

Chapter 11

The Plural Faces

of Holocaust Memory

in America

Yang, James E. 1993. The Texture of Memory.
New Haven: Yale University Press

American public memory of the Shoah began with the first newspaper reports of mass murder early in 1943. Though often buried beneath accounts of military battles, these stories haunted both the Jewish refugees who had arrived in the mid-1930s and second-generation Jewish Americans with family still in Europe. To this vicarious memory of events, newly liberated survivors arriving after the war added their personal experiences. At first, Jews in America enacted such memory in traditional, ritual forms: remembering the dead in Yizkor services during the high holidays, lamenting the catastrophe on the Ninth of Av, or even leaving place-settings empty at home festivals in honor of those recently lost. Relatives who knew the exact dates of their loved ones' deaths lighted *Jahrzeit* candles, while those who did not know where or when their family was killed waited for the rabbinical ruling that deemed the Tenth of Teveth such a day of mourning and remembrance.

The first public Holocaust commemoration in America took place at the very height of the killing, on 2 December 1942. On this day, according to the Jewish Telegraphic Agency, some five hundred thousand Jews in New York City stopped work for ten minutes, both to mourn those already killed and to call attention to the ongoing massacre. In a gesture of sympathy, several radio stations observed a two-minute silence before broadcasting memorial services at 4:30 that afternoon.¹ Similar commemorations followed the next spring, culminating in several mass public memorial ceremonies, including a pageant held at Madison Square Garden in March 1943, called "We Will Never Die" and dedicated to the two million Jews who perished at the hands of the Germans that year.² Other public

memorials included mass rallies called by the Jewish Labor Committee to mourn the destruction of the Warsaw Ghetto. The largest single Holocaust memorial event during the war took place on 19 April 1944, the first anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto uprising. On the steps of New York City Hall, over thirty thousand Jews gathered to hear Mayor Fiorello La Guardia and prominent Jewish leaders honor the memory of fighters and martyrs who had died in the uprising.

Much of the horrifying information that moved these groups to memorialize Europe's dying Jews had been distributed by the man at the Polish News Agency who later proposed the nation's first Holocaust monument. After fleeing to France from Vienna in 1938 during the Anschluss, A. R. Lerner came to New York, where he edited bulletins for the Polish News Agency describing the plight of Polish Jews under Nazi occupation. His parents had died in France after following him there, and the rest of his family—Polish Jews—had perished in the death camps. In 1944, using photographs and documents supplied by the Polish underground, Lerner published a pictorial history of the Nazis' annihilation of European Jewry. Later, he organized an exhibition of these same materials at the Vanderbilt Gallery on Fifty-seventh Street in New York, sponsored by the Jewish Labor Committee. In January 1946, as vice president of the National Organization of Polish Jews (NOPJ), he proposed that the group establish an eternal flame in tribute to the "Heroes of the Warsaw Ghetto and the Six Million Jews Slain by the Nazis," to be situated somewhere in New York City.³

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Within days, according to Lerner, the NOPJ had petitioned the new mayor of New York, William O'Dwyer, for a place to build their "Eternal Light." The mayor endorsed the project, as did Robert Moses, commissioner of the Parks Department, who enlisted the aid of Stuart Constable, the department's chief designer. Moses wrote to the NOPJ that he preferred a monument to an eternal flame and would proceed when they found a suitable site in the city. At Lerner's suggestion, Constable and Jo Davidson, a well-known sculptor and friend of Constable, drove to Riverside Drive to look for an appropriate site. Constable reported back to Lerner that on approaching Riverside Drive between Eighty-third and Eighty-fourth streets, he and Davidson watched as an old, bearded Jew stood quietly in the park as if in deep contemplation. Apparently struck by the apparition, they stopped the car and decided that the spot on which the Jew stood, monumentlike, would be the future site of the memorial.

The date for the dedication was chosen less arbitrarily. "My decision to hold the dedication ceremony in September or October," Lerner said, "was chiefly influenced by the acute situation in Palestine where a bitter fight raged between the Jews and the English which caused the United Nations to put the Palestine question on the agenda before the Assembly in October, 1947."⁴ Between May and

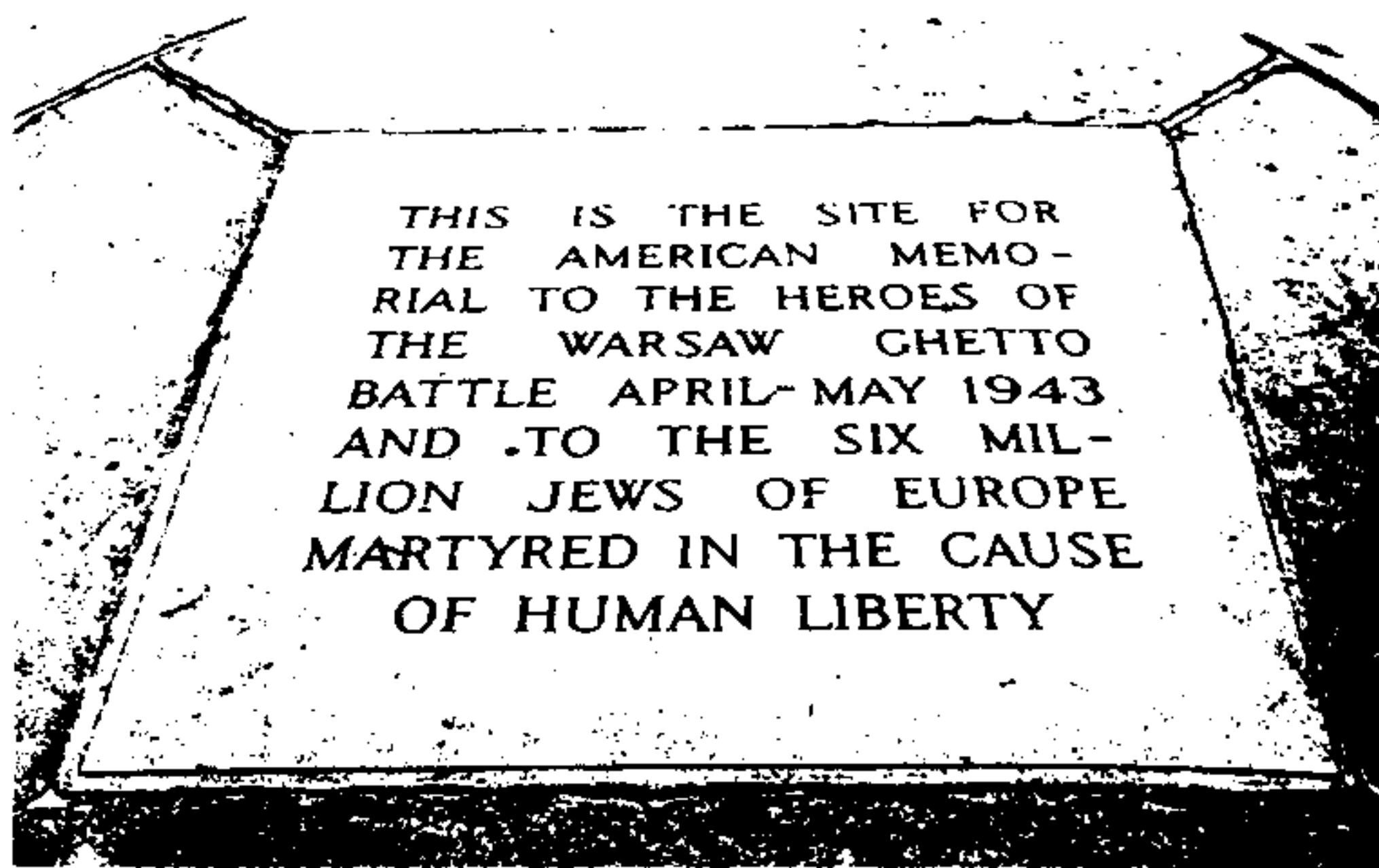


A mass rally on the steps of New York City Hall commemorates the first anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto uprising, 19 April 1944. Mayor Fiorello La Guardia listens as Sen. Isaac Rubinstein, former chief rabbi of Vilna, reads. Among those standing in the second row are writer Sholom Asch, poet Julian Tuwim, and, on the far right, miniaturist Arthur Szyk. Photo: Courtesy of YIVO Institute for Jewish Research.

October, Lerner mounted a furious public relations and fundraising campaign. Before long, letters from all the European ambassadors began to pour in, each requesting some role in the ceremonies. Hundreds of civic and religious leaders from all sectors pledged their support, as well, also expecting to take part in a public way. Arrangements were made for television, newsreels, and the Voice of America to cover the dedication ceremonies. Hundreds of thousands of admission tickets were sent to civic organizations for distribution and mailed to all delegates at the United Nations.

At 12:30 on a rainy Sunday afternoon, 19 October 1947, tens of thousands of people jammed the Riverside Park mall from Eighty-third to Ninety-fifth streets. With people crowded onto rooftops above and blocking the streets below, Mayor O'Dwyer dedicated the site of the future monument and marked it with a cornerstone slab inscribed with the words: "This is the site for the American memorial to the Heroes of the Warsaw Ghetto Battle, April–May 1943 and to the six million Jews of Europe martyred in the cause of human liberty." Descriptions of the ceremony and excerpts from speeches filled the next day's newspapers. In its editorial two days later, the *New York Times* declared, "It is fitting that that a memorial to six million victims of the most tragic mass crime in history, the Nazi genocide of Jews, should rise in this land of liberty." The stone slab remains to this day, but the memorial itself was never built.

The first New York City memorial, dedicated to the site of the still unbuilt memorial in Riverside Park. Photo: Courtesy of YIVO Institute for Jewish Research.

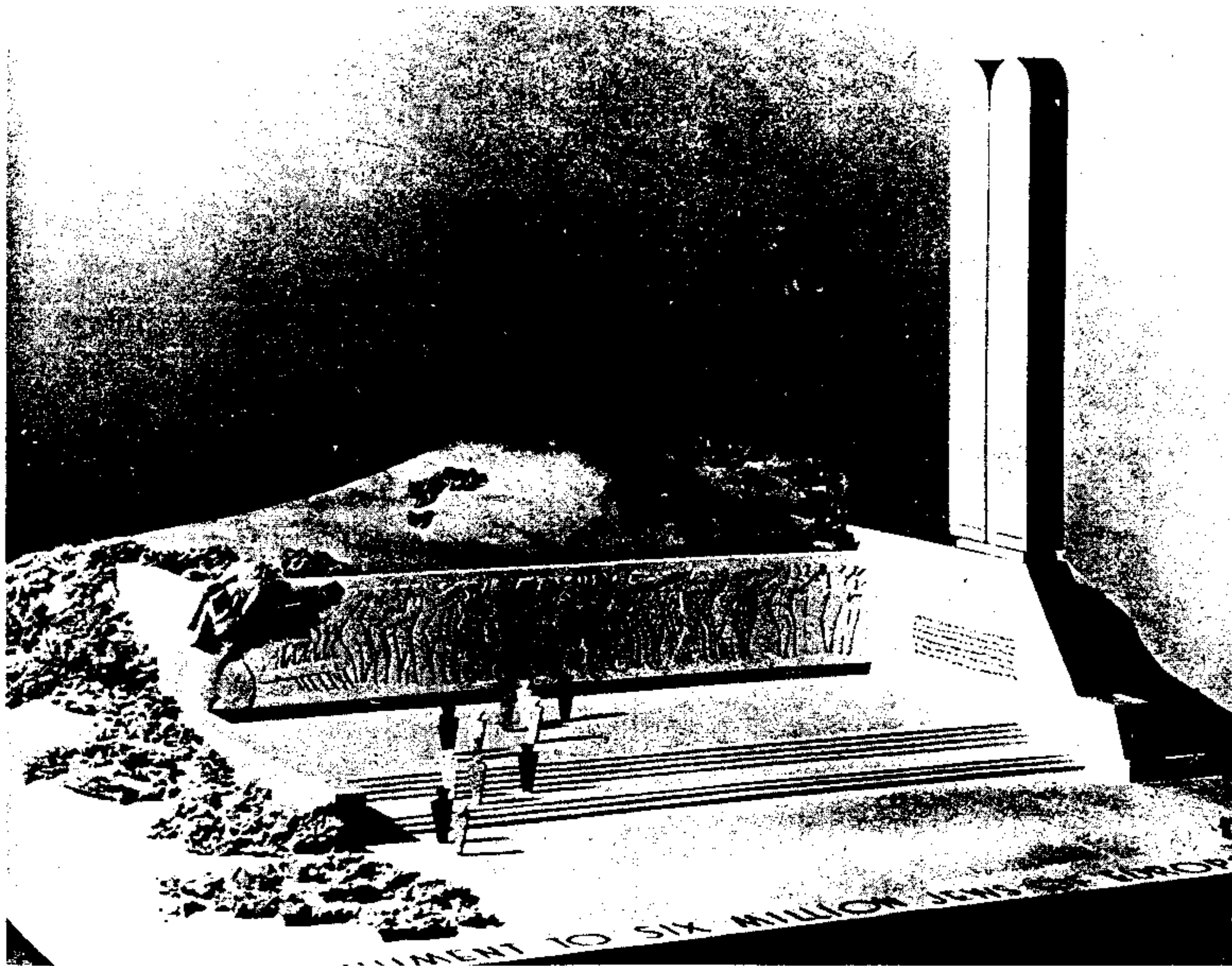


The First American Monument: Forever Unbuilt

As is often the case, the subsequent story surrounding the unbuilt memorial can be more instructive than a finished memorial could ever have been. The first proposed monument, designed by Davidson and architect Ely Jacques Kahn in 1948, consisted of a series of steplike blocks forming a pedestal, atop which stood a muscular, heroic figure. With his arms swept back, his chest thrust forth defiantly, and sleeves rolled up, the bare-handed fighter towered over a rabbinical figure below, hands up as if beseeching the Almighty; another figure aided a fallen comrade, and yet another slumped dead against the front of the pedestal. Within months, however, and without much commentary, the New York City Arts Commission rejected the model and began a search for another.

A year later, another model was submitted by the Memorial Committee for the Six Million Jews of Europe. Designed by a Columbia University architecture professor, Percival Goodman, it had a 25-foot-high wall stretching 120 feet long, crowned by a 45-foot pedestal and menorah. It was rejected on two counts, according to Arthur Hodgkiss, executive secretary of the Parks Department. Not only would the memorial take up an inordinate amount of space, but in its sheer visibility, it could well cause automobile accidents by startling motorists on the Henry Hudson Parkway.⁵

Two years later, ground was actually broken for an 80-foot-high black granite pylon of two tablets, on which the Ten Commandments were to be inscribed. In this design by architect Erich Mendelsohn and sculptor Ivan Mestrovic, the tablets would rise at one end of a long plaza, bordered on one side by a 100-foot-long wall of bas-relief figures depicting the struggle of humankind to fulfill the Commandments—all urged on by a giant carving of Moses. Though the design was accepted by the Arts Commission, Mendelsohn's death in 1953 discouraged



potential donors, and fundraising efforts eventually broke down altogether.

Nearly twelve years passed before two memorials by Nathan Rapoport were submitted for consideration in 1964. One, the *Scroll of Fire*, was proposed by the Warsaw Ghetto Resistance Organization (WAGRO). The other, submitted by the Artur Zygelboim Memorial Committee, was a sculpture of the committee's namesake, engulfed by flames, about to pitch forward—a reference to Zygelboim's 1943 suicide in London to protest the world's indifference to the plight of Jews in Poland. After rejecting the Zygelboim sculpture on behalf of the commission as too tragic for recreational park land, too distressing for children, Eleanor Platt, a sculptor and Arts Commission member turned to the *Scroll of Fire*. "This proposed work seems to be excessively and unnecessarily large," she wrote. "Even if it were to be smaller and in better taste, artistically, I believe that by approving it or the Zygelboim sculpture, we would set a highly regrettable precedent."⁶

In the eyes of Rapoport and his sponsors, however, the crux of Platt's response came in her concluding remarks, which incensed the Jewish community. "How would we answer other special groups who want to be similarly represented on

Model of memorial designed for Riverside Park site in New York City, designed by Erich Mendelsohn and Ivan Mestrovic but never built. Photo: Courtesy of YIVO Institute for Jewish Research.

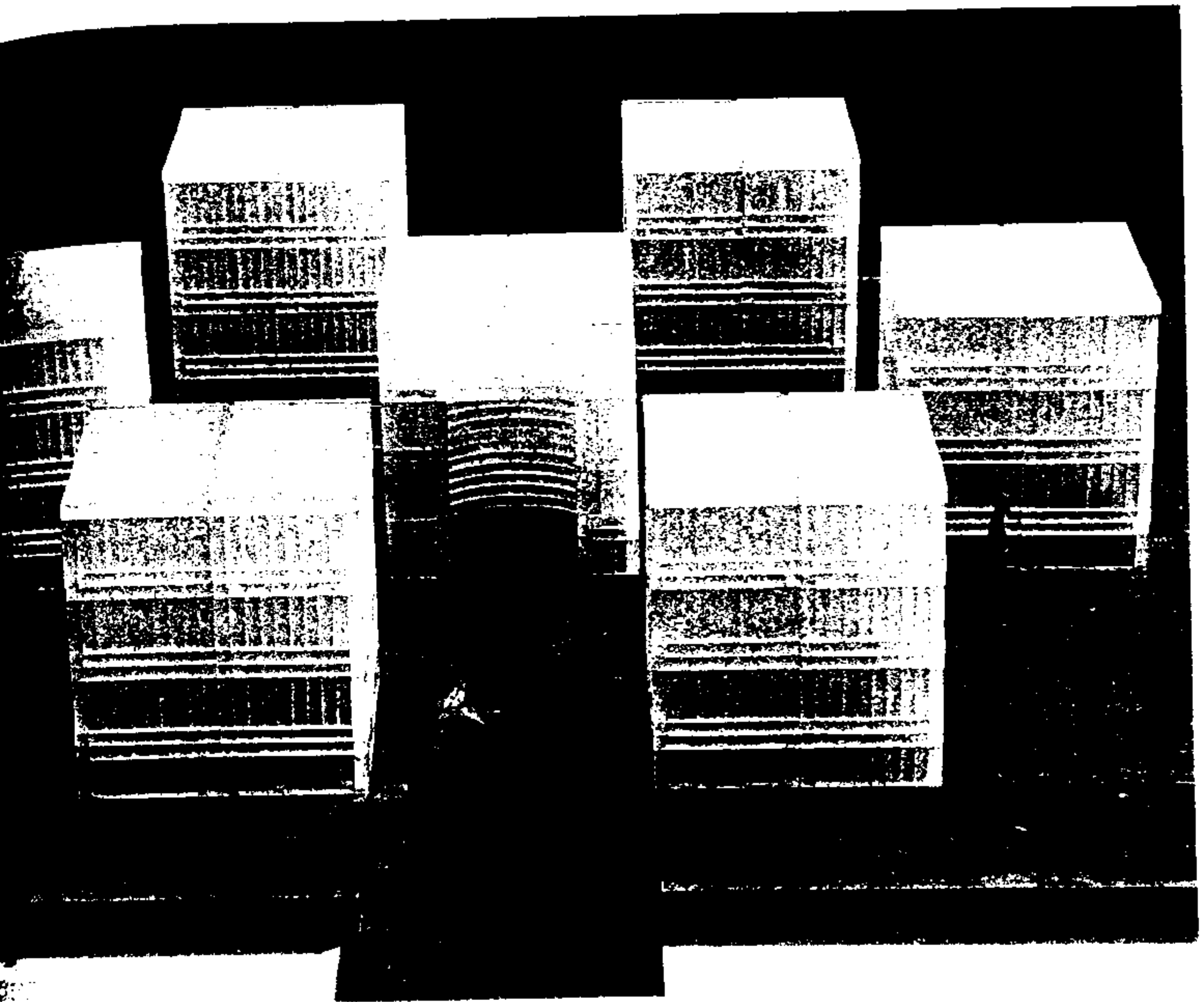
public land?" she asked. Stunned by her reference to "special groups," the sponsors were further bewildered by Parks Commissioner Newbold Morris's opinion that "monuments in the parks should be limited to events of American history." They saw numerous examples of other immigrant groups' national heroes immortalized in stone and bronze, from Central Park to Washington Square. Eventually, Rapoport's *Scroll of Fire* was erected in Israel, where national memory had always been defined by that of Jews everywhere, a continuum of generational memory transcending borders.

But these American survivors of the Warsaw Ghetto may have continued to wonder what the difference was between "events of American history" and those of "Americans' history." For, like many American immigrants, they included both old and new worlds in their historical memory. In a culture composed of immigrants, they assumed that their "foreign" experiences would come to be regarded also as American, that as part of their European past, the Holocaust would become part of America's past. As a land of immigrants, the survivors had hoped, America would also be a land of immigrant memories, of pasts that were "foreign" only insofar as they transpired in other lands, but American in that they explained why immigrants had come to America in the first place. If the survivors' history was not a part of the public memory, could they still regard themselves as part of the public?

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The New York Holocaust memorial was never built at its assigned place in Riverside Park. The square stone remains, however, protected by a short cast-iron fence, largely unknown to most New Yorkers. Once a year, around 19 April, wreaths of flowers appear inside the enclosure. Undeterred, WAGRO continued its search for funds and an acceptable design. In the mid-1960s, with the city's blessing, a new site on the lower tip of Manhattan across from Ellis Island and the Statue of Liberty was chosen as more suitable for a truly civic monument. An umbrella committee calling itself Memorial to the Six Million Jewish Martyrs, Inc. and comprising some twenty major Jewish organizations commissioned a model from the celebrated architect Louis Kahn. In October 1968, Kahn's model of six great glass blocks was exhibited to wide acclaim at the Museum of Modern Art. A season of fundraising dinners was kicked off to raise the 1.5 million dollars necessary to install the monument. Five years later, the committee had raised \$17,000, barely enough to pay the architect for his model. Kahn died in March 1974, and the following May, the executive committee announced that fundraising efforts had been stymied by a worsening economic recession, Israel's recent wars, and the crisis of Soviet Jewry. Fearful that a drive to fund memory of the past could be at the expense of endangered Jews in the present, the memorial committee suspended further work on the New York monument.⁷



Louis Kahn's
model for a
Holocaust
memorial in
New York City,
designed in
1967 for Battery
Park but never
built. Photo:
Courtesy of
Vladka Meed.

Which is not to say that New York was left without its share of Holocaust monuments and memorial centers. Most synagogues in New York continue to reserve some space for a small memorial: a bas relief of Janusz Korczak and his children frames the doorway of the Park Avenue Synagogue; a miniature memorial garden invites quiet meditation at the Brotherhood Synagogue on Gramercy Park. In other places, Rapoport's Warsaw Ghetto Monument has been divided thematically and reproduced: the exilic bas relief has a home at the Jewish Theological Seminary, while a version of the fighters occupies the lobby of the Workmen's Circle Building.

Other memorial motifs depend similarly on their sites and sponsoring institutions. Sculptor Harriet Feigenbaum's marble bas relief is set vertically along the corner edge of the Appellate Division Courthouse of the State Supreme Court on Madison Avenue and Twenty-fifth Street. Carved swirls of flame and smoke climb gracefully from an etched plan of Auschwitz, up along the corner, cut off bluntly at the top. This memorial "to Victims of the Injustice of the Holocaust" is inscribed with words that echo its placement as a kind of cornerstone for the courthouse, the reason for its commission: "Indifference to Injustice Is the Gate to Hell."

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The American Memorial Terrain: Denver

With little national coordination, other memorials did begin to appear across the country, quietly as plaques on synagogue walls, or as small memorial gardens in the courtyards of suburban synagogues. Occasionally, the rabbi would read from a pulpit salvaged from a destroyed synagogue in Germany, Poland, or Czechoslovakia. Eventually, as a community's confidence grew, small memorials were dedicated publicly in civic spaces usually reserved for state and national monuments. Open competitions were occasionally held, though more often it was the donor him- or herself who conceived of the monument's form and commissioned it. Typically, a Holocaust memorial committee would invite a local artist to submit proposals until they could agree on one they liked. Even as community projects, these memorials rarely achieved popular consensus: if they were too figurative, religious leaders balked at their not being Jewish enough. If they were too abstract, survivors protested that their all-too-literal experiences were betrayed.

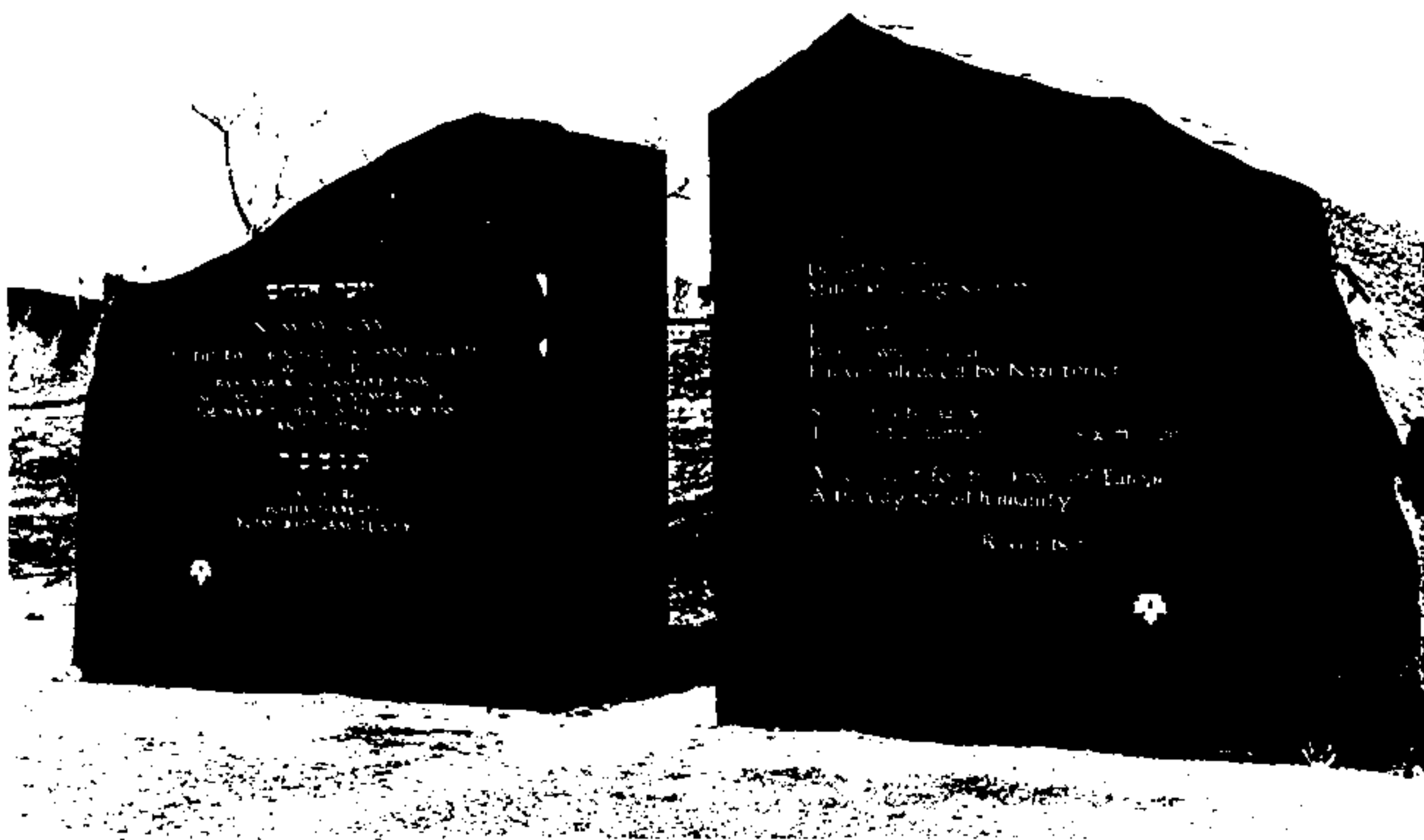
Today, nearly every major American city is home to at least one, and often several, memorials commemorating aspects of the Holocaust. What each remembers depends on who commissioned the monument, under what financial conditions, and in what context. For example, not long after Yevgeny Yevtushenko's poem "Babi Yar" came to the attention of Americans, the city council in Denver passed

a motion "to recall the past tragedy of Babi Yar, as well as the necessity to speak out against anti-Semitism in the Soviet Union today."⁸ As the plight of Soviet Jewry had paralyzed one memorial in New York, it would now inspire a new one in Denver. Accordingly, the city council designated a twenty-seven-acre parcel of undeveloped city land for a Babi Yar Memorial, chosen for its apparent topographical resemblance to the site of the infamous massacre at Babi Yar: a ten-meter-deep drainage culvert recalled to their minds the ravine at Babi Yar. After several years of fundraising, a dedication ceremony addressed by Elie Wiesel, and a Congressional motion commending the committee for its work, plans for the memorial were nearly completed.

But when the model and inscriptions were publicly announced, representatives from the local Ukrainian community rose in protest. There was no mention of the massacre of Ukrainians that took place at Babi Yar in 1942, they argued, which included the martyrdom of the nationalist poet Olena Teliha, among others. After several rounds of negotiations between the Babi Yar Foundation and a newly formed committee of Ukrainian Americans, the foundation agreed to change the monument's inscriptions to reflect the Ukrainian dimension of the killings at Babi Yar between 1941 and 1943. In return, the Ukrainian group would contribute \$25,000 to finish the memorial. Two massive, polished chunks of charcoal granite at the entrance to the Babi Yar Memorial in Denver now commemorate the "Two Hundred Thousand Victims Who Died [at] Babi Yar, Kieve, Ukraine, U.S.S.R.,

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Stone gateway
to Babi Yar Park
in Denver.

Photo:
James E. Young.

September 29, 1941–November 6, 1943. The Majority Jews with Ukrainians and Others.”

Beyond the portal stones, a number of other, mixed symbolic markers dot the great expanse of green, rolling park land. One hundred crabapple trees were planted to represent Jews killed at Babi Yar. A narrow, high-sided wooden bridge spans the culvert, an oblique reference to boxcars that once carried Jews to their deaths (though not at Babi Yar). Across the park, a round granite slab in the shape of a tree trunk sheared near the ground signifies a people cut off, mid-growth. Near the entrance, a large round marble stone is inscribed with the names of the park’s founders, its chief donors, and the politicians who participated in its establishment.

Today, Denver’s Babi Yar Memorial Park lies quietly unvisited by much of the community. The city’s park service continues to maintain the grounds, and neighborhood children on bicycles still careen down the park’s grassy slopes. But the voice box that once narrated Babi Yar’s history to visitors has long been broken, its tape lost. Holocaust Remembrance Day ceremonies have been moved to other sites throughout the city. For, as was the case in many American communities, the building process itself was occasionally so bruising and contentious, that much of Denver’s Jewish community grew alienated from the very site that was meant to unify them. In time, wounds may heal and the community may yet return to their Babi Yar Park, but as of this writing, the memorial seems all but forgotten by its community.

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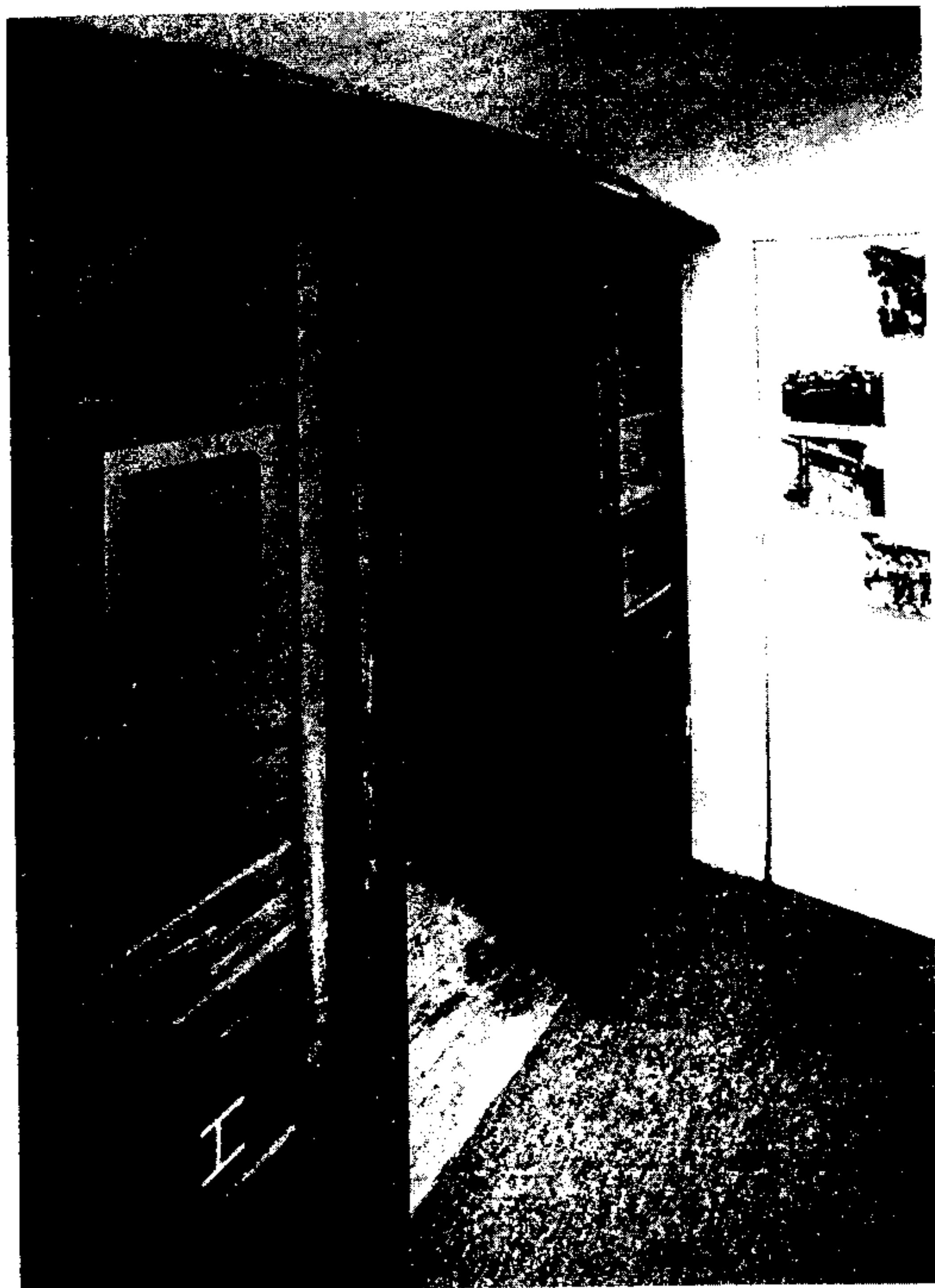
Dallas

As terrain and fundraising combined in Denver to shape the Babi Yar Memorial’s message, the artists’ and primary sponsors’ visions dominate in other American memorials. Though survivor Michael Jacobs says he had wanted an outdoor site for the memorial he had long planned for his Dallas community, he gratefully accepted the downstairs space donated to him by the local Jewish Community Center in 1980. This would be the future home of the Dallas Memorial Center for Holocaust Studies, a professionally run museum and study center for Holocaust education and research. As the chief donor and fundraiser, Jacobs wanted the center to bear some mark of his personal experiences during the Holocaust, some trace of the survivor’s vision.

This vision was defined for him when he was led downstairs to see the space for the first time. As he descended, Jacobs has said, the stairs appeared to be so many railroad ties, the handrails seeming to lead him into the boxcar he’d been forced into as a young Jewish child in Poland.⁹ Committed to presenting a rhetorically authentic reconstruction of events, the survivor-sponsor traveled to Europe in

1983 expressly to find one of the boxcars that once transported Jews to the East. He first tried the Dutch national railway, but they had disposed of all the now ancient boxcars. He then called the Belgian railway, who believed they had one car left, which they were about to destroy. Assured by authorities that its murderous credentials were beyond reproach, Jacobs arranged to have the car shipped intact to Galveston, whence it would be trucked overland to Dallas. At first, the railway tried to sell the boxcar to the survivor; but when told of its purpose and Jacobs's own past, they agreed to donate it, as shippers did their services over the entire length of the boxcar's journey to America.

On its arrival in Dallas, the boxcar was shortened by one third of its length to fit into the building. It was then placed at the bottom of the center's stairs as an entry hall to the museum, a kind of antechamber, just to give visitors the sense



Boxcar entryway to the Holocaust memorial museum and study center in Dallas. Photo: Courtesy of the Dallas Memorial Center for Holocaust Studies.

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of "having been there." As the survivor's memory had been dominated by his experiences in boxcars, so too would the visitor's museum experience be framed. But here a minor memorial crisis ensued. During the museum's dedication, a few of those who really "had been there"—the survivors—refused to enter the boxcar at all: once had been enough. When they complained that they were, in effect, barred from visiting a museum devoted to their experiences, a solution followed immediately. The boxcar remained, but survivors were given their own, hidden entrance, a secret door for survivors only. To this day, the boxcar entryway is the only one of its kind.

Tucson

In Tucson, local topography and landforms combined with the Jewish Community Center's design to influence the shape of Holocaust memory in still other ways. Unveiled on 22 April 1990, the coincidental convergence of Earth Day and Holocaust Remembrance Day, the Holocaust memorial at the center seemed to embody the simultaneous gesture every monument makes to both landscape and memory. As the "Grand Canyon State," Arizona had long linked its identity to its monumental natural setting. Artist Ami Shamir thus conceived and built Tucson's Holocaust memorial in direct proportion to the wide-open landscape it would inhabit. With its 43-foot-high, broken-topped column, a reflecting pool, and 150-foot-long bas-relief wall, it would be the largest Holocaust monument in America.

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For its size would correspond to that of Tucson's landscape, not to that of its small but vibrant Jewish community of some twenty thousand. In this sense, Tucson confirmed the general wisdom that the smaller the community, the more manageable and streamlined the memorial building process will be. In a community of relatively uniform aesthetic tastes and historical concerns, the Holocaust memorial committee found little disagreement in evaluating some eighty submissions and proposals from artists around the world. When the local Jewish federation decided to build an expansive new recreational and educational community center, one open to the entire non-Jewish Tucson community, they voted to commission the memorial as part of the complex, thus avoiding the usually fractious fundraising chores. Costs of the memorial would be built into the center's ten-million-dollar budget.

Though the building's architect had not designed a specific space for the monument, he had planned for a long, free-standing wall to extend outward from the main structure by some 150 feet to define and enclose the surrounding open desert. Instead of sitting isolated and exposed, the center would seem linked both to nearby roads and to the landscape; such a structural arm would also create a

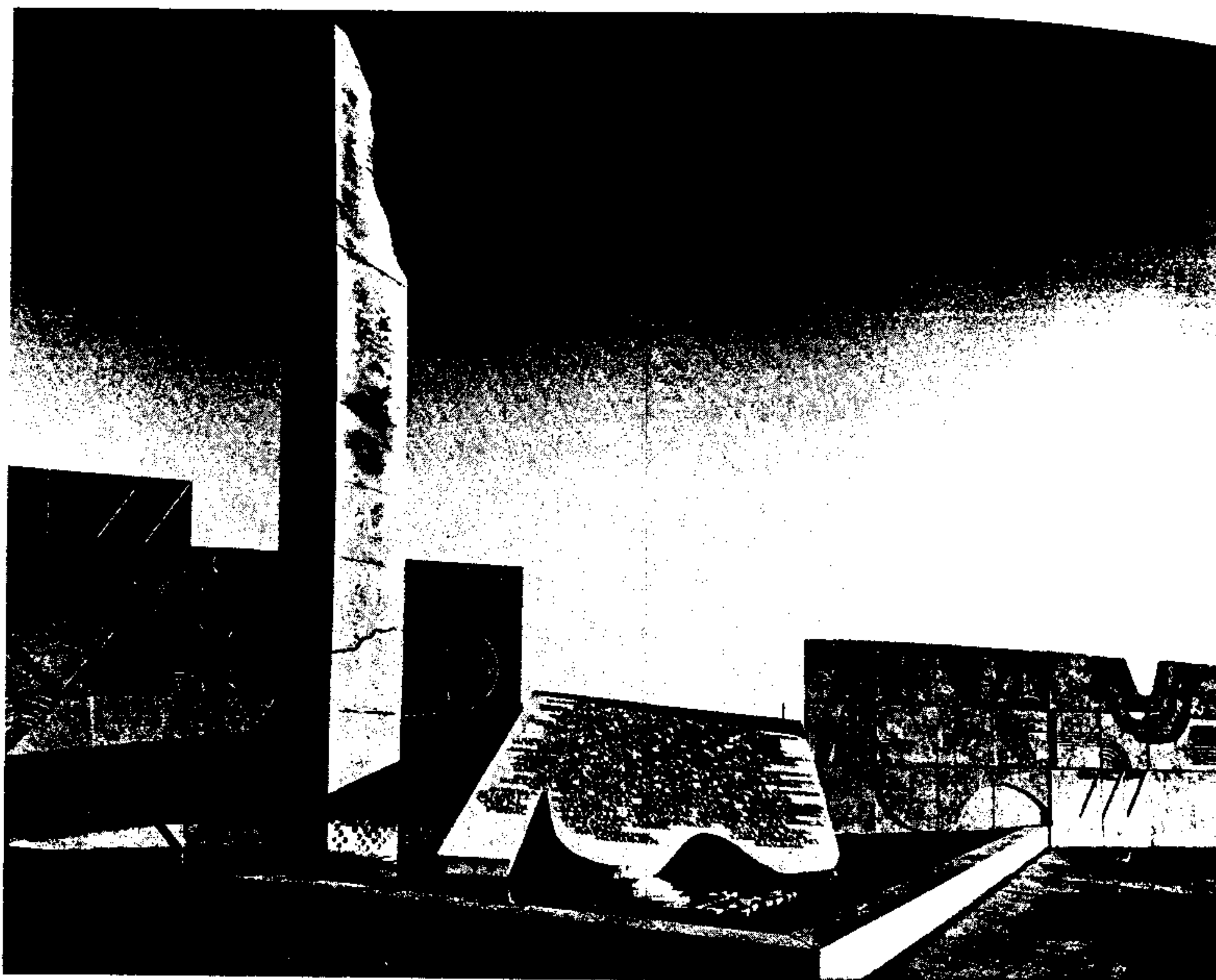
large, inviting plaza and parking lot in front, breaking the landscape into manageable parts. As it turned out, the wall and the plaza it created also provided an ideal space for the monument; indeed, by building the monument into the free-standing wall, Shamir has made it seem part of the center's original structure. As a result, the monument now functions as the architectural entryway visitors pass through on their way into a stunning complex of auditoriums, cavernous gymnasiums, weight rooms, swimming pools, and tennis courts. Built as it is into the wall and plaza, the memorial houses and thus lends a certain cast to all the activities that take place in the center.

From a distance, only the three-sided concrete column and long white wall are visible. The open country around it is dotted with postcard-perfect, three-armed saguaro cactus trees, sandy dry gulches, and low-slung Santa Fe-style homes—all dwarfed by the craggy Santa Catalina mountain range looming eight thousand feet high a couple of miles to the west. As we approach, we see that the column and walls are poured in white concrete sections. Like many of the monument's other elements, the broken top of the column resonates in several ways at once: some iconographic, some symbolic. By itself, the column suggests an architectural remnant from a shattered civilization, or, in the tradition of Jewish funerary motifs, a broken tree, or a broken candlestick recalling a life interrupted by death. Survivors, as well as those who have only visited the camps since the war, say they see in the lone column a crematorium chimney.

Both tower and wall seem to take on the color and cast of the natural earth forms nearby. The tower's broken top, for example, recalls the craggy peaks of the nearby mountains. At sunset, the entire wall complex radiates the warm pink glow of evening. The pastel hues of the desert—reds, yellows, and browns—are picked up, seemingly cast into the raw white concrete of the wall and monument, while the sky's sunset gold is reflected in the pool of water at its base.

Other elements simultaneously reinforce and undercut the tranquility of the setting, which takes on the taut stillness of ruins. A section of the wall appears to have toppled forward into the reflecting pool, leaving a wide gap in the wall's length. With its round-topped edges, the section leaning into the pool recalls the tablets of the law, broken and reinscribed with the names of some 147 concentration, death, and labor camps. According to the project's director, Fred Steiner, the artist made sure every local survivor's former camp was listed here, a place where individual stories might be recalled together. A piece of stone from Dachau was also embedded in the slab of concrete bearing the camp's name, linking the removed memorial sign to its place on earth.

Rivulets of water run down from cracks in the column to feed the pool, on which seems to float a stylized Hebrew quotation from Jeremiah 31: 15–17:



The Holocaust memorial at the Jewish Community Center in Tucson, Arizona, designed by Ami Shamir, 1990. Photo: Courtesy of the Jewish Community Center of Tucson.

"There is hope for thy future." The aim, according to the artist, was "to conjure up the essences of complementary archetypes such as destruction and rejuvenation, hopelessness and hopefulness . . . death and life with the emphasis on the power and vitality of life forces to overcome unspeakable difficulties."¹⁰ Together, images and words suggest that from brokenness, life still flows. Shamir, an Israeli living in New York, seems to combine Israel's sense of continuing Jewish life after the Holocaust with America's ever-sanguine view of the future.

In addition to resonating the nearby "lay of the land," Shamir's design seems to have incorporated some of its local lore as well. For as stark and raw as the wall looks from a distance, on closer inspection we find that its entire length is covered with a bas relief of what appear to be etched hieroglyphs: geometric lines and squiggles, randomly drawn arrows and a star of David, Hebrew lettering (Zachor, or remember), and round intermeshing gears. According to the artist, these abstract signs gesture to the identity of the memorial maker, on the one hand, and to the railroad tracks and machinery of death, on the other. Further

down the wall to the right, a stylized menorah cut out of the top of the wall serves as both part of the monument and the only icon marking the site as specifically Jewish.

Whether intentionally or not, Shamir's wall signs also recall yet another kind of local iconography, known primarily to the inhabitants of Tucson familiar with the history of their environs. For wherever someone digs in Tucson—for a new sidewalk, swimming pool, or even a monument—handfuls of red-clay pottery shards are churned up, remnants of a now extinct tribe of Native Americans, retrospectively named "Hohokam"—loosely translated as "the Disappeared Ones." The Hohokam tribe left more than broken vessels: they also left what has been called a "legacy on stone," thousands of petroglyphs carved into nearby stone faces, caves, and cliff sides. Various abstract and anthropomorphic in design, the petroglyphs now function in the popular imagination as indecipherable epitaphs for an extinct people. The visual resonance between Shamir's wall etchings and the petroglyphs of the Hohokam tribe may be apparent only to those who have seen both, yet it still links the memory of one genocide to another and in so doing ties the monument that much more closely to its surroundings.¹¹ The result is a Holocaust monument whose elements speak directly to its habitat, even as it commemorates events so distant in time and space that they may seem more mythical than real to much of Tucson's non-Jewish community.

It also becomes clear that in its many elements, the monument draws on much more than local landscape and lore. For, like any artist, the monument maker has drawn from his own particular repertoire of memorial figures and materials, forms and motifs. With several memorial commissions to Shamir's credit, it is not difficult to trace the recirculation of elements from memorial to memorial, each recalling some aspect of its predecessors. In fact, it seems likely that the Tucson memorial, with its seemingly unlimited space, invited just such a compilation of previous Holocaust memorials designed and built by the artist in New Jersey and Los Angeles. The forms of a memorial Shamir built in 1983 for Temple B'nai Abraham in Livingston, New Jersey, for example, are repeated here: a broken-topped column, cut-out menorah, and leaning tablets are slightly rearranged and enlarged in scale to the monumental surroundings of their new home in Tucson. To them, Shamir has added the long wall that will be part of his new design for the Simon Wiesenthal Center in Los Angeles. Even the broken column in Livingston appeared in Shamir's earlier commission for the Wiesenthal Center's first memorial courtyard, built in 1977. By rearranging a number of repeating elements from his previous work, the artist might even be said to have created a kind of modular monument, eminently adaptable to its new surroundings.

Los Angeles: Three Memorials

In general, the larger a particular Jewish American community and the greater its diversity, the more difficult it will be to reach agreement on a unified memory of the Holocaust, much less a single memorial space. Conversely, the more compact and homogeneous the community, the easier and more single-minded the memorial-building process usually is. This is why Tucson has a memorial and New York does not, why San Francisco finally agreed to build its controversial monument while Boston is still raising funds for its memorial. This may also be why Los Angeles has ended up with two major Holocaust museums, plus a large public monument.

In Los Angeles, with a Jewish population second only to New York's in size, public memory of the Holocaust has been riven into three unequal shares: the Jewish Federation's Martyrs' Memorial and Holocaust Museum, the Simon Wiesenthal Center's Beit Hashoah—Museum of Tolerance, and a striking monument of black granite columns set in Pan Pacific Park. In a Jewish community of six hundred thousand, including some thirty thousand Holocaust survivors and refugees, rival memories and competing interests were inevitable. Practically the only common trait uniting an otherwise diverse weave of pious and secular, left- and right-wing, European and Mediterranean Jews has been the desire to remember. But questions of how, what, whom, and where to remember have divided the community no less than in other cities. While the Jews of Los Angeles have not decided on the single best way to commemorate the Holocaust, all agree that there is, for better or worse, more than enough memory to go around.

Indeed, even the desire to remember was born in conflicting needs. "At first, we wanted to forget," local survivor Otto Schirn has said. "But when we realized that our forgetting might lead to others never knowing about the Holocaust, we began to work on remembering—both for ourselves and so that others would know what happened. That's when the idea of a monument was born."¹² Each side of this twin memorial impulse would eventually demand its own corresponding space: one would be a substitute gravesite where survivors could mourn their lost families, the other a public exposition of Holocaust history. From its inception in the 1960s, the Los Angeles memorial was thus to plod painstakingly along two parallel tracks—one monumental, one museological—until it was joined—some say challenged—later by an energetic newcomer, Rabbi Marvin Hier.

By 1973, Schirn and his committee of fellow survivors had found what they believed to be a friendly neighborhood park for their projected memorial, the Pan Pacific Park in the traditionally Jewish Fairfax district of Los Angeles. That the neighborhood was not quite as Jewish as it had been in the past, but had become a more representative mix of African Americans and new immigrants from Mexico

and Asia, made the space even more appealing in the "new Americans'" eyes. An open competition for a memorial design was called in 1977, and ten artists submitted drawings. Within weeks, a jury of survivors, local academic art historians, and Jewish community leaders had chosen Joseph Young's proposal for six triangular columns of black granite, each twenty four feet high, equipped with gas flames to be kindled on commemorative days.

But when the survivors' group turned to the county for use of the public park, the Board of Supervisors balked. According to the Los Angeles County Parks code, a public park was a civic, and therefore nonsectarian, space. This was, after all, *Pan Pacific Park* and so could not display the religious symbols or forms of any single group. The Holocaust, in the board's view, would have to be broadly defined to include all of its victims, Jews and non-Jews. The monument would have to invite the entire community into its space, without the implicit boundaries suggested by stars of David, crosses, or moons and crescents. As good "new Americans," the survivors agreed to omit all religious iconography. While the original design had included a hexagonal arrangement of columns inside a larger star of David, the final version would be the granite columns only—arranged in the outline of the now missing star.

Likewise, other specific references to Jewish victims would come only in oblique symbolism, according to the artist, forms that allowed the memorial projections of both Jews and non-Jews. The six columns, for example, would be open to many interpretations: their number would suggest in Jewish eyes the approximate number of Jewish dead, six million; others might count each as signifying one of the six death camps in Poland. Some would see the black columns as commemorative candles or torches, others as crematoria chimneys belching flames. In their vertical reach, they could be regarded as soaring emblems of heroism, while their triangular shape could recall the patches worn by all concentration camp inmates. Young has also suggested that the space between columns could recall the absence of victims, the missing generation of children.

In fact, rather than conveying a sense of comfort or reassurance, the artist has attempted to suggest some of the pain that comes with mourning and remembrance. "I did not want to make something beautiful," he said, "but something to evoke the experience itself, which was not pretty."¹³ The 75-by-100-foot space includes both the black granite columns set in a floor of black and red granite and a wall of broken-topped, unfinished granite chunks. A low black granite bench is meant to evoke the uncomfortably short bench traditionally used when Jewish mourners sit Shiva. And rather than inspirational memorial inscriptions, two sides of each of the three-sided columns will be incised with a historical text, each one of twelve panels describing a year of the Nazi rule. On the third side of

each column, a bronze bas relief will illustrate images from the period, with a special text set at child's eye level.

Though conceived in 1973, the monument at Pan Pacific Park was dedicated eighteen years later, in the fall of 1991. Meanwhile, the other half of the city's memorial project, its expository part, was also under way. What had begun as a small, traveling exhibition of photographs in 1976, organized by a group of survivors, finally found a home on the twelfth floor of the Jewish Federation office building on Wilshire Boulevard in 1978. In both conception and style, the exhibition reflected its modest origins—a meeting over coffee between an American-born businessman, Morton Silverman, and survivors from the area. We did not want a “pigeon-roost” in a park, said Silverman, but “something to teach, to document.”¹⁴ With this in mind, Silverman and his group gathered photographic documents, labeled them, and solicited space from local universities and community centers. The exhibition's designers forswore a slick, high-tech appearance for a more understated, books-on-walls approach, one that would fit in flexibly with whatever space it occupied. Eventually, the local Jewish Federation found space to mount the exhibition permanently at its offices.

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For a while, this room was the first and only Holocaust museum in America, a small sister to Yad Vashem in Jerusalem, which had sent consultants to advise the Jewish Federation. Working closely with Los Angeles County schools, the federation's small staff of survivors brought thousands of students from neighborhoods throughout the city to tour the museum. In fact, as instructive and powerful as the photographic panels were, students and teachers agreed that the exhibition's principal resource was the survivors who led them through the museum. In their presence, the photo montages came alive. The survivor-docents' living commentary seemed to invigorate the “book on walls,” filling in the gap between a grainy black-and-white past and the present moment. The director, Michael Nutkiewicz, recalls that after visiting the museum in 1982, Elie Wiesel told him, “You have a little jewel up here.”

Over the years, the center amassed a huge archive of photographs and artifacts—everything from uniforms to badges, letters to train schedules. For twelve years, visitors found their way up to the little jewel on the twelfth floor, but when the Bank Hapoalim vacated the space next door, the federation mounted a million-dollar campaign to endow a much larger, more accessible museum on the ground floor. In 1991, the new Martyrs' Memorial and Museum of the Holocaust took its place on Wilshire Boulevard's museum row, just down from the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, the Page Museum, and the Craft and Folk Museum.

Survivors still lead tours, but rather than focusing only on a long road to death, the redesigned exhibition begins with descriptions of Jewish culture and life in



Survivor Marc Salberg leads students on a tour of the Martyrs' Memorial and Museum of the Holocaust in Los Angeles. Photo: Courtesy of the Martyrs' Memorial and Museum.

nineteenth-century Europe—showing what was lost. And instead of emphasizing the end of Eastern European Jewry only, the new space will include elaborate displays of French and Greek Jewish communities whose destruction is often overlooked. According to Nutkiewicz, the exhibition story line does not end in 1945 with the liberation of the camps, but also covers the ensuing three years to suggest the continuation of Jewish life in Israel and America. “The content committee doesn’t want to give the impression of Jews as [just] victims,” Nutkiewicz has said, “but [also] to demonstrate that they had a rich life before 1933.”¹⁵

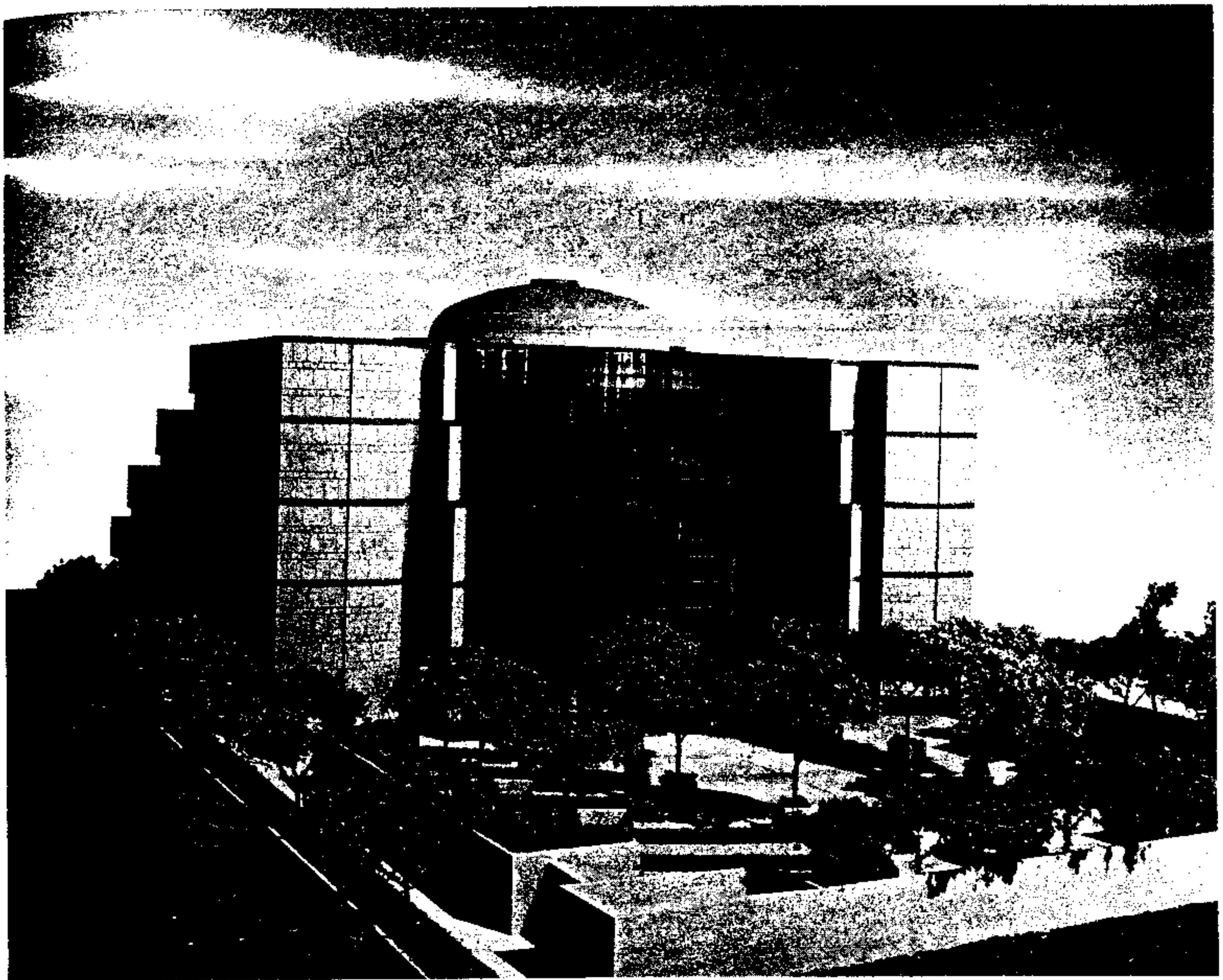
About the time in 1977 when the Jewish Federation decided to open the Holocaust museum, a young orthodox rabbi was on his way to Los Angeles to found the city’s first orthodox Yeshiva. New York-born and -trained, Rabbi Marvin Hier had taken a sabbatical from his congregation in Vancouver to spend the year before in Israel. He had been much impressed by two institutions there: a small yeshiva called Or Sameach for young Ba’alei Tshuva (secular Jews who “return” to the orthodox fold) and the Yad Vashem memorial and museum. On his return

to Vancouver, Hier decided to found his own yeshiva in Los Angeles, after Or Sameach's example. With encouragement and financial backing from philanthropist Samuel Belzberg, whose children Rabbi Hier had shepherded back into the Jewish flock, the young rabbi moved to Los Angeles in 1977 to open a West Coast branch of Or Sameach. Within months, not only had Hier opened a Yeshiva (later affiliated with Yeshiva University) but, to the consternation and amazement of his newly adopted community, he had appended to it a Holocaust memorial and museum, the Simon Wiesenthal Center.

To this day, the motivation and timing underlying Hier's yoking of the yeshiva and Holocaust remain a festering sore point in the Jewish community. In the eyes of his well-to-do supporters, Hier's timing and vision were propitious: his Wiesenthal Center was to be the advanced edge of the Holocaust museums boom. But to his many detractors, including much of the academic and religious community, the rabbi was an interloper and opportunist, a self-promoting media hound who beat Angelenos at their own game. Many believe that while his original plans to open a Yeshiva were sincere, once he tapped the immense potential in the Holocaust as a fundraising theme, he allowed the means to become synonymous with the ends: Holocaust and Jewish education would become one. Critics charged that in this city of illusions, Hier had cleverly mixed Holocaust fundraising with Holocaust consciousness raising; even worse, in their minds, the public—especially the wealthiest sector—had bought it.¹⁶ Furthermore, Hier was accused of dividing the area's financial resources, having jumped into the pool of potential donors precisely at the point when the Jewish Federation began raising funds for its long-planned museum.¹⁷

With its 380,000 contributing members, the Simon Wiesenthal Center is now the largest Jewish organization in the world and home to a sparkling new, five-story, fifty-million-dollar Holocaust museum and memorial complex. For better or worse, it has in fact borne out the words of the center's principal financial backer, Samuel Belzberg, who once told a reporter, "It's a sad fact that Israel and Jewish education and all the other familiar buzzwords no longer seem to rally Jews behind the community. The Holocaust, though, works every time."¹⁸

Ever mindful of both the differences between civic and Jewish constituencies and how they overlap, the Wiesenthal Center has constantly refined its mission to reflect the contingencies of audience and funding. As the recipient of state funds, the center was forced, in a lawsuit brought by local Jewish groups anxious to preserve the separation of church and state, to divorce itself completely from the yeshiva it once supported. Both the mission of the new museum and its name have been refined accordingly: it will now be a nonsectarian, public museum whose stated aim will be to confront bigotry and racism. Its new name,



Beit Hashoah—Museum of Tolerance, suggests that tolerance can be propagated precisely through the study of its greatest antithesis, the Holocaust, and other examples of racial and religious persecution.

In keeping with its new civic mandate to be answerable to Los Angeles' large black, Hispanic, and Asian communities, Beit Hashoah—Museum of Tolerance plans to examine the history of all social and ethnic prejudice and its consequences in America. In the words of a promotional brochure, "The museum's main exhibit area is organized in two sections: the history of racism and prejudice within the American experience . . . and then the story of the most quintessential example of man's inhumanity to man—the Holocaust." The exhibition hall on the ground level will include multimedia presentations of the civil rights movement in America, with a biographical section on Martin Luther King, Jr. After examining American forms of racism and bigotry, visitors will meet the Holocaust—now part of a distinctly American continuum. In this way, European and Christian anti-Semitism will be thematically subsumed to a more universal propensity in humankind toward prejudice and race hatred.

Model of Beit Hashoah—Museum of Tolerance, Los Angeles. Photo: Courtesy of the Simon Wiesenthal Center.

According to the exhibition model, the second main exhibition hall is devoted to "the Shoah—the Destruction of European Jewry." As at the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C., visitors entering the Holocaust section of the Museum of Tolerance will receive a passport bearing the photo of a child "enmeshed by events of the Holocaust." At every station, visitors insert their cards into machines to learn further details of their adopted child's life. In anticipation perhaps of a near future without survivors to lead us through such exhibits, technology makes former victims themselves our new guides. The first tableau in a succession of installations—"Berlin 1932: A Streetscape in Pre-Nazi Germany"—features a Jewish woman and child dining amicably at Café Kranzler with a German businessman, doctor, and military officer. On a screen above, according to the plan, visitors "see these same people ten years later as they are transformed into the victims and perpetrators of the Holocaust." From here, we will be led through a series of dioramas and multimedia presentations presenting the subsequent twelve years—Kristallnacht, the invasion of Poland, the Wannsee Conference, ghetto uprisings, and finally the entry gates to Auschwitz. Only at the last station will visitors learn the fate of their child-guides.

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At the end, visitors return to the present day in the form of a "situation room," complete with wire-service monitors relaying minute-by-minute instances of anti-Semitism and other human rights violations. Whether this will bring the past forward or make the present moment seem already historical and archaic in its museum setting remains to be seen.

Holocaust memorials not only reflect the aesthetic tastes of their communities, the topographies of their landscapes; in both process and execution, they tend also to embody the community's broader ethos. What happens when, in the words of Judith Miller, Hollywood meets the Holocaust? The results may have been all too predictable. Early conjecture surrounding the initial design of the Wiesenthal Center was not always without basis: in the land of Disney and entertainment theme parks, a Holocaust chamber of horrors, replete with piped-in smoke and screams, did indeed make its way onto the drawing board—only to be rejected by the project's organizers.

The ultimate design of the center showed both taste and Hollywood flash, even if the slickness of the promotional campaigns left many in the community uneasy. In media-saturated Los Angeles, where the strength of an idea or depth of talent is often measured in decibels and talk-show visibility, even the public institutions have had to rely on show-business techniques to draw some of the region's great wealth into its cultural and performing arts centers, its museums, and universities. Given the ethos of a region dominated by the "entertainment industry," the Beverly Hills Holocaust banquets featuring everyone from George

Bush to Arnold Schwarzenegger should not be surprising, no matter how surreal they seem at first blush. Because Los Angeles is a big city, where all kinds of people give all kinds of money for all kinds of causes, all kinds of memory are going to exist side by side: both the glitzy, entertaining productions of the Wiesenthal Center and the more measured, lower-key exhibitions at the Martyrs' Museum.

None of which is to ignore the serious consequences for Holocaust memory and understanding that also take root in this media wonderland. In the Wiesenthal Center's case, it becomes clear that those who live by the media sword may also be wounded by it. On the one hand, the center has succeeded masterfully in converting media attention into museum-building capital. At the same time, because discord and controversy elicit more media attention than anything else, the power plays, media coups, and bitter rivalries between Holocaust organizations in Los Angeles have generated far more publicity than any actual memorial-work yet accomplished. To a great extent, in fact, "public memory" of the Holocaust has been defined in Los Angeles explicitly by that which plays on the media waves.

As a result, publicity of the internecine wars between competing museums in Los Angeles, between national and state museums in Washington and New York, has become a kind of mutant variation of "public memory." Precisely because of the prurient attention these controversies attract, and because no community likes washing its dirty laundry in public, the entire process—necessarily a public one—grows ever more distasteful and painful. For those survivors whose dignity was already shattered by the Nazis, the unseemly charges and countercharges, the indignities of fundraising and political maneuvering, become almost too much to bear. For many survivors and others who always wanted their community's resources directed toward education and social services, such memorial scenarios grow ever more egregious and unpalatable. Few could have predicted that so much disunity would arise in the name of memory, the only activity that has traditionally unified the Jewish people over time.

San Francisco: George Segal's Holocaust

San Francisco has long prided itself on the often spectacular blend of its architectural and natural landscapes. So when Mayor Dianne Feinstein's Holocaust memorial committee conceived of its project in 1981, members set their sights high: theirs would be both a memorial and a work of public art great enough to stand on its own. The aim would not be to acquire merely a flame or a stone, "but a major work of art for the city."¹⁹ In the words of Henry Hopkins, then representing the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art and a committee mem-

ber, "the memorial should serve a dual audience: those who would go to see it because of the subject, i.e., a memorial, and those who would go to see it because it would be a great work of art and thus would learn about the Holocaust and its implications for mankind."²⁰ The committee could not have foreseen how a monument might succeed valiantly in its constituent parts—as memorial and as art—and yet divide the community and generate nearly as much controversy as memory.

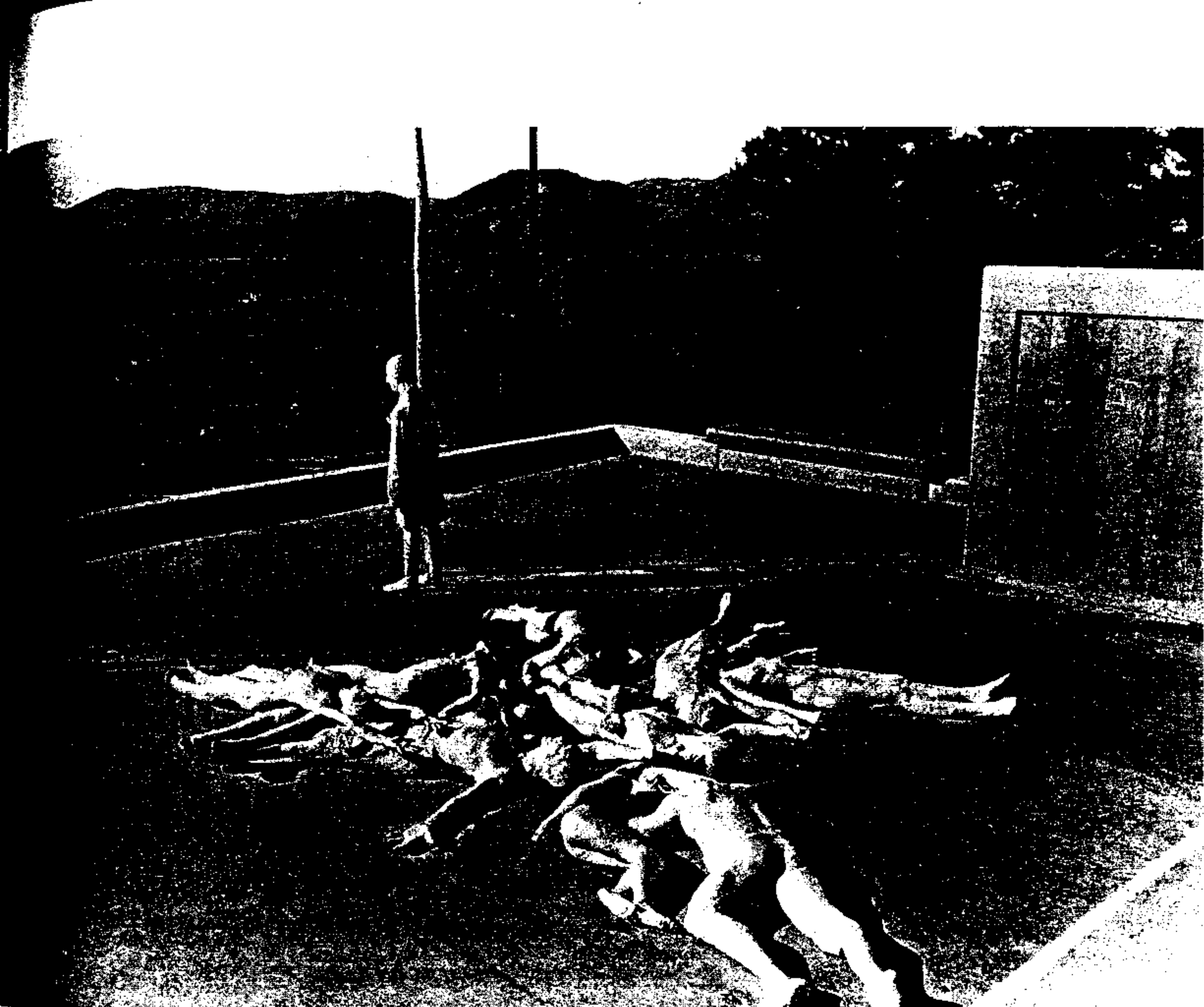
With its lofty goals in mind, the committee acquired a prime site from the city Parks Commission at Lincoln Park's Palace of the Legion of Honor—a shoulder of land set amid pine and cypress trees overlooking the Pacific Ocean just west of the Golden Gate. An equally promising list of prospective artists was compiled, including some of the most distinguished sculptors of the century: Henry Moore, Joan Miró, Isamu Noguchi, Louise Nevelson, Max Lieberman, Menashe Kadishman, Robert Graham, Ya'akov Agam, and George Segal. Of those invited to participate, however, only Agam, Kadishman, Graham (together with Lawrence Halperin), and Segal submitted designs. The rest either declined (some respectfully, others dismissively) or ignored the invitations altogether.

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Deliberations began with Agam's proposal, which was rejected out of hand for being, in the words of one committee member, "too Agam-ish, too kitschy and light-weight." And while the committee admired Kadishman's forty-foot memorial column, they balked at its cost and were sure that the Parks Commission would never allow such a tower to dominate the Legion of Honor. The short list came down to a conceptually innovative memorial tunnel proposed by Graham and the landscape architect Lawrence Halperin, and an installation by George Segal, who had turned reflexively to his hallmark white plaster figures. Though at first intrigued by Halperin's and Graham's negative-space concept, committee members feared that in its secluded location, the "black hole" could prove dangerous, inviting both crime and physical accidents.

Segal's design had almost never been conceived. The artist had long mulled over possible aesthetic responses to the Holocaust, but the loss of nearly all his parents' European family during the war and the prospect of immersing himself in such memory led him to resist the committee's repeated overtures. Nevertheless, on his way home from mounting an exhibition in Tokyo, Segal agreed to stop over in San Francisco to tour the proposed memorial site. It was early June 1982, and Israel had just invaded Lebanon. Shaken and anxious to hear more details, the politically dovish artist recoiled at the tone and language that American newscasters used in describing the war. "I was horrified for the first time in my life to hear anti-Semitic words coming out of American mouths," he related afterward. "In that instant, I decided to do the [Holocaust] piece. . . . It seemed precisely



George Segal's
Holocaust at
the Legion of
Honor in San
Francisco, with
a view toward
the Pacific
Ocean. Photo:
Ira Nowinski.

the wrong moment for me to abandon my support for the state of Israel and my fellow Jews, despite my objections to Begin and Sharon."²¹

Barely three months later, the committee received photographs of Segal's memorial: a tableau of eleven cast-white figures behind a barbed wire fence. One tattered, plaster-white figure (modeled on an Israeli survivor) stands looking out from behind the fence, his left hand resting on the wire. Behind him, ten bodies lie splayed in a pile, rife with both biblical and formal allusions: a woman with her head against a man's rib, a partly eaten apple in her hand; a father fallen near his son, both sacrificed; a man with outstretched arms, seemingly crucified. Radiating outward, the pile of corpses forms a rough star from one angle, a cross from another. On visiting the artist's New Jersey studio, committee members found that the work seemed to fit in with their original conception: it would be both high, cutting-edge art and an explicitly defined space for Holocaust memory. The committee agreed unanimously that it had found its design and returned to San Francisco to raise funds for its installation.

By this time in Segal's career, his plaster forms had long been celebrated as pop-cultural heirs to Duchamps' ready-mades, Warhol's soup cans, and Hopper's mundane slices of life. Widely acclaimed and exhibited in New York and European galleries, they were collected and shown in dozens of major museum installations. Before long, Segal's human-sized forms also began to find homes in public outdoor spaces, commissioned as commemorative bronze statuary to honor bus riders at New York's Port Authority, steelworkers in Youngstown, Ohio. For an artist who had turned away from the two-dimensional flatness of canvas to sculpture precisely for its material volume and three-dimensional space, this seemed to be the most natural memorial medium.

As a young painter during the 1950s, Segal had wrestled with the legacies of German expressionism and fauvism in the context of contemporary abstract expressionism. Still influenced by the broad brushstrokes and primary colors of these schools, he was also indebted to contemporaries like Jan Muller, Wolf Kahn, and Felix Pasilis. Segal thus worked hard to reconcile abstraction with his powerful desire to depict the human figure. This led him to explore the materiality of both his medium and his subject, the human form. Allan Kaprow's seemingly three-dimensional canvases and tar-babies moved Segal toward his own experiments with human volume and space. But, dissatisfied with his paintings, he turned to space itself (not its illusion on the two-dimensional canvas) for the third dimension: the material volume of human forms would follow the canvas's illusion of volume. In the late fifties, Segal began placing free-standing, roughly hewn human forms, made of chicken wire and burlap dipped in plaster, in front of large canvases painted with brightly colored, life-sized figures.

In the sixties, Segal won renown by casting first himself, seated at a table, and then others in plaster-dipped, cotton-gauze strips. Initially, both critics and, according to Phyllis Tuchman, the artist himself were unsure about these casts: they were disturbing, even morbid somehow in their echoes of the figures caught in the lava and ashes of Mount Vesuvius's eruption.²² But it was precisely this capacity to formalize the pedestrian moment, captured in *media res*, that set Segal's medium apart. His figures clustered at street corners, arrested in midstep, or sat at tables; they stood in front of pinball machines or lay in bed. In its sudden stillness, its shocking whiteness, the human form was both affirmed in his plaster casts and abstracted as a formal object of study.

Long regarded merely as the step between a sculptor's clay maquette and the final bronze piece, the plaster model was preserved in its own right by Segal. Even after casting his plaster figures in bronze—his concession to the monumental—Segal began to return them to their penultimate stage of creation by covering the bronze in a permanent, plaster-white patina. As a result, both his sculpture and monuments suggest themselves as works still in process, provisional and unfinished.

By the time of his San Francisco commission, two other public memorial experiences had left Segal wary of, if inured to, the political and emotional agendas underlying all such public commissions: one at Kent State University in honor of the students killed there by the National Guard in 1971, and another in Tel Aviv in honor of the state of Israel. In both cases, he had submitted variations on Abraham's binding of Isaac, neither of which suited his sponsors. While Kent State had hoped for something like a soldier's gun being brushed aside by a young nude woman, his sponsors in Tel Aviv had inferred an unfavorable political comparison between the aborted biblical sacrifice and that made by young Israeli soldiers for the policies of the older generation.

Like that of most Americans, Segal's "Holocaust experience" was necessarily vicarious, limited to the photographs and newsreel footage taken at liberation. When asked to remember the Holocaust, therefore, it was the piles of corpses and barbed wire, the shock and revulsion that came back to him. To refresh his memory before starting work on the San Francisco memorial, Segal returned to the site of his memory: archival photographs of liberation. One in particular, by Margaret Bourke-White, stuck with him and became the image he decided to replicate in his tableau of plaster casts. Segal adds another reason for using the corpses as his motif: strewn as they were, the bodies seemed to exemplify the violation and degradation prisoners underwent at the hands of the Nazis. "I determined that I would have to make a heap of bodies that was expressive of this arrogance and disorder."²³

Once his theme was decided, Segal told a reporter, he "had two options in dealing with that heap of corpses." One would have been to use bodies borrowed from a morgue, a prospect he rejected. The other was to ask his friends "to play dead," so that, in his words, he "could bury images of sensuality and myth in their gestures."²⁴ In fact, when several critics remarked not only the apparent robustness of the bodies but their teeming sensuality, Segal responded, "That was also put there purposefully, so there would be overtones of the life force amid all the tragic and carnage."²⁵ He had become, he said later, as interested in Eve's sensuality as anything else, adding, "It has to do with survival."²⁶ For Segal, questions of historical veracity were less important than the sense of recently passed life still emanating from his forms.

Back at his New Jersey studio, Segal gathered a number of his friends, young and old, and briefed them on their duties as models. They undressed, and then he asked his friends "to fall down, to collapse and imagine they were dead," after which the artist began the arduous process of wrapping bodies in plaster-soaked cotton-gauze strips. In the next hours, there was plenty of time for the models to meditate on their roles as victims. In fact, Segal had hoped from the outset to capture some expression of his models' responses to their task, some trace of their own memory. In the forms their bodies took, Segal hoped that their thoughts, too, would somehow become part of the cast: reflected in a frozen grimace, a contorted limb. In Segal's words, this piece would thus be "a summation of gestures and movements, of piling and heaving. It becomes a collection of each individual's ideas about death. Some were relaxed, some were rigid, some were drooped. It's a collection of a series of movements that are all ruminations on death."²⁷ In fact, the figures in the memorial seem only temporarily stilled, ready to rise and brush themselves off after a brief rest. By reminding us that the dead were once whole, living humans, the artist hoped to rehumanize all the victims, to undo some of the degradation that moved his conception in the first place.

Once the design became known, civic response was swift and predictably fractious. As new committees formed to raise funds, others were called to stop the monument's installation. Whereas survivors had hoped for a place to mourn lost loved ones, a substitute gravesite, other groups bewailed the want of similar monuments to mark their losses. Some art historians scorned what Peter Selz called the monument's "wax-work representation," while others, like Selz's colleague Brian Wall, applauded both the artist and his aesthetic conception.²⁸ Because part of the brilliance in Segal's earlier cast-white sculpture had been its formalization of the banal moments in life, other critics felt that his medium was at direct cross-purposes with his Holocaust theme, the least banal of subjects. Did it trivialize memory, they wondered, or expand the sculptor's medium? For



George Segal
installs one of
his plaster-
white figures
for San
Francisco's
Holocaust
memorial,
dedicated in
1983. Photo: Ira
Nowinski.

dissenting critics, the particularization of Segal's life-sized figures reduced both the scale of meaning and possibilities for memory in ways that abstraction would not have done.²⁹

On arrival today at the turnaround at the Legion of Honor, the visitor is struck by a seeming dissonance between the Holocaust theme and its beautiful setting. But within a few minutes, this incongruity becomes less problematic. We see, for example, that Segal's white forms echo the tormented figures in Rodin's *Gates of Hell*, long installed nearby at the Legion of Honor, itself a memorial to the fallen of World War I. As we look around, we may be reminded, as well, that the concentration camps were often placed in stunningly beautiful, secluded countryside in Germany and Poland—an ironic perversion of pastoral oft noted by survivors.³⁰ During the dedication of the original plaster model at the Jewish Museum in New York, more than a year before the memorial was installed in San Francisco, Segal addressed this question directly. "That contrast may in itself speak volumes—about the beauty of the world and the dark underside of human nature," he said, adding later that "I intend this work in part as a memorial to all people who have been victims of that dark underside of human nature."³¹ The issue may be less one of "agony in paradise" than the particular effect of the setting on the piece itself, which turns out to be considerable.

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In fact, Segal has made two memorials, one an indoor sculpture, the other an outdoor monument. The plaster model of *The Holocaust* was unveiled to the public on 10 April 1983 at the Jewish Museum, as a part of its Yom Hashoah commemorations. The museum has since acquired the original plaster models for its permanent display. In their interior setting at the museum, the white plaster casts invite us to contemplate their forms as objets d'art, part of the artist's larger corpus. The survivor stands alone, estranged from the heap of corpses lying behind him and separated from us by the fence. Stooped slightly forward, he stares straight ahead at no one, at nothing. Enclosed by a ceiling overhead and spotlighted, he remains still and mute, encumbered by an interior memory too recent, too painful to articulate. At the memorial's Jewish Museum dedication in 1986, Segal reiterated this point. "It is fitting," he said, "that silent art represent the muted voices that were forever stilled in the Holocaust."³²

The deathly stillness is now made palpable, affirmed and highlighted, in the indoor installation. On the other hand, it concentrates our attention on the forms themselves, made ghostly and strange by the white plaster. Without color, only line and shadow, these forms in their whiteness become emblematic and mythical. Surrounded by nothing but its dark borders, the installation remains all-absorbing: memory is defined as an interior, symbolic process.

But in the glory of the sculpture's California environment, with sunshine and spectacular view, memory is externalized, swallowed up by the vastness of its setting. The human forms in particular are miniaturized in such landscape, reduced and made less striking. Indeed, it could be said that we often seek out such beautiful surroundings precisely to lose ourselves in them, places where our thoughts and preoccupations are made to look small and inconsequential by comparison.

In such a context, these figures seem to refer neither to their material, nor to themselves, nor to the ghastly moment of liberation; instead, they are drawn outside themselves by the landscape, become less about themselves than part of their surroundings. While in the museum, they inspire quietude, stillness, and contemplation, at the Legion of Honor, they merge with the great outdoors—the song of birds, rustle of trees, thwack of golfers, roar of cars make them too much a part of the present moment. The white plaster forms lose the context of their material and the artist's corpus and acquire new, California-esque significance. Visitors remark that, at a glance, the sprawling bodies appear to become sunbathers, the barbed wire fence a volleyball net. From their elevated perspective in front of the monument's inscription, visitors look down at the scene, as from a cliff over a beach. Rather than lingering on the installation, the eyes of visitors are apt to join the survivor's own gaze over a spectacular landscape of sloping green grass, a golf course, the ocean, and sailboats—framed by trees on one side and the Golden Gate on the other. Whereas, indoors, the survivor seemed to be looking inward and asking us to do likewise, by his position in the park, he looks out—and invites us to join him, yet another tourist transfixed by the view.

On the memorial's unveiling on 8 November 1984, the eve of Kristallnacht, a steady rain dampened spirits and seemed to lend the setting an enclosed, interior feel; in the summer fog, visitors are also contained by the space, less apt to lose themselves in a landscape shrouded from view. Dazzling sunlight, on the other hand, can be almost blinding when reflected off the white bodies: our gaze over the space is quite literally repelled and seeks refuge in the green shade of golf course and trees, the cool blue of the ocean. In this respect, the fine black-and-white photographs by Ira Nowinski can assist memory here. For in his control of light and tone, his depiction of low-hanging, smoke-colored clouds, the photographer is able to cultivate a brooding, ominous setting. His cool, dark frames recenter the white forms in our consciousness, fence us back into the memorial space.

Despite, perhaps even because of, its transformation from museum sculpture to public monument, Segal's memorial continues to lead a vibrant life in San Francisco's civic mind. Ceremonies for Yom Hashoah are conducted here, as well as Kristallnacht commemorations. When former President Ronald Reagan went to



Segal's
Holocaust after
being defaced
by vandals.
Photo: Ira
Nowinski.

Bitburg, the memorial served as gathering space for a spontaneous countervigil. Four days after its installation and dedication, vandals spray-painted the faces of the figures black and added their own counterinscription to the wall behind it: "Is this necessary?" The monument has since been sprayed with Nazi swastikas and cleaned a number of times. When detractors suggested that its whiteness may well have invited its desecration, supporters responded that this sounded a lot like blaming the victim: were the Jews, by extension, responsible for their own murder? In a show of support, an anonymous donor has sent flowers to be laid weekly at the site ever since. Survivors still come daily to tend the memorial, as if it were a surrogate gravesite for lost loved ones.

In San Francisco, with its large population of Japanese Americans, aspects of the monument necessarily evoke other memories, as well. In fact, the project's landscape designer, Asa Hanamoto, could not help but recall his own experience in an American internment camp for Japanese Americans during World War II. "It's been a long time," he said, "but I still remember those barbed-wire fences and those guard towers with machine guns in them. It stays with you."³³ The designer reflects as much his experience as the artist's, making it a joint memorial, embodying plural kinds of memory. Knowing this, the busloads of Japanese tourists at the Legion of Honor may not recall the Jewish Holocaust so much

as their own experiences, or perhaps those of their American cousins during the war. Like all memorials, this one depends on those who visit it, those who resist it, those who embrace it for its life in the mind, its many lives in many minds.

And like many communities before and after it, San Francisco has found that its effort to build a site for shared memory could not help but expose the many conflicting and contested assumptions underlying "public memory." Few communities are prepared for this kind of controversy, and most are embarrassed by it, ashamed that such a seemingly unifying cause like public memory should betray so much real disunity. In the heat of argument, bruised friendships and fractured political alliances, most communities are ill-prepared to acknowledge the value of the process itself. Largely unfazed by the argument, possibly even invigorated by it, Segal was able to take the long view of this process when he inspected the site a year before the monument's dedication. "What's at stake," he commented, "is the quality of the response, in the area of public education. Sculpture functions as a community memory. It's a civilized root to educate young people, to reinforce freedom and tolerance and respect for individuals. I don't mind all the discussion."³⁴ As Segal seemed to recognize early on, debate is also a form of memory.

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The Plural Faces
of Memory

Liberty State Park, New Jersey

Though his medium is not typical of other Holocaust memorials in America, the liberation motif in Segal's monument is. This is the one experience shared by both survivors and American soldiers during the war: one that conforms conveniently to America's most powerful self-idealization. For the young American GIs who liberated Dachau and Buchenwald, memory of the Holocaust necessarily excludes the conditions in Europe before the war, the wrenching break-up of families, deportations to ghettos and camps—even the killing process itself. American soldiers were not witnesses to the process of destruction, only to its effects.

Even the first national days of Holocaust remembrance in America were called for explicitly in light of the American liberators' experiences, independently of either the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Commission or Yom Hashoah. In 1979, Sen. John Danforth proposed that 28–29 April of that year, the days corresponding to the thirty-fourth anniversary of Dachau's liberation by American troops, be designated as national days of remembrance. The senator was unaware of Yom Hashoah and its proximity to these days, which have since been moved to coincide more closely with the Twenty-seventh of Nissan. Though they now seem to coincide with the Jewish calendar's day of remembrance, America's national



Nathan
Rapoport's
Liberation,
erected within
sight of
America's
greatest
ideological
icon, the Statue
of Liberty
(right), and Ellis
Island (out of
photo on left).
Photo:
James E. Young.

days of remembrance necessarily recall both America's experience as liberator and the Jewish catastrophe—each in the figure of the other.

Because the "American experience" of the Holocaust in 1945 was limited to the grisly moments of liberation, it may not be surprising that one of the most widely visited monuments to this era in America, entitled *Liberation*, is located in Liberty State Park, New Jersey, within sight of America's greatest ideological icon, the Statue of Liberty—all part of a topographical triad including Ellis Island. In this work by Nathan Rapoport (sculptor of the Warsaw Ghetto Monument), a young, solemn-looking GI walks forward, his eyes on the ground, cradling—almost pietà-like—a concentration camp victim. With skeletal chest showing through shredded prison garb, his arms spread, and his eyes staring vacantly into the sky, the victim exemplifies helplessness.

Commissioned by the State of New Jersey and sponsored by a coalition of American Legion and other veterans' organizations, the monument is consonant with both the specific experiences of Americans in the war and with traditional self-perceptions of the nation's role as rescuer in war and as sanctuary for the world's "huddled masses." Indeed, the official state resolution dedicating the monument on 30 May 1985 defined explicitly its place in American history:

Whereas the Liberty Park Monument Committee was formed by Governor Thomas H. Kean to raise funds for, and commission the construction of, a monument to honor American Servicemen of World War II as liberators of oppressed people, and

Whereas the theme of the monument was to recognize that our servicemen fought, not to conquer nor to be aggressors, but rather to rescue and restore freedom to those persecuted and oppressed by the fascist powers³⁵

According to the program notes from the dedication, though other monuments have honored American victory in World War II, this is the first one to show us the purpose of the fight. In *Liberation*, America's reasons for fighting World War II would thus reiterate America's memory of its origins.

The governor's remarks at the dedication emphasize the monument's American pedigree even more strongly. "To me," he said, "this monument is an affirmation of my American heritage. It causes me to feel deep pride in my American values This monument says that we, as a collective people, stand for freedom. We, as Americans, are not oppressors, and we, as Americans, do not engage in military conflict for the purpose of conquest. Our role in the world is to preserve and promote that precious, precious thing that we consider to be a free democracy. . . . Today, we will remember those who gave their lives for freedom."³⁶ As such,

Liberation has become an obligatory photographic stop on the campaign trail for national candidates, including George Bush, Dan Quayle, and Jesse Jackson in 1988.

Liberty and pluralism thus comprise the central memorial motifs in both current and proposed museums to the Holocaust in America. The museum at the Simon Wiesenthal Center in Los Angeles is being reconceptualized, moved next door into an expansive new complex, and renamed Beit Hashoah—Museum of Tolerance, both to reflect its pedagogical mission (tolerance) and to attract as wide an audience as possible. In New York, the new Museum of Jewish Heritage—A Living Memorial to the Holocaust is being planned for Battery Park City in lower Manhattan, within sight of Ellis Island and the Statue of Liberty, thus situating the Holocaust somewhere between American shrines to immigration and liberty. The twin names of these two museums illustrate both the dilemma each faces in professing civic values in a sectarian space and the attempt to overcome this dilemma by balancing Jewish and American memory in one line.