

Reflections after the Holocaust Museum

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The museum itself is great – I took lots of pictures, but I won't include ones that I'm not citing/referencing specifically in this writeup. If you're able to go to Washington DC at some point in your life, I highly recommend visiting it.

I liked that they added the leadups to the Holocaust - how Hitler gained power, the historical shenanigans and mistakes that happened (the treaty of versailles, the unhappy citizens, and the fire that Hitler blamed on communists which he somehow used to get himself emergency dictator powers), and the injustices that people let slide right before the war itself. A lot of it sounds disturbingly familiar - the police having ultimate power and just searching people randomly, the Nazis getting everyone to boycott Jewish goods to impoverish the Jewish people and make it easier to discriminate against them (which got people to do violence against random Jewish people), the burnings of Jewish books and scientific books and gay books to "purify German culture", Jewish shops being forced to close down and Jewish kids getting expelled from public schools (anti-trans laws in public schools)

I'm also glad that they included the ineffectual halfhearted attempts to stop everything prior to the holocaust. Within Germany, the Jewish community tried to solve everything within the law and with fair trial, which of course doesn't work when the Law itself is working against you.

America's response was even more upsetting. Jewish people were leaving Germany for obvious reasons, but they had to go somewhere. Roosevelt made an international conference and said "hey y'all don't actually gotta let that many immigrants in", and proceeded to let barely any refugees into the country. I wonder where that could possibly be happening in America today???

America in general was dropping the ball into the gutter - when Nazi Germany was hosting the Olympics, the logical (and right) thing would've been to boycott it and not go. One of the best ways to show a country that you won't tolerate what they're doing (besides attacking them) is to refuse to participate in the ultimate symbol of unity across the world. Jewish officials told the US not to go, but the US went anyway. We thought it was a win for us 'cause Jesse Owens, a Black American, got a lot of medals, which disproved Nazi ideology, but it actually *helped* the Nazis because (surprise) one of the biggest TV-watching nations in the world was broadcasted the streets of Nazi Germany in the Olympics and, of course, they cleaned everything up and made sure everything looked perfectly fine, which ended up helping the Nazi's image in the eyes of the world, and further doomed the Jewish population.

They also included the other groups that the Nazis oppressed and killed. Communists, unionists, liberals, and pacifists were arrested which is hilarious. Why would you arrest a pacifist. They, by definition, don't pose a threat to anyone. They also went after Roma and homosexuals, regarding homosexuals as sexual/biological degenerates. Incidentally, that's also part of the reason why I don't like dismissing people as sexual degenerates. Interestingly, homosexual males were imprisoned in concentration camps way more than lesbians?? I have no idea what to do with this - it was just part of the exhibit.

I do appreciate that Freud's and Einstein's confrontations with the Holocaust were included, along with photos. Intellectually, I know that they were alive during that time period, but internally, they're part of a different time period/era for me. Including them helps collapse my internal timeline, if that makes sense.

When Germany was taking over Poland, they imprisoned the Polish people and used their people for slave labor, but what they did afterwards is very telling. The Nazis cut off their education, preventing them from taking schooling higher than fourth grade and discouraging teaching them how to read. It really tells you that these fascists know how easily their ideologies fall apart in the face of simple critical thinking and literacy

The Ghettos that Germany made to place their impoverished Jewish population into are a clear precursor to the actual concentration camps that'd come later. Impoverishing a demographic you want to get rid of, making low quality mega-cheap housing to put all of them in one place, and then using the correlation between the demographic and low-quality dangerous areas to further discriminate against that demographic and justify using them as a "source of inexpensive labor" feels very, very familiar

Over the gate to an Auschwitz, there was inscription that says "Work will make you free", which feels like something you'd find over a prison in the US or something a boss would say to someone to justify corporate capitalism.

They also, of course, included the actual atrocities of the Holocaust. All the fucked up medical experiments, the gas chambers, getting literally worked to death, the train - all of it was there. There was also a room where you could listen to people's audio-verbal accounts of what they went through in the Auschwitz. One of the things that stood out to me was that they shaved the heads of the people entering the Auschwitz and about to be gassed. I assumed that it was just another way that the Nazis dehumanized the Jewish people and made it easier to do war crimes to them, along with being a parallel to the way the US treats its imprisoned population. It probably was, but it turns out that they also **sold** the bags of hair and used them to make slippers and other shit.

I don't know why this detail stands out to me. It's, arguably, the biggest show of how much the Nazis have dehumanized the Jewish people, literally scrapping them down for parts like you would a broken car or toaster. But we already knew how much the Nazis dehumanized the Jewish people. I think it's because it's a lot closer to the way you'd treat a broken machine/robot than the other atrocities. I still need to think about it more.

There were heroes - good people, who put themselves at extreme risk to help the Jewish people and everyone else the Nazis were targeting, but it clearly wasn't enough. There were plenty of good people - in the museum, there's a room that just has a wall full of names and stories of the way these heroes tried to help the people persecuted by the Nazis, but it obviously wasn't enough. We needed countries and systems to act against the Nazis but, as we went over earlier, the US' response (especially at the beginning) was pathetic.

I do also appreciate that they included what happened after the war. One of the most upsetting details is that people still died after they were freed from the concentration camps. People didn't really understand what happens when you feed someone who's spent an extended period essentially starving to death. The answer is that they die. They die because their bodies can't handle all that food. I think this detail affects me a lot because they were freed - the bad guys were dead and the good guys won, but these guys who were undoubtedly feeling awesome and free at last just died for the stupidest reason.

In general, I think the way that everything was handled after the war was upsetting. I'm against the death penalty, and wary against prison sentences that're longer than a year. But if there's a time to use the harshest sentences,

this is the time. And they just... didn't. People got away scot-free or with a lot of leniency - more leniency than I feel like the current justice system would give to a black person caught stealing like 3 dollars' worth of stuff from a Walmart.

Another upsetting post-war thing is that, after Nazi Germany fell, antisemitism was still widespread in Europe. There were anti-Jewish riots, discrimination, and violent mobs in Poland. I feel like I had more faith that, after the most visible and most ultimate evil in the world had shown its true face and taught people what the word "genocide" meant, people would question any piece of rhetoric/ideology that they shared with that ultimate evil. But they didn't. They still thought they were in the right. And that disgusts me. Non-Jewish victims also remained persecuted - the Roma people and homosexuals, most notably.

This thing irked me, but I don't know if it was supposed to irk me. One of the things they showed off was a poster that one of the Jewish agencies helping displaced victims of the Holocaust put out, urging those people to learn a trade and contribute to society. I think it pisses me off because these guys went through unimaginable trauma and witnessed more death than should be physically, morally, and socially possible. And now you're telling them to get a fucking job?



The US also threw *again* by balking on its immigration laws. The US would've been a *great* place to go, but the immigration laws in place were "flagrantly discriminatory against Jews", as President Truman put it. Which is why all the Jews went to Israel. So, in a sense, the mess happening in Palestine is largely on the US.

They also had an extra temporary exhibit at the end of the main Holocaust exhibit - one about the genocide happening in Burma/Myanmar against the Rohingya. And it's interesting seeing the rhetoric that the perpetrators use to justify violence against the Rohingya. It's unsurprisingly similar to the rhetoric a certain presidential candidate is using against "illegal immigrants". It's weird because, in this new age where everyone has a video camera and a microphone on them at all times, you'd think that governments wouldn't be able to get away with doing the holocaust **again**, but here we are. Technologically, everything's different, but nothing's really changed.