



ANALYZING THE IMPACT OF CONTEMPORARY HOLOCAUST EXHIBITIONS

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ANALYZING THE IMPACT OF CONTEMPORARY HOLOCAUST EXHIBITIONS

This publication examines the impact of “The Holocaust and Second World War Galleries” at Imperial War Museum London and “The Holocaust: What Hate Can Do” at Museum of Jewish Heritage—A Living Memorial to the Holocaust, with extended references to “Auschwitz. Not long ago. Not far away.” a traveling exhibition that has been hosted at different venues in Europe and North America.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction ... 4

Context and Literature Review ... 5

The Holocaust and Second World War Galleries, IWM London ... 8

The Holocaust: What Hate Can Do, MJH ... 13

Conclusion ... 20

Bibliography and Further Reading ... 21



ANALYZING THE IMPACT OF CONTEMPORARY HOLOCAUST EXHIBITIONS

INTRODUCTION

The subsequent research report will examine the impact of two recently established Holocaust exhibitions. “The Holocaust and Second World War Galleries” opened at Imperial War Museum (IWM) London in fall 2021 and “The Holocaust: What Hate Can Do” opened at Museum of Jewish Heritage—A Living Memorial to the Holocaust (MJH) in New York City in summer 2022. The report will synthesize information provided by IWM London and MJH, alongside analysis of public engagement, press coverage, and critical responses, as well as first-hand accounts, reactions and observations. It will focus on a) the inclusion of innovative content, b) the overall contribution to Holocaust awareness, and c) the relationship to contemporary Jewish life and experiences. At the same time, it will consider the exhibitions within the broader contexts of the contemporary Jewish and Holocaust museum field, with extended references to “Auschwitz. Not long ago. Not far away.,” a popular but critically divisive exhibition that has been hosted at different venues in Europe and North America since 2018.



Photo: The Holocaust Exhibition, IWM, Nigel Howard

CONTEXT AND LITERATURE REVIEW

It has been argued that Jewish museums fall short when they sublimate the particularities of Jewish culture into universal assumptions about human (and/or American) experience. In relation to Holocaust museums, Rothstein suggests that Holocaust and Second World War exhibitions often stress commonalities between persecuted communities to make generalized warnings about the consequences of intolerance and persecution. He observes that these exhibitions ‘wreak havoc with both history and moral clarity’ (2016), as they downplay the specific forms of antisemitism that led to the Holocaust.

Several responses build on Rothstein’s critique. Appelbaum portrays a Jewish-museum discipline caught in stasis, as it attempts to ‘commemorate a way of life... irretrievably lost’ (2016), rather than depict the complexities of post-Holocaust Jewish experience. Hoare attributes these tensions to the diversity of people who visit museums: ‘this particular story must be told in a way that has an appeal beyond a Jewish audience...’ (2016).

Sion’s thorough study of European museums (2016) corroborates this final point, as she observes how exhibitions struggle to accommodate both Jewish and non-Jewish visitors; nonetheless, she applauds a select number of institutions that explicitly identify and fight antisemitism, as opposed to oft-generalized concepts of intolerance. In her final remarks, she describes how Jewish museums are uniquely situated to reach non-Jewish audiences, and how they might use their position to address the current resurgence of antisemitism in Europe and the United States.

Rothstein’s critique would later re-emerge in response to the traveling exhibition “Auschwitz. Not long ago. Not far away.” Co-produced by Musealia and the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum, it displays 700 objects and 400 photographs, items loaned from 30 institutions, and selected artifacts from the collection of the hosting institution. Depending on the venue, it occupies between 12,000 and 27,000 square feet across 20 thematic galleries. The exhibition examines the specific atrocities at Auschwitz, while conceptualizing the Holocaust as a universal warning against hatred and intolerance.

Despite the COVID-19 pandemic, “Auschwitz” reached a significant audience, with sizeable ticket sales, multiple professional awards, and generous press coverage (Auschwitz.net 2023). Reviews of the exhibition praise how it adeptly represents the long history of antisemitism in Europe (Blumenthal 2019), the banality of evil and the culpability of ordinary Germans (Von Drehle 2021), and the horrors of what happened at Auschwitz (McShane 2019).

However, Rothstein's ambivalent response to "Auschwitz" after it premiered at MJH returns to the themes outlined in his earlier critiques. Referring to the German-made Model 2 freight train car, transported to the venue and stationed outside the building, he observes: 'there is no indication about whether it transported Jews, nor is there information about how closely it resembles boxcars that did' (2019). Rothstein protests how Nazi antisemitism is treated as an afterthought, and how Jewish experiences of the Holocaust are levelled to provide teachable lessons about the universal dangers of intolerance and persecution.

Another response goes further to provide a particularly damning indictment of the exhibition and its long-term impact. Horn outlines positive aspects and describes "Auschwitz" as 'thorough, professional, tasteful, engaging, comprehensive, clear;' nonetheless, she posits that rehashing every atrocity and instance of human suffering 'fixes nothing,' and that Holocaust museums are ultimately powerless against the present-day resurgence of antisemitic prejudice (2019). She reiterates Rothstein's argument that the Holocaust emerged from specific historical contexts but then forcefully asserts that it should not be used as a metaphor to learn about discrimination, persecution, or even contemporary antisemitism. In the article's conclusion, she assures the reader that she will never visit a Holocaust exhibition again.

To summarize, debates around Rothstein's critique (2016) highlight several broader criticisms of contemporary Holocaust representation and education. Firstly, museums often omit the particularities of antisemitism to make generalized statements about intolerance and persecution. Secondly, they have historically highlighted pre-Holocaust Jewish tradition, while inadequately addressing life post-Holocaust. Thirdly, there are anxieties about how museums serve their diverse audiences, and about how successfully they might challenge antisemitic prejudice and discrimination into the 21st century.

These assessments provide useful context when analysing the impact of the exhibitions at IWM London and MJH. They will be expanded upon and considered together with the three themes outlined in the introduction: the inclusion of innovation, the contribution to Holocaust awareness, and the relationship to contemporary Jewish life.



THE HOLOCAUST AND SECOND WORLD WAR GALLERIES (IWM LONDON)

SUMMARY OF EXHIBITION, VENUE, AND DISPLAYED COLLECTIONS

“The Holocaust and Second World War Galleries” opened in October 2021. The renovated exhibitions jointly occupy more than 30,000 square feet across two separate levels at IWM London, a leading museum of war and conflict. Pre-pandemic, the museum received over a million visitors every year. Located in the nation’s capital city, it serves a diverse and multicultural audience of both Jewish and non-Jewish visitors. While it organizes regular school visits and educational programming, “The Holocaust Galleries” are not recommended for children under 14, due to the inclusion of graphic film footage.

IWM London is the first museum in the world to include Second World War and Holocaust exhibitions in the same space. In keeping with the institution’s concentration on personal perceptions of conflict, the exhibition foregrounds the first-hand testimonies of survivors, veterans, and eyewitnesses. The institution has publicly stressed the importance of preserving these perspectives, as the events of the Holocaust move beyond living memory.

The exhibition replaced an earlier Holocaust gallery at IWM London, opened in June 2000. Funding was announced in 2019, with £30 million allocated to remodel the extant exhibition and better understand the Holocaust alongside the war (Morrison 2019). “The Holocaust Galleries” are separated into 11 discrete sections, each of which features digital exhibits, video installations, and motion graphics visualizing maps and statistical data. The exhibition additionally displays more than 2,000 photos, books, artworks, and letters, alongside personal objects that include jewellery, clothing, toys, and musical instruments. The museum has made new acquisitions and organized loans to supplement its established collections.

What innovative formats, content, and/or ideas have been included?

Press coverage of the exhibition often refers to innovative design choices, with a repeated emphasis on the use of colour and bright light throughout the space. According to the architects, these decisions were made to emphasize that the atrocities of the Holocaust happened in daylight, as acts of state-sanctioned violence and genocide (Long 2021). The use of light also demands that audiences witness and comprehend the horrors of the Holocaust. The prevalence of darkness, typical at other Holocaust museums and exhibitions, might ‘tacitly suggest that these things happened in the shadows... and not in the world in which we all live;’ curator James Bulgin continues here to make broader observations about Holocaust denial, and the importance of making the facts of the Holocaust plainly and unequivocally known to museum audiences (in Judah 2021).

Given these observations, it can be argued that Rothstein’s central critiques (2016) have been appropriately addressed. “The Holocaust Galleries” focus on Jewish experiences of Nazi Germany and the Holocaust, and identify the specific hatred of Jewish people that animated Hitler’s genocidal campaign. At the same time, the museum instrumentalizes forms of radical empathy (described above) to demand compassion from its diverse audiences, and to challenge any antisemitic biases or prejudices brought to the exhibition.

Furthermore, throughout the exhibition, Jewish perspectives on the Holocaust are centered before any allegedly expert or neutral commentary provided by the museum. On arrival, visitors are confronted with a 1942 quote from Nachum Grzywacz, a student who helped to preserve the Underground Archive of the Warsaw Ghetto. These powerful words highlight the contingency of memory, as well as the struggle to preserve stories of adversity, resilience, and survival: ‘I want the coming generation to remember our times... I don’t know my fate. I don’t know if I will be able to tell you what happened later’ (in Toberman 2021). Grzywacz was killed in the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising of 1943 (Whitlock 2013). Each subsection is similarly introduced by a quotation from a Jewish individual or organization; these voices are able to tell future audiences “what happened later,” and therefore retain control over the narrative.

Press coverage also indicates how the exhibition represents ‘the massive diversity and plurality of Jewish life pre-war’ (Bulgin in Toberman 2021). Ben Fuller, an educator at the Holocaust Educational Trust, stresses how learning about Jewish life and culture pushes audiences to fully comprehend ‘the victims as people first rather than seeing them purely through a spectrum of their victimhood’ (in Judah 2021).

These techniques are vital in providing a complex understanding of Jewish life and experience pre-Holocaust, and in educating audiences about the world Hitler and the Nazi Party intended to destroy. Nonetheless, these remarks relitigate Appelbaum's critique of Jewish museums, and her observation that contemporary Holocaust museums too often emphasize the 'irretrievably lost' (2016), rather than stories of hope and endurance post-Holocaust.

What is the relationship to contemporary Jewish life and experiences?

Broadcast television reports about the exhibition frequently feature interviews with two Holocaust Survivors: Eva Clarke and John Hajdu (i.e., ITV News 2021). Clarke was born at Mauthausen concentration camp, and her birth certificate is displayed at IWM London. Its presence in the museum speaks to the possibility of life and renewal, even amidst the worst examples of human pain and suffering. Yet, it is exhibited alongside other passports and visa documents, testaments to the difficulties Jewish survivors encountered when attempting to leave mainland Europe before, during and immediately after the war. While Clarke eventually resettled in the United Kingdom, the exhibition emphasizes the difficulty of the immigration process, as refugees were frequently interred as "enemy aliens" (Toberman 2021).

Bulgin and Judah (2021) also discuss the installation of a section of barracks from the concentration camp Velten. This technique is similarly used in the travelling exhibition "Auschwitz," where monumental architecture is extracted from former camps and ghettos, and then installed in the hosting venue. The presence of larger elements, such as fence posts, railway boxcars and camp barracks might be considered particularly effective in the United Kingdom and United States, where people have fewer opportunities to visit the actual sites in mainland Europe. Moved into a brightly lit museum, these objects attest to the legitimacy of the history represented in the exhibition, while their monumentality quickly communicates the weight and scale of the suffering endured by victims of the Holocaust.

Further methods have been used to communicate these horrors, and to demand empathy from museum audiences. Sound is deliberately piped into the exhibition, 'used to "evoke but not recreate" the experience of victims' (Long 2021); high-pitched ringing is intended to emulate post-gunfire tinnitus, a low rumble conveys the heavy industrial work forced upon prisoners and, in a space focussed on concentration camps, visitors are insulated from sound 'to convey the feeling of a gas chamber' (2021).

Although it is important that visitors should feel compassion for the millions who suffered and died, IWM London's methods raise ethical questions. Is it appropriate for audiences to performatively "experience" these forms of suffering, particularly when they will likely never endure persecution to the extent depicted in a Holocaust exhibition? It is vital to consider the limitations of stimulating an emotional response within an audience demographic, especially when these same strategies might distress Jewish audiences who have experienced actual antisemitic harassment. Zetterstrom-Sharp and Minott (2020) have written on the restraints of anti-racist museum practice that provides "teaching moments" for an assumed museum public, while isolating the people represented in exhibitions and displays.

What is the overall contribution to Holocaust understanding and awareness?

Side-by-side exhibitions about the Holocaust and the Second World War might have had problematic results, especially if Jewish experiences of the Holocaust had been subsumed into a broader narrative about the global conflict, its causes, and its deadly consequences. However, critical responses suggest that IWM London avoided this outcome; 'Jewish victims were not casualties of war. They were targeted for an enterprise without precedent in human history: the industrialised elimination of an entire people' (Freedland 2021). Freedland commends how the exhibition handles these crucial historical realities, and how it employs the contexts of the Second World War to clarify how and why the Holocaust happened, and to expose the antisemitism used to justify and enact genocide.

John Hajdu recalls systematic discrimination against Jewish communities in Budapest, both during the Holocaust and the subsequent Soviet occupation. Survivor testimonies -- typically presented as written documents, audio interviews, or filmed monologues -- have been staples of the Holocaust museum since its earliest post-war permutations. Hajdu's contribution, however, suggests an alternative approach to survivor participation in contemporary Holocaust exhibitions. Instead of a document, artifact, or testimony, Hajdu provides a professional skill: he translates a postcard from the museum's collection, one of many dropped from trains bound for the Auschwitz concentration camp. His involvement in the exhibition ensures that English-speaking audiences can experience these emotive stories -- of ordinary people attempting to communicate with family members and loved ones -- but at the same time, it highlights the vital roles played by Holocaust survivors in preserving these narratives for future generations.

Clarke and Hajdu’s contributions to “The Holocaust Galleries” provide a brief impression of how Jewish people survived, endured, and prospered after the Holocaust. Yet, despite limited allusions to post-war life, the exhibition makes fewer direct references to the present-day experiences of Jewish people, particularly in comparison to “The Holocaust: What Hate Can Do.” Perhaps consequently, public dialogue around the exhibition lacks any explicit engagement with contemporary intolerance and bigotry. This feels like an important absence, given recent controversies related to antisemitism in the British political system (Walker and Mason 2019), as well as the spread of misinformation about Naziism and the Holocaust, and the broader resurgence of antisemitic prejudice worldwide.



Photo: The Holocaust Exhibition © IWM

THE HOLOCAUST: WHAT HATE CAN DO (MJH)

SUMMARY OF EXHIBITION, VENUE, AND DISPLAYED COLLECTIONS

“The Holocaust: What Hate Can Do” opened at MJH in New York City in summer 2022. The permanent exhibition occupies 12,000 square feet at the museum, which educates audiences about Jewish life before, during, and after the Holocaust. Its programming is broadly dedicated to teaching people about the dangers of hate and intolerance. MJH has not posted an age recommendation for the exhibition and pre-pandemic, nearly 60,000 schoolchildren visited the museum every year. However, it is planning a separate exhibition, “Courage to Act: Rescue in Denmark,” for elementary-age children. The museum sets out to serve a diverse audience but given the population demographics of New York City and the United States it is likely that the exhibition receives a larger percentage of Jewish visitors than IWM London.

The exhibition places the Holocaust into the broader context of Jewish history, and it uses artifacts and oral testimonies to tell stories of ‘personal and global decision-making, escape, resistance and resilience...’ (MJH 2022). In varied forms of public engagement, the curatorial team have highlighted the importance of the exhibition due to the prevalence of contemporary antisemitism and the increased spread of misinformation about fascism and the Holocaust.

“The Holocaust” replaced the core exhibition established with the museum's foundation in 1997. Incidentally, the original exhibit had been dismantled in 2019 to temporarily host “Auschwitz: Not Long Ago. Not Far Away.” The exhibition features over 1,250 original objects, documents, photographs, and testimonies. Items were typically donated by Holocaust survivors and their families, many of whom settled in New York and nearby places. Alongside artifacts and testimonies, the exhibition also incorporates music, documentary films and an audio guide hosted on Bloomberg Connects, a free mobile app.

1000+ YEAR HISTORY OF ANTI-JUDAISM



144



1492



1290

The Expulsion of Jews from England

Medieval English Jews were expelled from the country in 1290. The expulsion was the result of a combination of factors, including religious intolerance and economic reasons. The Jews were expelled from England and were not allowed to return until the late 19th century.



1499-1500



1492

The Alhambra Decree

The Alhambra Decree, issued by the Catholic Monarchs of Spain in 1492, ordered the expulsion of all Jews from the Kingdom of Castile and the Kingdom of Aragon. The decree was a result of religious intolerance and the desire to create a more homogeneous Christian population.



16

Massacre of Ukraine

The massacre of Ukraine, also known as the pogroms, was a series of violent attacks against Jews in Ukraine during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The attacks were motivated by religious intolerance and economic factors.

What innovative formats, content, and/or ideas have been included?

The exhibition at MJH was planned during the COVID-19 pandemic and lockdown, and it opened to the public in its aftermath. Yet, despite this relevant context, it is seldom mentioned in press coverage, critical responses, or public engagement from the museum. The most explicit reference to these circumstances might be the audio guide available on the Bloomberg Connects app: the tour uses images, video footage and audio clips to provide an unusually comprehensive virtual experience of “The Holocaust,” an exhibition that audiences might not have visited in person due to social-distancing restrictions.

In many ways, the app’s content resembles a characteristic museum audio-guide, with a measured voice-over narration describing the objects, photographs, and documents physically displayed behind glass. However, the app goes further, not only by providing a digital representation of the item, but by displaying a caption with a description and information about its provenance, alongside video footage and other images that relate to the wider story implied by the artifact. The additional data would be invaluable to researchers, students, and educators, but also to casual museum visitors, who might learn more about an object in real time, or else return to an object they overlooked after they leave the exhibition.

The museum’s focus on educational programming is clearly relevant here. As young people become more accustomed to digital technologies, and at the same time more prone to misinformation about the Holocaust (see below), it is important to find tactile and engaging ways to supplement the museum experience. Although the interface of the app is occasionally awkward to navigate, it feels like a positive step in realizing the potential of smartphone technology in heritage spaces, and in understanding that exhibition experiences should not start and end within the confines of a physical museum building.

What is the overall contribution to Holocaust understanding and awareness?

Press coverage of “The Holocaust” has been limited and what has appeared focuses more explicitly on individual objects, personal stories, and the thematic resonances of the exhibition. However, Hoffman’s review for *The Guardian* (2022) offers a detailed overview of the exhibition’s physical layout. Hoffman describes how audiences are first led along a dimly lit corridor, soundtracked with Yiddish and Hebrew songs, and decorated with images of domestic Jewish life in the early-20th century. At the end of the corridor, visitors are confronted with text: ‘Many of these Jews were murdered by April 1943.’ The first gallery space of the exhibition considers one month, and interrogates different angles and perspectives of the Holocaust -- from the genocidal atrocities under way in Europe to the Bermuda Conference where Allied diplomats discussed the plight of Jewish refugees -- which all happened concurrently in April 1943.

Although the exhibition starts in *medias res*, with the historical stakes clearly stated in these opening moments, it subsequently rewinds to provide an entire floor dedicated to cultural and historical context. The first gallery unpacks the basic tenets of Judaism, and how customs, beliefs, and political attitudes might differ. Objects featured in the gallery speak to lives and traditions interrupted. A Matzah Cover is displayed, embroidered by Sarah Rafalowicz in the early 1930s, and gifted to her fiancée Pincus Bertram. Bertram survived the Holocaust. Rafalowicz did not.

The next galleries explore the long history of antisemitism in Europe, and Jewish responses to persecution from the 1880s to the 1930s. The next explores the precise manifestations of Jewish discrimination in Nazi Germany throughout the 1930s, from anti-Jewish legislation to the Nazi Party’s fascination with eugenics and race science. Visitors then board an escalator to the museum’s second floor, ‘where the mechanics of mass murder... are revealed’ (Hoffman 2022) in galleries dedicated to the Holocaust and its consequences.

Returning once more to Rothstein’s commentary on Holocaust museums (2016), the exhibition addresses one of its central criticisms: that these museums often collapse the specificities of the Jewish experience into universal observations about the danger of intolerance and persecution. By dedicating the entire first floor of the exhibition to Jewish culture and tradition, the history of antisemitism, and Nazi attitudes to the European Jewish population, audiences are reminded of the particular circumstances that led to the Holocaust.

The chronological structure is also important to consider here. A recent study found that an alarming percentage of young adults in the United States lacked basic knowledge about the Holocaust; half could not name a concentration camp or ghetto and, remarkably, a quarter of respondents to the survey 'believed the Holocaust was a myth, or had been exaggerated, or they weren't sure' (Sherwood 2020). As these events pass beyond living memory, contemporary museums are tasked with providing detailed insights into Jewish tradition and the history of antisemitism, while also ensuring that audiences are aware of the most fundamental facts of the Holocaust. Although a simple technique, it is therefore imperative to begin with an immediate reminder of the larger stakes, before the exhibition moves backwards to provide more context and an in-depth look at Jewish life pre-war.

At the same time, representatives from the museum have drawn unambiguous parallels with the present moment: 'antisemitism and fascism are again on the rise throughout the world' (Song Beer 2022). Furthermore, nearly all press coverage of the exhibition refers to the Russian invasion of Ukraine, with a deliberate focus on the complex history of Ukrainian Jews, and of Jewish communities in Russia and the Soviet Union. The exhibition's media preview was attended by survivor Toby Levy, who lived in Poland (now Lviv in modern-day Ukraine). She spoke on contemporary antisemitism at the event, and shared with the audience: 'I'm scared... My hope beyond hope is that this museum can teach and that everybody will become a witness. When I'm gone, I need you all to be a witness for me' (in Cohen 2022). In an echo of Nachum Grzywacz's quotation at IWM London, Levy speaks to future generations with an uncertain plea: that they persevere in the fight against antisemitism, and that they continue to remember 'what happened later' (in Toberman 2021).

What is the relationship to contemporary Jewish life and experiences?

Nonetheless, Levy speaks to another important aspect of the exhibition: "I am alive... I have Jewish children and grandchildren and great-grandchildren. That's my revenge' (in Cohen 2022). Arguably to a greater extent than "The Holocaust Galleries" at IWM London, "The Holocaust" provides an extended look at post-Holocaust stories of survival and prosperity, particularly in the American context, and relates the content of the exhibition more directly to contemporary Jewish life and experiences.

The exhibition includes a copy of an Affidavit of Support, needed for immigration purposes. It had been written for Herbert Mendel, so that he could leave Berlin with his wife Ilse and his son Julius before the outbreak of the war. Dr Julius Mendel later served in the US Air Force and donated 20 objects to the museum. In conversation with Schiffman, Dr Mendel expresses gratitude to the United States, and expresses the belief that 'he has lived the American dream' (2022). Doris Schechter similarly came to New York as a refugee in 1944. A photograph of Schechter appears in the exhibition, captured as she enjoys her first American hot dog; however, also quoted by Schiffman, she remarks: 'I tell people to never lose your identity' (2022).

Inspired by memories of traditional food in the Old World, she started a bakery business that remains family-run today. As in the (similarly food-themed) traveling exhibition, "I'll Have What She's Having: The Jewish Deli," the suffering of the Holocaust does not recede. Instead, these narratives are supplemented with nuanced and complex recollections of what happened after Holocaust survivors reached the safety of the United States, and of how Jewish identity and culture had to be negotiated and fought for in these migratory contexts.

Rothstein argues that Jewish museums often highlight 'the freedom of Jews to become American' before they fully reckon 'with the freedom of Jews to remain fully Jewish' (2016). By foregrounding the stories of individuals like Toby Levy, Dr Julius Mendel, and Doris Schechter, the exhibition therefore highlights a potentially underutilized application of the Holocaust museum. It is crucial that these institutions continue educating (predominantly non-Jewish) audiences about the history of antisemitism and the Holocaust, particularly as awareness declines, misinformation spreads, and the events pass out of living memory. Yet, equally, these collections might also provide useful foundations to examine the patterns of migration, assimilation, and acculturation that shape Jewish American communities into the present day.



Photo: Auschwitz. Not long ago. Not far away. Exhibition

ANALYZING THE IMPACT OF CONTEMPORARY HOLOCAUST EXHIBITIONS

CONCLUSION

The report will conclude with brief observations, anchored by comparisons between the two exhibitions and by the themes outlined in the introduction: the inclusion of innovation, the contribution to Holocaust awareness, and the relationship to contemporary Jewish life.

Responses to “The Holocaust Galleries” at IWM London typically highlight inventive design elements, including light, sound, and colour, and consider how these elements might suggest broader themes about the Holocaust, its perpetrators, and its victims. On the other hand, “The Holocaust: What Hate Can Do” at MJH employed the careful arrangement of technology, alongside a physical space and gallery layout that attempts to guide visitors through a historically exact but emotionally demanding exploration of the Holocaust. These aspects of the exhibitions speak to Hoare’s (2016) and Sion’s (2016) comments on the varied and diverse publics that visit Holocaust museums, and on the need for original ways to educate and demand empathy from non-Jewish audiences.

“The Holocaust Galleries” attempt to understand the Holocaust in relation to the Second World War, whereas “The Holocaust” places it more directly within the contexts of Jewish history. Although these ambitions feel remarkably distinct, both address Rothstein’s broader critique of Holocaust museums (2016) and the more specific criticisms levelled at “Auschwitz. Not Long Ago. Not Far Away.” (Rothstein 2019, Horn 2019). The exhibitions deliberately identify the specific forms of antisemitism that motivated the Holocaust and, while they sometimes gesture towards more universal themes, they more often focus on Jewish experiences of legislated prejudice, discrimination, and genocide in Nazi-occupied Europe.

Finally, “The Holocaust Galleries” and “The Holocaust” mutually reckon with the complex journeys of the Jewish diaspora before, during and after the war. Press coverage of “The Holocaust Galleries” foregrounds the input of Eva Clarke and John Hajdu; the exhibition emphasizes the vital role that survivors have in maintaining public awareness of the Holocaust, and in preserving these stories and perspectives for future generations. Nonetheless, responses to “The Holocaust” imply that this exhibition likely goes further in its nuanced exploration of Jewish-American experiences post-Holocaust, and in its attempt at direct engagement with contemporary Jewish life, the recent resurgence of worldwide antisemitic prejudice, and the wide-reaching implications of the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

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