

Mark Celinscak

The Holocaust and the Canadian War Museum Controversy

In February 1998 the Senate Subcommittee of Veteran Affairs held hearings to discuss a proposed Holocaust gallery in the Canadian War Museum. The hearings ultimately led to a democratization of the museum's content and presentation. The controversy also helped lead to the creation of both the Canadian Museum of Human Rights in Winnipeg as well as the establishment of a National Holocaust Monument in Ottawa. Finally, by examining the Holocaust gallery controversy from the perspective of the present day, we can better appreciate a growing body of research that explores how the Canadian government, media, military and average citizen responded to the Holocaust.

En février 1998, le sous-comité du Sénat des anciens combattants a organisé des audiences afin de débattre de la proposition de créer une galerie sur l'Holocauste au sein du Musée canadien de la guerre. Ces audiences ont permis une démocratisation de l'élaboration du contenu et de la présentation du Musée. La controverse suscitée a aussi permis la création du Musée canadien des Droits de la personne à Winnipeg et du Monument national de l'Holocauste à Ottawa. Analyser cette controverse dans une perspective actuelle amène à mieux appréhender l'historiographie grandissante portant sur les réponses du gouvernement, des médias, de l'armée et du citoyen lambda canadiens à l'Holocauste.

To control a museum means ... to control the representation of a community and its highest values and truths.... It is precisely for this reason that museums and museum practices can become objects of fierce struggle and impassioned debate. What we see and do not see in ... museums – and on what terms and by whose authority we do or do not see it – is closely linked to larger questions about who constitutes the community and who defines its identity.¹

– Carol Duncan

In October 2016 the Vancouver Holocaust Education Centre unveiled an exhibition of national significance.² Titled “Canada Responds to the Holocaust, 1944–45” it explored the closing months of the Second World War and the immediate postwar era from the perspective of Holocaust survivors, Canadian liberators, aid workers, and journalists. The exhibition integrated artifacts, oral testimonies, documents, photographs, radio and newsreel clips to examine how Canadians reacted to Nazi atrocities.

Shortly after it opened to the public, the co-research director of the exhibit, Richard Menkis, explained that it was the first of its kind to publicly detail the initial encounters between Canadians and Holocaust survivors at the end of the war.³ Never before had a museum offered such a wide-ranging exploration of Holocaust-related topics such as liberation, medical relief, representation, and immigration from a Canadian

perspective. Never before had accounts by such a diverse number of Canadian witnesses to the physical and cultural destruction of the Holocaust been put on public display.⁴ More than seventy years after the end of the Second World War, the country's involvement in one of the twentieth century's seminal events was finally put on exhibit in a Canadian museum.

VANCOUVER HOLOCAUST EDUCATION CENTRE

**CANADA
RESPONDS**
TO THE HOLOCAUST
1944-45

OCTOBER 16, 2016 - MARCH 31, 2017

This original VHEC exhibition examines the contact between Canadians in Europe and survivors of the Holocaust. It captures the varied voices of the men and women desperately struggling to find responses to the emerging realization of the breadth and inhumanity of the Shoah.

Vancouver Holocaust Education Centre
55 - 950 West 41st Avenue

Exhibition Hours
Monday - Thursday, 9 AM - 5 PM
Friday, 9 AM - 4 PM

Opening Program
October 16, 2 pm
Zack Gallery, JCC.
Followed by reception at the VHEC.


**VANCOUVER
HOLOCAUST
EDUCATION CENTRE**

VHEC.ORG

SUPPORTED BY THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT OF CANADA AND THE PROVINCE OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

The Vancouver Holocaust Education Center's "Canada Responds to the Holocaust, 1944-45" exhibit posters. Vancouver Holocaust Education Centre JCC, 160908.

**THE END OF THE WAR
IN THE NETHERLANDS**



The end of Nazi rule in the Netherlands

The final liberation of the Netherlands took place on V-E Day. In the areas not previously liberated, including Amsterdam and Rotterdam, this was the first real occasion for celebration. Many Dutch Jews remember celebrating with the Canadians, but their joy was hardly complete.

In this interview, she tells the story of her liberation. She elaborates on the enthusiasm for liberation and the Canadians, but also the harsh reality of losing family members, or of claiming children put in hiding who no longer knew their parents.

Later, Tillie met a Canadian soldier, Lester Sugarman. They married in Amsterdam in early 1946.

Tillie Sugarman (née Bueno de Mesquita), and others in her family, acquired false papers and survived by hiding their identity. In one interview she said, "It was happy and sad...it was not an undiluted joy; you lost people as you gained freedom."

Artist: Steve Houghton, former Battle Commander of the Netherlands forces, is awarded across Canada in the company of the First Canadian Army in May 1945.
© 2015 The Canadian War Museum. All rights reserved. www.cwmmuseum.ca

Why did it take nearly three-quarters of a century for an institution to examine, in detail, Canada's encounter with Holocaust survivors at the end of the war? In fact, there had been previous attempts to document this connection. In 1997, plans for a new Canadian War Museum in Ottawa included an expansive Holocaust gallery. Once the proposal became public knowledge a heated debate began in the country. In February 1998, the Senate Subcommittee of Veteran Affairs held hearings to discuss the issue. Canadian academics, politicians, veterans and others were invited to testify about the proposal. Upon conclusion of the hearings, the plan for a Holocaust gallery in the Canadian War Museum was cancelled. In the view of many who testified, the Holocaust either had no place in the country's war museum or it held no direct connection to Canada and its military.

This paper investigates the testimonies given during the Senate Subcommittee hearings in Ottawa by those who were against the proposed Holocaust gallery in the Canadian War Museum. Veterans' groups, historians, museum management and government officials squared off in lengthy and ardent debates. Indeed, the majority of the witnesses who testified were against the proposal. What were the central issues in the deliberations? What were the concerns of various interest groups and what did they argue in support of their cause? Lastly, what do the hearings say about Canada and its recollection of the Second World War and the Holocaust?

Representing the Holocaust in War Museums

As scholars such as Jay Winter have argued, modern museums have become sites in which the public contemplate sacred themes.⁵ While not replacing religious institutions outright, museums have become central spaces in which people consider issues concerning life and death, as well as good and evil. Contemporary museums occupy unique positions in society that were once the exclusive domain of churches and other places of contemplation and have thus risen to great prominence in both the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. As institutions, they are an important component in the self-representation of modern nation-states. As Sue Malvern suggests, a museum often displays its collections, not simply to communicate stories to the public, but to "represent the nation to itself."⁶ Museums highlight what a society prioritizes at any given time.

Since the early twentieth century, the topic of war has dominated museum space in much of the public representation of history. For many reasons, war museums became an international phenomenon as a result of the two world wars and as such, they too have a history. While war museums predate these global conflicts, the century of "total war" helped establish them across the world.⁷ Britain's Imperial War Museum, for example, was established in 1917 during the First World War. Originally, war museums were intended as tributes to those who experienced battle firsthand. In the decades following the First World War, museums established codes and guidelines for selecting appropriate images of war largely due to concerns about offending those still in mourning.⁸

After the Second World War, museums continued avoiding explicit, graphic or sensationalist images. Instead, museums attempted to orient visitors to war by including re-creations, such as those of the battlefield or underground bunkers.⁹ Indeed, for much of the twentieth century, the military was the focal point in war museums.

Toward the end of the twentieth century museums began to feature the experiences of non-combatants during war.¹⁰ For example, life on the home front and the internment of citizens became topics of considerable interest in national war museums in

both Europe and North America. Perhaps the most influential aspect of this development was the inclusion of the Holocaust as a topic of focus in the history of the Second World War. Museums became increasingly aware of the importance of the Holocaust in their coverage of this conflict.

At present, many war museums contain galleries or exhibitions regarding the genocide of European Jews. For example, a Holocaust gallery is featured at the War Memorial Museum in Auckland, New Zealand, one of the country's most important institutions. Opened in 1997, the War Memorial Museum's Holocaust gallery was developed with the support of the Jewish community of Auckland. Employing photographs and artifacts, including bricks from the Warsaw Ghetto, the gallery details the unfolding of the Holocaust. It also makes national connections and incorporates the stories of Jewish refugees who later made their way to New Zealand.

Likewise, the Mémorial de Caen in Normandy, France is an institution that focuses on the Second World War and which also maintains an exhibition on the history of the Holocaust. A series of gallery spaces detail the persecution of Jews before the mass killings, the camp system and the genocide itself. There is also a section regarding the fate of the Roma during the war.

Yet another example is the ongoing project at the National WWII Museum in New Orleans, Louisiana. Titled the "Liberation Pavilion" and scheduled to open in 2020, visitors will be able to explore three levels documenting the Holocaust, prisoner of war camps, events surrounding the closing months of the war, as well as the displacement of survivors after liberation. These examples reveal how the inclusion of the Holocaust in war museums has become increasingly common over the last two decades.

It was perhaps the Imperial War Museum's Holocaust gallery that had the greatest impact on the proposal at the Canadian War Museum. In 1991 the Imperial War Museum opened a special exhibition on the liberation of Bergen-Belsen, a concentration camp located in northwest Germany which was surrendered to the British Army at the end of the Second World War. The display told of the camp's liberation, using film, sound recordings, paintings and other artifacts. However, the exhibition told little of Bergen-Belsen's history before its surrender, nor did it place the camp's liberation in the broader context of Hitler's war against the Jews.¹¹ Nevertheless, there was considerable public interest in the exhibition and it soon led to a much larger installation.

Five years later the Imperial War Museum announced its decision to mount a major, permanent exhibit devoted entirely to the topic of the Holocaust. At a cost of £5 million, it was funded by both private sponsorship and a Heritage lottery grant. Howev-

er, as scholars Suzanne Bardgett, Donald Bloxham, and Tony Kushner have discussed, there were criticisms regarding the plan from those who argued that the exhibition had no place in a national museum in Britain.¹² Despite a measure of concern and uncertainty, the Holocaust exhibition at the Imperial War Museum received critical acclaim in both the press and academia.¹³ Ranging over two floors and covering 1200 square meters, it was officially opened by Queen Elizabeth II in June 2000.

Controversies surrounding museum exhibitions are common. At the Imperial War Museum, for example, there were reservations relating to the size of the exhibit. Some critics expressed concerns over whether or not, as a national institution, the museum would be free to comment objectively on Britain's response to the Holocaust. Likewise, the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, North America's preeminent institution for remembering the genocide of European Jews, has also dealt with contentious issues over the years.¹⁴

As for the Canadian War Museum, its mandate is threefold. First of all, the museum honours Canadians who served in war or who subsequently lost their lives in battle. Second, the museum provides space to examine Canada's involvement in battle and to consider the impact of war upon the country and its citizens. Finally, the Canadian War Museum documents the country's military contribution to peace-keeping and security both at home and abroad. In short, the mandate of the Canadian War Museum is to remember, to preserve, and to educate.¹⁵



The original Canadian War Museum on Sussex Drive. Canadian War Museum, 20020045-1904.

One of the inspirations for a Holocaust gallery in the new Canadian War Museum came from a successful exhibition in 1992 titled "Anne Frank in the World, 1929–1945." It was held at the previous Canadian War Museum in Ottawa and attendance was strong. Moreover, the idea for a Canadian national gallery was also bolstered by the opening of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum the following year.¹⁶

In November 1997, the architectural plan for the new Canadian War Museum was made public. At a total cost of \$12 million, there were to be three substantial additions to the war museum. The updated museum would have a more enhanced exhibit space, a Memorial Chamber, a theatre, and room to display some of the substantial war art that the Museum had collected over the years. Most of these additions did not garner much discussion or debate. What did make certain interest groups take notice was the proposed gallery to document and memorialize the Holocaust.¹⁷

The announcement about the expansion and the proposed Holocaust gallery galvanized Canada's veterans and came at a time when Canadian veterans felt both marginalized by museum staff and under attack by various groups. For example, *The Valour and the Horror* was a 1992 Canadian television documentary miniseries that consisted of three two-hour films. The series investigated major battles during the Second World War which involved Canadian forces. The three-part series proved to be highly controversial. The second program, "Death by Moonlight: Bomber Command," explored the experiences of Canadian pilots in the Royal Air Force's Bomber Command. This particular program suggested that Allied aerial bombardment deliberately targeted German civilians. Consequently, many veterans felt the program depicted them either as victims of their superiors, or worse still, as criminals. The series became the subject of an inquiry by the Senate of Canada, which ultimately sided with the veterans' complaints against the filmmakers.¹⁸

With regard to the Holocaust gallery at the Canadian War Museum, veteran groups argued that they were not even consulted about the decision, and as a result, the situation grew tense. In February 1998, a parliamentary committee held hearings on the issue. Proponents of the addition encountered resentment from committee members, as well as from the veterans and other opponents of the gallery who appeared at the hearings. Offering their opinions were scholars, politicians, museum staff, journalists, veterans and other invited guests.

In February 1998, the Senate Subcommittee of Veterans Affairs heard testimony from approximately fifty witnesses. The primary concerns of the opponents of the proposed Holocaust gallery can be divided into three broad categories. The first relates to the relationship, or lack thereof, between Canada and the Holocaust. The second concern was the size and scope of the proposed gallery. The third major issue related to the appropriateness of such a topic in a national war museum. It is

to these testimonies that we will now turn.

Canada and the Holocaust

Several critics argued that the war museum should not contain a Holocaust gallery because there is little or no connection between Canada and the Holocaust. While recognizing the importance of the genocide in relation to the Second World War, Duane Daly, the Secretary of Royal Canadian Legion, argued plainly that the Holocaust “did not involve Canadian troops firsthand or directly.”¹⁹ Cliff Chadderton, Chairman of the National Council of Veteran Associations, agreed with Daly’s testimony. “Canada has no direct connection with the Holocaust,” he added, stressing that “there is no direct relationship between the feats of arms carried out by the Canadian military and the horrendous suffering of the Holocaust victims.”²⁰ According to both men, for the Holocaust to be depicted in the Canadian War Museum, the country’s military had to be somehow directly involved in it. They saw no evidence of participation and were opposed to the proposal on those grounds.

In addition, the Holocaust gallery at the Imperial War Museum was frequently referenced by critics during the debate. By the time of the Senate hearings, the British Army’s liberation of Bergen-Belsen was well documented; indeed, many witnesses justified the Imperial War Museum’s decision to mount a permanent exhibit devoted exclusively to the Holocaust because of the British Army’s efforts at Bergen-Belsen. According to E.W. Halayko, the National President of the Armed Forces Pensioners and Annuitants Association of Canada:

It is being said that every capital in the western world has a Holocaust museum, including a Holocaust wing in the British War Museum. That is not absolutely correct. Elements of the British army liberated [the] Bergen-Belsen concentration camp on April 15, 1945. It is that liberation, which was part of the British army’s accomplishment that is being displayed. We Canadians did not liberate any camps, so we really have no direct connection with the Holocaust.²¹

A series of witnesses echoed Halayko’s sentiment, including Helen Rapp, the Vice-Chairman of the Armed Forces Pensioners, Luc K. Levesque of the Canadian Association of Gulf War Veterans, and Derek Farthing, President of the Bomber Command Association of Canada.²²

The testimony of numerous historians also supported the argument concerning the lack of connection between Canadian forces and the Holocaust. R.H. Roy explained that “In a word, I do not see the Holocaust as a factor in either our pre-war or war-time military policy. I looked at the four volumes of the official history of the

Canadian army written by Colonel Stacey and found no mention of the Holocaust. I looked at the official history of the RCAF, and there was no mention there. I looked at some of the biographies of our generals, and no mention is made there. I looked at the Canadian Encyclopedia, and again no mention..."²³ Consequently, Roy and other historians suggested that because of the lack of historical evidence, the proposed gallery would be better suited in the Canadian Museum of Civilization rather than in the nation's war museum. Overall, a majority of those who testified at the Senate Subcommittee on Veterans Affairs hearings argued that Canada's involvement in the Holocaust was tenuous at best. While British and American forces were clearly involved in the liberation of Nazi concentration camps, critics of the proposal were adamant that Canada's military made no such contribution and had no such involvement.

However, by examining the Holocaust gallery dispute from the perspective of the present, we can better appreciate a recent, growing body of research that explores how the Canadian government, media, military and average Canadians either responded to or encountered the remnants of the Holocaust. Indeed, the exhibit at the Vancouver Holocaust Education Centre clearly reflects this development. Recent scholarship in the field of Canadian Jewish Studies has shed new light on the country's complicated relationship with this tumultuous period in history.

In the years following the Canadian War Museum controversy, a slew of research emerged that explores the topic of Canada and the Holocaust. For example, Franklin Bialystok's *Delayed Impact: The Holocaust and the Canadian Jewish Community* (2000) acknowledges that in the decades following the war, the Holocaust was not a significant part of public discourse or scholarly study in Canada.²⁴ The author reveals that the Holocaust did not become a part of Canadian Jewish identity until the 1980s. Likewise, Ruth Klein's edited collection, *Nazi Germany, Canadian Responses: Confronting Antisemitism in the Shadow of War* (2012) examines Canada's relationship with the Holocaust from a range of viewpoints.²⁵ The work investigates how Canada responded to the unfolding of the Holocaust through media coverage, community activism, the world of literature and on university campuses.²⁶

More recently, Richard Menkis and Harold Troper's *More than Just Games: Canada and the 1936 Olympics* (2015) highlights the history of Canada's involvement in the 1936 Olympics hosted by Nazi Germany.²⁷ The authors tell a layered story about how Canadian involvement in the event was about more than simply sport; it was also about nationalism and politics. Meanwhile, Adara Goldberg's *Holocaust Survivors in Canada: Exclusion, Inclusion, Transformation, 1947-1955* (2015) is the first comprehensive analysis of the resettlement experiences of Holocaust survivors in early postwar Canada.²⁸ The author demonstrates how Canada's Jewish community both assisted and hampered the ability of Holocaust survivors to adjust to a new country.

Finally, recent studies are also beginning to detail the involvement of Canadians in the liberation of Nazi concentration camps at the end of the Second World War.²⁹ Canadian forces were involved in the liberation of the Herzogenbusch (Vught) concentration camp, the Amersfoort concentration camp and the Westerbork transit camp, all of which were located in the Netherlands. In addition, Canadian military personnel were also involved in the liberation of the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp in Germany. At war's end, Canadians both encountered and assisted the survivors of Hitler's brutal camp system. Without a doubt, new research is deepening our understanding of Canada's complicated relationship to the Holocaust.

Size and Scope of the Holocaust Gallery

During the initial planning stages, it was anticipated that the Holocaust gallery would cover approximately 2,000 square feet. That number later increased to 2,500 and then 4,000 square feet. At the time of the public announcement, the proposed Holocaust gallery was projected to cover around 6,000 square feet. According to historian Norman Hillmer, the expansion would have made it four times larger than any other gallery in the Canadian War Museum.³⁰

Indeed, the sheer size of the proposed Holocaust gallery was unacceptable to many of Canada's war veterans. Jan de Vries, President of the 1st Canadian Parachute Battalion, highlighted the irony regarding the lack of recognition of his battalion in the old Canadian War Museum. On 15 April 1945, the 1st Canadian Parachute Battalion came across the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp on the day of its surrender.³¹ Attached to the battalion were medics who tended to the ill and photographers who documented the crimes. Some of the men of the battalion also distributed rations to the starving inmates. It was a moment many of the men would never forget. And yet, regarding his battalion, de Vries pointed out that "There is no display of this unique unit in the [current] war museum."³² If, as de Vries argued, "[n]o other Canadian unit ... was involved in the liberation of concentration camps," how could there be an entire gallery devoted to the Holocaust when a battalion with direct connection is not even recognized in the museum?³³ Many of those opposed to the gallery stressed that before exploring other topics, staff at the war museum must first effectively tell the complex story of the nation's military. Indeed, several witnesses at the hearings testified to the pitiable state of the old war museum.

For Joseph Kobolak, the Dominion President of the Royal Canadian Legion, the size of the proposal was cause for alarm. According to Kobolak:

In fact, to our great concern, it was revealed that the gallery would consume some 35 per cent of the additional space. On this basis alone, we cannot accept the establishment of a Holocaust Gallery in the Canadian War Museum. A small exhibit would have been acceptable, but a major gallery which

consumes 35 per cent of the proposed expansion is totally inappropriate, as thousands of military display pieces rest unshown in the Vimy warehouse. These are the priority items for display in any expansion. The implementation of a major Holocaust Gallery will only serve to overshadow the historical military displays while occupying valuable space which should be dedicated to those who fell in the defence of our country.³⁴

While not opposed to recognizing the Holocaust in the nation's capital, Kobolak and many others felt that due to the substandard state of the current war museum, the gallery would be better suited as a stand-alone museum or as part of the Canadian Museum of Civilization.³⁵

A number of academics and historians also addressed the size of the proposed gallery, but from an entirely different perspective. In short, to properly document the totality of the Holocaust would require an utterly enormous space. Therefore, any gallery done accurately would simply dwarf the rest of the museum. Historian Terry Copp stated that his "great concern about a Holocaust Gallery on the scale that was originally planned in the War Museum ... is that if it is well done, it would be so powerful, so evocative, and so central that it would overpower the War Museum."³⁶ While Copp argued that the Holocaust should be addressed in any Second World War museum, a gallery of such a size would be ill-suited in the new Canadian site. He also cautioned that if the Holocaust gallery was poorly designed, there would be yet another controversy.³⁷

This was the shared concern of Holocaust historian Michael Marrus. He was apprehensive about the ability of museum staff to adequately detail the Holocaust; a topic, he suggested, that was outside the realm of their expertise. "It is important to have a Holocaust Gallery with the highest degree of professionalism and historical and museological expertise," he continued, "I think that the Canadian War Museum, esteemed institution that it is, simply lacks the kind of professional expertise and experience, which is difficult to acquire, to mount such a project."³⁸ Marrus suggested that if such a gallery was to be properly conceived, experts from outside of the country would likely need to be commissioned. In short, the state of the old Canadian War Museum, the size of the proposal and the lack of trained staff were reasons stressed by many opponents.

Indeed, the Holocaust gallery controversy later influenced the creation of both the Canadian Museum of Human Rights in Winnipeg and the National Holocaust Monument in Ottawa. And yet, controversies continued to follow the memorialization of the Holocaust in the country. The Canadian Museum for Human Rights, which was initially conceived as a Holocaust museum, saw heated, public battles over proposed content. In particular, some Ukrainian Canadian leaders attempted, unsuccessfully, to remove the stand-alone Holocaust gallery from the museum, which the government had promised to establish after the Canadian War Museum controversy.³⁹

Likewise, the National Holocaust Monument in Ottawa faced a number of issues.⁴⁰ The initial site proposed for the memorial, located between the Supreme Court of Canada and Library and Archives Canada, was rejected because large smokestacks across the Ottawa River in Gatineau were noticeable in the background.⁴¹ Moreover, on 27 September 2017, when the memorial was finally unveiled to the public, it caused further uproar. A plaque outside the memorial failed to mention Jews as victims of the Holocaust. The inscription on the plaque stated the following:

The National Holocaust Monument commemorates the millions of men, women, and children murdered during the Holocaust and honours the survivors who persevered and were able to make their way to Canada after one of the darkest chapters in history. The monument recognizes the contribution those survivors have made to Canada and serves as a reminder that we must be vigilant in standing guard against hate, intolerance, and discrimination.⁴²

The government quickly recognized the inaccuracy and the plaque was revised. While its establishment was undoubtedly influenced by the debates surrounding the new Canadian War Museum, the National Holocaust Monument was unable to escape controversy, receiving negative international coverage upon its unveiling.⁴³ As these examples illustrate, history and its commemoration often clash.

Appropriateness of the Holocaust in a National War Museum

There were several witnesses who testified about the appropriateness of the Holocaust as a subject in a national war museum. While the rationale often differed from witness to witness, many reasoned that the topic of the genocide of European Jews simply did not belong in a Canadian museum devoted to war.

Derek Farthing argued that war museums were no place for a subject such as the Holocaust, one featuring horrific imagery. “We want [children] to climb over the tanks,” he explained, “and see the kinds of helmets their great grandfathers had to wear. We want to give them complete freedom to satisfy their innate curiosity about Canada at war.”⁴⁴ He argued that the Canadian War Museum encourages children as young as five years of age to explore its exhibits, and consequently, such extreme subject matter could have a seriously negative psychological impact on certain patrons.

Farthing added that if a Holocaust Gallery was ultimately built in the Canadian War Museum, the logistics would be both costly and complex when it came to the admittance of children. He said:

What does it all mean? It means that someone qualified in mental reactions to horrifying stimuli must decide at exactly what age we will allow children to be subjected to these sights. Is it age 11? Is it age 14? Should they be supervised or not supervised? Should they be in groups or classes? Should they be accompanied by a teacher? Perhaps the children should be of drinking age before we allow them to view the exhibits by themselves. Having decided which children we will allow to enter the proposed Holocaust Gallery, we must set up a foolproof system to guard against any breaking of the rules, to prevent lawsuits from the angry parents of children with nightmares. Does this mean a cadre of six commissionaires to man the door at all times? Will we check non-existent ID cards for every child who approaches the door? Will 9-year-old Johnny's mother be able to explain to him why his 14-year-old brother is allowed to go in, but he cannot? What does it all mean?⁴⁵

Farthing maintained that the war museum should continue to encourage young Canadians to visit, and as such, the addition of a Holocaust gallery would be deeply problematic to that end.

Cliff Chadderton of the Veteran Associations agreed with Farthing, noting that the Holocaust gallery at the Imperial War Museum displays a sign warning that the subject matter in the exhibit is not recommended for children under fourteen and that they must be accompanied by an adult.⁴⁶ He added that any coverage of the Holocaust would include "graphic portrayal of murderers, pitiful human remains, burial pits, gas ovens," which should not be "associated with the life and times of the young Canadians who have gone to war at the behest of their government during the history of this country."⁴⁷ Many veterans stated they would not want to take their grandchildren to a museum that features depictions of genocide. In short, several critics maintained that the Holocaust was simply too grim a topic for a war museum.

Furthermore, Chadderton was concerned that any Holocaust gallery would also likely detail the country's controversial wartime policies. For example, he stated that the Canadian War Museum was not a suitable venue to consider Prime Minister Mackenzie King's wartime program, one which included the country's restrictive immigration policy towards Jewish refugees during the Nazi era.⁴⁸

Likewise, Senator Marcel Prud'homme took issue with any potentially negative depiction of French Canadians in a Holocaust gallery. He argued that the Québécois people are frequently depicted as anti-Semitic during the war years and even to the present day.⁴⁹ He further stressed that French Canadians "did not control immigration in the old days," suggesting that anti-Semitism in Québec society would likely be a featured part of any Canadian Holocaust Gallery.⁵⁰ Thus, there were concerns that the proposed gallery would expose deep wounds in Canadian society.

Lastly, Canadian war veterans who were opposed to the Holocaust gallery were nearly unanimous in their condemnation of museum staff for not checking with them about the proposal in a sufficient manner. “At no time [were we] consulted,” explained Kobolak, “with the detailed proposals on the size, content and context of such a gallery. At no time were we asked to support a specific plan. When we did ask for a full briefing during the debate, the context and relevance of the proposed gallery was not fully explained.”⁵¹ Most veterans who testified agreed with Kobolak’s message. Museum staff had moved forward with the Holocaust gallery without first considering their points of view on the matter. This, they maintained, was entirely unacceptable.

The deliberations of the Senate Subcommittee hearings held to debate the proposed Holocaust gallery clearly demonstrate the influential lobbying power of Canada’s war veterans. This was put on full display, nearly ten years later, when the Canadian War Museum revised its Bomber Command exhibition after being pressured by various veterans’ groups. A panel titled “Strategic Bombing: An Enduring Controversy” questioned the effectiveness of the Bomber Command raids over Germany, highlighting, among other issues, the number of dead and those left homeless. Facing pressure from veteran groups the museum revised the panel despite the fact that four professional historians – upon further review – all agreed that the exhibit was historically accurate.⁵² Like the proposed Holocaust gallery, veteran groups were uncomfortable with the framing of certain subject matter by museum staff. Consequently, they rallied the support of veterans across the country, provoked media coverage and garnered national, public support. In so doing, they altered the content of the museum space.



The new Canadian War Museum located on the LeBreton Flats opened in May 2005. Canadian War Museum 2015-0031-0005-Dp1.

On 18 February 1998, Adrienne Clarkson, Chairwoman of the Canadian Museum of Civilization Corporation Board of Trustees announced that while the expansion of the war museum would proceed, the Holocaust gallery would no longer be pursued as part of the project. A statement by the Board of Trustees was read in Parliament that same day. Regarding the proposed gallery, the board stated that “The Holocaust story can best be told in a separated venue fully dedicated to it. The Corporation will assist in the exploration of an alternative site for the eventual development of a stand-alone and independent Holocaust Museum. The Canadian Museum of Civilization Corporation will continue to support the development of a Holocaust Museum.”⁵³ In short, the plan for a Holocaust gallery in the Canadian War Museum was abandoned.

Several observations can be made concerning the Senate Subcommittee hearings to debate the inclusion of a Holocaust gallery in the Canadian War Museum. First, it led to a democratization of the museum’s content and presentation. Secondly, the controversy undoubtedly helped lead to the creation of both the Canadian Museum for Human Rights in Winnipeg as well as the establishment of a National Holocaust Monument in Ottawa. Finally, by examining the Holocaust gallery controversy from the perspective of the present, we can better appreciate a growing body of research that explores how the Canadian government, media, military and average citizen responded to the genocide.

Indeed, in the two decades that have followed the Holocaust gallery controversy at the Canadian War Museum a great deal of research has been undertaken on the topic of Canada and the Holocaust. “What had all of this to do with Canada?” asked R.H. Roy during the 1998 Senate Subcommittee hearings.⁵⁴ At the time, and in relation to Canada’s military, this was a reasonable inquiry. Twenty years later many of the questions and concerns raised by opponents of the proposed Holocaust Gallery have been addressed in new research in Canadian Jewish Studies.⁵⁵ Each in their own distinct way has contributed to a better, more nuanced understanding about Canada and the Holocaust.

Paradoxically, none of the fifty witnesses who testified at the Senate Subcommittee hearings referenced what has become a growing concern in the field of Holocaust Studies, namely the “nativization” of the genocide of European Jews.⁵⁶ Since most witnesses were against the proposal, perhaps this is understandable. In short, “nativization” refers to the fact that historical subjects often take their shape and have certain motivations depending upon their national context. This is particularly true of museums. How a subject is framed changes depending on context and climate. Accordingly, the representation of the Holocaust varies from country to country. In short, a different Holocaust is remembered, which is often the result of conflicting political and religious motives.⁵⁷

Therefore, to what end would the Holocaust be framed in any museum in Canada, be it one concerning war, civilization or something else entirely? How would the “Canadianization” of the Holocaust appear? This is a significant area of concern largely ignored by both the proponents and opponents of the proposed Holocaust Gallery.⁵⁸

Any war museum that focuses on the Second World War without addressing the Holocaust is problematic. A war museum should strive for a complex and multi-faceted representation of the war. Military historian Terry Copp perhaps put it best during the hearings when he remarked:

I must say that I am unhappy with the way in which the War Museum fails to address the questions of what the great struggles of the 20th century were about.... It seems to me that a War Museum that deals with the great conflicts of the 20th century and which has a specific and significant body of information about the Second World War and which does not address the Holocaust in some way or another, is simply a War Museum which is staying away from one of the central issues of the 20th century.⁵⁹

The Canadian War Museum should grapple with the question of the war’s origin, the significance of Canada’s participation, as well as the meaning of the Holocaust. To do otherwise is neglectful, leaving coverage of the Second World War unfinished.

1

Carol Duncan, “The Art Museum as Ritual.” In *The Art of Art History: A Critical Anthology*. Second Edition. Edited by Donald Preziosi (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 425. Duncan makes similar comments in “Art Museums and the Ritual of Citizenship.” In *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display*. Edited by Ivan Karp and Steven Lavine (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991), 101-102.

2

Produced by the Vancouver Holocaust Education Centre, “Canada Responds to the Holocaust, 1944-45” was researched and written by Richard Menkis and Ronnie Tessler with the Bergen-Belsen panels composed by the author.

3

Lauren Kramer, “Vancouver Exhibit Captures Canada’s Response to the Shoah.” *The Canadian Jewish News* (3 November 2016).

4

While the Vancouver Holocaust Education Centre was not the first to explore the topic of Canada and the Holocaust, it was the first of its kind to offer a comprehensive examination of the involvement of Canadians as active participants in the liberation and relief of survivors. A number of museums in the country had previously focused on the Holocaust, but this was typically done outside of the Canadian purview. And yet, whenever the topic was examined from a Canadian perspective it was often through the topic of immigration policies, the issue of antisemitism or through artwork. In contrast, the Vancouver Holocaust Education Centre explored how Canadian military personnel, doctors, nurses, aid workers, nutritional experts and the like assisted Holocaust survivors at war’s end and in the ensuing weeks, months and years.

5

Jay Winter, “Museums and the Representation of War.” *Museum and Society* 10, No. 3 (November 2012): 150.

6

Sue Malvern, "War, Memory and Museums: Art and Artefact in the Imperial War Museum." *History Workshop Journal* No. 49 (Spring 2000): 179.

7

Winter, n 5, 153.

8

Ibid.

9

Barton C. Hacker and Margaret Vining, "Military Museums and Social History." In *Does War Belong in Museums?: The Representation of Violence in Exhibitions*. Edited by Wolfgang Muchitsch (Bielefeld: Transcript, 2013), 51.

10

Ibid., 54.

11

Suzanne Bardgett, "The Depiction of the Holocaust at the Imperial War Museum since 1961." *Journal of Israeli History: Politics, Society, Culture* 23, No. 1 (Spring 2004): 153.

12

See Bardgett, "The Depiction of the Holocaust at the Imperial War Museum since 1961" and Donald Bloxham and Tony Kushner, "Exhibiting Racism: Cultural Imperialism, Genocide and Representation." *Rethinking History* 2, No. 3 (1998): 349-358.

13

Bardgett, 156.

14

See Edward Linenthal, *Preserving Memory: The Struggle to Create America's Holocaust Museum* (New York: Viking, 1995).

15

Canada Senate, "Proceedings of the Subcommittee on Veterans Affairs." Issue 3 - Evidence - Afternoon meeting (2 February 1998).

16

Reesa Greenberg, "Constructing the Canadian War Museum/Constructing the Landscape of a Canadian Identity." In *(Re) Visualizing National History: Museums and National Identities in Europe in the New Millennium*. Edited by Robin Ostow (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008), 185.

17

Norman Hillmer, "The Canadian War Museum and the Military Identity of an Unmilitary People." *Canadian Military History* 19, No. 3 (2010): 4.

18

See David J. Bercuson and S.F. Wise, *The Valour and the Horror Revisited* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1994). However, the complaints of the veterans were never heard in court and no court ever ruled on them.

19

Canada Senate, "Proceedings of the Subcommittee on Veterans Affairs." Issue 4 - Evidence - Morning meeting (3 February 1998).

20

Ibid.

21

Canada Senate, "Proceedings of the Subcommittee on Veterans Affairs." Issue 6 - Evidence - Afternoon meeting (5 February 1998).

22

Note: While the exhibition at the Imperial War Museum highlights the role played by British forces at Bergen-Belsen, it also traces the Nazi persecution and murder of the Jewish people in Europe from 1933 to 1945.

23

Canada Senate, "Proceedings of the Subcommittee on Veterans Affairs." Issue 5 - Evidence - Afternoon meeting (4 February 1998).

24

Franklin Bialystok, *Delayed Impact: The Holocaust and the Canadian Jewish Community* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2000).

25

Nazi Germany, Canadian Responses: Confronting Antisemitism in the Shadow of War. Edited by L. Ruth Klein (Montréal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2012).

26

For recent studies regarding Canadian responses to the Holocaust see Norman Erwin, "The Holocaust, Canadian Jews, and Canada's 'Good War' Against Nazism." *Canadian Jewish Studies* 24 (2016): 103-123; Ulrich Frisse, "The 'Bystanders' Perspective': *The Toronto Daily*

Star and Its Coverage of the Persecution of the Jews and the Holocaust in Canada, 1933-1945." *Yad Vashem Studies* 39, No. 1 (2011): 213-243; and Magdalena Kubow, "Kanada? *The Canadian Jewish News* and the Memory of the Holocaust in Canada." *Holocaust Studies: A Journal of Culture and History* 19, Issue 3 (2013): 131-160.

27

Richard Menkis and Harold Troper, *More than Just Games: Canada and the 1936 Olympics* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2015).

28

Adara Goldberg, *Holocaust Survivors in Canada: Exclusion, Inclusion, Transformation, 1947-1955* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2015).

29

For further information regarding the involvement of Canada's military in the Holocaust see Mark Celinscak, *Distance from the Belsen Heap: Allied Forces and the Liberation of a Nazi Concentration Camp* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2015); Cecil Law, *Kamp Westerbork, Transit Camp to Eternity: The Liberation Story* (Clementsport: Canadian Peace-keeping Press, 2000), and Richard Menkis, "'But you can't see the Fear that People Lived Through': Canadian Jewish Chaplains and Canadian Encounters with Dutch Survivors." *American Jewish Archives Journal* 60, No. 1-2 (2008): 24-50.

30

Hillmer, 4.

31

Celinscak, *Distance from the Belsen Heap*, 36-37.

32

Canada Senate, "Proceedings of the Subcommittee on Veterans Affairs." Issue 4 - Evidence - Afternoon meeting (3 February 1998).

33

Ibid.

34

Canada Senate, "Proceedings of the Subcommittee on Veterans Affairs." Issue 4 - Evidence - Morning meeting (3 February 1998).

35

Note: the Canadian Museum of Civilization is now known as the Canadian Museum of History.

36

Canada Senate, "Proceedings of the Subcommittee on Veterans Affairs." Issue 5 - Evidence - Afternoon meeting (4 February 1998).

37

Ibid.

38

Canada Senate, "Proceedings of the Subcommittee on Veterans Affairs." Issue 6 - Evidence - Afternoon meeting (5 February 1998).

39

Catherine D. Chatterley, "Canada's Struggle with Holocaust Memorialization: The War Museum Controversy, Ethnic Identity Politics, and the Canadian Museum for Human Rights." *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 29, No. 2 (Fall 2015): 189-211.

40

Jason Chalmers, "Canadianising the Holocaust: Debating Canada's National Holocaust Monument." *Canadian Jewish Studies* 24 (2016): 155.

41

Don Butler, "A Monumental Controversy: History of the Memorial to Victims of Communism." *Ottawa Citizen* (6 March 2015).

42

"Holocaust monument plaque that didn't mention Jews to be replaced." *CBC News* (6 October 2017).

43

Dan Bilefsky, "Canadian Holocaust Memorial Neglects to Mention Jews." *The New York Times* (5 October 2017).

44

Canada Senate, "Proceedings of the Subcommittee on Veterans Affairs." Issue 4 - Evidence - Afternoon meeting (3 February 1998).

45

Ibid.

46

Canada Senate, "Proceedings of the Subcommittee on Veterans Affairs." Issue 4 - Evidence - Morning meeting (3 February 1998).

47

Ibid.

48

Ibid.

49

Canada Senate, "Proceedings of the Subcommittee on Veterans Affairs." Issue 6 - Evidence - Afternoon meeting (5 February 1998).

50

Ibid.

51

Canada Senate, "Proceedings of the Subcommittee on Veterans Affairs." Issue 4 - Evidence - Morning meeting (3 February 1998).

52

David Dean, "Museums as Conflict Zones: The Canadian War Museum and Bomber Command." *Museum and Society* 7, No. 1 (March 2009): 1-15.

53

"Statement on Holocaust Museum-Conformity with Recommendations of Veterans Affairs Subcommittee." In *Debates of the Senate (Hansard)*, 1st Session, 36th Parliament, Volume 137, Issue 40 (18 February 1998).

54

Canada Senate, "Proceedings of the Subcommittee on Veterans Affairs." Issue 5 - Evidence - Afternoon meeting (4 February 1998).

55

See endnote 30.

56

Michael Berenbaum, "The Nativization of the Holocaust." *Judaism* 35, Issue 4 (Fall 1986): 447-457. Also see Berenbaum's *After Tragedy and Triumph: Essays in Modern Jewish Thought and the American Experience* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

57

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

58

For a recent scholarly discussion of such an issue see Jason Chalmers, "Canadianising the Holocaust: Debating Canada's National Holocaust Monument." *Canadian Jewish Studies* 24 (2016): 149-165.

59

Canada Senate, "Proceedings of the Subcommittee on Veterans Affairs." Issue 5 - Evidence - Afternoon meeting (4 February 1998).