctoral degree from UC Berkeley. Dr. Cramsey has held additional positions at National War College, Tulane University, and Université libre de Bruxelles.

Dr. Cramsey began by highlighting the multivariate approach essential to her study of modern central and eastern European Jewish history. Places like Poland, for example, represent regions marked by Nazi fascism, colonialism, socialism, communism, revolution, and other political forces. Understanding this region, she asserted, hinges on understanding community, otherness, and religion as "hovering": as ideological forces with the potency to compel thoughts and actions. For a scholar to study the Jewish experience in this region requires the scholar to step into a "deeper awareness of lived and imagined religion."

One case requiring this deeper awareness was Dr. Cramsey's approach to studying the internal relations of Jewish communities in these regions. For example, a holistic examination of older Jewish communities requires scholars to circumvent strictly hagiographical retellings of rabbinic leadership and its curation of homogenous Jewish life. Dr. Cramsey resorted to undertaking the study of historical Jewish families: a study leading her to find that family accounts of historical Jewish communities often demysticized narratives of rabbinic history. For example, hagiographical literature characterizes the Ba'al Shem

Tov as a hermetic figure who embodied complete separation from the rest of European society. Accounts of families in his community, however, render this narrative not just unrealistic but untrue. They characterize the Ba'al Shem Tov as a doctor, neighbor, and citizen of his country. Family accounts also challenge narratives of isolation from Christian society, showing that many Jews had Christian neighbors as babysitters, teachers, and housemaids. This led Dr. Cramsey to examine what she considers a universally experienced but universally forgotten phenomenon: infancy. "How does one capture early childhood?" she pried, characterizing it as an "experience of being taken care of that everyone shares but no one remembers." Cultivation of Jewish identity and religion must be an integral part of the child-rearing process, Dr. Cramsey asserted. Far before formal religious education begins, the processes associated with breastfeeding, language training, and other psycho-physiological developments show that religious identity contains a fundamentally biological component.

Dr. Cramsey has developed this approach to further examine how Jewish identity has been transmitted to children over the centuries and into the modern era. And, Dr. Cramsey argues, this methodology maps out not just the processes of Jewish identity, but anti-Jewish identity as well. If, at minimum, a vague sense of religious identity – the "hovering" ideology capable of compelling thought and action – can be inculcated into those infancy, can this understanding of ideology contribute to a rational explanation of the "soft antisemitism" that wormed its way into much of Polish culture as well, and eventually resulted in mass murder? Much of the origins of antisemitism – more appropriately described by "anti-Judaism" – find historical context beginning with New Testament literature, subsequent theology, and eventual "blood libel" conspiracies resulting in frequent pogroms in the premodern and modern eras.

Sarah Cramsey: A Cosmic Struggle?: How Historians Grapple with Religion as a Casual Force

But a kind of “soft antisemitism” undergirded each of these actions: perhaps a household joke, a dinnertime conversation, or a sermon on Matthew 27. Soft antisemitism, of the kind beginning at birth and permeating the household, Dr. Cramsey concludes, turns violent under pressure. This is the basis much of her understanding of why parameters of morality changed after Nazi invasion. A sense of legitimacy or normalcy materialized intuitions into action. Indeed, even throughout the course of the war, Dr. Cramsey found, Christians in Polish towns grew evermore willing to assist in loading Jews into cattle cars, robbing houses, and scouring the countryside for those in hiding. Nazi ideology’s blurring of ethnic and religious lines caused a compound effect as well, further weaponizing soft antisemitism into violence and cruelty. Sustained violence occurred after the war, Dr. Cramsey noted,

.Dr. Cramsey concluded by remarking on the rather grim nature of uncovering this sentiment and the human susceptibility to external pressure. She drew close attention to the fact that from more than 50 countries, Yad Vashem has honored over 27,000 “righteous gentiles” who risked their lives to help their Jewish neighbor and that 7,177 of these honorees were Polish Christians, far more represented than any other demographic. Many of these heroes did so for explicitly religious reasons, thus rendering a purely negative interpretation of Polish Christianity in the 1940s incomplete and incorrect. Rather, Dr. Cramsey, argued, these examples further demonstrate the importance of understanding the capability of religious ideology to motivate action – whether for good or evil—under the pressure of turbulent times. As the lecture closed, Dr. Cramsey noted the personal importance of joining the larger conversation of history and celebrated searching

for the “frustrating but illuminating reality” of the Polish past.



An alumnus of W&M, Dr. Cramsey is a historian of east central Europe and Assistant Professor of Judaism and Diaspora Studies at Leiden University in the Netherlands. Her first book, *Uprooting the Diaspora: Jewish Belonging and the “Ethnic Revolution” in Poland and Czechoslovakia, 1936-*

1946, will be published at Indiana University Press in 2023.

including deliberate Polish Christian attacks on Holocaust survivors in 1946 and at least three other major pogroms stemming from resurrected blood libel accusations. The damage of Nazi occupation – both physical and ideological occupation – left the moral parameters of daily Christian life in ruins long after the Nazis surrendered

Annette Yoshiko Reed: "From Gentile Inclusion to Jewish Christianity"

April 26th, 2022

By George French

"Rabbis and Fathers" (RELG 316)

Professor Yoshiko Reed began her lecture by inviting us to ponder an important question: At what point did Christianity as an identity become distinct from Judaism? At first glance, the question seems to have an easy answer. The 'Premodern Understanding' was that Jesus' disciples amassed followers of their own and passed on his teachings, steadily growing until they established a unique religious presence. However, Professor Reed made it clear that the lines were far blurrier than that. In its earliest form, all members of the Jesus Movement were, in fact, Jewish. They celebrated the feasts, practiced the ceremonies and observed the Mosaic Law. It was precisely because of their Jewish identity that the Twelve had a conception of the Messianic role Jesus claimed to fulfill, and awareness of this factor has led to a different model of understanding the Jewish-Christian divergence, known as 'the parting of the ways', over against the traditional model of supersessionism. Under supersessionism, Rabbinic Judaism is a mother whose child, Christianity, grows to maturity under the care of its mother while still maintaining a separate identity. This has led many scholars to study Gentile Christianity and Rabbinic Judaism as exclusive categories containing little to no overlap. In the contemporary model, however, the two are viewed as initially overlapping circles with a shrinking in-between group (Jewish Christianity) that Christianity would eventually label as heretical for their continued observance of Mosaic Law.

Professor Yoshiko Reed noted, however, that this is still a largely Christian perspective. In Judaic thought, there are really only two categories: Israel (Jews) and 'the Nations' (Gentiles). Among Gentiles, there are those who convert fully to Judaism and those who are simply 'God-fearers'. Contrary to Christianity's adoption of Gentiles on the basis of their faith, no one supersedes

these categories in Judaism; Jews who join the 'Jesus Movement' are still Jews, and Gentiles who join it are still Gentiles. It is here that Prof. Yoshiko Reed asks the question: What is the fate of the Gentiles? This question is significant because it is a source of major overlap between what we now think of as Judaism and Christianity. It gets to the heart of deeper questions about salvation and the will of God. Prof. Yoshiko Reed invites us to ponder whether Christianity is simply 'Torah for the Gentiles' or perhaps something unique and distinct from Rabbinic Judaism altogether.



Annette Yoshiko Reed is Professor in the Skirball Department of Hebrew and Judaic Studies, New York University. Beginning with her

2005 monograph, *Fallen Angels and the History of Judaism and Christianity* (Cambridge University Press), she has been a leading voice in scholarship on Jewish Christianity and post-70 CE Judaism beyond rabbinic circles.

Rabbi Esther Lederman: "Women and the Rabbinate"

April 28th, 2022

By Veda Pai

"Women, Sexuality, Family, and Judaism" (RELG 327, GSWS 391)

Rabbi Esther Lederman came to speak to Dr. Maggie' Kirsh's class, Sexuality, Women and Family in Judaism. Working for the Union for Reform Judaism, Lederman began her lecture with an article about controversy with Woman's Day Mag. The magazine, clearly targeted towards women, hired a male rabbi in residence to write a monthly column. This lack of representation - that even extends to a magazine for women - is the main topic of Lederman's discussion. Rabbi Lederman outlined the history of female rabbis, which began in the 1930s with Regina Jonas, a hidden figure in Judaism. Rabbi

knowing that she has opened doors and allowed young women to reach towards rabbinical study. Following this uplifting section, Lederman discussed modern iterations of support networks for female rabbis.

For example, the Women's Rabbinic Network, an organization for those in Reform Judaism, has chosen to expand its language and works towards rabbis of colors and LGBTQ rabbis. Its expansion is in light of multiple moments in which the need for support was exemplified.

The #MeToo movement sparked many emotions, and rabbis across the country shared their experiences within the movement. The lack of help and support clearly proved that these organizations were needed. In a final question and answer section, Rabbi Lederman spoke openly about problems and troubling cases that have arisen in the previous years, namely three investigations

into sexual misconduct within the Reform movement. Lederman herself stated that these whisperings were not surprising but still hurtful all the same.

Including more diverse rabbis and raising difficult topics in sermons may not erase the problems facing the Reform movement, but such initiatives empower communities to speak out and discuss issues complicating their lives. In total, Lederman exemplified the need for not just female rabbis, but multi-identity rabbis that reflected the complexities of the present day.

Ordained in 2008 from Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion in NYC, Rabbi Lederman is the Union for Reform Judaism's Director of congregational innovation and sits on the Central Conference of American Rabbis' task force on the experience of women in the rabbinate.

Lederman's focus then shifted to the life of Sally J. Priesand who was ordained amongst her male counterparts and became the first female rabbi in America in 1972. Yet, she did not easily get a job, proving the need for representation and fight for female rabbis in rabbinical study. Framing her lecture around the voices of female rabbis, Lederman played podcasts discussing the pressures felt from being a minority. Sally Priesand, however, states that she takes comfort in

Joshua Fishbein: "Out of the Ashes of the Holocaust"

May 3rd, 2022

By Lulu Dawes

"The Holocaust" (RELG 309)

Dr. Joshua Fishbein captivated the class via Zoom owing to his incredible ability to tell a story and convey emotion through music. As an extremely accomplished musician, educator, and choral conductor, Fishbein showcased his five-movement cantata *Out of the Ashes of Holocaust*. The piece recounts his maternal grandmother's survival story as a seven-year-old Greek Jew living during the Holocaust, and the family who saved her and her relatives.

Fishbein's grandmother, Josephine Velelli, was taken in by the Greek-Christian Michalos family, who lived on a winery in rural Greece. Despite never meeting a Jewish individual before, the Michaloses agreed to take in Josephine and her family, ultimately saving their lives from the Nazis. Though the Nazis would eventually burn down the Michalos family home — forcing both families to share a two-room peasant cottage — the members of both the Michalos and Velelli families would outlive World War II. Both families independently moved to Baltimore, where they coincidentally found each other once again and became life long, multigenerational friends.

Each movement of the cantata focuses on a different aspect of the story. Movement I is the introduction, serving as the backdrop. Movement II, titled "Our friends from Greece", introduces the two soloists—with one representing Fishbein's great-grandmother Emily Velelli and the other representing Kathryn Michalos, the matriarch of the family. Movement III "Homeless Again" tells of the destruction of the Michalos family home, when they moved into the cottage and lived together like one big family. Movements IV and V, titled "Never the Same" and "A Tiny Ripple of Hope" respectively, retell the end of the Holocaust and the families' reunification in America.

Fishbein based his piece on a 1984 Baltimore Sun article, which was added to the U.S. House of Representatives' record by then-representative Barbara Mikulski; Mikulski quoted Robert F. Kennedy's "Day of Affirmation Address" in the process.

By transforming the story into an incredible cantata, Fishbein has forever solidified the generational retelling of their family's tale. Collaborating with his wife, Fishbein's piece reminds the audience of hope and acts of heroics and highlights how some friendships can transcend nations, decades, wars, and generations.



Currently, Dr. Fishbein teaches on the music theory faculties of The Peabody Institute of Johns Hopkins University and Towson University. He is an award-winning composer who specializes in choral music.

Leora Batnitzky: "How Judaism Became a Religion"

May 3rd, 2022

By J.R. Erskine

"Modern Jewish and Christian Thought" (RELG 335)

Among other outstanding speakers this semester, the William and Mary Judaic Studies Department had the unique pleasure of welcoming Leora Batnitzky, Ph.D., and Director of The Ronald O. Perelman Department of Jewish Studies at Princeton. Much like in her book, *How Judaism Became a Religion*, Dr. Batnitzky centered her lecture on Judaism's shift towards a more modern notion of religion. Building her ideas on the relationship between Kant's *Religion* (1793), Schliermacher's *Speeches* (1799), and Mendelssohn's *Jerusalem* (1783).

Beginning with Schliermacher's first speech, and highlighting its defense of religion in response to Kant six years prior, Batnitzky details Kant's approach to practical reason. Emphasizing the importance of treating people as "ends within themselves" she explained the dichotomy between Kant and Schliermacher's respective works. Kant's whole rejection of religion within reason, alongside Schliermacher's belief that everybody is religious at their core Dr. Batnitzky elucidated the point that because these two philosophers, and by extension rationalists and existentialists as a whole, are radically different they cannot coexist.

With this base of Kantian rationalism she shifted her focus to the relationship between Schliermacher and Kant's definitions of religion, demonstrating how they both construct the category of religion as an inherent fundamental - though they approach it in distinctly different ways. She uses Schliermacher's first speech as an example, demonstrating how he argues that this "religious feeling" is passive, happening to you without your control - a convenient catch-all assertion to support his existential view on religion. Contrary to Schliermacher, Kant reduces religion to an explanation

for morality and a method to discern moral truth. Diverging from the traditional Pauline assumption that faith saves from Sin, Kant alleges that reason alone can save from immorality. Though they radically disagree on many fundamentals, both Schliermacher and Kant ultimately assert that religion's purpose is to focus on the internal state of the individual - discounting external



Dr. Leora Batnitzky is Director of The Ronald O. Perelman Department of Jewish Studies at Princeton and a professor of both Religion and Jewish Studies. She has taught at Princeton since 1997.

forms of religion (read: *The Law*). Ultimately this diminishes the importance of Judaism in their eyes as they view it being only concerned with the letter of law - without any of the spiritual benefit.

With this in mind, Dr. Batnitzky shifted her focus to Mendelssohn's *Jerusalem*, particularly, his argument for Jewish independence and the necessary separation of

Leora Batnitzky: "How Judaism Became a Religion"

church and state, which he further elaborates by stating that “Judaism has no relationship to any earthly (read: governmental) power. This comports with what we know of the political context Mendelssohn found himself in when he wrote Jerusalem. As a Jew in 18th century Germany, Mendelssohn was partially forced to engage in religious apologetics to justify his religious stance. He does this elegantly by first defining his 3 types of truth: Eternal (i.e. mathematics, something that can be understood with little prior experience), Contingent (where experience or direct observation is necessary), and Historical (an experience had by a collective). Within the context of these truth definitions he created, he goes on to rebut what he calls the “dogmatic nature” of Christianity, critiquing it against “rational Judaism.” Mendelssohn links practicing the Jewish Law with his idea of historical truth in that it becomes a collective experience, this, he uses to refute Pauline separation of Spirit and Law - underscoring it as a primary feature of the Jewish faith.

Furthermore, Dr. Batnitzky offered excellent insight into Mendelssohn’s opinions on the modern definition of religion, and demonstrates how his engagement in religious apologetics paved the way for the Pittsburgh Platform. In attempting to show issues in contemporary definitions of religion, Mendelssohn comes up against the Lockean idea of the separation of church and state while still trying to engage with Jewish law in its inherently political spirit. Dr. Batnitzky explained, he qualifies Judaism as a religion, because to classify it otherwise brought concern that it would conflict with state law - establishing the idea of a nation within a nation. Additionally, he combats the Pauline idea found in Corinthians, “...the letter [of the law] kills”, going on to define Jewish ceremonial law as a “living script”, where interpretation is a spiritual activity - with constant reinterpretation serving as a force to protect against idolatry. It was truly a joy to welcome Dr. Batnitzky to

our campus, and we hope to have her back in the near future to teach us more.

Selected

Writings

Shaping

Holocaust

Memory in the

United States:

Remembering and

Forgetting after

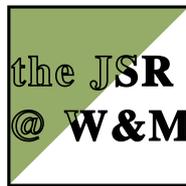
1945

By Tyler J. Goldberger



In this piece, Goldberger explores public memory and memorializations of both the Holocaust and the U.S. Civil War as the United States continues upon a path of incredible polarization. As a lecturer at Yad Vashem in Jerusalem, Israel for this summer's 'Echoes & Reflections Advanced Learning Seminar,' Goldberger voices the reckonings we, as Americans face.

Tyler J. Goldberger is a History Ph.D. Candidate at William & Mary exploring the United States' diplomatic and non-state responses to the Spanish Civil War and Francisco Franco dictatorship, particularly interested in how these responses contributed to the development of human rights discourse. His History course this semester, Post-1945 United States Memory and Human Rights, takes a transnational approach to concentrate on local, regional, and national memories of violence, oppression, and othering in which the United States has held a significant role. He also serves as the Special Collections Research Center Instruction and Research Associate at William & Mary Libraries.



Why does the United States memorialize the Holocaust? And, how does contemporary Holocaust memory intersect with the reckoning of the American Civil War happening throughout the United States landscape today? These are the questions that I took with me to Yad Vashem in Jerusalem, Israel as a lecturer for the **Echoes & Reflections Advanced Learning Seminar**. As the United States is one of many nations currently undergoing deep meditation and polarization on the legacies of the past for the present and future, I felt it extremely important to discuss motivations of remembering in the United States and how they contribute to both intentional and subconscious forgetting. Advancing Michael Rothberg’s argument in *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization*, I sought to impress upon the seminar participants how memories of violent pasts can work together to advance and amplify each other and their relevance today. This seminar provided a fruitful opportunity to assert that prioritizing particular historical memories can serve to elide others, while also illuminating memory as adoptable and adaptable into discourse happening today locally, regionally, and nationally.

I first interacted with Yad Vashem in the summer of 2017 as an intern for **Echoes & Reflections**, an educational program dedicated to supporting secondary teachers educating their students on the Holocaust. Working under the mentorship and leadership of Sheryl Ochayon, I learned about the significance of intentional and primary source-driven pedagogy to connect the past to people interested in studying what happened before them and amplifying the stories of those who are often silenced or erased by violence and intolerance. During my summer at Yad Vashem, I supported the production of an educational video toolbox, **Liberations and Survivors: The First Moments**, as a photo archivist. I chose and acquired permission for all of the images and video clips that appear in this versatile teaching tool, which has been viewed almost two million times since its release in late 2017. I also had the unique opportunity to participate in the Advanced Learning Seminar. Deepening the knowledge of selected secondary school educators of the Holocaust, this seminar invites these pedagogical practitioners to Yad Vashem in order to gain knowledge, stories, and skills from global experts in Holocaust studies. Over the course of ten days, I deepened my understanding not only of the Holocaust, but also about the importance of instilling the lessons and warnings of the Holocaust for our contemporary world.

Fast forward five years, and I was invited to speak as a lecturer for the Advanced Learning Seminar. As a History PhD Candidate at William & Mary specializing in modern United States history, transnationalism, and historical memory, I knew I wanted to prioritize lessons about the United States during and after the Holocaust with a particular focus on remembering and forgetting. While the narrative of American soldiers during World War II as liberators has become the dominant one in the traditional telling of the United States defeat of racism and fascism, I wanted to challenge participants to think critically about when, how, and why the United States has adopted the Holocaust as a part of its national narrative. I wanted participants to explore the political, economic, social, and cultural contexts surrounding the erections and alterations of Holocaust sites of memory in the United States. And, I wanted to illustrate the myriad interpretations that these sites provoke from different consumers at different moments in time.

Infusing my academic passions and pedagogical principles, incorporating primary source analysis and active participation in the classroom, I developed a lecture entitled “Shaping Holocaust Memory in the United States: Remembering and Forgetting after 1945” that provoked meaningful reflection and discussion on the overlapping and distinct purposes of Holocaust museums, memorials, and monuments in the United States. I argued that these sites of memory provide an opportunity to



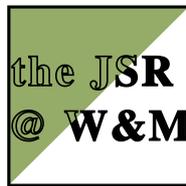
engage with questions of how narratives and memories of the past are constructed, reconstructed, negotiated, interpreted, and reinterpreted over time in local, regional, and national contexts. As with any site of memory, these Holocaust representations illustrate how particular people have chosen to remember the Holocaust as well as the narratives and stories inherently forgotten by these constructions. They also illuminate the reality of shifting memories of the past over time, showcased by various Holocaust museums today that educate on other genocides, mass atrocities, human rights violations, and crimes against humanity.

I started my presentation eliciting how the participants of the seminar defined “history” and “memory” to gain a foundation in their interpretations and backgrounds. Most of them reflected on how their notions of “memory” have shifted following the 2020 murder of George Floyd, alluding to a connection I sought to make it showcasing how thinking about the legacies of violent and genocidal pasts can inform our understandings and responses to contemporary human rights atrocities. I then transitioned to think about how memory presents itself on the physical landscape, including the erection of various memorials, monuments, and museums throughout various local, regional, and national contents. Provoking the participants to think through “Who wants whom to remember who, what, when, where, why, and how,” we reflected on the role of diverse and competing stakeholders who become crucial to the controversies, complications, and conversations surrounding any site of memory.

Thinking about the dynamicism of sites of memories, I then pivoted to explore the history of Holocaust memory in the United States, highlighting moments and motivations not traditionally discussed in a survey of Holocaust education. Concentrating on the self-interested nature of the United States in the 20th century, I spoke about the immigration quotas that plagued the nation starting in 1924, and how these restrictions influenced the rejection of Jewish refugees aboard the SS St. Louis. I also argued that the late 1960s and 1970s that saw the first significant Holocaust memory movement in the United States corresponded with severe sociopolitical and racial division at all corners, along with the amplification of Holocaust stories from survivors and popular culture sources. This national embrace of the Holocaust allowed for a unity narrative to be developed despite the various social movements speaking out against persistent injustices, human rights violations, and lower-class citizenship.

Despite the national embrace of Holocaust memory, its formation at the end of the 20th century emphasized the diverse stakeholders involved. The erection of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum on the National Mall in Washington, D.C., a project conceived in the national sphere in the late 1970s and inaugurated on the 50th anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising in 1993, presented much discontent and disagreement over visions of what this space should hold and how the Holocaust should be depicted for museum visitors. Divisive debates considered the types of stories and narratives to tell, how much the United States should be incorporated into this story, and how non-Jewish victims should be displayed. While the project of Holocaust memory served as an opportunity for the United States to show its human rights considerations for an international genocide, it simultaneously worked toward silencing domestic groups fighting for their rights. It took the National Mall an additional eleven years to host the National Museum of the American Indian and twenty-three years before the National Museum of African American History and Culture was erected, groups significantly disadvantaged and oppressed in the United States for all of the nation’s history.

As we worked through the importance of considering the place and space of particular sites of memory, and how they might silence other pasts, I then provided time for group-based learning, in



which each group received a regional Holocaust memorial and were tasked with answering questions about the context, geographic location, stakeholders, and interpretations. As they worked together, the participants learned about the funding sources, project directors, and temporalities surrounding the discourse and construction of Holocaust memorials from California to New York. They debated the artistic interpretations of suffering, pain, and loss, weighing in with their personal opinions on how they evaluated the sites and compared and contrasted the lessons they were “supposed” to glean to those that they felt they gathered from their own understandings. Through hands-on learning, they came to understand how particular stakeholders and their motivations have a powerful role in the timing, presentation, and symbolism of how the Holocaust appears on the physical landscape in the United States. And, the participants learned that these sites of memory change over time, whether through additional iconography, moments of vandalism and desecration, or other physical changes.

I capitalized on the discussion of evolving sites of memory to highlight how exactly we can think about the intersection and interaction of Holocaust memories with memories of Native genocide and slavery in the United States. With the recent amplified activism, oftentimes led by civil society, that has challenged unapologetic representations of settler colonialism and white supremacy, particularly in Virginia, I spoke to how Holocaust museums are incorporating these narratives as a part of Holocaust education. Not only does focusing on injustices with which are being reckoned in the present-day contribute a heightened significance to learning from the Holocaust; it also forces the United States to critically examine its active role in the marginalization, repression, and othering of populations outside of those privileged by those in power since before the official founding of the nation.

Recent exhibits at various Holocaust museums, such as those in **Tampa Bay, Florida**, and **Skokie, Illinois**, have discussed the localized experience of African Americans in the twentieth century in the United States, speaking to the resilience and strength of these communities despite oppressive Jim Crow practices that mirror extremely harmful racism and nationalism executed by Nazi Germany. Other exhibits, such as in **Houston, Texas**, are curating exhibits that concentrate on the process of genocide, illuminating how hate speech and normalized othering contribute to nations that accept the inferiority of particular identities. The seminar participants and I ended out session with the **“Uprooting Prejudice: Faces of Change”** exhibit at the Holocaust Memorial Resource & Education Center of Florida. Days following the murder of George Floyd, photographer John Noltner traveled to the site of Floyd’s murder and captured individuals’ responses to his question, “What do you want to say?” While Noltner has utilized this space to present the consequences of othering to an audience, many populations, particularly Jewish American populations, have **reacted in uproar** to comparisons to the Holocaust and Floyd murder. The museum has continued to stand with its exhibit, **arguing** that this historical moment in time demonstrates the importance of connecting past prejudice with contemporary practices of human rights atrocities. While participants held varied opinions regarding these recent Holocaust museum developments, they practiced articulating their thoughts through oral communication with those who held differing views and respectfully participated in moral and civic dialogue being presented all across the United States today.

In what I hope was a provocative and instructive session, I wanted to instill in these pedagogical practitioners that the richness of memory studies comes from the ambiguous and multi-layered interpretations of the past. Inserting the Holocaust into the story of the United States’ national narrative, despite the overwhelming negligence of the Holocaust in the United States while **newspapers actively reported** on the horrors, should elicit questions of who, what, when, where, why,



and how these memories become normalized and embraced in the national consciousness. They also should prime us to think critically about what is simultaneously being forgotten, and how this amnesia contributes just as much, if not more, to national identity, national myth, and nationalism. Lastly, we should evaluate the convergence and divergence of memories pertaining to violent pasts in attempts to carry the lessons of the past into the present and future.

I will be hosting a webinar, “Holocaust Memory and Memorialization in the United States,” through Echoes & Reflections at Yad Vashem on Monday, November 14 from 3:00p-4:00p to continue these ideas and conversations. You can register [here](#).



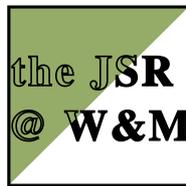
Reflections:

Memorializing,
Disposing,
Forgetting.

By Jack Boyd



The following is a series of excerpts from a journal Boyd kept during the summer of 2022 while visiting sites of public memory associated with European authoritarians of the 20th century. Generously funded by William & Mary's 1693 Scholars Program, Boyd set out to reflect on linkages between yesterday's authoritarians and today's ever growing list. These three entries tackle three museums in three cities uniquely liable for the Holocaust.



May 31, 2022. *Haus der Geschichte Österreich in Vienna, Austria.*

I began this leg as I assumed many tourists had before. Wandering the gilded, imperial streets of the *Allstadt* and *Innerstadt* (the decorated and lauded downtown), balking at the prices and admiring the expensive cars. Teslas, BMWs, Audis cruise beneath Habsburg marble. You can sit in coffee shops Freud frequented for eight euro a latte and fifteen per apple strudel. It is an odd business model when you think about it – sit in an incredibly old and outdated restaurant and pay more. Emperors with eyes of stone stare into the horizon fifty feet above you; the statues are two, three, even five times larger than their human subject could have possibly been. I am here to research history; I feel as if, without the cars, I have stepped back into it. I look around for a time machine – I must have left it back in the train station.

Austria is uniquely attached to authoritarianism in the modern period. Absolutism is Austrian. God put the Habsburgs on the planet to rule Europe. Or that is at least how they spun it until the First World War. Since, the Austrians democratized, joined the EU, and boast an incredibly high standard of living. Yet, the Habsburgs never left. Their gold drips from buildings, rolling out of pores high above. Rooves of copper, long oxidized, gleam in the daylight, reflecting the light and an idea: you are small.

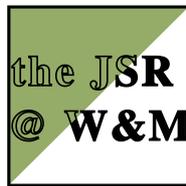
That same feeling bubbles up as you approach the Hofburg: the system of many massive palaces transitioned from Habsburg residences to Museums. Recycled buildings do not feel so changed. The angel above, anointing a monarch who once had more money than God, peers down: you are small.

I will be the first to admit it. As soon as I walked in, between doors three times my height, I was lost. Disoriented. Confused. I was here for a museum; all I saw was chandeliers. For as far as the eye could see, flickering glass hung down in impressive shapes. The gray veined marble extended in front of me for what felt like farther. It is the kind of marble that is only marble. Pure. Old. Incalculable. The kind of marble where you need metal stays to keep slabs together. Paintings lined the walls. Aged monarchs depicted in the peak of their health, beauty, and fashion. Do you have a crown and scepter too? No: *you are small*.

The small bald man at the counter scrutinized me above maroon reading glasses. After a few questions on his part: *Which museum are you here to see? There are multiple in one building? Yes, four. Holy crap this place is massive. Where are you visiting from? The states. Cash or card?* I tapped my card (give whoever invented this ability a pay raise!).

The *Haus der Geschichte Österreich*, or the House of Austrian History to those of us whose German pronunciation is often intertwined with pointing at a spelling for someone else to read and then respond in English, takes up a few floors of a massive complex in the *Hofburg*. The museum focuses on the last hundred years or so of Austrian history. It's brand new. It opened at the end of 2018 and with the pandemic, few have really seen the inside. The rise, fall, and rise again of democracy. If the time frame did not already give it away, I was not here for the Habsburgs – I would need to cross the square to a different museum to learn about them – instead I was here for the definition of fascism. I was here for Adolf Hitler and Engelbert Dolfuss, the man who gave Hitler Austria.

Like many of the museums I had visited so far, the *HdGÖ* began with a timeline on one side of a long corridor and a series of thematic elements and deep dives into specific events on the other. This first half of the museum is named after Alma Rosé Plateau, the head of the orchestra at the Auschwitz-Birkenau Death Camp, who saved as many lives as she could. The palace within which the *HdGÖ* resides does not really have rooms in the proper sense of the word. So much of it is the airy vaulted corridors two or three stories high that I described earlier. This series of rooms is therefore fully artificial. You walk through a long rectangular prism, pristinely white, to advance through time.



The beginning focuses on the wild era of 1918, as the Austrian people fought, conferred, and decided on a new form of government; the end on European Union membership and the more globally-connected, modern nation. Between, white neon signage alert the visitor to a new section or year. Behind glass, in this white, sanitized, almost medical environment, the curators placed multitudes of objects for you to reckon with. Yes, there is an interactive exhibit to decide for yourself which fundamental rights are most endangered today. Yet there are also Nazi flags. Next to the flag is a running video series of interviews with those imprisoned at concentration camps. Plaques describe the situation and succinctly explain who was hurt. Beyond, an in-depth description of how Engelbert Dolfuss suspended parliament and ruled Austria with unchecked power from 1933 until Hitler's *Anschluss*. Fascism and National Socialism the curators contend saw a rise in the aftermath of the Great War. It simmered. Dolfuss brought it into his governance. Then, he brought even more of it in with Hitler's annexation. The museum admits that the period's Austrian government was actively complicit in Hitler's crimes. There is good. There is bad. There is ugly. They give it all to you. Is Nazism sanitized? No. But it is rejected. It is discredited. And we are reminded of modern movements that seek to act just like it.

The second section of the museum sits on a landing between two flights of stairs. If you follow the steps up from the *HdGÖ* through the exhibit you would end up at a side entrance for the formerly Imperial Collection of Greco-Roman statues. The liminal space is not small. Imagine a staircase landing if you were a mouse.

Next Exhibit: *Disposing of Hitler*.

That's what the sign said.

Most aspects of Nazism are illegal to present in public in Austria. And here was his name. In bold type. Right there. In front of my face.

For forty odd years, museum curators, academics, politicians, and community members bounced ideas around about how best to tell this disgusting portion of their nation's history. A museum of tolerance? A history museum? Destroying it all? Showing it all? Showing some, but not all? This exhibit is by no means the first Austrian attempt at telling the Nazi story – and it may not be the last.

Climbing the marble stairs, you can see past the exhibit on the landing in near perpetuity. Yard after yard, football field after football field of massive chandeliers dangling two stories in the air. Looking behind, the palace's interior extends a similar distance. I could hear my footsteps echo off the walls. More portraits of ancient Kings and Queens looked down as if to say that they were surprised I was there. As I reached the top, I understood why. I was the only one there. I looked back up at the portraits. The Archduke got his point across: you little American are at this museum quite early. I forgot society starts later here.

About six feet tall, the first plaque guards the entrance to the new section. The exhibit is dedicated to those silenced by the *Anschluss*. Once a day, every day, the museum plays the sounds of the *Anschluss* happening. The sounds, cries but also triumphant music. Scared people. A victorious Reich. Hitler's voice will ricochet off the palace walls. They warn the visitor that it is haunting, especially in a place as historically and politically charged as the Habsburg palaces. They sincerely hope that the museum presents this story as an appeal for democracy and human rights in our modern world.

To critically examine the past, over the last few decades, the museum began collecting items connected to the Nazis that would have normally ended up in a flea market. A coin of this. A pin of that. A set of postcards. Maybe some stamps. Cups, mugs, mundane items. Yet also obviously charged



Yet also obviously charged pieces: weapons, statues.

Outside of the museum, showing any of this is illegal. Yet, the museum knows (and so do you), these items frequent many private homes – whether the residents know it or not.

The first section is interactive. Presented with a few slips of paper, each with a photograph of an item, it is to your discretion what to do with the item. Destroy? Preserve? Fit for sale? Your opinion. Tack it to a board with a few lines of your thoughts. Thousands of slips of paper adorn the three boards. A wide variety of languages and opinions, often on the same piece. Can you sell the bracelet? Do you need to destroy the Iron Cross?

Next, the curators present their take. On fourteen tables lay fourteen different objects, ranging from a telegram to a set of collectible stickers found on the back of cigarette boxes. The historians asked five questions. What is the object? What does the object mean? Who used the object and how? What story can be told by this object? How can the object be used in a museum?

A doll's stroller made out of a crate used in the invasion of France. To his daughters, the former German soldier made a toy. They had no clue it was recycled. Underneath the doll's mattress, he leaves the shipping label. After all those years, he is still a true believer. Decades later, his family finds the pram. They donate it to the museum. There's a copy of their donation letter and the original packaging it was sent in. Handwritten. A cardboard box.

A Wehrmacht knife. A mass-produced unit. Made for every German soldier. Not as useful as a gun – rarely, if ever, used in combat. After his deployment, the soldier adds an intricate engraving. His name, a fanciful shield, some eagles. The museum worries that exhibiting a weapon makes violence seem attractive. Laying on the table behind some glass, it looks miniscule. So shiny after all these years. It would look more at home in a silver collection, between plates and coins.

Two bronze renderings of Hitler's head. They lie sideways on the table. As if someone had finished using them and just set them down.

Shreds of paper. They arrived in a small container. Part of an interactive art exhibit where Austrians shredded Nazi paperwork and paraphernalia from their homes as a form of catharsis.

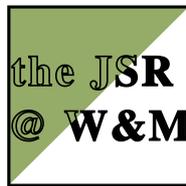
A lamp stand. A Jewish family repurposed the wood from an old cabinet. The cabinet once stood in a country home seized from them by the Nazis. The Nazis turned it into a convalescence home. When the family finally got the home back – someone decided they needed a new lamp. Later, the family donated the lamp stand.

Some people brought their items in boxes and crates. Others mailed them in. One person even left their briefcase with the sticker collection inside. Some donated anonymously. Others did not. Some owned the pieces personally. Others found them in a relative's attic.

One of the last tables showed a microphone. Rusted. Clearly old. Out of style even in the thirties. The man worked for a radio station in Vienna. The radio station covered one of Hitler's speeches during the Anschluss. His boss handed him the microphone afterwards; the man kept it as a souvenir. It sat at his desk until his retirement in 1990. He donated it to the museum soon after, aware that it may have some value.

The museum didn't try to retell the story of Nazism. In this year, Hitler did this. Later, this bill was passed. The next year, the French surrendered. Unsuspecting American troops wander into a death camp.

Instead life – in its limited fashion under the yoke of authoritarianism – was described through the regular objects we use each day. I mean how would you tell that story? Is there an exact start date? Did it ever end? For some it did. For true believer's it never did. For those sent to die – they



never saw it end. For those who must reckon with it each day, it certainly never did. For those who see it come again... or maybe see how it never left.

My silent reflection was quickly broken. A group of chattering teens summited the stairs. Led by a docent a few years older than myself, they were sandwiched by a teacher no more than thirty-five. The fifteen or so kids were maybe thirteen or fourteen. The docent continued, explaining something about the building, the exhibit, a historical time-period. I caught a few words. He spoke German at an impressive clip. The students and teacher were engrossed in their surroundings. I am pretty sure they didn't see me. I was a fly on a wall, one of those moving eyes in a painting.

The fifteen children were evenly split, boys and girls. Some were blonde. Some had dark hair. One girl's hijab covered hers. The skin tones ran the gamut of possibilities. Sure, it may seem trite to contend: oh, this is Hitler's worst nightmare. A group of diverse kids, living together, learning history in all of its complexities. But maybe that is the best way to describe it? A little trite. A little too perfect to be true. Face to face with dictators and emperors, soaking it all in. Learning it all: good, bad, ugly.

June 1, 2022. *NS-Documentationzentrum* in Munich, Germany.

At first, I thought it was an extension of the university. The ceremonial gate, of sorts, sat at the edge of a street's intersection. On one side, a coffee shop designed for college students; on the other, a lawn divided two classical art museums: one for Egypt, the other for Greece. In typical fashion, all three (the gate and the two museums) rose above the oversaturated grass with white marble facades. Stouter than other buildings in the area, the wide columns held up heavy pediments in a battle nearly lost. While the gate stood firmly in its surroundings, the two museums appeared to be sinking before my eyes. And yet, the grass seemed to grow even faster, enveloping the buildings as they fell. Some kids played on the turf, a biker rested his head for a few fleeting moments of sunshine between downpours. Just beyond the plaza, or platz, two more art museums, built in a similarly grandiose way overlooked their own lawn.

Yet, I was interested in what lay between the two platzes. Across a few lanes of traffic, a concrete structure, annoyingly modern stuck out of the landscape. It looked new. Like an Ikea cabinet installed in a Victorian home. Out of place. Too simple. A few gashes purposely added to let in a few drops of light. Compared to the bright, white concrete, these windows appeared as dark as the inside of an ear. The blackout tint showcased nothing of the inside.

The NS-Documentationzentrum is a recent addition to the Munich landscape. Opened only a few years ago, it serves as the region's latest attempt in telling the story of National Socialism. As the curators note, it is not the first – and it probably will not be the last. Unlike other spaces in Munich, the museum is not so much a space for remembrance, but learning. The point is to expose the cruelty built by the Nazis – and show how regular people enabled it. Guilt is never centralized with one person the museum seems to say. A whole host of people let the devil run wild.

I played pool with a man from Brazil the night before. Rio. He had moved out to Hamburg for his masters about a decade ago. Days after graduation, at the twenty third hour, he received a call from a large energy drink company headquartered in Munich. Corporate law – not his favorite – but he was good at contracts and it paid the bills. For the last few years, he commuted a few hours into the Bavarian capital, appalled at the rising housing prices in Munich. For a fraction of the cost, he said, he got his own yard and a train pass. A few nights a week, he stayed at the same hostel – though the company “splurged” and got him his own room. He preferred the grungy atmosphere to the ritzy Hilton



his boss recommended. Here, he could actually talk to people – and beat a few tourists on the pool table while he was at it.

He asked me why I had chosen to visit Munich rather than a more exciting German city like Berlin. I explained this journal to the best of my ability given the language differences – I was mindful that English was at minimum his third language.

You'll like Berlin more – he really accentuated that second syllable.

Why?

Bavaria still is very conservative...

The docent pointed me to the elevator – I was supposed to begin at the top and work my way down. The fourth floor: really the fifth in American terms. It began as an origin story. Here is the ground in which the Nazi seed began to flourish. Eugenicists who called Munich's universities home at the turn of the 19th century. Poor economic conditions. Corrupt politicians who benefitted from the ultra-right wing and would expose themselves by indicting the Nazis. Communist scares. Perceptions of other people's laziness. Of being replaced. Of being left behind. Of being told what to do from Berlin. From Paris. From London. Propaganda campaigns. Scapegoats for the loss in the Great War.

Other. Other. Other.

Them. Them. Them.

Hitler began here. As he would later cry, Berlin was the capital of the Reich, Munich was the Nazi's home – *the capital of the movement*.

In this moment before Hitler's appointment as chancellor, the museum recognizes the many faces of his opposition in this early moment. Those who called out his hypocrisy, his lies, his danger. The SS started in Bavaria years before Hitler even had legal power. Terror groups roamed. These opponents put themselves in danger – many had to flee, never to see their homes again. A short list. Most were faces of indifference. As I turn the corner, about to head down to the next floor I notice a sign.

The Weimar Republic falls because people didn't oppose extremism enough.

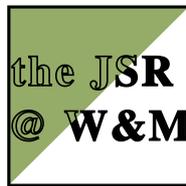
On the next floor, I am greeted with a large plaque. The end of rule by law and democracy. For table after table, plaque after plaque, picture after picture, the museum engulfs the visitor with the complete transformation of society. A forced coordination of the justice system. Race as state doctrine. Sterilizations. Political opponents sent to Dachau – the SS begins running the camp within a year of Hitler's ascension.

One wall is covered by a massive photograph. Mussolini, the Italian dictator, greets thousands of cheering Germans on the *Köningsplatz*. I recognized that gate. I had just seen it moments before. The grass was new: Hitler had installed concrete to better show off tanks and troops to adoring crowds.

The *NS-Documentationszentrum* sits on the previous site of the Nazi headquarters. An old, grand building, the National Socialist Party moved in after a string of contesting elections viably. They weren't winning across the board yet, but cash was flowing. They wanted a building that could show the prestige. Hitler could easily walk between the *Köningsplatz*, where he held rallies, book burnings and the like, and his office. Situated just outside of the city's old town, much of the building fell to Allied bombs in the 1940s. The rest was torn down later by the city government.

The photograph of the adoration of Mussolini sits next to another. Hollowed cheeks and gaping eye sockets stare you down. Dressed in the striped uniforms, prisoners at Dachau show the stark difference in life under the Nazis.

I can't tell why my stomach begins to swell and turn. Contract and heave. I am usually quite



good with blood and guts. If it weren't for the math involved, my mom jokes, I would have been a doctor. Friends and family come back with gashes and I deal with it. But there was something so revolting about these explanations.

The curators spared no details of the horrors of Hitler's beliefs about other humans and the lengths he would go to. Genocide was part of his government. His platform. His being. Everyone knew it. And still, people underestimated him. Still, people accepted him. Still, people were indifferent. The disgust lines your stomach and builds upwards. You no longer feel whole. As if something is gone, something has been taken.

The third floor gives way in one corner. It becomes a loft, a balcony over a portion of the second. There's a bank of television screens, each playing a different propaganda video. Nazi accomplishments on loop. Happy Germans going about their lives. Fanatical young people – and old – cheer as Hitler approaches. They would sell their lives for his wishes. Daladier and Chamberlain, the French and British leaders accepting Hitler's word. Whatever music or talking originally accompanied the clips was muted. Instead a soft piano track calmly accented the room. It was terrifying and disconcerting. It seemed to say: this is normal.

I squeezed through a group of high school students that separated me from the floor's last hallway. They had taken their headsets off for a brief moment so their teacher could explain the context of Daladier and Chamberlain's visit to Munich in 1938.

A few stools sat on one side of the hallway. That wall lay bare. Similarly, the curators had not hung anything on the other side. Yet, onto the wall itself, workers transcribed tens upon tens of specific anti-Semitic laws. As if to say: these aren't a plaque, they cannot be taken down. A stain that will not come out in the wash.

One law requires all Jewish persons, including children above six years old to wear a yellow star of David on their lapel. A few feet down the hall, there's a string of diary excerpts. A woman named Else Behrend-Rosenfeld writes of an incident in September, 1941. Two Jewish boys beaten, barely seven years old, mercilessly beaten because of their stars. By two kids the same age.

The next floor down, the second, covers the Second World War and its aftermath. Painstakingly, the museum documents war crime after war crime. Genocide after genocide. Which battalion, which commanding officer, on whose orders, on which day, who was killed, how they were killed, for what reason, for no reason, to prove a point, to prove they could, because they could.

Yet, who was at fault is complicated. Near the end of the war, as the Allies moved onto the offensive for the final push, the Germans began moving prisoners out of the concentration camps. Yet instead of trains – the guards forced them to walk. Death marches. In plain view of passersby, onlookers, German citizens, SS guards ruthlessly walked humans to death. Many Germans who witnessed these death marches reacted with indifference and fear. Very few people tried to help the prisoners. Indifference. The word shoots up again. A weed that refuses to go away.

The war is over. U.S. G.I.s liberate Dachau. Prisoners so gaunt they do not look human. In pictures, the prisoners are relieved, elated, crying tears of a thousand prayers answered. U.S. soldiers stand in shock. The soldiers search the premises. In securing the perimeter they find a train from Buchenwald. In one car, the SS left two thousand bodies. Prisoners who died along the way. No wonder the Americans weren't smiling.

Next comes the reeducation efforts. How do you convince millions of people that they were led astray? How do you do so without resorting to the same propaganda that the Nazis employed? They remove symbols, tear down buildings, open the press, tell the whole truth, send the Nazi leaders away,



give followers a second chance. Most doesn't work. Few people want to listen to Americans play God.

As I progress through the section, I can still see the TVs of Nazi propaganda. I can still hear the music. After all this work, had anything changed? Yes, many felt guilt. But for many more, it took decades to feel genuine shame. Genuine remorse. It took some victims just as long to even be recognized.

The museum ends soberly. A video montage plays silently. From 1963 to 2013. Fifty years of different reforms and museum exhibitions to teach about the horrors of Fascism. Of the Nazis. Of the Holocaust. Fifty years of a mayor or a professor or a community group giving a speech publicly. The camera pans over the crowd. Often there are police barricades protecting those there to listen. Neo-Nazis often swarm. Protesting the changes.

It is a bumpy road.

There are two fights simultaneously. The easy one to see is in front of our eyes. Those who continue to spread hate and vitriol. Who wish nothing more than a return to fascism and oppression. In one instance, in 1997, the Mayor of Munich opens an exhibition on the horrors of the Nazi regime. *It's our fault. We must recognize that and learn from it.* He intones. He is met with a hoard of protest. Swastikas emblazon crimson flags. Guns and bats everywhere. Stoic policemen guard a barrier. As time progressed the counter-protests grew larger. More and more Germans locked arms and hearts to repel these new Nazis.

The other fight is harder. We must fight against what we cannot see. We must fight forgetfulness. As time progresses and we get further and further from the action more people are willing to let it slip their mind. Indifference. The word of the day. The strongest act to help authoritarians wreak havoc is to do nothing. Doing nothing breeds terror.

June 7, 2022. *Jüdisches Museum in Berlin, Germany.*

The ground here in Berlin is made up of five or six different types of stones and bricks. Walkways to or from houses are often made using that typical red brick or maybe a grayer version. The sidewalks are likely striped: concrete sits next to small and square stone tiles which in turn sit next to larger stone squares or even irregular pieces. Sometimes, the original cobblestone peaks through. Each block is different, patched over time. The trash and the graffiti sits on top, and next to, and if you told me within, I'd believe you. The grunge is omnipresent. The town reflects the myriad of different lives its led – some good, many not.

The *Jüdisches Museum Berlin* (The Berlin Jewish Museum) is built in a similar way. An original building dating back a couple hundred years sits next to a much newer structure. The sort of building that is all metal with no right angles. It really juts and pokes at the sky in wild ways. Opening in 2001 (after a hiatus from its original opening in 1933, just days before Hitler's rise), the museum tells the story of the Jewish people specifically in Germany.

The two buildings are connected with an underground passage. The tunnel sets a disorienting tone. The floor is never quite level; neither is the ceiling. No angle seems correct. The lights, set in a line running down the middle of the ceiling, are also not quite perfectly aligned. You quickly lose judgment: of distance, of width, of space. Exhibits are placed at irregular intervals. Each is only a few pictures inserted into the wall behind dark glass. Small vignettes of the Holocaust. A family's passports. A set of cutlery stolen. An artist's rendering of death camps.

A few walls are devoted to videos of drummers pounding away in solitude. They are not in sync.



Surrounded by trees or rocks. One is even suspended in the air. An irregular drumbeat, therefore, follows you as you explore this underground territory. Often, hallways lead to nowhere. At the end of one such seemingly empty hall, a metal door reminiscent of an emergency exit peeks from the flickering lights. It's a cold, concrete room. The ceiling rises here, a few stories at least. One small opening towards the sun as the room tightens on one end. You have so much space, yet, far too little. Your feet echo but the walls close in. Reading a plaque, it's an artist's rendering of the Holocaust and its aftermath. It feels more than it represents. It's uncomfortable. That's the point, I guess.

After a flight of stairs, you enter a large room with many false hallways. A few black, granite stones stand alone. They're technologically advanced rocks. Wearing Bluetooth headphones, you can listen to Jewish voices. In another tall ceilinged and oppressively narrow room, an artist has thrown over a thousand metal faces into a pit. I'm not really sure where the pit ended and the wall began. I'm not sure if it was really a thousand – or far fewer – or far greater. Victims, too many to count, too many to see, too many to grapple with, of oppression and genocide.

The museum continues like this. Listening to wedding marches or holiday music (you get to pick on a handy iPad) behind beaded curtains while sitting on plush cushions. Tracing out the Hebrew alphabet beneath go-go lights. Relevant passages from the Torah line hallways; one room devotes itself to a historical glimpse into diasporic, medieval Jewry. Roman era statues with explanations of ancient anti-Semitism stand nearby to a video series explaining the importance (and not) of keeping Kosher.

As time moves farther, while the history becomes more tangible (more plaques closer together in a tighter chronological order), it also stays just as frenetic. Paintings hang from clear walls at odd spacings. Bars span the walls at irregular angles with quotes painted on. One side contains positive notions of Jewish acceptance by Europe; the other showcases the darkness still rampant. You can listen to Richard Wagner's operas, reading how the notably anti-Semitic composer made life actively harder for Jews. You can read a defense of him by his best friend: a Jewish man. There's a whole library set up in a corner. Instead of books, its shelves are stocked with broken glass and lead.

Walking into the more modern, final section, you pass by tens of portraits of famous Jews: from Jesus to Mendelsohn to Einstein to Cohen. They are cartoons – their facial flaws aggrandized with neon accents.

The museum is just confusing. Yes, the history worked chronologically – but the modern art terrified. It shot out in weird ways and the building seemed to ensnare you. I never quite knew where I was supposed to go. Two hallways would lead to the same place; three more led to nowhere. It was infuriating. It meant something. A sense of being trapped I think.

The next hallway was lined with ten foot tall paper banners. Hundreds of banners lined the wall. Each started with a year. 1930 to 1945. The first few papers are less full. Suddenly one year would have page after page after page of miniscule font. Anti-Jewish laws. The last one commands soldiers to burn evidence.

Unlike many museums, the *Jüdisches* strayed from showcasing gold teeth and hollowed bodies. Rather, the museum focused on the loss of life. While knowing that no one can truly fathom the number of lives lost – the curators tried to show how many people six million really is.

Then comes the after. What comes next?

The museum tackles culture and Israel and exodus and diaspora and moving back (or not). It's complicated. It's thorny. No one loves any part of it.

There's a video series at the end. Probably thirty or so screens mosaic a wall. Like those paintings in Harry Potter, German Jewish citizens, explain their plans for burial or cremation. Abroad?



At home? Where is home? The oldest is a woman around eighty. The youngest boy is four or five. Sometimes the images sing in a lackluster harmony.

A recognition that death is inevitable.

Is that what we are to gain from the museum? We will all die – and there are enough awful people that they may end our lives before we want.

Morbid.

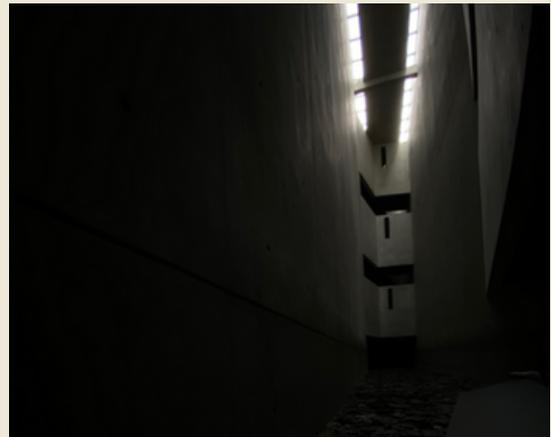
Honest?

In one of the last rooms, there's a young British man's plastic, reusable water bottle. It's emblazoned with the logo of a Jewish organization. He donated the bottle in 2019. A few years before, as a college student, he decided to study abroad in Berlin. Get to know the city that changed the trajectory of his family's life. But, he regularly wears a kippah – a yarmulke. His friends and family worried that such an act would be too dangerous outside of his London neighborhood. He wore a string of baseball caps throughout his time in Berlin, covering the skullcap.

He worried: had enough changed. I worry the same too.



Inside the *HdGÖ*



A moment for reflection within the *Jüdisches Museum*



The *NS-Documentationzentrum*



Anti-Jewish laws displayed at the *Jüdisches Museum*

The Jewish
Presence in the
Iberian Peninsula
as a Product of
The Spanish
Inquisition

By J.R. Erskine



Even since the formal end of the Spanish Inquisition almost 200 years ago, the Jewish population in the Iberian Peninsula has remained slim. This is of course a consequence of the 350 year long religious genocide which preceded the formal end in 1834 by Queen Maria Cristiana de Borbon – though her declaration hardly meant anything as the damage had already been done. Within those 350 years, all known Jews within Spain had been forcibly expelled, converted under duress, or murdered in an act of religious violence. As such, it makes the current Judaic presence in Spain somewhat exceptional as most mainland Jews are actually transplants. Either as a result of the 2015 bill passed by the aptly named Spanish Ministry of Justice, or through their own immigration to the Iberian Peninsula.

Francoist Spain & The Holocaust

As one may expect, Spain has been a historically inhospitable place for those of Jewish descent, even during the Holocaust where Spain declared formal neutrality as an olive branch to Hitler. This act of neutrality inhibited the passage of Jews fleeing Europe, leaving them vulnerable. While there were some notable instances of Spaniards assisting the Jewish flight from the Nazi killing machine, the official state policy remained.¹ This makes sense as the authoritarian dictator of the time, Francisco Franco, wanted to maintain trade relations between what was an impoverished post-civil war Spain and the fascist industrial power which helped bring him to power.² Jews have been at a radical disadvantage socially, and economically, since the late 1400s up to the present day as the Francoist dictatorship wasn't formally abolished until 1982 following his death.

In biblical literature the Iberian Peninsula is referred to as The Sepharad – traditional homeland of Sephardic Jews. This name springs from the prophetic text of Obadiah (1:20) “*The exiles of this host of the people of Israel shall possess the land of the Canaanites as far as Zarephath, and the exiles of Jerusalem who are in Sepharad shall possess the cities of the Negeb.*”³ Liturgically speaking, this passage from the book of prophets is designed to demonstrate the lengths with which the Prophet Abdias travelled in order to strengthen Jewish resolve against Edom.⁴ However, within the present day, it serves as a basis from which we can describe the Iberian Peninsula as The Sepharad – with biblical scholars dating the time of its creation to around the 9th century BCE.⁵ As such, those with Judaic roots from the peninsula are referred to as Sephardic due to their heritage in the land of The Sepharad.

¹ Erskine, Jonathan R. Entrevista con Fernando Rodriguez Izquierda. Personal, June 22, 2022.

² Gerber, Jane S. *The Jews of Spain: A History of the Sephardic Experience*. Free Press, 1994.

³ Taylor, John, and John Taylor. *The Bible*. Rutland Vt.: Printed by Fay & Davison, 1978.

⁴ JPMarichal. “Libro De Abdías • Biblicomentarios.” Biblicomentarios, November 4, 2021. https://biblicomentarios.com/libro-de-abdias/#La_fecha_de_redaccion_del_libro_de_Abdias.

⁵ Gottheil, Richard. *The Jewish Encyclopedia*. Funk and Wagnalls, 1964.

The Umayyad Caliphate and Golden Age of Jewish Culture

The Jewish populations in the present-day center around Sevilla, Granada, and Gibraltar – cities that were historically controlled by the Umayyad Caliphate during their 800-year Spanish history between the 7th and 15th centuries.⁶ These cities were centers of commerce and culture during the caliphate and at one time or another served as the seat of governance.⁷ The Umayyad Caliphate practiced peaceful coexistence between the various religious groups within their Iberian empire, and as such many Jews were employed by the Caliphate in educated positions – contributing greatly to Iberian art and literature. This was radically different from the Christian empires which had previously ruled over the Iberian Peninsula. Under the Umayyad Caliphate there was a measure of independence leading to what has been described as the “Golden Age of Jewish Culture” in the Iberian Peninsula.⁸ Contrary to the maltreatment faced in much of the rest of Europe, Jews had the opportunity to create art and culture, as

seen in texts such as the Barcelona Haggadah dating from the mid-14th century prior to the total Christian reconquest of the peninsula. In the years following the conquest of the Iberian Peninsula by Tariq of the Umayyad Caliphate in 711 the Jewish



Figure 1: Modern Reproduction of the 14th century Haggadah of Barcelona

population surged. This came as a consequence of increased immigration from the north of Africa and the increased freedoms brought about by the conquest.⁹ With new trade routes and freedom and religion offered by the Caliphate transition to the Iberian Peninsula was an appealing option for Jews of the time. For the first time Jews were able to hold public offices and many worked as scholars and translators,

⁶ Bowers, W. P. “Jewish Communities in Spain in the Time of Paul the Apostle.” *The Journal of Theological Studies* XXVI, no. 2 (1975): 395–402. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jts/xxvi.2.395>.

⁷ Menocal, Maria Rosa. *The Ornament of the World: How Muslims, Jews, and Christians Created a Culture of Tolerance in Medieval Spain*. Back Bay Books, 2012.

⁸ Chillida, Gonzalo Álvarez. “Presencia e Imagen Judía En La España Contemporánea. Herencia Castiza y Modernidad.” Essay. In *El Otro En La España Contemporánea / Prácticas, Discursos y Representaciones*, edited by Natalia Arce, 123–59. Fundación Tres Culturas del Mediterráneo, 2011.

⁹ Alexy, Trudi. *The Mezuzah in the Madonna's Foot: Oral Histories Exploring Five Hundred Years in the Paradoxical Relationship of Spain and the Jews*. Simon & Schuster, 1993.



translating classics from Arabic in *La Escuela de Traductores de Toledo* up through the 12th century.¹⁰ The impact of Jewish thought on the Iberian Peninsula was incredible, and with the same incredible swiftness the Spanish Inquisition undid much of that progress.

Roman & Visigoth Precedence for The Spanish Inquisition

Prior to the dominance of the Umayyad Caliphate, many Jews found themselves subjects of the loose collection of warlords and kings which have come to be called the Visigoths. The Visigoths, while living under a monarchical system, owed ultimate political authority to The Pope. This emergence of Christendom led to political treatises which served to directly stifle freedom of religion. The earliest of these, The Theodosian Code, laid out a political framework to limit the presence of other religions within Christian lands. Initially in Latin, the code goes on to illustrate what it calls “Western Norms” which described how citizens ought to live under the rule of the Roman Empire.¹¹ Using these norms, the Theodosian Code created a strict social hierarchy, placing Jews firmly below Christians. The Theodosian Code created a “legal precedent” for the exclusion of Jews throughout the history of the Christendom.

Just over 70 years later, the Visigoths established their own set of religious codices aimed at suppression of religion – the Breviary of Alaric. The Breviary of Alaric served to underscore the Theodosian Code and ultimately resulted in the physical segregation of Jews to *Juderias* within major urban centers. Year after year and ruler after ruler strengthened these codes to simultaneously prove their pious nature and show their strength against what they viewed as dangerous heretics.¹² Then, in 590CE, following the third Council of Toledo the situation took a turn for the worse. For the first time, the king formally declared the Visigothic lands to be politically Catholic, with the requirement that all living within the kingdom must convert to Catholicism alongside other stipulation to further cement a second-class status for Jews.¹³ This included prohibition from holding public office, marriage between Jews and Christians, and social mixing between the two faiths.

With this historic precedent, and the growing power of the Visigoths at the beginning of the 7th century the anti-Judaic decrees grew in strength. This forced many living within the Iberian Peninsula to convert publicly or flee the kingdom. Had the Umayyad Caliphate not invaded shortly thereafter it would have come as no surprise if this same pattern continued. Among these laws, Jews were forbidden from

¹⁰ Benocal, Maria Rosa. *The Ornament of the World: How Muslims, Jews, and Christians Created a Culture of Tolerance in Medieval Spain*. Back Bay Books, 2012.

¹¹ Gerber, Jane S. *The Jews of Spain: A History of the Sephardic Experience*. Free Press, 1994.

¹² Erskine, Jonathan R. Entrevista con Jonathan Levy. Personal, June 22, 2022.

¹³ Bernat, Gabriel. “Inquisición.” Website de Gabriel Bernat, December 2002.
<http://www.gabrielbernat.es/espana/inquisicion/index.html>.

celebrating The Passover and any other religious festival, on top of the formal declaration that Jewish children over 7 years old should be forcibly taken from their families to live instead with Catholic ones.¹⁴ As far as the Visigoths were concerned, the Jews could be forcibly baptized or become slaves of the state. This pattern was only halted by the invasion of the Umayyad Caliphate in 711CE, as they instituted radically different political structures allowing for freedom of religion. Given the precedent, it follows logically the force with which the Spanish Crown pursued the Inquisition. As they viewed the reconquest of the Iberian Peninsula as a direct continuation of their Visigoth ancestors, they sought to achieve the same “religious purity” that had characterized their reign nearly 800 years prior.¹⁵

In the minds of those who initiated The Spanish Inquisition, it was a continuation of the historical precedent set by the Theodosian Code while simultaneously serving to shore up political power through violent means. Promptly after uniting Spain under their two empires, King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella sought to unify the public, and heresy proved to be an effective means of doing so.¹⁶ At the onset of The Inquisition Jews were given two options: convert publicly to Christianity and renounce their Jewish heritage, or face execution at the hands of the crown. Though many fled the country to the north in search of more tolerant lands, just as many were executed or killed throughout the 350-year ethnic cleansing which characterized the Spanish Inquisition.¹⁷ This placed Jews at a cultural disadvantage which had become baked into the Spanish public consciousness following the formal end of the Inquisition, and even in the present day the Jewish population in Spain remains low, despite Spain often being characterized as the holy land of The Sepharad and original homeland of Sephardic Jews.

¹⁴ Weiner, Rebecca. “Judaism: Sephardim.” Jewish Virtual Library, 2010.

<https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/sephardim>.

¹⁵ Alexy, Trudi. *The Mezuzah in the Madonna's Foot: Oral Histories Exploring Five Hundred Years in the Paradoxical Relationship of Spain and the Jews*. Simon & Schuster, 1993.

¹⁶ Menocal, Maria Rosa. *The Ornament of the World: How Muslims, Jews, and Christians Created a Culture of Tolerance in Medieval Spain*. Back Bay Books, 2012.

¹⁷ Chillida, Gonzalo Álvarez. “Presencia e Imagen Judía En La España Contemporánea. Herencia Castiza y Modernidad.” Essay. In *El Otro En La España Contemporánea / Prácticas, Discursos y Representaciones*, edited by Natalia Arce, 123–59. Fundación Tres Culturas del Mediterráneo, 2011.



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