



“To the crematorium”: postwar U.S. tourism to West German concentration camps and beyond

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Abstract

For a long time since the end of the Second World War, the memory of concentration camps influenced U.S. public views on Germany. When in the late 1940s Americans could travel to West Germany again, a new tourist industry brought West Germany, and with-it Germany’s recent past, closer to the U.S. American public. This article investigates the renewed travel interest of Americans in West Germany with a special focus on former concentration camp sites. It demonstrates the importance of tourism in creating new cultural ties, the ways in which U.S. tourism to the camps established a memory of the Second World War, and how these narratives influenced German-American relations. In newspaper articles, visitors to West Germany shared their experiences, attitudes, and challenges upon visiting the former concentration camp sites and through those interactions made sense of the war and their own position in the postwar world order.

Keywords Postwar tourism · German-American relations · U.S. second world war memory · Postwar Germany · Concentration camp memorials

An article in the July 1947 edition of *Life* magazine introduced its cover story with the words: “Old Heidelberg on the banks of the winding Neckar, with its air of *Gemütlichkeit* and its ancient university.”¹ The cover of the magazine depicted postwar Germany in all its glory, with castle ruins and rolling woods behind a young American couple in the foreground wearing typical German *Lederhosen* and white stockings. As children of the local occupying forces, these two American teenagers explored the land of the former enemy with joy and serenity. Their experience at *Heidelberg High* was devoid of the devastation, ruin, and difficulties of the war-torn

¹ “Life Visits ‘Heidelberg High,’” *Life*, July 21, 1947, 92.

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Germany. Instead, idealized visions of Germany sought to draw visitors to a resurgent nation.

Already in 1947, U.S. citizens rediscovered Germany, and later West Germany, as a tourist destination which *Life* now advertised as a place of a rich historical past and a worthwhile stop on a European vacation. It seemed unbelievable that only two years earlier U.S. readers had flipped through pages of photographs showing mass atrocities at Nazi concentration camps in the very same magazine.² Pictures of Dachau, Bergen Belsen, or Buchenwald had shocked American readers and made these places recognizable in the U.S. public's mind as symbols of Nazi German atrocities. War heroes returning from the European front told stories of unimaginable brutalities, suffering, and death at the liberated camps. The intense news coverage of 1945, which had given the American public horrific images of death and inhumanity, had left a lasting and powerful impression. Yet, commencing in the late 1940s, Germany had to be rebuilt, lastingly appeased, and politically reintegrated into Europe.

This article engages with the revival of transatlantic tourism to West Germany and the ways in which tourism affected postwar German-American encounters. The research focuses on the ways in which American tourists engaged with, discussed and reflected upon the recent Nazi atrocities. Despite the profound impact of the liberation narrative on the perspectives of American tourists at concentration camp memorials, their experiences did not result in a negative shift in opinion towards Germany. Instead, a new postwar world prompted tourists to reframe the Nazi atrocities in light of evolving geopolitical dynamics during the early Cold War. This essay illustrates how tourists were one group of actors that shaped postwar German-American relations and the remembrance of Nazi atrocities, both at the initial encounters at the camps and beyond.

Since the sources on early postwar tourism to Nazi concentration camp are scarce, newspaper articles, travel guides, and individual experiences shared in news reports or memoirs constitute vital source material to study visitor experiences at the memorial sites. Newspapers for this article include the *New York Times*, *Christian Science Monitor*, *Commentary*, *Life Magazine*, *The Jewish Advocate*, *The St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, and the *Ohio Daily Express*, stretching from the end of the 1940s to the end of the 1950s. They are complemented by two travel guidebooks – *Fodor* and *Newmans European Travel Guide*. The former was the only guidebook in the early 1950s dedicated solely to West Germany. The second was a guidebook that was published on a regular basis and that included West Germany among other European

² After the liberation in 1945, images of the concentration camps dominated all major newspapers for a few weeks confronting the U.S. public with the atrocities perpetrated by the Nazi regime. See "Atrocities," *Life Magazine*, (May 7, 1945). For secondary literature see: Robert Abzug, *Inside the Vicious Heart: Americans and the Liberation of Nazi Concentration Camps* (New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985); Cornelia Brink, *Ikonen der Vernichtung: Zum öffentlichen Gebrauch von Fotografien aus Nationalsozialistischen Konzentrationslagern nach 1945* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2016), John C. McManus, *Hell Before Their Very Eyes: American Soldiers Liberate Concentration Camps in Germany, April 1945* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press 2015); Barbie Zelizer, *Remembering to Forget: Holocaust Memory through the Camera's Eye* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1998).



countries. It therefore presents a comparative basis for analysing what guidebooks informed incoming tourists about and how this information changed over time.

Early tourism to concentration camp memorial sites has thus far been underrepresented in literature. Generally, according to the current state of research, the works on (West) German tourism either deal with travels of Germans abroad, with tourism before or during the National Socialist era, or with the phenomenon of mass tourism in the late 20th and early twenty-first centuries.³ In this context, the literature often sidelines the early postwar period as one of comparatively little touristic activity, thereby ignoring the impact this period and the memories of the war reverberating in it had on touristic experiences. What is more, while tourism to concentration camp memorials is receiving increasing attention, studies in the transatlantic and international context are sparse, which ignores the potential such a perspective has for understanding how memories and impressions formed touristic experiences across regions and borders.⁴

Rudy Koshar's work, *German Travel Cultures*, represents a significant contribution to the field of German tourism. By employing historical travel guidebooks, Koshar is able to integrate cultural, political, and global developments into the narrative of German tourism over time.⁵ The decision of a nation to erect memorials and thereby the choice of which historical moments to remember is frequently influenced by political considerations rather than public desire, according to James E. Young.⁶ Habbo Knoch's study not only considers the physical space of memorials but also acknowledges their role as repositories of artefacts, catalysts for original research projects, containers for archives, museums, and learning sites. Knoch

³ Derek Dalton, *Encountering Nazi Tourism Sites* (New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis, 2020); Karl-Heinz Füssl, *Deutsch-Amerikanischer Kulturaustausch im 20. Jahrhundert* (New York: Campus Verlag, 2004); Rudi Hartmann, "Tourism to Memorial Sites of the Holocaust," *The Palgrave Handbook of Dark Tourism Studies* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 469–507; Wiebke Kolbe, *Geschichtstourismus: Theorie—Praxis—Berufsfelder* (Stuttgart: utb, 2022); Daniela Mysliwicz-Fleiß and Angela Schwarz, ed., *Reisen in Die Vergangenheit: Geschichtstourismus Im 19. Und 20. Jahrhundert* (Köln: Böhlau Verlag, 2019); Diane Popescu, ed. *Visitor Experience at Holocaust Memorials and Museums* (New York: Routledge, 2023); Adam T. Rosenbaum, *Bavarian Tourism and the Modern World, 1800–1950* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016); Hasso Spode, *Goldstrand und Teutonengrill: Kultur- und Sozialgeschichte des Tourismus in Deutschland 1945 bis 1989* (Berlin: Moser, 1996).

⁴ See also: Daniel P. Reynolds, *Postcards from Auschwitz: Holocaust Tourism and the Meaning of Remembrance* (New York City: NYU Press, 2018).

⁵ See also: Christopher Endy, *Cold War Holidays: American Tourism in France* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004); Koshar, *German Travel Cultures Leisure*; Rudy Koshar, "'What ought to be seen': Tourists' Guidebooks and National Identities in Modern Germany and Europe." *Journal of Contemporary History*, Jul. 1998. Vol. 33 No. 3, 323–340; John Urry, *The Tourist Gaze: Leisure and Travel in Contemporary Societies* (London: Sage, 1990).

⁶ James E. Young, *The Texture of Memory: Holocaust Memorials and Meaning* (Yale University Press, 1993). See also: Andreas Huyssen, "Monument and Memory in a Postmodern Age," *The Yale Journal of Criticism* 6, no. 2 (1993): 249–262 and Kirk Savage, *Monument Wars: Washington, D.C., the National Mall, and the Transformation of the Memorial Landscape* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009).



conceptualizes memorials as institutions that are dedicated to commemorating and acknowledging the victims of state-sponsored violence.⁷

The edited volume by Frank Bajohr, Axel Dreccoll, and John Lennon is a more recent contribution to the study of tourism. It specifically engages with the contemporary developments of dark tourism at concentration and death camp memorials. The volume focuses on the significance and experiences of visitors to these sites.⁸ Almost a decade before, Lennon and Foley's publication defined dark tourism as "phenomena [...] to signify a fundamental shift in the way in which death, disaster and atrocity are being handled by those who offer associated tourism 'products'." In their study, the authors identify dark tourism as a product of late modernity, both as a phenomenon that is shaped by and exerts influence over this period.⁹ Both works examine the occurrence of tourist interest in sites of death as a novel form of tourism that has been both encouraged and facilitated by modern media and modern travel opportunities. But like Doreen Pastor's approach that criticizes the dominating research of dark tourism in connection to concentration camps as too simplistic as many memorials were future-oriented towards "truth and reconciliation," this article neglects dark tourism.¹⁰

The tourists who visited West Germany from the late 1940s to the 1950s expressed a diverse range of interests in their travels that were, at times, contradictory. The desire to romanticize and idealize a prewar image of Germany, coupled with a profound anxiety about the country's destruction, shaped the experiences of these tourists. What was the response of American visitors to this dichotomy within Germany? They sought to observe the exuberant and well-fed Germans in *Lederhosen*, but also wanted to see the starving German people and the sites of atrocities. While visitors from the United States primarily enjoyed romanticized versions of West Germany, the concentration camps transformed from Nazi prisoner camps to memorial sites.¹¹ Concentration camp sites now represented new forms of inhumanity, prompting visitors to reflect on the meanings of humanity and to come to terms with their own understandings thereof.

⁷ Habbo Knoch, *Geschichte in Gedenkstätten: Theorie—Praxis—Berufsfelder* (München: Narr Francke Attempto Verlag, 2020).

⁸ Frank Bajohr, Axel Dreccoll, and J. John Lennon, ed., *Dark Tourism: Reisen zu Stätten von Krieg, Massengewalt und NS-Verfolgung* (Berlin: Metropol, 2020).

⁹ John J. Lennon and Malcolm Foley, *Dark Tourism: the Attraction of Death and Disaster* (Hampshire: Cengage Learning, 2000), 3.

¹⁰ Pastor, *Tourism and Memory: Visitor Experiences of the Nazi and GDR Past* (New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2022).

¹¹ Even though memorial sites located at Dachau or Bergen Belsen only in later years became state-run and educational institutions, early memorials existed at both sites before. Dachau memorial even provided a small, private run exhibition. The article thus engages with the beginning of the memorialization of Nazi concentration camps in Germany.



Early postwar U.S. travelers in Germany and at former Nazi concentration camps

From 1948 onward, the image and reputation of (West) Germany, then still under Allied occupation, changed, at home and abroad, from a war-shattered nation to a country on the economic rise. In *Life*, the two young Americans, who enjoyed the land of the former enemy, shifted the focus away from the destruction of German cities, the bustling “Trümmerfrauen,” German women who cleared the rubble, and the dire need for food in many German cities. The *Heidelberg High* article entertained the idea of discovering West Germany after years of war and to resume the Grand Tour to Europe, leaving much-needed U.S. dollars with their European friends.

For West Germany, tourism served to rekindle shattered ties and earn some money on the way. Following the reintroduction of international tourism to Germany in 1948, certain regions were better suited and more popular as tourist destinations than others. According to statistical data, the number of tourists visiting West Germany in the early 1950s was approximately one-third of the number recorded prior to the Second World War. However, the economy recovered rapidly, reaching prewar capacity by 1953. For example, Bavaria exhibited one of the most rapid growth rates in the tourism industry in West Germany.¹² This was to be expected when one considered that Bavaria not only lay within the U.S. American occupation zone but that, since the nineteenth century and the advent of commercialized tourism, Bavaria had become a consistent focus of international tourists.¹³

But tourists travelled to a Bavaria that was not always as picturesque as they may have thought, as demolished buildings made living conditions critical, food was in short supply, and the endless stream of refugees from the former German territories in Eastern Europe further aggravated the tense postwar situation. Yet, the Minister of Agriculture in Bavaria, Joseph Baumgartner, promised U.S. tourists coming to Bavaria that they should want for nothing. “The benefit accruing from the tourist trade will outweigh the drain on the Bavarian food supply,” he assured.¹⁴ Economic recovery ultimately improved German living conditions in the long run, taking greater importance over the availability of food, at least according to the Bavarian agricultural minister.

Not only did the Western Allied governments launch policies to stabilize Germany politically and socially, but they aimed to democratize, demilitarize, de-nazify, and re-educate (West) Germans. The Nuremberg and Dachau trials facilitated the implementation of denazification policies, which ultimately led to the German population being perceived as having undergone a process of redemption in the eyes of the American public.¹⁵ In the aftermath of the Nuremberg Trials, American

¹² Koshar, *German Travel Cultures*, 173.

¹³ Rosenbaum, *Bavarian Tourism and the Modern World*, 1.

¹⁴ “Bavaria seeks Tourists,” *The New York Times*, 02 June 02, 1947, 41.

¹⁵ Nikolaus Wachsmann, *KL: A History of the Nazi Concentration Camps* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux), 608. At the Nuremberg Trials from 1945 and 1946, the Allied prosecuted nineteen of the most high-ranking Nazi party members such as Reichsmarschall Herman Göring or highest-ranking SS leader Ernst Kaltenbrunner. During the Dachau Trials, the U.S. occupation forces prosecuted nearly one



policymakers assumed that Germany would be able to rehabilitate itself, given the country's presumed democratic tendencies. As a report by the *Office of Military Government for Germany, U.S.* (OMGUS) from 1946 stated: "And yet to write off the mass of postwar Germans as authoritarians and racists would most surely be an injustice." The report further stated that "the main finding of the extensive survey [...] is that most Germans had perspectives that were by and large democratic."¹⁶ In light of the recent atrocities, OMGUS nevertheless maintained the conviction that the planned denazification of Germany would ultimately prove successful. To prioritize the goals of democratization and re-education, the Allied trials and the country's post-war recovery received extensive media coverage. This presentation served to convey to the U.S. public the successful nature of the re-education efforts.¹⁷

By 1947/48, the looming Cold War accelerated the need to boost the German economy and to integrate it into an international community under U.S. hegemony – a community, in Detlef Junker's words, 'of security, values, production, consumption, information, leisure, travel, and entertainment.'¹⁸ Carrying the promise of furthering Germany's economic recovery, the tourist industry reconnected to a prewar tourist culture that had drawn on romanticized images of the country. In the early 1950s, U.S. media outlets and official reports chose to emphasize this long standing, traditional German culture, sidelining the recent traumatic past. To justify the rehabilitation efforts and many dollars spent, U.S. tourists helped to support official political aspirations of the U.S. on the European continent.

Referring to a growing closeness between Americans and Germans, *Heidelberg High* stated that "these postwar visitors are having at least as much effect on Heidelberg as Heidelberg has on them."¹⁹ A clear power dynamic characterized these early encounters between defater and defeated. The occupiers were to act as representatives of the values and ideals their government sought to instil in the former enemy by teaching them the ways of democracy. A pocket guide for U.S. soldiers compiled by the U.S. government in 1944 stated that as representatives of the United States, their duty was to reinforce democratic values: "Within the limits of your instructions against fraternization and intimacy, you can by your conduct give them a glimpse of life in a Democracy where no man is master of another, where the only limit of success is a man's own ability."²⁰ Originally targeting military personnel, the pocket

Footnote 15 (continued)

thousand SS perpetrators of concentration camp related crimes. Starting in 1945, the trials lasted up until 1947.

¹⁶ Anna J. Merritt, Richard L. *Public Opinion in Occupied Germany – The OMGU.S. Surveys, 1945–1949*. (University of Illinois Press, 1970), 40–41.

¹⁷ Susan L. Carruthers, *The Good Occupation: American Soldiers and the Hazards of Peace* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2016), 3.

¹⁸ Detlef Junker, "Introduction: Politics, Security, Economics, Culture, and Society – Dimensions of Transatlantic Relations" in *The United States and Germany in the era of the Cold War, 1945–1990: A Handbook: Volume 1: 1945–1968*, ed. Detlef Junker (Cambridge: Cambridge, 2004), 3.

¹⁹ "Life Visits 'Heidelberg High'," 92.

²⁰ United States. Army Service Forces. Information and Education Division. Pocket Guide to Germany. Prepared by Army Information Branch, Army Service Forces, United States Army. United States. Government Printing Office, 1944. 3.



guide came to be frequently used by U.S. tourists until *Fodor* published the first comprehensive tourist guidebook to postwar West Germany, *Fodor's Germany*, in 1953.²¹

Shortly after the *Life* article, tourist travel to West Germany recommenced. U.S. tourists entered the country with the great confidence of having become a global political power after the Second World War. No longer did Americans entertain feelings of inferiority towards Germans and their intimidating cultural legacy. If anything, the atrocities had proven the superiority of U.S. values in sustaining individual dignity and human rights at large.

After years of war and the Great Depression, a longing for normalcy encouraged U.S. Americans to plan a long European vacation. To some, the rubble of the cities in Western Germany had a particularly adventurous appeal. As one New York City travel agency advertised a vacation to Germany in 1953, it may be the “last chance to see the ruins.”²² The tourist’s interest in West Germany was therefore twofold: on the one hand, Germany remained a high-cultured country of beauty and natural splendour that was worth a prolonged visit. On the other, a sense of sensation-mongering of the ruins in Germany became part of the package.

Many tourists’ interest reverberated in the travel culture to the country that had already developed before the war. In the 1920s and 1930s, international tourism to Germany had experienced a period of significant growth. Initially, it was a predominantly elitist or middle-class pursuit, but it gradually shifted towards a new form of mass tourism. Even during the years of the Hitler regime, the prewar tourist economy was lucrative in many places. The Nazi regime used tourism from abroad to support the economy and to display the extraordinarily positive change of the country after seizing power in 1933.²³ It thereby portrayed the normalcy of the country and the stabilizing effect that had come with totalitarian rule, while concealing the growing violence within that would soon be directed outside.²⁴

An important theme in Nazi travel propaganda, according to Rudy Koshar, was the *Autobahn*. During the 1930s, *Volkswagen* became the face of German innovation. In Berlin, the city highway *Avus* was a “tourist sensation” and a “signature of the fast-moving, gleaming modernity of the German capital.”²⁵ During the 1930s many regarded Germany as leading in modernization and technological advancement. After the war, this was highlighted at the *New York Museum of Science and Industry*, where a trade display exhibited “pre-war items” in a “German show.”²⁶ The exhibition, held in April 1949 during the Berlin blockade and airlift and sponsored by the U.S. military government, showcased not only manufacturers from West Germany seeking to rebuild business ties with the United States but also the

²¹ Koshar, *German Travel Cultures*, 33.

²² Hermann Eich, *Die Unheimlichen Deutschen* (Berlin: Dt. Buch-Gemeinschaft, 1964), 329–30.

²³ Koshar, *German Travel Cultures*, 116–8.

²⁴ Elisabeth Piller, “Managing Imponderables: The Rise of U.S. Tourism and the Transformation of German Diplomacy, 1890–1933,” *Diplomatic History* 44,1 (2020), 48.

²⁵ Koshar, *German Travel Cultures*, 117–8.

²⁶ William Conklin, “Pre-War Items set for German Show – Trade Display here in April to Include Volkswagen, Toys, Wood-Carvings, Beer, Wine,” *The New York Times*, 23 February 1949, 2.



new *Volkswagen*, which was presented as a means of encouraging a road trip on the renowned *Autobahn* through Germany, with the aim of evoking positive memories. The products that were advertised, such as cars, beer, and toys produced in Nuremberg, fostered specific prewar stereotypes, excluding the viciousness of the Nazi regime's atrocities.²⁷

The display of German goods was not an isolated occurrence, but rather part of a broader postwar trend in consumer capitalism within the United States. Following the conclusion of the war, tourism not only facilitated the renewal of social relations with Europe but also contributed to the narrowing of the 'dollar gap,' which resulted from the substantial demand for U.S. products and the subsequent inability of U.S. factories to fulfil this demand independently. As Lizabeth Cohen notes, economists in the United States endorsed mass consumption as a tool to promote prosperity following the war.²⁸ In particular, consumer goods served as a conduit for the expenditure of U.S. dollars, while simultaneously facilitating the exportation of certain U.S. American values. In essence, a consumer's decision was that of a democratic citizen.²⁹ Opening the West German market for tourism and consumption ensured a growing influence of U.S. products and a demonstration of individual freedoms.

The trade display in New York City, the increased travels to Europe and Germany, as well as a growing attention by popular media such as *Life* demonstrate a continuing interest of Americans to rebuild former ties with the soon-to-be ally. For very diverse reasons, Germany prompted curiosity among oversea travellers: A certain prewar sentimentality motivated visitors to cross the Atlantic while the destruction of the country and the process of rebuilding fostered a sense of immediacy to history-making.

During the 1950s, the number of tourists from the United States visiting Germany increased steadily, nearly doubling in this period. The number of overnight stays by U.S. tourists rose from 400,000 in 1951 to over a million in 1956.³⁰ Newspapers captured the growing allure of West Germany. In 1952, *The Travel Agent* stated that "Germany is back to Her Pre-War Status as an Important Tourist Attraction." The article further stated that "Germany *is* doing everything to encourage the tourist trade" and the Germans "put all their famous organizational talents into play to cooperate with travel agents to attract visitors."³¹ Again, the article connected to pre-war stereotypes of German effectiveness and emphasized its positive rather than negative outcomes.

²⁷ Conklin, "Pre-War Items set for German Show."

²⁸ Lisbeth Cohen, *A Consumer's Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America* (New York: Random House, 2003), 114.

²⁹ Shelly Baranowski, *Strength Through Joy: Consumerism and Mass Tourism in the Third Reich* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 234.

³⁰ International travel statistics: Published on behalf of the International Union of Official Travel Organizations Research and Organization Commission by the British Travel and Holidays Association, Geneva, Switzerland: International Union of Official Travel Organizations, Technical Commission on Research, vol. 1957, Library of Congress, G149.I73.

³¹ "Germany is back To Her Pre-War Status As An Important Tourist Attraction," *The Travel Agent*, Jan 10, 1952, 20.



Similar sentiments are observable in early travel guides. For example, *Newman's European Travel Guide* published in the early 1950s, provided information on German destinations. According to its foreword, the guide was intended as a “handbook of suggestions” that ought to “save your time, help your budget, minimize your annoyance and increase your enjoyment.”³² The introduction to Western Germany thus stated that despite the fact that there were four occupation zones, there was “from a tourist standpoint, really only two: the Russian zone in the east, where travel is virtually prohibited; and the American, British and French zones.” It further specified that “Tourists now will find the advisable to travel only in Bavaria, the Black Forest and the Rhineland.” As these had also been popular tourist destinations before the war, *Newman's* here followed the same trend as *The Travel Agent* and connected postwar travel to pre-war romanticization. To no surprise, these were the dominant regions covered by the guide along with tips for transportation, currency, hotels, meals, and drinks.³³

Concurrently, the guide reinforced the dichotomy between the country's romantic pre-war image and its post-war devastation. Of particular note are the introductions to West Germany in the 1950 and 1951 editions of *Newman's*, which demonstrated a shift in the narratives on the country. The 1950 edition stated about Western Germany that it “is seeking a resumption of its tourist trade, but the average traveller will find little enjoyment in its devastated cities and its limited facilities.”³⁴ *Newman's* 1951 initial pages regarding West Germany varied considerably from that of 1950. It highlighted Germany's “picturesque towns, its scenic countryside, and its good hotels and meals.”³⁵ In just one year, *Newman's* underwent a substantial shift in its perception of West Germany's travel value, in 1951 conforming with the official efforts to integrate Germany into a Western sphere of influence.

Reflecting on the continuing change in the tourist economy, *Fodor* published a first comprehensive U.S. travel book dedicated only to postwar Germany in 1953.³⁶ In essence, *Fodor's* travel guide reflected the politically and publicly endorsed image of a rehabilitated and reintegrated West Germany, directing tourists to ‘traditional’ West German travel destinations. Its to-do list for Munich and Dachau, however, also illustrated how the guide began addressing Germany's recent past. Still, the guide addressed Dachau's pre-1930s culture. According to the guidebook, Dachau “was notorious for the concentration camp east of it [...] but before the Nazis provided it with an evil reputation it was a pleasant town.”³⁷ Though timidly acknowledging Germany's Nazi past, *Fodor* here still attempted to reconcile it with romanticized prewar image.

³² Harold Newman, *Newman's European Travel Guide*, (New York: Henry Holt & Company, 1950), 1.

³³ Newman, *Newman's European Travel Guide*, 1950, 267.

³⁴ Newman, *Newman's European Travel Guide*, 1950, 267.

³⁵ Harold Newman, *Newman's European Travel Guide* (New York: Henry Holt & Company, 1951), 263.

³⁶ Eugene Fodor, ed., *Fodor's: Germany 1953* (New York: David McKay Company). See also: Koshar, *German Travel Cultures*, 161.

³⁷ Eugene Fodor, ed., *Fodor's: Germany 1958*, (New York: David McKay Company) 254. See also for 1953 ed. quote: Koshar, *German Travel Cultures*, 186–7.



Given that the postwar reconstruction process was still in its nascent stages, travelling West Germany entailed a multitude of challenges. In addition to the scarcity of lodging, dining establishments, and leisure activities, a considerable investment of personal resources was necessary to visit former camps. It was a deliberate decision on the part of both the West German and the U.S. governments, to not actively promote the camps as tourist attractions.³⁸ Given their locations on the outskirts of major cities or towns, these memorials were only accessible by infrequent public buses at that time.³⁹ Some visitors therefore sought out locals and hired drivers to take them wherever they wanted to go.

If U.S. Americans visited a camp during this time, it was most likely Dachau memorial.⁴⁰ The liberation of Dachau was a pivotal event in German-American history, occurring at the conclusion of the Second World War. The site was located in the U.S. occupation zone, which constituted a significant portion of the country's territory. It was conveniently and quickly accessible by rail from Munich, in contrast to other sites of similar historical significance. Dachau concentration camp was the archetypal camp of Nazi Germany, being the first of its kind constructed by the Nazis in 1933.⁴¹ Over the course of its twelve-year existence, Dachau held several areas apart from the prisoner barracks. The medical experiments conducted at the Dachau camp included trials at high altitudes and freezing conditions, as well as experiments researching the effects of malaria and seawater on human physiology.⁴² Additionally, there was one of Heinrich Himmler's favoured initiatives: a farm for the breeding of angora rabbits, situated on the premises. A museum with images of physically disabled prisoners served as entertainment for the SS and, from 1943 onwards, the camp maintained a brothel.⁴³

After the liberation of Dachau concentration camp, the site experienced many changes before the opening of a bigger exhibition in 1965. A small memorial site was already installed in 1945 at the crematorium area. Other parts were used and reused before 1965. From 1945 to 1948, the U.S. military government and the Dachau Trials occupied most of the concentration camp area until the U.S. occupation turned it over to the Bavarian government in 1948.⁴⁴ Until the mid-1960s, the United States government continued to utilize the former SS garrison area as military base. In response to the intensifying flow of refugees from Eastern Europe, Bavarian authorities repurposed Dachau's barracks outside of the crematorium area into apartments and stores, utilizing the facility to house ethnic German refugees

³⁸ Lennon and Foley, *Dark Tourism*, 4–5.

³⁹ Paul Harvey Williams, *Memorial Museums: The Global Rush to Commemorate Atrocities* (Oxford: Berg, 2007), 5.

⁴⁰ Konnilyn G. Feig, *Hitler's Death Camps: The Sanity of Madness* (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1979), 43.

⁴¹ For detailed histories of Dachau and beyond see: *Dachauer Hefte* (Dachau: Verlag Dachauer Hefte, 1985–2009).

⁴² Feig, *Hitler's Death Camps*, 47–48, 51.

⁴³ Feig, *Hitler's Death Camps*, 49.

⁴⁴ Wachsmann, *KL*, 622.



until 1964.⁴⁵ For several months in 1961 the site even included a restaurant named ‘Zum Krematorium,’ (to the crematorium).⁴⁶ Notwithstanding the decision of the local government to repurpose the existing barracks at Dachau, the memorial site located in the vicinity of the crematorium continued to attract approximately 100,000 visitors in 1950.⁴⁷

The initial efforts to establish a memorial were unsuccessful, with both the U.S. military government and German authorities ultimately abandoning the project.⁴⁸ In 1945, the first exhibit in the crematorium was a display of pictures and postcards presented to incoming visitors. It is believed that a group of survivors, with the support of the U.S. occupation authorities, initiated the exhibit during the media frenzy of the Nuremberg trials to raise public awareness of the atrocities committed. This first exhibit featured mannequins demonstrating torture practices, including binding and clubbing prisoners on a wooden bench.⁴⁹ Those wishing to visit the memorial were required to pass through U.S. military personnel stationed at the main gate. A narrow pathway, distinct from the refugee housing, led to the crematorium and memorial area. The site encompassed an old brick structure and a larger building that included a gas chamber, which the SS utilized for trial gassings. However, due to the war’s conclusion in 1945, this method was not employed on a larger scale.⁵⁰

In 1953, the Bavarian authorities compelled survivor Erik Preuß, who maintained the first exhibit and provided information to incoming visitors, to cease his work at the former crematorium. They also prohibited him from selling pamphlets or conducting tours through the crematorium site.⁵¹ Following the Bavarian government’s prohibition of this inaugural exhibition, which included the ban of the sale of postcards or the offering of tours, no one installed any additional infrastructure at the site. This caused some distress among survivors, a group of whom came in 1955 to commemorate the tenth anniversary of Dachau’s liberation. As a reaction, and with the assistance of U.S. officials, the International Dachau Committee reopened a small exhibit for incoming visitors in 1960.⁵²

Although large-scale tourism to concentration camp memorials did not begin until the 1960s, when memorials such as Bergen-Belsen and Dachau opened their doors with exhibitions, the sites provided a tourist infrastructure and welcomed increasing numbers of visitors even earlier. The influx of tourists to the memorials during the 1950s led visitors to not only observe the structure and composition of

⁴⁵ Young, *The Texture of Memory*, 61–62.

⁴⁶ Harold Marcuse, *Legacies of Dachau: the Uses and Abuses of a Concentration Camp, 1933 – 2001* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 267.

⁴⁷ Harold Marcuse, “Reshaping Dachau For Visitors: 1933–2000” in *Horror and Human Tragedy Revisited: The Management of Sites of Atrocities for Tourism*, ed. Greg Ashworth & Rudi Hartmann (New York: Cognizant Communications, 2005), 118.

⁴⁸ Marcuse, *Legacies of Dachau*, 170–171.

⁴⁹ Young, *Texture of Memory*, 43.

⁵⁰ “Crematorium Area,” Dachau Memorial Center, last accessed September 10, 2024. <https://www.kz-gedenkstaette-dachau.de/en/historical-site/virtual-tour/crematorium-area/>

⁵¹ Gedenkstätte Dachau – Krematorium; hier: Eingabe des Nikolaus Kuchelmeister, Feb 22, 1954, A5310 / 43.483, Dachau Memorial Archive.

⁵² Young, *Texture of Memory*, 63–64.



the site, but to comment on the behaviour of fellow travellers, who often disrupted their experience. A *Washington Post* article on Dachau memorial from 1952 illustrated the increased tourism at the site. The article asserted that the memorial had become a “rousing tourist lure,” with visitors leaving their names on the walls and tour guides highlighting the lurid aspects of the camp. At the conclusion of each tour, visitors had the option of purchasing souvenirs, such as memorial booklets or postcards provided by Preuss, to take back to the United States.⁵³

The stories of individual tourists and groups prove relevant for understanding the motivations and expectations with which visitors came to the sites. One example is that of the *American Seminar*, organized by Sherwood Eddy. The seminar already had a long-standing, twenty-year, tradition. Eddy was one of the most influential and prominent U.S. American protestants during the first half of the twentieth century.⁵⁴ On the *American Seminar*, initiated in the 1920s, he brought together intellectuals and religious leaders from various backgrounds to give “knowledge about the world situation” through a mutual exchange in Europe.⁵⁵ In 1950, Eddy resumed these trips to Europe. A group of fifty members travelled Europe for about six weeks. An article about the trip by Herbert Miller, executive secretary of the Carlton Branch of the *Young Men’s Christian Association* (YMCA) in Brooklyn and the only Black member of the group, wrote that the group represented “every section of the United States [...] by ministers, social workers, college professors, newspaper men, authors and lecturers [sic].” According to Miller, the group should “bring back to the American people a report on actual conditions in Europe as we find them.”⁵⁶ The group’s itinerary covered several European countries, including the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, Germany, Austria, Switzerland, Italy, and France. According to the seminar’s pamphlet the aim was to “avoid propaganda” and to make “an effort to hear all sides of each question” during the course of their journey.⁵⁷

Overall, their visit to Germany appeared hastened: in only one week the group visited Berlin, Frankfurt, Munich, and Oberammergau. For Dachau, the group planned an entire day to inspect the displaced persons camp’s conditions and to look at the former concentration camp site. Immediately afterwards, the group would travel to Oberammergau for the famous Passion Play which was the first to be held after almost twenty years.

As to Herbert Miller, his remark on Dachau is particularly interesting. In an article for the Black newspaper *Ohio Daily Express*, he wrote: “I was made to wonder, particularly after visiting Dachau, the wartime infamous murder camp, if one of these days a purge of Negroes, the like of which the Jews experienced, might

⁵³ “Dachau’s Camp Now a Rousing Tourist Lure,” *Washington Post*, May 25, 1952, L7.

⁵⁴ Rick Nutt, *The Whole Gospel for the Whole World: Sherwood Eddy and the American Protestant Mission*. (Georgia 1997), 1.

⁵⁵ Nutt, *The Whole Gospel for the Whole World*, 201.

⁵⁶ Herbert Miller, “Europe As Seen By A Brown American On U.S. Seminar” *Ohio Daily Express*, 20 August 1950, 2 – 3.

⁵⁷ Sherwood Eddy Papers, “The American Seminar – Summer 1950” RG 32 21–220, Seminars and Lectures. Yale University.



come.”⁵⁸ His comment connected the legacies of Nazism to U.S. domestic politics and commented on the weaknesses within the American democratic system that would not be acknowledged by the political and media landscape in the early postwar period, namely the continuing disregard for the systematic inequality of Black people. Miller’s observation, relating his own position in society as a member of a marginalized group, indicated a lingering danger of minorities falling victim to social hatred, be it in a totalitarian or a democratic nation.

On the other side, in a report by Louise Gates Eddy, Sherwood Eddy’s wife, West Germany and the politics of National Socialism appeared in a different light than in Miller’s annotation: “Germany perplexed us for there is still no sense of individual responsibility for government action, no conception that a citizen must share responsibility for what his government does. It is aggravating beyond words for the German people to shrug their shoulders and feel they can blame Hitler for everything that happened in those fifteen years of nightmare when he ruled Germany.”⁵⁹ Eddy directed her attention at the future of West Germany while advising to learn from the past to re-educate Germans and integrate Germany into the Western sphere of influence. Her perception of postwar Germany was encapsulated by her concern regarding the way a society could embrace a dictator like Hitler and remain indifferent to the atrocities that occurred in their vicinity. Her comment reflected her concern for the future of Germany, rather than accounting for the past. In the rehabilitation effort of Germany, the U.S. should occupy a vital role.

Miller and Eddy approached their subject matter from different angles. Eddy accentuated the political atmosphere and behaviour of the West German population, while Miller critically deliberated on the parallels and possibly long-term effect of the millions murdered during the past decade, at home and abroad. To him, the fact that these atrocities took place transcended the fact that Germans had committed them. The atrocities laid bare the potential to commit violence that lurked in every human being and that was primarily grounded in prejudice, racism, anti-Semitism, and the fear of otherness. Already in the early postwar period, the concentration camp atrocities demanded addressing global inhumanities in more general terms.

Other, individual visitors assessed the memorial sites against the background of their personal family history, life experiences, or connection to Nazi atrocities. In the 1950s, Jewish-American visitors and survivors visited the Dachau and Bergen-Belsen memorials to commemorate and admonish the need to never forget the atrocities. It is important to note that preconceived notions of the camps strongly influenced visitors’ perceptions. Those who had a personal connection to victims of the Nazi regime or were themselves victims demonstrated a particularly strong connection to the sites and experiences associated with them. Dachau survivor Alfred

⁵⁸ Miller, “Europe As Seen By A Brown American On U.S. Seminar,” 2 – 3. Black daily newspaper from Ohio. For information on the newspaper see Library of Congress Chronicling America <https://www.loc.gov/item/sn88077226/>. Last accessed 10.09.2024.

⁵⁹ Sherwood Eddy. Letter by Louise Gates Eddy, September 1950. RG 32 21–220, Seminars and Lectures. Yale University.



Werner⁶⁰ wrote that “thousands of ex-Dachauers now come back as I did – ostensibly to see that the memorial is kept in order, but really, I suspect, to make sure the fire is out.”⁶¹ Werner was a highly esteemed member of the Art Historical Society of New York City. Originally from Austria, Werner was imprisoned by the Nazi regime in Dachau in 1938, following the Pogrom Night. Subsequent to his release, for which his fiancée Dr. Gertrude Bach fought, he immigrated to the United States. As with numerous other American nationals, Werner was learned of the gravity of the crimes perpetrated against humanity through the U.S. media.⁶²

As he proceeded towards the interior of the memorial, Werner observed a number of sites to which he referred to as the “old stuff.” However, upon further progress along the memorial, he observed a recently landscaped garden that evoked the ambience of an American state park, with a cottage at its centre. After wondering what this place had been during the war, his driver told him “Oh, that was only the *kleine Krematorium* [small crematorium]. Wait and see the real thing!”⁶³ What Werner described here is the *Garden of remembrance*, that the U.S. military government had arranged and that the Bavarian state now attended to.⁶⁴ Werner’s description is noteworthy for its contrast between his personal experiences, the expectations he formed about the camp, and his irritation at the well-maintained and picturesque garden, which did not align with his preconceived notions. The reality of the post-war camp no longer matched Werner’s reality in 1938, leading to a distorted view of the camp that mixed past and present. Nevertheless, despite his encounter with the U.S. American-style state park that provoked his irritation, Werner ultimately concluded that the memorial was adequate for its purpose: to facilitate the experience of the survivors and to educate those who lacked any personal connection to the subject matter.⁶⁵

Unlike Werner, large parts of the U.S. Jewish community had observed the war from a distance and, consequently, had shaped their views on the atrocities committed by the Nazis from within the United States. Two articles authored by Jewish Americans who had lived outside the reach of the Nazis and visited the Dachau and Bergen-Belsen memorials provide insight into how these groups evaluated these early sites. The author of the first contribution, Harry Simonhoff, was born in Lithuania in 1893. Shortly following his birth, the family immigrated to the United States. In 1948, he started to write the column “I’ll Say” in *The Jewish Floridian*.⁶⁶ In 1951, after his trip to West Germany, Simonhoff authored an article that summarized his experiences at the concentration camp memorial sites.

⁶⁰ Marcuse, *Legacies of Dachau*, 173. Description of Werner’s visit. The following analysis is based on Werner’s article in the *Commentary* after his return to the U.S.

⁶¹ Alfred Werner, “Return to Dachau,” *Commentary*, Jan 01, 1951, 543.

⁶² For biographical information see: Leo Baeck Institute: The Edythe Griffinger Portal. <https://www.lbi.org/griffinger/record/211574>.

⁶³ Werner, “Return to Dachau,” 545.

⁶⁴ Young, *Texture of Memory*, 62.

⁶⁵ Marcuse, *Legacies of Dachau*, 174.

⁶⁶ “Finding Aid to the Harry Simonhoff papers. 1948–1966,” American Jewish Archive, last accessed February 20, 2024. <http://collections.americanjewisharchives.org/ms/ms0027/ms0027.html>



Simonhoff's account of Bergen-Belsen contained inaccuracies. On one occasion, he referred to the "normal German town" of "Bergen-Belsen," which is, in fact, non-existent, as the town is Belsen and the greater region is Bergen. Nevertheless, Simonhoff provided a comprehensive account of the memorial's location and offered his own insights.⁶⁷ The former parts of the camp, such as the "tents and original wooden barracks of the *Kazett*" no longer existed after they had been burned down in 1945 by British forces to prevent the spread of diseases. A further mile away, a sign indicated the location of the mass graves, situated at the site of the former barracks. Simonhoff stated that the structures designated as the "gas chambers and crematorium" were no longer extant.⁶⁸ In point of fact, the SS did not install the gas chambers at Bergen-Belsen. However, given the media reports and popular debates about the atrocities, it is likely that Simonhoff was expecting to encounter this image. Previous information or misinformation, this shows, not only influenced expectations but even the perception of the camps.

Following the Second World War, the British military proceeded to demolish parts of Bergen-Belsen and to erect commemorative mounds over the thousands of individuals who the SS had murdered. In the former *Wehrmacht* base adjacent to the site, the military established a Displaced Persons (DP) camp, which remained operational until 1950. In conjunction with substantial survivor involvement, the British government formulated plans for a memorial that integrated the mass graves and positioned an obelisk centrally within the former camp. The West German authorities inaugurated the memorial in 1952 and transferred its administration to the State of Lower Saxony, thus making it the earliest state-run concentration camp memorial in Germany. Upon his arrival at Bergen-Belsen in 1951, Simonhoff discovered that the memorial site was still under construction and had not yet been officially inaugurated. However, the survivors of the concentration camp commenced the commemorative process for the victims of Bergen-Belsen as early as 1945, and they played a significant role in the subsequent construction of the site.⁶⁹

During his tour, Simonhoff offered a critique of the obelisk, citing poor planning as a significant issue. He drew a comparison between the obelisk and the Washington Monument in Washington D.C. The inscription read "To the Memory of All Those of Died in This Place." To Simonhoff, the inscription was an "inept, vapid" statement for such a "colossal catastrophe." He wondered, why, of the eight languages inscribed, German as well as Hebrew and Yiddish were missing. Simonhoff wondered: "Were they afraid the ex-Nazis would be offended if told of their ghastly behaviour?" Only a few feet away, however, he did find the Hebrew-inscribed memorial.⁷⁰

⁶⁷ Harry Simonhoff, "I'll Say To Bergen-Belsen and Dachau," *The Jewish Advocate*, March 01, 1951, 1.

⁶⁸ Simonhoff, "I'll Say To Bergen-Belsen and Dachau," 1.

⁶⁹ Rainer Schulze, "Forgetting and Remembering: Memories and Memorialization of Bergen-Belsen." *Holocaust Studies*, 12 (1–2), 2006. 218–222. See also: "Geschichte," Gedenkstätte Bergen-Belsen, last accessed September 10, 2024. <https://bergen-belsen.stiftung-ng.de/de/geschichte/gedenkort/>

⁷⁰ The author only in passing mentions this memorial. For more information on the obelisk see: Marcuse, *Legacies of Dachau*, 264.



During his following visit to Dachau memorial, a guide drew the visitors attention to the hanging tree and the ovens in which the SS had cremated victims. The veracity of Simonhoff's account of SS torture methods remained uncertain, as he provided a detailed description of methods without offering any objective evaluation. According to Simonhoff, prisoners were subjected to the use of bloodhounds, which were set on them in order to satisfy the dogs' hunger and thirst. Inmates were exposed to a particularly brutal form of execution, whereby they were "machine gunned in mass, their blood would drain off through this floor into the earth" which made "gas chambers seem humane."⁷¹

Simonhoff's report frequently lacked objectivity and featured sensationalism. The author presented accounts of atrocities that included both factual accounts and hearsay, in addition to generalized descriptions of camp functions. Moreover, the article employed visual tropes pertaining to the arbitrary rule of the SS, unimaginable brutality, and a considerable number of prisoner deaths. For instance, Simonhoff provided a comprehensive account of the alleged gassing that occurred at the Dachau camp, despite the absence of any corroborating evidence. He provided a detailed account of the process of undressing before the 'bath.' Furthermore, he wrote that "only when the gas came through the vents in the floor did they realize that their lives were confined to several minutes." Subsequently, bodies filled the crematorium, which the SS shoved into the ovens in a manner like that of a loaf of bread. All the while, SS officers observed the entire process through a side window and afterwards sold the ashes to relatives.⁷²

But Simonhoff was not the only one to report on the alleged gassing at Dachau. In 1954 another article made similar claims, stating that the SS burned victims alive in the Dachau furnaces and that visitors still witnessed the "Fingernail scratches, made in desperation by doomed prisoners, [which] still cover the walls of the 'undressing room' and the gas chambers."⁷³ The reports were designed to elicit a sensational response. A letter from the Bavarian State Chancellery indicated that the crematorium became a popular attraction, drawing numerous visitors to observe the 'Zurschaustellung,' a German term expressing vulgar exhibition, of the cremation ovens.⁷⁴ The expectation of visitors to find gas chambers at Dachau memorial demonstrates how reports after the liberation of the camps influenced public perceptions of them.

Beyond the sensationalist aspect, particularly for those who endured the Nazi regime, the preservation of these sites and their memory became a paramount concern following the end of the Second World War. In another article published in *The Jewish Advocate* in 1959 titled "A Visit to Belsen," readers were not only led through the site's memorial but it also provided them with a critical commentary on

⁷¹ Simonhoff, "I'll Say To Bergen-Belsen and Dachau," 1.

⁷² Simonhoff, "I'll Say To Bergen-Belsen ad Dachau," 1.

⁷³ "Horror of Dachau Camp is Told in Tablets around the Memorial – Sadistic Brutality Recalled in Signs, Ditches, Ovens and Scratch Marks on Walls of Crematorium," *The St. Louis Post Dispatch*, September 17, 1954, 18A.

⁷⁴ Bavarian Staatskanzlei to the Bavarian State Ministry of Finances, "Gelände des ehemaligen Konzentrationslagers Dachau," October 24, 1955. A5310 / 43.483, Dachau Memorial Archive.



the inadequate maintenance efforts made by West Germany. The author observed that the memorial of Bergen-Belsen was in a state of disrepair, noting the absence of a “caretaker’s hut” and the overgrowth of vegetation on the paths of the memorial site. The necessity to maintain the memorials of Nazi atrocities and the fear of their disappearance became pertinent in the years following the liberation.

This visitor attempted to recite the Kaddish, a Jewish prayer often used for mourning rituals, but the atmosphere of the memorial, devoid of even a single bird, was so desolate that it created a void, preventing him from praying. When weather conditions permitted, he heard the rumour that residents utilized the camp as a picnic area, seemingly unconcerned by its horrific history. The visitor, concerned by the apparent lack of emotional response from the German population, expressed worry that the natural environment would eventually erase all remaining traces of the Belsen concentration camp. He asserted that “international developments” demanded “that we should forgive,” yet this did not imply to forget the atrocities.⁷⁵

As some of the visitors with a personal connection to the camps history struggled with the behaviour of fellow visitors or the proper recognition of the victims, still others grew irritated by the surrounding and presentation of the compound.⁷⁶ In 1958, Clarissa Start visited Dachau to conduct research on Martin Niemöller, renowned Protestant pastor who had resisted the Nazi regime. She was a columnist for the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* who authored a few articles about the West German churches and welfare program after her invitation to the country by the West Germany government.⁷⁷ Her lasting impression was that she could not forget the “pink begonias” that “bloom at Dachau.”⁷⁸ The impression and description of the flowering camp site hinted at two contradictory sentiments: on the one hand, the crimes committed produced a feeling of revulsion and furthered abhorrence towards the perpetrators. On the other, the memorials failed to evoke the death, desolation, and smell of the camps. While surely the dead bodies and surviving victims had disappeared, the planting of colourful flowers seemed highly inappropriate to her.

Some expressed dismay at those who disregarded the site’s solemnity by littering. In 1956, a U.S. American lecturer residing in West Germany wrote to *The New York Times* that U.S. American tourists exhibited particularly poor behaviour at the Dachau memorial. They were “touring the places of horror and suffering as sight-seers, smoking cigarettes in the shower room where thousands had been poisoned by ‘Zyclon B,’ dropping ashes before the open ovens in the adjacent cremation chamber.”⁷⁹ Upon observing these incidents, he was unsurprised to find that West Germans held a negative view of U.S. tourists. According to the reader, “Mountains of

⁷⁵ L.C. Green, “A visit to Belsen,” *Jewish Advocate*, Dec 24, 1959, 2A.

⁷⁶ “Horror of Dachau Camp is Told in Tablets around the Memorial – Sadistic Brutality Recalled in Signs, Ditches, Ovens and Scratch Marks on Walls of Crematorium,” *St. Louis Post Dispatch*, 17 September 1954, 18A.

⁷⁷ Clarissa Start Lippert, see following link to her collection at the State Historical Society of Missouri. <https://files.shsmo.org/manuscripts/saint-louis/S0470.pdf>

⁷⁸ Clarissa Start, “The Pink Begonias Bloom at Dachau,” *St Louis Post-Dispatch*, 12 September 1958, 2F.

⁷⁹ Robert Rie, “Visitors to Dachau, Letter to the Editor,” *The New York Times*, August 31, 1956, 16.



film wrappers” plastered the crematorium itself.⁸⁰ Eventually, as these two examples show, some visitors felt a lack of authenticity at the camp sites. What they expected to see were the bunk beds, the dirt, the run-down courtyards, and the chaos that had dominated the photographs in the newspapers in 1945. Simply put, reality did not match their expectations.

Conclusion

The turbulence of the early postwar period gave rise to the emergence of tourism as a novel means of reconstructing social and cultural ties with West Germany. The increased interest in German culture served to soothe West German feelings of belonging and aided in the integration of the country into a European community. In particular, U.S. residents who had been relatively unaffected by the Second World War were eager to resume their Grand Tour of Europe, hoping for a new decade of peace and prosperity free of further conflict. In the years following the war, the number of tourists visiting former concentration camps remained relatively low. Nevertheless, those who did so set a foundation for the historical significance that would subsequently be attributed to these places.

This challenges the prevailing assumption that the public ceased to recognize the significance of these locations after the war. The growth of tourist culture at specific locations has been impeded by a lack of suitable infrastructure, the cessation of operations at the camps, and their absence from postwar travel guides. But those who desired to visit the camps were able to do so, and their experiences resulted in the establishment of novel commemorative traditions that afforded unique methods of remembering the war’s atrocities.

A review of the sources identified several visitor groups. One group consisted of white, educated intellectuals who shared a mutual interest in visiting the camp sites. Additionally, survivors of the camps returned to the sites either to provide solace in the knowledge that the camps had been destroyed or to pay tribute to their loved ones. Furthermore, a collective of Jewish Americans, imbued with an enhanced comprehension of the fated plight of European Jewry, undertook a mission to the camps with the objective of inscribing a memory in the annals of future generations. Herbert Miller, a Black YMCA worker, presented a unique perspective on the impact of Nazi atrocities against socially marginalized and racialized groups, based on his experiences at the Dachau memorial. The experiences of visitors to the memorials diverged from their initial expectations.

To a lesser extent, this article argues, did travellers in the early postwar period visit these sites to experience the dark side of history. Rather, historical curiosity and the chance to make sense of the recent war that was still so vivid in everyone’s memory compelled many to include concentration camp sites in their travel itinerary and shaped relations between the U.S. and West Germany. The increased travels

⁸⁰ Robert C. Nelson, “Tourist Insensitivity Dachau; Letters to the editor,” *The New York Times*, September 07, 1956, 11.



to West Germany in the early postwar period also shed light on how U.S. Americans came to terms with the recent Nazi atrocities and yet maintained a romanticized image of Germany. Even though reports from the liberation had altered views on Germany, tourism worked as a promotion of German values and culture before the advent of the Nazis.

The arrival of these new visitors to West Germany represented a resumption of a longstanding tradition of American travel to Europe, while simultaneously fostering a sense of renewed confidence in the veracity of their national beliefs. Germany had lost part of its humanity after the murder of millions of people. Nevertheless, traditional West German culture continued to captivate audiences across the Atlantic. In Bavaria, for example, visitors could enjoy the traditional attractions of the region's castles and mediaeval architecture while also learning about the atrocities of the Dachau concentration camp. Rather, the novel form of memory culture facilitated the coexistence of the beautiful and the bestial in the context of leisure travel.

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