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Genocide Museums and Memorials:
How the Politics of Victimization and the Entertainment Factor of certain Institutions cause Misinterpretations of Genocide

Shauna Lachendro

The University of Akron Senior Honors Project

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Memorial museums are a place of education, entertainment, and critical examination. Scholars are examining memorials of mass violence in order to determine how the experiences of both victims and survivors have been validated within a society’s collective memory. Museums and memorials face many obstacles that can interfere with every aspect of the sites from building plans to maintenance. Such issues include funding, determining the appropriate levels of violence and graphic imagery, deciding what specific information to include, and shaping how the institution should memorialize the victims. Once the institution establishes its funding, a huge obstacle is a lack of physical evidence. This occurs because the efforts to eliminate a culture or people are usually very effective, and evidence of those who perished or their history is lost. Once the institution or site overcomes these obstacles, they are often too political, too black and white, and too vague and simplified to understand what everyone seeks to discover: why did that episode of mass violence occur? There are four institutions in particular examined in this work: the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Kigali Rwandan Genocide Memorial, Tsitserakaberd, and S-21. Each of these institutions commemorate one example of Genocide in the twentieth century that is misunderstood or overgeneralized. However, the fact that these institutions exist demonstrate the importance of remembering these cultures, and they allow for their histories to come to the forefront of humanitarian discourse. From the start we need to understand that no institution is perfect, but there are ways to make improvements and provide the answer everyone is looking for.

The ability to critically examine museums and memorials that commemorate genocide and mass violence has become increasingly important. Museums themselves are culture-writing institutions, which means they are used to determine or solidify how a person understands a
culture.¹ Memorial museums in particular are dedicated to historical events of mass suffering.² Without any form of critical analysis, there could be inconsistencies in how a museum portrays certain realities. This creates an incorrect interpretation of a specific culture, event, or idea that people take home with them and use to interpret similar realities. Another important idea to remember when examining museums and memorials is that, according to Jinks, “memorialization is never culturally isolated.”³ From planning to the execution of museums and memorials, there are influences from various people with numerous cultural backgrounds that ultimately create an inclusive and cross-cultural memorial or institution. The only drawback to memorials, and occasionally memorial museums such as Tuol Sleng in Cambodia, is that they pay tribute to the victims, but say nothing about the cause or perpetrators.⁴ As a result, people leave with feelings of empathy and anger, but no understanding of why or how an atrocity such as genocide happened. They also leave with the idea that such atrocities live in the past, while ignoring present-day issues. One commonly unreported and recent event that is full of human right violations is the violence in Burma against the Rohingya. The Burmese government is abusing the Muslim Rohingya by destroying the group’s anthropological and historical record, revoking their Burmese citizenship, pardoning those who act violently against them, and torching their villages.⁵ These events are ignored and underreported by the media, European governments, and genocide museums and memorials. However, some museums, like the United States

Holocaust Memorial Museum, attempt to connect the past and the present by creating temporary exhibits on issues like the violence in Syria. However, the messages are often lost upon the visitors due to the density of materials provided. People visit memorials and memorial museums to learn and to grieve. These visitations result in the idea that visiting the museum is a humanitarian effort towards those who they are unable or unwilling to help during the atrocities.\(^6\) The good feelings they get for acknowledging the victims of mass violence or genocide then make it easier to ignore the present conflicts in the world since they already have some humanitarian brownie points. Increasing the public’s knowledge about issues of human rights violations and genocide can help prevent further atrocities by allowing for a sense of empathy. In many cases, violence occurs in nations that are underdeveloped. Visitors to memorial museums typically lack the ability to create a connection or bond with the victims because many of these victims have poor living conditions and modest lifestyles. The social and cultural disconnect between museum attendees and victims of mass violence and human rights violations widens the gap between the victim and the bystander. This creates the idea that there is a totally different and separate reality between the two worlds. Bridging this gap can ultimately allow for more humanitarian efforts to help those in need world-wide. In order to create institutions that can effectively teach people about the world’s atrocities, we must first critically examine the institutions that are already in existence.

Through this work I hope to help people look at memorial museums and monuments that commemorate genocide and mass violence through an objective lens. I will be analyzing four sites associated with genocide: The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, the Kigali Genocide Memorial, Tsitsernakaberd, and S-21. With this new outlook, people will be able to

discuss issues that are unpleasant and challenging. Examples include the Turkish silence on the Armenian genocide, the presence of Holocaust deniers, and the lack of teachings of the Rwandan genocide in history classes in Rwanda. When curators and directors look at their institution through rose colored glasses, they overlook the fact that information is missing. Understandably, orchestrated violence often effectively destroys culture and leaves little evidence of the destruction itself. However, what is missing from exhibits are facts. This lack of information could eventually be the difference between someone knowing a genocide happened and knowing how to spot the signs of genocide. In our current political climate fear and hate are growing. This discontent is dangerous. The sooner we can educate those in charge of institutions that memorialize or try to educate on genocide and mass violence, the better they can educate the masses and prevent future atrocities.

One of the first and most important topics to conquer is genocide. The definitions of genocide vary greatly. According to Ungor, “genocide can be defined as a complex process of systematic persecution and annihilation directed at a particular group of people by a government.” To expand on this idea, Serafim says, “…genocide involves not only mass killings but also a systematic attempt to carry out annihilation of the past, present and future…including the destruction of archives, libraries, and graveyards.” Finally, the United Nation’s Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, created in 1948, defines genocide as, “any of the following acts committed with the intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnic, racial, or religious group, such as: killing members of the group; causing serious

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bodily or mental harm to members of the group; deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part; imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group; [and] forcibly transferring children of the group to another group.  

The idea of genocide is a highly debated modern concept. In many cases of mass violence, the ruling of genocide is indecisive because of all the issues surrounding intent. For example, there is an inability to label the destructions of people and cultures during colonialism as genocide because there is no proof of the intent to destroy those cultures. For the purpose of this paper, genocide is defined as the systematic destruction of a people and their culture.

Institutions, such as museums and memorials, are political. Politicization is not always intentional, but it is always inevitable. According to Jinks, “[m]emorialization is one arena competing interest groups stake their claims on behalf of the dead.”  

The moment an institution takes a stand on any issue, belief, or practice that institution has become politicized. Often times, memorials and memorial museums seek government support, thus creating a need to appease different political figures. The creation of the United States Holocaust Memorial, for example, was to help President Carter gain support of the Jewish community. Memorial museums are not the only institutions subject to politicization. Lujan critiques the Smithsonian Museum of the American Indian’s displays by claiming, “[b]y taking away a lot of pain and suffering of the

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Indian experience, they’ve taken away…its historic context.”

Removing the historical context also removes the political context, which leads to culture talk. Culture talk has “…become a predominant mode of addressing citizenship, security, and even economy, which are conventionally considered to be distinct from culture.”

One of the most prevalent examples of culture talk is when the U.S media blames Islam and the Islamic culture for acts of terror instead of acknowledging the broader historical and political context associated with terror and terrorist organizations. The main way memorial museums are politicized is by promoting the protection of human rights.

Human rights is a politically charged issue, especially due to international human-rights laws that many countries either ignore or cannot uphold. Creating a human rights culture has always been a goal for memorial museums in order to help prevent future atrocities, but many of the humanitarian hawks these exhibits create get caught up in culture talks and end up doing more harm than good.

There are three specific types of humanitarian hawks: the first celebrate going to war as a strictly humanitarian effort, the second invoke security principals as well as humanitarian principals, and the last promote the idea that in the case of human rights violations there is no difference between interests and principals.

In the cases of Kosovo and Kuwait, humanitarians promoted helping those in Kosovo since their efforts would be seen as purely humanitarian. Helping with the issues in Kuwait, however, would have been interpreted as a ploy to secure their oil fields.

Essentially, many humanitarians seem to want to help people as long as their actions can be interpreted only as good intentioned and honest. In the end, by


promoting human rights culture, culture talk, and government propaganda, memorial museums become political.

Museums themselves are a unique type of institution. They function under the guise of education, but in reality they serve as a source of entertainment. According to Holmstrom, “[t]he blends of art, food, education, and entertainment in museums are now standard marketing procedures…the recent combination of these elements have resulted in rising attendance figures.”

This is why museums and institutions of the like are included on travel websites and county visitor’s bureau pamphlets and pages. Many museum directors and visitors interpret the museum as a type of fair or urban oasis to experience wonder and stimulation. People do not just go to museums to learn, they go to experience; the memorial itself is not the object of the visit. For this reason, people attend memorial museums. Sure, they want to learn about the history of an event, but they also want to feel a connection and experience objects and photographs that can link them to the past. Functioning as a form of entertainment is beneficial to institutions because it allows for them to be financially stable. Utilizing the entertainment factor allows for the easy construction of “…audiences, visitors, and donor lists.” By creating an emotive and dramatic experience, memorial museums seek to entertain visitors. On the other hand, they have to cater to the visitors’ wants in order to remain a prosperous institution. As a result, museums often have to condense the information presented into an easy to grasp lesson people can discover while browsing the collections.

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21 Holmstrom, “Looking for Entertainment?”
23 Ibid., 6.
Museums also have to be weary of what messages to portray. For example, the Guggenheim Museum in Spain recently had to pull four works from an experimental contemporary art show due to the outcry of animal rights activists. In a statement, the Guggenheim Museum stated “…explicit and repeated threats of violence have made the decision necessary.” Institutions have to run vigorous public relations campaigns, especially in the current political climate, in order to ensure their doors can stay open. President Donald Trump’s proposed 2018 budget eliminates important funding sources for both national and local museums alike: The National Endowment for the Arts, the National Endowment for the Humanities, the Institute of Museum and Library Services, and the Corporation for Public Broadcasting.

Museum officials understand the importance of having to become a necessity to the neighborhood though public outreach and events, especially in regards to nonprofit organizations, to secure a foothold for future success in the face of these proposed funding cuts. Understanding the needs and wishes of one’s community can benefit a museum in the long run. For example, while working at a local museum during an internship, I had to help rename one of the events due to a misunderstanding with a visitor. Typically, such incidences do not call for a complete remarketing of an event, but since the museum was trying to pass a levy that year, extreme precaution had to be taken to preserve our funding. The idea of a museum is straightforward, but in practice, running a museum successfully involves the understanding of public relations, community, entertainment, and politics.


27 Fears, “Guggenheim pulls controversial works.”


29 This is a personal story from my internship at the Massillon Museum in Massillon, Ohio in October of 2017.
In recent years, there has been a spike in what is known as “dark tourism.” Dark tourism is when people visit places generally associated with death and suffering in order to feel a sense of empathy or to pay respects.\(^\text{30}\) Cambodia and Rwanda actually promote dark tourism in order to justify their current political and social programs created for the reconstruction of their countries. These places also allow for people to commodify and promote dark tourist destinations in order to profit off of the tourism and souvenir purchases.\(^\text{31}\) This is easy to justify, since international tourism often revolves around the ideas of war and violence.\(^\text{32}\) Humans are interested by violence. The feelings of wanting to look at something brutal and grotesque, like a murdered human, but not being able to, are at play in dark tourism.\(^\text{33}\) People who visit dark tourist sites also report feeling like they were intruding, which can heighten the thrill of visiting genocide museums and memorials.\(^\text{34}\) Visitors to memorial sites that are located where the physical violence actually occurred report feeling unsettled, which adds to the thrill of the destination.\(^\text{35}\) Many people visit these sites in order to perform critical reflection and remembrance, since they feel this is their humanitarian duty.\(^\text{36}\) This way, they turn something macabre into something productive. By learning from the past, they fulfil a moral duty, which is what many dark tourists seem to want from their experiences.\(^\text{37}\) The ability to reflect on certain catastrophic historical events in an unsettling environment helps tourists feel that they are helping the global humanitarian effort.

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\(^{30}\) Williams, *Memorial Museums*, 141


\(^{32}\) Hughes, “Dutiful Tourism,” 320.

\(^{33}\) Bolin, “Performing Morality,” 200-01.

\(^{34}\) Ibid., 201.


\(^{36}\) Hughes, “Dutiful Tourism,” 319.

\(^{37}\) Bolin, “Performing Morality,” 206.
The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Washington D.C.

In the field of genocide research, the amount of information and testimonies in regards to the Holocaust is unmatched. Although information on the genocide in Rwanda is slowly increasing, there is a particular level of interest cultivated about the Holocaust within the public education system that allows for the popularity of destinations such as the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington D.C. This institution, which prides itself on being the world leader of genocide research, is definitely a valuable asset to any genocide scholar. However, the public exhibits themselves are politically charged, which in turn does not portray information that would be beneficial to the general public to know and understand, especially in our current political climate. The march by the Neo-Nazis in Charlottesville and the lack of police action not only demonstrate need for further education on the Holocaust, but also that racialized fear, hatred, and prejudice are still dividing factors in America today.

The creation of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM) was a fifteen year process. From its creation, the USHMM served as the focal point of Holocaust memory in the United States. Carter created the President’s Commission of the Holocaust in November of 1978 in order to gain the approval of the American Jewish community. It also commemorates the victims of the Holocaust and celebrate America’s role in the liberation of concentration camps. This was especially important in regards to the weakening in morale of the American people during the Vietnam War. Due to numerous theological and political disputes, such as ownership of Holocaust memory and the issues between Israel and Palestine, groundbreaking did

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38 Linenthal, Preserving Memory, 1.
39 Ibid., 2.
40 Ibid., 23.
41 Ibid., 10.
not occur until 1985. From the start the USHMM was a political entity. The Holocaust was a European event, and was not incorporated into American memory until the rise in the power of Israel. Since then, Holocaust education is either mandatory or required in over seventeen states. Some colleges, such as Stockton University in New Jersey and Keene State College in New Hampshire, offer a Holocaust studies degree. The USHMM was a result of an American public relations campaign.

The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum is an institution allotted to the American Jewish Community by President Carter, and chaired by the famous Jewish writer and Holocaust survivor Eli Wiesel. The institution, finished in 1995 and opened under the Clinton Administration, serves as a way to memorialize the victims of the Holocaust. It also serves as a reminder of what atrocities can happen when fear and hate run rampant. Eli Wiesel claims, “[t]he purpose of the museum is to be a sacred institution entrusted with containing the mystery of the Holocaust.” The USHMM’s mission statement says, “[t]he Museum’s primary mission is to advance and disseminate knowledge about this unprecedented tragedy; to preserve the memory of those who suffered; and to encourage its visitors to reflect upon the moral and spiritual questions raised by the events of the Holocaust as well as their own responsibilities as citizens of a democracy. Although the entire permanent collection is on the Holocaust, there is a specific focus on the Jewish experience. Many Jewish figures argued, “[t]he Holocaust is a Jewish event

42 Ibid., 57.
44 Finkelstein, The Holocaust Industry, 143.
45 Linenthal, Preserving Memory, 1.
46 Ibid., 3.
with a universal interpretation.” There have also been arguments that the creation of the structure represents Israel’s close geopolitical ties to the United States, since the Holocaust exhibit concludes with the creation of Israel. There were people who argued for the inclusion of other Nazi victims, but ultimately the Jewish experience dominates the exhibit. Despite the USHMM having a broader purpose, the Jewish experience still dominates the museum’s exhibit.

Historically, the Holocaust was the extermination of about 6 million Jews by Adolf Hitler’s Nazi party in Germany. Although many other groups perished during Hitler’s reign, such as the mentally and physically disabled, Roma, communists, and homosexuals, the Jews are by far the most examined group of people in regards to the Holocaust. Many feel the Roosevelt Administration’s failure to assist those targeted by the Nazis makes them an accessory to the horrors of the Holocaust. Within the Jewish community there is an idea that Holocaust memory is strictly Jewish. Despite there being 5 million non-Jewish Holocaust victims, prominent Jewish leaders felt Jews were specifically targeted for extermination while the non-Jewish victims were simply being murdered. Eli Weisel himself even said, “[o]ur remembering [of the non-Jewish victims] is an act of generosity…” The idea of Holocaust memory belonging to Jews was a major drawback in the creation of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, as well as other institutions such as the genocide exhibit in the Canadian Museum of Human Rights. At the time of the initial ideas on the creation of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, President Carter publicly announced his sympathies for the Palestinians, whose land was being

51 Linenthal, Preserving Memory, 3.
52 Ibid., 39.
53 Ibid., 53.
invaded by the Israelis.\textsuperscript{54} This badly damaged his relationship with the Jewish community, so the creation of the Holocaust Memorial Museum was thought to be a great public relations campaign for the White House. However, this proved to be more trouble than originally anticipated when other groups who were targeted by the Nazis began to step forward. Due to the struggles between the White House, Jewish community, and other groups of Holocaust victims, the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum took fifteen years to open.

Throughout the USHMM there is a clear Americanization of the Holocaust. The Americanization was the “process whereby the Holocaust has become recognized as a unique moral atrocity, endowed with universal meaning and significance.”\textsuperscript{55} During the 1960s, America began to define its own national history against the Holocaust. “Events in Israel, such as the trial of Adolf Eichmann in 1961 and the Six Day War in 1967, unleashed a flood of survivor memories.”\textsuperscript{56} The relevance of the civil rights movement and the fear of “losing” Israel also helped survivor memories flow within public discourse.\textsuperscript{57} In the 1970s, “America’s national identity became increasingly tied to its past as the antithesis of Nazi Germany,” which helped to promote the idea of America’s “goodness” during the Vietnam War.\textsuperscript{58} In 1978, the first Neo-Nazi march took place in America, causing a storm of protest. As a result, Carter created the presidential commission of the Holocaust. From that point on, the Holocaust was seen as “the most un-American of crimes and the antithesis of American values.”\textsuperscript{59}

\textsuperscript{54} Ibid., 17.
\textsuperscript{56} MacDonald, “First Nations,” 998.
\textsuperscript{57} Ibid., 998.
\textsuperscript{58} Ibid., 999.
\textsuperscript{59} Ibid., 999.
At the end of the Holocaust exhibit at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum there seems to be a light at the end of the tunnel. That light is the creation of Israel. The creation of Israel is an example of settler colonialism against the Palestinians. “Palestinians are losing their residency rights, being evacuated and losing their lands, and are often facing settler attacks by the Israelis.” Furthermore, after the Palestinians were pushed out of their lands, Israeli military camps and settlements were built in their place. The Israeli government is supporting these practices, but they deny this process of settler colonialism at a state and public level. However, not all Jews agree with this idea that Israel is justified in the fight against Palestine. For example, Marc Ellis, a Jewish theologian feels Jews are “using the Holocaust as a weapon to prove their innocence,” and they are “…blind to the injustice they are inflicting onto the Palestinians”. During the creation of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, however, the inclusion of the creation of Israel makes a political statement not only to the average American visitor, but also the U.S. politicians. By using the language of redemption in regards to Israel, politicians are pressured into associating the victimhood of the Jews with the creation of Israel, which gives a politician a reason to side with Israel in international affairs and politics. Essentially, the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum lays out all the atrocities and misfortunes faced by the Jews under Nazi rule, then declares that the creation of a Jewish homeland, Israel, is justifiable in spite of the past suffering of the Jewish community.

62 Ibid., 112.
63 Ibid., 15.
Aesthetically, the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum is a dark and dismal place. Each floor is painted dark colors with dim lighting. All the photographs are in black and white, which adds to the mysterious and wicked aura surrounding the Holocaust. Accents, such as the steel elevator, brick walls and pathways, and wooden furniture and train car create a sort of dystopian atmosphere to the already dark and chilly building. The only relief from the dismal imagery and surroundings are the glass walkways and bright white walls that separate the exhibits and contain contemporary monuments to the lost victims of the Holocaust. Upon closer examination of the exhibits, one can see the information is largely Americanized. The second people step off the cramped steel elevator into the first floor of the Holocaust exhibit they are greeted by a photograph of American soldiers encountering a concentration camp for the first time. After that, they are greeted by photos, videos, and other forms of media all created by Americans. The Americanization of the liberators of the Holocaust creates a sense of pride and relief for Americans who visit, ensuring their faith in the good intention of their country. Within the narrative presented of the Holocaust there is no mention of era-specific beliefs, such as Social Darwinism and Eugenics. Although these ideas were fading by the 1940s and 1950s, they were still influential in the idea of creating an Arian race, and these ideas were used in processes like forced sterilizations. Not explaining these past scientific concepts removes a layer of understanding for the average visitor of the museum. Overall, the museum works hard to create a narrative of how Hitler came to power, but the lack of descriptions of era-specific beliefs and how they have changed since the time of the Nazis separates visitors on an ideological and social level. People leave trying to determine how Germans would have fallen for the propaganda of

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64 This paragraph contains my personal ideas on the aesthetics of the Holocaust based on my visit there in August of 2017.

Hitler without getting a full understanding of the beliefs of the time period, which is problematic, especially for those wondering why such an atrocity happened in the first place. Within the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, the aesthetics and language help create an atmosphere that directly affects the visitors’ interpretations of the events.

Although the USHMM attempts to educate people on the folly of man and the rise of fascism, they seem to be missing some points. First of all, the Holocaust is portrayed in a way that it cannot be explained: as unique and random.66 This is true even through the words of those who survived the Holocaust, such as Eli Wiesel. The idea that the Holocaust is such a great mystery directly complicates the missions of Holocaust education and genocide prevention since the warning signs of genocide are not directly handled by the museum efficiently. The result is that people leave with a belief that the violence is a result of, “…charismatic leaders and fanatical political movements rather than individual aggressions and communal frictions.”67 Also, the idea that the Holocaust is strictly a Jewish affair undermines the experiences and memories of all non-Jewish Holocaust survivors, which prevents the validation of their traumas. Claiming the Holocaust was unique and elevating it as a true representation of good versus evil makes different human rights abuses and mass violence seem like a lesser problem, which lessens the responses on a geopolitical level.68 Many politicians, such as those who voted against the intervention in Kuwait in the 1980s, feel, “[w]here the concept of modern genocide is not at stake, we need not to intervene.”69 Finally, there is an Americanization of the Holocaust evident throughout the exhibits. Most information about liberation, including imagery, is strictly from an

66 Linenthal, Preservation of Memory, 4.
American perspective. This creates the idea that America is the antithesis of Nazi Germany and that we are good country. As an institution, the USHMM has several issues that prevent the fulfilment of their mission.

Largely, the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum acts as an educational center and memorial of those who perished during the Holocaust. Although the museum has issues, such as the promotion of Holocaust Memory belonging to the Jewish community, the promotion of Israel, the Americanization of the Holocaust, and missing information, such as the explanation of common racial beliefs and fears of the time, there are things this museum is doing right. First of all, the aesthetics within the museum promotes emotions, such as helplessness, in order to create a sense of empathy between the museum visitors and Holocaust victims. Empathy is important in the promotion of human rights since humans are more likely to want to make a difference if they can relate to people being victimized. Next, museum staff are always working to uncover more information about Holocaust victims and survivors in order to ensure they will not be forgotten, which is exactly what memorials are for. Though some material is gruesome, there is an active effort to warn people, as well as to create exhibits and activities with children in mind. Finally, the museum makes an effort to explain that during a time of political turmoil and alienation people need to stand up for each other not only because they would want people to do the same for them, but because as humans it is our duty to protect one another. With all the issues with the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, there are still ongoing attempts to improve the institution and make it accessible and educational for all types of people.

Although the USHMM is not the only place where the Holocaust is memorialized within the United States, this institution typically serves as the primary source of Holocaust information for many national and international citizens. With this being said, there are several ideological
issues that must be confronted by the institution to provide a more complete idea of the Holocaust in its entirety. There also needs to be a complete reconstruction of the idea of the ownership of the Holocaust and Holocaust memory in order for visitors to fully recognize the effects and lessons of the Holocaust. As an educational institution, the USHMM successfully teaches lessons about the Holocaust to people of all ages. The real question, however, is how to further improve these lessons to prevent more uprisings like Charlottesville 2017.

**Kigali Genocide Memorial, Rwanda**

In the year 1994, Rwanda faced a devastating tragedy: the Rwandan Genocide. In only 100 days, 800,000 Tutsi and moderate Hutu were killed with machetes, clubs, and firearms.\(^\text{70}\) The labels of Hutu and Tutsi were given to the people of Rwanda by the Belgians who colonized them. The Belgians favored the Tutsi over the Hutu, and years of oppression of the Hutu at the hands of the Tutsi followed.\(^\text{71}\) During the 1990s, the government of Rwanda warned the Hutu about the rise of Tutsi power. Despite the Tutsi being the minority group, fear of persecution of the Hutus by the Tutsi lead to the Rwandan Genocide. Like in most cases of genocide, fear was a powerful motivator for the Rwandan perpetrators.

Kigali Genocide Memorial (Kigali) serves not only as a memorial, but also as a museum. The museum contains three exhibits. The first is called “The 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi” and contains information about before the genocide, during the violence, and reconstruction after the genocide. The next exhibit is called “Wasted Lives.” This exhibit is a comparative exhibit that contains information about other episodes of mass violence, such as the Armenian Genocide, the Holocaust, and Cambodia. Finally, the last exhibit is called “The Children’s Room” and it

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\(^{70}\) Woets, “Comprehend the Incomprehensible,” 52.


Outside of the museum the memorial consists of a wall of the victims’ names, burial grounds, and gardens. The gardens, called the Garden of Reflection, is broken up into several parts: Gardens of Unity, Division, and Reconciliation, The Rose Gardens, The Garden of Self Protection, The Provinces of Rwanda Garden, The Flower of Life Garden, and The Forest of Memory. The purpose of these gardens are to provide a quiet place for reflection and contemplation.\footnote{Burial Place, \textit{Kaligi Genocide Memorial}, accessed 19 September 2017, http://www.kgm.rw/memorial/burial-place-gardens/.

The Wall of Names (figure 1) is made of black stone, and is reminiscent of the U.S. Vietnam Memorial in Washington D.C. This piece is still a work in progress due to the trouble of trying to identify all the victims of the violence. Finally, the mass burial consists of three rows and contains over 250,000 victims, with more being added as bodies are being found. The exhibits themselves within the museum are dark, much like the USHMM’s exhibits. In the Exhibit “The 1994 Genocide Against the Tutsi,” photographs of the victims are hung from a wire against a black backdrop. The simplicity of the thin wires and the happy photographs of victims before the genocide serve as a reminder of the fragility of life. The
black backdrop alludes to the dark demise the victims faced in 1994. The next exhibit, “Wasted Lives,” contains information on other atrocities, such as the Holocaust. The curators included information about events that transpired, as well as dramatic colors and images to create a sense of fear and disgust towards the perpetrators (figure 2). Finally, “The Children’s Room” contains photographs and information about the children that perished during the violence of 1994. Such information includes the names, interests, favorite foods, and other personal information about the child victims. Blown up photographs of toddlers and babies that became victims are on the walls, which are white to represent their purity and innocence as victims. The photographs are in black and white, which creates even more of an almost angelic feel to the exhibits, making the children more like martyrs than victims. The uses of certain materials, colors, and information create a sense of empathy towards the victims of the Rwandan Genocide, which is further exploited by the unfinished Wall of Names, Gardens of Reflection, and mass burials.

The purpose of this memorial site is to both commemorate and educate, which is the same as most memorial museums. Kigali’s specific mission statement is, “[t]o provide a dignified place of burial for victims of the Genocide against the Tutsi, to inform and educate visitors about the causes, 

Figure 2- Holocaust exhibit in “Wasted Lives.” Photo credit https://www.aegistrust.org/learn/mass-atrocities/Holocaust/

75 These are my own interpretations based on photographs of the exhibition found online.
76 These are my own interpretations.
implementation and consequences of the genocide, and other genocides in history, to teach
visitors about what we can do to prevent future genocides, to provide a documentation center to
record evidence of the genocide, testimonies of genocide survivors, and details of genocide
victims, and to provide support for survivors, in particular orphans and widows.”77 This
statement is much like that of the USHMM. Although I cannot safely determine the efficiency of
Kigali as an educational institution, the museum seems to be fulfilling most of the mission
statement effectively. There is a burial ground for the victims of the genocide, which makes the
first part of the mission statement successful. There is also an archive of information about the
genocide and the victims of the genocide online and on site, so that fulfills another part of the
mission statement. Finally, the museum supports many community building programs, such as
refurbishing houses and providing psychological support for genocide survivors. In regards to
education, the archives contains many materials on survivors, mapping the genocide, as well as
the politics and social institutions involved with reconstruction after the genocide. Overall, the
museum is fulfilling its purpose as a center for education, remembrance, and social support.

Kigali Genocide Memorial is a popular tourist attraction in Rwanda with the purpose of
commemorating the victims of the 1994 Rwandan Genocide of the Tutsis. The museum
successfully fulfills its mission statement as an institution of commemoration, reflection, and
social support. Aesthetically, the exhibit enables a sense of empathy for visitors, which is useful
in the museum’s role in preventing further acts of genocide and mass violence. The simplicity of
the exhibits makes statements that could easily have been overlooked with an abundance of
information, and the interior and exterior of the complex serve their intended purposes. Kigali

Genocide Memorial in Rwanda serves as a friendly reminder of the dark side of Rwandan history.

**Tsitsernakaberd, Armenia**

Before the Holocaust happened, the Turks implemented a genocide against the Armenians during World War I. The Ottoman Empire was struggling, and in order to preserve the empire, the Young Turks, a prominent political party, felt the need to fight against foreign influence within their lands. After a history of Turkish propaganda and the racialization of the Armenians, Turks began to see Armenians as agents working for foreign powers, likely Russia, to undermine the state. Since race was a characterization used to explain natural selection at the turn of the twentieth century, people felt the incommensurable races were viable for extinction. This form of thinking, among other issues, lead to the Armenian Genocide in 1915.

Although the Armenian Genocide happened in 1915, the genocide memorial did not open until 1967. The memorial is built in Yerevan, Armenia, and was promoted by Hakob Zarobian, the first secretary of the Community Party of Armenia. He was urged to bring about the monument by a group of historians in 1964 when they wrote a letter to the party leader asking for a “monument to symbolize the rebirth of the Armenian people.” After hundreds of thousands of people showed up to the 1965 Yerevan Demonstrations to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the Armenian Genocide, the Soviet party, which was then in charge, decided to go through with building a genocide memorial. In 1966, they announced a national contest for the design of the

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79 Brader, “Race War,” 389.
80 Ibid., 383.
82 Doydoyan, “Tsitsernakaberd.”
83 Ibid.
memorial, and just one year later the memorial was opened to the public.\footnote{Ibid.} During the 1990s, the collective memory of the Armenian Genocide became visible.\footnote{Tsypylma Darivea, ‘‘The Road to Golgotha:’ Representing Loss in Post-socialist Armenia.’’ \textit{Focaal—European Journal of Anthropology} 52, no. 1 (2008): 93.} This resulted in the opening of the Armenian Genocide Museum and Institute in 1995. After the Holocaust, the world went through a type of moral reordering, and communities worked to establish their historical truths.\footnote{Darivea, “Representing Loss,” 93.} One truth was finally coming to the surface: the Armenian Genocide.

During the second half of the nineteenth century, the Young Turks orchestrated the “most notorious episode in ethnic cleansing of non-Muslims from Anatolia.”\footnote{Dogan Gurpinar, “The Manufacturing of Denial: The Making of the Turkish Official Thesis on the Armenian Genocide Between 1974 and 1990,” \textit{The Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies} 18, no. 3 (2016): 218.} To this day, the death toll is unknown. Estimations are around two-thirds of the Armenian population, which is approximately 1.4 million.\footnote{Mann, \textit{Dark Side of Democracy}, 140.} The Young Turks, whose empire was in decline, forced the Armenians to relocate in order to remove their Armenian influence. This “Armenian influence,” or Armenian culture and heritage, is essentially seen as a non-Turkish, which is why Turks felt the Armenians were working with Russia. On these marches, similar to the Native American Trail of Tears, the Armenians were attacked by civilians. The government did nothing to stop the violence, and actually warned people when the Armenians were coming to their communities. As a result, the Armenians were removed from Anatolia by death, starvation, and exhaustion.\footnote{Gurpinar, “Manufacturing of Denial,” 218.} Removing this minority group from the Ottoman Empire, which is now broken up into many countries, such as Turkey, Iraq, Syria, Palestine, and Armenia, is an example of genocide since the aim was to rid Turkish society of the Armenian influence.
To this day, the Armenian Genocide is a controversial topic. The Armenian Genocide is often referred to as the “Armenian Problem.” This problem has yet to be seriously discussed by Turkey, which is where a large portion of the Armenian population resides today. To the Turks, “the events of 1915 were not actively endorsed or defended, but ignored, silenced, and trivialized…. The Armenian Question was resolved for good.”\textsuperscript{90} In Turkey, the Armenian Genocide is a taboo. When someone tries to even discuss the Armenian Question, they are met with nationalist arguments. Most government officials remain denialists, and the window of discourse is never fully opened.\textsuperscript{91} For the Armenians, however, they present their memories and stories of the Genocide in an allegorical manner in order to help people learn from their experiences, as well as to prevent issues with the government in Turkey.\textsuperscript{92} Despite the Turks’ political agenda, the Armenians still share the stories of their experiences, helping others understand the Armenian Question has yet to be answered.

In 1995, the Armenian Genocide Museum (AGM), located at Tsitsernakaberd, was opened to the public. The mission of this institution is:

[t]o promote the collection, study and presentation of the visual textual materials, including also artifacts, related to the life of the Western Armenians in the Ottoman Empire before and during the Genocide, to develop more effective cooperation and collaboration among organizations worldwide involved in the research of genocide, particularly Armenian Genocide, to create and develop an academic institution on Genocide Studies in the Republic of Armenia, to raise international awareness among the international community on the first Genocide of the 20th century defined initially as “a

\textsuperscript{90} Gurpinar, “Manufacturing of Denial,” 218.
\textsuperscript{91} Ibid., 236.
\textsuperscript{92} Darivea, “Representing Loss,” 94.
crime against humanity,” and to preserve and honor the Tsisternakaberd memorial complex of Genocide victims and the Tisernakaberd park.93

As with most memorial museums, the mission statement for AGM includes recognition, education, and preservation. This genocide in particular struggles with finding information, not only due to the success of the perpetrators during the genocide, but also due to the large time frame between the genocide, 1915, and the recognition of the genocide as a crime against humanity in 1995. Interestingly enough, the Soviets were the ones who allowed for the memorial to be built. Not long after, Armenians gained independence from the soviets.94 The memorial itself is rather plain, and does not include any religious symbols, which are important to the culture and heritage of the Armenian people. Accidentally, the restrictions put on the memorial by the Soviets allowed for an easily interpreted and symbolic outlet for people to learn and grieve. As an institution, Tsitsernakaberd successfully fulfills its mission.

Tsitsernakaberd is plain, but the symbols created within the space are fitting for the institution’s purpose. The memorial itself consists of an obelisk, a wall of remembrance, the “Sanctuary of Eternity,” trees of remembrance, and

Figure 3- “The Sanctuary of Eternity” and Obelisk. Photo credit http://www.oneweekinarmenia.info/armenia-day-6-ashtarak-spitak-vanadzor-debed-river-canyon-sanahin-hagepat-monasteries.php/p1040673-600x450-90-5

94 Seppala, “Temple of Non-Being,” 32.
Mount Ararat off in the distance. The obelisk, which can be seen from a distance, represents, to many, the new Armenia. Next to the obelisk sits the “Sanctuary of Eternity” (figure 3). From a distance, the structure almost resembles an Armenia church without the dome. The openness of the sanctuary is symbolic and represents the openness of the Armenian Question. This structure is devoid of any Armenian symbols or alphabet. Also, unlike the other memorials discussed, there are no personal objects of the deceased and no bodies. Instead, the structure contains the eternal flame that burns for the victims of the genocide. The openness of the sanctuary is symbolic and represents the openness of the Armenian Question. This structure is devoid of any Armenian symbols or alphabet. Also, unlike the other memorials discussed, there are no personal objects of the deceased and no bodies. Instead, the structure contains the eternal flame that burns for the victims of the genocide. The wall of remembrance is much like the wall at Kigali, and serves as a commemoration of those who lost their lives in the violence. The trees of remembrance surround the memorial, all of which have been planted by world leaders as a show of support for the Armenians and acknowledgement of the Armenian Genocide. Finally, Mount Ararat, a sacred symbol of the Armenian homeland, lingers in the distance, reminding the Armenians of their roots (34). The entire memorial is laid out to lead the visitors along the wall of remembrance and right into the “Sanctuary of Eternity” (figure 4). To the right—the biblical side of salvation—stands Mount Ararat, and to the left—the side of doom—stands the wall of remembrance. Although the monument itself is rather plain, the

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95 Ibid., 34.  
96 Ibid., 34.  
97 Ibid., 31.  
98 Ibid., 32.  
99 Ibid., 33.
symbols of the landscape create a narrative of the Armenian and their struggles to remember their history and overcome atrocity.

Though the memorial itself is rather plain, Tsitsernakaberd consists of a myriad of symbols that add context and significance to its structures. In this example, the absence of objects demonstrates the success of the Armenian Genocide, while the elements of the eternal flame, wall of remembrance and trees of remembrance reinforce the fact that the genocide was real and people remember. The validation that comes from these specific elements of the memorial act as a form of validation for those who were almost eradicated by the Young Turks, even though Turkey refuses to acknowledge the atrocity as a part of its history. The purpose of this memorial is to commemorate, educate, and preserve the history of this atrocious event, and with the amount of support this structure receives, they are succeeding in their mission.

S-21, Cambodia

During the 1970s, the Khmer Rouge came to power and eradicated between one and three million people. Before the rise of the Khmer Rouge, the U.S. backed military regime of Lon

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100 Mann, *Dark Side of Democracy*, 339.
Nol faced off with the Vietnamese backed communist guerilla movement in a brutal civil war.\textsuperscript{101} In the end, the communists won and developed the Khmer Rouge. The party was full of leftist nationalists, but in the 1960s there was a shift towards a more Moa-ist line of communism.\textsuperscript{102} Eventually, the violence got out of control. Prison camps were used to carry out most of the administrative violence, where people were considered “neak tos,” or “already convicted.”\textsuperscript{103} One prison camp in particular, Tuol Sleng, or S-21, is now a common dark tourism attraction for international travelers. This memorial sight is specifically interesting due to the fact that it functions specifically on emotion rather than education by displaying little information and having survivors run the tours. The experiences of the visitors are feelings rather than facts, and many leave angry and confused about what occurred in Cambodia under the Khmer Rouge in the 1970s.

For the purpose of this paper, the atrocities in Cambodia are going to be considered a genocide rather than a politicide. The justifications for this interpretation spring from the class divides in Cambodia at the start of the Khmer Rouge. In Cambodia, the idea of class was broad, and often certain classes contained people of specific regions or ethnic identities.\textsuperscript{104} One prime example is that the middle class was typically made up of the Vietnamese (Mann, 341). The goal of the Khmer Rouge was to remove the class system and create a communist utopia, which involved purging society of a few types of people, including higher classes and military personnel.\textsuperscript{105} With these ideas in mind, the Khmer Rouge aimed to destroy certain people,

\textsuperscript{101} Mann, \textit{Dark Side of Democracy}, 339.
\textsuperscript{102} Ibid., 340.
\textsuperscript{104} Mann, \textit{Dark Side of Democracy}, 340.
specifically the Vietnamese middle class, and their cultures, thus constituting the term “genocide.”

Historically, the Cambodian Genocide occurred after the war between Cambodia and Vietnam. As a result of the war, the Khmer Rouge gained power.\(^{106}\) The country, already struggling due to the war, was full of unrest. In order to quiet down the masses, the Khmer Rouge chose to gain power through fear; this is when the torturing and executions began.\(^{107}\) S-21 was set up as a place where people accused of treason could be dealt with.\(^{108}\) No more than three months after the fall of the Khmer Rouge, S-21 was opened as a museum to foreign journalists and delegations in order to shine light on the dark reign of the Khmer Rouge.\(^{109}\) In 1979, S-21 opened as an institution for the education and commemoration of the Cambodian Genocide.

S-21, once used as a detention center, is not a welcoming place. The exterior of the museum is lined with barbed wire, which was used to prevent escapes during the period S-21 served as a prison (figure 5). Upon entering the museum, visitors are often made uncomfortable by the complete lack of information.\(^{110}\)

\(^{106}\) Tyner, “Administrative Violence,” 363.
\(^{107}\) Ibid., 363.
\(^{108}\) Ibid., 364.
\(^{109}\) Violi, “Trauma Site Museums,” 46.
\(^{110}\) Ibid., 47.
The next part of the prison is covered in photographs of the victims of S-21. They are all displayed throughout the make-shift prison cells. The photographs are black and white mug shots, and all of these prisoners seem to know their fate.\textsuperscript{111}

The eeriest part about the photographs is that the visitor looks at them through the eyes of the perpetrators, since they took the photos (figure 6). Other objects on display of the museum include instruments of torture, documentary photographs and maps, and human remains.\textsuperscript{112} The institution itself contains barely any records due to issues of funding, politics, and a lack of trained staff.\textsuperscript{113} The only information visitors get are from the survivors of the Cambodian Genocide who volunteer at the institution. This adds a more informational and emotional touch to the museum.\textsuperscript{114} Interacting with the actual survivors give the visitor a historical validation of these crimes against humanity that was lacking through the unavailability of educational material. The lack of information alludes to the

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{111} Ibid., 50.
  \item \textsuperscript{112} Hughes, “Dutiful Tourism,” 321.
  \item \textsuperscript{113} Stephanie Benzaquen, “Looking at the Tuol Sleng Museum of Genocide Crimes, Cambodia, on Flickr and Youtube,” \textit{Media, Culture, and Society} 36, no. 6 (2014): 792.
  \item \textsuperscript{114} Benzaquen, “Looking at Tuol Sleng,” 798.
\end{itemize}
success of the Khmer Rouge’s plans of extermination, and without the survivors eyewitness testimony, visitors would leave feeling confused, uncomfortable, and possibly a bit skeptical.

Since 1979, when Vietnam invaded and overthrew the Khmer Rouge, S-21 has gone through some important changes that express changes in ideals within the locality. One of the most important changes is, despite being a popular tourist attraction, the government stopped promoting S-21 on government travel sites because they fear the site will make people think Cambodia is a dangerous place.\footnote{Hughes, \textit{Dutiful Tourism}, 322.} This is interesting considering the government promoted S-21 at its opening in order to explain the atrocities of the Khmer Rouge, but now they are trying to hide that part of their history. Mai Lam, the first curator of S-21, specifically tailored the exhibits to play on the sympathies of foreigners from the start.\footnote{Benzaquen, “Looking at Tuol Sleng,” 793.} The new effort to try to hide the past, however, is in vain. The level of horror visitors experience at S-21 has even made it so the images of the S-21 prisoners have become “iconic images of mass violence.”\footnote{Tyner, “Administrative Violence,” 366.}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{Figure_7_Skull_Map_no_longer_on_exhibit.jpg}
\caption{Skull Map, no longer on exhibit. Photo credit http://ltocambodia.blogspot.com/2011/09/looking-back.html}
\end{figure}
was on exhibit in S-21, but public outcry and the imminent decomposition of the bones lead to the deconstruction of the exhibit.¹¹⁸ At the end of the museum, there is a gallery of works painted by an S-21 survivor which were, until 2006, not protected behind glass. Due to a difference in ideology at the time, the original staff felt the paintings did not need to be protected, but later they were shielded from the Cambodian environment.¹¹⁹ The reason for the spike in interest in preserving these works is because they became important evidence of the violence of the Khmer Rouge rather than just crude paintings meant to make people feel sympathetic towards the state during the reconstruction period.¹²⁰ Since the opening of S-21, there have been a series of ideological changes that have affected the museum as an educational institution.

One unique aspect about S-21 is the idea that this memorial helped shape reconstruction efforts after the fall of the Khmer Rouge. This is the main reason the institution itself underwent several changes throughout the years. Cambodia makes much of its foreign income off of tourism, so trying to prove Cambodia is not a dangerous place is a top priority of the current government.¹²¹ Creating a memorial or memorial museum shows a validation of history, and allows for people to learn from the past. States can use genocidal pasts to create a narrative for the future, mostly through rallying support of the people and consoling the victims.¹²² Eliciting empathy from foreign powers also works in the favor of reconstruction, since many places can get motivated by humanist culture. The government of the countries that are plagued by violent histories, especially Cambodia and Rwanda, can play off of the sense of cultural superiority powers such as England, the US, and France may possess, and use this to their advantage to

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¹¹⁹ Ibid., 794.
¹²⁰ Ibid., 795.
secure funding and resources. Ultimately, playing the pity card after a catastrophic event is an easy way to carry out reconstruction efforts.

The main issue with S-21 is the lack of information for the visitors. Those who are not lucky enough to talk to one of the survivors is left to read isolated images on their own. The problem comes when people start to over-read and try to find a specific interpretation to make the object relatable or make sense. Overall, the purpose of the museum is to create empathy rather than to explain something that many people find hard to comprehend. In the end, this site fails to explain the complexity of the Cambodian Genocide to its visitors, preventing the ability for people to learn from the past. All visitors really learn is how to be a victim, not how to prevent future atrocities.

As an institution, S-21 provides visitors with a unique emotional experience, but ultimately leaves them with more questions than answers. One of the main purposes of memory museums is not only to commemorate, but also to educate. S-21 is clearly lacking in the education department. As an institution designed to help provide information, there is little information available outside their archives. As a result, S-21 might be a unique tourist site, but people may want to visit their local libraries if they want to learn more about the Cambodian Genocide.

Conclusions

Through critical examination, memorials and memorial museums can be evaluated on their efficiency to fulfil their roles of preserving memory and educating the future generations. Each of the institutions mentioned in this analysis have helped preserve the memory of genocide victims, as well as helped educate people on the horrors of mass violence, but each institution

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has their own issues to resolve. The USHMM needs to realize the dangers of looking at the Holocaust as simply a Jewish affair, which would in turn allow for the ability to culturally recognize all forms of mass violence as tragic, not just the “special cases.” Even though violence against Jews and Jewish memory is still prevalent in the world, so is the stigma against other types of people, like Muslims and Blacks.\textsuperscript{125} If the allied nations want to be responsible for the victims of the Holocaust, then they need to acknowledge the non-Jewish victims as victimized as well.\textsuperscript{126} Kigali Genocide Memorial in Rwanda still faces an issue of identity. The leaders of Rwanda want to reconcile by bypassing ethnic categories.\textsuperscript{127} Despite the genocide resulting in the deaths of over 800,000 people in the late 1990s, the government wants to pretend these colonial-era ethnic categories that have divided the nation do not exist.\textsuperscript{128} This is one of the first steps to erasing the history and memory of the genocide. Tsitsernakaberd serves as a pilgrimage site for Armenians around the world, but still cannot get the Turks to answer the Armenian Question. The Ottomans took a play out of the book of Colonialism when they tried to export their “vices,” also known as the Armenians, and it is about time Turkey stops trying to write the genocide out of its history and learn from its past mistakes.\textsuperscript{129} Finally, S-21 has to supply some sort of information for the tourists, otherwise they will interpret the events of the Cambodian Genocide through faulty generalizations.\textsuperscript{130}

\textsuperscript{126} Peter Novick, \textit{The Holocaust in American Life} (New York; Houghton Mifflin Company, 1999), 47.
memorials, genocide memory is being lost or misunderstood. Museums and memorials that commemorate episodes of genocide and mass violence need to be constantly changing, updating, and promoting genocide memory. Social norms from the past need to be better explained, and connections between the past and present need to be clearer. Critics also need to help. Just writing is not enough. They need to come up with ways museums can be fixed for the lay person to understand the past and prevent future atrocities. This can be done in many ways, such as by increasing and better explaining information, providing better training for staff, and confronting difficult topics, such as the Turkish denial of the Armenian genocide. There are ways museums and memorials can be altered to help fulfill their missions as institutions of education, remembrance, and prevention.

The ability to critically analyze memorial museums and institutions that commemorate episodes of mass violence and genocide is becoming increasingly important. Institutions, such as the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, are struggling in their mission to educate and prevent future episodes of mass violence and genocide. This is not news. The fact that the USHMM vows “never again,” and yet there have been several genocides since proves the need to educate the public on genocide and increase genocide prevention tactics. Museums struggle to keep their doors open and have to resort to becoming a mode of entertainment for visitors, or becoming a political vassal. These factors, and others, tend to water down the messages a museum intends to portray, which leads to misinterpretations of materials or unanswered questions. The ability to objectively look at an institution that supplies such a polarizing topic is essential to their survival and their mission. As soon as museums and memorials start to get past

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their political ties, victim identity politics, and black-and-white ideology, the higher their educational value will be.
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