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## Chapter 9

# Reshaping Dachau for Visitors: 1933–2000

Harold Marcuse

Even though, since the 1970s, Auschwitz has eclipsed Dachau as the most widely recognized symbol of Nazi atrocities, the Dachau concentration camp museum remains by far the most visited original site associated with Nazi Germany. With the annual number of visitors rising from ca. 100,000 in the early 1950s to peak at just under 1 million in the late 1980s, the Dachau memorial site museum ranks among the top five most-visited museums in Germany. With foreign tourists consistently comprising well over 50% of those visitors, state and local officials have long been concerned about the impressions visitors gain at the site. As this chapter will show, their attempts to shape visitors' experiences by reshaping the site were misguided more often than they were successful. From the early 1950s until the mid-1980s the Dachau site was repeatedly sanitized of authentic historical substance, but those reductions proved ineffectual in modifying visitors' preconceptions and expectations. As the site once again undergoes extensive modification at the turn of the millennium, the redesigners' failure to consider their predominantly young audiences' relationships to the historical events appears to be leading to yet another ineffectual, top-down form for the memorial site.

## The "Clean Camp": 1933–1943

The story should begin at the beginning. Long before the Dachau concentration camp became a site memorializing Nazi atrocities, it was a showcase for the implementation of Nazi ideology. It was the first concentration camp to be set up in 1933, and it was the first to be under the direct supervision of Heinrich Himmler, who soon controlled the entire concentration camp network in the German Reich. Already by early 1934 Dachau had become a model for all other Nazi concentration camps. One of Dachau's first commandants, Theodor Eicke, developed a penal code that Himmler extended to the entire Nazi concentration camp system. As the paradigm concentration camp, Dachau served as a "school of violence" where many lead-

ing concentration camp officials received their training. Eighteen of the top concentration camp commandants and officials started out in Dachau, among them Adolf Eichmann, the bureaucrat who masterminded the industrially organized extermination of the Jews, and Rudolf Höss, the infamous commandant of Auschwitz (Distel & Jakusch, 1978, p. 78; Richardi, 1983, p. 125).

Additionally, Dachau was the camp where the best-known prisoners, including heads of state and leading officials from occupied countries, were incarcerated. In keeping with the Dachau camp's importance and prominence, from the start Himmler's SS frequently took German and foreign officials on tours of the camp. SS General von Eberstein accompanied numerous tours. Von Eberstein described his impression, and presumably that of his guests, in testimony before the Nuremberg court in 1946:

I can only repeat that everything was scrupulously clean, the sanitary installations that I saw were in excellent order, that in peacetime the prisoners were well nourished and, as I saw during the war, on the average their food was like the food of every German outside. I can only say here on oath what I myself saw with my own eyes. (International Military Tribunal, 1946, vol. 20, pp. 342ff)

Such testimony points to a little-known fact about the Nazi concentration camps: In the Nazi mindset they were perceived as correctional, even educational, institutions. The definition of "concentration camp" in a 1939 German encyclopedia began as follows: "Better [called] containment and correctional camps. Since 1933 they have the purpose a) to hold . . . hardened criminals, b) to temporarily neutralize Communists and other enemies of the state . . . and educate them to be useful national comrades" (Berning, 1964, p. 112, after Meyers Lexikon, 1939).

This idealized conception explains the inscription "Work makes free," wrought into many concentration camp gates, as well as another inscription painted in broad white letters in prominent places in many camps: "There is only one path to freedom. Its milestones are: Obedience, Diligence, Honesty, Orderliness, Cleanliness, Sobriety, Truthfulness, Self-Sacrifice, and Love of the Fatherland."

In light of the actual conditions in the camps, however, these trappings of what I call the "clean camp" were a pinnacle of cynicism. The "clean" impression was created by elaborate preparations prior to such visits. They were described at the Nuremberg trials by the Dachau camp's former head prisoner doctor (Blaha, 1946). When a delegation was expected, the prisoners had to make sure that their barracks and other showcase buildings such as the kitchens and infirmary were spotless. Prisoners considered "dangerous" were kept out of sight. A typical visit began at the service building with the admitting rooms, kitchen, and laundry, then went to the prisoner infirmary, then to a dormitory barrack, usually that of the German inmates, who received the best treatment in the camp (Figure 9.1). Sometimes the priests' barrack chapel, which included an altar and liturgical furnishings, was part of the tour. Visitors met only with carefully selected inmates.

These manipulations were apparently quite successful. In spite of evidence to the contrary, not only the visitors themselves, but also the broader populace, professed to accept the "clean camp" image. Whether or not they accepted it with inner conviction

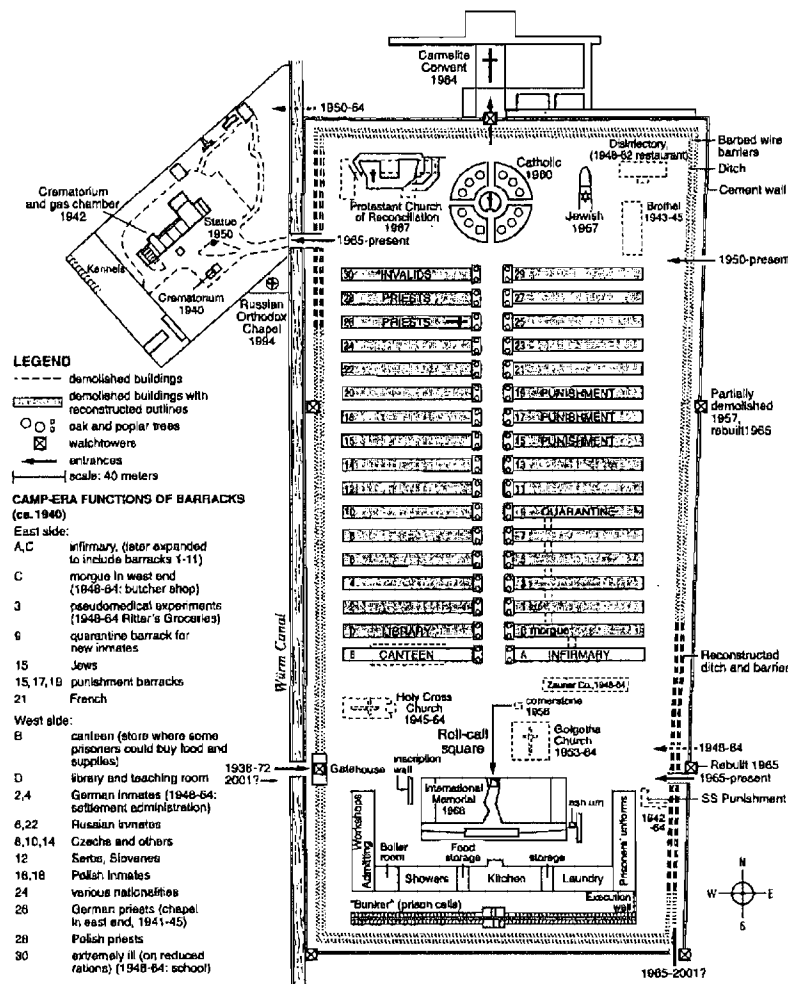


Figure 9.1. Plan of the prisoners' and crematorium compounds of the Dachau concentration camp, showing changes that were made in converting it to a memorial site. (Harold Marcuse and Steve Brown)

tion is not important, for it offered a convenient, exoneratory excuse after the war, embodied in the evasive exculpation "We didn't know!" As I will argue, West German officials, when successfully pressured by concentration camp survivors to convert

the former camps into memorial sites, attempted to realize, retroactively and perhaps unconsciously, the "clean camp" image. In some cases, such as Dachau, the officials could not avoid incorporating some coincidentally preserved elements of the murder machinery, but the overall impression conveyed by (West) German memorial sites is scrupulously "clean."

## The "Dirty Camp": 1943–1945

As living conditions in Germany deteriorated after 1943, it became increasingly difficult to "clean up" Dachau for special tours. By the end of 1944 conditions in camps such as Dachau were absolutely catastrophic. Even Herculean preparations could not make them presentable to outsiders, and raging epidemics made them potentially lethal as well. Thus official visits dropped off during the demise of Hitler's empire, and the next outsiders to tour the Dachau camp were the American liberators on April 29, 1945 (Whitlock, 1998). They saw corpses laid out in rows outside the infirmary, viewed the interiors of the filthy, overcrowded barracks, the kennels of the camp's guard dogs, and the crematorium building with its gas chamber, overflowing morgue, and ash-laden ovens. General Henning Linden was one of the first to tour the camp. He filed the following report:

We went through a small crematory, outside of which were shoes and clothing . . . we saw several stacks of dead bodies, . . . each looking like a human skeleton with the skin stretched over it. We visited rooms in barracks, where bunks were stacked five and six high in a room 20 by 30 [feet] where 50 men were quartered in so-called hospital wards that were nothing more than a concrete barracks floor with straw strewn on it . . . living skeletons were lying in ragged, dirty clothing and bedding. The outstanding picture I got from my inspection of this camp was the barbaric, infamous systematic effort of the camp routine to degrade the human to a point where he bordered on the animal. I would strongly recommend that all German citizens within marching distance of this concentration camp be forced to walk through [it], to the end that the German people could know and realize what form of government and philosophy they have been supporting during the Nazi regime. (Dann, 1998, 15f)

Linden, like many other regional commanders throughout Germany, ordered that nearby civilians be taken through the camp. The sights seen by such forced tours were published in newspapers, brochures, traveling exhibitions, and weekly news-reel films (Abzug, 1985; Brink, 1998; Marcuse, 2001, pp. 52–56). Whether out of fear, disbelief, denial, or for other reasons, however, those publicity efforts did not succeed in displacing the "clean" Nazi propaganda image in the minds of most Germans. This can be seen in the case of the man who was to serve as the Dachau town mayor for the three decades from 1966 to 1996, Lorenz Reitmeier. He was 14 years old in 1945.

Reitmeier was taken through the camp by a surviving Polish priest immediately after liberation (Holzhaidner, 1985; Reitmeier, 1970, 1985). He saw some of the horrifying sights, including an evacuation train laden with the corpses of 2000 inmates.

After the tour the Dachau teenager joined the liberated priest for a bowl of soup in the priest's quarters. His subsequent descriptions of the experience indicate that, in spite of the evidence he witnessed, he held fast to the image of the "clean camp" that presumably dominated his Nazi-era consciousness. For him, the horrific conditions seem to have been a brief and exceptional phase.

Within 2 months of liberation most of the surviving Dachau inmates had been released or repatriated to their home countries, and the US army used the former concentration camp as an internment camp for captured German army officers, members of the SS, and high-ranking functionaries of the Nazi party. In November 1945, parallel to the well-known trials in Nuremberg, a US military court was set up in the Dachau camp to try Nazi criminals such as the personnel of Dachau and other concentration camps. For this purpose the prisoners' barracks were fenced off, and parts of the service building and some outlying buildings in the SS part of the camp were converted into courtrooms. Camp survivors were allowed and perhaps even encouraged to install a small documentary exhibition in the larger gas chamber-crematorium building.

A series of postcards, one small 23-page picture pamphlet (*Dachau: Ein Tatsachenbericht*), and a handful of existing photographs document that this first exhibition emphasized the horrific brutality of the concentration camp. Life-size mannequins in SS and prisoner uniforms were set up to demonstrate the use of the "whipping horse" and the practice of "pole hanging" (suspending prisoners from a tall pole by their hands bound behind their backs). A third group portrayed a released but rearrested prisoner "standing punishment" (*Strafstehen*) near the entry gate with a sign around his neck, "I am back again." The selection of pictures in the accompanying pamphlet illustrates the exhibition's focus on crimes and atrocities. More than half of its 23 illustrations depict the most gruesome scenes photographed in the camp at liberation. The subsequent history of the exhibition indicates that it did not succeed in establishing this "dirty" image of Dachau in the minds of the local populace. Rather, it seems to have convinced local officials of the need to expunge evidence of that part of the camp's history.

As the Cold War rivalry between the US and the Soviet Union began, especially the US relaxed its punitive stance toward Germany and took measures to gain the favor of the German populace. For example, the denazification and war crimes trials were rapidly ended after 1947. In Dachau in this more lenient atmosphere, the German authorities began removing traces of its atrocious past.

## "Cleaning Up" the Former Concentration Camp: 1946–1955

Subsequent editions of the Dachau exhibition brochure indicate that its message was already being toned down while under US auspices prior to 1948. A second edition of the pamphlet was published early in 1946, shortly after the end of the first Dachau trial (International Information Office, 1946). In it a shocking sequence depicting the cremation of corpses was reduced from five pictures to two. New additions were comparatively innocuous, such as 12 pictures showing scenes from the proceedings of the first Dachau trial.

Still later editions from 1949 and 1950 further reduced the number of photographs of corpses while increasing the total number of illustrations. The new material included contemporary views of the various gravesites in Dachau, symbolic representations of camp statistics, and a number of charcoal sketches depicting life in the camp. The shift from pictures of corpses to pictures of cemeteries illustrates a tendency to "bury" the horrors of the Nazi past and preserve kinder memories.

As US military authorities began to wrap up the denazification process, close down the internment camps, and return them to German officials, the Bavarian government began to think about what to do with the former Dachau concentration camp. In November 1947 the Bavarian parliamentary committee on social policy discussed a proposal that former Nazi camps be reused as work camps, because a new "Law to Combat Work-Shyness and Loafing" was being drawn up that called for the committal of wayward women and lazy men to "educational work camps" (Hagn, 1947). The matter was discussed in the full Bavarian House on January 16, 1948, and the representatives unanimously passed a resolution that called on the Bavarian government to:

immediately begin negotiations with Military Government for the soonest possible release of camp facilities (Dachau) in order to establish work camps for asocial elements. . . . The importance of work camps as places for the re-education of work-shy elements to productive citizens should be emphasized. (Verhandlungen, 1947/48)

Right down to the choice of words and the explicit inclusion of Dachau, this reasoning testifies to the postwar pervasiveness in the German public sphere of the image propagated by the Nazis of the concentration camps as "clean" correctional institutions.

The Bavarian parliament's decision to convert the Dachau camp into a penal facility was not an exception in West Germany. For example, in October 1947 the Hamburg prison authority appealed to the Hamburg Senate to request from the responsible Allied authority the release of the former Neuengamme concentration camp for use as a prison in the Hamburg penal system (Bringmann & Roder, 1987, 38f). While this endeavor succeeded in Hamburg, in Dachau the Bavarian government had to change its plans. With the heightening of the Cold War, German refugees began pouring into Bavaria from Czechoslovakia and other Eastern European countries. In the fall of 1948 the Bavarian government instead converted Dachau into a residential settlement for refugees.

The wall, barbed wire fencing, and barriers were removed, and most of the 32 barracks were converted into apartment buildings with 24 one- and two-room dwellings each (Figure 9.2). One barrack was converted into a school and dry goods store, another into four workshops, two others into dormitories for single men and women, yet another into an office and communal kitchen, and one quarter of another into a public bathing facility. The former delousing facility for clothing at the north end of the camp was converted into a restaurant with a meeting hall for up to 600 persons, and several of the apartment barracks also contained small stores (Rost, 1956). In one barrack space was even allotted for a planned municipal administration. In the following 7 years, the camp street was paved, street lights installed, flower beds

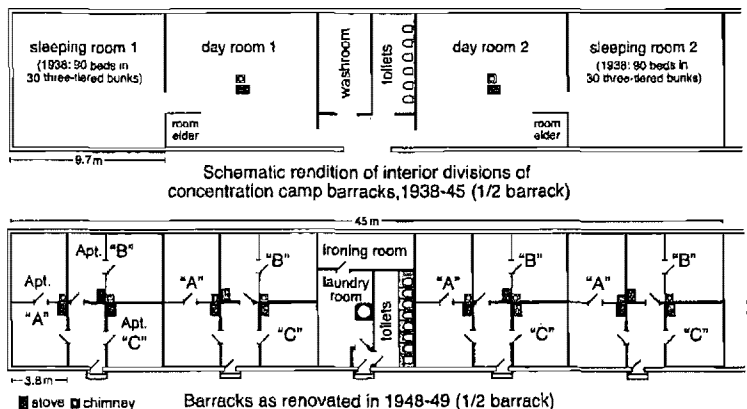


Figure 9.2. Comparison of blueprints of the Dachau concentration camp barracks as furnished in 1938 and as remodeled in 1948. (Harold Marcuse and Steve Brown)

planted, and more stores and factories granted concessions in the old camp buildings (Marcuse, 2001, pp. 162–164). As far as the elected representatives of the Bavarian people were concerned, there was no need to preserve remnants of the concentration camp for present or future visitors.

The following story published by a visitor in 1951 indicates how foreign visitors assessed these changes (Werner, 1951). Alfred Werner was an Austrian Jew who had been imprisoned in Dachau for several months in 1938–1939, before he was able to emigrate to the US. In the summer of 1951, Werner returned to Germany as a tourist. In Munich his inquiries about the Dachau camp met with hostile reactions from local residents, but once Werner was on his way to Dachau in a bus, talkative Dachau natives addressed him and told their version of how a concentration camp had appeared from close proximity, namely relatively innocuous.

When his taxi from the Dachau bus station entered the former prisoners' compound, Werner discovered a kind of shantytown, "a German version of a Hooverville," as he wrote. The concentration camp barracks were now covered with "Eternite" asbestos cement paneling and inhabited by "DPs" (displaced persons) from Eastern Europe. As the taxi cruised down the central camp/settlement street, Werner noted that barbed-wire fencing still surrounded some parts of the compound (the bunker and entry gate area still belonged to the US Army until 1971). He resisted the urge to stop and inspect the barrack in which he had lived because he did not want to disturb the playing children. Finally the taxi drove into a walled enclosure surrounding what appeared to him like a "tastefully landscaped American state park." This park featured a statue, several plaques, and two crematoria, the larger of which included a gas chamber bearing the inscription "shower room," a morgue, and four ovens. Werner commented positively on the graffiti on the walls, much of it from survivors like himself.

The expatriate Austrian Jew contemplated the perfunctory manner in which his driver-guide explained the ovens and gas chamber to him, namely "with a certain callousness . . . common to all guides who show visitors through cemeteries, battlefields, and the like." Werner reasoned that the memorial site was probably designed as it should be: soothing for those who had suffered in the camp, a documentary warning for those who had not experienced Nazi Germany, and not so graphic as to disturb present-day life in the city of Dachau and in Germany.

Many Americans, especially American Jews, right down to the present day, express similar sentiments. In many published accounts from the early 1950s to the 1980s, American visitors describe their anticipation, observations of local Germans, thoughts about the sights in the camp, and attempts to make sense of their visit (Bettelheim, 1956; Bronstein, 1988; Decter, 1967; Gun, 1966, pp. 296–309; Halperin, 1971, pp. 106–113; H-Holocaust, 1994; Philipson, 1957; Ragins, 1992; Stokes, 1999; Tennenbaum, 1976; Wakim, 1964; interviews by author, 1992–1993). Except for details about the physical condition of the former camp, which changed dramatically during those three decades, their narratives reveal a high degree of similarity. This suggests that preexisting knowledge and expectations play an extremely important role in how the memorial site is experienced.

Nonetheless, the Bavarian authorities modified the site extensively in repeated attempts to shape visitors' experiences. The first such modification was prompted by Alfred Werner's published account. His December 1951 article came to the attention of the main Munich newspaper, the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, which sent a member of its editorial staff to retrace the Austrian-American visitor's tracks and prepare a report for German readers (Steinmayr, 1952a).

In contrast to the returning Jewish survivor, the German newspaperman Joachim Steinmayr made no mention of the refugee settlement in his account of his visit. Nor did he reflect about his own impressions, or about what other German visitors might learn from seeing the preserved remains. His primary concern was the impression that the former camp might make on foreigner visitors. Steinmayr found the small exhibition of photographs, models, posters, maps, relics, and explanatory tables "unattractive." In his article he repeatedly mentioned the groups of American soldiers gazing at the whipping horse, entering their "countless" names in the visitors' book, "heatedly" but "unconcernedly" discussing something near the now-empty kennels of the camp bloodhounds, and all the while taking pictures of sights such as the old crematory, the execution range, and the "gallows tree."

Steinmayr concluded his report with a series of quotations. A refugee farmer living in the former concentration camp barracks said: "Something must be done." The mayor of Dachau commented: "We Dachauer don't like this collection of curiosities at all, but we keep our hands off." A taxi driver told him: "Whether we like it or not, it attracts foreigners, and they would be disappointed if there were nothing to see." A representative of the State Restitution Office told Steinmayr that he personally was dissatisfied with the exhibition, but explained that the German authorities were at the mercy of the foreign tourists:

If we change any part, foreigners would storm the barricades. They will say: the Germans want to cover up their guilt. . . . Many of the foreigners who were

once imprisoned in Dachau are completely justified in denying us Germans the right to have any say in what happens to the crematorium in Dachau.

Steinmayr used this quotation to imply that only foreign interests supported the exhibition. He concluded this first article with the simple demand that "something must be done." In successive versions of this article Steinmayr continued to criticize the Dachau memorial site (Steinmayr, 1952b, 1952c, 1952d). In a July 1952 version he concluded:

Thus this place that was supposed to stimulate introspection . . . has become a site of curiosity and lust for sensations. . . . Additionally, the visitors of the grounds, especially 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 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.

Steinmayr had put into words what many local residents thought, and the Bavarian authorities responded. Almost immediately after the survivors' memorial ceremony on April 30, 1953, the Bavarian government took action (Marcuse, 2001, pp. 176-180). On May 5, 1953 the cabinet decided to remove the exhibition and close the crematorium to the public. Only 1 week later their plan was implemented. The exhibition was removed, and the sale of printed matter within the crematory complex and all guided tours were prohibited. The Finance Minister announced to the press that it had been necessary to clear out the exhibition in order to "counter uncontrollable propaganda" being spread by the curator, a survivor of the camp ("Bayern schliesst," 1953).

The Bavarian government, however, did not realize that an international pilgrimage of Dachau survivors from France was planned for June 7. French survivors and family members of inmates who had perished had been coming to Dachau annually in June for a number of years. They had attracted little attention because the French never stayed overnight on German soil. A short time after the pilgrimage French Minister of Justice Edmond Michelet, a Dachau survivor, published articles condemning the removal of the exhibition in the French newspapers *Figaro* and *Le Monde*, prompting the French General Consulate to send an official inquiry to the Bavarian government.

The correspondence between the Bavarian Ministry of Finance and the State Chancellery reveals the motives of the Bavarian government for removing the exhibition (Marcuse, 2001, p. 180f). The State Chancellery suggested that the Finance Ministry might mention that a survivor, Erich Preuss, had set up the exhibition "without a permit"; that the type of presentation was, "in the unanimous opinion of the responsible authorities . . . not commensurate with the sacrifices of the camp prisoners" (sic!); and that Mr. Preuss had made substantial personal profits through the sale of brochures and postcards. The clinching argument was that "a broad spectrum of the

public, in particular also groups of former prisoners, felt that this was, for obvious reasons, an unworthy situation that was to be terminated." That rationale was later used in the official answer to the French inquiry. The State Chancellery's accompanying explanatory letter to the Bavarian Finance Ministry, however, offers a glimpse of the real motivation: "For political reasons we strongly advise that especially no reference be made to the climate of opinion vis-à-vis the exhibition that obviously dominated certain circles in the city of Dachau."

Other West German newspapers also used descriptions of tourist visits to Dachau in order to explain the removal of the exhibition. In late May 1953 the Munich *Merkur* published a pathos-filled description of a Swiss family's visit to Dachau ("Dachau kämpft," 1953). The family members, according to the article, had felt quite at ease in the town until they decided to visit the former KZ. That evening they returned to their hotel completely distraught, and the "aging lady" suffered an "actual" heart attack. The family fled the town 2 hours later. "What happened in this 'symptomatic' case?," the author asked rhetorically, and indignantly answered his own question: "The former KZ prisoner Erich Preuss, employed for many years by the US camp [actually by the Bavarian State Restitution Authority], had described the tragic past with great authenticity."

The journalist apparently thought that Preuss should have been less authentic. A week later a Heidelberg newspaper characterized Preuss as someone who "could not forget what he had experienced as a KZ inmate" ("Bayern schliesst," 1953). The article, which suggested that "Dachau be turned into a memorial of reconciliation, just as the dilapidated barracks of the former KZ have turned into a blossoming city of expellees," then fired its lowest shot at Preuss. In its most powerful invective it claimed that:

He preferred to lead the columns of visitors, after they had completed their travels through the gorgeous landscapes of the [German] south, into his KZ memorial site, where [their impression of] the reconstruction of the new Germany was destroyed by "parting impressions" and intentionally fostered feelings of resentment. [emphasis added]

Foreign interest in Dachau remained high, however. For instance, in early March 1954 the *New York Herald-Tribune* published a front page article about the memorial site (Coblentz, 1954). The article, written in a cool, objective style, showed understanding for the removal of the old exhibition, but also criticized German attempts to sanitize remains of the Nazi past. The author described how the SS complex was being used by the "Dachau Detachment" of the US Army to process food and rations for army units throughout central Europe, while the Bavarian government had refurbished the prisoners' compound to accommodate 5000 "expellees" from the East. The directional sign at the entrance to the US installation listed eclectically "laundry and dry cleaning, chapel, crematory, and motor pool." In the crematorium itself the author found no historical documentation, only hundreds of signatures on the walls. He offered the Bavarian government's explanation for the removal of the exhibition 9 months earlier, namely because it had been "offensive to good taste and . . . harmful to an improvement in international relations." He concluded by noting critically that the German caretaker had tried to convince

him that the crematorium-gas chamber building had been built by the US army after the war for propaganda purposes.

Another article, published in 1954 by the *Manchester Guardian Weekly*, was more critical of the German clean-up efforts (Prittie, 1954). Author Terence Prittie first contrasted the "raggedy refugee-children" and old women peering out of the concentration camp barracks windows with the "perfectly preserved" garden around the crematoria. Then he described the gruesome murder apparatus in straightforward terms, noting that the walls were covered with "scribbled messages." In conclusion he quoted a story in a German newspaper that repeated the claim that the US had built the crematorium after the war to "pin guilt" on Germany. Prittie prophesied that in a year's time there would be neither a sentry nor directional signs.

He was right on the second count: the town of Dachau had the directional signs removed that same year, and it even attempted to prohibit the sale of literature about the concentration camp in the stores and restaurants in the former camp. In 1955 the county governor spearheaded an even bolder initiative: closing the crematorium grounds to the public, and tearing the building itself down (Marcuse, 2001, pp. 181–185). In contrast to the Bavarian government's behind-the-scenes maneuvering to close the crematorium exhibition in 1952–1953, however, this attempt was public. When Dachau county's representative submitted the proposal to the Bavarian parliament in July 1955, it immediately met a barrage of vehement protest from camp survivors and the news media.

From 1952 to 1955 the political situation had changed. The German "economic miracle" had come into full swing. West Germany had been accepted into NATO and had begun rebuilding its army, and Chancellor Adenauer was about to leave for a visit to Moscow, where he would negotiate the release of the last German POWs and Nazi perpetrators still being held in the Soviet Union. Thus, West Germans had far less cause to perceive themselves as victims. State officials were now turning their attention outwards and trying to establish a "clean" image in the international public sphere, rather than catering to local fears of bad publicity. The same Bavarian Minister of Finance who ordered the removal of the exhibition in 1953 told the press in 1955:

I think that the former concentration camp Dachau is so well known and so notorious the world over, and so many people died and were murdered there, that it would give the world a very false impression if one were to prohibit visitors. Landrat Junker was very poorly advised to have submitted this bill. ("Landrat schlecht beraten," 1955)

The county governor withdrew his proposal, and survivors of the camp began mobilizing internationally to launch a campaign to close the refugee settlement and preserve the former camp buildings as a memorial site. It took a full decade before their efforts succeeded.

## The Move Toward Documenting the Past: 1955–1960

Protracted negotiations between the survivors' organization and the Bavarian government began in 1957. A breakthrough came in 1960 from a rather unexpected source: the Catholic priests who had been imprisoned in the camp. Munich suffragan

bishop Johannes Neuhausler, who had been imprisoned with the famous oppositional Protestant church leader Martin Niemöller in the concentration camp's tract of cells for special prisoners, was in charge of organizing the Eucharistic World Congress to be held in Munich that year. Critical reactions by recent prominent visitors prompted Neuhausler to decide to erect a chapel in the camp, thus making it more "dignified" for the unavoidable visits by foreigners.

Within 6 months Neuhausler had organized a fund-raising drive, found a suitable design, and begun construction. He decided to dedicate the chapel at an official ceremony during the World Congress in early August 1960, when tens of thousands of foreign visitors would be present. The Dachau survivors, who had included a museum in their 1957 memorial site design, realized that the World Congress would be an excellent opportunity to unveil a preliminary exhibition. In July 1960 they created a small museum in the morgue and undressing rooms of the crematorium, where the first postwar exhibition had stood until 1953. The August 1960 chapel dedication was an impressive event, with ca. 50,000 people in attendance. During the following year the survivors expanded and improved the temporary exhibition, and the Bavarian government began negotiating more seriously about relocating the thousands of people still living in the former concentration camp.

This 1960 exhibition contained many of the elements of the permanent exhibition that was to open in 1965. In one room a model of the prisoners' compound of the concentration camp, which had already been commissioned by the survivors in 1957 for the permanent museum, was displayed. The rest was a collection of artifacts, charts, photographs, and facsimile documents. A local newspaper reporter described it as follows:

Statistics, blueprints, and documents aid one's memory: arrest warrants from the Gestapo; orders to send the prisoners' tooth-gold directly to the medical office, to make women's hair into felt and yarn, and to bring the low temperature experiments "to a good conclusion"; clemency petitions, reports about autopsies, police investigations; photocopies of orders of the day and liquidation detail lists; pictures, graphs. In their midst spotted gray-blue striped prisoners' uniforms, bull whip, whipping horse, and other instruments of torture. A "profitability calculation" makes a ghastly impression: for an average life span a net profit of 1631 Reichsmarks per prisoner is calculated, "not including the proceeds from the utilization of the bones and ash," says the panel. Under it the terse preprinted forms: "release due to death"—sent to the families of dead prisoners. The last room of the exhibition is dominated by the headlines in the international press—about the liberation of the Dachau KZ prisoners on 29 April 1945, and about the subsequent trials of the SS thugs and henchmen. In one glass case lie nearly 50 books and brochures—memoirs of liberated prisoners. At the exit a placard warns: "Never Again!" (Reichel, 1960)

It is interesting to examine the differences between this exhibition and the one later installed in the service building in 1965 (which will remain until ca. 2002). Most notably, the earlier documentation did not contain any reference to the systematic extermination of the Jews. Of course there was little room in the crematorium to display such documentation, but since the Judeocide was missing from the contem-

poraneous plans for the final museum, considerations of space were probably not the reason for its exclusion. Rather, in 1960 there was very little public awareness of the Holocaust per se. Only after the Eichmann trial in 1961 did the scope of the Holocaust—and its links to their own camp—become clear to the survivors of Dachau.

Another important difference was that the 1960 exhibition included models of the gassing facility at Hartheim in Austria, where almost 3200 Dachau inmates had been murdered, and of the shooting range at nearby Hebertshausen, where an estimated 6000 Soviet prisoners of war were executed (see Figure 9.3). Although Dutch survivor Nico Rost, one of the leading figures in the movement to create a museum, felt that these models were, if anything, too small to convey the enormity of the events they represented, they were not included in the 1965 museum (Rost, 1962). The 1965–2002 exhibition shows only photographs and some documents of these two aspects of Dachau's history. I have not been able to find a satisfactory explanation for the disappearance of the models, although it does conform to the tendency to focus only on events within the Dachau concentration camp itself. The camp survivors made this concession in order to allay the criticism of Germans who claimed that the planned memorial site would force the town of Dachau to bear the entire burden of all crimes committed in Nazi Germany.

The survivors' sensitivity to criticism of the memorial site is also evident in the sign explaining the word "Brausebad" (showers) stenciled above the entrance to the gas chamber. The explanatory sign attempted to strike a balance between the untrue claim that the gas chamber in Dachau had been built under American command after the war, and the fact that it had never been used for factory-scale murder. The text read: "This room would have been used as an undressing and waiting room if the gas chamber had worked. The sign 'shower baths' served to deceive the prisoners." In fact, the gas chamber was in good working order long before the end of the war. It was indeed never used for systematic gassings (probably because the death rate in Dachau was high enough to keep the crematorium ovens running near capacity anyway), but it was tested on at least two groups of prisoners. The explanatory sign thus inadvertently supported the myth of the "clean camp," by implying that the gas chamber had been some sort of nonfunctional sham. The 1965 sign was terser but similarly misleading: "Gas chamber/disguised as a shower room/never used as a gas chamber."

The permanent museum's conception, developed in conjunction with German specialists sympathetic to the survivors' cause, was presented to the public in May 1963. It claimed programmatically that the exhibition would serve to "transmit to the widest possible audience a realistic and in every respect truthful picture of all events that occurred in this camp. Beyond that the exhibition has to show how this murderous system could develop and expand" (Distel & Jakusch, 1978, p. 5; Lehrke, 1988, pp. 99–104). In keeping with this second goal, the 1965 exhibition included an introductory section on antisemitism and the Nazi rise to power, and another section on the program to exterminate the Jews. The four main sections are entitled: The Prehistory up to the Take-over of Power, The Dachau Concentration Camp, Extermination, and The End of the Concentration Camps.

The first goal of being "realistic and in every respect truthful," however, proved difficult. Almost exclusive use of documents and photographs, for instance, was less

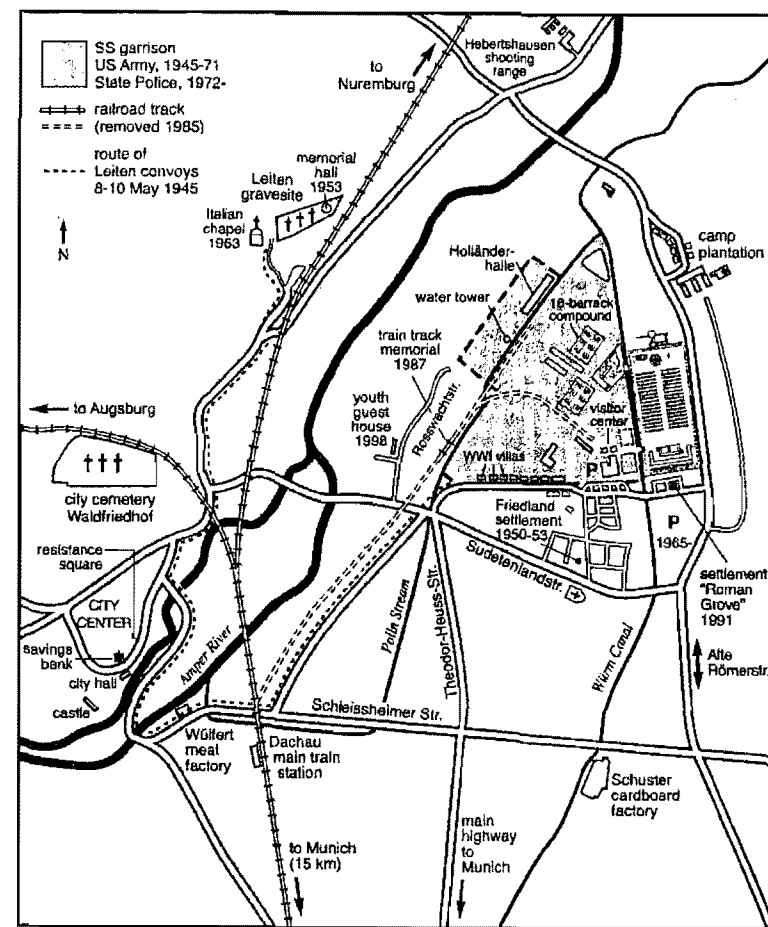


Figure 9.3. Map of the region surrounding the former Dachau concentration camp, including the city center and several of the gravesites of Dachau's victims. (Harold Marcuse and Steve Brown)

realistic than the mannequins used to reenact punishment scenes in the 1945 exhibition. Instead, realism was achieved primarily by huge enlargements of very graphic photographs of scenes in KZ Dachau and other concentration camps. For example, one series depicts the death of a human subject during "high altitude" experiments

in a decompression chamber in Dachau; another shows an SS man standing among corpses in a mass grave after the liberation of Bergen-Belsen.

And while everything was truthful, it was not the whole truth. No mention was made of "cultural" activities organized by the inmates, so that the exhibition does not convey the aspects of the daily routine that helped to make life remotely livable under the extreme SS repression. Reading, writing, dramatic productions, and political discussions, for example, were important to many of the long-term inmates. Another example is the role of religion in the daily life of some inmates, to which one exhibit case in the 1960 exhibition was devoted, but which was dropped from the 1965 exhibition. Or the clandestinely tolerated use of forbidden "bed sticks," polished sticks that helped to make the perfectly smooth beds needed to escape punishment during the "ordinary" years. In fact, given the predominance of graphic atrocity photographs in the exhibition, the overall impression is exclusively of repression, horror, and inhumanity. The decision to rely solely on official documents made it much easier to document bureaucratic exploitation and murder than to portray solidarity and resistance among the inmates. A graduate student studying memorial site exhibitions concluded in 1990 (see also Lehrke, 1988, pp. 99-103):

Those who leave the [Dachau] memorial site [museum] take shocking pictures of horrors with them. These pictures do not serve only as sources of historical information. The greatly enlarged photographs reproduce especially the fear and terror which the prisoners experienced, presented from the perspective with which perpetrators view their victims. Almost all pictures are contextualized by explanatory texts and historical documents, but the emotional shock that they are able to trigger predominates nonetheless.

Consciousness of one's own [distancing] reactions when confronted by photographs of horror is not made possible by the primarily emotional appeal of the pictures in Dachau, but rather only by intellectual reflection about historical reality. The pictures in Dachau, especially the ones in the section about the medical experiments performed on prisoners, are detrimental to this approach [of fostering intellectual reflection]. (Brink, 1990, p. 72)

In 1960 the general secretary of the international survivors organization, Georges Walraeve explained why the museum focused on barbarity:

As a monument of inhumanity it should teach the coming generations love of their neighbors, fraternity, and respect of human rights. . . . [It] should not arouse feelings of hatred towards the German people, although the public, especially the younger generations, must be informed about the past without making things seem better than they were. (Reichel, 1960)

Exactly how shocking pictures of atrocities can be used to foster love and respect is a problem with which pedagogues are still grappling today.

## The "Green" Memorial Site

In addition to the development of the main museum exhibition between the late 1950s and 1965, the site as a whole was undergoing substantial changes. After the

Eucharistic World Congress in 1960, Suffragan Bishop Neuhausler proposed planting the whole barracks area with trees (Hoffmann, 1998, 78f) (Figure 9.4). He also invited the Protestant and Jewish religious communities in Germany to erect memori-

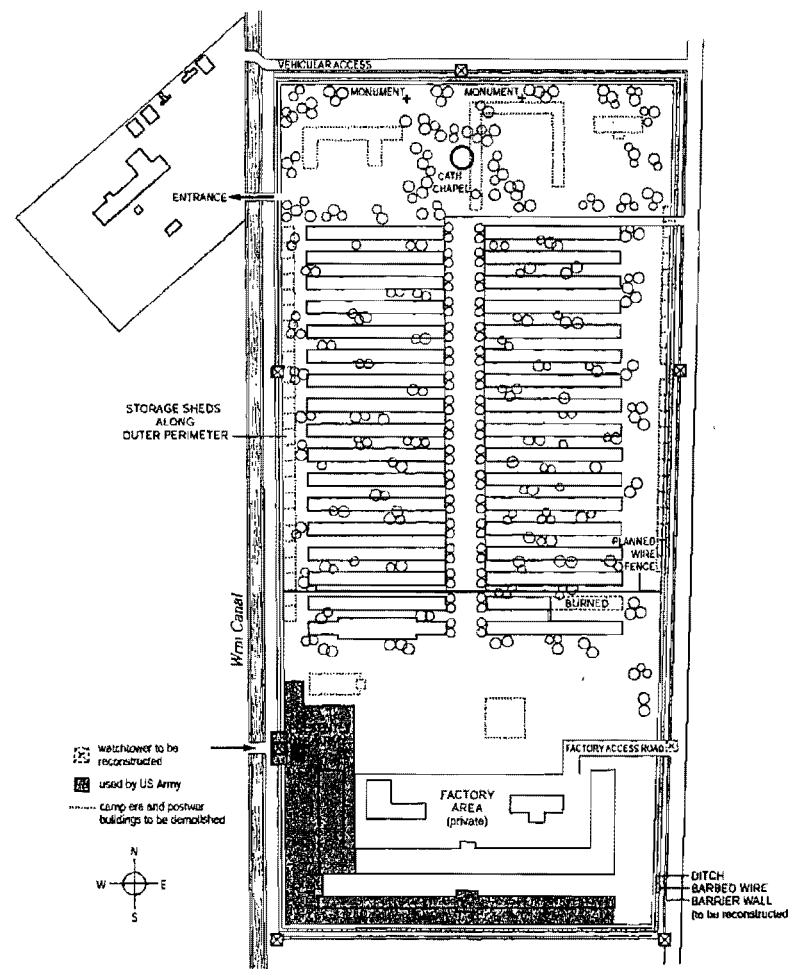


Figure 9.4. Design for a "green" Dachau memorial site proposed by Bishop Neuhausler in 1960. (Harold Marcuse and Steve Brown)



als flanking the Catholic chapel at the north end of the central camp street. Although the international survivors organization forced Neuhäusler to drop this plan of greening the entire memorial site, Jewish and Protestant commemorative buildings were constructed. They were dedicated in May 1967. A Russian Orthodox chapel was added in 1994 (Figure 9.1).

Although Neuhäusler was not able to push through the greening of the former Dachau prisoners' compound, he successfully defended a remnant of that plan. He wanted the three religious memorials at the north end to be "unified" by a grassy area planted with trees. While the Dachau survivors and the architects of the Protestant and Neuhäusler's Catholic chapel were willing to compromise and allow "sparse natural plantings" and perhaps "a few tall trees" in the memorial site, the architect of the Jewish memorial drew the line, demanding a 30-meter "tree-free zone" around his building. Ultimately, a ring of grass and dwarf oak trees was permitted around the Catholic chapel only.

## The Sanitized Memorial Site: 1965–1996

Although the various exhibitions graphically presented the horrors of the Dachau's Nazi past to visitors, the camp terrain was emptied of historical relics. While it was clear from the outset that the gatehouse, watchtowers, and gas chamber-crematorium building would be preserved, the Bavarian government was able to persuade the survivors that it was not feasible to preserve the camp barracks. They had been built in 1937 with a life expectancy of 10–15 years (Himmler had thought that by then the Nazis would have won the war and been able to dispense with concentration camps), and even their extensive renovation in 1948 had not been able to remove all damage from years of misuse. The costs for restoring and maintaining nearly 29,000 square meters of floor space would have been quite high. The survivors proposed various plans for partial preservation, such as restoring only a few select barracks, or leaving only the end walls standing, but all were rejected by the German authorities.

It was easier to remove those traces of life and history in the camp that did not fit into the message that the memorial site was to convey. As Volkhard Knigge (1996), director of the Buchenwald memorial site in the 1990s, phrased it: "The minimization of remains is a prerequisite for the maximization of possibilities for creating new meanings" (p. 207). Already in 1959 former camp elder Oskar Müller noted that the Bavarian authorities were constantly trying to destroy as many relics of the camp as they could. In a letter to a fellow survivor he wrote:

We aren't making any progress in the creation of a warning and memorial site in Dachau. It is quite obvious: The motivation for this stance [of the Bavarian authorities] is the intention to spread the cloak of silence and oblivion over the last period of German history. The persecutors of yesterday who are once again setting the tone fear the presentation of historical truth, they fear those documents that reveal their shameful deeds. (Müller, 1959)

Without historical relics and documents, government authorities could shape the memorial site to embody the impression they wished to convey to visitors.

The primary prerequisite for the creation of the memorial site was the relocation of the 1500–2000 people who had been living in the former concentration camp since 1948. Finally, in 1963–1964 new housing for the refugee residents was built, and all of the barracks were demolished. The two immediately bordering the roll-call square were rebuilt according to modern standards, with foundations, cement floors, tightly fitting windows, locking doors, etc. One of these two new barracks was left empty, the other furnished to show the three different interior bunk designs in spatial succession in the central section of the 90-meter length of the building. One day room, one washroom, and one communal toilet room were reconstructed as well (the original barracks had two of each). The small enclaves with more comfortable beds for the barrack functionaries, however, were not reconstructed. The outlines of the other 30 demolished barracks were marked by low cement curbs filled with pebbles. Small tablets indicate the original barrack numbers, but not the special functions that they served.

Other details of the original camp were omitted as well. The roll-call square had been subdivided by raised curbs, which were not reconstructed. Instead, the international monument with its broad substructure was placed within the wings of the service building. This left the vast expanse of the original assembly grounds completely empty. The roll-call square itself, and the entire camp including the areas where the barracks had stood, were strewn with gravel, while the area around the religious memorials was covered with small, light-colored pebbles. The "milestones to freedom" inscription on the roof of the service building was not reconstructed, nor were a number of other signs and pictures throughout the camp, such as the mural behind the crematorium ovens depicting a man riding on a pig reminding workers "Wash hands before touching corpses, any one who does not wash is a pig," and the saying "One louse—means death" (Gun, 1966, p. 32; Smith, 1972, p. 75).

Almost all of the special-function buildings in the camp were demolished and not replaced: the canteen and infirmary barracks, the inmates' library, the punishment barracks, the priests' chapel, the clothing disinfectory, the brothel, the greenhouses, the kennels, the rabbit hutches, and an SS detention building (Figure 9.1). Only the entry gate building, the "special prisoners" bunker behind the service building, the two crematoria, and the watchtowers were left standing (or, in the case of two watchtowers, reconstructed). (The gate and the bunker were still under US army control; the crematoria were protected by a 1955 international treaty.) Taken together, these changes reduce the multifaceted and contradictory hell of KZ Dachau to a rather sterile, unidimensional image: a barren, gray-white expanse surrounded by a high concrete wall and watchtowers, a huge museum, two dormitory barracks at one end, three churches at the other. Almost as an afterthought, the park with the two crematoria and gas chamber hang appendix-like at the far corner. Thus, the former concentration camp Dachau was reduced to a streamlined symbol: it had all of the stereotypical attributes of a Nazi camp—gate, barbed wire, watchtowers, crematoria—but otherwise it had become a representation of the spotlessly "clean camp" of Nazi propaganda, complete with a museum and churches. Visitors noted this sanitized look with disappointment.

In 1966, after the memorial site was completed, a critical reviewer wrote that Dachau was "made up like a witch who wants to appear harmless" ("Eine so pittoreske

kleine Stadt," 1966). He noted the fresh paint on the service building, the clean gravel on the roll-call square, the absence of barracks, the trim "chapel of atonement" at the end of a beautiful tree-lined lane, and the cypress trees and well-trimmed hedges surrounding the crematoria. In 1968, after the international memorial was dedicated, a reporter for the London *Times* recorded a similar impression (Warman, 1968). Noting that "much of the camp does not . . . act as an effective reminder of the past," he offered the following description:

The watchtowers and barbed-wire fences remain, but all the barracks are gone save two, which are renovated and clean, almost clinical. . . . the barrack areas are now neatly marked off and numbered. . . . The crematorium—complete with ovens, a stretcher in the mouth of each—is a chilling sight, but it is hidden behind trees in a beautifully kept garden and it is outside the camp itself.

This British journalist also quoted several survivors who felt that the concentration camp should have been left in its original state. "It means nothing as it is," one told him.

After the Jewish memorial and Protestant church were dedicated in 1967, two elements of the survivors' plan for a memorial site still remained to be realized: a central camp memorial at the roll-call square, and the restoration of the access to the memorial site through the original gatehouse with its inscription "work makes free." The central memorial was dedicated in September 1968, but the access through the gatehouse was not even realized in 1972, when the US army pulled out of the former SS camp and returned the southeast corner of the camp to Bavarian authorities. The gatehouse became accessible at that time, but instead of re-creating the original access route, the Bavarian government stationed a detachment of state police in the former SS camp (Figure 9.3). Another quarter-century passed before government officials even began to consider modifications of that police installation to allow the partial reconstruction of the original access route.

From 1968 until the end of the 1990s a few didactic improvements were made, but the physical form of the site and the exhibition remained essentially the same. In 1969 a film about the camp and its liberation was completed, and in 1978 a catalog of the exhibition was published. Outdoors the poplar trees along the camp street were replanted in the late 1970s or early 1980s. In 1983 the Bavarian government created positions for nine secondary school teachers to work with school classes on a rotating basis. In 1985 a few large signboards with maps, enlarged photographs, and short texts were posted at strategic points in the memorial site. Although local authorities resisted the construction of a youth hostel throughout the 1980s and 1990s, in 1983 a coalition of local groups began to sponsor a summer tent camp for international youth encounters. After a decade their efforts began to bear fruit, and in 1998 a "House for Youth Encounters" was dedicated.

## Visitors Statistics: 1950–1995

Many of the didactic improvements had to do with the changing number and demography of visitors to the site. Dachau visitor statistics suggest that the popularity of the former camp among visitors is a generational phenomenon. A look at the ag-

gregate number of visitors to the memorial site shows a jump around 1960 from roughly 160,000 visitors per year to about 360,000 visitors per year (Figure 9.5). Then from 1975 the curve of total visitors climbs steeply to about 900,000 per year in the early 1980s, where it oscillates sharply before falling off slightly to a new plateau of about 700,000 in the mid-1990s. (The 1990s plateau may actually be 20% or more higher, because the head counts as visitors enter the museum have given way to hourly estimates. Additionally, during the most crowded times both individual and group visitors often do not enter the museum at all, and are thus not included in the counts.) The sharp oscillations of the 1980s are due to events such as the closing of the memorial site on Mondays for maintenance since 1983; the upsurge of interest during the anniversary years 1985 and 1990; and a falling off of foreign, especially American, visitors at the time of the Gulf War in 1991. Nonetheless, the plateaus of the 1950s, 1960s, later 1980s and later 1990s are clearly visible, as are the periods of change in the early 1960s and later 1970s.

A closer look at the breakdown between German and foreign visitors allows a more precise dating of transitions (Figure 9.5). The two curves do not begin to diverge until after 1965, when the number of German visitors falls off slightly and does not begin to pick up again until 1974, 5 years later than the climb in the number of foreign visitors. Thereafter the number of Germans climbs more steeply until 1979, when it again begins to level off in comparison to the more constantly rising number of foreign visitors. Looking at yet another level of detail within the German visitors, we can see that the proportion of Germans coming to the Dachau memorial site in organized youth and school groups increased dramatically during the 1960s and 1970s, from ca. 2.5% in 1965 to 14% in 1970, to 21% in 1975, and 42% in 1980 (Figure 9.6). The proportion rose much more gradually to 50% in 1990, after which it jumped to and then oscillated around ca. 60% through the middle of the decade. The steep rise

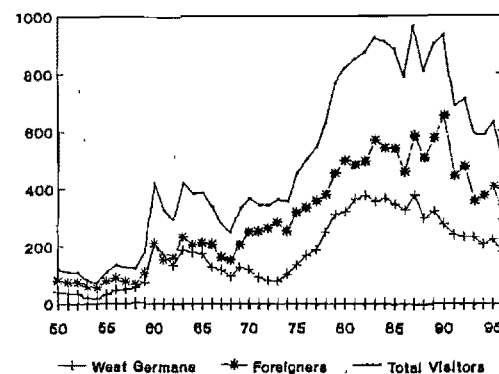


Figure 9.5. Graph of visitors to the Dachau concentration camp memorial site, 1950–1996, with breakdown of German and foreign visitors. (Harold Marcuse)

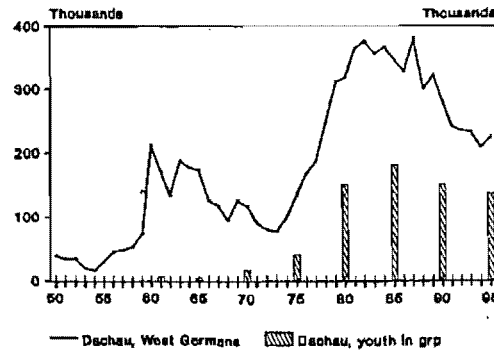


Figure 9.6. Graph of visitors to the Dachau concentration camp memorial site, 1950–1995, with bars indicating of those visitors arriving in organized school and youth groups, 1961–1995. (Harold Marcuse)

from the late 1960s to 1980 reflects the generational transition in interest in the Nazi past during the 1970s. Even if most of these groups of young Germans came to Dachau at the initiative of their 1968 generation (born ca. 1937–1953) teachers, the subsequent plateau indicates that interest in the memorial site was strong enough to be self-sustaining.

It is difficult to assess the effects of other factors on the number of visitors to Dachau, such as the rising standard of living, which increased leisure and travel time, and the role of improved transportation infrastructure (availability of buses, quality of autobahns, construction of a commuter railway to Dachau, etc.). A comparison with two other major Bavarian tourist attractions, the Deutsches Museum of Science and Technology in Munich, frequented primarily by Germans, including especially school groups, and Neuschwanstein Castle, equally popular among foreigners, can help to answer this question (Figure 9.7). The relatively steady upward climbs (with a slight steepening in the late 1960s) in these curves indicate that the sharp climbs and plateaus for Dachau depended on variables other than those determining visits to sites of educational and recreational tourism. However, the parallel rises and plateaus in the German Museum and Dachau curves after the early 1970s may indicate the effect of visits by school groups.

### Reconstruction Versus Preservation: Changes 1996–2003

Not until the mid-1990s, when members of those younger, more interested generations had acceded to positions of political power in Germany and in Dachau, were substantial changes to the memorial site considered. In 1988 the Bavarian ministry of culture proposed convening a panel of experts to draw up guidelines for a major renovation, but it waited 7 years before assembling this “advisory council” in 1995.

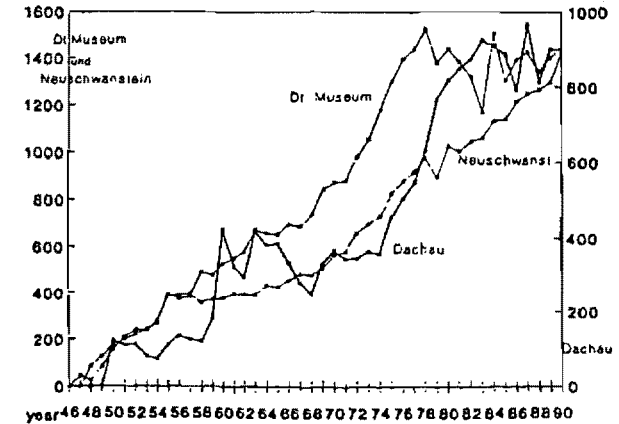


Figure 9.7. Graph of annual visitor statistics for Dachau and two comparable tourist destinations in Bavaria: the German Museum of Science and Technology in Munich, and Castle Neuschwanstein, 1946–1990. (Harold Marcuse)

Composed of seven historians and four Dachau survivors, the council solicited input from local, regional, and national groups interested in the educational work taking place in the memorial site. In May 1996 it released its draft recommendations, which it summarized in six guidelines (Fachbeirat, 1996). Most of them addressed what should be done with the site. They stipulated that the planned visitor tour should retrace the path that entering inmates followed, starting at the entrance gate and continuing into the service building where the initial registration took place, then proceeding to the barracks area and crematorium (Figure 9.1). The few other remaining historical buildings would be used to house exhibitions relating to those buildings' original functions (most had been empty or inaccessible since 1965). Thus, the SS “day house” (the entry gate building) would house an exhibition about the SS, the camp prison (“bunker”) would contain documentation about the inmates held and punishments performed there, the crematorium would give more information about murder in the camp, and the reconstructed barracks would house exhibits about inmate groups and daily life in the camp. Additionally, ca. 33 explanatory panels would be erected throughout the terrain. Finally, the main museum exhibition would be modernized to incorporate the latest historical findings and multimedia technology, and a new exhibit about the postwar history of the camp would be included. A more specific 1998 plan specified further that every room would also contain some documentation about its original function (Haus der Bayerischen Geschichte, 1999).

One guideline, however, transcends the “what” and addresses the “how” of redesigning the site. Instead of positive goals, it lists several prohibitions (Fachbeirat, 1996): a) no reconstructions or stagings will be implemented; b) the watchtowers

will not be accessible (avoidance of the perspective of the perpetrators); c) outside of the main exhibition the history only of KZ Dachau will be addressed (no references to the situation in other KZs); only texts and pictures of KZ Dachau will be exhibited.

While the other guidelines attempt to maximize the Dachau site's ability to promote experiential learning, the last guideline sharply limits the possibility of using sensory experiences to foster emotional connections between visitors and the history of Nazi Germany. Such connections are the source of experiential learning's power, and distinguish it from intellectual approaches. The prohibitions unwittingly perpetuate the streamlined "clean camp" image, and thus replicate some of the shortcomings of the old memorial site. As I will show, these prohibitions are a didactically misguided attempt to avoid potentially powerful but controversial aspects of the site's presentation.

First of all, reconstructions at sites of atrocities are a sensitive issue because they can appeal to visitors' lurid interests, as opposed to creating a space for respectful commemoration or historical learning. Max Mannheimer, one of the Dachau survivors on the advisory council, stated this position concisely when he told a reporter in 1996 that the memorial site "should not become a horror story," as one might find "recreated at Disneyland" (Sing, 1998). Additionally, because people who deny that the Nazi government practiced systematic genocide claim that concentration camp crematoria and gas chambers are postwar fabrications, *any* actual postwar construction could support their arguments. These are valid concerns, but presumably a great many aspects could be reconstructed before there was any danger of the Dachau memorial site becoming a historical "chamber of horrors." Also, to allow deniers' pseudoarguments to determine crucial didactic decisions grants them victory.

A survey of the elements of the camp that were destroyed and already reconstructed underscores the irrationality of prohibiting additional reconstructions. From the inscription "Arbeit macht frei" on the camp gate, which was removed during the American occupation, to the wall, ditch, barbed-wire barrier, and two watchtowers demolished in the 1950s, to the barracks bulldozed in 1964, important features of the concentration camp have already been re-created. Prohibiting further reconstructions would merely allow apologetic past visions of the "clean camp" to determine the future appearance and impact of the memorial site. The real question is not whether there should be reconstructions, but what should be reconstructed, and how it should be reconstructed.

Let us examine pros and cons of reconstruction in a few specific cases. The most salient feature of the present camp terrain is the rows of poplar trees lining the central camp street. The original trees were planted during the expansion of the camp in 1938. They were felled in the 1960s and replanted in the late 1970s or early 1980s. Especially when they are in full foliage, these "second-generation" trees dominate the barren camp terrain and make a strong impression on visitors. Why, of all of the original elements in the barracks area, were they alone reconstructed? Without competition from other reconstructions, they help to create a serene atmosphere appropriate to the commemorative function of a memorial site. It would be quite different if, say, the barbed wire fencing that once surrounded some barracks, isolating some groups of prisoners from others, was reconstructed. Those interior fences would reinforce an experience of the

isolation and harshness of life in the camp, while the trees provide a space of emotional respite for reflection about the historical events.

In contrast to the trees, only two barracks of originally 34 have been reconstructed. They were built in 1965 after the extensively modified originals from 1938 were torn down. However, as mentioned above, they were built to a much higher standard, with concrete slab floors and reinforced concrete supports. Whereas most of the original barracks had been subdivided into four sections, each consisting of one day room and one dormitory room (Figure 9.2), one of the new barracks was furnished with a single day room and three different dormitory rooms, each representing the different bunk bed configurations that accommodated increasing numbers of inmates. And not only that: the two barracks that originally adjoined the roll-call square were not dormitory barracks. They housed the camp infirmary and the canteen, where privileged prisoners could purchase food, tobacco, and some personal items.

Instead of reconstruction, the other 32 barracks, most of which were dormitory barracks, were marked by low cement walls, which many visitors mistakenly assume are remnants of the original barracks. Neither the two reconstructed barracks nor the low cement rectangles convey an impression of the daily lives of the inmates. The hierarchies among the prisoners, and their segregation in different barracks according to nationality, religion, degree of severity of punishment, and health are neutralized. Nothing conjures up the advantages of living in a barrack closer to the kitchen, which, for example, not only shortened by up to 500 meters the distance the large vessels of broth had to be carried, but lengthened the time one had to eat it as well. How would kitchens, showers, a library, canteen, brothel, rabbit hutches, and greenhouses fit into most visitors' preconceived notions of Nazi concentration camps? In this case the reductive reconstruction dispenses with features that are crucial both to forging an experiential connection to the historical events and for understanding the moral and physical complexities of the Nazi system of oppression and murder.

The watchtowers at Dachau were similarly reconstructed and restored without important elements such as gun emplacements or searchlights. They are now also directly accessible from the prison camp grounds without the intervening barbed wire barriers and deep ditch. In fact, a passageway was broken through the base of the north tower, while other towers now have new doorways from the grass strip that has replaced the ditch. These iconic buildings have thus lost much of their former threatening appearance. What effects do these distortions have? For camp survivors, omitting such details helps to avoid traumatic reminders of the horrors of the camps. For postwar pedagogues, it helps to ensure that visitors will not be tempted to slip into the "perspective of the perpetrators." In the words of advisory council member Hans Günter Hockerts, a professor of contemporary history at the University of Munich:

There will be no theatrical stagings. Visitors will not be allowed to go into a watch tower, because then they might slip into the role of a perpetrator. No one will be allowed to play a virtual SS-man—there is enough of that in those awful video games. (Sing, 1998)

Some German educators thus fear that young Germans, some of whom harbor arrogant attitudes, will identify with the power of the SS in the camp. Instead of

allowing young people to confront and overcome that identification, the pedagogues are attempting to predetermine the outcome. There is a danger here: as we have seen, past attempts to shape visitors' experiences through omissions and prohibitions have had little effect. Creating dissonant impressions and raising difficult issues is a more promising way of fostering the development of an emotional connection than an attempt to administer the most straightforward anti-Nazi message possible.

For young people with little foreknowledge of the history, such graphic elements as machine guns, or the possibility of mounting the stairs and surveying the terrain might be an effective means of evoking an experiential sense of the oppressiveness of the original camp. Indeed, the entry watchtower of Auschwitz-Birkenau is an almost mandatory first stop on tours of that site. As the demographic balance shifts farther away from groups with personal connection to Nazi-era events, it is becoming increasingly necessary to strike a new balance between the sensibilities of emotionally primed visitors and the needs of naive tourists.

Exhibits in several recent Holocaust museums confirm that graphic elements are indeed effective means of connecting with the experiential senses of their visitors. In the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, DC, visitors ascend in a dungeon-like elevator, pass through an original deportation boxcar, and walk through an arrangement of decaying survivors' shoes. In the Simon Wiesenthal Center's Beit Hashoah—Museum of Tolerance in Los Angeles, the tour ends with visitors filing through two narrow tunnels into a simulated gas chamber. Many visitors report that these are powerful experiences. In these US museums, the setting makes clear that these are only simulated experiences. At an actual concentration camp site, that distinction is not as clear, and it is much more important to explicitly distinguish reconstructions from original remains. At original sites such potentially tasteless or traumatizing details might better be replaced by adequate previsit preparation or other on-site documentation. Still, that is no reason not to allow visitors to enter the towers.

Another problematic area of reconstruction is the bridge over the ditch and through the barbed-wire fence that connects the prisoners' compound and the crematorium area. This 1960's bridge misrepresents the complete physical isolation of prisoners in the camp from the murder and corpse disposal installation. During the concentration camp period the crematorium compound was concealed and strictly off limits to all but the few prisoners who worked there.

There are reasons for connecting the two in the memorial site. From a practical standpoint, the bridge allows visitors to walk directly from the barracks area to the crematorium compound. Additionally, as historically distorting as this direct access may be, it does illustrate the close functional connection between persecution and genocide that evolved in the concentration camps in 1941–1942. However, other ways of achieving these practical and symbolic ends might distort the original situation in the camp less. For instance, a clearly modern ramp or catwalk over the barbed-wire barrier, moat, and wall would allow visitors to physically experience their privilege of being able to transcend the prisoners' compound and examine the crematoria. A separate, ground-level bridge farther north along the wall could provide access for disabled visitors and maintenance personnel.

How to present surviving buildings poses additional problems. Most camp-era buildings were repeatedly modified during the half-century since 1945, and they still bear

traces of each new use. We have already seen that there are cases where reconstructions may be desirable or even necessary, and that it may be better if the reconstructions do not attempt to replicate or simulate the exact camp-era. Questions of historical and didactic importance must be considered, as well as issues of sensitivity and taste, and less invasive alternatives should be explored. These considerations also apply to the presentation of coincidentally preserved remains. There is a broad spectrum of possibilities, ranging from displaying only the surviving elements of the remains, stripped of all later additions and bearing the scars of time, to restoring the original appearance of those remains, to preserving also the later modifications, even if they conceal features of the original situation. The key is to find the most effective means of connecting visitors with the history of the site. Let us examine two cases, both in the service building that houses the main exhibition: the decision to strip the walls down to the remnants of the first layer of paint and leave them in that condition, and the decision to destroy a postwar interior wall with decorative murals from the period of US occupation.

In 1998 part of an original inscription "... verboten" ("prohibited") in Gothic script was discovered behind a cabinet in the long-empty west wing of the service building (Marcuse, 2001, p. 400f) (Figure 9.8). Some advisory board members be-



Figure 9.8. Nazi-era inscription discovered on a wall of the west wing of the Dachau service building in 1998. Removal of the neighboring coats of paint revealed the text "Rauchen verboten" (smoking prohibited). (Courtesy of the Dachau Memorial Site Archive)

came very excited about the power of this original relic, and decided that *all* walls in the west wing should be stripped down to the remains of the first coat of paint and left that way as the backdrop of the exhibition. Subsequently, Nazi-era inscriptions or graffiti were discovered in only a very few places. This decision has already been implemented in the exhibition in the "bunker," which opened to the public in January 2000. Visitors must view the documents on display in a distinctively dirty and unpleasant setting, resembling a construction site more than any situation that was ever present in the concentration camp. The dirty, peeling, blotched walls do not convey an impression of the original building (which, as one of the most modern prisons in its day, was probably kept spotless), although they do convey a sense of the building's age. Critics call this a "brick fetishism" that overcompensates for the destruction of historical relics elsewhere, while giving the historical exhibition a cheap, unfinished, and unserious character.

The future main exhibition will thus also be housed in rooms that appear run-down and dirty, thereby debasing it and distracting from its message. As an alternative, it would be possible to highlight the inscriptions of interest by exposing only them, while restoring the rest of the walls as nearly as possible to the original appearance. This would create a tension between concealment and discovery, heightening visitors' emotional experience and evoking a feeling for the historical "layering" of the site. The power of this sense is graphically illustrated by this very inscription. When the paint next to "verboten" was stripped off, the entire inscription was revealed to be the unexpectedly banal "*smoking* prohibited." Because this prohibition implies that some inmates could and did smoke in other areas, and that newcomers assumed that they could smoke in the camp, it provides an ideal opportunity to discuss visitors' preconceptions of concentration camps. Furthermore, because smoking prohibitions are widely regarded as beneficial public health measures today, the inscription could be used to raise the question whether Nazism contained progressive as well as repressive features. Whether this inscription will be interpreted so as to explore such issues, however, is still unclear. In any case, it will foster the cognitive dissonance that undergirds complex learning.

Secondly, the decision to remove all postwar additions to the interior of the west wing necessitates the destruction of US-era murals painted on a wall constructed after 1945 (the murals are too fragile to be removed and displayed elsewhere). In stark contrast to the harshness of the concentration camp, the murals depict peaceful scenes: a tropical sunset, a city silhouette, and a snowy mountain valley (Marcuse, 2000). Because the murals document the US army's use of and attempt to take symbolic possession of the site after 1945, they would provide a powerful backdrop for the planned exhibition on the postwar history of the site. In this case it is necessary to balance, on the one hand, how much the wall would impair the experience of the Nazi-era admitting room's original function, which is already diminished by the lack of reconstructions and by the exhibits the room will contain. On the other hand, the murals would help younger generations to understand and come to terms with their own mediated relationship to the Nazi era, which is the biographical equivalent of the aforementioned "layering" of the site. This is another case where the original site's primary advantage over the classroom, its ability to use auratically heightened sensory experiences to forge connections between visitors and history, could be

intensified. If the modifications are implemented as planned, however, that unique power will be lost.

## Conclusion

This overview of the winding path between the Dachau concentration camp and its successive recreations as a memorial site reveals that the site was never optimized to respond to the educational needs of visitors. Instead, it was continually redesigned according to the representational desires of those in charge of it. First, US occupation authorities used it to punish former Nazis, and presented only the most barbaric aspects of the camp's past use as a prison and "death mill." Even before the former concentration camp was returned to them in 1948, Bavarian authorities tried to turn the camp into the correctional institution portrayed by Nazi propaganda. Economic and political constraints prevented them from realizing that goal. Instead, rapidly changing exigencies at the beginning of the Cold War prompted them to convert it into a residential settlement for refugees by the end of the year.

By the end of the 1950s that solution proved to be a source of increasing embarrassment, so Bavarian authorities reluctantly yielded to camp survivors interested in creating a memorial site. Still, the authorities were able to shape the site in such a way that the horrific events of the Nazi period were represented in an abstract, minimalist, "clean" way. Especially in the 1950s and early 1960s German officials succeeded in removing most traces of the everyday life in the concentration camp, leaving only a few icons of a clean, streamlined murder factory: a wall with watchtowers and a gate, two nondescript barracks, and a gas chamber/morgue/crematorium building. Survivors successfully thwarted attempts to plant the entire site with trees, although, in keeping with their own focus on commemoration, they allowed some trees to be planted where originals had stood in the camp, and they permitted the construction of new religious buildings.

The analysis of visitor statistics over a 45-year period reveals the ebb and flow of German and foreign interest in the former Dachau concentration camp. In general, rising interest meant increased pressure on those in power to preserve and document the history of the camp. They reduced the former camp to a symbolic minimum that balanced pressure from both sides. On the one hand, the former concentration camp had to appear "clean" enough to mollify local constituencies. On the other, it had to contain enough trappings of the camp so as not to draw criticism from disappointed visitors. A generational change beginning in the late 1960s and cresting in the 1980s prompted a series of augmentations to the didactic infrastructure of the site. With increasing distance from the events and a shift toward visits by organized groups of young people, however, more and more visitors began arriving with less and less foreknowledge about the camp. It was not until the late 1990s, however, that further-reaching changes to the appearance of the site were considered. By that time the political will to confront the complexities and ambiguities in the concentration camp's history was beginning to materialize.

A younger generation of politicians and pedagogues developed guidelines to restore greater historical authenticity to the Dachau memorial site. These guidelines focus on the preservation and accessibility of the few authentic relics that coinci-

dentally survived the destructive impulses of past generations. Still, in their reluctance to recreate important but incongruous features of the concentration camp, and in their willingness to destroy evidence of postwar uses, these guidelines run the risk of past unsuccessful attempts to shape visitors' experiences without considering their needs. A memorial site must be designed to meet visitors half way, addressing their interests first, before attempting to infuse them with the views the site's designers wish to convey.

## Note

<sup>1</sup>Personal interviews by author were with (1992–1993): Belinda Davis (b. 1959), interviewed March 2, 1992, Ann Arbor, Michigan; Irene Marcuse-Silver (b. 1953), visit in September 1981, interviewed March 1, 1992; Diana Saso (b. 1971), visit in 1991, interviewed May 10, 1993; Kevin Wong (b. 1967), visit in 1985, interviewed March 12, 1993.

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