

## Lessons of the Holocaust in Germany: Past, Present, Future

by Prof. Harold Marcuse, UCSB  
[UC Irvine symposium  
“Lessons of the Holocaust,” April 13, 2010]

1. Assessment: What lessons can be learned (and taught)?
2. Actual lessons in Germany, 1945-today
3. What lessons should be taught?

*[note: this pdf version includes “hidden” slides that were not shown to the audience, which have my notes for the oral remarks—the titles of these slides are [in brackets], as is other commentary not used or added for this pdf version]*

## [HM Intro Remarks]

- Before we look at the actual lessons in Germany, let’s try to figure out what the **range** of such lessons might be. That way we may be **better able to assess** what may appear to be the failings of Holocaust education in the past.
- Note that the lessons may be different than the **reasons why** we teach—the push from below—in other words, what motivates us to teach about the Holocaust.
- The lessons are the **GOALS** of our teaching, what we want our students to take away after done.
- Quote by J.B. Conant

## [James Bryan Conant]

*Diary as a Harvard Freshman (1910-11)*



“Education is what is left after all that has been learnt [in the classroom] is forgotten.”

- Lived 1893-1978 (He was 17 in 1910)
- 1933-1953: president of Harvard
- 1953-55- 57: **US High Commissioner & Ambassador to Germany**
- [not necessarily man to emulate: Nazis, Hanfstaengl—“mild antisemitism” of time; but Manhattan project]

## [Lessons for Whom?—diff for diff. entities]

1. Countries: democratic, authoritarian; rich, poor, ...
2. Organizations & Institutions:
  - Governmental (military, police, bureaucracies, ...)
  - Professional (doctors, educators, engineers, judges, ...)
  - Businesses (manufacturing, finance, information tech., ...)
  - NGOs (religious, charitable, issue advocacy, youth, ...)
3. Individuals & Groups—**teaching takes place at individual level:**
  1. Perpetrators (direct murderers—also desktop, beneficiaries)
  2. Bystanders (**collaboration**, indifference, **rescue**, resistance)
  3. Victims (Jews, political opponents, “unproductive,” “socially unfit,” disabled, Roma, Slavic peoples)

## 3 'Holocaust' Commandments

- (a) “Thou shall **not be a perpetrator**;  
(b) thou shall **not be a victim**; and  
(c) thou shall never, but **never, be a bystander.**”
- Most cited lessons of the Holocaust
- By Prof. Yehuda Bauer  
1998 speech to the German Parliament;  
2000 Stockholm Int’l Forum on the Holocaust;  
2006 speech to the United Nations
- [(a) no one admits to being a perpetrator  
(b) example Netanyahu {next slide}  
(c) example Obama {following slide}]

## [Israeli Prime Min. Netanyahu, 4/11/10:]

- “I believe that three of the lessons [of the Holocaust] are: **Strengthen yourself, educate for good** and **fight evil**. The first lesson – strengthen yourself – first of all concerns us, the people of Israel who were abandoned and powerless before the waves of murderous hate that broke against us again and again, in every generation. We need to gird our strength for our independence to ensure that the next enemy cannot plot his schemes against us.”

### [US President Obama, 4/11/10]

- Written statement:  
"We must **work**, instead, on behalf of a world of justice and peace, in which all nations and peoples **value the humanity** that we share, **and the dignity** inherent in every human being."  
"The memories of the victims serve as a constant reminder to honor their legacy by renewing our **commitment to prevent genocide**, and to **confront anti-Semitism and prejudice** in all of its forms."  
"Even at places like Buchenwald, the dignity and courage of those who endured the horrors of the Holocaust remind us of **humanity's capacity for decency and compassion**."

### Your Personal Lessons?

- What do you see as the *primary* (or *any*) lesson (or lessons) of the Holocaust for yourself? {take a moment to think of some}
  - a. Imagine that you were in a classroom in Germany in 1932, with Hitler winning electoral landslide after electoral landslide
  - b. Imagine you had a classroom full of world leaders, then or now
  - c. Or that you were in a genocidal or pre-genocidal situation today (as a teacher, in a country)

### [ask for audience examples; discuss]

- Not an easy question to answer, even for experts on the history of the Holocaust, or people who know a lot about it.
- My own answer:
  - Be vigilant, **need to step in**, need to **be informed**
- PLO/Mahmoud Abbas; Iran/Achmadinejad; bin Laden; N.Korea/Kim Jong IL (son of K. IL-Sung); ...
- *Sudanese capital* Khartoum; first multi-party election since 1985/6 (since 1989 coup) **started yesterday**
  - President Omar al-Bashir's victory is a foregone conclusion.

### Most Lessons are Content Lessons

#### USHMM Teaching Guidelines

#### Teaching about the Holocaust can illustrate:

1. Origins & effects of prejudice, hate & fear
2. Benefits and disadvantages of various values and behaviors
3. Consequences of not getting involved
4. Use of technology for good or evil
5. Role of government (need for checks & balances)

**All are taught by the selection of content**

### Students want to know--content

#### USHMM's Frequently Asked Questions:

[education dept: 5 most-asked questions]

1. *Why the Jews?*
2. *How did Hitler kill millions of people?*
3. *What did the U.S. know and do?*
4. *Why didn't the Jews leave?*
5. *Why didn't they fight back?*

Let's turn to Germany in 1945:

- Allied soldiers liberate the concentration camps  
-> Germans who cheered Hitler must learn the consequences of their actions

### Death Mills Film, 1945-Jan. 47





Exhibitions of  
atrocities photos

Linz, Austria,  
June 1945

"These shameful deeds: You're guilty!"

## Diese Schandtaten: Eure Schuld!



## German Reactions to Lesson

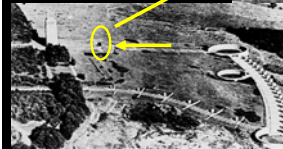
1. We didn't know ->  
Myth of Ignorance
2. We were victims too ->  
Myth of Victimization
3. We resisted when we could ->  
Myth of Resistance

## East Germany: Antifascism Rules

### Causes:

- Big Industry
- Junkerdom
- Militarism

->extinguished/  
in West



Buchenwald,  
Completed 1957  
"Site of Admonition &  
Commemoration"

## [Example: East Germany]

- Heroic, antifascist resistance
- Nothing to learn – just be vigilant  
(gov't knows best)
- Since 1949:  
"culmination of revolutionary German labor movement";  
"stronghold of antifascism"
- Big industry, junkerdom & armed forces -> responsible
- Consequence:  
→ expropriation of factories & large landowners in 1950s  
"extinguished" Nazism & "chauvinism"
- "All round educated socialist personality"  
→ did not question authority, BUT  
adapted to existing conditions
- A lesson we (in U.S.) would resist?  
A big exception to denying personal responsibility ...

## Martin Niemöller (1892–1984)



Cover of  
Time, 1940

"First they came for the  
Communists, but I wasn't  
a Communist, so I did  
nothing, ..."



In Dachau, 1963

### [Niem's Jan. 6, 1946 speech]

- We preferred to keep silent. We are certainly not without guilt, and I ask myself again and again, what would have happened if, in the year 1933 or 1934 - there must have been a possibility - 14,000 Protestant pastors and all Protestant communities in Germany had defended the truth until their deaths? If we had said back then, it is not right when Hermann Göring simply puts 100,000 Communists in the concentration camps, in order to let them die. I can imagine that perhaps 30,000 to 40,000 Protestant Christians would have had their heads cut off, but I can also imagine that we would have rescued 30-40,000 million [sic] people, because that is what it is costing us now.
- [Lesson: don't stand idly by.  
Example Alfons Heck/San Diego--anybody know him?]



### Simplizissimus, 1946

- For one repentant sinner there is more joy than for 10 just people
- Jump right in  
What can happen to you  
You black sheep from the brown house!  
You'll be painlessly rehabilitated  
As white lambs you'll come out at the end
- We know already—you weren't the ones!  
(The Others were always guilty)  
How quickly to the good the bad can change  
As we can see in black & white in this picture

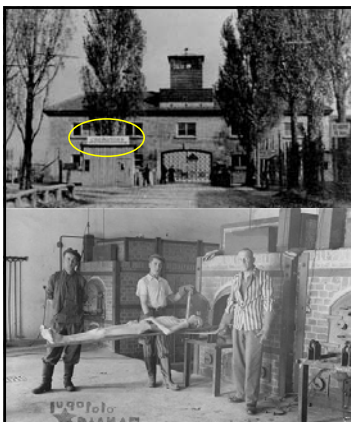
### [Transition of 1950s: Accusation→Silence]

- "let's forget about it" LESSON: ignore and keep silent
- Revised myths:
  1. Ignorant of renazification
  2. Victimized by Allies
  3. Resistance to learning anything new
- Basically no one in power in mainstream wanted anything to do with past
- What was "Holocaust" in 1950s Germany? (not in common use until 1970s):
  - "most recent past" (jüngste Vergangenheit)
  - "Hitlerzeit"
  - "Third Reich"

### 1948->50: "Unknown Prisoner"



[Koelle statues: compare later with 1968 memorial]



### Postcards sold in Dachau, 1945-50

Photo posed shortly after liberation

### 1<sup>st</sup> Dachau Exhibition: Physical Brutality

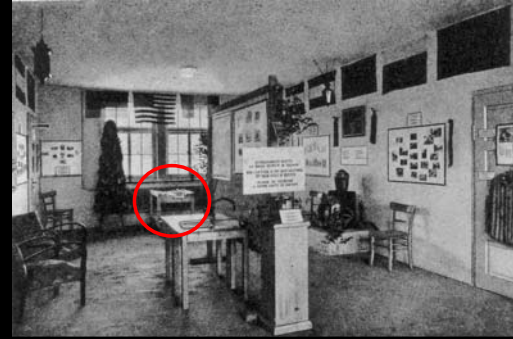




[Description of 1<sup>st</sup> Dachau Exhib. (LegD p. 81: Gert Naumann)]

- They saw a tall crucifix on the roll-call square, and a sign "to the crematory" on the gatehouse. The men were taken in groups of ten into a small wooden barrack, and returned reeling, some with bloody noses. When it was Naumann's turn he saw on one wall "huge pictures from the KZ, horrible pictures of starving KZ inmates, mountains of corpses, tortured creatures." The German internees had to stand right in front of the pictures, and a US soldier came by from behind and punched their heads so that their faces smashed against the pictures. → "rubbing noses in excrement"

### 1950 exhibition: toned down content + commemoration



[July 15, 1952 News Wire article:]

- This place that was supposed to stimulate introspection ... turned into a site of curiosity and lust for sensations... Additionally, the visitors of the grounds, esp. the conspicuously large number of American soldiers, show not the least trace of piety. They take pictures .. And talk as if they were in a zoological garden or in a wax museum, not at a site of remembrance for the suffering and death of innocent people. Thus one has the impression that the gas chamber and the crematory ovens and the two mass graves ... were never horrible reality. One leaves KZ Dachau in spite of all of the commemorative plaques ... with the feeling that this place that was intended to be a fiery appeal to humanity does not or only poorly fulfill that mission.

### 1953: exhibition removed

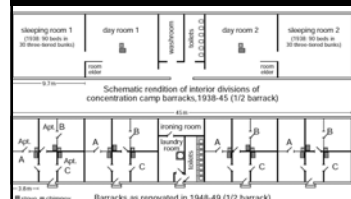


- "WIR WOLLEN RAUS aus den KZ BARACKEN in menschenwürdige Wohnungen zu Preisen die wir bezahlen können"
- WE WANT OUT of the CONCENTRATION CAMP BARRACKS into decent apartments at prices we can afford

### 1948-65: "Settlement Dachau-East"



### From Barracks to Apartments

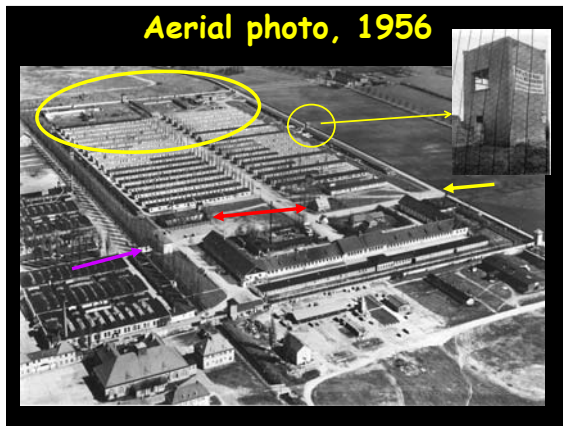


Original camp division;

24 apartments/bar.  
2200 total res.

Barrack 3:  
a grocery store

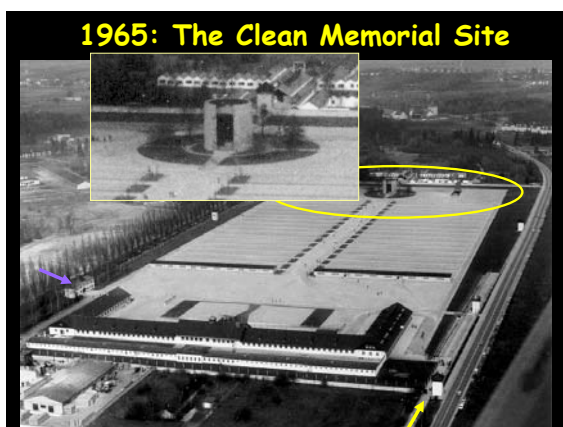
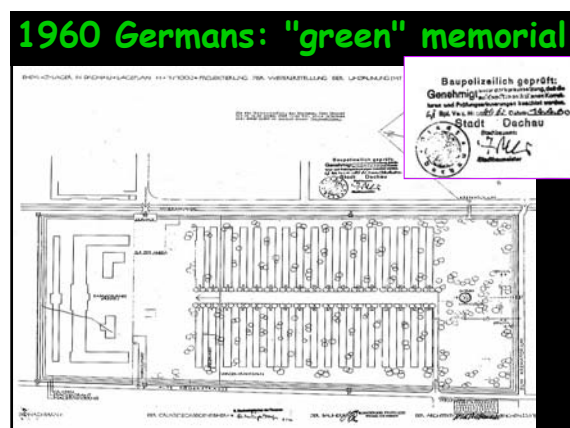
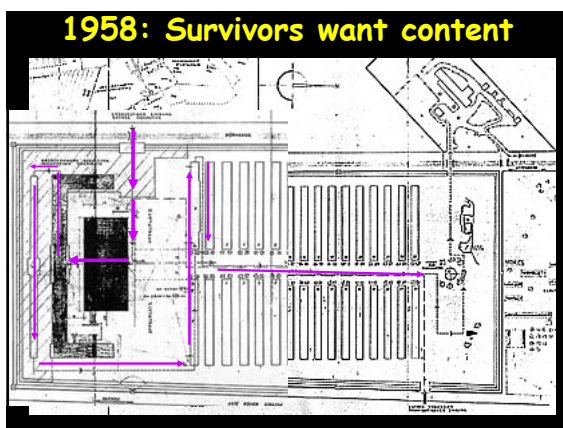




## [1955 teaching report]

By German Education Committee  
(Dt. Ausschuss fuer Erziehungs- und Bildungswesen)

- Emphasized need for political education
- How to deal with "recent past"?
- "Hitlerism"
  - Suggest that Hitler & inner circle responsible
  - NOT the mass of German people  
[intentionalism lets people off the hook;  
functionalism blames it on functionaries]

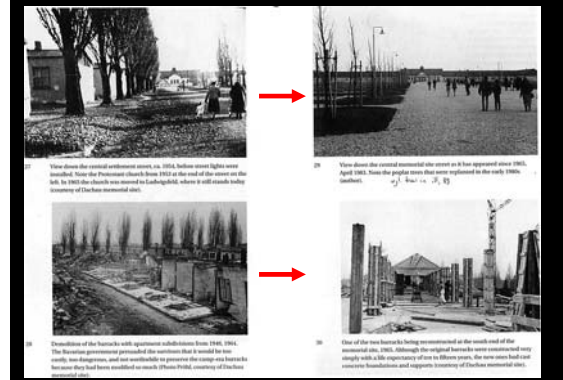


## 1968 International Memorial

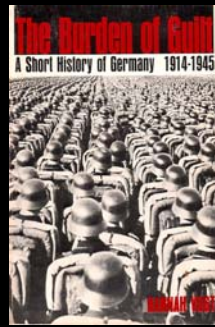


[compare with two Koelle statues from 1948]

## 1950s -> 1960s: Why?



## 1961 Textbook



Hannah Vogt, *The Burden of Guilt ... 1914-1945*

## [Vogt: Chapter titles]

- Did Hitler come to power legally?
- What was life like in the Third Reich?
- Who was responsible for the 2<sup>nd</sup> World War?
- What happened to our Jewish fellow citizens?
- Was there a right to resist?

## Can we learn from the past? (Vogt's lessons)

1. Responsibility or Fate?  
→ it is in our power to change things
2. No freedom w/o citizens will to make sacrifices
3. Press & opposition control power
4. Justice, not violence
5. Change is possible
6. Honor the dead to value life

## [Other events around 1960 indicative of change]

1. 1959 wave of antisemitic incidents
2. 1961 Eichmann trial in Israel – on TV for educ.
3. 1961 guidelines: History must include Nazi period
4. 1964 Auschwitz Trial in Frankfurt

## 1968: A New Generation





