

The Miami Holocaust Memorial and American Holocaust Memorialization

A Brief Tour

Visiting the Miami Holocaust Memorial is like visiting a gravesite or mausoleum. Eerie and life-size statues of Holocaust survivors and victims can be found at the entrance, exit, and center of the circular memorial. The outer perimeter of the memorial consists of granite and Jerusalem stone and is semi-circular, leaving it open to the outside world. The visitor enters to his right and passes a statue of a mother standing and weeping over her two children. As the visitor continues, he will pass walk past several “history panels” (see *Figure A*). These panels contain a brief history of the Holocaust written by the memorial’s historian and Warsaw ghetto survivor Helen Fagin.

As the visitor continues down this path, he will begin to hear the voices of children singing in Hebrew. At this point, the visitor will transition from seeing black granite walls to white Jerusalem stone, where, “interrupting this pilgrimage is an Eternal Light and an enclosed shrine-like space leading to a narrow passage.”¹ The visitor will first enter the “shrine” and see a yellow stained-glass “Jude” star above him that shines on to the ground (see *Figure B*). As the visitor proceeds, he will enter a tunnel that decreases in height toward the center of the memorial. The tunnel has the names of major concentration camps along its top edge, and at its end the visitor can see the statue of a kneeling lady reaching out to him (see *Figure B*).

When the visitor enters the center of the memorial, he is surrounded on all sides by a circular granite wall engraved with the names of family members and friends lost, during the Holocaust, by Miami community members. The only point of exit and entry into this sanctuary is back through the preceding tunnel. But most unique about this inner circle of the memorial is the forty-two foot high bronze hand that has bodies hanging from it or struggling to get to the

top. The hand, marked by a numbered tattoo, simply reaches to the sky (see *Figure C*). Surrounding the hand are similar groups of statues, such as an emaciated, elderly couple reaching out to one another (see *Figure D*).

After the visitor has finished viewing this portion of the memorial, he returns to the outer semi-circle of the memorial through the Jerusalem stone temple. Continuing to walk around this outer perimeter, the visitor will then pass several more granite name panels. As the visitor reaches the end of this semi-circle, he sees a statue similar to the statue at the beginning, but now the mother and children lay sprawled out on a pedestal as if dead. Finally, in between these outer granite walls and the inner sanctuary of the hand and statues is a reflection pool that contains a scattering of flora and fauna (see *Figure E*).

The Holocaust Memorials of America

The question of how this memorial came into existence has a complex answer. As Peter Novick, a historian of the American experience of Holocaust memory, points out, no one wanted to focus on remembering the Holocaust immediately in the post-war years. He argues that “dwelling on these atrocious scenes seemed like unhealthy voyeurism to many.” Yet by the 1960s and 1970s as Israel began to play a greater role in American foreign policy-making, American consciousness of Judaism and the Holocaust began to re-awaken. Novick argues that NBC’s 1978 broadcast of the television miniseries *Holocaust*, viewed by around one hundred million Americans, really launched the memory of the Holocaust into mainstream American thought, where it has since remained.²

Since then, Holocaust memorials have begun to appear across America despite the event not having happened on American soil. James Young, historian and author of *The Texture of Memory*, a defining text on Holocaust memorials, writes

American memorials seem not to be anchored in history so much as in the ideals that generated them in the first place...In America, the motives for memory of the Holocaust are as mixed as the population at large, the reasons variously lofty and cynical, practical and aesthetic. Some communities build memorials to remember lost brethren, others to remember themselves.³

Removed from the sites of terror, death, and destruction, American Holocaust memorials necessarily cannot encourage visitors to reflect upon how a local setting or cultural atmosphere could have brought thousands to commit such atrocities. Instead, American Holocaust memorials must rely upon more “lofty” ideals of aesthetics or politics in their organization and design. For example, a European Holocaust memorial design team might ask if a certain object is appropriate to place at a former camp site where millions might have died, while an American design team might have to ask how to depict a site of terror where one had never existed.

Further, as Young points out, some American communities build Holocaust memorials “to remember lost brethren, others to remember themselves.” However, as we enter the 2010’s, more and more Holocaust survivors are dying. As historian Alison Landsberg notes, “the possibility of transmitting what one might call ‘living memory’ becomes increasingly precarious and ultimately impossible” as this generation dies.⁴ While American Holocaust memorials might have originally emerged to help American Holocaust survivor-émigrés “remember lost brethren,” they must now take on an additional role in helping future generations to remember the people affected by the Holocaust.

Finally, historian Efraim Sicher discusses why American Jewish identity has influenced the mass emergence of Holocaust memorials in America. Sicher argues that “it is the Holocaust

above all that has revived the long-term collective memory and made a search for Jewish identity attractive.” He maintains that the remembrance of the Holocaust “has been enabled...because of shifts in the construction of identity in general and of Jewish identity in particular within the American nation, as well as because of the decline of organized Jewish communal identity.”⁵

The drive to memorialize the Holocaust in America has been, in part, driven by the American Jewish community as a way to strengthen its communal identity. As such, Holocaust memorials act as a medium through which American Jews can outwardly express their Jewish identity after decades of assimilation pressures in American culture encroached upon the vibrant traditions of American Jewry. Therefore, Holocaust memorials are, in addition to transmitters of memory, objects of material culture that articulate a long-suppressed culture.

The Miami Holocaust Memorial—It’s Precursors and Development

Therefore, the broader Miami Jewish community’s decision to begin openly discussing and memorializing the Holocaust in the 1980s was not so out of context against the broader trends of American Holocaust memorialization. In April 1983, one of the earliest attempts of the Miami Jewish community to actively memorialize the Holocaust began on the South Campus of the Miami-Dade Community College. Students of the school’s Hillel chapter, a Jewish student organization, assembled on the main grounds of the campus. Bringing along with them barbed wire, hundreds of cardboard Stars of David, and gray paint, they built a “concentration camp” with fifteen-foot high watch towers. The following day, one of the students began to read names of those killed during the Holocaust, and the group showed “slides of pictures taken in the camps

just after Germany surrendered—and [sold] bagels.” Just as the future Miami Holocaust Memorial would incite criticism, this attempt at memorialization also created some discontent in the local community. One student at the college claimed “I don’t see why you have to keep constantly bringing up these dreadful moments again and again...All it does is give Jews a motive for hatred—hatred against the Germans, hatred against the Arabs.”⁶

By 1984, however, a movement to officially and publicly memorialize the Holocaust on city land began. The initial stages of development began in 1984 when a group of elderly Miami Jewish citizens decided to form a committee to plan and design a memorial for the Holocaust on South Beach. The memorial opened to the public in 1990, but it still had to deal with several outstanding issues. Primarily, as a Holocaust memorial for the Jews, and not homosexuals, Roma, and other minority groups who suffered during the war, many assumed the city to be “giving away the public land to a private, religious organization.” However, the memorial committee and its supporters contended that “the memorial...is not only for Jews. ‘[It] is an institute of higher learning.’” As a committee with a perceived religious affiliation, it also had to deal with the financing of the memorial’s formerly public-owned land and the maintenance of a grounds crew and security staff. In this matter, the memorial committee and the city of Miami agreed to a ninety-nine year lease, where the committee agreed to raise money to pay for the memorial’s maintenance and to pay a nominal fee of ten dollars for the land annually.⁷

Even with the city and the memorial committee working together to figure out how to run the memorial in a practical (and theoretically non-religious) manner, many local community members have still protested over the existence of a Holocaust memorial on city land. For example, on the fiftieth anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, a former member of the Ku Klux Klan planned to lead a white supremacist rally at the site of the memorial. However, in the

name of preserving both the right to free speech and the sanctity of the memorial, Miami Beach City Manager Roger Carlton forbade the demonstration at the memorial and instead relocated it to a site four hundred yards to the east.⁸ Despite these setbacks and difficulties, the memorial now welcomes approximately 150,000 visitors per year.⁹

Today, the Miami Holocaust Memorial exists not just as a traditional memorial but as a defining piece of material culture for the South Beach Jewish community. Every physical element of the memorial has a story behind it and significance to it. The stones are the bedrock of the survivors' ethnic homeland; the architecture symbolizes the trains that took families to their deaths; the flowers emphasize the uniqueness of surviving the Holocaust. The Miami Holocaust Memorial certainly serves the traditional function of a memorial to transmit memory. But a material culture analysis reveals that it also embodies the lives of its creators.

Material Culture and Collective Memory—Closer Than We Thought

Material Culture and Collective Memory

Historian Cary Carson argues that “it turns out in the end that we are all handmaidens. We all are engaged in the common enterprise of writing and exhibiting American history.”¹⁰ We do so by going about our daily routines—brewing tea in the morning, heating up instant food in the microwave in the afternoon, and brushing our teeth before we go to bed. These acts seem simple, perhaps even trivial, to those of us who begin to ignore our own personal habits over time. But to a material culture historian, these actions, and particularly the objects that allow us to do them, represent an active participation in history-making. This participation allows us all to engage in Carson’s “common enterprise of writing and exhibiting history.”

Thus, to live and to act is to help write history, and the objects we utilize speak to our culture and historical development as a society. Think, for example, of the cup of tea you might brew in the morning. Assume that you drink the tea by brewing it with an electric teapot. Is the electric teapot of an ornate design, perhaps like what you would see on a porcelain teapot of the Victorian era? Probably not, for most of our electric teapots have come from factories, where quantity often comes over quality or aesthetic appeal. But it is likely that we do not mind not having a beautiful teapot and instead will take our utilitarian one for the sake of speed, ease, and convenience. Thus, in reading this electric teapot as an object of material culture, we can see that our society values speed, taste, and ease of access over, perhaps, style and design in our daily use of teapots.

If we can learn about our cultural values and practices just from the design and use of this teapot, then we should similarly be able to learn about the cultural values and practices of another era from its objects as well. The things human kind creates naturally tend to reflect human culture. If we can read objects as we do historical texts, then we have a new (material) lens through which to view the past. Ann Smart Martin and J. Ritchie Garrison, material culture historians, argue that “material culture is recursive. It is not just the product or reflection of culture. It is imbedded in culture; it is symbolic, active, and communicative.”¹¹ Thus, we must, as historians, value what objects previous generations have left us, for these things not only have a past culture written and exhibited within them but communicate that culture to future generations as well.

In addition to the role that these objects play to contain and communicate the culture of their creators, historians may also look to material objects as transmitters of collective memory to future generations. Simply, a collective memory is an idea or understanding of an event,

cultural circumstance, or place that many people, particularly those who make up a community, may share. Historian Iwona Irwin-Zarecka argues that “a ‘collective memory’—as a set of ideas, images, feelings about the past—is best located not in the minds of individuals, but in the resources they share.”¹² Therefore, in seeking to understand collective memory, as Irwin-Zarecka suggests, it might be best to look at the shared, material resources of that community to get at the memories they contain.

But can material objects really fulfill two functions—to allow historians to read into a community’s culture and to transmit a collective memory—simultaneously? To this discussion of the relationship between material culture and collective memory, material culture historian Leora Auslander adds that

the use of material culture for the writing of history entails, therefore, the use of both theoretical or conceptual work that addresses the relation between people and things in the abstract, and that which focuses on those relations under particular forms of economy and polity.¹³

If we look at the “writing of history” in a material culture framework, we may argue that history is made from the “theoretical” collective memories that address the relationships between people and their things in particular social, cultural, political, and economic contexts. Thus, it appears that historians may effectively learn about past societies and cultures through the concurrent study of material culture and collective memory.

The Miami Holocaust Memorial—Memory, Material Culture, and the South Beach Jewish Community

This particular study of the relationship between collective memory and material culture focuses on the Holocaust memorial found in South Beach, Florida. At first glance, a Holocaust memorial there seems out of place, for most people view today’s South Beach as a sort of hodge-

podge of ethnicities, sexual orientations, and party styles. Steven Gaines, a historian of South Beach, writes that

the city is a chimera. In eternal flux. If you walk a few blocks in any direction and look at the buildings and at the faces of people on the streets or listen to the chatter, you could be in any of four or five different places—Tel Aviv, Saint-Tropez; Rio de Janeiro; Berlin; Coney Island... ‘Everybody in this town is on drugs and drinks almost every night,’ notes Dr. Jeff Kamlet, the city’s primo drug counselor to the local glitterati.¹⁴

Even though, at first glance, South Beach seems like a place meant for partying—and not memorializing—the Holocaust Memorial actually fits well into its surroundings as a piece of local material culture.

In a study of the existence of memorials as objects of material culture, Michael Rowlands and Christopher Tilley argue that “monuments and memorials exist as a means of fixing history. They provide stability and a degree of permanence through the collective remembering of an event, person or sacrifice around which public rites can be organized.”¹⁵ Therefore, it appears that the South Beach Jewish community might have originally created its Holocaust memorial as a way through which to “fix” its collective memory of the Holocaust within the context and physical space of its wider community. However, the community today dwindles, and the only object of material culture that this community now has to leave for the long-term is its Holocaust memorial. But why is this memorial all that is left?

The story begins in the 1930s and 1940s, when year-round good weather and a beautiful environment on the beach, made South Beach a popular place for Jews to settle in the 1930s and 1940s. The atmosphere even attracted them to settle there despite high levels of antisemitism and “NO DOGS OR JEWS” signs that hung in South Beach until 1949, when they were banned.¹⁶ Yet in the past two to three decades, South Beach has begun to change. With littered beaches, a large homosexual population, and a reputable party-life, South Beach no longer

attracts Jewish elders for retirement at the rate it once did. Those Jewish elders that can still be found on the Beach most likely settled there originally between the 1920s through 1960s when South Beach had a reputation for its beautiful beaches, good weather, and Art Deco style. This population that remains is beginning to die out or relocate to other nearby Florida counties.¹⁷

Today, the South Beach Jewish community has dwindled. The city that once had a plethora of kosher Jewish hotels and delis now only has a few. Where there were once thirty-five practicing synagogues, many have disappeared, and those that remain struggle for financial support and membership. The community has never even had cemeteries to bury its dead, for it is illegal to bury people on South Beach because of high water levels.¹⁸ The South Beach Jewish community is losing the material culture it created, utilized, and manipulated through the 1970s and 1980s, when it began to enter this stage of decline. Steven Fain argues that the South Beach Jewish community now primarily lives with

Molokh ha-Mavet, the Angel of Death...[who] waits behind every palm tree on the beach and every club chair in each and every lobby. His presence is known to all and he is respected—a prominent citizen of Miami Beach.¹⁹

This community that once thrived so vibrantly and openly in the face of antisemitism now faces a greater peril—old age and death. As community members move away or die off, their small objects that may be read as material culture tend to disappear with them or with their descendants.* The community has made some efforts to maintain and restore its cultural institutions, also objects of local material culture—such as the Florida Jewish Museum that exists in two converted synagogues. However these institutions are facing demise as well.

Further, little has been done to attract the *people* who ultimately make up a community. Whether the inability to attract a new generation of Jews to settle in South Beach comes from the

* Material culture historians of Judaism might consider the following as such “small objects” of material culture: menorahs, phylacteries, prayer shawls, yarmulkes, and print advertisements for local delis.

community's unattractiveness to retirees or from the children of previous generations of Jewish citizens moving away, the community certainly seems to be in its last throes of life.

As a dying community, South Beach Jews seem to have had a desire to create something tangible and lasting that will allow future generations to understand their existence and lifestyle on South Beach. In an extensive study on death, memory, and material culture, Elizabeth Hallam and Jennifer Lorna Hockey establish that “mementoes, memorials, words, and artefacts [*sic*] can be understood as external cultural forms functioning to sustain thoughts and images that are conceived as part of the internal states of living persons.”²⁰ Thus, a Holocaust memorial in South Beach could be partially understood as a way for the dying community members to remember the family members and friends they lost during the Holocaust. Like James Young who suggests that communities may build Holocaust memorials to remember “lost brethren,” Hallam and Hockey also emphasize this ability of memorials to sustain the memory of those lost.

But why did this community choose a Holocaust memorial through which to express its communal culture? Whether the members of the South Beach Jewish community fought in the war in Europe, watched the war's progress from America, went through the camp system, or had friends or relatives who went through the camps, the Holocaust was the defining event for Jews of their generation[†]. As the Holocaust stands as a defining event in modern Jewish history, the South Beach Jewish community wanted to pass on its personal and direct memories of it to future generations. Yet as a defining event that occurred during *their lives*, the Holocaust has certainly contributed to the definition of the culture of the South Beach Jewish community. Thus, any attempt for the South Beach Jewish community to tangibly memorialize the

[†] In reference to Jews who “watched the war's progress from America,” I refer to all American Jews at home during the war. Many of the Jewish elders in South Beach today or at the inception of the Holocaust Memorial did not grow up or live in South Beach. Much of the elderly South Beach Jewish community moved there from the northern American states—they are often colloquially referred to as “snowbirds.”

Holocaust—to create an object out of an experience—must somehow represent its culture. Historians therefore can and should read the Miami Holocaust Memorial as the defining object of material culture belonging to the South Beach Jewish community.

Methodology

In an attempt to understand how the memorial as a whole exists as a defining piece of material culture for the Miami Jewish community, we must understand how individual components of the memorial serve to tell various stories about the social, cultural, and religious lives of the South Beach community. This paper will proceed by taking various parts of the memorial and analyzing how each represents particular elements of South Beach Jewish culture. In the final portion of the paper, these components will be brought back together for an analysis as a whole. I will then argue that such an analysis can allow historians to take a step beyond the model for memorial analysis developed by James Young in *Texture of Memory* (1994). I will propose a new model for the analysis of memorials that incorporates Young's work into the analytical tools of material culture scholars.

Finally, South Beach does not, and has not, consisted exclusively of Jews. While in its early days South Beach attracted primarily vacationing families and retirees (Jewish and non-Jewish), the South Beach of today hosts vibrant sub-communities of Cubans, homosexuals, *and* elderly Jews. However, in reading this paper, it must be kept in mind that this is *purely* a study of the Jewish community of South Beach. When some of the other sub-communities of South Beach are discussed, they are done so in the context of their relationships with the South Beach Jewish community. As the Miami Holocaust Memorial exists to represent the South Beach Jewish community, this paper aims only to represent and discuss the same.

The Miami Holocaust Memorial: The Components of Material Culture

The Granite Walls

The granite walls of the Miami Holocaust Memorial surround the inner walls around the central bronze hand statue and the inside part of the outer walls of the entire memorial. The granite itself comes from India and has, in one portion, the “History of the Holocaust” and, in another portion, thousands of names of people lost in the Holocaust engraved into its surface.²¹ It is in some ways similar to the Vietnam memorial in that it has a similar look and effect but instead has stone wrapped around the visitor in a circle rather than in a long line.

The first set of granite “history” panels (see *Figure F* and *Figure G*) begin to give a picture of what the Holocaust means to this community. On the first granite history panel is the label “THE HISTORY OF THE HOLOCAUST 1933-1945.” For someone unfamiliar with Jewish history or the development of World War Two, these dates might initially seem odd. Such a visitor might ask, “Why a start date of 1933 and not, perhaps, 1939 when the war began?” The following panels, “etched with photographs of the tortured Holocaust history” and a “poignant introduction and captions,” written by the memorial committee’s historian Dr. Helen Fagin, attempt to answer this question.²²

These panels, as seen partially in *Figures F* and *G*, depict the history of the Holocaust as beginning with the rise of Hitler to power, escalating with the establishment of ghettos and antisemitic laws, culminating with mass murder, and ending with the liberation of survivors. Interestingly, the memorial’s history panels and the rest of the memorial do little to establish that non-Jews, including homosexuals, mentally retarded people, and others, were persecuted. Thus, in the most basic of terms, for this community, the Holocaust is what began with sanctioned Nazi persecution of Jews and ended with the Allied liberation of Jews.

Although this definition might seem extraordinarily simple to historians or people familiar with the Holocaust, it is important to comprehend the South Beach Jewish community's understanding of the Holocaust. One must keep in mind that this Jewish community looks at the Holocaust as an experience and a word entirely sacred and belonging to them. Thus, this community appears to not view as valid the claims that other groups may make to the "Holocaust," as a word, concept, and event, to their groups.

This understanding of the Holocaust by the South Beach Jewish community sometimes causes problems in a city that "embodies...a collision of social, religious, ethnic, political, and sexual cultures and age groups" that may also want to make claims to the word or experience of the "Holocaust."²³ In a casual conversation with a gay man in South Beach, a sense of a local dissatisfaction with the Jewish community's definition of the Holocaust emerged. He seemed especially angry that the Miami Holocaust Memorial "forgot the pink triangles"—a reference to the pink triangular patches that Nazi camp inmates who were persecuted for their homosexuality had to wear. He felt that for the memorial to only pay tribute to the approximately six million murdered Jews was disrespectful on the part of the South Beach Jewish community.

Additionally, a huge controversy arose in 1994 over the use of the word "holocaust" in the Miami Cuban community, a large population of the city. Just across the Biscayne Bay between South Beach and downtown Miami, the local Cuban community decided to erect a "Monument to the Cuban Holocaust." On a street corner off of Brickell Avenue,

a bronze Madonna will weep for her dead. She will rise from a pool of water, hands groping for the heavens. Behind her, a black granite wall will list the names of the lost, men and women killed by firing squads in Havana, tortured in prisons in Camaguey and drowned on their way through the Florida Straits.

Ruth Taffin, a seventy-one-year-old member of the local Jewish community, exclaimed in protest to the memorial: “How dare they use that word! ...They didn't die in ovens! What kind of holocaust did the Cubans go through?”²⁴

A discussion of the local understanding of the Holocaust proceeded in a *Miami Herald* article. It asks “As thousands of Cuban refugees languish behind barbed wire in Guantanamo, a debate over definition is brewing. People are asking what a holocaust is. What a concentration camp is. And do the rights to those terms rest with one group of people?” The article continues by emphasizing the diversity of the local community:

This debate is perhaps inevitable in Miami, one of the few places in America so dominated by refugees from repression, that living memories of Salvadoran death squads, Haitian attaches and Nazi gas chambers sear the city's consciousness... At least one out of every four people living in Dade County have [*sic*] fled from repressive regimes, census data indicate.

With this notion of diversity in mind, the article closes with a discussion of the difference between “holocaust” and “Holocaust,” contributed to by *New York Times* writer William Safire: “Holocaust with a capital H refers to the massacres in concentration camps like Treblinka and Auschwitz...Used with a lower case h, it can refer to killings on a grand scale like Rwanda and Cambodia.”²⁵

Even though the Cuban memorial seems to somewhat resemble the Miami Holocaust Memorial—a central bronze statue and granite plaques of engraved names of those killed in each—a battle over word choice, rather than one of appearances or design, began. Although the organizers of the Cuban memorial finally agreed to remove the word “Holocaust” from their memorial, the debate over the meaning of this word shows that tensions still exist between the Jewish and non-Jewish citizens of South Beach. Therefore, just from reading the history panels

of the Miami Holocaust Memorial as objects of material culture, historians may learn precisely what the Holocaust *means* as a word and a concept to the South Beach Jewish community.

Additionally, without tour guides or docents, the memorial's history walls help visitors to get more out of their trip to the memorial than just seeing gruesome statues. On their own, visitors can leave the memorial with a full lesson, to some degree, of the Holocaust. They would therefore, hopefully, have learned something new and taken a step in helping future generations to "never forget" by carrying on this new knowledge themselves. In this sense, the memorial does its job as a *memorial*—to transmit memory. But in the sense of the memorial existing as a piece of material culture, the granite history walls show historians the value that the local Jewish community places on learning and passing on memory—values shared with the wider Jewish community.

But, on occasion, the memorial does offer tours from either its executive director Avi Mizrachi, local non-survivor volunteers (usually Jewish and usually elderly), or local survivor-volunteers. On one of my visits, I join the end of a tour given by Joe, one of the memorial's Holocaust survivor volunteers. As a tour guide, he spent most of his time along the history panels, so his tour group, consisting mostly of young, Hispanic males, could put direct images to the words of his experiences. He openly asked for questions at the end of his tour and received the eagerly-posed questions: "Were you on any of the ships the British turned away from Palestine?" and "So you're from Israel?"

Joe answered "no" to each of these questions, as I expected as someone familiar with Jewish history, particularly that of the Holocaust. As a part of Judaism's value of education, teaching the Holocaust to the (non-Jewish) public has become important purely as a matter of survival and to avoid another future genocide. But inherent in teaching the Holocaust is teaching

about Judaism, for this Jewish community clearly sees the Holocaust as a necessarily Jewish event. The questions posed to Joe reflect somewhat a lack of knowledge of Judaism, especially in the assumption that Joe was from Israel (implying that many assume that all Jews are from Israel). Historically, most Holocaust survivor-immigrants came to America from Europe—and not Israel. Especially after Israel became a state in 1948, either Israel *or* the United States were, usually, the final destinations for Jewish émigrés, not Israel and then America. In Joe’s explanation to this question, he also offered a similar explanation about not all Jews being from Israel. By clarifying this distinction between Jewish immigration trends post-Holocaust, Joe and the memorial passed on the tradition of learning and helped to clarify a point of Jewish history to these non-Jewish visitors.

Additionally, the memorial has a scrapbook prepared by a seventh-grade class after their visit to the memorial and tour with Joe. Some of the comments by the children, in addition to thanking Joe for the tour included

“When I get to be a grandmother, I will tell my grandchildren your amazing story.”

“I did not want to believe that the Holocaust was real, until I saw your tattoo.”

“When you told us about the hell they put you in for no darn reason, my heart paused.”²⁶

From these comments and from the tour that I accompanied, we can see how much people can take from visiting the memorial and looking at the history panels. Obviously, meeting and interacting with a Holocaust survivor makes the experience of the memorial much more meaningful. But this generation of seventh-graders will be one of the last to be able to have this experience, for Holocaust survivors are beginning to die out at a greater rate. Thus, for one girl to say that she will pass on what she has learned from Joe to her grandchildren shows the transmission of the Jewish value of education from one group and one generation to the next.

Only in this way has the Jewish tradition survived, and only in this way will the memory of the Holocaust and of the South Beach Jewish community thrive.

Finally, the memorial committee also wanted to “give survivors and those who lost loved ones [in the Holocaust] a place to visit in lieu of the cemetery they do not have.”²⁷ This aspect of the committee’s goals is fulfilled by the granite walls with names of those lost in the Holocaust engraved into them. Further, these walls also help to fulfill particular traditions in Judaism surrounding death and thus serve as a crucial piece of material culture within this community.

One of the memorial’s functions is to symbolically act as a gravesite or massive tombstone for Holocaust victims. This function of the memorial not only memorializes these victims but also helps Miami Jews who need a way to deal with the deaths of their loved ones in the traditions of their religion. As such, the memorial certainly exists as an object of material culture, for it gives historians a look into the cultural traditions surrounding death in Judaism.

Judaism has several traditions when it comes to death, dying, and burial. With respect to the Holocaust and the Miami Holocaust Memorial, some of the most relevant traditions in Judaism include burying a non-cremated body soon after the death, putting up a tombstone one year after a person’s interment, and either visiting the gravesite or saying prayers on a person’s anniversary of death or other relevant holidays. Clearly, the nature of death and murder in the Holocaust has prohibited the fulfillment of many of these traditions. For example, survivors usually could not attain the bodies of their loved ones, so they had no where to bury them and then later visit their gravesite.²⁸ Not until the opening of the Miami Holocaust Memorial, where names could be engraved on the granite walls, did South Beach survivors or relatives of Holocaust victims finally have a place where their loved ones could be commemorated in a way appropriate to the Jewish tradition.

But does a massive display of names of Holocaust victims on such a public level really honor these Jewish traditions? Elizabeth Hallam and Jennifer Lorna Hockey argue that the “public placement of an object, such as a memorial sculpture, may transform its spatial setting and the social practices which take place within this, lending different meanings and associations.”²⁹ Certainly, the existence of such a memorial on previously publicly-owned land has led to some controversy, with people calling it a “monstrosity” or bigoted because “it’s essentially a monument to a single religion.”³⁰ But having such a public memorial for victims of the Holocaust seems to have helped the South Beach Jewish community deal with the loss of their relatives, religious brethren, and friends. For the most part, the names on the memorial are submitted by community residents, and they number in the thousands, emphasizing the amount of loss and devastation experienced by members of this community. But on a more personal level, the memorial really seems to assist local community members to cope with loss. Memorial executive director Avi Mizrachi reported that at least one of his survivor-volunteers goes to touch his family’s names on the memorial every day if he is physically able to do so.³¹

Further, the memorial’s engraved walls also appear to have helped the community deal with current antisemitism that might remind them of their experiences or understanding of the Holocaust. On Holocaust Remembrance Day 2007, five years after the murder of Jewish journalist Daniel Pearl by al-Qaeda forces, the memorial’s committee decided to engrave Pearl’s name onto the walls. Even though Pearl was not even alive during the Holocaust, the committee elected to put his name on the wall “because his murder illustrates that Jews still face dangers and persecution from forces that want to annihilate them.”³² Thus, as Hallam and Hockey suggest, the public nature of this memorial allows for it to take on a new meaning for the community. They not only see it as a memorial to the victims of the Holocaust but also as a

memorial to the victims of antisemitic persecution. Though few, if any, other non-Holocaust victims' names are on the walls, the admission of Pearl's engraved name shows not only this community's respect for the dead but also, again, its value of education. Pearl's name on the granite walls emphasizes how the community wants people to learn and realize that antisemitic atrocities, like what happened during the Holocaust, have not stopped. With this learning can come a better understanding of antisemitism and ultimately Jewish history, thought, and culture.

Finally, when looking at the granite name walls as material culture, historians may glean one additional aspect of the local expression of Jewish culture out of them—the value of community. Part of having so many traditions in Judaism is to maintain a sense of wider community among the exiled Jews spread around the world. A Jew in Israel, Russia, the United States, or anywhere else should follow the same traditions and rituals as the other, which connects one Jew to another even though geography may not. For example, when someone dies in a Jewish community, the bereaved enter a week of mourning known as “shivah.” During shivah, community members, including family and friends, are supposed to take care of the mourners by bringing them food, helping around the house, and being there for them emotionally. Just as shivah helps to serve as a “communal healing vessel for the bereaved,” Jewish traditions around death and dying revolve around communal participation.³³

As seen in *Figures H and I*, the memorial's bronze statues and visitors are reflected in the walls of the memorial and symbolize the eternal connection of community that Jews have tried to preserve despite the exile from their homeland. Visitors literally become a part of the memorial—they can see themselves as part of the group of statues in the reflections in the walls, and they can imagine the possibility of their names being among the names they see in the walls. With the dead seemingly gathered with the living at the memorial, the South Beach Jewish

community has helped to make tangible the conceptual notion of how community has been sustained in Judaism despite exile and genocide. Here, the living are among the dead, and the dead are among the living.

Regardless of creed, race, or ethnicity, a visitor to the Miami Holocaust Memorial should not just take away a better understanding of the Holocaust from the granite walls of the memorial but a better understanding of Judaism. Even if visitors have little familiarity with Jewish traditions, reading the memorial's brochure or going on a tour with a volunteer can help visitors better comprehend this community's understanding of the Holocaust. But beyond the average visitor who might go to the memorial on vacation or a school field trip, historians of Judaism may benefit most from what the memorial's walls offer. Not only do they tell a story of a community's memory of the Holocaust, but they tell a story of that community's cultural and religious beliefs, values, and traditions.

The Flora: The Bougainvillea Flowers and the Lily Pond

A study of the material culture aspects of the Miami Holocaust Memorial necessitates an examination of the elements of nature incorporated into the memorial. The memorial is nestled on a piece of land directly adjacent to the Miami Beach Botanical Gardens. From the Gardens, the memorial appears as an extension until a visitor goes through a narrow pathway covered in greenery and walks into the statue of the mother and her children lying on the ground dead. Around the memorial is a line of palm trees and other greenery. From a distance, and before a visitor can accurately see the emaciated, struggling bodies on the central hand statue, the hand appears as almost a natural extension of the tree-lined landscape (see *Figures J and K*).

Like at the memorial, local style balances between the use of beautiful greenery and manufactured goods. Yet, somehow, the community has found a balance between the two and has created a style unique to South Beach. This style began to take shape in the 1930s, when the city began to attract primarily the urban middle class. As a result, the city's "architecture and planning were also remarkable for their distinctly urban character." But in South Beach, architects and designers incorporated two particular styles known as "Art Deco" and "Mediterranean Revival" into the urban buildings and structures of the 1930s. The unification of these styles resulted in the use of bright neon colors, decorative features on building exteriors, ceramic tile designs, and lavish gardens.³⁴

The lavish gardens, particularly of the Mediterranean Revival style, fit well into the natural surroundings of South Beach, already rich with lush trees of deep green hues. Stephen Fain describes the natural beauty of South Beach:

Along the walk east from Washington Avenue, the tropical beach fades and the huge old oaks, broad-leafed sea grapes, and the banyan trees with their sprawling canopies and dangling air roots grow in rows...It's an urban street, but different from the others. On Jefferson, Meridian, Euclid, and the other avenues there is a quiet calm--and also a feeling of loneliness and invisibility...In keeping with the unofficial requirement of Mediterranean design, local buildings often flaunt gardens and lanais adorned with sculptures and pastel ceramic tile murals.³⁵

Today, we can see how the planned design meshes with the local flora of South Beach. The focus of the designers and architects of South Beach in the 1930s to unite the urban and the natural in artistic and architectural form created a particular style native to South Beach.

Visual and material culture historian Jules David Prown argues that such style can actually help historians to understand a community's motives, values and practices. He contends that

Every time a person in the past manipulated matter in space in a particular way to satisfy his practical or aesthetic needs, he made a type of statement, albeit a nonverbal statement

that is considerably more difficult for most of us to comprehend than a written statement. Yet it is the nonverbal, unspoken, perhaps even unconscious, nature of this statement that gives it particular importance.³⁶

Looking at design and style—whether present for “practical or aesthetic needs”—can give us a better picture of a society’s or community’s culture.

Keeping in mind these local stylistic traditions, memorial designer and architect Kenneth Treister set out to create “a garden of meditation” for the Miami Holocaust Memorial. He writes that

Some artists depict the Holocaust only in the dimensions of its horrors with concrete, metal and barbed wire. I broadened the theme to include a serene and peaceful garden...dedicated to the memory of the beautiful European culture and its six million Jewish souls...now lost.³⁷

Memorial director Avi Mizrachi added that he, along with the memorial’s committee, hoped that the memorial would become a place where locals would even come to sit and relax or eat lunch. He considers it an “open park.” Mizrachi has even installed Wi-Fi at the memorial, so people can sit there with their laptops and connect to the internet.³⁸ The memorial, originally referred to as the “Holocaust Memorial Garden,” is meant not just to be a place to memorialize the Holocaust but to sit and enjoy the scenery.³⁹

But part of Mizrachi’s hopes in people’s enjoyment of the scenery is that they will reflect upon their surroundings. Especially with a huge, forty-two foot hand jutting out of the center of the memorial, it is difficult to visit the garden-memorial without at least realizing what surrounds you. However, I saw few, if any, people just languishing at the memorial (and none with their laptops) during my two-week visit. Though I visited in the height of a hot and humid Miami summer, when staying outside for more than a half hour means laying on the pool or beach and not touring an outside garden or memorial, I have trouble imagining that many people spend their spare time relaxing at the memorial in cooler weather because of its grotesqueness. Further,

the memorial is far away from any major office buildings, meaning that office workers probably will not take their lunch breaks there. Finally, the availability of free Wi-Fi at the memorial is not advertised and probably not well-known. To me it would seem awkward or uncomfortable to browse the internet near statues of dying bodies.

Even with these drawbacks, Mizrachi's, Triester's, and the committee's desire to have a memorial with a public garden still has some merit. The atrocities and horrors exhibited in this memorial can emotionally torture any visitor, and during a visit to the memorial, it is nice to escape from the depicted devastation to a garden full of life and energy.

But at this memorial, an educated visitor can not really escape from the culture and ideas embodied in the memorial's garden. As earlier noted, Jules David Prown argues that "a nonverbal statement...is considerably more difficult for most of us to comprehend than a written statement. Yet it is the nonverbal, unspoken, perhaps even unconscious, nature of this statement that gives it particular importance."⁴⁰ Almost all of the natural elements of the memorial make such a nonverbal statement. Some are more obvious than others, some are more intentional than others, and some only come after reflecting on the intentions of the memorial and the people who designed it.

Take, for example, the bougainvillea plants and the arbors around the memorial that hold them (see *Figures L and K*). Upon looking closely, a visitor should notice that the majority of the flowers are white, but a few scattered branches have pink flowers. In selecting the plants for the memorial, architect-designer Kenneth Treister deliberately chose this particular breed of bougainvillea trees with only one branch of pink flowers per tree. To him, the uniqueness of the pink flowers among the white flowers of the tree symbolizes the uniqueness of surviving the Holocaust—a "symbol of survivors among God and nature."⁴¹

Just as the selection of this bougainvillea tree was deliberate, the design of the trellises that would support the trees were equally so. On a first glance, they might seem rather ordinary. But on a second glance, a visitor should begin to notice they rather resemble railroad tracks. What most struck Treister about this particular design once it was in place at the memorial was how much more the trellises created an image of railroad tracks through their shadows on the memorial's ground.⁴² By combining the visual imagery of the bougainvillea trees and the arbor, a natural symbolic memory of victims being carried off to the camps on trains emerges, for the arbors "carry" the flowered trees. That the arbors lead into the central granite tunnel designed to represent a train car with slats looking out into the world adds to the integration of this imagery throughout the memorial.

In addition to the trees and trellises, the memorial's lily pond also carries a weight of cultural significance. The pond itself is very still and is only ever disturbed by storms or the slight movement of a bug's landing or a turtle's swimming (see *Figure N*). In it lay the flowers of the bougainvillea trees that have fallen off from above and into the water, suggesting the shortness of life. But the pond also carries another natural element symbolic of the briefness of life—its lily pads. The flowers of the lily pads close at night time and open up every morning, suggesting, respectively, the beginning and the ending of a life.⁴³ Finally, the pool itself is meant to be a reflecting pond, where visitors may literally and metaphorically reflect upon what they have just witnessed at the memorial. Looking into the pond, one can see a reflection of the hand and of the memorial's walls. In a natural and peaceful setting, the memorial can be viewed as a whole in one glance, and visitors can enjoy the peaceful view while considering the implications of what they have just seen (see *Figures N, O, and P*).

With this understanding of the symbolic significance of the natural elements of the memorial, what can historians learn about the South Beach Jewish community? In considering this question, we should return to look at *Figures J* and *K* and also consider how Mizrachi and Treister have expressed a desire for the memorial to exist as a public garden. Especially because the Miami Beach Botanical Gardens sit next to the memorial, one could argue that the Holocaust Memorial was intentionally designed to be an extension of a public space belonging to the entire community of South Beach. In this sense, the Jewish community might be expressing their desire to be an integrated part of the whole community—something that Jews of this generation strived for in the early 1950s and 1960s as they settled into their new communities. This framing of the memorial suggests the deeper desire that many Jews around the world have long had to assimilate into greater society.

Second-generation American Jews of the first half of the twentieth-century often participated in very “American” activities—like baseball, boxing, and comedy—in order to fit into society. Though they often maintained aspects of their Jewish identity, like still commemorating major holidays or speaking Yiddish with their family, they also changed other aspects of themselves, like their names, in order to appear less “Jewish” and better fit into society. This memorial, like many twentieth-century Jews, does just that. Through its many natural design elements, it makes an attempt for the Jewish community to express itself within the greater community. But by maintaining the subject matter of the Holocaust, an event this community uniquely values as a part of its communal history, the community still maintains its Jewish identity.

Specific natural elements of the memorial express particular memories of the Holocaust that this community experienced—whether personally in Europe or indirectly through the

discovery of Nazi atrocities from abroad in countries like America. But when these elements are viewed wholly and as elements of material culture, they reveal deeper cultural desires within the South Beach Jewish community. As with the granite walls, we can see how the memorial transmits a particular collective memory of the Holocaust through its flora. However, this community's manipulation of plants and other earthly elements can help material culture historians gain a better understanding of the South Beach Jewish community.

The Stone, the Hallway, and the Dome of Contemplation

In this material culture analysis of the Miami Holocaust Memorial, even the memorial's walls and floors—its essential foundation—must be taken into consideration. The walls outside the black granite, the “Dome of Contemplation,” the central hallway, the benches, the columns, and the floors of the memorial are all made of stone imported from Jerusalem. Essentially, the entirety of the memorial outside of the black granite history and name panels and the bronze hand and sculptures consists of this Jerusalem stone. Like skin is to the human body, the Jerusalem stone is to this memorial—it contains the interior of the memorial and gives it a face to the outside world.

But, like skin, the memorial's stone walls are most often viewed as unremarkable—if even considered at all. A survey of visitors to the memorial reveals that the Jerusalem stone usually comes in at the bottom of the list of noticeable material components of the memorial. Letters from schoolchildren and dignitaries tend to remark on the memorial's hand sculpture rather than on the stone. While newspaper reporters did mention the stone in articles published around the time of the memorial's opening, they did so only in the context of a list of what could

be found at the memorial or in remarking upon the significance of its importation from Jerusalem.[‡] 44

If visitors are to see the stone as such an elementary part of the memorial, then why go to the bother and expense of importing it from Jerusalem? But the fact that the South Beach Jewish community did go to such great length for something so basic emphasizes its importance as an element of material culture at this memorial. In the biblical understanding of Judaism, Jerusalem is regarded as the center of the Jewish homeland in Israel. Most religious Jews believe that when their messiah comes, Jews (some believe Jews alive *and* dead) will congregate in Jerusalem and reunite after centuries of being spread across the globe in the Jewish Diaspora. This belief is so basic and essential to many religious Jews that few would consider challenging the validity of Jerusalem as the holy center of the Jewish religion. Thus, taking stone directly from Jerusalem and building the foundation of the memorial with it shows how the South Beach Jewish community values Jerusalem for what it represents in their religion.

Applying an understanding of the significance of Jerusalem for the global Jewish community to the utilization of Jerusalem stone at the Miami Holocaust Memorial exemplifies how this community still values the connections its religion has to Jerusalem. In this sense, the use of the Jerusalem stone also emphasizes the South Beach Jewish community's connection to the larger international Jewish community. The South Beach Jewish community's expressed link to Jerusalem, as seen in the memorial's Jerusalem stone, emphasizes their role as a

[‡] One comment from a newspaper writer (Mark Robichaux. "Critics Quiet As Memorial of Holocaust Takes Shape," *The Miami Herald*. October 30, 1988): "The memorial, at Dade Boulevard and Meridian Avenue, already commands attention from passers-by. A circular wall, soon to be covered in black granite, similar to the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, D.C., now surrounds what will be a sunken reflecting pool. The entire memorial, dotted with columns, benches and layers of steps, is built with Jerusalem stone from Israel." Preceding this quote was a description of the bronze hand statue and following the quote was a description of the memorial's flora.

community of the Diaspora that maintains its bond to Jerusalem despite living thousands of miles away from it.

Finally, with respect to the stone as a necessary building material, one *Miami Herald* article reports that “a task force of Muslim Arabs was brought here to Miami Beach from Israel, by a local Jewish contractor, to lay the Jerusalem stone.”⁴⁵ Unfortunately, no other documentation of the use of Arab workers in the building of the memorial could be found, and the lack of mention of this happening anywhere else makes it appear somewhat dubious. However, if we are to take this as true, we could read this community’s use of “Muslim Arab” workers to erect the memorial as a desire that the South Beach Jewish community has for the global Jewish community to make peace over land disputes in the Israeli and Palestinian areas. Though this correlation might not even exist, it is something that, if true, should be considered in a material culture analysis of the memorial.

In keeping in mind what the essential bedrock of the memorial signifies for the South Beach Jewish community, we can better analyze the parts of the memorial that are made entirely of the Jerusalem stone. Leading into the central part of the memorial, where a visitor would find the large hand statue, there is a short hallway connected to the “Dome of Contemplation”—made entirely out of the Jerusalem stone (see *Figures Q, R, S, T, and U*).

Upon entering the circular-roofed and cylindrical-shaped dome, a visitor can look up and see a stained-glass window, about two feet in diameter, of a yellow Star of David. Looking closer, the star, with the word “Jude” inscribed on it, actually appears to resemble the fabric stars that Jewish people living under the Nazi regime had to wear in the ghettos. Only in this portion of the memorial is a visitor really shut out from the outside world. Looking ahead from the dome (see *Figure T*), a visitor can see slats of light coming in through the upcoming hallway.

Just beyond that, the visitor will begin to see shapes of bodies. Standing in the dome forces a visitor to do just what the name of the dome suggests—contemplate.

But on what, specifically, does the memorial encourage the visitor to reflect? At this point, the visitor has seen the bougainvillea flowers around the memorial and can look onto the ground of the dome and see that some flowers have blown into the memorial and lay strewn across the floor. This display of scattered, dead flowers again emphasizes the shortness of life that their display outside of the dome also seems to represent. In addition to the lost flowers that have blown into the dome, the Jude star, as a stained-glass window, shines a yellow star onto the walls or the floor of the dome throughout the day (see *Figures S and T*). The movement of the star through the dome during the daylight hours suggests that wearing this star was just a way of life—and thus a component of the experience—of the part of this community that directly lived through the Holocaust. Just as the image of the star moves through the dome during the day, European Jews had to continue with their lives as best they could during the Holocaust and while they wore the cloth version of this star. Finally, having the dome built purely of the Jerusalem stone helps to tie the experiences that part of this community had during the Holocaust to the historical experiences of suffering of the international Jewish community. By indirectly incorporating visual and material elements—the flowers and the star image—that represent the Holocaust into the Jerusalem stone dome, the South Beach Jewish community has shown that it, as a Jewish community, values the Holocaust as a defining event in its history.

The combination of these components of the memorial in one secluded place can overcome a visitor. Perhaps, then, this is why memorial architect Kenneth Treister has a long tunnel made of the Jerusalem stone leading out from the dome (See *Figure T*). As a visitor enters the hall from the dome and begins to walk to the heart of the memorial, the height of the

hallways begins to decrease leaving just enough room for a person of average height to walk through into the memorial's center. During this walk through the hallway, a visitor will be able to see to the outside garden of the memorial through slats about three inches wide on either side of the walls (See *Figures T and U*). These slats were designed to make a visitor feel like they were trapped inside a cattle car with only small slats to look to the outside world.⁴⁶ To further emphasize the metaphor of the hallway representing the trains that took victims to camps, Treister included names of some of the major concentration and death camps intersecting with the slats (See *Figure U*).

Walking through this hallway should, simply, represent the journey that millions of Jews took on train cars to the camps. But what does the hallway, made purely of Jerusalem stone, say about the South Beach Jewish community as an example of its material culture? Like the memorial's "Dome of Contemplation," housing so many visual and material symbols of the Holocaust among the stone of Jerusalem emphasizes how this Jewish community values the Holocaust as a defining event of both its communal experience and that of the broader global and historical Jewish community.

The Jerusalem stone that acts as the foundation of the memorial holds this community's collective memory of the Holocaust. Reading the components of the memorial that are made of this stone as elements of material culture, historians may then see that in material and in memory the South Beach Jewish community looks at the Holocaust as a defining event not just in their lives but in the entirety of Jewish history. The stone of Jerusalem— metaphorically and literally the core of Jerusalem and of Jewish identity—represents the long-held association that Judaism has had with that city. Now, this community of the Jewish Diaspora has taken a part of their religious homeland and manipulated it to hold and portray its memory of the Holocaust. What

was once stone became Jerusalem stone, and what was once Jerusalem stone has now become the stone through which the culture and memory of the South Beach Jewish community are transmitted.

The Hand and the People It Carries

A forty-two-foot tall bronze hand with around one hundred statues of men, women, and children on and around it sits in the middle of the memorial (See *Figures W, X, and Y*). From the design made by Kenneth Treister, the hand came into existence at a foundry in Mexico City and then began a long journey to South Beach. From Mexico City, the hand traveled by boat to Texas and then by two flatbed trucks to Miami. During this trip, one of the truck drivers reported that “the trucks pulled up at a restaurant and a group of high school students came over to admire the work. The driver told them of the memorial and one student responded: ‘Neat sculpture, but what the hell’s the Holocaust?’”⁴⁷

In deciding to erect a Holocaust memorial in South Beach, the local Jewish community knew it needed something strong, striking, and perhaps even disturbing to catch the attention of people like this student and to teach them a lesson about hatred and genocide. In Treister’s original designs, the memorial was to be seventy-two feet high. Because of complaints from locals, fearing this atrocity of a statue would mar South Beach, the memorial committee had the hand scaled down to sixty-feet in April 1987.⁴⁸ By at least October 1988, the memorial committee had further compromised with the community to scale the hand down to around forty-feet in height. In defense of the memorial, city commissioner and memorial committee member

Abe Resnick argued that “in the beginning, people just thought we were building a hand...But it’s a whole concept.”⁴⁹ Here, Resnick refers to the memorial’s garden, walls, and other elements as the “whole concept.” But a simple survey of anyone who has ever been to the memorial or knows of it always elicits the reply: “Oh, that’s the place with the big hand, right?”[§]

Without a doubt, the memorial’s hand is its central feature and for what most people recognize it. Besides losing nearly thirty-feet in height, the memorial’s hand only differs from its original design now by having a wall surround its bottom half and hide many of the statues in the heart of the memorial (See *Figure Z* for the initial design *Figure AA* for its current state). But even with these changes, the memorial has still attracted artistic criticism. Take for example, the critique by local art critic Helen Kohen:

Whatever architect Kenneth Treister aspired to in his design for Miami Beach’s Holocaust Memorial, at this point in its installation it has come down to “that arm.” That’s the 40-foot-high green outcropping with hand attached that has been confounding anyone who happens upon it. A flycatcher? A statue of liberty without a torch?⁵⁰

Despite artistic criticism, the broader national and international Jewish communities have lauded the hand and the memorial. Of a collection of letters addressed to architect-designer Kenneth Treister generally praising him for his work on the memorial, almost all people refer to the hand as his highest point of achievement in the memorial’s design. Hollywood director Steven Spielberg, who in 1994 established the Shoah Foundation, charged with collecting oral testimonies of Holocaust survivors, visited the Miami memorial the same year and wrote the following to Treister:

When I went to Miami with my wife on her movie location and paid a visit to the Holocaust Memorial there, [we] had our legs knocked out from under us by the

[§] Here, I speak from my own personal experience during the course of my research. I can not recall a single person with whom I have spoken—in or outside of Miami—who has visited the memorial and not given me some form of this response.

devastating and provocative image of the hand and wrist and victims of the Holocaust being consumed by the harshest fire modern civilization has ever beheld.⁵¹

Other letters to Treister, ranging from those written by the local Jewish community to those by members of the Israeli government, contain similar words and sentiments.⁵²

The ability of the hand and sculptures to successfully transmit the South Beach community's memory of the Holocaust to a wide spectrum of Jewish people emphasizes its value as an object of material culture. As discussed earlier, a core cultural value of Judaism is the value of community. The maintenance of community does not just mean organizing local activities or following the holidays practiced by neighbors and foreigners alike. It means, also, the preservation and transmission of Jewish traditions and beliefs throughout generations. Until the compilation of Jewish traditions in written form in the Talmud around 500 CE, Judaic tradition had been passed down through generations in oral form. Though the wider Jewish community still values the oral tradition, it now more frequently turns to the Talmud for an understanding of Judaism.

Like the Talmud, the Miami Holocaust Memorial may also be read as a way in which a community of Jews has transmitted, and will transmit, its cultural beliefs, values, and practices to future generations of Jews. By creating the memorial, the South Beach Jewish community has made its mark on the wider Jewish community of this era. It has expressed, in the form of bronze, granite, and stone, its experience of one of the most important events in Jewish history. The South Beach Jewish community has clearly helped to contribute to a sense of solidarity throughout the present international Jewish community. By making tangible what it saw or witnessed during the Holocaust in the gruesome hand and statues the South Beach community has created a place where the international Jewish community may come to "re-experience" one of the greatest events in their shared history.

The hand and its statues have not just touched the local, national, and international Jewish community. Several articles in *The Miami Herald* report that non-Jewish visitors have come from all over the world to the memorial and have been struck by the hand. In 1997, one twenty-five-year-old spring breaker visiting South Beach from Lucerne, Switzerland visited the memorial and spoke with a *Miami Herald* reporter. After “staring somberly” at the sculptures depicting the Holocaust, the student proclaimed “This is history, this is culture...You could explain a lot of things in life if you know history.”⁵³ Clearly the memorial and its hand had a strong impact on him, and because of the hand’s gruesomeness, the student was drawn in to look closer at the memorial.

Perhaps on a more touching level, the hand and sculptures have even helped to “transcend barriers” in Holocaust memorialization, as one reporter notes. In July 1991, a large group of blind and visually impaired people from Boca Raton and Delray Beach, Florida traveled to South Beach to visit the memorial. Some of the group members were at least able to look at the history panels through a magnifying glass. Others, who physically have never been able to see imagery of the devastation of the Holocaust, finally had a way in which to “see”—they were able to touch the statues on and around the hand and create pictures in their minds. As the group left the memorial, many asked “how and why six million people were killed in gas chambers and concentration camps. They wanted to know if a Holocaust could ever happen again.”⁵⁴

As emotional human beings, it is often difficult to hear about such a terrible experience. But to be confronted by it—with recreations of the struggling human bodies—is nearly traumatic. Jewish or not, visiting the Miami Holocaust Memorial, where life-like bodies lay sprawled on the ground or reach out for help, is emotionally challenging. But being able to touch physical, life-like, and to-scale representations of a suffering people can make more of an

impact than just looking at the pictures of them. Visiting this memorial creates a connection between those who witnessed or experienced the Holocaust and those who witness and experience their recreated memories. Thus, the memorial, as an object of material culture, emphasizes the value that the South Beach Jewish community has for strong community ties.

In addition to this material culture reading of the hand that offers historians an understanding of the value of community, the hand also reveals how this community values the experiences of its survivors. When examined in conjunction with its smaller statues, the hand can be read as a symbol of the uniqueness of survival, just like the memorial's bougainvillea flowers. The hand seems to break through this massive group of struggling "people" as it reaches to the sky (See *Figure BB*). Even though the hand has the arm tattoo eternally associated with camp inmates, it seems to have broken through the torture and horror that others (the surrounding statues) faced and succumbed. With its tattoo, the arm survives and tells its story to future generations.

This component of the memorial reveals the value this community places on life. They clearly wish to pass on the memory of those who died in and survived the Holocaust. However, when reading the hand as a piece of material culture specifically representative of this community, one can take the analysis of the memorial a step farther. As such, the memorial's hand suggests that even when this community one day disappears, a memory of its existence should survive. Just as the hand breaks through the pack to tell its story, the memorial should survive through time and tell the story of this community's memories of the Holocaust and of their existence in South Beach. The hand does not just transmit the memory of surviving the Holocaust but the understanding that the South Beach Jewish community wants its culture to survive in the memory of future generations.

Memory and Material Culture Revisited in South Beach

Memory, Material Culture, and the Holocaust

In reading this Holocaust memorial as an object of material culture, as well as a transmitter of collective memory, I have worked from the model established in James Young's *The Texture of Memory*. This work is one of the first to examine several American and European Holocaust memorials and consider how they came into existence and what functions they serve in their current communities. As the study of material culture has only emerged as an accepted methodology of historical examination in the recent decades, it might not have occurred to Young to incorporate it into his work. Regardless, historians should now consider the study of Holocaust memorials incomplete without a consideration of the applicability of material culture to their studies.

In this light, Young's work does not lose the value that it offers historians of the Holocaust interested in the study of collective memory. Rather, the building blocks Young offers are essential to the complete examination of a Holocaust memorial. The incorporation of material culture scholarship into Young's work can help historians attain a deeper understanding of a Holocaust memorial. This addition can allow scholars to better understand the group of people who decided to create the memorial and their cultural motivations. With an understanding

of the memorial's creators, historians may better analyze the effectiveness and message of the memorial itself. As such, I would suggest the following approaches for a researcher studying a Holocaust memorial to take.

First, James Young argues that "Holocaust memorials reflect not only national and communal remembrance, or their geographical locations, but also the memorial designer's own time and place."⁵⁵ Historians should consider the process through which a community decides to memorialize, how the location can influence the design of a memorial, and how the memorial designers' personal biases may influence their interpretation of the memorial.

Young also points out that "Holocaust memorials attempt to point immediately beyond themselves."⁵⁶ Thus, historians of Holocaust memorials must keep in mind that the designers and planners of memorials often want to encourage people to think of other relevant genocides or atrocities of mankind and how to learn from the Holocaust. Scholars must ask "Does this Holocaust memorial have a function in current world affairs?"

Finally, Young argues that "some communities build memorials to remember lost brethren, others to remember themselves."⁵⁷ A historian of Holocaust memorials must examine what value a memorial has in remembering those lost in the Holocaust and what value it serves to remember those who survived.

In introducing the study of material culture into the examination of Holocaust memorials, historians should first consider Jules David Prown's argument: "every time a person in the past manipulated matter in space in a particular way to satisfy his practical or aesthetic needs, he made a type of statement, albeit a nonverbal statement that is considerably more difficult for most of us to comprehend than a written statement."⁵⁸ In studying a Holocaust memorial, therefore, historians should look at how aesthetic, natural, and manufactured design elements

might subtly express or emphasize the culture of a memorial's creators. Considering *how* a community expresses its culture can help historians better understand the process of memorialization in that community.

Material culture historian Leora Auslander also reminds us that “objects not only are the product of history, they are also active agents in history.”⁵⁹ In looking at a Holocaust memorial as a piece of material culture, historians should examine how the elements of the memorial can directly impact history. For example, in the Miami Holocaust Memorial, I have described how shocked visitors have become upon seeing the memorial's hand. Thus, one could ask, “How does the gruesome hand influence people to be weary of measures of hatred and discrimination?” If the hand has helped to convince visitors of the dangers of institutionalized hatred, then the hand has potentially taken an active role in history-making, for that person could go on with his life making decisions with that knowledge in his mind.

Finally, Ann Smart Martin and J. Ritchie Garrison warn that “people cannot adequately comprehend the lives of others unless they are prepared to engage the meaning of objects.”⁶⁰ Thus, a historian approaching a study of a Holocaust memorial must be prepared to actively challenge the existence of every component of the memorial. To do so is the only effective manner in which to understand the memorial's creators and, ultimately, the reason for the existence of the memorial and the purpose it serves for that community.

This addition of a material culture analysis to a study of collective memory in Holocaust memorials can give historians a richer and deeper understanding of individual Holocaust memorials. Not only will a better understanding of each Holocaust memorial emerge, but the historical community may better answer the question “Why memorialize the Holocaust?” By incorporating the study of material culture into Young's model, the answer to this question boils

down to a multi-faceted consideration of political, social, cultural, aesthetic, and functional factors.

Leaving the Memorial

Like many American Holocaust memorials, the Miami Holocaust Memorial seeks to transmit the memory of the Holocaust to future generations. This facet of Holocaust memorialization is becoming increasingly important as Holocaust survivors near the end of their lives and can no longer directly transmit their memories. But in addition to the abilities of memorialization, Holocaust memorials also offer historians a new source through which to study the communities that created them.

Particularly in the case of local memorials, unlike the national U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum, the study of a memorial will help scholars to better understand the culture of a local community. In the case of the South Beach Jewish community, an examination of the Miami Holocaust Memorial has revealed that it does not just transmit memory of the Holocaust. As Cary Carson might have phrased it, the South Beach Jewish community acts as a handmaiden. The South Beach Jewish community has engaged in the enterprise of writing and exhibiting their local history by creating the Miami Holocaust Memorial.

But we must not be fooled into believing that the Miami Holocaust Memorial is the *only* object of material culture that can tell a story about the South Beach Jewish community. Historians may look to the remaining synagogues, like the Temple Emanu-El; objects part of

Jewish home life, like menorahs or containers for ritual foodstuffs; the existence of kosher and kosher-style delis, like Jerry's Famous Deli; and the Florida Jewish Museum, made of two converted synagogues located on South Beach. A study of all of these objects of material culture can give historians the clearest picture of the South Beach Jewish community.

However, I believe that the Miami Holocaust Memorial is the best local object of material culture, for it tells the story of how this community directly understood and reacted to one of the greatest events in their personal experiences (whether directly or indirectly) and in Jewish history. This event absolutely shaped their cultural, religious, and social beliefs and values. As such a formative event in the lives of Jews of the generation that live in South Beach, a study of their reaction to the Holocaust is a study of their culture and their lives.

Certainly, the Miami Holocaust Memorial can not be studied in a vacuum. The interpretation of it that I have provided is an interpretation accompanied by a knowledge of Jewish tradition. It is also an interpretation that has come about from the time I have spent in South Beach, Florida among its Jewish community. Though I saw a dying community, I saw how much they valued life and how much they desired to transmit the memory of their existence to future generations. Those that remain in the South Beach Jewish community seem to have an unyielding desire to permanently leave their mark on the greater South Beach community. The Holocaust Memorial helps the community to do just that, and historians must keep in mind that the South Beach Holocaust Memorial does more than transmit a collective memory of the Holocaust—its acts as an exemplary piece of material culture.

Endnotes

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² Peter Novick, *The Holocaust in American Life* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1999), pp. 110, 146, 209.

³ James Young, *The Texture of Memory: Holocaust Memorials and Meaning* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), p. 284.

⁴ Alison Landsberg, "America, the Holocaust, and the Mass Culture of Memory: Toward a Radical Politics of Empathy," *New German Critique* 71 (1997), p. 64.

⁵ Efraim Sicher, "The Future of the Past: Counteremory and Postmemory in Contemporary American Post-Holocaust Narratives," *History & Memory* 12, no. 2 (2001), pp. 62, 65.

⁶ Susan Faludi, "Students Spurn M-DCC Memorial to the Holocaust," *The Miami Herald*, April 10, 1983.

⁷ Linda Brockman, "Miami Beach Commisssion [Sic] Agrees to 99-Year Lease," *Miami Jewish Tribune*, October 16-22, 1992; *In Memory of the Six Million Jewish Victims of the Holocaust*

(Miami Beach, FL: The Holocaust Memorial Garden); Avi Mizrachi, Personal interview, July 21, 2009.

⁸ “Test of Free Speech,” *The Miami Herald*, April 18, 1993.

⁹ Avi Mizrachi, July 21, 2009.

¹⁰ Cary Carson, “Material Culture History: The Scholarship Nobody Knows,” in *American Material Culture: The Shape of the Field*, eds. Ann Smart Martin and J. Ritchie Garrison (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1997), p. 413.

¹¹ Ann Smart Martin and J. Ritchie Garrison, “Shaping the Field: The Multidisciplinary Perspectives of Material Culture” in *American Material Culture: The Shape of the Field*, eds. Ann Smart Martin and J. Ritchie Garrison (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1997), p. 15.

¹² Iwona Irwin-Zarecka, *Frames of Remembrance: The Dynamics of Collective Memory* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 1994).

¹³ Leora Auslander, “Beyond Words,” *American Historical Review* 110, no. 4 (October 2005), p. 1023.

¹⁴ Steven Gaines, *Fool’s Paradise: Players, Poseurs, and the Culture of Excess in South Beach* (New York: Crown Publishers, 2009), pp. 13-4.

¹⁵ Michael Rowlands and Christopher Tilley, “Monuments and Memorials,” in *Handbook of Material Culture*, eds. Chris Tilley, Webb Keane, Susanne Küchler, Mike Rowlands, and Patricia Spyer (London: SAGE, 2006), p. 500.

¹⁶ Laura Cerwinske, *South Beach Style* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 2002), p. 39.

¹⁷ Zen Ben Beitchman, “Synagogues in the Sand,” in *Jews of South Florida*, ed. Andrea Greenbaum (Waltham, MA: Brandeis University Press, 2005), p. 179.

¹⁸ Steven Gaines, pp. 15-20.

¹⁹ Stephen M. Fain, “Images of Miami Beach,” in *Miami Beach: Photographs of an American Dream*, ed. David Scheinbaum (Miami: Florida International University Press, 1990), p. 12.

²⁰ Elizabeth Hallam and Jennifer Lorna Hockey, *Death, Memory, and Material Culture: Materializing Culture* (Oxford: Berg, 2001), p. 4.

²¹ David Hancock, “Holocaust Memorial Plans Taking Shape,” *The Miami Herald*, August 23, 1987.

²² Helen Fagin.

²³ Laura Cerwinske, p. 39.

²⁴ Rachel Swarns, “A Debate Over Definitions: ‘Cuban Holocaust Memorial Dismays Many Jews,” *The Miami Herald*, November 6, 1994.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ “Scrapbook for Joe: The Charter School at Waterstone Thanks Joe for Guiding Them on Their Tour on May 4, 2009,” The Charter School at Waterstone Seventh Grade Class, Available at the Miami Holocaust Memorial.

²⁷ Helen Fagin.

²⁸ Simcha Paull Raphael, p. 119.

²⁹ Elizabeth Hallam and Jennifer Lorna Hockey, p. 77.

³⁰ “Monstrosity” comment found in Christopher Wellisz, “Group, Resnick Spar Over Memorial,” *The Miami Herald*, April 26, 1987. “It’s essentially a monument to a single religion” comment

found in Lynn Horsley, "Only Names of Jewish Victims Solicited for Holocaust Memorial," *The Miami Herald*, February 20, 1988.

³¹ Avi Mizrachi, July 21, 2009.

³² Laura Figueroa, "Pearl Takes Place on Hallowed Wall," *The Miami Herald*, April 16, 2007.

³³ Simcha Paull Raphael, p. 431.

³⁴ Stephen M. Fain, p. 7; and Allan T. Shulman, "Miami Beach Between World's Fairs: The Visual Culture of a Modern City," in *The Making of Miami Beach: 1933 - 1942*, ed. Jean-François Lejeune and Allan T. Shulman (New York: Rizzoli International Publications, Inc., 2000), pp. 40-72.

³⁵ Stephen M. Fain, p. 7.

³⁶ Jules David Prown, "Style as Evidence," *Winterthur Portfolio* 15, no. 3 (Autumn, 1980), p. 198.

³⁷ Kenneth Treister in Helen Fagin.

³⁸ Avi Mizrachi, July 21, 2009.

³⁹ *In Memory of the Six Million Jewish Victims of the Holocaust*.

⁴⁰ Jules David Prown, p. 198.

⁴¹ *Holocaust Memorial, Miami Beach, Florida: A Sculpture of Love and Anguish*, VHS, Directed by David Braman, Narrated by Chaim Topol, Written by Manny Diez (Miami, FL: WPBT South Florida Public Television, 2002).

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ See “Scrapbook for Joe...” and Moshe Nissim to Kenneth Treister, April 25, 1991, Available at the Miami Holocaust Memorial, as examples of letters. See Mark Robichaux, “Critics Quiet As Memorial of Holocaust Takes Shape,” *The Miami Herald*, October 30, 1988, and Dan Froomkin, “Holocaust Memorial Designed to Educate as Well as Honor,” *The Miami Herald*, June 4, 1989, as newspaper article examples.

⁴⁵ Hal Hertz, “Holocaust Memorial Lifts an Arm ‘Truly Guided by the Hand of God,’” *The Miami Herald*, February 3, 1990.

⁴⁶ *Holocaust Memorial, Miami Beach, Florida: A Sculpture of Love and Anguish*.

⁴⁷ David Zeman, “Hand Rises in Memory of Holocaust Victims,” *The Miami Herald*, December 9, 1989.

⁴⁸ “A Walk Through the Holocaust Memorial Park,” *The Miami Herald*, April 7, 1987.

⁴⁹ Mark Robichaux.

⁵⁰ Helen Kohen, “Time for a Look at Public Art in Progress,” *The Miami Herald*, December 31, 1989.

⁵¹ Steven Spielberg to Kenneth Treister, July 1, 1994, Available at the Miami Holocaust Memorial.

⁵² See Moshe Nissim, and Hiram Rosov to Kenneth Treister, May 8, 1990, Available at the Miami Holocaust Memorial.

⁵³ Rick Jervis, “Vacationing Students Pause to Remember Holocaust’s Toll,” *The Miami Herald* April 10, 1997.

⁵⁴ Miriam Pereira, “Holocaust Memorial Transcends Barriers,” *The Miami Herald*, July 14, 1991.

⁵⁵ James Young, p. 8.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 284.

⁵⁸ Jules David Prown, p. 198.

⁵⁹ Leora Auslander, p. 1017.

⁶⁰ Ann Smart Martin and J. Ritchie Garrison, p. 20.

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