RECKONING WITH THE PAST: GERMAN AND AMERICAN MEMORIALIZATION THROUGH PHYSICAL AND DIGITAL SITES

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ABSTRACT

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In Germany and the United States, memorialization of the Holocaust and slavery have evolved differently over the past several decades. Monuments and memorials carve out a particular national identity and historical narrative in both countries, and memorial sites that were once sites of atrocity play an important role in these memorial landscapes. How do sites of atrocity become sites of memory? This thesis attempts to answer that question by closely examining a former concentration camp and a former plantation: the Sachsenhausen Memorial and Museum in Oranienburg, Germany and the Whitney Plantation in Wallace, Louisiana. The first half addresses traditional memorialization through these memorial sites, tracing their development over time and their operation in the present day. Both sites are also contextualized, and their roles in the broader memory cultures of Germany and the United States are explored. The second half then turns to more contemporary conceptions of memorialization. The concept of digital network memory is introduced, and social media is examined as a possible form of counter-monument. This thesis then returns to the Sachsenhausen Memorial and the Whitney Plantation and considers the relationship between physical sites and digital memory and the role of visitors, who both consume memory and produce memory by "remediating" the information and content at these sites and giving them a second life on social media. Throughout this paper, the ideas of authenticity, agency, and mediation in memorialization are discussed.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

A few months after I decided to write a thesis about German and American memorialization, I met with a professor in my university's Germanics department to discuss the project. The first thing she told me was that, as someone who had grown up in Germany, she, along with everyone she knew, was deeply aware of the Holocaust's singularity. She was taught from a young age that the Holocaust should never be compared to any other event, and she warned against portraying Germany as a model.

I do not disagree with the professor. This thesis is not my attempt to compare the Holocaust and slavery. I am not interested in comparing the crimes of the perpetrators or the suffering of the victims. What I am interested in, however, is what came afterward in both Germany and the United States and how our memories of the past are formed and unformed. Susan Neiman and Michael Rothberg both advocate for a form of "comparative thinking" regarding memory cultures. This does not mean equation—no two histories are identical.[1] According to Rothberg, bringing different memory cultures into conversation with one another "produces more memory, not less." He writes that "Memories—especially publicly articulated memories—echo each other, appropriate each other's forms and figures, and develop in dialogue with each other."[2]

In Germany, public remembrance of the National Socialist era is ubiquitous. Holocaust memorials can be found across the country, and in Berlin, interspersed among the government buildings and other historical monuments like the Brandenburg Gate are memorials to different

[1] Neiman and Rothberg, "Conversations on Europe. Learning from Memory: A Transatlantic Conversation with Susan Neiman and Michael Rothberg."
[2] Rothberg, "Holocaust Memory after the Multidirectional Turn."

victims of the Holocaust. They are sometimes as small as cobblestones,[3] and other times, they are as large as the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe, also known as the Berlin Holocaust Memorial. Reminiscent of a massive cemetery, thousands of concrete slabs occupy two hundred thousand square feet in the center of the city. In the United States, however, the memory culture surrounding slavery is much less easily defined. During the Black Lives Matter protests in the wake of the murder of George Floyd, an African-American man, by the police, protesters began to topple statues in Alabama, Georgia, Indianapolis, Virginia, Florida, and other states. The monuments that fell were mostly statues of Confederates, individuals who fought to maintain the institution of slavery.[4] Monuments and memorials represent specific histories, but they also reflect values and traditions. Somehow, over the last century or so, the memorial landscapes in Germany and the United States came to be very different, not only in terms of the historical narratives and figures they elevate but also the values they uphold.

In this paper, I will explore the separate processes of memorialization in these two countries as well as memorialization more broadly as a phenomenon. I am specifically interested in the spaces where the Holocaust and slavery were carried out. How do people use and interpret sites of atrocity, and, in doing so, how do they shape collective memory? To answer these questions and others, I will focus on a former concentration camp in Germany and a former plantation in the United States: The Sachsenhausen Memorial and Museum in Oranienburg, Germany and the Whitney Plantation Museum in Wallace, Louisiana. Both were once sites of atrocities and death that have more recently been transformed into sites of memory that engage with the past. Both are now popular tourist destinations operating within the Holocaust and

[3] See https://www.stolpersteine-berlin.de/en/node/1
[4] Burnett, "Confederate Statues Come Down Around U.S., But Not Everywhere."

plantation tourism industries, which also affects how the memories are made and consumed. There is an incredible amount of literature on Holocaust memory culture and comparatively less on the memorialization of slavery in the United States, so rather than holding the two next to each other, I will mostly tell their stories separately and occasionally delve into commonalities or distinctions.

The first section of the thesis will cover traditional memorialization and the two sites of memory. I will start with the Sachsenhausen Memorial and Museum and show how memory is uniquely crafted at this site. Along the way, I will also discuss the memorial site in the context of broader developments in Germany after 1945, and how Sachsenhausen fits into the memorial landscape. After discussing Sachsenhausen, I will turn to the Whitney Plantation and describe its development over time and its unique position among other plantation museums.

In the second section, I will turn to more contemporary conceptions of memorialization. I will start by explaining the counter-monument before delving into digital network memory and the relationship between physical sites and the digital landscape, as well as the tourist's role in all of this. I will summarize some of the ideas of scholars in digital memory studies and then apply them to the memory of the Holocaust and slavery on social media platforms, and then I will ground my exploration of digital and social media memorialization in two specific sites of memory, the Sachsenhausen Memorial and the Whitney Plantation.

Chapter 2: The Sachsenhausen Memorial and Museum

In 1961, the Sachsenhausen National Memorial opened in the German Democratic Republic (East Germany). The site is located in Oranienburg, north of Berlin. Sachsenhausen

was one of the three concentration camps turned into commemorative sites by the GDR and one of the first concentration camps to become a national memorial site in all of Germany. After East and West Germany were officially reunited in 1990, a new iteration of a memorial site at Sachsenhausen was developed, and in 1993, the Sachsenhausen Memorial and Museum re-opened, which still exists to this day.

This chapter will describe Sachsenhausen's journey from a site of atrocity to a site of memory—both the 1961 site and the 1993 site. Along the way, Sachsenhausen's role in the broader development of concentration camp memorials in Germany after the end of the Holocaust will be examined, before concluding with a discussion of the present-day operation of the site and how it conveys its own history to visitors.

Sachsenhausen's history

The Sachsenhausen concentration camp was not the first Nazi detention facility in Oranienburg. An earlier concentration camp was built on the grounds of a former brewery on Oranienburg's main road in March 1933 and used until July 1934. In this camp, about three thousand opponents of National Socialism, most of whom were Communists or Social Democrats, were interned. The internees were punished and forced to do hard labor, and Jewish prisoners were often the targets of violence. At least 16 internees were killed. After its closure, it became a reserve camp, set aside for future use. The Oranienburg concentration camp was largely forgotten after World War II, and today, the early concentration camp is memorialized with a plaque and memorial stone. It is often confused with the Sachsenhausen concentration camp, which was built in 1936 on the edge of Oranienburg.[5]

[5] "1933-1934 Oranienburg Concentration Camp."

Soon after the Oranienburg concentration camp closed, Heinrich Himmler and Theodor Eicke devised a new SS concentration camp system that would hold the large number of prisoners targeted by the Nazis' racial policies, which began with the Nuremberg laws in 1935 and were enforced with increasing violence after Kristallnacht in 1938. The Sachsenhausen concentration camp was built by hundreds of prisoners from other concentration camps while the world convened in nearby Berlin for the Olympic games in the summer of 1936. It was intended to be the "star,"[6] the ideal concentration camp that would project an image of the SS's absolute power and strength. The triangular design of the prisoner camp ensured complete control of thousands of prisoners. A machine gun pointed from the single watchtower directly at the roll call area, and the prisoner barracks stood in half-circles behind the roll call area. The plans were later changed to incorporate more barracks and more prisoners. SS administration buildings and residences were placed along the main road leading to the entrance of the camp, for Sachsenhausen was a training site for SS guards and the administrative center for the entire concentration camp system. The camp also consisted of the shooting grounds and factories, where inmates were forced to work and manufacture building materials and munitions that would be shipped to Berlin.[7] Sachsenhausen was a forced labor camp that mostly held political prisoners, but in 1942, an extermination section was added to the industrial yard.

Over 200,000 political prisoners, allegedly "racially or biologically inferior" people, homosexual people, criminals, and "asocials" were interned in the site between 1936 and 1945. Most were German citizens at first, but over time, increasing numbers of foreign forced laborers and Allied prisoners of war were deported from occupied territories to Sachsenhausen. It is estimated that at least 30,000 prisoners were killed in the camp due to starvation, disease, forced

[6] Wiedmer, "Sachsenhausen," 169.
[7] "1936-1945 Sachsenhausen Concentration Camp."

labor, medical experimentation, and systematic exterminations through gunshots, the gallows, and the gas chamber, which was in the extermination section named “Station Z” by the SS.[8]

In the last few months of the Sachsenhausen concentration camp’s existence, the SS carried out mass murders of inmates. On April 21, 1945, the SS fled and forced about thirty thousand prisoners onto a death march, during which thousands died. The Red Army arrived at the camp soon thereafter and found about three thousand men and one thousand women and children. Just a week later, the camp was opened as an unofficial memorial site for the first time, when the inhabitants of Oranienburg visited and saw the atrocities that had occurred right next to their homes.

Before the Sachsenhausen concentration camp was fully transformed into a memorial site, it was utilized for a different purpose. Just a few months after liberation in 1945, the camp was once again filled with prisoners. Sachsenhausen was “Special Camp No. 7,” one of ten special camps established by the Soviet Union in their occupation zone. While the Soviets were not the only Allied power to create such detention areas, each went about it differently. In the Soviet zone, the camps punished Nazi criminals but also imprisoned other opponents of Stalin’s regime, including non-Stalinist Communists and German Social Democrats. Most prisoners were National Socialists, but some were arrested arbitrarily and many were held without trial. In 1948, the majority of the camps were closed down, but Sachsenhausen was the largest of the three that remained in operation. It was re-named “Special Camp No. 1.” Between 1945 and 1950, twelve thousand people died of hunger and disease in the camp. The surviving prisoners were released when custody of the site was granted to the East German government. These special camps were shrouded in silence both during their existence and afterward; families of prisoners were not

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[8] Ibid.

informed of their whereabouts or even their deaths. After the Soviet special camps were shut down, no one spoke of the camps' existence under threat of punishment. After German reunification, mass graves from this period were discovered just outside the site.[9]

Sachsenhausen as a site of memory

The Sachsenhausen National Memorial (1961-1990)

When the camp was under Soviet control, memorialization was not a priority within the site. Thus, the first commemorations were memorial stones placed in the Oranienburg town center. After the GDR was founded in 1949, Oranienburg had a memorial competition to honor the fifth anniversary of the camp's liberation. The winning proposal involved converting the former concentration camp into a garden, but in the end, the efforts came to a halt, probably due to limited funding and time. According to Caroline Wiedmer, the GDR also needed more time to erase the "five destructive years of intervening history…to prevent their interfering with the new state image."[10] The Soviet special camp was the unwanted "intervening history" that created an issue for the new East German state, which needed to prove to its citizens and the world that it was the "better" Germany and that communism had triumphed over fascism. Whether intentionally or not, the site's history during both the Nazi and Soviet eras was slowly dismantled over the next few years. Against the wishes of former inmates, many Nazi-era structures were neglected and demolished rather than preserved. The National People's Army took over former SS buildings. Station Z was blown up so that a firing range for the police could be built in its place. Oranienburg locals, who needed fuel and building materials, stripped the barracks. By clearing out many physical reminders of the Nazi atrocities that had taken place within the site, the space became a better canvas for the GDR to build something new. As the former director of

[9] Butler, "Ex-Death Camp Tells Story Of Nazi and Soviet Horrors."
[10] Wiedmer, "Sachsenhausen," 176.

the Buchenwald memorial site, Volkhard Knigge, once wrote, the "minimization of remains is a prerequisite for the maximization of possibilities for creating new meanings."[11] The intentional destruction and natural decay created space for the GDR to begin laying its own narrative over the Sachsenhausen landscape.[12]

In 1955, the SED, the governing party of East Germany, decided to erect national memorial sites at Sachsenhausen, Ravensbrück, and Buchenwald. The GDR defined itself as an anti-fascist state to separate itself both from Nazi Germany and from what the East Germans viewed as its successor state, West Germany.[13] Through commemoration, the SED sought not only to remember comrades lost to Nazi terror but also to declare a victory over fascism and solidify the position of East Germany as a legitimate and heroic state. East Germany used commemorative sites to establish its postwar national identity, and the former concentration camps were central to this.[14] In contrast, in its West German counterpart, numerous camps were left untouched. Survivors had to initiate the memorialization of former concentration camps and pressure government officials to provide support, which was how Dachau finally received public funding from the state of Bavaria in 1965. It was not until reunification that West Germany offered federal funding to support concentration camp memorials.[15] According to Wiedmer, concentration camps took on political importance in the GDR because they were the "site of the fighters' suffering and ultimate transcendent triumph." Holocaust victims in the GDR were primarily understood to be anti-fascist resistance fighters, and victims who were persecuted for

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[11] Marcuse, "Holocaust Memorials," 79.
[12] Wiedmer, "Sachsenhausen," 177.
[13] Ibid, 175.
[14] Farmer, "Symbols That Face Two Ways," 99.
[15] Neiman, *Learning from the Germans: Race and the Memory of Evil*, 111.

racial or other reasons were marginalized. In addition, the "highly visible" nature of commemorations at sites like concentration camps was essential for the GDR's purposes.[16]

Funding for the memorial sites mostly came directly from GDR citizens, who were asked to donate to show their commitment to the state. Six million marks went to Sachsenhausen's reconstruction, and the same architects who designed the Buchenwald commemorative site were invited to plan Sachsenhausen's. Each of the groups involved had a different vision for the site. The former prisoners wanted preservation of the "authentic site" that portrayed the daily lives of prisoners, but with so much of the Nazi-era structures in severe disrepair, the wall around the camp and the barracks and buildings would have to be reconstructed. The preservation of original buildings was the key aspect of the memorial sites at Auschwitz and Majdanek in Poland, but the East German architects wanted instead to remove the "unsightly debris of history" and erect "something upliftingly monumental, something that would...recall suffering and triumph in a symbolic fashion."[17] They believed that a straightforward reconstruction would not be able to communicate the suffering and violence experienced by prisoners in the camp as well as an artistic rendering could. The third group was the state politicians, who simply wanted space for all of their public events. In the end, after years of discussion and designs, the three groups were able to come to a compromise. A few elements of the camp were rebuilt, such as the track where prisoners had been forced to walk, sometimes to the point of death, to test shoe prototypes. Other buildings and areas were represented less concretely. For example, most of the barracks were not reconstructed, but outlines were added to the wall to indicate where some once stood.

[16] Wiedmer, "Sachsenhausen," 177.
[17] Ibid, 178-9.

Three new monuments were installed at the site. The first, a towering 40-meter-high obelisk called the Tower of Nations, was the focal point of the entire site, visible from any point within the memorial site. The committee of former survivors asked for a monument like this one to commemorate their resistance and heroism rather than their suffering. The memorial is described as an "antithesis to the Nazi architecture,"[18] standing defiantly across from the watchtower and looming over everything else within the site. At the top of the obelisk were red triangles to represent those worn by political prisoners in the camp and the many nationalities of those prisoners. This monument does not contain any reference to other victim groups that were imprisoned at Sachsenhausen.

A second monument was a sculpture placed at the foot of the obelisk. Created by German artist René Graetz, *Liberation* featured three muscular figures standing tall, with their chins up and chests out. The Soviet soldier and two liberated prisoners projected strength, determination, and triumph without showing any hint of the suffering and indignities they experienced. It paired elegantly with the "international communist appeal" and imposing nature of the Tower of Nations.[19]

The third monument countered the message of the first two, but it was deliberately set apart from them. Waldemar Grzimek's *Pietá* was placed in Station Z, the area that had once contained the gas chamber, execution trench, and crematoria. The sculpture also consisted of three figures, one of whom was carried in a blanket by the other two. Their emaciated appearance was intended to depict the suffering of prisoners, while the portrayal of mutual assistance upheld the GDR's values. Station Z became the area for mourning, but Bookheimer writes that this meticulous separation of the memorial into two "respective areas of prescribed

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[18] Ibid, 180.
[19] Bookheimer, "The Layers of Memory at Sachsenhausen," 12.

memory...placed...triumph at the front and center of memory at Sachsenhausen, while the conversation about suffering and mourning was quite literally pushed to the periphery."[20]

In addition to the monuments, three museums were added to the site. The largest, the Museum of the Anti-Fascist Struggle for Freedom by the Peoples of Europe, was dedicated to the war and resistance fighters across Europe. It stood just outside the camp triangle. Information directly related to Sachsenhausen as a Nazi concentration camp was not provided here, but the exhibits, which were organized by country across 19 rooms, bolstered the GDR's message of international unity and victory over fascism. Naturally, the Soviet Union and Germany were given the most space.

The camp museum was installed in what had once been the inmate kitchen. This smaller exhibit displayed the history of concentration camps and the daily life of prisoners in Sachsenhausen, highlighting resistance and liberation. The GDR's historical narrative was that Nazis persecuted victims because of political resistance as well as economic interests. This narrative extended into the camp museum, where racism and anti-Semitism were carefully written out and the only reason provided for the internment of Jews was their Communist status.[21] The last section of this museum described the histories of the two postwar Germanies, emphasizing again the continuation of the National Socialist regime in the Federal Republic of Germany in the west and, in contrast, the anti-fascism and elimination of capitalism in the "new, humanist" Germany.[22]

In the context of the Eichmann trial taking place concurrently in Jerusalem in 1961, the silence regarding the persecution of Jews in the Sachsenhausen memorial site was scrutinized.

[20] Ibid, 15-6.
[21] Wiedmer, "Sachsenhausen,“ 185.
[22] "1961-1990 Sachsenhausen National Memorial."

The GDR's anti-Israel stance meant that Israel could not be given a place among the other nations in the Museum of the Anti-Fascist Struggle for Freedom by the Peoples of Europe. However, when an organization of former Sachsenhausen internees in Israel protested, the GDR relented and created a new museum. Two barracks, Barracks 38 and 39, were reconstructed for this purpose, and the Museum of the Resistance Struggle and Sufferings of Jewish Citizens was set up just a few weeks before the memorial site's inauguration. Barracks 38 and 39 were located at the edge of the memorial site and again reflected the Jews' marginalization.[23] Jewish resistance was the key theme, and the museum designers skirted around specific details about daily Jewish life at Sachsenhausen and the deportation of Jews to extermination camps like Auschwitz. However, the memorial did address the genocide of European Jews, which was a first for the GDR's memorialization efforts.[24]

Who and what were not represented in the GDR's memorial landscape? It is true that most prisoners in Sachsenhausen were interned for political reasons, and those political prisoners were also terrorized by the Nazis. Furthermore, many of the survivors consulted during the site's planning were Communists whose values aligned with the East German government, so while the narrative was selective and one-sided, it was not a complete fabrication.[25] However, the minimization or outright exclusion of numerous other victim groups was inaccurate and inexcusable. Jewish victims were ignored in most areas of the memorial site, and the Sinti and Roma, homosexual people, the Jehovah's Witnesses, and other non-political groups were not mentioned at all. Women were also unrepresented, even though around twenty thousand were held in Sachsenhausen. The period when the camp became a special camp was swept under the

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[23] Wiedmer, "Sachsenhausen," 187.
[24] Bookheimer, "The Layers of Memory at Sachsenhausen," 18.
[25] Ibid, 22.

rug, despite the attempts of West German media to compare the numbers of concentration camp victims to the numbers of Soviet special camp victims.[26] All in all, suffering and indications of weakness were unwelcomed in the memorial site, and the atrocities were downplayed. Instead, the Tower of Nations and the message that it projected were "architecturally, visibly, and ideologically dominant" throughout the memorial site. When visitors were in the section of the camp designated for mourning, they could not avoid seeing the obelisk, an unobstructed and monumental reminder of communist triumph.

The Sachsenhausen National Memorial was inaugurated on April 23, 1961, with an audience of one hundred thousand people. The finished site became "a sort of theater," where government functionaries were able to perform their "arsenal of rituals" to show the world that East Germany was the peaceful and true Germany, unlike the FRG.[27]The site hosted events, rallies, and speeches, and young men were sworn into the National People's Army right in front of the Tower of Nations.[28] The Sachsenhausen National Memorial was designed to overcome the past, especially by emphasizing the Nazis' defeat at the hands of the Soviets, but it also looked primarily to the future and played a key role in crafting the national identity of the new East German state, alongside the Buchenwald and Ravensbrück memorial sites. For the next three decades after the opening ceremony, interpretation of the Nazi past in the GDR was "essentially paralyzed."[29] Few cared about preserving the original buildings at Sachsenhausen, which were left to rot, and in the end, history seemed to matter less than political and ideological interests.

The Sachsenhausen Memorial and Museum (after 1993)

[26] "1961-1990 Sachsenhausen National Memorial."
[27] Wiedmer, "Sachsenhausen," 187.
[28] Bookheimer, "The Layers of Memory at Sachsenhausen," 18.
[29] Wiedmer, "Sachsenhausen," 188.

In 1989, the Berlin Wall came down, and the GDR dissolved the next year as East and West officially became one again. As for Sachsenhausen, the memorial creators and state officials were now tasked with using the site to memorialize a history that had been further complicated in the postwar years by the Soviet Union and GDR. A commission of historians was appointed in 1990 to recommend changes for Sachsenhausen, but before they finished their work, the interim director of the site, Gerhard Emig, added information about Soviet wrongdoings to the site's narrative in a way that "seemed to equate their significance."[30] Emig was a civil servant in western Berlin who had been imprisoned in a Soviet special camp. The sign he erected just inside the entrance to Sachsenhausen declared that "the end of Communist domination…[made] it possible also to commemorate those who, under the Soviet occupying power and under the lawless GDR state after 1945, sacrificed their freedom, health, and their lives in resistance."[31] Emig was not alone in his desire to bring the history of the Soviet camp further into the light; other former prisoners placed a memorial stone dedicated to the "Victims of Stalinist Arbitrariness" on the inside of the camp triangle.[32] However, the question of how to interpret the Nazi and Soviet camps within the same site was far from easily resolved.

In the early post-communist period, memorialization of the Soviet special camp in Sachsenhausen was sparse, but the language used sometimes suggested that all who were interned by the Soviets were resisters or victims. Considering that some were imprisoned for their Nazi ties, this blanket characterization of the prisoners was appalling to many. How could Nazi perpetrators be commemorated as victims alongside the victims that they had terrorized in concentration camps? The culture of silence and lack of public knowledge on the Soviet camps

[30] Farmer, "Symbols That Face Two Ways," 108.
[31] Ibid, 110.
[32] Ibid.

only muddled the situation further because people inaccurately believed that every single prisoner in the special camps was a Nazi who was legally imprisoned after trial and extremely undeserving of memorialization. While there are still unanswered questions about what happened in the special camps, scholars are now certain that non-Nazis and innocent people died within them.[33] At the Sachsenhausen site, these two histories collided and provoked controversy and debate around issues of victimhood and complicity. The site administration even sounded out public opinion while revising the site, asking visitors to answer a questionnaire about their purpose for visiting and the section of the camp's history they were most interested in.[34] At least one important lesson that emerged during these initial years of German reunification was that the National Socialist concentration camps and Soviet special camps should not be conflated nor equated. Doing so would prevent people from grappling fully with both histories and reduce the experiences of many victims who were systematically persecuted and murdered. Over time, the Sachsenhausen memorial site shifted to reflect this notion.

In 1993, the Brandenburg Memorials Foundation was founded, and the Sachsenhausen Memorial and Museum became one of the sites under its purview. It began to receive public funding from the state and federal governments. The site's new administrators decided to create two distinct commemorative areas with separate entrances to address and remember both the Nazi and Soviet periods. They removed Emig's sign and incorporated stone barracks, the command post, and a gravesite from the Soviet era into a new exhibit located outside the triangular camp. As Bookheimer writes, this separation meant that the Soviet camp narrative would not be "misconstrued as a comparative or competitive history to the site's Nazi past."[35]

[33] Bookheimer, "The Layers of Memory at Sachsenhausen," 32.
[34] Farmer, "Symbols That Face Two Ways," 109.
[35] Bookheimer, "The Layers of Memory at Sachsenhausen," 33.

In addition to determining whether and how to incorporate the Soviet era into the memorial site, the site administration had to (re)interpret the Nazi past at Sachsenhausen. They could remove the GDR's previous memorial work and recreate the "original" camp as it appeared in 1945, which was what the former Sachsenhausen prisoners had favored when the GDR was planning the site, or they could preserve the more recent installations that testified to East German history. The situation became even more complex when the two barracks that were restored by the GDR for its Jewish Museum, Barracks 38 and 39, were set ablaze by alleged neo-Nazis in 1992 following a visit by Yitzhak Rabin, the Prime Minister of Israel. Victims' organizations and historians disagreed about what should be done with the severely damaged barracks. The former prisoners and Jewish community wanted a full reconstruction to preserve the authenticity of the site and the memory of Jewish suffering. In their eyes, an artistic and abstract memorial, which historians wanted, would promote forgetting, while a reconstruction would prove what had happened during the Holocaust to the world and younger generations.[36] On the other hand, historians scrutinized the idea of "authenticity," pointing out that the burnt barracks were not the original barracks built in 1938 but rather recreations built prior to the opening of the Sachsenhausen National Memorial in 1961.[37] Could "inauthentic" buildings truly bear witness to what had happened in the past and teach future generations? Furthermore, historians and others who opposed reconstruction argued that the "relatively tame re-enactment…[would] mock the actual horrors of life in the camps,"[38] fueling visitors' misguided beliefs that they could fully grasp the Holocaust and the suffering of victims with one visit to a former concentration camp. They advocated instead for a more symbolic monument established

[36] Wiedmer, "Sachsenhausen," 190.
[37] Ibid.
[38] Ibid, 191.

in the place of the barracks, perhaps utilizing the charred remnants as a reminder to remain vigilant against anti-Semitism.

In the end, the two barracks were rebuilt, and the museum was updated to provide a more accurate and nuanced depiction of the Jewish victims' experience in concentration camps, rather than focusing singularly on Jewish resistance as the previous memorial site had done. The barracks were reconstructed yet again to show visitors what daily life in the camp was like. However, the final design for these barracks also included encasing some burnt sections behind a glass wall as a stark reminder that extremism and racism still existed.[39] Thus, the rebuilt barracks attempt to bear witness both to the horrors that occurred from 1936 to 1945 and in the more recent past.

As for the other installations and exhibits added to the site by the East German government, the Tower of Nations, *Liberation*, and *Pietá* were left intact to show visitors how the GDR constructed a narrative through memorialization to serve its political interests. The memorialization during the GDR has become a key aspect of the decentralized concept of the present-day site, a layer of memory for visitors to engage with. The tall obelisk and Graetz's sculpture continue to project strength and victory from the center of the camp, but the site's landscape has been renovated and opened up so that visitors are not forced to stare at the obelisk upon entering and can turn their gaze instead to other parts of the camp. In the area that was formerly Station Z, a white covering was added. *Pietá* and the remnants of the execution instruments can now be viewed against a stark white backdrop, cutting out distractions and evoking a sense of pervasive emptiness. In the past, the Tower of Nations was still visible from this area of mourning and sorrow, but that is no longer the case. In this section, the designers also

[39] Ibid.

added an exhibit called "Murder and Mass Murder at Sachsenhausen Concentration Camp," markers for mass graves, and a memorial to the mass murder of Soviet prisoners of war. Photographs of the Soviet soldiers show faces with "fear, sadness, and determination."[40] These additions allow for a more personal and multi-faceted portrayal of those Communist heroes who were upheld and immortalized in sculptures as strong, "ideal" victims during the GDR era. By contextualizing and reinterpreting the GDR monuments, the dominant narrative crafted by the East German government throughout the site is diluted.

While the monuments were kept at the site, other GDR exhibits were removed or expanded. The previously mentioned changes to Barracks 38 and 39 created a more comprehensive educational and sensory experience for visitors who wanted to learn more about Jewish victims and the daily lives of prisoners. The small camp museum located in what had once been the prisoners' kitchen was converted into an exhibition about key events during the history of Sachsenhausen concentration camp, relating it to broader historical developments during the National Socialist period.[41] The Museum of the Anti-Fascist Struggle for Freedom by the Peoples of Europe was shut down. That GDR museum had omitted any information about Sachsenhausen, but it was replaced by the New Museum in 2002, which houses far more comprehensive exhibits about the Nazi era at Sachsenhausen and the Oranienburg concentration camp. The New Museum also contains a self-reflexive permanent exhibit called "From Memory to Monument," which documents the processes of memorialization at Sachsenhausen after 1950. This exhibit critically reflects on the destruction of much of the site's original structures during the GDR era and the construction of an ideologically tainted narrative. It pulls back the curtain on the transformation of Sachsenhausen from a site of atrocity to a site of memory, touching on

[40] Bookheimer, "The Layers of Memory at Sachsenhausen," 26.
[41] "Permanent Exhibitions."

themes such as authenticity and state identity. "From Memory to Monument"' also highlights the voices and work of victims who sought to counter the GDR's monopoly over memory, which reveals to visitors that memory is authored by specific people and groups who have different backgrounds and motivations. The exhibit shows who has historically had the power and means to control the historical narrative. Thus, memory is not only about what we remember, but also what we forget and which stories and narratives are suppressed. As Wiedmer notes, this exhibit communicates that today's Sachsenhausen does not aim to restore a "spurious authenticity" to the site nor pretend that it is an "unadulterated site."[42]

In total, today's Sachsenhausen Memorial and Museum includes thirteen permanent exhibitions as well as rotating special exhibitions. The site commemorates victims who were persecuted for political reasons as well as those persecuted for their race, biology, or religion. The narrative is more inclusive and accurate, and it humanizes the victims through individual stories and collected artifacts. Other previously untouched aspects of Sachsenhausen's history are further elaborated on in exhibits about the town of Oranienburg, the punishment and discipline of prisoners, and medical care and experimentation. Three exhibits, located in the former watchtower, the commandants' house, and the administrative building where the entire concentration camp system was managed, focus on the SS perpetrators. The site also promotes academic research with its library, archive, and collections, which are open to the public. While the GDR narrative of victory and heroism is not fully erased from the site, it is one important part of a decentralized design with multiple narratives. There is a focus on the preservation of "original" structures but also an acknowledgment of the many changes that the camp has undergone and the discrete and overlapping layers of memory present at the site.

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[42] Wiedmer, "Sachsenhausen," 168.

When the SED decided to convert Sachsenhausen into a concentration camp in 1955, they wanted the world to see. The recently-established GDR weaponized history to prove both to its citizens and the world that the GDR was a legitimate country, a place of peace and contentment that was superior to the Germany that would soon be on the other side of a wall.[43] For the grand opening in April 1961, Oranienburg citizens were asked to clean up and beautify the town to make a good first impression on the one hundred thousand guests. For the next three decades under GDR rule, visits to Sachsenhausen were obligatory for "school groups, trade union members, National People's Army recruits, and other organizations," and in 1989, Sachsenhausen received 406,164 visitors. However, after reunification, the annual number of visitors continuously decreased, and in 1993, the site only saw 153,945 visitors. As the new administration carefully re-made the memorial site, they had to consider their diminishing audience, and they set out to determine who was visiting the site and for what reasons.[44] All of this goes to show that not long after Sachsenhausen was a concentration camp and an internment camp, it became a site meant to be viewed and visited, and today, it is not only a site for commemoration and education but also a site of tourism.

The Sachsenhausen Memorial is now visited by about 700,000 visitors every year.[45] Film director Sergei Loznitsa and his cinematographer, Jesse Mazuch, traveled to Sachsenhausen and Dachau with their cameras, and in 2016, their documentary, *Austerlitz*, premiered at the Venice Film Festival. Their black-and-white film consists only of long, uncut takes, without any voiceover narration or narrative arc. Interestingly, they do not focus on the hulking Tower of Nations or the remains of the gas chambers or any of the other structures and installations at the

[43] Ibid, 176.
[44] Farmer, "Symbols That Face Two Ways," 109.
[45] Fürstenau, "Sachsenhausen Concentration Camp: Anniversary of Liberation."

site. Instead, they turn the camera on the visitors, observing the masses of tourists who pass through Sachsenhausen on a day that could be any typical summer day.[46] In the first five minutes of the film, we see a teenage boy wearing a t-shirt with the words “Cool story, bro” emblazoned across the front. Countless visitors wear shorts and t-shirts and tote selfie sticks and massive backpacks. As they sit down to rest their feet and eat snacks, shuffle around looking bored and tired, and playfully interact with one another, it seems as though they could easily be transplanted into any other tourist attraction, like Disney World or the Eiffel Tower. The filmmaker also shows how memory at the site in the present day is mediated through audio listening devices and tour guides, focusing on the tour groups at several points. One guide declares that the group is about to enter the “darkest part of [their] tour,...the extermination facilities,” and as people trail the guide into Station Z, the camera captures their chatter and laughing faces. The tourists’ cameras are also a constant presence in the film, always hanging around necks and clasped in hands. The camera shutter sounds in the background act as a soundtrack for the film. In the shots of the entrance gate, bodies jostle as people try to capture the “Arbeit macht frei” inscription. One woman poses, hugging the gate, while others hold each other and smile brightly in front of it. At the end of the film, the entrance gate is shown again, this time as tourists stream out and head for their next destination. One young boy hops into the frame and waves giddily at Loznitsa's camera before he goes.

This film only captures a day or two at Sachsenhausen, and while the camera seems to observe everything that happens in the camp passively, the shots that made it into the film were selectively chosen and assembled by the filmmakers. However, *Austerlitz* still provides a glimpse into the present-day Sachsenhausen Memorial and Museum. The audience learns little about the

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[46] Loznitsa, *Austerlitz*.

history of Sachsenhausen or its prisoners from watching the film, but they see a key part of the site's operation: the tourists. With minimal dialogue and exposition, Loznitsa raises questions about Holocaust tourism and the commercialization of memorial sites like former concentration camps. Hundreds of thousands of visitors are going to Sachsenhausen every year, but he asks, "Why do they go there? What are they looking for?"[47] Loznitsa also interrogates the memorial sites in his film. His portrayal leaves the audience wondering how the memorial sites have evolved into yet another stop on sightseeing tours and whether the sites should regulate the behavior of tourists or demand more reverence. While Loznitsa avoids direct commentary in his film, he later states during an interview that "The tourists are just looking at things like they are from another world...Like consumers. It's selling horror in small pieces. It looks like that, when you stay outside and just observe people."[48]

In this statement, Loznitsa echoes some scholars in tourism studies and Holocaust memory studies. Holocaust tourism is usually characterized as a form of dark tourism, which is defined as travel to places associated with tragedy, mass destruction, suffering, and death.[49] According to some scholars, dark tourism is enabled by "an industry that exploits the postmodern appetite for such sites through processes of commodification that ensnare uninformed travelers."[50] These scholars also question whether the tourist experience at such sites is authentic with all of the "reconstructions, facsimiles, and other alterations" to the commodified sites.[51] Loznitsa suggests that the indifferent and disrespectful tourists in his film are representative of "dark tourists," or unsophisticated, ignorant consumers of commodified and

[47] "Austerlitz."
[48] Rapold, "Sergei Loznitsa's Movie 'Austerlitz' Observes Tourists in Concentration Camps."
[49] Reynolds, "Consumers or Witnesses?", 336.
[50] Ibid.
[51] Ibid, 336-7.

inauthentic versions of history. However, in the same shots, we also see tourists who appear to be more solemn and contemplative. Daniel Reynolds investigates the phenomenon of Holocaust tourism in his book *Postcards from Auschwitz*. He writes that the concept of the tourist should be expanded to include "numerous, fluid, and even contradictory subjectivities." Tourists can fall anywhere on the spectrum from "the pilgrim and the researcher to the uninformed and the morbidly curious," and they can also take on more than one of those roles.[52] In his other writings, Reynolds continually pushes back against the dismissive and contemptuous attitude many people have toward Holocaust tourism, arguing instead that the phenomenon is complex and not necessarily detrimental to Holocaust remembrance as a whole. He and other scholars propose that the tourists to these memorial sites are not only consumers but also producers of representations of historical memory, which is a point I will return to later.

Reynolds argues that "tourists play an undeniable, even indispensable role in Holocaust memorialization,"[53] and the tourists at Sachsenhausen are no exception. The Memorial's website is mostly structured to help facilitate visits. Entry to Sachsenhausen Memorial and Museum is free, but donations are welcome. Visitors can pay a small fee for an audio guide or a larger fee for a guided tour of the outdoor space with a tour guide trained by the Sachsenhausen Memorial, and these tours are offered in 15 different languages. The three-hour tours are facilitated by the Friends of Sachsenhausen Memorial and Museum, a non-profit organization founded in 1998 to support the site's memory work. The revenue generated from the official tours also supports the site's maintenance. The tour provides "insight into the history of the Sachsenhausen concentration camp in easy-to-understand language and with visual materials" and breaks for

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[52] Reynolds, *Postcards from Auschwitz*, 33-4.
[53] Reynolds, "Consumers or Witnesses?", 349.

reflection.[54] Due to high demand, the Memorial recommends booking tours at least four months in advance, but visitors can also receive tours from private companies. To offer tours at the site, the private operators are required to attend training courses, earn a license, and pay a fee that will also go toward the care and preservation of the Memorial. Lastly, the Memorial offers a wide array of programming for students and young people and hosts visitors at a youth hostel called the International Youth Centre "Haus Szczypiorski," which was formerly the home of Theodor Eicke. Through these tours and programs, the website emphasizes the historical and political education that visitors, especially young students, can receive through the site.[55] However, through its museum exhibits and guided tours, Kerry Whigham notes that Sachsenhausen "rigidly curates the experience of the visitor" rather than allowing the visitor to encounter the site in a unique, experimental way.[56] Whigham's analysis of the visitor's experience at Sachsenhausen provides a different lens through which *Austerlitz* can be viewed. Loznitsa criticizes the tourists he captures on camera because of their disengaged viewing of the site, but perhaps they are not entirely to blame. The memorial designers seem to give the visitors little space or agency to do anything besides look.

This chapter has primarily delved into the transformation of the Sachsenhausen concentration camp into a Soviet special camp and then two discrete memorial sites. This history reveals how individuals and groups shape collective memory of the Holocaust through former concentration camps, and how state officials, victims' organizations, architects, historians, administrators, and a multitude of other stakeholders all play a role in this process. Collective memory is not the same thing as history. Memory refers to what individuals and groups and

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[54] "Guided Tours."
[55] "Since 1993 Sachsenhausen Memorial and Museum."
[56] Whigham, "Reading the Traces."

nations choose to remember and forget, and it is a "collective phenomenon that only manifests itself in the actions and statements of individuals."[57] As a result, the dominant narrative or memory that emerges is always subjective, based on a particular relationship to the past and contemporary interests, which is perhaps most easily seen during the GDR era. As a result, sometimes the memories of people whose interpretations of the past are rooted in direct experiences of or connections to trauma do not become collective memories. Kansteiner sums it up succinctly when he writes that these groups, such as victims' organizations, "only have a chance to shape the national memory if they command the means to express their visions, and if their vision meets with compatible social or political objectives and inclinations among other important social groups."[58] After Germany was reunified, Sachsenhausen Memorial expanded its narrative, but the site was still carefully curated and re-made to reflect the values of the new designers and government, as well as a different relationship to the National Socialist regime, Soviet occupation, and the German Democratic Republic.

Over the last several decades, the issue of authenticity has been threaded throughout many of the debates surrounding memorialization at Sachsenhausen and other camp memorials. As Wiedmer says, "Representation and authenticity stand in uneasy relation to one another."[59] Attempts to create more accurate and better representations of the past at Sachsenhausen have led to "reconstructions, facsimiles, and other alterations," and, consequently, Sachsenhausen and the other former concentration camps are not the same as they were in 1945. However, for memorials, "authentic" is usually interchangeable with "original," and an authentic site implies a site that has not been touched or altered. The idea of authenticity is what makes historical sites

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[57] Kansteiner, "Finding Meaning in Memory," 180.
[58] Ibid, 187-8.
[59] Wiedmer, "Sachsenhausen," 165.

and museums full of artifacts so appealing. It is why millions of visitors crowd into former concentration camps every year. They seem like places "where a sort of direct, privileged access to the Holocaust is possible via the very stones and mortar that housed it."[60] The reconstruction of those "stones and mortar" to look "authentic" has raised concerns about performative or staged authenticity at memorial sites, especially in relation to the commercialization of such sites. However, what makes Sachsenhausen's story so interesting is its acknowledgment that it is not authentic. The "From Memory to Monument" exhibit deliberately reveals that many different minds and hands have shaped the site since its inception, and in doing so, the Sachsenhausen Memorial critically reflects upon its own creation.

Reynolds proposes a different definition for "authenticity" at tourist sites, suggesting that "authenticity is better understood as transparency and accuracy about the processes in place to maintain the sites, to document the condition of the camps at their various stages of development."[61] This authenticity may be part of the reason why Bookheimer argues that present-day Sachsenhausen fits Bill Niven's description of the "ideal concentration camp memorial."[62] Sachsenhausen has been transformed from a site of atrocity, the "ideal concentration camp," into a site of memory that acknowledges the imperfect processes of memorialization and reckons with its complex, thorny history.

Chapter 3: The Whitney Plantation

While our discussion of Sachsenhausen remained largely within the triangle of the former prisoner camp and just outside its walls, this area only makes up about five percent of the overall

[60] Ibid, 165-6.
[61] Reynolds, "Consumers or Witnesses?", 348.
[62] Bookheimer, "The Layers of Memory at Sachsenhausen," 47.

camp. The remaining space includes the satellite camps, SS barracks, and SS residences, or, as Wiedmer describes it, "the site of the perpetrators."[63] Because local inhabitants in Oranienburg moved into the former SS residences and the GDR National People's Army took over the barracks, much of the original infrastructure has been relatively well-preserved, and Sachsenhausen is the only former concentration camp where "the remnants of the perpetrators" are "preserved to this extent."[64] Up until recently, people prioritized the preservation of the sites of victims in Germany and Europe, for these sites could serve as witnesses to the atrocities and as places for mourning. On the other hand, the sites of perpetrators were destroyed in an attempt to eradicate their memory.

In Oranienburg, the decisions after the war regarding what to do with the camp were also influenced by more practical concerns. The population needed housing, and the huge lots next to Sachsenhausen seemed to provide the perfect solution. After reunification, the state of Brandenburg thought that it could "come to terms with a part of [Oranienburg's] past…openly" and accommodate the growing population by converting the space into a neighborhood with apartments and shops. Not all were so fond of this idea, which architect Daniel Libeskind characterized as a "trivializ[ation of] the area through domestication."[65] In the end, the competition jury decided against constructing a new neighborhood, but the SS houses that already existed and were inhabited by Oranienburg citizens still posed a problem. The buildings were slowly rotting, but when Brandenburg Memorials Foundation suggested giving the houses collective landmark status, the residents were opposed. They were aggravated by the constant discussion surrounding their homes, where they had been living undisturbed for decades. Many

[63] Wiedmer, "Sachsenhausen," 192.
[64] Ibid.
[65] Ibid, 193.

had also been officers in the National People's Army, so they viewed the houses as "war booty" they could rightfully seize from the "defeated fascists."[66] The uncertainty about what should be done with the space surrounding the Sachsenhausen Memorial and Museum and the residences of Nazi perpetrators shows the conflict surrounding memorializing perpetrators. Some people are concerned that memorialization efforts conflict with practical, contemporary interests, and others support erasing all traces of the SS and embracing a new orientation for the site. However, in some people's eyes, studying and preserving the history of the perpetrators and consequently maintaining their memory is crucial for understanding the victims of the Holocaust. Although this may never happen, it is interesting to consider what would happen if the SS residences in Oranienburg became memorial museums, similar to the Nazi party rally grounds in Nuremberg or the Topography of Terror in Berlin.

In the United States, there is also an ongoing conversation about memorialization at the sites of perpetrators associated with slavery. To be clear, I am not suggesting that SS officers and slaveowners should be equated. However, for both groups, some of the sites that witnessed the atrocities they committed still exist today and are used in various ways. Whether or not these sites have deliberately been reshaped into memorial sites, they influence our collective memory of the Holocaust and slavery. The sites of perpetrators I am referring to are the plantations across the Southern United States, which represent the country's antebellum history and project a certain narrative about enslaved people and the enslavers.

The Whitney Plantation is one example. On December 7, 2014, the Whitney Plantation in Wallace, Louisiana opened as a museum. Fifteen years of restorations and $8 million transformed the plantation into what some call the first slavery museum in America and the only

[66] Ibid, 197.

plantation museum in Louisiana focused on the lives of the enslaved.[67] This largely came about because of one individual: John Cummings, a New Orleanian and former trial lawyer. Cummings acquired the property, poured millions of his own dollars into restorations, and, perhaps most importantly, possessed the will to forge a counter-narrative about American history and create a different kind of memory in the Deep South.[68] The Whitney is no ordinary plantation museum, which its development from site of slavery to site of memory illustrates. This chapter will follow that history, considering the Whitney as an individual site and within the broader landscape of plantation museums and memorialization in the United States.

The Whitney's history

Founded by German immigrant Ambroise Heidel in 1752, the plantation started as a much smaller parcel of land with twenty enslaved Africans. Over time, the spelling of the name "Heidel" was changed to "Haydel", reflecting the family's acculturation to French Louisiana. From Ambroise's death around 1770 up until the start of the Civil War, the plantation and practice of slavery was passed down through generations of Haydels, creating much wealth for the family and expanding over time. After the first sugar crystals in Louisiana were granulated in 1795, the plantation switched from indigo to sugarcane production and continues to produce sugar cane to this day.[69] The transition to sugar cane and the resulting need for increased labor coincided with the U.S. Congress ending the importation of slaves to America in 1808, which allowed the domestic slave trade to boom.[70]

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[67] Cummings III, "The U.S. Has 35,000 Museums. Why Is Only One about Slavery?"
[68] Amsden, "Building the First Slavery Museum in America."
[69] "Whitney Plantation Slavery Museum."
[70] "The Domestic Slave Trade."

In 1819, 61 enslaved people lived on the plantation. Most were born in Louisiana and considered "Creoles," but 19 were born in Africa and were survivors of the brutal Middle Passage. Some were forced to cross the Atlantic when they were less than ten years old. The enslaved Africans on the plantation were Mande, Congo, Kiamba, and Temne people, and aspects of their food and customs have become part of Louisianan culture. Some of the enslaved people were traded from the Caribbean and the slaveholding states in the Upper South. The 1819 inventory also revealed that 21 enslaved women and nine children lived on the plantation. Sickness related to grueling labor was common, and homesickness and loss of autonomy also affected the mental well-being of many. While death rates were not precisely recorded, mortality was high among the children born to enslaved women, who were often impregnated while young. From 1823 to 1863, 39 children died on the plantation, and only six lived past the age of five.[71] Enslaved women had to care for their owner's children at the expense of their own, and families were frequently torn apart due to sales and auctions.

When the Haydel plantation began producing sugar instead of indigo as its dominant crop, the need for labor increased due to the dangerous nature of sugar production.[72] Enslaved people were forced to plant and harvest the sugarcane and then grind the cane to extract the sugar juice, which would be boiled in massive open kettles. They worked around the clock, and the kettles caused third-degree burns and lost limbs. Death was common due to the "labor, the disease environment, and the lack of proper nutrition and medical care."[73] The harsh labor and punishment that characterized the lives of the enslaved led some to resist by running away, risking mutilation and death if they got caught. Some who escaped into the swamps became

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[71] "Enslaved Workers at Whitney Plantation."
[72] "Slavery In Louisiana."
[73] Ibid.

maroons, living in communities with others. Resistance often took subtle forms, but there were slave revolts as well, such as the 1811 German Coast Uprising.[74]

Marie Azélie Haydel acquired the land in 1840 and became the last Haydel to own the plantation. Under her ownership, the plantation drastically grew in size and production and had over 100 enslaved workers.[75] In 1795, there were 2,797 enslaved people living along the German Coast, where the Haydel Plantation was located. By 1860, that number had quadrupled to 8,776. The Haydels owned approximately 350 people during the 110 years they owned the plantation, but the lacunae in the birth and death records mean that number is likely an underestimate.[76] Azélie Haydel's death prior to the Civil War left the plantation in a state of limbo. During this period, many enslaved people fled to join the Union army. After the war, the property was sold to Bradish Johnson, a businessman and plantation owner, and the Whitney was named in honor of one of his daughters. A year later, in 1868, the plantation resumed its operations with wage laborers, some of whom had previously been enslaved on the plantation, and it continued to pass from owner to owner over the next century.[77]

In 1990, the Whitney underwent a change in ownership that laid the groundwork for the museum that was to come. Formosa Chemicals and Fiber Corporation purchased the land with the intention of building a $700 million rayon plant. The potential for environmental hazards and loss of the plantation's historic buildings caused both environmental activists and preservationists to push back, so Formosa commissioned a survey of the entire property to determine what sections they could use for the factory. When the resistance did not cease, the

[74] "Resistance."
[75] "Plantation Owners."
[76] Institute of Historical Research, *IHR Partnership Seminar*.
[77] "Plantation Owners."

Whitney went up for sale yet again in 1999 and finally found its way into John Cummings' real estate portfolio. Cummings also received the eight volumes of research into the plantation's history, courtesy of Formosa, and within this study, he began to see "the story of slavery…in terms of who built what."[78] Seeking out more information about the "who," Cummings began to read about slavery. Thus, the Whitney plantation as we know it today was born. The museum remained under Cummings' ownership until he donated it in 2019, and the site is now a 501(c)(3) non-profit run by a board of directors.[79]

The Whitney Plantation is located on the famed River Road between Baton Rouge and New Orleans, alongside several other restored plantations and mansions. The Evergreen Plantation neighboring Whitney is marketed as the most intact example of a traditional plantation. Grand two-story mansions in a variety of styles, from Creole to Greek Revival, stand on both banks of the Mississippi, along with towering oak trees like those in front of the Oak Alley Plantation. According to the Louisiana Department of Culture, Recreation, and Tourism, the "highest concentration of millionaires in America" could be found along this road in the mid-19th century, and the history of these "millionaires" and their sugar plantations is preserved through approximately 30 plantation homes. Hundreds of thousands of tourists visit these homes every year to see "the stunning architecture, elaborate furnishings and entertaining tales of life and livelihood in antebellum Louisiana."[80] There is, however, no mention of the mass enslavement and dehumanization of Black people that made these slaveowners into millionaires. Jennifer Eichstedt and Stephen Small visited over one hundred plantation museums and concluded that "white-centric plantation museum sites employ strategies for handling or

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78 Amsden, "Building the First Slavery Museum in America."
79 "Whitney Plantation History."
80 "Plantations Historic Homes and Gardens."

managing a racialized past and present that add up to a pattern of obfuscation and mystification."[81] At these sites, slavery is largely excluded and the focus is on the architecture and beauty of the main house and the culture of the Southern upper echelons.[82] The owners' lives are romanticized, and the owners are portrayed as genteel and "good slaveowners." The Laura Plantation on River Road was the first historic site to include stories of enslaved Africans on the tour when it opened in 1994. However, the tour is presented from the perspective of Laura Locoul, who was born and raised on the family plantation, and she is described as a "kinder" slaveowner despite not freeing them and participating in the post-emancipation sharecropping system. [83] Great detail is provided about the daily lives of owners like Laura, and comparatively little is provided about the people who toiled from sun-up to sun-down to make the grandeur possible. When they are mentioned, they are portrayed as servants rather than forcibly enslaved people.

This messaging commonly presented in plantation tourism fits in neatly with the broader landscape of memorialization in America. Across the nation, museums, memorials, and monuments promote a dominant narrative that suppresses the role of enslaved people in the making of the county. Patricia Davis writes that the important memories that have imbued the landscape with meaning and "have marked them as historically significant places, have been those celebrating white heroism, individualism, and triumphalism—often over nonwhite 'others'—effectively conflating American heritage and identity with whiteness."[84] Memorial structures have played an especially large role in this process, especially in the Southern states. After the end of the Civil War, the reconciliation of white Northerners and white Southerners

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[81] Eichstedt, *Representations of Slavery*, 102.
[82] "Plantations Historic Homes and Gardens."
[83] Ibid.
[84] Davis, "Memoryscapes in Transition."

produced hegemonic memory of the war that excluded the causes and consequences, namely slavery, and instead centered the heroism of the soldiers.[85] The North and South diverged, however, in how the Southerners attempted to make meaning of their defeat. The "Lost Cause" mythology put forth an idealized, romanticized version of antebellum life and asserted that the Confederacy had nobly gone to war to protect the values and traditions of this civilization. This narrative is illustrated by the numerous monuments commemorating Confederate individuals that dot the southern landscape. While the Lost Cause created racial solidarity across economic class for white Americans, it was also strongly bolstered by the wealth and power of particular white citizens. In his article recounting the establishment of and backlash against Confederate statues on the campus of the University of Texas at Austin, Ben Wright argues that certain men with wealth and privilege could "colonize public spaces with an intentionally curated set of values and remembrances."[86] It is said that "history is written by the victors," but in truth, antebellum and Civil War history were written by anyone with power and wealth—in other words, anyone who was not Black.

The Whitney as a site of memory

The Whitney Plantation attempts to serve as a counterpoint to this dominant narrative in America's memorial landscape through its unique position as a plantation museum and its location amid other River Road plantations. In contrast to its neighbors, the Whitney does not utilize actors in period costumes or reenactments to create a sense of nostalgia for antebellum culture and allow visitors to relate to the owners of the plantation. Instead, it tells a specific counter-narrative, cultivating empathy and education through the tour and stories of slavery.

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[85] Ibid.
[86] Wright, "Confederate Statues and Their Dirty Laundry."

The Whitney Plantation Museum was visited by 375,000 visitors in its first five years.[87] Visitors come from far and wide, with the majority living over 160 miles away and about 20 percent coming from other countries.[88] The visitor experience at the Whitney is structured around the guided tour, which takes visitors from the historic Antioch Baptist Church, which was built by freedmen and whose congregation consisted of people formerly enslaved on River Road plantations, through the memorials and grounds, and finally to the "Big House," which is what enslaved people called the owner's mansion, at the end of the tour.[89] I will now go into further detail regarding specific components of the tour and site to provide a fuller picture of the Whitney Plantation's pedagogy.

Each tour begins with a video, in which visitors hear the voices of former slaves Charlie Smith and Laura Smalley, establishing early on the importance of the enslaved people's narratives. The video explains the source of much of the information that will be provided throughout the tour. Visitors learn that, in the 1930s, when President Franklin Roosevelt formed the Works Progress Administration (WPA) to create jobs for Americans after the Great Depression, the Federal Writers' Project was part of it. Writers, editors, historians, and researchers were scattered across the United States to capture American experiences, and one unit recognized the value of interviewing former slaves and preserving the era of slavery from the perspective of its survivors. From 1937 to 1939, the Federal Writers' Project collected slave narratives from individuals who had been children and teenagers before emancipation. The video voiceover concludes with encouragement for the visitors to read their names on the memorials at

[87] "Whitney Plantation History."
[88] Institute of Historical Research, *IHR Partnership Seminar*.
[89] Keller, "Inside America's Auschwitz."

the Whitney, to "read their words" and "remember them," again focusing on the voices of the formerly enslaved people.[90]

One of the most visible aspects of the Whitney Plantation, pictured across the website and brochures, is the Children of the Whitney. These are forty small clay sculptures of enslaved children, crafted by Ohio-based artist Woodrow Nash, who sit and stand among the pews of the church as well as throughout the plantation. These sculptures serve to humanize the past and the children who once lived, labored, and died on the plantation. In addition, they visually supplement the Federal Writers' Project's slave narratives, representing the interviewees as they once were.[91] During a discussion at the Brooklyn Historical Society, Cummings elaborates further on the reasoning behind these sculptures. When moderator Jelani Cobb asks Cummings and Dr. Ibrahima Seck, the Whitney Plantation's director of research, about the obstacles they faced in creating the Whitney as a slavery museum, and specifically the psychological and emotional resistance of Americans against this portrayal of history, Cummings says, "We were told that the answer is children." They intentionally did not "put big slaves up," believing that portrayals of children were the best method for encouraging empathy in visitors.[92] Cummings goes on to say that the sculptures are extremely effective, and that visitors sit among them, holding them and feeling deeply moved. Despite the intention to cultivate empathy for enslaved people through children, an attendee at the Brooklyn Historical Society discussion raised an apt point about the danger of strategically using children rather than "big slaves" at the museum.[93] This subscribes to a long tradition of infantilizing enslaved people and portraying them as beings in need of guidance and rescue from white owners and overseers. In an article dissecting

[90] "Whitney Plantation and Slavery."
[91] "The Children of the Whitney."
[92] "Whitney Plantation and Slavery."
[93] Ibid.

plantation counternarratives, Michelle Commander critiques this choice because, even if done unintentionally, it risks reinforcing racist viewpoints and suggesting that children are the only innocent victims worthy of commemoration.[94]

This question of how to go about commemorating enslaved persons is also relevant when considering the Whitney's multiple memorials. The first memorial encountered upon leaving the church is the Wall of Honor, engraved with the names of 354 people who were enslaved on the Whitney Plantation, along with their birth date, place of origin, and skills. We see inscriptions such as, "Pauline, Seamstress & Laundress, born ca. 1796, East Coast," as well as testimonials about the slave experience. The next is the Allées Gwendolyn Midlo Hall, a series of granite slabs engraved with the names of the 107,000 people enslaved in Louisiana. The memorial also commemorates Hall, whose scholarship accounts for much of the knowledge regarding the history of slavery both broadly and in the Louisiana region. At the center of the Field of Angels is Rod Moorehead's *Coming Home*, a large bronze sculpture of an angel holding a dead infant, which is surrounded by slabs engraved with the names of the 2,200 enslaved children who died in St. John the Baptist Parish, where the Whitney is located.[95]

The Whitney's fourth monument is more controversial than the others. In January 1811, the largest slave revolt in the southern United States took place in Louisiana as enslaved people marched off plantations on the German Coast towards New Orleans. Those who revolted were suppressed after two days, and in the aftermath, 95 were killed. Sixty were then decapitated, and to discourage other enslaved people from rebelling, their heads were places on stakes along River Road. Despite being the largest slave revolt in United States history, the 1811 German

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[94] Commander, "Plantation Counternarratives."
[95] "The Big House and the Outbuildings."

Coast Uprising has been overlooked by historians and is unknown to many. To memorialize the revolt, Woodrow Nash was commissioned to create 60 ceramic heads, which are placed on stakes in a section of the plantation. The memorial is not mentioned on the Whitney's website, and it is unclear whether the tour consistently covers it. The memorial is a source of controversy among locals, some of whom view it as "disturbing." Seck and Cummings acknowledge the graphic nature of this very literal representation, but both find it necessary.[96] This fourth memorial exemplifies the "tension between remembering and forgetting the trauma of slavery." While some Southern historic sites may resist showing the violence and trauma of slavery due to a fear of alienating white audiences and thus losing attendance, Derek Alderman points out that rehashing the trauma of slavery also poses the risk of traumatizing African Americans further. He writes that African Americans are forced to both recover slave narratives and recover *from* slavery.[97] Commander also questions whether this memorial promotes a "hypervisibility of violence" that is unproductive in helping the audience to understand slavery.[98] Thus, while creating a fuller representation of the local history and the lives of the enslaved, the different memorials reveal some of the tensions involved in memorializing atrocity, such as the need to make authentic representations without re-traumatizing people.

Along with the monuments, the visitors pass by the outdoor kitchen where the enslaved people prepared meals, a "hot box" or metal chamber where slaves were held as punishment or to await sale at auction, sugar kettles, the blacksmith's shop, the overseer's home, slave cabins, and other outbuildings. A mix of replicas and original structures make up the restored property. The tour ends at the Big House.[99] This choice is meant to minimize the importance of the Big

[96] Amsden, "Building the First Slavery Museum in America."; "Whitney Plantation and Slavery."
[97] Alderman, "Surrogation and the Politics of Remembering Slavery in Savannah, Georgia (USA)."
[98] Commander, "Plantation Counternarratives."
[99] Davis, "Plantations Are a Dark Chapter in American History—Here's Why to Visit."

House and its slave-owning inhabitants at the museum and go against the narrative at other plantation museums, where the tours usually only take place within the Big House. The tourists enter using the back entrance that the enslaved people had to use, and during the few minutes spent inside, they learn about the mansion from the perspective of the enslaved people. What the tour does not include is any romanticization of the Haydels' lives.

Gaila Sims' analysis of the Whitney as a memorial, museum, and plantation museum argues that its "greatest strength" lies in its status as the "first plantation museum in [the] area to focus wholly on the lives of the enslaved."[100] While other newly-created and established memorials and museums have recently begun to grapple more with the issue of slavery, very few plantation sites are dedicated solely to this purpose. Cummings did not purchase the plantation with the intention of making it into a memorial and museum, but once he began reading into the history of the Whitney, he felt that he had to tell the story of slavery. He was not the only person or the first person with a desire to build a slavery museum in the United States. Douglas Wilder became the first elected African-American governor in the United States when he became the governor of Virginia in 1990. In 2001, Wilder announced his vision of building a museum about slavery and the crucial role it has played in American history, not just African-American or Southern history. The United States National Slavery Museum was supposed to be built in Fredericksburg, Virginia, and millions of dollars were pledged by public figures in support. Despite years of fundraising, however, the museum did not receive enough donations to begin construction or pay property taxes, and Wilder's dream was never realized. In Washington D.C., the National Museum of African American History and Culture was the culmination of almost a century of advocacy and proposals for a museum that would memorialize African-American

[100] Sims, "Mandatory Education: Sharing the Story of Slavery at the Whitney Plantation Museum," 34.

achievements. In the early 2000s, after an intense legislative push, the museum received authorization from the United States Congress and federal funding, and it opened in 2016 on the National Mall to much fanfare and praise. The museum addresses slavery, but it is not intended to be a slavery museum. The exhibits on slavery "stand alongside those containing a trumpet played by Louis Armstrong and boxing gloves worn by Muhammad Ali," and the main message is that "civil rights triumphs and America is wonderful."[101] These two cases demonstrate how essential financial support is for commemorative work. Donations did not always suffice and federal funding was difficult to obtain. Fortunately for the Whitney, however, funding was never an issue. Cummings restored the Whitney, brought in artifacts from other plantations, and commissioned memorial artwork for the site with his personal wealth. His money brought his vision of the Whitney to life, but, importantly, he also possessed the willpower to create a plantation museum that would reckon with a difficult history that other plantation museums were unwilling to confront. The making of the Whitney Plantation Museum seems unconventional relative to other museums and memorials, but in a memorial landscape characterized by physical reminders of Lost Cause ideology and glamorous plantations that honor slave-owning families, perhaps an unconventional path was exactly what was necessary to bring a museum like the Whitney into existence.

At traditional museums, the long process of making memorials involves artist proposals, board member debates, and fundraising. For the Whitney's various memorials, Cummings could skip this traditional vetting process. The memorials still manage to yield "conventionally effective results: at once chastening and challenging, beautiful and haunting,"[102] which is echoed

[101] Amsden, "Building the First Slavery Museum in America."
[102] Ibid.

by tourists across online review websites.[103] However, it is important to acknowledge that the memory created at the Whitney is selective and was shaped primarily by one individual, who was white, wealthy, and lacked a direct connection to slavery in the United States. Even though Cummings consulted a few experts, such as Seck, a Senegalese historian who was present for most of the planning period, he was not obligated to do so, and at the end of the day, he had the final say over how the site should look and function. The Whitney today serves as a gathering place for Black and white descendants of the Haydels, but it is unclear if these descendants were consulted for the planning of the site. When interviewed, Seck describes Cummings' "stubbornness" while building the museum as "frustrating," but also acknowledges that few others would be "willing to put so many millions of dollars into a project like this."[104]

The Federal Writers' Project slave narratives also factor heavily into the site's design and the tourist experience. The small sculptures of enslaved children throughout the site were commissioned to represent the interviewees. Cummings initially planned to install speakers near the slave cabins that would play the recordings of interviews. At the start of the tour, the visitor receives a small identification card with the profile of a former enslaved person on it. The slave narratives are incorporated to emphasize the humanity of the enslaved people and to ensure that the formerly enslaved people's perspectives are represented as well as possible in a site that tells their story. However, there are some limitations of the WPA interviews. The interviewers were mostly white Southerners who selected the "most obsequious informants."[105] Historians have suspected that the interviewees did not give accurate descriptions of their experiences and instead said "what their interviewers wanted to hear,"[106] for those interviewers were sometimes

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[103] Sims, "Mandatory Education: Sharing the Story of Slavery at the Whitney Plantation Museum."
[104] Amsden, "Building the First Slavery Museum in America."
[105] Berlin, "Introduction: Slavery as Memory and History," xx.
[106] Ibid.

descendants of slaveowners and employees of the government. The interviewers were also influenced by preconceived notions about slavery, Reconstruction, and African Americans, patronizing their interviewees and asking leading questions. Lastly, problems arose when the interviewers transcribed interviews. Interviewers edited the words of their informants and reconstructed the conversations. As a result, the slave narratives were sometimes "little more than fabrications" were more revealing of the "historical memory and racial attitudes of white Southerners in the 1930s than of the lives of black slaves in the 1850s."[107] Seck acknowledges the complicated context of the WPA in an interview,[108] but visitors to the site may not learn about it. Furthermore, none of the formerly enslaved individuals who were interviewed lived in Louisiana, so the experiences described may not reflect those of the enslaved population at the Whitney, even though visitors may come to believe otherwise when they hear the recordings of interviews during their tours. This highlights the lack of slave narratives that have been preserved in the United States and the difficulty of memorializing the lives of the enslaved without such records. However, the Whitney's work with its descendant community, a phrase coined by Michael Blakey to represent the group of people descended from those who were enslaved in one place,[109] may be a meaningful way to remedy this and learn more about the experiences of the Whitney's enslaved population and their families. If the Whitney Plantation wants to achieve its main goal of educating and sharing the "raw facts of slavery,"[110] it would be worthwhile for the site to acknowledge the circumstances surrounding the enslaved people's testimonies.

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[107] Ibid, xxi.
[108] "Whitney Plantation and Slavery."
[109] Blakey, "To Understand Slavery, Listen to the Descendants."; Institute of Historical Research, *IHR Partnership Seminar*.
[110] "Whitney Plantation and Slavery."

The tension between authenticity and representation that Wiedmer describes at Sachsenhausen Memorial also applies to the Whitney. Most of the structures, including the Antioch Baptist Church, the slave cabins, and the jail or hot box were transplanted from other plantations or historic sites. Not many plantation museums in the South still have slave cabins. Few of the sites that Eichstedt visited had extant slave quarters, and the slave quarters were rarely interpreted as housing for enslaved people. They were used as "gift shops or garden sheds," "empty, uninterpreted buildings," bed and breakfasts, or even a "Confederacy museum."[111] The lack of surviving cabins can be attributed to the decay of the poorly built structures over time or destruction during the Civil War and afterward to banish "certain unpalatable aspects of the past."[112] Furthermore, preservation efforts to support Black heritage sites like slave dwellings are supported by few and underfunded, and people believe that slave cabins simply are not important enough to preserve.[113] This is understandable when one considers the heavy focus on the Big House and its inhabitants at most plantations and the minimization of other areas of the site associated with the lives and labor of the enslaved. Before the Civil War, there were twenty-two slave cabins on the grounds of the Whitney, but they were destroyed in the 1970s to facilitate sugar production at the site. Some members of the Barnes family, which owned the plantation at that time, allegedly pushed for all the buildings on the site to be razed so that they could sell the site for more money.[114] In order to show visitors the conditions that the enslaved men, women, and children lived in, slave cabins were moved from other plantations to the Whitney. The "slave jail" was also relocated from a different parish in

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[111] Eichstedt, *Representations of Slavery*, 98-9.
[112] Ibid, 99.
[113] Skipper, "What to Throw Away and What to Keep: Sites of Slavery, Cancel Culture, and the Movement for Black Lives."
[114] "The Slave Quarters."

Louisiana. It was built in 1868 and probably used for convict leasing. However, the structure has been reinterpreted at the Whitney as a structure that held enslaved people as punishment or before auctions.[115] The slave cabins, jail, and other structures that can be viewed on the site in the present day are not "specific historical markers." Instead, they "act as a curated exhibit to evoke a sense of the daily lives of the people who were enslaved."[116] For visitors, however, that distinction may not be so clear. The fact that the Whitney is not only a museum but also a plantation may allow visitors, like those at former concentration camps, to believe they are entering an "original" site and somehow directly accessing that era of history. The designers of these sites may also recognize that their audience desires authenticity, or something close to authenticity, and thus try to erase traces of mediation. Paradoxically, the more carefully curated these exhibits are, the more they may feel like authentic sites to their visitors.

The Whitney Plantation is one of many antebellum-era plantation museums across the Deep South. For 110 years, it was owned by the Haydels, who enslaved hundreds of African and Creole people to produce sugar. After the Civil War, the plantation changed hands several times, and then in 1990, it was sold to a petrochemical company that hoped to raze the existing buildings and build a rayon plant on the land. The research into the background of the Whitney, commissioned by Formosa Chemicals and Fiber Corporation, was what led its next owner, John Cummings, to further interrogate the history of slavery on the site and in the broader landscape. The story of the Whitney Plantation's transformation into a site of memory shows how economic interests affect memorialization efforts. From its founding, the plantation has been a means of production, which people used as justification for the atrocities and violence perpetuated on the

[115] "The Big House and the Outbuildings."
[116] Maloney, "Preservation in Print February 2016 Cover Story."

site. Later in its history, the Barnes family considered removing the original buildings to sell the plantation, without any regard for the site's history, and Formosa Chemicals came close to doing the same thing. Economic interests could have easily prevented the site from becoming a memorial, but in the end, it was a single person's wealth and determination that transformed the site into what it is today. The Whitney Plantation Museum was created rather unconventionally by Cummings and a handful of other people, but it has been successful, widely referenced as one of the only slavery museums in the United States and singular among plantation museums, which generally glamorize and celebrate the wealthy slaveowners and their lifestyle and exclude mention of slavery. The Whitney placed the stories of the enslaved front and center to produce a counter-narrative in the Southern memorial landscape.

By examining the Whitney's transformation into a memorial site, we can also see how the memorialization of slavery in the United States was hampered early on in its history when the myth of the Lost Cause was born and then by the development of plantation tourism. Through memorialization, a dominant narrative emerged that minimized slavery and the traumatizing experiences of African Americans and instead promoted the South as an idyllic, romantic place and Southern white people as benevolent and righteous. The Big Houses were restored to their full glory and preserved, while the testimonies of enslaved people and slave dwellings were neglected. That creates challenges for a site like the Whitney, which had to acquire artifacts and buildings from other sites to create a good representation of slavery. As a result, the Whitney Plantation, along with many other sites of memory, attempts to balance the needs for representation and authenticity at the same time.

The Whitney Plantation Museum crafts a certain narrative, reflecting the understanding, interests, and values of those who designed it. Cummings interprets the plantation based on his

background and experiences. Seck describes the museum as a form of reparations, or "Cummings's desire to…try to make amends of a kind that have been a source of debate since emancipation."[117] Cummings himself has discussed white guilt as a possible motivation, but beyond that, he feels that his consciousness has shifted from learning about slavery and wishes to do the same for others by educating them. Through the many monuments placed on the site, Cummings memorializes the suffering of enslaved people, showing its horrors by portraying the young children who died at the plantation and the decapitated heads of slaves who revolted. His strategy has been described as "emotional manipulation" and "sensory excess."[118] Through the mandatory tour, the site administration also oversees the visitors' engagement with the monuments and the message of the site. Interestingly, the memorializing at this site is sometimes limited or even off-limits. Admission for most people to the Whitney costs twenty-five dollars, which makes the site inaccessible to some. [119] Visiting the monuments for free is not allowed, and paying visitors are also not allowed to wander the grounds of the plantation alone until their tours are over. During the tour, the guide explains each of the memorials, and then visitors are granted a few minutes at each memorial stop. Thus, it seems that the visitor's ability to remember and reflect individually on slavery is rather constrained.

The Whitney Plantation's greatest strength is its position as a plantation museum. It carefully subverts the common narrative presented at the sites that neighbor it, and by doing so, the Whitney is also changing the broader landscape of memorialization. Other museums have followed suit by revising their tours, adding exhibits, and changing the dress code so that the tour guides no longer wear antebellum hoop skirts.[120] Perhaps, in time, the plantation museums will

[117] Amsden, "Building the First Slavery Museum in America."
[118] Commander, "Plantation Counternarratives," 36-7.
[119] "Whitney Plantation | Guided Tours of Whitney Plantation Museum."
[120] Gallo, "Louisiana's Plantations Are Reckoning with Their Racist Past; Here's How Some Are Evolving."

also become a key piece in the United States' reckoning with its racial history, just as the concentration camp memorials have played a fundamental role in making memories of the Holocaust across Europe.

Memorialization is often associated with the idea of permanence. We build structures and rituals that are meant to last and be passed on, preserving memories of events and people for posterity. The histories of the Sachsenhausen Memorial and Museum and the Whitney Plantation Museum demonstrate, however, that these sites are simultaneously resistant and subject to change. Usually, those with power and resources control them and use them to project their values and narratives, they also adapt and reinterpret the sites to meet contemporary needs. Sometimes these sites become the projects of state government and large organizations, and sometimes they are shaped by the hands of a few individuals. These sites change, and the dominant memories change, and these sites may therefore end up being less "authentic" than many visitors expect. Furthermore, as Kansteiner writes, memory is born out of deliberate remembering and forgetting, and as we have seen, individuals, organizations, and nations all have different notions of what should be remembered and forgotten.[121] It seems impossible for a site of memory to encapsulate all of those different, contradictory notions at once. However, what would happen if we embraced memorialization as a dynamic process, performed by many people rather than just a few select groups and individuals? In the following chapters, we will explore these questions as we discuss the reception of sites of memory and different forms memorialization can take.

[121] Kansteiner, "Finding Meaning in Memory," 180.

Chapter 4: The Counter-Monument

As we have seen in the previous sections, physical memorial sites are complicated and embedded with layers of memory. The sites convey history to visitors, yet they each have unique histories, shaped by different hands and intentions, and their unique histories play a role in how sites like the Whitney Plantation and Sachsenhausen Memorial transmit memory to visitors today. Hundreds of thousands of people have visited these two sites during their time as memorials, and millions more visit other sites of memory across the globe. While it may be difficult to ascertain the exact motivations underlying every visit, physical sites continue to hold value for many.

Part of the appeal of the physical locations where the historical event occurred and the original artifacts is their perceived authenticity. Compared to the places and objects constructed after the fact, there seems to be a kind of "unalterable truth" in the originals.[122] Historical sites that are also memorial sites project authenticity and authority onto their subject matter. They seek to give the visitors an immersive experience through carefully curated exhibits, monuments, and restored structures. However, physical sites are limited in their ability to transmit unaltered truth and memory to their audiences, which is something that might not be readily apparent to the visitor. While significant research and thoughtfulness are poured into the creation of sites, monuments and memorials still embrace certain narratives and the values of the creators.

We see this in the Sachsenhausen site prior to reunification in 1990 when the German Democratic Republic utilized carefully curated exhibits and commissioned monuments to establish a narrative of communist heroism and triumph in the face of fascist terror. While the

[122] Wiedmer, "Sachsenhausen," 165.

Jewish victims and other victim groups were not completely written out of the picture, the emphasis and spotlight focused heavily upon those who were persecuted for political reasons and who opposed the far-right ideology of the Nazis, who were primarily members of the Communist Party.[123] In the center of the site, the Tower of Nations commemorated the political prisoners held at Sachsenhausen. It rose above all else, insistent and deliberately constructed so as to be visible from nearly every vantage point within the camp. The wall separating the section of the camp where executions took place, Station Z, from the main part of the camp was knocked down, and while separate areas were created for mourning and triumph, visitors could see the obelisk unobstructed while visiting Station Z.[124] All this was done in order to address the recent Nazi past but also promote the narrative that the GDR was the new and "better" German state and communism triumphed over fascism.[125]

The Tower of Nations is perhaps a stark example, and Sachsenhausen during the GDR era is not representative of all memory sites. Moreover, the present-day Sachsenhausen Memorial and Museum has a permanent exhibit called "From Memory to Monument" delving into the GDR's use of the site and allowing the visitor to view the process of memory creation and ask questions about authenticity.[126] Sachsenhausen's memorial landscape today is far more nuanced and layered than it was a few decades ago, and this story pulls back the curtain on the curatorial dynamics. Multiple forces drive memory creation, and groups or individuals tasked with creating a memorial interpret events in a particular way, based on their unique position, beliefs, and needs. While the "From Memory to Monument" exhibit offers a more comprehensive and inclusive perspective of the past, it still reflects a particular relationship with

[123] Bookheimer, "The Layers of Memory at Sachsenhausen," 21.
[124] Ibid., 14.
[125] Ibid., 8.
[126] "From Memory to Monument. The History of Sachsenhausen National Memorial 1950–1990."

GDR history, especially when it critically reflects upon the East German government's manipulation of the site.

At these sites of memory, it is difficult to find a balanced relationship between the producers and consumers of memory, for the prescribed role of the visitors with regard to monuments and memorials is to listen and absorb the message. Plaques or trained tour guides present a narrative, telling them what to think. Visitors can arrive at sites with knowledge and preconceptions based on media or other sources, so they are not simply sponges that will passively absorb the material. However, these sites often do not offer space for the visitors to participate or contribute their memories in a meaningful way. Because of this, some monument makers have rejected traditional memorials. James Young writes about the generation of artists after World War II who began to question commemorative practices of the time. They feared that conventional memorials, in a counter-productive and perhaps even harmful way, attempt to console the audience or redeem a tragedy. Rather than engaging and challenging viewers, conventional forms allow for complacency and protect public consciousness from memory. These artists have turned instead to counter-monuments that subvert traditional memorial forms and "challenge the very premises of their being."[127]

One striking example is the Monument against Fascism, designed by Jochen Gerz and Esther Shalev-Gerz in Hamburg, Germany. Today, if you visit the location in Harburg where the monument was placed in 1986, you can no longer see it protruding from the ground. The *Monument Against Fascism* started as a 12-meter-high lead pillar. The tall, thin monument did

[127] Young, *The Texture of Memory: Holocaust Memorials and Meaning*, 27-8.

not seem to take on the most groundbreaking form, but there was more to it than met the eye. An inscription at the base translated into seven languages read:

> We invite the citizens of Harburg, and visitors to the town, to add their names here to ours. In doing so we commit ourselves to remain vigilant. As more and more names cover this 12 metre-high lead column, it will gradually be lowered into the ground. One day it will have disappeared completely and the site of the Harburg monument against fascism will be empty. In the long run, it is only we ourselves who can stand up against injustice.[128]

The metal of the pillar could be scratched with a steel-pointed pen attached to the corners, and the sides would soon be hammered, engraved, painted, and drawn on by the public.

The Gerzes declared that they did not want to build something that would reduce viewers to passive spectators by telling them what to think. Furthermore, the Gerzes found the “didactic” and “demagogic” nature of monuments to be too closely linked with fascism itself.[129] Instead, the inscription on their monument invited passersby to carve their names and statements onto the pillar, and, in doing so, make a deliberate commitment to remain vigilant against injustice. As soon as one section was covered with names, it would sink into the ground. By 1993, the monument was fully embedded in the ground. Today, an empty space remains, with only the top of the pillar still visible.

Both the Tower of Nations in Sachsenhausen and the Monument Against Fascism claim to be anti-fascist monuments. Through the design of the Tower of Nations, the GDR wanted to make “the triumph of anti-fascism…visible.”[130] It did so by towering 40 meters into the air, ensuring that every eye would be drawn to its hulking form. The landscape surrounding it was

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[128] “The Monument Against Fascism.”
[129] Ibid., 28.
[130] Wiedmer, “Sachsenhausen”, 180.

bare, and the second monument located in front of it, René Graetz's *Liberation*, complemented and grounded its message of communist strength.[131] The Monument Against Fascism, in contrast, was located in a retail center in a suburb, amid brick walls and bustling shoppers. The Gerzes refused the beautiful park location offered to them, choosing a "normal, uglyish place" instead.[132] The monument was not grand. But, in its own way, it was unavoidable and striking. The location was intentionally chosen so that the pillar would be in the way of pedestrians as they moved through the space, an obstruction in their normal, daily lives. It was meant to be a blight that would demand their attention and engagement.

Usually, monuments don't ask to be vandalized. Quite the opposite—the memorial site is supposed to leave an impression on those who visit. Some sites offer visitors the chance to express their reactions and personal views in small ways. At the Whitney, post-it notes on a wall in the visitor center contain visitors' testimonies.[133] However, the memorial consumers' viewpoints are generally not formalized, and they are limited to the small, brightly-colored squares on a portion of a wall or, at other museums, the guest book full of blue and black ink.

The Monument Against Fascism asks passersby to make their mark on it. The Gerzes envisioned rows of names, but the actual result was quite different: names, scribbles, and small drawings. Some people squeezed tiny letters into available space, while others scratched massive words across an entire face of the pillar, covering up all of the messages underneath. The sides are almost completely illegible in some photographs; words and names are covered by scratch marks, spray paint, and marker ink. Stars of David and slang emerge, and at some point swastikas do as well. How could a monument against fascism display a symbol of it? The Gerzes

[131] Bookheimer, "The Layers of Memory at Sachsenhausen", 13.
[132] Young, *The Texture of Memory*, 28.
[133] Keller, "Inside America's Auschwitz."

designed their monument to be a mirror, reflecting the "social temperature" of the people.[134] The message and values represented by a swastika have no place in a memorial space promoting justice, peace, and healing, but when one appears, it reflects a certain relationship to the past. The graffiti that betray more irreverent and offensive beliefs become part of the memory, and only reinforce the pressing need for present and future generations to remain vigilant. The Monument Against Fascism was meant to passively accommodate all responses. It has a narrative, like other memorials, but the narrative was written communally by all who signed. In this way, the monument pushes the burden of memory back onto the people rather than prescribing a certain way for people to remember the past. And, according to Young, the memory grows within the visitors as they actively engage with the Monument Against Fascism, and they take the monument's place as living carriers of memory as the monument sinks. The Gerzes' project rejects permanence, and some might argue that such a monument is useless if the memory work ceases as soon as it disappears. However, the monument only sinks once people have engaged with it, and in theory, the people who sign their names on the metal take on the memory and commit to sharing it. The empty space that remains is open for further memorialization and engagement.[135]

The Gerzes sought to provoke with their design. They did not want a fixed and permanent monument, but rather an unfinished monument, constantly changing and slowly vanishing. There was a wide array of reactions to this atypical monument and its unsightly graffiti, but all of those feelings and reactions also reflected forms of memory in the Gerzes' eyes.[136] However, others have questioned whether the reception of the monument was actually indicative of its success.

[134] Young, *The Texture of Memory*, 35.
[135] Ibid., 33.
[136] Ibid., 34.

According to Thomas Stubblefield, the Harburg Monument Against Fascism does not break free from the monumentality of more conventional forms. It only reaffirms an already remembered past and upholds the artists' authority.[137] In other words, the Gerzes' monument only succeeded in reinforcing both established narratives about National Socialism and established memorial traditions. In the eyes of the Harburg locals, the Gerzes and their counter-monument possessed the same didacticism and demagoguery that the Gerzes found so troubling in traditional monuments.

Stubblefield writes that most local residents were wary of the monument. The counterintuitive design was mind-boggling, and beyond that, the monument felt like an imposition on their daily lives.[138] On the one hand, the placement of the monument was intentional, and perhaps the Gerzes would argue that this backlash is meaningful and indicative of the continual need to reckon with the past. However, the locals' frustration with the monument seemed to be colored less by their attitude toward fascism and Holocaust memory and more by their perception of the artists and politicians as self-aggrandizing. To them, the monument was yet another case of official memory imposed by higher powers, which conflicted with the supposed participatory nature of the counter-monument. The Gerzes constantly offered explanations and instructions for how the monument should be utilized, and the local politicians exploited the monument, making the successive lowerings of the pillar into media events and opportunities to grandstand."[139] And lastly, it is uncertain whether or not the monument truly encouraged creative and active engagement. Stubblefield argues that the monument could not

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[137] Stubblefield, "Do Disappearing Monuments Simply Disappear?", 2.
[138] Ibid., 6.
[139] Ibid.

give passersby free rein over how they chose to remember and respond, for the artists only invited participation in a pre-conceived and contained space.[140]

Young's embrace of the counter-monument and the Gerzes' Monument Against Fascism, can be further illuminated by reading some of his other works. In a different essay, Young discusses his participation in the creation of the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe in Berlin. The process was hampered by multiple competitions and unending debate over what the perfect solution to Germany's memorial problem should be. No one could agree on how Germany, the perpetrator nation, could appropriately memorialize the Holocaust and mourn its victims. Young believes that there is no single solution. The ideal memorial is the debate itself, "perpetually unresolved amid ever-changing conditions."[141] Regardless of their execution, I believe that the Gerzes' vision of how a memorial should be and their rejection of rigid monuments that allow for passive audiences is worthy of further consideration. Memorialization is a dynamic process. People who come from different places and times have different relationships to a historical event, and creating space for more interpretations rather than narrowing the field will get us closer to something comprehensive and truthful. The architect of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, James Ingo Freed, once said that it is important to let "memory be sufficiently ambiguous and open-ended so that others can inhabit the space, can imbue the forms with their own memory."[142] The Monument Against Fascism is fleeting and impermanent. It only captures a slice of memory in a certain time and place, and it does not attempt to do more than that or solve Germany's memorial problem. And much to Young's delight, it facilitates a more fluid relationship to the past, allowing for a multitude of responses to

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[140] Ibid., 10.
[141] Young, "Germany's Holocaust Memorial Problem——and Mine," 68.
[142] Farmer, "Symbols That Face Two Ways," 115.

exist side-by-side and on top of one another. By inviting the audience to take part, these counter-monuments put the memorializing into their hands.

There is another space where some of the Gerzes and Young's goals can be realized: digital media and, in particular, social media. Social media pages, feeds, and walls are also social mirrors, reflecting people's attitudes and values in real-time. The content posted is incredibly fast-paced and ephemeral, with conversations starting and ending every second. Online sites also have seemingly unlimited space for people to offer their opinions, and they allow us to see a wide range of different viewpoints all gathered in one space. Almost anyone can freely post on these sites, and people can participate as much or as little as they desire. They can also express themselves creatively with words, imagery, and other digital tools. In many ways, social media networks are reminiscent of the Monument Against Fascism in Harburg. People constantly added to the sides of the metal pillar, writing over one another and changing the monument's overall appearance every day. The monument contained space for many to participate, and it was placed in public so that anyone could access it.

Could social media be a counter-monument? Counter-monuments reject the monumental, static, and didactic nature of traditional monuments, and in doing so, they democratize memory processes. They engage and challenge instead of allowing viewers to be passive spectators who consume memory that is carefully curated and gatekept by groups and individuals. Social media platforms are dynamic, unfinished products. Not only are they accessible, but they also foster engagement and participation rather than allowing one narrative to dominate a space. However, the intensely dynamic and ephemeral nature of social media also raises many questions about how memory functions in such a space, especially in relation to established physical sites.

Scholars in the field of digital memory studies expand on this idea. Astrid Erll and Ann Rigney describe a notable shift within memory studies from "sites" to "dynamics," or from a focus on the "canonical" memory sites to an understanding of cultural memory as dynamic processes.[143] Andrew Hoskins also says that there are two different memory cultures in the digital age. The first is an institutionalized and regimented one, perhaps best exemplified by physical sites like the Sachsenhausen Memorial and Museum and the Whitney Plantation Museum. The second is emergent, fluid, and fragmented, and it is facilitated by the digital hyperconnectivity on Internet platforms. Within the emergent digital network, the "communications in themselves dynamically add to, alter, and erase a kind of living archival memory."[144] In other words, the memory is comprised of the conversations and interactions themselves. It is what Young hoped for—memorialization through debate.

While the traditional and physical sites of memory may not provide opportunities or space for individuals to make their own memory, digital platforms can do so. Erll and Rigney use the term "remediation" to describe how media, throughout history, have continually engaged with, reproduced, and replaced one another.[145] They argue that the dynamics of cultural memory are closely related both to remediation and social frameworks. Remediation does not happen on its own; people remediate content and products that they consume. Remediations are thus acts of reception, and the individuals who remediate are both producers and consumers, or "prosumers."[146] Sergei Loznitsa describes the tourists at the Sachsenhausen memorial as "consumers," but those tourists can reproduce the content they capture on their cameras on their Instagram pages, which makes them prosumers. In this way, visitors to physical sites of memory

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143 Erll and Rigney, "Introduction," 1-2.
144 Hoskins, "Digital Network Memory," 92.
145 Erll and Rigney, "Introduction," 3.
146 Törnquist-Plewa, Andersen, and Erll, "Introduction: On Transcultural Memory and Reception," 7.

may actually be able to play an active role in memorializing. Furthermore, media producers and users can turn a tool for "(re-)presenting" the past into a cultural memory medium.[147] Thus, social media can be both instruments for memorializing and digital memorials.

When describing the effect of digitalization on memory, Hoskins writes that the entire memory "ecology" has been knocked off balance, and the "very character of memory, its meaning, its uses, its potential and its risks" are transformed.[148] We learn more and more every day that social media and technology shape our lives, our relationships, and our understanding of the world around us. There is potential for these digital spaces to help us uncover and grapple with our pasts as well. Social media networks may be environments that foster "transnationally shared, passionately pursued and possibly also self-critically inflected memory practice."[149]

There are many different types of social media. Social networking sites, like Twitter, are primarily meant to help people connect, while media sharing sites, like YouTube, provide a space for people to post, share, and find pictures, videos, and other media. Each platform has different capabilities, but over time, as more and more features are added, we see many beginning to overlap. Twitter and YouTube increasingly affect how we think about media and how people around the world interact and form relationships with another, and this has implications for the creation of collective memory.

In the following sections, I will examine how social media functions as a counter-monument and the tourist as a prosumer of memory by examining digital memory of the Holocaust and slavery. I will again return to the Sachsenhausen Memorial and Museum and the

[147] Erll and Rigney, "Introduction", 6.
[148] Hoskins, "The Restless Past," 10.
[149] Kansteiner, "Transnational Holocaust Memory, Digital Culture and the End of Reception Studies," 310.

Whitney Plantation Museum, but this time, I will focus on how they are received. After providing a broad overview of digital memory, I will focus again on the two sites of memory and show how their visitors remediate memory on social media sites such as YouTube and Twitter.

Chapter 5: Sachsenhausen on Social Media

Digital Holocaust memory

Earlier, I wrote about the divide between two different memory cultures. The institutionalized, analogue memory culture is best represented by physical sites like museums and monuments, as well as radio, television, and film during the broadcasting era. The second is the emergent, fluid culture that was born during the rise of digital culture and the Internet. Digital memory culture is developing and growing in tandem with the increasingly complex technologies we have, and it encompasses video games, social media networks, virtual reality and augmented reality, holograms, and artificial intelligence.

The COVID-19 pandemic drove memorialization into virtual spaces, but the line between analogue and digital memory is not so distinct. In our 21st-century memory culture, the two are very much intertwined. For instance, Holocaust memory institutions frequently employ digital technology such as apps that visitors to their sites can utilize and social media accounts, through which they share content with a wider audience. However, Wulf Kansteiner writes that official Holocaust memory institutions seem to use digital media simply to amplify the same "iconographic and narrative structures" that have remained unchanged from "the invention of popular Holocaust memory in the 1980s."[150] These institutions, like the United States Holocaust

[150] Kansteiner, "The Holocaust in the 21st Century," 123.

Memorial Museum (USHMM), which Kansteiner specifically critiques, avoid stirring the pot too much in their physical exhibits and social media outreach efforts. While certain recent technological additions, like apps, allow the visitors to participate and interact with the exhibits to a larger extent, the institution still retains control over the memory and narrative about the Holocaust. The memory "institutions" can also refer to local and national governing bodies. In his book about the aftermath of the Allied bombing of Germany during the Second World War, David Crew devotes a chapter to the dissemination of images and narratives of the bombing from local publications to multimedia and the Internet. Crew describes how individual cities, like Frankfurt am Main, have created websites to share historical information about National Socialism and the bombing war, but these cities often convert analog photographs to digital versions for their websites. They do not innovate or seek out creative means for presenting the same images or new images.[151]

There are spaces within digital memory culture where the institutions, which often take on the role of gatekeepers of Holocaust memory, cannot exert as much control over how memory and narratives are framed, and social media is a potentially fruitful platform. Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial and Museum, the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, and Yad Vashem are three prominent Holocaust institutions. All have significant followings on both Twitter and Facebook, and they regularly post a range of content, including informative videos, images, stories of individuals during the Holocaust, and information about the sites in the past and present. In the description section of their Facebook pages, the USHMM and Yad Vashem both explicitly state that their "Wall" is intended to be a "forum" that is, respectively, "open and

[151] Crew, "After the Cold War," 199.

welcoming to many issues and opinions" and "open and inviting to many views and opinions."[152] Engagement on the Walls of all three pages varies, with some posts receiving a handful of comments and others receiving thousands, but none of the recent posts have empty comment sections. What also stays constant is that, after provoking discussions, these institutions remain silent unless they specifically host a special Q&A in the comments. The USHMM and Yad Vashem both remove posts that violate community guidelines and ban repeat offenders, but they avoid adding to the comment sections, even when the occasional user targets a question toward them.[153] Kansteiner finds that the passivity reflects the general policy of Holocaust institutions, who prefer to broadcast a "carefully shaped, widely acceptable message," yet withhold their expertise on the moral questions and current events mentioned by users in their comment sections.[154] However, the users do not seem to mind, and they freely interpret the information provided, create their own narratives, and debate with one another. The majority of comments seem to be in English, but other languages are sometimes represented, and the less formal language of social media, comprised of slang and emojis, perhaps allows the users to engage with the history and memory in a more accessible and familiar way. Individuals can also express their emotions and affirm or reject other people's stances by reacting with "likes," hearts, laughing faces, sad faces, and angry faces. Within social media, the institutionalized and emergent memory cultures collide, and the results, like the Walls of these official Facebook pages, reflect a kind of democratization and shifting control in contemporary memory. We again see a transnational, multi-directional process that is also more self-critical as users from different

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[152] "United States Holocaust Memorial Museum."; "Yad Vashem: World Holocaust Center, Jerusalem."
[153] For example, one user commented on an event hosted by Yad Vashem in March 2021, "Why don't you post your Zoom events online - FB/ YT etc? The zoom lives can reach a few dozen people at most, I didn't even know about this lecture until 2 days after! Plus it's easier to watch on demand any time and not be tied to a single broadcast... These lectures deserve a wider audience!" and received no response.
[154] Kansteiner, "The Holocaust in the 21st Century", 126.

communities bond over their mutual participation in these Facebook groups, navigating heavy personal histories, Holocaust education, and other questions regarding the memory of atrocities and the consequences of that memory.

Maurice Halbwachs is often regarded as the father of theories about collective memory.[155] He argued that memory is created through socialization, within a specific group framework. Halbwachs discounted individual memory; in his eyes, individual memories were constructed in social contexts by a collective.[156] Pierre Nora then built upon Halbwachs' ideas, observing that groups select certain people and events to commemorate while excluding others, and establish traditions to maintain a specific collective memory. Collective memory representations have been selected by those in power, and they are thus a "manipulated construction" by those with power and status.[157]

More recently, scholars have described collective memory in the 21st century as "transnational and multidirectional," and less bound to political power, nations, and canonical sites of memory compared to memory practices of the past.[158] Johnny Alam claims that, on social media, transnational gestures and solidarities can create a sense of belonging within an imagined community that goes beyond existing nation-states.[159] Collective memory is a dynamic process, made all the more so by social media and the new online social frameworks that are forming and shifting and dissolving constantly.

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[155] García-Gavilanes et al., "The Memory Remains."
[156] Halbwachs, *The collective memory*.
[157] Zhao and Liu, "Social Media and Collective Remembrance."
[158] Ibid.; Erll and Rigney, "Introduction", 2.; Alam, "Transnational Social Media Monuments, Counter-Monuments, and the Future of the Nation-State," 200.
[159] Alam, "Transnational Social Media Monuments, Counter-Monuments, and the Future of the Nation-State", 195.

This can be seen in a Twitter conversation that starts on the topic of a virtual tour of Auschwitz before branching off in a multitude of directions, occasionally looping back to the original point. The discourse is formed by the Polish Ministry of Culture and National Heritage, which runs the Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial and Museum, in tandem with people from the Czech Republic, Canada, Germany, India, Ireland, the United States, Scotland, and England. On March 9, 2021, a little over a year after Poland announced its first case of COVID-19 and in the midst of the ongoing global pandemic, the official Twitter account of the Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial and Museum posted: “Most people are not able to visit @AuschwitzMuseum. Especially nowadays. That is why we have made panorama.auschwitz.org available. It’s a virtual visit full of facts & testimonies, documents and photographs, artworks by prisoners & objects related to the history of the camp."[160]

Alongside these words is a screen capture of the virtual tour interface. At that particular moment in the virtual tour, you are in Auschwitz II-Birkenau, looking at the road between sectors BII and BIII from a bird’s eye view. The landscape is rather symmetrical, with brown rectangles evenly spaced throughout the green grass. The photograph is incredibly sharp; you can distinguish the individual rocks on the road. It shows the camp from a high, wide-angle that someone visiting in person would never get. Neither the tweet nor the picture provides context for what is being portrayed, which are the remains of prisoner huts. The image is overlayed with buttons for zooming in and toggling about, as well as white arrows that you can click on while within the virtual tour to traverse to other sections of the camp. Upon actually visiting the website linked in the tweet, the homepage greets you with the words, “AUSCHWITZ-BIRKENAU – VIRTUAL TOUR” and the subheading “Virtual sightseeing of former nazi

[160] Twitter post, March 9, 2021. Accessed March 21, 2021.

concentration camp."[161] When I first visited the website in March 2021, the large image on the front page showed the campgrounds covered in snow. A few tourists can be seen in the photograph. This large photograph and the text on the home page suggest that what the website is offering is a tourism experience, not simply historical information about the Holocaust and the atrocities committed at concentration and extermination camps, which can be found on a multitude of websites, including Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial and Museum's official website (http://auschwitz.org/en/). This website attempts to transmit the specific experience of visiting Auschwitz-Birkenau today. From the homepage, virtual visitors can choose to enter either "Auschwitz I," "Auschwitz II-Birkenau," or "Auschwitz-Birkenau – Alte Judenrampe" ("the old Jewish ramp"). As you navigate the site, you come across 200 panoramic images of the camp from all angles, including aerial views and internal and external views of the structures, historical descriptions, and links to other resources for further study. The full-screen, panoramic design, which allows you to turn around and examine the surrounding environment at any point during the tour, provides a more immersive experience than, say, a slideshow of the same photographs. A virtual map can be pulled up that indicates your current virtual location within the camp at any given moment so that you can situate yourself and decide where to go next.

By seeking to re-create an actual in-person visit to the site, this resource cements the importance of physical sites of memory. Plenty of information about Auschwitz's history can easily be accessed on the Internet, but once the coronavirus pandemic put a halt to the flow of millions of tourists, the Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial and Museum created a new resource to fill a specific gap and bring the experience of a concentration camp visit directly to people. The result, a rich compilation of textual and visual information, is impressive. While the tour is

[161] "Auschwitz-Birkenau - Wirtualne Zwiedzanie."

limited because it is only available in Polish and English, overall, it makes Auschwitz more accessible to many people. The images are of incredibly high quality and even portray the camp in certain lights and from certain angles that would be out of reach for in-person tourists.

One of the first direct replies to Auschwitz's March 9 tweet says, "I've visited the virtual Museum on several occasions, and I feel I've barely cracked the surface. It's haunting and so overwhelming, and to give the Memorial and those who died at and survived Auschwitz and Birkenau even a bit of due respect, it will take me several trips."[162] The individual's choice of words like "haunting" and "overwhelming" reflects a real emotional response to the virtual site. This tweet also points to another benefit of the online tour: visitors can spend as much or as little time as they want perusing the site, and they can re-visit any time and as many times as they want. The same individual continues in a follow-up tweet, "Thank you for preserving the incredible history of the @AuschwitzMuseum (facts, structures, amazing testimonies), esp in a time when many would rather forget our difficult past. If we never forget our history, we continue to learn from it and never again repeat the horrors. Heart emoji."[163] In the other responses to the initial tweet from Auschwitz Memorial, multiple users echo the same gratitude. But this only accounts for about one-fifth of the 56 direct responses to the tweet (as of March 21, 2021). In the other direct responses, we see an interesting range of reactions to and opinions on not only the virtual tour, but also on the physical site, personal histories, and current events. In ten separate tweets, individuals discuss their visits to Auschwitz in the past. They frequently employ emotional and sensory language. One individual wrote on March 9, 2021 that the "most profound moment" they experienced was "being hit with the smell of ashes from the cookfires"

[162] Twitter post, March 10, 2021. Accessed March 21, 2021.
[163] Twitter post, March 10, 2021. Accessed March 21, 2021.

after entering the barracks in Birkenau.[164] They do not elaborate any further, and it is unclear what the user means by "cookfires," but Twitter allows other people to respond freely and make meaning. Another user reinterprets the described experience: "That is not what you smelled. The wood holds onto the smell of decomposing bodies, death, disease. You smelled their pain and agony."[165] Others describe the impact the site left upon them in more general terms, like the person who was left "forever changed after walking on the ground where these atrocities occurred."[166] Others focus on aspects of their in-person experience that they found disagreeable, like "the asian and american tourists posing for ridiculous smiling and laughing selfies/group pictures at a place of such sadness,"[167] but multiple individuals express interest in visiting the site in the future. They also describe personal connections to the site. For example, one person shares that their great grandmother died at Auschwitz in 1943 and that they hope to travel to the site to remember her and other victims.[168] Finally, some people relate the Holocaust to current issues, from the insurrection on January 6, 2021 by "U.S. citizens who terrorized our Capitol"[169] to the oppression of the "Uyghyers who are victims to the Brutal Communist Chinese."[170]

These direct responses to Auschwitz's initial tweet are only a small slice of the overall reaction, which includes thousands of likes, retweets, and retweets with comments. Some of the direct replies to Auschwitz Memorial's tweet generate other conversations. For example, the tweet about the U.S. Capitol insurrection leads to a brief debate about the relativization of the Holocaust. One of the responses argues that "Nazism had nothing to do with [t]he Capitol staged

[164] Twitter post, March 9, 2021. Accessed March 21, 2021.
[165] Twitter post, March 10, 2021. Accessed May 7, 2021.
[166] Twitter post, March 9, 2021. Accessed March 21, 2021.
[167] Twitter post, March 15, 2021. Accessed March 21, 2021.
[168] Twitter post, March 15, 2021. Accessed March 21, 2021.
[169] Twitter post, March 10, 2021. Accessed March 21, 2021.
[170] Twitter post, March 10, 2021. Accessed March 21, 2021.

insurrection" and relating the two "is an insult to Holocaust victims."[171] The winding, wide-ranging replies in this Twitter discussion are an interesting starting point for considering the intersection of physical and digital sites of memory. Some of the tweets, perhaps inadvertently, show the limitations of the virtual site by drawing attention to the intense physical aspect of visiting a place like Auschwitz in-person. At most, the virtual tour can perhaps recreate the sights, but it cannot evoke the smells; the feeling of walking across the grounds, knowing who walked those grounds before you; the sound of other tourists' chatter. Although the initial tweet outlines an online resource "full of facts & testimonies, documents and photographs, artworks by prisoners & objects," minds cannot help but wander to the site that the virtual tour is based upon, and the value and necessity of in-person visits permeates the conversation. The original places and objects seem to visitors to have inherent value or some kind of fixed, unchangeable truth, as Wiedmer says.[172]

Regardless of how sharp the images or how accurate and factual the information is, the site on our screens is constructed out of pixels, rather than bricks, and its value relies upon its close association to the "real" thing. However, at the same time, the tweeted replies demonstrate the potential of digitalization, and social media in particular, for remembering the past. There does not seem to be a prescribed way to respond to @AuschwitzMuseum's tweet. The initial tweet does not even necessitate a response, yet numerous people willingly come forward to talk about their personal experiences related to the Holocaust, sometimes sharing personal photographs. Some promote genocide prevention, like the individual who mentions the abuses against Uyghurs in China, which is a goal of many Holocaust memory institutions. The

[171] Twitter post, March 15, 2021. Accessed March 21, 2021.
[172] Wiedmer, "Sachsenhausen."

Auschwitz Institute for the Prevention of Genocide and Mass Atrocities, for example, is based in New York but hosts a yearly seminar on genocide prevention in partnership with the Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial and Museum.[173]

This conversation thread sparked by the announcement of Auschwitz's virtual tour demonstrates the possibility for social media to serve as an unregulated, generative environment where dialogue can flow freely. People can engage as little or as much as they would like. A single heart emoji is a sufficient response for some, while other post pictures or longer reflections. However, the thread simultaneously reveals some of the platform's limitations. Occasionally, a tweet is hidden because the author deleted it or made it a private tweet, visible only to their followers. In addition, Twitter does not take an entirely hands-off approach. At the bottom of the thread, users can click on a button to "Show more replies." This reveals the posts deemed by Twitter as "disruptive" or potentially offensive.[174] The tweet about the Uyghurs has been filtered into this bottom section, along with a tweet that says "this is amazing..thanks for providing this!"[175] and a single emoji of a broken heart. If a post violates Twitter's policies, the platform will delete it. Thus, digital memorialization is shaped not only by individual users and institutions, but also the social media hosts.

Both Sachsenhausen Memorial and Museum and the Whitney Plantation have significantly smaller online presences compared to Auschwitz. The virtual memorialization stimulated by these sites reflects some of the same themes mentioned above but also veers

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[173] "Lemkin Seminar, Global Edition."
[174] Matsakis, "Twitter Will Begin Hiding All Tweets From Suspect Accounts."
[175] Twitter post, March 15, 2021. Accessed May 7, 2021.

toward different directions. By examining it, we may be able to better understand digital media's role in contemporary memory. We will now turn to the Sachsenhausen Memorial.

YouTube: Sachsenhausen

The virtual tour that the Auschwitz Memorial tweeted about on March 9, 2021 was actually not the first of its kind. As the tweet itself suggests, not all people are able to visit concentration camps in person, even before the onset of a global pandemic. A Google search of "Auschwitz virtual tour" delivers a few different options. Some consist of slideshows of photographs and text descriptions that visitors can click through, and others lay out similar information in an article or blog post. In April 2015 at Oregon State University, philosophy professor Marta D. Kunecka used a "PowerPoint and other visual aids" to "recreate the experience of touring the Auschwitz complex". Her "virtual 'tour'" was based upon her own experiences conducting tours at Auschwitz while studying in Krakow.[176] The result I want to focus most on, however, is YouTube videos. YouTube is a video-sharing platform, and its format enables the visual and auditory aspects of one's experience to be transmitted more easily and smoothly. In January 2015, in honor of Holocaust Remembrance Day, BBC News posted a video of Auschwitz taken with a drone. The camera sweeps over and throughout the site as sentimental music swells in the background.[177] Westdeutscher Rundfunk, a German public broadcasting institution, presented "the first ever global 360° project realised in Auschwitz-Birkenau," first in German in January 2017 and then in English a year later. The virtual reality experience is supplemented by video testimonies from three survivors.[178] These examples are from public broadcasting services, and they are thus more formal remediations of the site on YouTube. On

[176] "A Virtual 'tour' of Auschwitz | Holocaust Memorial Program."
[177] BBC News, *Auschwitz*.
[178] WDR, *Inside Auschwitz – English Version in 360°/VR*.

the other end of the spectrum of YouTube videos are the individuals who post video blogs, or vlogs, of their lives and travels. Thousands of such videos exist documenting trips to sites like Auschwitz, with titles such as "VISITING AUSCHWITZ POLAND - CHILLING FOOTAGE OF CONCENTRATION CAMPS" and "Visiting Auschwitz: A Life-Changing Experience."

There are fewer videos of the Sachsenhausen Memorial and Museum, and the most highly-viewed YouTube videos on the former concentration camp are in Spanish, German, and Portuguese, but I only focused on the videos with spoken English or English subtitles. When one types "Sachsenhausen" into the YouTube search bar, the results include a mixture of videos about the site's history, news media, documentary film clips, and videos capturing visits to the site. The videos that fall into the last category are mostly produced by individual travel or lifestyle videobloggers, or vloggers, and they bear some similarities to each other in terms of content. Individuals rarely offer their own unique commentary or interpretations of the site's artifacts; rather, they restate what they have learned or show their tour guide speaking. Some people show themselves, but overall, most keep the camera's lens on the site, panning over the landscape and buildings. The simplest videos just show the camp from the perspective of someone walking through it, accompanied by background music or the tour guide's commentary. Other more edited videos include voiceovers, speaking segments featuring the vlogger, and explanatory text overlays. In a few but not all cases, the vloggers respond to the site, either by writing in the video description box or speaking at the end of the tour. Essentially, the videos related to Sachsenhausen on YouTube provide virtual tours of the site, giving viewers all over the world a glimpse into how Sachsenhausen concentration camp looks today.

The videos in English generally do not attract more than a few thousand viewers. Many elicit no response, and the ones that do only have a handful of comments. It would be difficult

and futile to make broad, generalized statements about the impact of these videos, but there are some trends across the comment sections. The majority of comments are positive, with praise for the tour guide and the video creator. Some comments express plans and hopes to visit the memorial in the future. There are some critical comments as well, either about the video itself or the content it presents. For example, one individual comments underneath a video, “can't you make this slide show a little faster ,... 1 short second per image is way too long !... make it a flash OK seriously we [lose] 99% of the feelings as each image does not print in our mind... we react only because we already know what this is all about.”[179] On a different vlog, another person complains about the “crap music” and lack of explanation[180] and yet another criticizes the explanations provided and points out that there are “Lots of factual errors. For one, Sachsenhausen was not where every member of the SS was trained. It was where one part of the SS - the Totenkopf troops who staffed the camps - were trained. There was a large part of the SS that was not directly involved with the camps. Also - there were successful escapes from the camp.”[181] The presence of these dissenting viewpoints alongside the information remediated from the Sachsenhausen site creates an interesting experience for the online viewer, who must decide who and what to believe. They can also exert their agency in other ways, from joining in on the conversation to “liking” and “disliking” videos and comments with the click of a button. By doing so, they also shape what others see, since YouTube promotes the messages that receive the most engagement.

For many viewers, the videos remind them of their own personal experiences, and they feel compelled to share their own stories and memories of visits to Sachsenhausen. They often

[179] YouTube comment, 2019. Accessed March 20, 2021.
[180] YouTube comment, 2019. Accessed March 20, 2021.
[181] YouTube comment, 2020. Accessed March 20, 2021.

point out specific minutiae: “Was there last spring. One thing that caught me off guard was after wandering down an underground hallway, there was this very potent sweet smell in the cramped experimentation room. That room for me was the most haunting part. One of the most disturbing And unnerving places on earth.”[182] In a different comment section, another person offers, “it was at the point where i saw blood on the floor of the body storage room that it all seemed so much more ‘real’, that was the point when it all really hit me and i just broke down. Visiting a place like this is a very emotional experience that will stay with me forever.”[183] Another user discusses a particularly intense experience at the former camp: “I was there in 2002, then aged 15. Now 31. I will go back there someday, even though the previous visit scared the crap out of me. I've never been there before, yet i knew where things were that weren't there anymore at the time, just pointed stuff out and [the] guide confirmed. How the hell could i have known that? The rest of the tour i was numbed by this experience, Don't remember a thing except this weird [experience]. Therefore, when i ever visit Berlin again i will surely go to see the camp once again, hopefully then [being] able to properly look around. Let's hope it's been the last World War...”[184] Viewers connect with one another when they share similar experiences of past school trips to the site. They offer one another advice, such as “it is an extremely powerful experience. One thing I ask is that you take your time and really take everything in. Read everything, feel emotions. It puts everything into perspective. The emotions I felt in this place was indescribable, and in the experimentation chambers you will feel a strong energy. I did, anyway. Just empathise, take it in x.”[185] Other viewers use the space in the comment section to share stories about their own family members who were imprisoned at Sachsenhausen. They write about their grandfathers, great-

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[182] YouTube comment, 2021. Accessed March 20, 2021.
[183] YouTube comment, 2010. Accessed March 20, 2021.
[184] YouTube comment, 2018. Accessed March 20, 2021.
[185] YouTube comment, 2018. Accessed March 20, 2021.

grandfathers, great-grandmothers, and other relatives, describing their lives and deaths and how they hope to carry on their legacy. One writes, “Our relations Hans gansmann and Johann gansmann were incarcerated there. Both survivors. Why would you go there To sight see?”,[186] engaging with some of the questions about Holocaust tourism that Loznitsa and Reynolds both try to answer in their work.

The tone or style of videos also seems to shape viewers’ engagement. The narrative expressed in these videos is perhaps not wholly focused on the memorial and museum, and viewers seem to pick up on that. One vlog starts off with an upbeat montage of clips from the vlogger’s travels in Berlin set to electric music. Within the first five seconds of the video, we see the individual smiling and wiggling his eyebrows and a shot of a concentration camp prisoner’s uniform. During the rest of the video, he shows photographs and video clips of the site with his own commentary and his tour guide’s words. He characterizes the tour as “informative” and encourages viewers to also visit the camp, and the last third of his video features his return to Berlin and highlights his food and drink. The video has 331 views and no comments.[187] In a separate, similar video, a young woman travels to Berlin with friends and visits Sachsenhausen on the third day of her trip. At multiple points in the video, she and her companions are laughing and chatting, but in the middle she shows the camp as she walks around. The woman describes the experience afterwards as “heavy and really unimaginable.”[188] There are 11 comments and 1,100 views on this video, but only one comment relates to the site itself (“Historic and frightening place”[189]). Half of the comments are concerned with the personal lives of the vlogger and her friend. In another video, which claims to be the “world's first 360° paranormal

[186] YouTube comment, 2019. Accessed March 20, 2021.
[187] Chronicles of Chard, *Visiting Sachsenhausen Concentration Camp | Oranienburg, Germany*.
[188] Larissa Zeeuwe, *BERLIN DAY 3 | Visiting Concentration Camp Sachsenhausen | Vlog 153*.
[189] YouTube comment, 2020. Accessed March 20, 2021.

investigation or 360° video filmed at Sachsenhausen Concentration Camp," an individual visits Sachsenhausen in search of paranormal activity. The video can be moved around by the viewer, similar to the panoramic virtual tour of Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial and Museum. The video creator provides details and stray observations about the site as he walks around it, and watching the video gives the impression that you are walking alongside him. He has a device that seems to measure paranormal activity, and at one point, as the scanner detects something, he comments, "This whole room was full of dead bodies right here."[190] There are only two comments, one of which says, "Great video just like being with the 360 awesome ill never get to visit there so thank you."[191] Across social media, it is not uncommon to see people characterize former concentration camps as "haunted," and this video seems to be a direct response to that. The creator of the video uses and presents the site in a novel way. Even though its intent is not necessarily to convey the history of the Holocaust and the former concentration camp, it manages to do so, introducing the audience to the horrors that occurred at the site from the perspective of a ghost-hunter.

Twitter: Sachsenhausen

On January 27, 1945, the Soviet Army liberated the Auschwitz-Birkenau Concentration and Extermination Camp. 60 years later, in 2005, the United Nations designated the day as International Holocaust Remembrance Day. Many other individual countries also observe their own Holocaust memorial day; Germany, for example, has commemorated this day since 1996. International Holocaust Remembrance is usually characterized by official events and ceremonies hosted by official governing bodies and Holocaust memory institutions. These events honor the

[190] DDF GhostHunting, *Sachsenhausen Concentration Camp In 360° Paranormal Investigation*.
[191] YouTube comment, 2019. Accessed March 20, 2021.

memory of victims and urge people to reflect with speeches from survivors, politicians, and Jewish leaders, as well as services such as the Jewish Mourner's Kaddish. Simultaneously, social media provide a virtual space for hundreds of thousands of both official and unofficial commemorations by individuals and organizations. The posts that appear every year, with hashtags such a #WeRemember and #NeverForget and photographs of concentration camps, are part of a different kind of online memorial tradition.

Social media sites such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram all host these Holocaust Remembrance Day posts. Each site allows users to express themselves in different ways and within different formats, and as a result, there is some fluctuation across platforms. Facebook allows for longer written reflections, while on Instagram, the focus is largely on the images, rather than the captions. On Twitter, the small space allotted for messages usually results in very brief, direct messages.

In Peter Gloviczski's book *Journalism and Memorialization in the Age of Social Media,* the author notes the "brevity" of posts while examining the activity of a memorial group on Facebook created in the wake of a crisis on a college campus. To him, the short and uncomplicated messages demonstrate that "meaning trumps form in many online memorials."[192] This could perhaps also be said for the short-form content that Twitter is known for. However, I would also argue that the "forms" of memorialization created on social media should not be so quickly overlooked.

Hashtags are a means for organizing conversations on social media. The hashtag originated in 2007 on Twitter, and by clicking on a specific keyword or phrase prefaced by the

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[192] Gloviczki, "Public Memory in the Online World," 72.

number sign "#", users can find other posts around a specific event, theme, or topic. Anyone can create or use a hashtag, and the wide breadth of both hashtags and emojis that accompany text, image, and video posts can allow users to express more with less. By simply posting a hashtag like "#NeverForget" or an emoji featuring two hands pressed together as though in prayer, an individual is able to convey their solidarity with the victims of the Holocaust and publicly commit to maintaining their memory. These digital tags may also lower the barriers for entering into the memory conversation, helping users who might want to post something in support of a cause but are unsure of what to say. Interestingly, the form of hashtagged phrases has expanded beyond social media to physical memorial sites. The Los Angeles Times published an article on January 27, 2021 featuring photographs of International Holocaust Remembrance Day commemorations around the world.[193] With many of the ceremonies moved online due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the photographs lack any large crowds. Rather, a few lone individuals are shown laying wreaths or lighting candles. The very first photograph in the article shows the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe in Berlin, lacking people, but with a small bouquet of roses lying on top of one of the dark grey steles. The brightest part of the image is the white tag attached to the roses, and the message on the tag is simply "#WEREMEMBER." A few photographs down in the article, another image portrays the Austrian Parliament building. Projected against the side of the building are multiple copies of the words "We Remember" layered atop one another. However, the boldest part of the projection in the center is, again, the hashtag "#WeRemember." The use of a projection on the side of this historic building in Vienna reflects the increasingly common use of technology for memorialization, but one's attention is drawn in both images to the hashtag in the middle. Given the wide array of choices with regard

[193] "Photos: International Holocaust Remembrance Day."

to what words or images to project or attach to the note at the Berlin memorial to commemorate that day, it is interesting that a hashtag was selected.

The #WeRemember campaign is launched by the World Jewish Congress annually as a digital Holocaust education initiative for International Holocaust Remembrance Day. Participants are encouraged to take a photograph of themselves holding a sign that says "We Remember" and then post the image on social media with the hashtag.[194] In this way, with strategies such as social media campaigns, official institutions can try to control how the memory is being created as they move into digital spaces. However, the use of the #WeRemember hashtag expands beyond this campaign. It is not certain whether the individual who laid the rose bouquet or the Austrian Parliament were intentionally participating in the campaign. Many individuals who utilize it in the context of Holocaust commemoration do not include the requisite photograph, and they use the hashtag as they see fit. The hashtag is not only used on January 27 but also year-round, and it not only commemorates victims of the Holocaust but also other individuals who have lost their lives. It also serves as a template for users to fill in. We see this in tweets, "Today, on International #HolocaustRemembranceDay #WeRemember the millions of Jewish, queer and disabled people who lost their lives to antisemitism and hate and those who survived atrocities."[195] Another person posts about the importance of remaining vigilant against white supremacist groups, saying that "If #WeRemember, we must call out #antisemitism here."[196] The hashtag #WeRemember, in addition to the others often paired with it, such as #NeverForget and #HolocaustMemorialDay, is used as a vessel to convey an important, broader message about remembering millions of lives extinguished and continually combating anti-

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[194] "WJC Launches #WeRemember Campaign Ahead of International Holocaust Remembrance Day."
[195] Twitter post, January 27, 2021. Accessed April 2, 2021.
[196] Twitter post, January 27, 2021. Accessed April 2, 2021.

Semitism and hate. However, I do not know if the meaning necessarily "trumps" the form any longer, for the form has also become increasingly important. Hashtags were originally created so that one could find other similarly tagged posts. They connect posts about common themes, movements, and events. Twitter also informs people about which hashtags are "trending" at any given moment. These trending hashtags will be featured, and others will also know that it is a focal point in popular public discourse. A user cannot click on a hashtag projected on a wall and use it in the way it was intended to work, but it perhaps informs people that the conversation is happening on social media and encourages them to visit those online sites. And beyond that, the form of the hashtag informs viewers of something important, something that numerous people care about and discuss. The expansion of the hashtag "#WeRemember" beyond social media to physical sites denotes that Holocaust Remembrance is indeed a broad movement that many participate in, both online and offline.

Hashtags like "#WeRemember" and "#NeverForget" have become an integral part of the common vocabulary used in the social media conversation surrounding Holocaust remembrance. On International Holocaust Remembrance Day, many tweets that use this language seem to echo one another on social media. Almost every user strives to "honor" or "remember" the millions of Jews and other victims murdered during the Holocaust. They also end their message by re-affirming their commitment to confront or fight hatred and anti-Semitism. There is a recurring imagery of lit candles tagged with #LightTheDarkness, as well as quotes from Elie Wiesel and Hannah Arendt, like "'One person of integrity can make a difference.' - Elie Wiesel, Holocaust survivor and Nobel Peace Prize winner."[197] The similar, repetitive language used is most evident in the tweets from politicians, celebrities, and other public figures. This tweet from an American

[197] Twitter post, January 27, 2021. Accessed April 2, 2021.

politician is representative of many others tweeted by their peers: "Today, #WeRemember the six million Jewish people and the millions of others, including the Roma and Sinti, Slavs, people with disabilities, LGBTQ+ individuals, and more, who were killed during the Holocaust. We honor their memory by denouncing hate and standing up for truth."[198] Since these individuals are often those who have the largest following on Twitter, their messages reach more people, and their tweets thus garner more likes and reactions and may be more likely to show up on other people's timelines. It seems at first glance that there is a consensus among Twitter users or that they are almost all saying the same things regarding the Holocaust.

However, if we take a deeper look, it becomes easy to find the other voices mixed in with those tweets. Twitter elevates voices that have traditionally not been represented in official memory spaces. The website almost acts as an open forum in which both public figures and non-public figures can divulge their personal relationships to the event and people being memorialized. Even on an official day of commemoration like International Holocaust Remembrance Day, Twitter conversation about the Holocaust among individuals is diverse and dynamic, evolving every second as more users chime in and correct each other. On this platform, we also see a memory practice emerge that is both more self-critical and self-referential.

Multiple tweets provoke debate about how the Holocaust should be discussed. For example, one individual critically notes that "'Holocaust' is too often used as an empty signifier, repeated ad nauseam in order to avoid facing what this thing was and did."[199] As they continue their thread, they ask for people to question the ways they currently think and speak about the atrocity and actively reckon with their own role in violence and genocide. A separate tweet

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[198] Twitter post, January 27, 2021. Accessed April 2, 2021.
[199] Twitter post, January 27, 2021. Accessed April 3, 2021.

similarly dissects the language and vocabulary used in discussions. The author criticizes how others use the word "perish" to characterize what happened to millions of victims, explaining that "'Perish' has a passive sense: these people were actively murdered because they were considered 'inferior'."[200] Another person enters the conversation about the relativization of the Holocaust. They assertively state, "DO NOT EVER COMPARE THE HOLOCAUST TO ANY OTHER INJUSTICE IF YOU ARE NOT JEWISH. EVER."[201] The author of this tweet seems to suggest that anyone who is not Jewish cannot understand the Holocaust and thus should not make comparative statements about it. They attempt to emphasize the singularity of the Holocaust while also arguing that the Jewish community should play a dominant role in shaping our conceptions and memory of the Holocaust. Along with correcting and commenting on the ways in which people speak about the Holocaust, Twitter users also reveal false beliefs and gaps in the conversation and highlight information that may be overlooked. One tweet provides a statistic and simply says, "Reminder: 11% of American adults under 40 (falsely) believe that Jews caused the Holocaust."[202] Another tweet creatively utilizes visual aids. The author includes images of maps that show multiple countries marked with the location of "[Nazi] monuments" in an attempt to show the complicity of those who were not German.[203]

Holocaust education is also a popular and debated topic. One person tweets, "please do not get your holocaust education from a [Carrd]," which is a platform that allows people to easily design and build one-page websites. The person continues, "i cannot emphasize enough that you must read books and articles about it," and then writes in a follow-up tweet, "and no looking at

[200] Twitter post, January 27, 2021. Accessed April 3, 2021.
[201] Twitter post, January 27, 2021. Accessed April 3, 2021.
[202] Twitter post, January 27, 2021. Accessed April 3, 2021.
[203] Twitter post, January 27, 2021. Accessed April 3, 2021.

pictures is not sufficient education either."[204] Many people in the replies agree with the author and express horror at the thought of "aesthetic" webpages about the Holocaust that can be created by any "random person, probably a child." Others ask interesting questions, ranging from "What is 'Holocaust education'?" to "I saw a carrd on the subject that was a collection of links to things like Yad Vashem, Jewish Book Council, the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, My Jewish Learning, etc...of course no one list can cover everything, but is something like that a reasonable starting point?"[205] The conversation broadens as some reflect upon the shortcomings and strengths of the Holocaust education they received as part of school curricula. Documentaries, Hollywood movies such as *Schindler's List* and *The Boy in the Striped Pajamas*, books and articles with "personal narratives" and "general histories", and "'war history' nerds" are all suggested and critiqued as potential sources for Holocaust education. Throughout the conversation, a few individuals suggest that certain platforms, such as Carrd and even Twitter, are inadequate and even inappropriate for learning about such a "serious subject."[206] As one person writes, those who want to understand the Holocaust "should watch documentaries of survivor accounts. And they should also look at the trials after the fact. Reading a carrd is as good as understanding the holocaust through a sugarcoated twitter thread. I want people to finally understand how disturbing it was."[207] One does not have to look far to find examples of such threads. People post series of photographs, screenshots of articles, and links to more information and resources. In one thread, viewers can see four photographs of prisoners forced on death marches, with the caption, "death marches. prisoners were rounded up and put to walk for miles, weeks of little/no food. if you stopped, you got trampled to death. often times during

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[204] Twitter post, January 27, 2021. Accessed April 3, 2021.
[205] Twitter post, January 27, 2021. Accessed April 3, 2021.
[206] Twitter post, January 28, 2021. Accessed April 3, 2021.
[207] Twitter post, January 28, 2021. Accessed April 4, 2021.

the winter they'd strip prisoners and make them walk naked in the snow. they were all executed after their march."[208]

Can a Twitter thread be a genuine form of memorialization? That is a question that people raise even as they post Tweets honoring the Holocaust. Is it impertinent to think that one could actually comprehend such an event through a "sugarcoated" thread, or do most understand these tweets to be a "reasonable starting point"? And, if one does dedicate a thread to the memory of Holocaust victims, what exactly should go into it? On Holocaust Remembrance Day 2021, someone re-shared a politician's tweet honoring the day, not to affirm the tweet's contents but rather to draw attention to the hundreds of anti-Semitic replies that it elicited. The user acknowledges that "there are valid criticisms of Israel's domestic and foreign policy and their downright awful treatment of Palestinians in many areas of life, but a Holocaust remembrance thread probably isn't the best place for them."[209] Where is the best place for such comments and criticisms, if not a Twitter thread? On the same day, the British political discussion television program *Peston* invited Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis to speak about the Holocaust and contemporary genocides. One user's direct response to the show notes that Mirvis "conveniently forgets the Palestinians. #Peston."[210] This tweet is perhaps not an explicit Holocaust remembrance tweet, yet it reflects the author's relationship with memory and the author's belief that failing to acknowledge what is happening to Palestinians is antithetical to honoring the Holocaust.

[208] Twitter post, January 27, 2021. Accessed April 3, 2021.
[209] Twitter post, January 27, 2021. Accessed April 3, 2021.
[210] Twitter post, January 27, 2021. Accessed April 3, 2021.

In an essay about the new memory culture created within the digital media ecology, Hoskins characterizes the memory as "on-the-fly."[211] Digital memory is constantly emerging and accumulating new characteristics and meanings. While the history of Sachsenhausen shows that physical sites can also acquire new characteristics and meanings over time, the rapid pace at which digital media changes and the way that digital memory never really stops being constructed set it apart from more traditional memory. Due to the constant construction, Hoskins also points out the unique ability of media to act as both "subjects and instruments of inquiry."[212] Gloviczski makes a similar observation when he describes social media as a space "of and for public memory."[213] Social media pages, including Facebook walls and Twitter feeds, represent evolving digital monuments but also allow users to create their own and respond to other earlier remembrances. As a result, and as we can see in these various tweets, digital memory culture simultaneously creates space for online remembrance posts and asks whether or not those remembrance posts should even exist. The high number of people correcting one another on the platform helps to foster a new memory practice that is self-critical and dynamic.

Furthermore, digital memory culture is self-referential, in that people who tweet about the Holocaust often do so as it pertains to themselves. They insert themselves into the memory dialogue and make it more personal. In conversations referred to previously regarding Holocaust education, people often mention their personal experiences with Holocaust curricula and school-mandated trips to former concentration camps. In other tweets posted on Holocaust Remembrance Day, individuals posted about their identification with victims as a means for crowdfunding. Through these tweets, we can see how the self-referential aspect collides with

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[211] Hoskins, "Digital Network Memory," 94.
[212] Ibid., 95.
[213] Gloviczki, "Public Memory in the Online World," 70.

social media trends at a given moment to shape social media memorialization. One person writes, "HELLO GOYIM FOLLOWERS AND PPL WHO HAPPEN TO PASS BY! ITS HOLOCAUST REMEMBRANCE DAY AND U R OBLIGATED TO GIVE ME MONEY. RN. HELP THIS ASHKENAZI JEW GET THEIR PARTNER DOWN THIS SUMMER!" along with a link for donating money.[214] In a separate tweet that received thousands of retweets and likes, an individual writes that, in honor of Holocaust Remembrance Day, "jews and rroma [should] please drop ways to send [them] money,"[215] prompting over 30 responses from users who identify as Jewish and Roma and request financial assistance for anything ranging from groceries and rent to medical procedures. The author of this tweet also clarifies that "the only people who should be donating to people in here are gentile white europeans/Americans,"[216] which raises the question of whether the online crowdfunding is intended to be a form of reparations. These tweets are not typical Holocaust Remembrance Day tweets, and they may seem inappropriate for memorialization settings outside of social media. However, they reveal how social media practices are adapted for and shape digital memorialization. Online crowdfunding surged during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 and 2021.[217] With so many pandemic-related job losses and medical issues, online fundraisers became a way for people to supplement income and generate support. Websites specifically designated for fundraising, such as GoFundMe, saw an increase in activity, but on social media sites such as Facebook and Twitter, it became more common for people to "drop their CashApp or Venmo in the comments"

[214] Twitter post, January 27, 2021. Accessed April 5, 2021.
[215] Twitter post, January 26, 2021. Accessed April 5, 2021.
[216] Twitter post, January 27, 2021. Accessed May 7, 2021.
[217] Lerman, "Struggling to Stay Afloat during the Pandemic, People Turn to Strangers Online for Help."

so that others could donate directly to them.[218] On January 27, 2021, the online crowdfunding became a way for people to remember the Holocaust and honor its victims.

On the other hand, the free-form ways in which people post about the Holocaust on social media could potentially be problematic. It is difficult to verify whether every user who posts a donation link is Jewish, Roma, or otherwise related to Holocaust victim groups. The requests for money could intentionally or inadvertently reinforce the stereotype of Jewish people as greedy and eager to pursue wealth and control of financial institutions. This stereotype has been mobilized by people throughout history, including the Nazis, to stoke violent anti-Semitism and blame Jews for the exploitation of others."[219] But while anti-Semitism is rife on Twitter and other platforms, within the crowdfunding conversations, people seem to be supportive of one another, liking and retweeting each other's posts to help them draw more positive attention.

Another custom that has emerged on social media is posts about trips to sites such as former concentration camps, museums, and monuments in honor of International Holocaust Remembrance Day. Photographs are often included. In this way, the memory at the Sachsenhausen Memorial and Museum is remediated or given a second life in a new, online context. By examining these posts, we can also get a sense of the reception of the site. However, the visitors are not only passive consumers of memory; by posting and remediating the content, they become producers of memory as well.[220] While many of these posts echo one another, there is also space for creativity and individual insights.

[218] Ibid.
[219] Rosenfeld, "The Historic Roots of Anti-Semitism and How They Play out Today."
[220] Törnquist-Plewa, Andersen, and Erll, "Introduction: On Transcultural Memory and Reception," 6.

From December 2020 through April 2021, I used a social media and web monitoring tool called Mention to keep track of conversations surrounding the Sachsenhausen Memorial and Museum on Twitter. Mention collected tweets in English that included the word "Sachsenhausen" and sent a daily report. On January 27, 2021, in addition to the flood of tweets referring to the Holocaust that I described above, there was a sudden surge in mentions of Sachsenhausen as well.

Images of the words "Arbeit macht frei" displayed on the entrance gate at Sachsenhausen seem to be shared more than any other part of the camp, but people also post pictures of the fences and the various monuments constructed at the site, such as Waldemar Grzimek's *Pietá*, the GDR era sculpture of two inmates carrying a third in a blanket, and the imposing Tower of Nations obelisk in the center of the camp. There are images of the execution trench and remains of the ovens in the section of the camp where the killings took place, formerly known as Station Z. Others show the barracks, quotes from prisoners inscribed on walls, and images of sketches of inmates found within the camp and exhibits displaying prisoner clothing. Through these pictures, we can see the site from a multitude of perspectives. We see it at various times of the year, both when it is sunny and bright and when the ground is covered in a layer of snow. We also see large groups of tourists and how they behave, for tourists are frequently in the background of photographs and an essential feature of the site today. While selfies taken at Holocaust memorials, or "Shoah selfies," have become a subject of backlash and controversy,[221] a few individuals still post images of themselves in a manner that could perhaps be said to be more thoughtful or appropriate. They are usually standing far from the camera with clasped hands and somber, serious facial expressions.

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[221] Magilow, "Selfies at Sachsenhausen: Shoah Selfies, Shoah Selfie Shaming, and Social Photography."

The words they write about the site, sometimes accompanying photographs and sometimes not, are illuminating. With the limited space available in a tweet, former visitors usually focus on communicating a particular aspect of their experience. In response to someone who posts about their visit to Dachau, and how "It was a crisp spring day and the weather added to the surreal nature of the place,"[222] another person posts a photograph they took looking outwards from the camp. The image looks like it could be of a park, with trees, grass, and a pathway cutting through. They write that they had a "Pretty similar experience at Sachsenhausen. Down to the surrealist tricks played by the weather. On a sunny winter day. This was right outside the camp."[223]

Some people share deeply personal insights, providing context around their visit. For example: "Over 10y ago I was backpacking Europe w a friend, who was the first of her Jewish fam to return to a concentration camp. I didn't take many pics of Sachsenhausen b/c we cried most of the day, but sharing b/c we must never forget."[224] Later on, in a conversation about Holocaust deniers, they write, "I wish every person who denies it could go there. We went on a sunny day, & I have never felt such a heaviness. Even the sounds are dampened, silent except the sound of wind scraping against concrete and your shoes gnashing against gravel. It makes you absolutely sick with grief."[225] Family histories are also disclosed. One person's father liberated Mauthausen concentration camp, and they have taken their children to "#Mauthausen #Sachsenhausen #Wannsee so they don't ever forget either."[226]

[222] Twitter post, January 27, 2021. Accessed April 5, 2021.
[223] Twitter post, January 27, 2021. Accessed April 5, 2021.
[224] Twitter post, January 27, 2021. Accessed April 5, 2021.
[225] Twitter post, January 28, 2021. Accessed April 5, 2021.
[226] Twitter post, January 27, 2021. Accessed April 5, 2021.

The descriptions of the visits are emotionally-charged and vivid. In an individual's 15-tweet thread recounting their trip to Sachsenhausen in June of 2016, they start by mentioning that "It was raining - our guide said, 'It's often like this, as if Heaven is crying.' I thought I would be fine. I wasn't fine." Over the next several posts, they add that they "walked quietly" so as to not "break the silence," which was "arresting." They show the barracks and photo albums of people killed in the camps, emphasizing "The cold and the wet and the grey and the silence." Towards the end, the author also connects the importance of Holocaust Remembrance Day to the riot at the United States Capitol on January 6, 2021, pleading for others to "Remember. Remember because it can happen here. Because it is happening here."[227] The sense of silence and bleakness permeating through the site is echoed by several others. One person describes the feeling as "loud silence.' Even though Sachsenhausen was a "wide open space", they "couldn't even hear birds," and the site was "completely lifeless, just a piercing painful reminder."[228] The area surrounding Sachsenhausen Memorial is also represented on Twitter. For one individual, "one of the things that stuck with [them] was the quaint little neighborhood right outside the concentration camp... so close the residents would have been able to smell them burning bodies... and yet... they ignored it."[229] Another person also focuses on how the camp is "surrounded by a neighborhood of charming homes and shops. Ordinary people lived ordinary lives surrounding unspeakable atrocities." They write that "silence is complicity," and they end their message by condemning those who remain silent in the face of injustices and by asking people not to forget.[230] However, both of these visitors do not seem to know that the houses right outside the camp were SS residences, rather than homes for "ordinary people [living] ordinary lives." In

[227] Twitter post, January 27, 2021. Accessed April 7, 2021.
[228] Twitter post, January 27, 2021. Accessed April 7, 2021.
[229] Twitter post, January 27, 2021. Accessed April 7, 2021.
[230] Twitter post, January 27, 2021. Accessed April 7, 2021.

many of the social media remediations of the Sachsenhausen site, the authors seem to prioritize making emotional appeals rather than conveying accurate information. There is a real risk of inaccurate information spreading on the site without being counteracted, but it seems like other users are more willing to engage with emotionally charged language than factual historical information.

It is difficult to get a full and comprehensive picture of Sachsenhausen Memorial and Museum on Twitter, but we do get representations of the site that show which aspects of the site or the experience stand out the most to visitors. Most social media activity seems to be self-referential by nature, so we also gain insight into the individual tourists and their different backgrounds and expectations. The photographs of various points in the camp are not always contextualized, and it is occasionally difficult to ascertain what is being shown. However, the remarkable thing about these tweets is not necessarily their ability to reproduce the complete site in a virtual format, but rather the opportunity they provide for visitors and tourists to exert their agency and play a more active role in producing memory.

As I discussed in the chapter on the Sachsenhausen site, Holocaust tourism has traditionally been frowned upon in Holocaust studies and tourism studies. Tourism plays an undeniable role in the operation of historic sites and Holocaust memorialization in general, with millions crossing the globe to visit Holocaust sites of memory every year. However, dark tourism, raises valid moral questions and concerns about the commodification of mass suffering and violence. While many of these sites have free admission and the money generated from guided tours and resources are utilized for staffing and maintenance of the sites, the gift shops, masses of tourists with selfie sticks, and snaking lines still give the impression that these visitors are attending theme parks. Such an environment may pose the risk of trivializing what the site

represents or desensitizing tourists to the violence presented to them, and it also seems to be at odds with the goals of Holocaust remembrance.

Reynolds has written extensively about Holocaust tourism and acknowledges the "ample reason to be concerned about the tourist gaze's voyeuristic potential,"[231] but he also challenges the common view of tourists as mindless consumers of inauthentic representations, unable to think critically. He specifically analyzes photography as a means for tourists to exert their agency and then produce their own representations of history. I find that the posts they create on social media also reflect this agency and enable participation in the on-going creation of memory and knowledge surrounding events of the past like the Holocaust. What the Twitter users choose to post shows how they can direct the tourist gaze outward, moving away from a voyeuristic consumption of the suffering of victims. They discuss what is happening beyond the site, critically comment on the "ordinary people" living "ordinary lives" and ignoring the suffering happening right in front of them. In one of the tweeted threads I mentioned above, the author posts an image of two other visitors taking a photograph of the "Arbeit macht frei" embedded in the camp's main gate. The author writes, "I noticed two young woman standing outside that gate, taking its picture. Not taking their own photo - no, of course they weren't doing that. But then I saw why they were photographing the gate."[232] The author of this tweet focuses their own camera lens on other tourists who are also using photography as a means of engaging with Holocaust memory and indirectly comments on what constitutes appropriate tourist behavior. The user also posts their own photograph of the entrance gate, which is likely very similar to the one captured by the two women. In a way, by showing the author's fellow tourists, the author of

[231] Ibid., 339.
[232] Twitter post, January 27, 2021. Accessed April 7, 2021.

the tweet turns the camera lens on themself and their own behavior as a tourist, making it clear that what the audience is viewing is mediated through a tourist's lens. The visceral descriptions of the visitors' experiences at Sachsenhausen show a kind of reverence for what transpired at the site. No one presumes to fully understand what prisoners endured at the site, and many recognize an overwhelming sense of loss, silence, and absence despite the exhibits, tour guides, and multitudes of visual and textual information offered to them. As Reynolds writes, many seem to realize their "removal from the victims' experience" after visiting.[233]

Not every visitor may fully embrace the role of producing memory, but those who do are enabled through platforms like social media. Tourists can carry the meaning of memory sites beyond their walls and generate further discourse. They bring Sachsenhausen Memorial and Museum to a wider audience while also bringing it into dialogue with other Holocaust memorials. A narrative of the Holocaust is constantly being written by institutions as well as individuals on Twitter, and a large portion of it builds upon the work begun at the physical sites. In addition, though, social media grant the space for personal reflection, emotional processing, and constructing one's "sense of self in relation to these experiences" that the physical sites do not necessarily provide.[234] It is a space where disagreeing comments can exist side by side, but it is also a place where people across the globe can reach a consensus, and where people encourage one another also to visit the sites of memory or learn about the Holocaust through other means.

On the other hand, the open discourse about the Holocaust on the Internet can be problematic. A major concern regarding digital memory is that it opens the door for more counterfactual representations of the Holocaust and then enables these misrepresentations to

[233] Reynolds, "Consumers or Witnesses?", 344.
[234] Ibid., 336.

spread with greater ease. Holocaust denial and anti-Semitic sentiments exist all over the Internet, including on YouTube and Twitter,[235] and whether or not the platforms or official Holocaust memory institutions should play a greater role in tamping down on this sort of dialogue is an important question that many are grappling with. However, individuals also strive to counter Holocaust denial through their tweets, occasionally using anecdotes about visits to Holocaust sites of memory to strengthen their message. For example, one individual writes, "I've been to sachsenhausen concentration camp and met holocaust survivors when I went to palestine. the holocaust is 100% real and happened not even 100 years ago. people who experienced it are still alive. this is not an issue to be taken lightly…I can't believe I even have to say this."[236]

Apart from the official days of commemoration, mentions of Sachsenhausen show up almost daily on Twitter, especially as new stories about the lives and deaths of survivors and victims murdered at Sachsenhausen are posted. People occasionally share their reactions to visits at the site, both prompted and unprompted, and many find common ground in their experiences. More contentious debate involving Sachsenhausen and Holocaust memory arises sporadically on Twitter, often precipitated by political events. Two prominent cases were the insurrection at the United States Capitol on January 6, 2021, during which a rioter wore a sweatshirt emblazoned with "Camp Auschwitz." The act prompted immediate backlash and condemnation, with many drawing upon their memories of visiting Auschwitz and other former concentration camps to express their horror. Then, in February 2021, German prosecutors charged a 100-year-old former guard at Sachsenhausen concentration camp with over 3,500 counts of aiding and abetting murder. News articles about the event were shared and re-shared many times over, with people

[235] "Groundbreaking ADL Analysis Estimates 4.2 Million Anti-Semitic Tweets in One-Year Period."
[236] Twitter post, January 31, 2021. Accessed April 8, 2021.

indicating their opinion by simply commenting with the word "Good" or applause emojis. Others go into greater depth, referencing their personal experience with Sachsenhausen to show why they support the German prosecutors' actions. "I've visited Sachsenhausen and seen what went on there, you could not have been a guard there and not been an accessory to murder - the evidence of it was everywhere. Amazingly it was/is just outside Berlin in a residential area. Sickening, neither time nor age must forgive," writes one individual.[237] Another person also mentions feeling "physically affected" by their visit. They say, "I felt sick and could not stay in the morgue. It was as if I could feel the evil and the pain and i had to come out and sit outside and get my air back."[238] The conversation also moves in other directions as some people ask whether Germany is ready to be "honest" about the "protection that has been afforded ex-Nazis since the war" and whether perpetrators of other abuses should also be held accountable. There are both tweets in favor of and in opposition to prosecuting the former guard, but it seems that many are aware that the issue is not so black-and-white. As one individual writes, it is "Hard to know what is right. Having been a Nazi concentration camp guard cannot be forgotten. Being 100 years old makes many other things a bit different."[239] Someone else asks, "what has he been doing since?"[240] However, throughout the conversation, we see that visits to Sachsenhausen Memorial can shape how people think about the Holocaust and its perpetrators. The Twitter feed further reveals how memory and people's relationships to past events can be nuanced and can shift as those events become more and more distant.

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[237] Twitter post, February 9, 2021. Accessed April 8, 2021.
[238] Twitter post, February 9, 2021. Accessed April 8, 2021.
[239] Twitter post, February 8, 2021. Accessed April 8, 2021.
[240] Twitter post, February 8, 2021. Accessed April 8, 2021.

Chapter 6: The Whitney on Social Media

Digital slavery memory

Compared to the well-established Holocaust memory culture that has been in development for decades in Germany and abroad, including in the United States, the memory of slavery in the United States seems relatively vague and uncertain. On June 19, 1865, soldiers in the Union Army finally arrived in Texas with word of the Emancipation Proclamation that was issued more than two years earlier. This day, now known as Juneteenth, is when African Americans commemorate the end of slavery. It is a tradition to gather with friends and family for barbeques and church services as well as reflect on slavery and its legacy in the nation. However, many non-African Americans are unaware of Juneteenth, for it is absent from school curricula, even during Black History Month in February.[241] It is celebrated in most states, but not recognized as a national holiday. The United States also does not seem to acknowledge the International Day of Remembrance of the Victims of Slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade on March 25 and the International Day for the Remembrance of the Slave Trade and its Abolition on August 23.

When the Whitney Plantation opened in 2014 as a museum, it was described as the first slavery museum in America. In reality, other museums did memorialize slavery prior to that point, but the history of slavery was usually subsumed under African-American history, and the takeaway was often that "civil rights triumphs and America is wonderful," according to historian Paul Finkelman.[242] In 2016, the massive and highly-anticipated National Museum of African American History and Culture opened on the National Mall in Washington, D.C., the Unites

[241] Bleiker, "Juneteenth: Celebrating the End of Slavery in the US."
[242] Amsden, "Building the First Slavery Museum in America."

States' capital. Another two years later, the National Memorial for Peace and Justice, a memorial to the victims of lynching, opened in Montgomery, Alabama. At the time, it was reported that there was "nothing like it in the country," which is a claim that is probably still true three years later in 2021.[243] The memorial is comprised of steel columns, partially inspired by the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe in Berlin. Less than a mile away and opened on the same day, the Legacy Museum tells the narrative of how the slavery system in the United States began and argues that it did not end but rather evolved into other forms of racial terror and discrimination that have led up to the current system of mass incarceration.

These memorials and museums have only existed for a short time, but they play a significant role in helping Americans begin to reckon with the slavery and racism that make up a significant portion of their country's founding story. For so long, many Americans failed or were unwilling to confront and process "the Peculiar Institution" and the collective trauma that it caused. According to historian Ira Berlin, who wrote extensively about the lives of enslaved Black men and women, slave narratives were collected during the early 20th century, yet ignored by historians. During the civil rights movement of the 1960s, people finally became interested in slavery as the "root cause of America's racial problem," which "reawakened interest in the narratives."[244] The narratives are valuable and utilized in the present day by sites like the Whitney, but scholars also found issues, such as the white interviewers' reconstructions of the narratives that revealed more about the "historical memory and racial attitudes of white Southerners in the 1930s than of the lives of black slaves in the 1850s."[245] While there are not as many "ex-slave stories" as there are Holocaust survivor testimonies, those that exist are also an

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[243] Robertson, "A Lynching Memorial Is Opening. The Country Has Never Seen Anything Like It."
[244] Berlin, "Introduction: Slavery as Memory and History," xix.
[245] Ibid., xxi.

immensely valuable historical source that can “put a human face on an inhuman social system.”[246] Scholars are actively studying such sources and putting together increasingly comprehensive and diverse narratives about the lives of the enslaved.

Another important driving force behind memory of the era of slavery is the plantations where African and Afro-descendant people were enslaved and suffered. However, as I discussed in my earlier examination of the Whitney Plantation, the narratives constructed at most plantation sites exclude the enslaved individuals, instead highlighting the glamour and wealth of slave-owning families and the grand architecture of the mansions in which they lived. The white enslavers are portrayed as honorable and refined people who treated their “servants” benevolently. The treatment of enslavement, or lack of treatment, serves to “erase, minimize, or trivialize the fact and experience of slavery,” and that has deleterious effects on how slavery is remembered by the crowds of tourists who pass through the sites.[247] In these plantations as well as in public education curricula, memory of the enslaved is characterized by erasure and misrepresentations.[248]

Bernard Powers, history professor and director of the College of Charleston Center for the Study of Slavery, describes the South’s approach to history as “schizophrenic,” which is why people conceive of these sites as “peaceful, kind of pristine,” and “romantic” and do not understand “how the sites were created in the first place.”[249] Without official institutions defining the memory of slavery, and with so many plantation sites across the southern United States producing questionable narratives about the relationships between the enslaved and the

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[246] Ibid., xlix.
[247] Eichstedt, *Representations of Slavery*, 101.
[248] Heim, “It Is America’s Original Sin. So Why Haven’t the Nation’s Schools Done a Better Job of Teaching about Slavery?”
[249] Luongo, “Despite Everything, People Still Have Weddings at ‘Plantation’ Sites.”

enslavers, the narrative of slavery and the South is inconsistent and overly romanticized. It seems that the relatively new museums and memorials are charged not only with creating new memories but also unraveling false ideas of what happened in the past. However, within digital spaces, many users also participate in the work of correcting and producing memories of slavery.

Boone Hall Plantation is a popular wedding venue in Charleston, South Carolina. On their Instagram page, they mostly post images of the gardens, which are met with positive feedback. However, in the two posts that feature couples who married at the site, the comments take a turn. On June 18, 2016, Boone Hall posted the first of these two with the caption, "'If These Trees Could Talk' Boone Hall Plantation provides a spectacular setting for a couple's special day. #boonehallplantation #CHS #explorecharleston #charlestonweddings #spectacular #aaronandjillianphotography #charlestonweddingmagazine #weddingsunveiled #bride #brideandgroom." The comments say, "…if these trees could talk they would be weeping" and "They would tell you how many black bodies swung from their branches."[250] On May 8, 2020, the site tries again. One person writes, "This is disgusting. Having a plantation wedding in America is like having a concentration camp wedding in Germany." Others declare that it is "ignorant," "despicable," and "unsettling."[251] On January 18, 2021, Boone Hall dedicated a post to Martin Luther King, Jr., which receives two comments with scathing criticism. Someone writes, "Y'all make money off of a racist plantation aesthetic that coincided with the murder of generations of Black people, but you think it's appropriate to post Dr. King? You host weddings on the grounds of blood and brutality, but you think pausing for a day is good enough? Go straight to hell. Making money off of a cultural genocide is sick."[252] On Twitter, perhaps inspired

[250] Instagram comment, June 18, 2017. Accessed April 10, 2021.
[251] Instagram comment, May 8, 2020. Accessed April 10, 2021.
[252] Instagram comment, January 18, 2021. Accessed April 10, 2021.

by the 2017 "Yolocaust" project that combined selfies taken at the Berlin Holocaust Memorial with images of prisoners at extermination camps, a user suggests that "People should photoshop slaves into the plantation wedding pictures of white people," which many proceed to do.[253] The comments range from dark humor and GIFs ("'Did you get our Slave The Date?'"[254]) to more serious, contemplative messages ("To have a wedding where our ancestors suffered brutally is no laughing matter. I feel like this is an attempt to show how pompous it all is to even consider having a celebratory event there and essentially erasing history."[255]) While the artist behind the "Yolocaust" project chose to eventually take down the images, the wedding photographs still remain (as of April 10, 2021). One person comments that it is "Brilliant" that there are "entire social media pages dedicated to this."[256]

Other social media discussion of slavery is wide-ranging, and often shifting to comment on contemporary events and needs. Like those who talk about the Holocaust, some individuals focus on sharing education resources and articles and equipping others to have conversations surrounding slavery and racial oppression. One person's Twitter thread says, "I hate phrases like "slave mentality" & efforts against work on slavery/Jim Crow, stop shaming folks for navigating oppression…We need to further examine these periods/experiences/systems to better understand the complexities & counter inaccuracies…Also check out scholarship that does just that like 'Slavery at Sea" & "Dispossessed Lives,' organizations like AAIHS & #blktwitterstorians."[257] Another person writes, "As we get approach the inaugural #AnarchaLucyBetseyDays, note that I do not write or say 'black slaves.' The appropriate terminology is 'enslaved Black women' bc

[253] Twitter post, December 16, 2019. Accessed April 10, 2021.
[254] Twitter post, December 16, 2019. Accessed April 10, 2021.
[255] Twitter post, December 19, 2019. Accessed April 10, 2021.
[256] Twitter post, December 16, 2019. Accessed April 10, 2021.
[257] Twitter post, December 30, 2016. Accessed April 10, 2021.

slavery was imposed on them. They were fully human even if every attempt was made to dehumanize them."[258] Even though there is a lot of frustration expressed about the silence hanging over the topic of slavery, during Black History Month in 2016, multiple people tweeted requests for people to stop focusing only about slavery. As one person explains and many others reiterate, "Black History Month is more than just slavery and Martin Luther King Jr."[259]

The language used in the conversations on social media is also much more open and informal, and people seem to utilize humor as a means of processing the heavy subject material. They react to people and events in the news with sarcasm, memes, and GIFs. In response to someone who argues, "humans will never advance if we are always looking for reasons to hate, so sad people just can't do things without bringing up color of skin...cats and dogs don't do this yet we as the smartest animal just can't ignore it," another individual retorts, "I don't think that dogs have subjected cats to 400 years of slavery and Jim Crow but go on and be great sis...."[260] Digital conversations surrounding the Holocaust are also shifting toward a more casual tone, especially as younger generations join in, but for the most part, users seem to tiptoe carefully around the subject. They also try to avoid using comparative language when mentioning the Holocaust. On the other hand, the word "slavery" is applied to innumerable situations on social media. Many do not hesitate to relate it to the Holocaust or to essential workers during the COVID-19 pandemic. One person writes, "Imma need y'all to stop comparing the Holocaust to slavery because there are barely any similarities between them..." They elaborate in the next

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[258] Twitter post, February 27, 2021. Accessed April 10, 2021.
[259] Twitter post, February 3, 2016. Accessed April 10, 2021.
[260] Twitter post, January 27, 2021. Accessed April 10, 2021.

tweet, "I'm not saying that the Holocaust wasn't a horrible thing to happen bc it was but it didn't last nearly as long and Jewish ppl received reparations."[261]

However, one key difference between Holocaust and slavery remembrance on social media seems to lie in how the institutions of Holocaust memory still maintain influential presences on social media. They are able to monitor and curate the digital memory to a certain extent.[262] Furthermore, contemporary Holocaust commemoration, at least prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, was largely rooted in the "personal experience of presence" at physical sites of memory,[263] and a large component of the digital memory culture is a remediation of those experiences in a new medium. For memorialization of slavery, those institutional gatekeepers of memory did not exist for a long time, and if anything, counternarratives abounded, splintering the truths about slavery and the Confederate States. However, with the emergence of sites such as the Whitney Plantation, which is a different type of plantation museum, perhaps something is shifting in the digital discourse and reception of these sites.

YouTube: The Whitney

A search for videos about the Whitney Plantation on YouTube will mostly result in highly produced videos by news media outlets. Videos produced by CBS This Morning; Essence, a lifestyle magazine; AJ+, a news channel run by Al Jazeera Media Network; The New Yorker; The New York Times; The Atlantic; Wall Street Journal; and C-SPAN are all among the top 20 most viewed videos related to the Whitney on the platform, and the number of views they receive range from the about 10,000 to 2.3 million. Some of the video titles sound similar, such

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[261] Twitter post, January 9, 2021. Accessed April 10, 2021.
[262] Ebbrecht-Hartmann, "Commemorating from a Distance," 6.
[263] Ibid., 2.

as "Whitney Plantation museum confronts painful history of slavery," "America's First Museum Dedicated to Telling the Story of Slavery," and "Southern Slavery, Unsanitized"; showing how noteworthy and unique the Whitney's singular focus on slavery is. While some of the information overlaps, the videos each provide a different perspective of the site. Both the CBS news clip and the New Yorker video feature interviews with John Cummings, the owner of the museum who initiated the effort; Dr. Ibrahima Seck, the Director of Research; and Sybil Haydel Morial, a descendant of an enslaved woman named Anna and the brother of the slaveowner.[264] The interviews are the centerpiece of the videos, and a large emphasis is placed on Dr. Seck's careful research into the enslaved people who once lived at the Whitney. The creators of the memorial site seek to educate above all else, and this comes through in a video when Dr. Seck is briefly shown giving a tour to visitors. While these two videos show the site, the focus is primarily on the people behind it. When Cummings explains his motivation for restoring the Whitney with a focus on the enslaved person's narrative, he mentions the "hundreds of memorials and museums dedicated to the Holocaust" in Germany. Germans "own" their history, and Cummings hopes that America will also reach that point. At the end of one of the videos, Dr. Seck observes that memory has been changing in the United States ever since they embarked on this project.

The Whitney Plantation utilizes the media well, and the videos of the site are beautifully filmed and edited. Cummings and Dr. Seck can directly communicate the meaning of the site to audiences, and the news media thus play an important role in the creation and dissemination of the memory. On the other hand, the New York Times' video, "Southern Slavery, Unsanitized |

[264] CBS This Morning, *Whitney Plantation Museum Confronts Painful History of Slavery*.; The New Yorker, *America's First Museum Dedicated to Telling the Story of Slavery | The New Yorker*.

The Daily 360," is a panoramic 360-degree video that allows the online viewers to immerse themselves into the site while a voiceover provides contextualization.[265] It is similar to the virtual tour of Auschwitz and the 360-degree virtual reality video of Sachsenhausen in that viewers can maneuver and turn as though they are standing within the grounds. The Essence video is also a remediation of a tour, and the viewer is able to follow the host and Dr. Seck virtually around the site.[266] The video is very edited and quickly cuts from scene to scene, featuring birds-eye-view shots of the site, overlayed images and captions, and atmospheric background music. As a result, it feels more apparent that the site is being mediated, but the information also feels more accessible. The subject of the video produced by AJ+ is not the Whitney Plantation, but rather the 1811 German Coast uprising, the large slave rebellion that is commemorated at the Whitney.[267] The video portrays a reenactment of the slave rebellion, intercut with historical information and interviews, and it thus promotes knowledge about an aspect of the lives of the enslaved that is often overlooked.

These videos, as well as the other more produced ones, generate thousands of comments, and the top comments that are automatically presented also have hundreds of replies underneath. There is vibrant connection and both agreement and disagreement within these comment sections. One of the most popular themes across many of the comment sections is the inadequacy of public education about slavery in the United States. One individual sums up the general feeling in the comment section when they write, "Crazy how in school slavery was sugar coated and taught to us."[268] Another claims that they "learned more from YouTube…than [they] ever

[265] The New York Times, *Southern Slavery, Unsanitized | The Daily 360*.
[266] ESSENCE, *Were Slaves Really "Well-Fed"?*
[267] AJ+, *The Largest Slave Rebellion Was Hidden From U.S. History | AJ+*.
[268] YouTube comment, 2020. Accessed April 11, 2021.

learned in school."[269] Some other people comment on the inaccurate portrayals in textbooks that "made it seem like [their] ancestors were [too] afraid to fight,"[270] and the lack of diversity among their teachers. Overall, the comments reflect a self-awareness about the inadequacy of memory culture in the United States surrounding slavery. People from other countries also chime in: "In Germany we have dozens and dozens of museums about the Holocaust and WWII. I am actually quite shocked that the museum in this video was the FIRST museum on slavery in the United States.... wow. Really goes to show how much America has tried to run away from and ignore that part of history."[271] Cummings and Seck's goal of promoting education through their site, even virtually, seems to be successful.

The virtual representations of the site experience are received well by most, and the differing emotional reactions show the complexity of this memory and relationships that people may have to it. A few people make comments like this one: "I felt like I was there, made me even more thankful for the sacrifices my ancestors made for me."[272] Responses are often tinged with emotion. For example, one person writes, "I'm 59 years old, and i cried like a baby near the end of this video....please remember that this took place a little over 100 years ago....Let us not go back."[273] Another person expresses that they only feel "anger" that is "never at rest."[274] Some tourists who have already visited the Whitney revisit the site on YouTube, and they use the comment section as an opportunity to open up about their experiences, using descriptions such as "overwhelming" and "painful."

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[269] YouTube comment, 2020. Accessed April 11, 2021.
[270] YouTube comment, 2020. Accessed April 11, 2021.
[271] YouTube comment, 2020. Accessed April 11, 2021.
[272] YouTube comment, 2018. Accessed April 11, 2021.
[273] YouTube comment, 2020. Accessed April 11, 2021.
[274] YouTube comment, 2020. Accessed April 11, 2021.

However, when the comments are sorted to show the most recent first rather than the most popular, comments on the other end of the spectrum also appear that express an unwillingness to reckon with the United States' complicity or to accept any blame or feelings of guilt. These comments do not overwhelm the conversation, but they arise repeatedly. People defensively point fingers and try to move blame elsewhere, inquiring about slavery in the northern United States and around the world. They complain that they are "tired of the whole propaganda that slaves build America and crap like that! Whites build America!"[275] and argue that "white people should not sorry now for what happened bc they had nothing to do with it and it was ended 200 years ago."[276] This mentality of guilt and shame is alleged to be preventing the nation from moving forward. There are also comments that attempt to trivialize slavery, by arguing that "as bad as the institution of slavery was, there are also stories of compassion between the owners and owned that this narrative chooses to ignore."[277]

On the other side of reception is people who find the site is inadequate for actually addressing the underlying racial issues in the country, as well as people who direct attention instead to other sites doing similar work. "Slavery and racism never ended" is a common statement, and the continual oppression of Black Americans is an important point that many emphasize. The space in the comment sections is often used to argue for reparations. Some question whether such restorative work should even be done at a plantation. "Beautiful and Historic? Why are we celebrating this? This is no better than confederate flags flying around."[278] As alternative options, others mention the National Lynching Memorial in Montgomery or

[275] YouTube comment, 2021. Accessed April 11, 2021.
[276] YouTube comment, 2021. Accessed April 11, 2021.
[277] YouTube comment, 2021. Accessed April 11, 2021.
[278] YouTube comment, 2021. Accessed April 11, 2021.

another museum on River Road created by a Black woman named Kathy Hambrick that has been telling the story of slavery for 20 years.[279]

Along these more produced videos, the platform also hosts multiple personal vlogs of visits to the Whitney. They provide a chance for virtual viewers to notice different aspects of the site, especially those that the vlogger took special notice of themself. In a video titled "Whitney Plantation // New Orleans with Kids," recorded by a vlogging family that consists of a woman and her two children, about a quarter of the 44 comments focus on children.[280] A few ask about the museum's appropriateness for a four-year-old or other ages. One person writes that they "have to go back" because their group included small children and they missed some exhibits "because they were too graphic for children."[281] The video poster responds, "the only portion that was really difficult for my oldest was the memorial in the back. We utilized the trip as a learning opportunity and she did great. Kids are much more resilient than we give them credit for. I hope you're able to go back to get the full experience."[282] Other people seem to feel encouraged to also visit with their "children's grandchildren" or other young relatives, and one comment praises the vlogger for "teaching this cute lil girl," or her daughter, "about her history."[283] We see some of the same expression of grief and gratitude toward ancestors in the comments, but a few people also ask about some of the art and monuments shown on the screen, filtered through the vlogger's gaze. Two comments ask about the statues of the enslaved children around the site. The vlogger shares about the meaning of those statues that she learned through the tour experience and how they personally affected her and her young children. When another

[279] YouTube comment, 2020. Accessed April 11, 2021.
[280] Tribe on a Quest, *Whitney Plantation // New Orleans with Kids*.
[281] YouTube comment, 2019. Accessed April 11, 2021.
[282] YouTube comment, 2019. Accessed April 11, 2021.
[283] YouTube comment, 2020. Accessed April 11, 2021.

person asks about the "heads," the vlogger goes in-depth about the memorial to the 1811 German Coast Uprising, remediating many memories from her tour for the virtual space. We also see this in comment sections of the other more personal vlogs, where the video creators can also engage with the audience in the comment section, rather than broadcasting a message like many of the news organizations. In a video uploaded by a couple that frequently vlogs titled "TOURING WHITNEY PLANTATION *THRU THE EYES OF THE SLAVES*," we see glimpses of the tour they received as well as the couple's immediate reactions to and reflections upon the site.[284] The comment section is a mix of conversations about the "messed up" nature of wedding plantations, how others felt about the plantation when they visited, and reactions to the video and the couple.[285] Similar to the ways that the responses to the vlogs about Sachsenhausen were often shaped by the video creator's choices in what they portray and how they portray it, this video is also about the couple's relationship, and the many comments about how "cute" the couple is or people's hopes that the couple will stay together are a direct response to that aspect of the video. A third interesting video, which is not necessarily a vlog, is titled "IUIC PRESENTS | HORRORS OF THE WHITNEY PLANTATION | DOCUMENTARY."[286] It was created by a religious organization called Israel United in Christ, and in the video, individuals combine a tour of the Whitney with spiritual teaching, drawing connections between the Bible and what they learn about the site. The comments show attempts to process the memory at the plantation alongside religious commentary. One person notes, "The video is great but a little ironic. Only because I do not believe in the bible. Slavery was bad and the bible is still a source of bondage."[287] Many others try to reconcile the narrative of slavery at the Whitney with religious

[284] Jevan Vlogs, *TOURING WHITNEY PLANTATION *THRU THE EYES OF THE SLAVES**.
[285] YouTube comment, 2021. Accessed April 11, 2021.
[286] IUIC Documentaries, *IUIC PRESENTS | HORRORS OF THE WHITNEY PLANTATION | DOCUMENTARY*.
[287] YouTube comment, 2019. Accessed April 11, 2021.

narratives. The comment section of this particular video also contains more Holocaust denial and racist and homophobic comments relative to the other vlogs capturing the site.

However, for the most part, the comments posted on these vlogs are sensitive and insightful, and people demonstrate a willingness to push their own personal education further as well as an understanding of how this history has traditionally been addressed in the United States and what needs to change. People share, “My grandmother was a slave, she wouldn't talk about it. Her sister would talk to us about what they encounter as a slave. Lord Have Mercy! We're still going through. Thanks for sharing this video it's very educational to our children's,”[288] and “I use to hate history because as it pertained to my people it was always about slavery...I view it differently now because I know who I am and why it happened.”[289] In another comment about the monuments at the Whitney, a person writes that “The angel statue holding the baby means so much. I've been watching a lot of plantation videos recently and I have never seen anything like her. I hope every single one of these people are finally resting comfortably after a lifetime of entrapment and pain.”[290] Lastly, we get comments that thank and commend the video creators for sharing these sites with a wider audience. As one person writes, “It takes courage to directly and honestly examine our (relatively recent) history. Your on-location narration is genuine and comes across with compassion. I'm white guy from Boston, pretty far from Louisiana, but your video is quite powerful. We all need to understand our shared history, the good and the bad, if we want our country to thrive, improve, and fulfill its promise.”[291]

Twitter: The Whitney

[288] YouTube comment, 2020. Accessed April 11, 2021.
[289] YouTube comment, 2019. Accessed April 11, 2021.
[290] YouTube comment, 2020. Accessed April 11, 2021.
[291] YouTube comment, 2019. Accessed April 11, 2021.

From December 2020 to April 2021, I also used Mention to monitor references to the Whitney Plantation on Twitter. I found that there are not necessarily hashtags or scripts for what people wrote about the site. There does not seem to be an obvious equivalent for #WeRemember or #NeverForget or any of the other hashtags that have become synonymous with Holocaust memorialization. There was no flood of posts about visits to slavery memorials on International Day of Remembrance of the Victims of Slavery and the Transatlantic Slave. However, the Whitney is brought up in conversations year-round, and it seems to have a reputation within the Twittersphere as one of the most significant sources of truth about slavery. That reputation is created not only through the Whitney's media efforts, but also the consistent remediation of the site on social media by tourists.

One Twitter user posted on October 6, 2020, "Visited Whitney Plantation in LA over the weekend. The experience was powerful given we often talk about slavery in the abstract. 2 key take aways: 1. We ARE our ancestors. They are still with us. 2. Refusing to educate yourself creates ur own prison. There are 0 excuses."[292] The post is accompanied by photographs of the front of the big house, the 1811 Slave Revolt Memorial by Woodrow Nash, and a slave cabin. An exchange follows when another person shares about a trip they took to Cuba. They write, "a guide brought us to a large cave where the cimarrons escaped to and lived. I felt in my bones that some of my people had been there. I was sobbing - and even now beyond words…I totally agree with you overall. Our history must not be abstract – when we can help it."[293] The author of the initial tweet empathizes with them, saying, "I took a lot from that plantation. There was about three times that tears came to my eyes, but an overwhelming feeling of gratitude for the amount

[292] Twitter post, October 6, 2020. Accessed April 12, 2021.
[293] Twitter post, October 6, 2020. Accessed April 12, 2021.

of strength and hope our people had will remain with me. That 'when we can help it' part matters. I hear you."[294] This exchange is not singular; there are many similar examples all over Twitter and other social media. These exchanges reflect the fleeting connections and momentary networks between people that are constantly created and then dissolved on social media, and they are part of this chaotic online memory culture. In a separate tweet, a person shares about their day at the Whitney on a self-guided tour, declaring that "it was one of the most profound experiences of my life. To know that my entire existence is built from that horror. I'll never be the same again."[295] Others re-affirm the "life-changing" experience of visiting the site or write about their plans to visit the site in the future.

On March 26, 2021, a picture of Georgia governor Brian Kemp signing a new voter suppression law circulated on social media. Twitter users immediately pointed out the fitting nature of the painting hanging over Kemp's head—a romanticized, lush rendering of Callaway Plantation—and how it represented Georgia's historical and contemporary white supremacy and "the new, new Jim Crow" that Kemp had signed into law.[296] More than one person suggests that "All anyone needs to do is to get themselves to the @WhitPlantation - as powerful as Auschwitz, in its way - to appreciate the symbolism of that piece of ... art behind Kemp."[297] According to another user, "There is only one plantation worth visiting: the Whitney Plantation, which tells the stories of the enslaved people who lived there. https://whitneyplantation.org."[298] These tweets reinforce the Whitney's status on Twitter as an exception to other plantations and a source of education and knowledge. "Go to the Whitney Plantation" appears again and again as advice or

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[294] Twitter post, October 6, 2020. Accessed April 12, 2021.
[295] Twitter post, January 30, 2021. Accessed April 12, 2021.
[296] Twitter post, March 26, 2021. Accessed April 12, 2021.
[297] Twitter post, March 26, 2021. Accessed April 12, 2021.
[298] Twitter post, March 27, 2021. Accessed April 12, 2021.

recommendation. Interestingly, social media and digital memorialization of the Whitney seem to work in service of the physical site. Official Holocaust memory was first rooted in the physical sites of memory before becoming digitized more recently, and institutions are still figuring out how to navigate and utilize digital media effectively. On the other hand, it seems that digital memory of slavery has developed alongside the commemorative sites, and social media is a platform where people call for the creation of more physical sites like the Whitney.

The Whitney is slowly re-shaping people's conceptions of plantations through social media. In response to an individual's post about their visit to the Whitney, one person simply writes "Plantation" with an emoji of a face with a monocle, which represents a questioning or skeptical attitude. However, another individual jumps in and quickly clarifies that "It's now a museum devoted to studying the institution of slavery and the enslaved of the American South. If I ever have kids, they will know this place."[299] When people suggest that the site should be burned down for being a plantation, the response they receive is, "No, the Whitney Plantation is set up as a monument to the slaves that suffered there. It tells their story in their own words. Nothing like those 'tourist' plantations."[300] Digital media tries to separate the Whitney from the other plantation sites. Tourists who visit plantations like the Whitney expecting a *Gone with the Wind*-esque romantic narrative of white Southern gentility are mocked, along with tourists who behave too much like tourists by, for example, taking selfies in front of memorials. However, at the same time, the Whitney *is* a "tourist plantation"; the site is designed for consumption by tourists through a guided experience. Twitter accounts dedicated to promoting tourism in Louisiana post about the Whitney Plantation, urging people to visit, and the front page of the

[299] Twitter post, December 10, 2020. Accessed April 12, 2021.
[300] Twitter post, June 25, 2020. Accessed April 12, 2021.

Whitney Plantation website (whitneyplantation.org) displays a badge awarded from TripAdvisor for being the "#1 Thing To Do In Wallace, Louisiana!" The Whitney is embedded within the glamorous plantation tourism industry, advertised alongside the other plantations on Louisiana's River Road, but it tries to subvert the dominant narrative from within. Because of its focus on the enslaved victims rather than the enslaving perpetrators, the Whitney is frequently compared to sites like Auschwitz on Twitter, which then leads us to the question of whether the Whitney is a site of dark tourism.

However, digital media creates space to engage with these issues and for redefining our notions of what a plantation is. It is a space where people can debate the utility of such sites, and where a tweet that says, "I'm torn. I have family down that way, and if I ever got the chance to go, I would like to see the mansions and plantations, for their historical beauty. Yet knowing the history, and being the sort who would have to take the slave tours, would I still see them as beautiful?"[301] can exist right next to a tweet that says, "Babies slaughtered, men and women hunted for sport, raped for fun, and tortured. Experiments performed with no anesthesia....these are the kind of things that happened on plantations."[302] Perhaps the answers will never emerge, but the important thing is that these different viewpoints and contributions will continue to emerge on Twitter and other social media day after day.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

Over the past few years, digital memory studies have seen a shift in focus from sites to dynamics. As this thesis explored the history and present-day landscape of German and

[301] Twitter post, February 1, 2021. Accessed April 12, 2021.
[302] Twitter post, February 1, 2021. Accessed April 12, 2021.

American memorialization, it ended up following a very similar trajectory. We started in Oranienburg, Germany, where the Sachsenhausen Memorial and Museum has been in operation since 1993. The site's history as a Nazi concentration camp (1936-1945) and then Soviet special camp (1945-1950) complicated efforts to transform the site into a memorial. When the newly-formed German Democratic Republic took over the site in 1950, they made the first attempt. The GDR's Sachsenhausen National Memorial opened in 1961. During this time, we can see how memorialization is tied to state identity. The concentration camp memorial played a major role in the development of the East German national identity, and the site was carefully curated to balance both overcoming the Nazi past and meeting East Germany's political needs, regardless of whether they conflicted with the needs of other groups, such as victims' organizations. Exhibits and monuments like the massive Tower of Nations were placed on the site to project a primary message of Communist triumph and anti-fascism. In 1990, however, the GDR dissolved as Germany was reunified, and the Sachsenhausen National Memorial was replaced with the Sachsenhausen Memorial and Museum in 1993. This second memorial site deals with the site's complicated history through a decentralized concept and addresses many of the shortcomings of the GDR site, such as the exclusion of victims who were not imprisoned for political reasons and the heavy emphasis on war and resistance rather than the suffering and mourning. Interestingly, the present-day site still maintains the GDR era monuments as one of its layers of memory, and the memorial site transparently and critically reflects upon its own development as a memorial site in the exhibit "From Memory to Monument."

The next chapter focused on the Whitney Plantation Museum in Wallace, Louisiana in the United States, which was founded by Ambroise Heidel in 1752 and then passed through generations of the Heidel/Haydel family until the Civil War. The Haydels enslaved people to

produce indigo and then sugar. After the Civil War, it continued to operate as a sugar-producing plantation with wage laborers instead of enslaved laborers. The site was eventually acquired by a petrochemical company that wanted to build a rayon company, but the desires of environmentalists and historical preservationists successfully campaigned against it. The company, Formosa Chemicals, commissioned a survey on the site, and the findings regarding the site's historical involvement with slavery were interesting to the next owner, John Cummings, who used his own wealth to turn the plantation into a plantation museum with a sole focus on the lives of the enslaved over 15 years. The Whitney Plantation re-opened in 2014 as the purported first slavery museum in the United States. It was uniquely situated as a plantation museum, due to the traditional focus of plantation museums on the glamorous, romanticized lifestyles of slaveowners and the omission or misrepresentations of slavery commonly perpetuated.

The discussions of these two sites reveal that sites of atrocity and suffering can be transformed into sites of memory, and sometimes two sites of memory, through very different means. Sachsenhausen's transformation was inextricably tied to German state identity. On the other hand, the Whitney's transformation can largely be attributed to one person who did not possess any direct tie to slavery. The two stories show that the people behind memorialization are motivated by contemporary interests and communicate their own values and interpretations of the past through the memorials, and the memory at the sites is subjective. The tension between perpetrator memory and victim memory arises when the sites must determine what to do with sites of perpetrators, how to represent experiences of victims that are unfathomable, and how to handle situations where the line between perpetrator and victim is less clear cut. The designers of memorial sites also have to negotiate between representation and authenticity when they make decisions about what to preserve, recreate, and make. We find that the authenticity commonly

associated with historic sites such as former concentration camps and former plantations is perhaps more curated and spurious than visitors would expect, but that is not necessarily a negative thing. The Sachsenhausen Memorial's transparency about the processes of memorialization reflects a different kind of authenticity that is necessary in a world where all memory is mediated.

Which memories become part of collective memory seems to depend largely on who has the power and means to enforce their narrative. However, throughout this paper, we have seen that collective memory, especially in the digital era, is more complex than that. Institutions try to enforce certain narratives, but others can also construct their own versions of memory. The first half of this paper focused primarily on the memory makers at traditional sites of memory, but the second half leaned further into the idea of memorialization as a process by considering the role of visitors at these sites, or memory consumers, and how they contribute to memorialization, especially in an increasingly digitized world. I introduced the concept of the counter-monument to show some of the limitations of traditional monuments, and then I illustrated how social media can act as a form of counter-monument that is constantly being constructed by many people and that acts as a social mirror. In particular, the "prosumers" of memory who remediate memory from sites like the Sachsenhausen Memorial and Whitney Plantation contribute to a fast-paced and fluid memory culture. The social media memorialization of the Holocaust and slavery is constantly changing and allows for multiple different narratives to exist in the same space, so it is difficult to fully characterize. However, I described some trends and themes to paint a picture of the digital memory landscape.

The COVID-19 pandemic forced many sites of memory to suddenly adapt to and explore options for virtual memorialization.[303] However, even before the global pandemic was announced in March 2020, institutions and individuals were developing new technological means for memorialization. The pandemic only accelerated processes that had already begun. Some groups have been working on developing extremely technologically advanced tools, such as three-dimensional holograms of Holocaust survivors,[304] while others have developed controversial Holocaust video games.[305] In an article focused specifically on Holocaust institutions' use of social media during the pandemic, Tobias Ebbrecht-Hartmann discusses how "established analogue commemorative modes" can be transformed and transferred into social media environments.[306] As I discussed in the chapter on digital Holocaust memory, memorials were present on social media platforms before the pandemic but mostly used social media simply to broadcast messages or disseminate well-establish narratives or images in their collections.[307] Ebbrecht-Hartmann argues that such sites are becoming more experimental with their virtual memorialization, combining "digital aesthetics and formats such as the selfie perspective, video diaries, and influencer videos, and combin[ing] them with established approaches to teaching and learning about the Holocaust."[308] He also touches on the development of virtual tours and digital videos. What I believe is missing in his discussion, however, is the recognition that other users on social media were participating in this kind of experimental virtual memorialization even before the pandemic.

303 Ebbrecht-Hartmann, "Commemorating from a Distance."
304 Kansteiner, "Transnational Holocaust Memory, Digital Culture and the End of Reception Studies," 320.
305 Ibid, 311.
306 Ebbrecht-Hartmann, "Commemorating from a Distance," 14.
307 Kansteiner, "The Holocaust in the 21st Century," 123.
308 Ebbrecht-Hartmann, "Commemorating from a Distance," 14.

As the pandemic is slowly brought under control and we shift back to in-person functions, it will be interesting to see which digital developments we continue using. Virtual tours seem like a viable candidate. While they cannot replace the in-person tour experience, as the Twitter conversation about the Auschwitz-Birkenau virtual tour indicates, they do reach distant audiences and serve as an excellent, accessible learning tool. In addition, with institutions becoming more active in the digital sphere, rather than simply broadcasting their messages for users to consume, perhaps memorial sites can employ more open forums and audience participation to give their online and in-person visitors a chance to produce memory and make meaning of the past for themselves. And in turn, hopefully, we will see even more fruitful, participatory, and lasting dialogue around the Holocaust and slavery across physical and digital environments, fulfilling James Young's dream of the ideal memorial.

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Biography

Amanda Hua was born in London, Ontario on March 5, 1999 and grew up primarily in Houston, Texas. She enrolled in the Plan II Honors program at the University of Texas at Austin in 2017 and also studied psychology, social work, and German. In the summer of 2019, she studied abroad in Würzburg, Germany, where the idea for this thesis first took root. After graduating from UT in May 2021, she plans on continuing her studies to become a clinical social worker.