JAST, 2020; 53:7-33

Submitted: 22.09.2019

Accepted: 18.10.2019

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Troubling Memories?:

The German-American Heritage Museum of the U.S.A. and the Memory of the Holocaust

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Abstract

The recognition politics of German-American activists and their ethnic organizations have been marked by significant successes since the late 1980s. The opening of the German-American Heritage Museum of the U.S.A. (GAHM) in Washington, D.C. in 2010 is a symptom and continuation of these intensified visibility politics aimed at raising the symbolic capital of German-American ethnicity. By closely examining the representations of National Socialism and the Second World War in the GAHM's permanent exhibition and its wider cultural programs, including its temporary exhibitions, this paper sheds light on the museum's problematic memory politics which stand in direct competition with the one pursued by the nearby United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. Whereas attempts at confronting the German National Socialist past have been intensified by the museum's leadership in more recent years, the existence of pro-Nazi German-American groups still remains silenced in the museum. German-American identity politics and the dynamics of Holocaust memory are intricately interrelated, I argue, with the latter not impeding but, paradoxically, rather catalyzing the former's strength.

Keywords: German Americans, Ethnic Museums, Identity Politics, World War II, Holocaust Memory

Sakıncalı Anılar?:

Amerika Birleşik Devletleri Alman-Amerikalı Miras Müzesi ve Holokost Deneyimi

Öz

1980'lerin sonlarından bu yana Alman-Amerikalı aktivistlerin ve etnik organizasyonların tanıma politikaları önemli başarılara imza atmıştır. Washington D.C.'deki Amerika Birleşik Devletleri Alman-Amerikalı Miras Müzesi'nin 2010 yılındaki açılışı Alman-Amerikalı etnik kökeninin sembolik sermayesini arttırmayı hedefleyen bu yoğun görünürlük politikalarının bir göstergesi ve devamı niteliğindedir. Bu çalışma, müzenin kalıcı ve geçici sergilerini de kapsayan geniş kültürel programlarında Nasyonel Sosyalizm'in ve İkinci Dünya Savaşı'nın temsilini inceleyerek, yakınlarındaki Birleşik Devletler Holokost Anma Müzesi'yle doğrudan rekabet içinde olan müzenin, sorunlu hafıza politikalarına ışık tutacaktır. Son yıllarda müzenin liderliğinde Alman Nasyonel Sosyalist geçmişiyle yüzleşme çabaları yoğunlaşsa da, Nazi yanlısı Alman-Amerikalı grupların varlığı halen göz ardı edilmektedir. Alman-Amerikalı kimlik politikaları ve Holokost deneyimi dinamikleri arasında karmaşık bir ilişki vardır. Holokost deneyimi sanıldığı gibi Alman-Amerikalı kimlik politikalarına sekte vurmaz, aksine onları güçlendirir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Alman-Amerikalılar, Etnik Müzeler, Kimlik Politikaları, İkinci Dünya Savaşı, Holokost Deneyimi

The recognition politics of German-American activists and their ethnic organizations have been marked by considerable successes since the 1980s.[1] In 1983, the three-hundredth anniversary of German immigration to America was celebrated in the United States on a na-

tion-wide scale, in 1987 a German-American Day was first proclaimed by U.S. President Ronald Reagan and has been celebrated on a yearly basis ever since, in 1988 a German-American Friendship Garden was inaugurated in close proximity to the White House on the National Mall, and in the year 2000 the Hermann Monument in New Ulm, Minnesota, was recognized by the U.S. Congress as "a national symbol for the contributions of Americans of German heritage" (House Con. Res.). Last but not least, in 2010, the first national German-American Heritage Museum of the U.S.A. was officially opened in Washington, D.C. The latter's objective was to increase the visibility of German Americans as an ethnic group in the nation's capital and to raise public awareness for German-American contributions to American society.

The German-American Heritage Museum of the U.S.A. (GAHM), although the first German-American museum with the ambition to tell the history of German-Americana on a national scale, was albeit not the first heritage museum to be opened in the United States by German Americans. Already in the 1920s, a small museum by today's name of Landis Valley Village & Farm Museum was founded in the city of Lancaster in Pennsylvania to preserve the Pennsylvania German material culture and heritage ("Site").[2] In the following decades, especially in the wake of the ethnic revival and roots movement of the 1970s and 80s (cf. Novak; Glazer and Moynihan; Jacobson), several more German-American heritage museums with a focus on local history emerged. Most of these museums were initiated by self-commemorative collectives with the intention of celebrating the history of a political unit (e.g. Cincinnati), a religious group (e.g. the Missouri Synod of the Lutheran Church), or an ethnic (sub-)group (e.g. the Germans from Russia) (cf. Hobbie x). In the wake of the memory and museum boom of the 1990s and 2000s (cf. Winter), the first larger German-American heritage museums with a regional focus and an objective of highlighting the manifold contributions of German Americans to the development of the United States were opened in cities with a traditionally large number of German-American inhabitants such as Chicago (Illinois), Cincinnati (Ohio), and Davenport (Iowa).[3] Whereas heritage museums founded by German Americans prior to the 1990s pursued the objective of celebrating and raising awareness for the history of German settlement and their religious, political and cultural practices in specific locales, the newer German-American museums set themselves the task of providing an overview of German-American

contributions to the U.S. nation and its various states. Notably, and perhaps contrary to expectations, it was thus not the ethnic revival and the roots movement of the 1970s which spurred the creation of higher-profile German-American heritage museums, but a post-Cold War setting that provided the context for the emergence of German-American sites of memory aimed at acquainting larger audiences with a contributionist history of German-Americana on a regional and national scale. Whereas other European-American ethnic groups such as the Swedish Americans and Ukrainian Americans opened their own ethnic heritage museums with a regional and national orientation as early as the 1970s and 80s, comparable German-American heritage museums were not to emerge as a cultural phenomenon until the mid-1990s and thereafter.[4] What accounts for this alternative trajectory and time lag in German-American self-presentation in the medium of museums, one may wonder? And which narratives about the (ethnic) past are transmitted at these German-American sites of memory?

German-American Heritage Museums and Their Politics Of Memory

German-American heritage museums and their memory politics have so far received only scant scholarly attention. This is especially true with regard to the discursive construction of the two world wars. Although a few, mostly journalistic, articles on German-American museums have indeed been published (e.g. Tolzmann; Grow; Koch), these mostly abstain from analyzing the exhibition spaces from a critical vantage point and rather tend to advertise the respective museums as valuable and long-due additions to the American cultural landscape.[5]

This paper aims to contribute towards closing this research lacuna by means of a case study on one of the largest and arguably best-noted German-American heritage museums in the United States: the German-American Heritage Museum of the U.S.A. in Washington, D.C. By closely investigating the discursive strategies at work in the permanent exhibition as well as its wider cultural program, including its temporary exhibitions, I intend to shed light on the problematic employment of history at this German-American site of memory.[6]

Ethnic museums function as media of collective memory that

collect (and hence select), preserve, and disseminate knowledge about the collective experience of ethnic groups to a larger public. Mediating between the collective past and the present, they simultaneously reflect, stabilize and also actively shape (local) ethnic collective identity by offering meaningful narratives about the ethnic group's past to their visitors.[7] In our present moment driven by competitive identity politics,[8] ethnic museums participate in managing the public image of minorities in the public sphere and act as potential purveyors of ethnic pride (Conn 479-85).

To meet above stated research objective, I essentially explore three related questions. First, which narratives about the Second World War does the German-American Heritage Museum of the U.S.A. promote in its permanent exhibition? Second, which narratives about World War II does the GAHM transmit in its wider cultural program, including its temporary exhibitions, and how has the museum's representational politics changed over time? And, third, how is the GAHM's founding history and agenda entangled with other socio-political and cultural discourses, especially with the rising importance of the Holocaust in American life? More precisely, to what extent does the GAHM perpetuate memories that compete with those constructed by Jewish-American institutions about the German(-American) past?

The German-American Heritage Museum of the U.S.A.

The German-American Heritage Museum of the U.S.A. (GAHM) is based in Washington, D.C. and run by the German-American Heritage Foundation of the U.S.A. (GAHFUSA). The organization was officially founded in Philadelphia (PA) in 1977 as the United German-American Committee (UGAC), but was renamed in 2006 into the German-American Heritage Foundation of the U.S.A. Basically continuing its agenda from the late 1970s, the now Washington-based non-profit organization describes itself as "the national membership association for German-American heritage" whose main objective is to cultivate "a greater awareness for German-American heritage and history through outreach efforts that deepen cultural understanding" ("Welcome"). The organization's plans for its own museum came to fruition in March 2010 when the GAHM was officially opened to the public. The museum is housed at the organization's headquarters in

Washington, D.C.'s Penn Quarter in a townhouse called Hockemeyer Hall. The latter was fittingly built in 1888 by a German immigrant by the name of Hockemeyer, who went on to become a successful merchant in America, in what had once been the old European-American section of Washington, D.C. ("History"). In 2008, Hockemeyer Hall was acquired by the GAHFUSA with the intention of creating the first "national" German-American museum on American soil. As explained on the museum's website, the organization "opened the German-American Heritage Museum (GAHM) as the first national inspiration for German-American heritage and culture. The GAHM tells the story of all Americans of German-speaking ancestry and how they helped shape our great nation today" ("About Us"). The term "national" thus carries a double significance in this context: first, in the sense of a museum that functions as the main, i.e. central, institution for the representation of German-American history in the United States and, second, in the sense of a museum that focuses on German-American history as it evolved on a national as opposed to regional or local scale. More specifically, the museum's function and mission are defined by the GAHFUSA as "to collect, record, preserve and exhibit the rich cultural legacy of Americans of German-speaking ancestry and make their contributions to American history available to audiences of all ages" ("Museum"). In line with this mission statement, the museum covers German-American history from the early phase of German immigration to America, starting in 1607, up to current times with a strong emphasis on contributionist narratives that underscore the positive impact Americans of German descent have had on the development of the U.S. nation. In other words, the museum is indicative of the increasing – and increasingly successful – recognition and symbolic politics on the part of German-American activists since the 1980s, which was, and still is, aimed at raising the public profile of German-Americans as an ethnic group.

The GAHM is open to the public four days a week from 11am to 5pm, excluding Mondays and the weekend when the facility is closed. Since its opening in 2010, the GAHM's permanent exhibition has changed only very little. However, several temporary exhibitions of a wide thematic variety, all of them concerning German-Americana, have been launched at the museum over the years. The GAHFUSA regularly hosts special cultural programs such as lectures, *Stammtisch* nights and, more recently, cooking events, yoga practices, and German

language classes on its premises. Once a year, a festive black tie gala is held to honor an outstanding American of German descent. In 2018, German-born entrepreneur and investor Peter Thiel received the award of "Distinguished German-American of the Year" ("Peter").

Located at 719 6th Street, NW, the mere location of the GAHM is significant as it is situated only a few blocks away from the National Mall and the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM). Due to their geographical proximity, the GAHM and the USHMM thus stand in a dialogic relationship, which does not only materialize on a spatial but also on content level as both museums deal with German history. Immediately after its opening in March 2010, a staff writer from *The Washington Post* surmised that the new German-American heritage museum in the nation's capital may have been intended as a riposte to the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum on the National Mall (Fisher, "German-American"). The museum's director Rüdiger Lentz, a journalist and former Bureau Chief for *Deutsche Welle Radio and Television* in Washington, D.C., was quick to refute these suspicions by means of a published reply to the *Washington Post*'s compromising article in which he vehemently disputed any connection between the GAHM and the USHMM. Copies of Lentz' reply were made available at the GAHM as take-away leaflets for visitors in the first few weeks after the opening of the GAHM (Lentz, "Origins"). Even today, the GAHFUSA stresses the prime location of the GAHM on its website by pointing to its "close proximity to the National Archives, the National Portrait Gallery and the Newseum" ("About Us"). The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum is conspicuously absent from this list. The posited connection between the two memory sites is further corroborated by the fact that "the idea of creating a museum to represent German-American history" was first raised by UGAC/GAHFUSA leaders in the year 1993, i.e. the very year the USHMM was officially opened to the public ("A Celebration"). Although this circumstance certainly does not prove an underlying connection between the two memory sites, it at least invites some reflection on the temporal coincidence between German-American activists' decision to promote their own version of German-American history in a museum setting and the simultaneous institutionalization of Holocaust memory in the nation's capital. In light of the (West) German government's efforts under Chancellor Kohl to influence the representation of German history in the USHMM (cf. Eder 84-129) and the decades-long fight on

the part of several larger German-American organizations, including the UGAC/GAHFUSA, against anti-German sentiment and stereotypical depictions of German(-American)s in the U.S.-American media (cf. Schuldiner; Lange, "How"), the notion of the GAHM's function as a platform for voicing alternative views on German(-American) history that would challenge those of the USHMM appears even less far-fetched.

Leaving the question of intentionality – i.e. the disputed question of whether the GAHM was meant to serve as an intended riposte to the USHMM or not – aside, the content of the GAHM's permanent exhibition itself offers enough cause for disturbance. Concisely put, the GAHM constructs a completely positive discourse on German-American ethnic history, promotes the image of a modern, democratic, and tourist-friendly contemporary Germany and thus opts for a version of the German(-American) past and present that stands in stark contrast to the one mediated at the USHMM.[9] Notably, positive contributions of Americans of German descent to American politics, society, and culture are highlighted within the GAHM's permanent exhibition as are the strong traditions of German-American cultural and singing clubs. At the same time, references to pro-Nazi rallies of German-American organizations in the years prior to the United States' entry into the Second World War, as in the notorious case of the German-American Bund at Madison Square Garden in New York City in 1939 (cf. Diamond; Wilhelm), are completely missing, including in the section dedicated to German-American ethnic history during World War II. Furthermore, on an information panel entitled "Germans in Exile: Forced Immigration During the Third Reich," which deals with the period of National Socialism after 1933, the mediated narratives exclusively focus on German-American heroism, opposition, and victimization at the expense of more problematic accounts of German-America's role during National Socialism. For instance, the concerted and ultimately successful efforts of the German-Jewish exile and founder of *Universal Studios*, Carl Laemmle, to sponsor affidavits for more than three-hundred persecuted German citizens, who were subsequently allowed entry into the United States as refugees, get recounted ("Germans"). In another information panel, visitors are presented with a narrative about the heroism, opposition, and victimization of Carl-Otto Kiep, a German General Consul in New York. Kiep had to give up his diplomatic post, allegedly due to an utterance he made about Albert Einstein's immigration quoted in the

exhibit as being "Your gain is our loss!" ("Germans"). Back in Germany, Kiep was executed for his active role in the resistance movement, as the panel further explains. Although the related facts are correct, the representation of the National Socialist era at the German-American Heritage Museum is still disconcerting. By stressing the heroic and laudable efforts of a prominent German American, who was himself a Jewish refugee and hence a victim of National Socialism, as well as the execution of a leading German diplomat and resistance fighter at the hands of the German government a skewed picture of the German-American past during the National Socialist period is ultimately produced as the existence of pro-Nazi groups on American territory, a chapter just as relevant to German-American history, is at the same time completely omitted from the exhibition's discourse.

The representation of today's Germany and of the German nation state at the GAHM is similarly restricted to a thoroughly positive image that focuses on German hospitality, its rich culture, and scenic landscapes. In tune with this romanticized depiction of today's Germany, negative chapters of German history are discursively transformed into a positively connoted transatlantic narrative. A panel on German political emigration after 1933, for instance, makes a point of reinterpreting this history as an example of a 400-year-long productive German-American cultural exchange: "[…] the political refugees are a shining testament to the positive cultural exchange that has gone on between the United States and Germany for over 400 years" ("Germans"). In an adjacent panel, the larger historical trajectory of the transatlantic relationship between Germany and the United States is summoned and the shift to a unified, democratic Germany emphasized: "World War II ended 65 years ago. Since then former enemies have become allies, even friends. Germany […] is reunited. Its political stability and economic power have gained it worldwide respect" ("Partners"). Further down in the same text, the political transformation the German state underwent is underscored via a parallelism with the United States and an emphasis on the country's transition from a society of emigrants to one of immigrants: "Today's Germany is no longer a major emigration country. In fact, just the opposite. Similar to the United States in the 19th and 20th century, it has become a country of immigrants. For political refugees as well as for people trying to escape economic hardship, Germany has become a beacon of hope, as has been and continues to be the United States of America" ("Partners").

In contrast to the GAHM, the curators of the USHMM refrain from a reference to Germany's political transformation into a modern, democratic state and rather point to the persistent antisemitism in German society on the museum's website: "Today we face an alarming rise in Holocaust denial and antisemitism – even in the very lands where the Holocaust happened […]" ("About Museum"). In effect, the USHMM thus challenges GAHM's construction of an idealized image of contemporary Germany.

With its focus on an exclusively positive depiction of the German present and a glorified German-American ethnic history, the GAHM essentially opens up a counter-discourse to the hitherto dominant, primarily Holocaust-related, and thus negatively marked representation of Germany in Washington, D.C.'s memorial landscape. In spite of contrary statements on the part of the GAHM's leadership at the time of its opening, the construction of the German and German-American pasts in the museum's permanent exhibition suggests that its representational politics, if not consciously aims at then at least still effectively produces a counter-view to the hitherto dominant image of Germany as shaped by the USHMM in downtown D.C. Differently put, the GAHM promotes a positive German(-American) identity model that stands in contrast to the overwhelmingly negative image of German(-American)s as presented at the USHMM. The version of German-American history conveyed by the GAHM, in combination with its mediated positive view of contemporary Germany, thus functions as a corrective with a double objective: increasing the reputation and public profile of German-American ethnicity as well as improving the image of the German nation state in the United States. The GAHM's construction of German-American ethnic history – a narrative uniquely positioned between the American and German national pasts – thus serves as a memory-political tool via which the perception of the German nation state in the United States is steered and managed.[10]

The dispute over the representation of the German past and present that emerged in Washington, D.C.'s memoryscape as a result of the opening of the GAHM and its implicit contestation of the USHMM's construction of German history begs the question to what extent the dynamics of Holocaust memory in the United States are generally interrelated with the constructions of German-American identity. In this vein, one may ask to what extent the phenomenon of the so-called "Americanization of the Holocaust"[11] has not perhaps paved the way

for an increasingly successful German-American symbolic politics as briefly outlined in this paper's opening section. At least it is worth noting that the first public post-WWII recognition of German-American contributions to American society by the U.S. administration, which took place in the context of the American Bicentennial in 1976, did not only coincide with the reconceptualization of the United States into a pluralist society in the wake of the "white ethnic revival"[12] and roots movement, but also with a rising Holocaust consciousness in the United States since the 1970s. In the light of a significant rise in the importance of the Holocaust in American life in the 1990s, I propose that the more recent successes of German-American identity politics – as exemplified by the recognition of the Hermann Monument as a national symbol of German-American contributions to American society by the U.S. Congress and the U.S. President in the year 2000 as well as the inauguration of the GAHM in the nation's capital in 2010 – were paradoxically not prevented but catalyzed by the Americanization of the Holocaust. The increasing institutionalization of the memory of the Holocaust in the United States since the 1970s and the 1990s, in particular, impacted German-American identity politics in at least two ways. First, a number of German-American organizations, dedicated to reestablishing a forceful German-American identity politics, did not fall silent in the face of a rising public commemoration of the Holocaust in the United States, but developed counter-discourses in response to what they considered to be "anti-German defamation" campaigns run by influential Jewish Americans and their alleged powerful lobbies in the U.S. media and the political arena. German-American activists thus stepped up their efforts to fight what they termed "anti-German propaganda" by disseminating their own strategically selected narratives aimed at raising the symbolic capital of their ethnic group. For the latter purpose, they relied on two strategies: first, claiming German-American contributions to the development of the United States, which were frequently accompanied by efforts to gain symbolic recognition from federal and state institutions, and second, claiming a German-American victim status, which often went along with a scandalous rhetoric of Holocaust relativization or, albeit less frequently, even Holocaust denial. The increasing importance of the Holocaust in American public discourse thus did not dis- but rather encouraged German-American activists and their networks to pursue a passionate politics of visibility and recognition.

Second, and perhaps paradoxically at first sight, the rising awareness of the Holocaust in the United States did not merely prompt counter-discourses on the part of German-American activists and their ethnic organizations but facilitated the production of positive German-American auto-images in yet a more basal way. The appropriation of the Holocaust in the United States as a significant "American" memory and its increasing institutionalization since the 1990s – as exemplified paradigmatically by the founding of the USHMM in 1993 and the broadcasting of Steven Spielberg's *Schindler's List* in the same year – transposed the memory "burden" of the Jewish genocide from German Americans, who had for a long time been primarily associated with and hence held responsible for upholding the memory of the Holocaust in the U.S., onto the American public at large. The Americanization of the Holocaust, in other words, led to a change of the actant role traditionally ascribed to German Americans as the descendants of the "perpetrators" in contrast to the Jewish "victims" to a more "neutral" position in the collective memory of American mainstream society. As a result of the transposition of Holocaust memory onto the collective memory of the American public at large, a narrative vacuum emerged for German Americans who found themselves in a position to reconstruct their ethnic collective past on their own terms. Ethnic leaders of larger German-American organizations and institutions consequently saw themselves empowered to fill this newly emerged narrative vacuum with positive episodes from their ethnic history – as, for instance, the German founding myth of the "Hermann Battle," iconically condensed in the Minnesotan *Hermann Monument,*[13] and the manifold contributions of German-American scientists, journalists, politicians, entertainers, and sports stars as presented at the GAHM in D.C. – and to self-consciously promote their new ethnic identity constructions in institutionalized form in the nation's capital and beyond. Differently put, the Americanization of the Holocaust did not prevent but much rather empowered German-American activists to pursue an enforced visibility politics by shifting the memory burden from German Americans to the American majority society as a whole. Radically put, the Americanization of the Holocaust opened up a void in German-American constructions of the past, which resulted in a substitution of German history's buzzwords beginning with the letter "H": instead of constructing the ethnic self-image via the memory of *H*itler and the *H*olocaust or fighting against its centering in U.S. (popular) culture, *h*eritage and *H*erman the Cheruscan now serve as key reference points

for German-American ethnic self-commemoration in public space (cf. Lange, *Herman* 110).

The Americanization of the Holocaust certainly was not the only factor, but yet most probably had its part in a complex interplay of interrelated discourses, which facilitated and enabled a rehabilitation of German-American ethnicity in American society after the devastating effects of two world wars. The memory and museum boom of the 1990s, a politically stable transatlantic relationship between the United States and the (West) German Federal Republic in the 1980s and thereafter as well as a professionalization of German-American ethnic networks and their increased cooperation with and support from German (state) institutions were among other significant factors conducive to a revitalization of an increasingly successful German-American identity politics. Last but not least, yet another factor deserves consideration with regard to more recent German-American identity iterations, namely a fundamental shift in the modes of memory in relation to the Holocaust. The beginning of the 21st century marked a threshold at which a generation of Holocaust survivors started passing away and the memory of the Holocaust transitioned from the memory frame of the "communicative" into "cultural" memory. Successive generations of Holocaust witnesses thus found themselves in a position to construct and tell their own histories about the Holocaust based on the memories of their predecessors (Scholz 21). For German Americans this condition bore a heightened chance of creating an alternative version of their ethnic past, i.e. one constituted independently of the Holocaust.

New Tendencies in the GAHM's Representational Politics

In the past few years, tentative attempts at an increasingly critical engagement with the German Nazi past have become visible in the GAHM's representational politics. In 2016, a traveling exhibition on the atrocities committed against Jewish lawyers in Germany during the National Socialist era was put up at the GAHM for several months ("Lawyers"). The exhibition entitled "Lawyers Without Rights: Jewish Lawyers in Germany under the Third Reich" – sponsored by the German Federal Bar (*Bundesrechtsanwaltkammer*) and shown in collaboration with the American Bar Association in the United States – was accompanied by a lecture and film series that openly confronted the

genocide of the European Jews. For instance, Stephan Wagner's film *The General*, focusing on German-Jewish Attorney General Fritz Bauer's pursuit of justice for Holocaust victims, was screened at GAHM in the context of the exhibition's accompanying program. Furthermore, in the summer of 2018, a traveling exhibition on the topic of exile and forced migration from the Third Reich, which had been produced by the *German Exile Archive 1933-1945* of the German National Library in Frankfurt, was put up at the GAHM under the title of "Exile: Experience and Testimony 1933-1945" for several months. Another indication of GAHM's recently increased critical engagement with the German National Socialist past is a film series, launched by GAHM in celebration of Marlene Dietrich over one week in April 2018, at which Stanley Kramer's *Judgement at Nuremberg* was also screened.[14] Apart from the cooperation with federal and private institutions based in Germany, as in the case of above cited traveling exhibitions, the GAHM has lately also started cooperating with Jewish-American institutions. For instance, a lecture delivered at the GAHM in October 2016 in the context of the "Lawyers Without Rights" exhibition was co-hosted by the Jewish War Veterans of the USA, the Jewish Historical Society of Greater Washington, and the National Museum of American Jewish Military History.[15] The cooperation with Jewish-American institutions is significant as prior to the year 2016 no strategic cooperation of such kind existed. The institutional dialogue between the GAHM and Jewish-American organizations has been maintained in subsequent years as evidenced by the GAHFUSA's co-sponsorship of a film series at the Washington Jewish Film Festival in D.C. in 2017.

The onset of a shift in the German-American Heritage Museum's curatorial policy from a relative marginalization of the memory of the Second World War and the Holocaust towards an open confrontation with the German Nazi past in its temporary exhibitions and accompanying cultural program can be pinpointed to the year 2014. Probably as a result of a change in the museum's top leadership and the recruitment of journalist Petra Schürmann for the position of Executive Director, the GAHM hosted a traveling exhibition on the German student resistance movement "The White Rose" in the summer of 2014 ("A Celebration"). As in the case of the previously mentioned traveling exhibitions, "The White Rose" exhibit was originally also produced by a German institution, in this case the *Weisse Rose Stiftung e.V.* in Munich, and subsequently exported to the United States so as to be

shown at selected cultural institutions. Though focusing on German resistance to National Socialism and hence an aspect that did not so much compromise as rather shed a positive light on the role of German citizens during the Third Reich, "The White Rose" exhibit still stands out in the trajectory of GAHM's program record as it was the first temporary exhibition under the museum's roof specifically dedicated to the historical chapter of National Socialism.[16] In line with GAHM's new content orientation in its temporary exhibitions, the film screenings, which form part of the institution's wider cultural program at the museum facilities, similarly underline the GAHM's changed approach to dealing with the National Socialist past as these have for a few years now also included films with a thematic focus on the Second World War such as *The Book Thief*, *Nowhere in Africa*, and *The Reader*.[17]

Though the GAHM's cultural program since 2014 points at an increased willingness to confront the German Nazi past and to thereby highlight the institution's commitment to the principles of German *Vergangenheitsaufarbeitung* (i.e. a coming to terms with the past), the GAHM's self-critical engagement with the German(-American) past has its limits. To begin with, its cultural program duplicates the narrative structures familiar from the museum's permanent exhibition in that stories of heroism, victimization, and German(-American) resistance are foregrounded. A critical focus on German perpetrators and bystanders is largely avoided, however, one of the few exceptions being a screening of Kramer's *Judgment at Nuremberg*, a film that directly tackles moral questions of German (war) guilt in the context of the Nuremberg Trials. The structural complexity of National Socialism is thus not sufficiently acknowledged in the GAHM's representations of the German past, as the entanglement of larger segments of the German public in National Socialist crimes, be it as perpetrators or bystanders, remains unaddressed.[18] Probably even more disturbing, though, is the fact that – just as in the case of the permanent exhibition – the GAHM's wider cultural program does equally not address the existence of German-American organizations in the United States which were openly supportive of National Socialism in the 1930s and 40s. In spite of the museum's increased efforts at coming to terms with the era of the Third Reich, the German-American chapter of the Nazi past thus still remains silenced. National Socialism is conveniently relegated to the other side of the Atlantic, whereby a sacrosanct and innocent view of German-Americana is preserved. The strategic omission of narra-

tives about German-America's entanglement with the Nazi movement can, moreover, not simply be explained away with a lack of engaging educational material suitable for familiarizing audiences with these more problematic aspects of German-American ethnic memory. For instance, in 2017, a widely advertised seven-minute documentary on the German American Bund entitled *A Night at the Garden*, which was co-produced by renowned American director and producer Laura Poitras (*Citizenfour*) and nominated for the 91st Academy Awards for Best Documentary Short, was released and would have lent itself perfectly to the GAHM's educational program.

Conclusion

A question that inevitably arises after having toured the permanent exhibition at the GAHM is why those responsible for its content opted for precisely such a representational politics regarding the Second World War. Why is a fully self-critical engagement with the problematic aspects of German-American ethnic history still missing at the German-American Heritage Museum of the U.S.A.? Differently put, why do the more recent efforts of, at least partly, confronting the German National Socialist past not encapsulate German-American ethnic history but merely extend to German WWII-history across the Atlantic?

The answer is a multidimensional one that consists of several interrelated factors. First and foremost, the logic of American identity politics encourages ethnic groups to advertise themselves uncompromisingly in the most favorable light possible. The past is thus put in the service of the present so as to advance a specific group's presentist concerns, interests and visions for the future. Consequently, narratives considered compromising and counter-productive to the aim of furthering the group's societal standing are strategically excluded from collective public self-representations.

Secondly, this general logic of American identity politics also underlies the agenda of ethnic museums in the United States that serve as "points of crystallization" (J. Assmann) of specific collective identities, i.e. as sites of memory that mediate and simultaneously shape the memories of and about specific ethnic groups.[19] German-American museums are no exception in this regard.

Third, quite a few German-American leaders of the (post-)war generation who initiated or helped develop some of the larger German-American museums have over decades repeatedly lamented the dissemination of anti-German sentiment and propaganda via American media outlets and U.S. popular culture. With their lamentos, they inscribed themselves into a larger German-American jeremiadic tradition: In the aftermath of the Second World War, and especially in the late 1970s and 1980s, German-American organizations like the United German-American Committee (i.e. GAHFUSA's predecessor organization) and the German-American National Congress (DANK), for instance, spoke of a veritable defamation campaign at work in U.S. media and culture which they frequently linked to the rise in Holocaust remembrance that gained in momentum in the third quarter of the 20th century in the United States.[20] It may thus be reasonably assumed that quite a few of the larger German-American museums that started opening from the mid-1990s were also meant to function as platforms for disseminating counter-narratives to the perceived dominant negative representation of Germans in the American public sphere. In other words, German-American museums like the GAHM were likely founded with the double goal of, first, retrieving a forgotten or little known ethnic past but also, second, of presenting counter-histories to the established Holocaust-centered discourses on Germany and its past. Understood in this vein, it is not all that surprising that the GAHM's permanent exhibition looks the way it does.

Moreover, the temporal correlation between the "Americanization of the Holocaust" and the institutionalization of its memory in the form of museums, most notably at the USHMM, raises the question of a potential interrelation between the dynamics of Holocaust memory and German-American identity politics and, more specifically, the emergence of German-American heritage museums in the United States. The Americanization of the Holocaust, I argue, did not prevent, but, quite paradoxically, much rather catalyzed the emergence of German-American heritage museums due to a transposition of the commemorative burden of the Holocaust from German Americans, who had for a long time been primarily associated with and hence deemed responsible for commemorating the atrocities of the Second World War, to the American public at large. The Americanization of the Holocaust was certainly not the only factor that paved the way for an increasingly successful German-American identity politics and

the emergence of German-American heritage museums, as pointed out above, but rather one in a complex combination of interrelated factors – among which the memory and museum boom of the 1990s as well as a stable transatlantic political relationship between the (West) German Federal Republic and the United States stand out – that ultimately led to a rehabilitation of German-American ethnicity in American society (cf. Lange, *Herman* 110-111).

However, fourth and finally, considering the comparatively recent generational shifts in leadership at the GAHM, it is possible that an alternative strategy regarding the representation of the German-American past will soon be implemented at the museum. As is to be hoped, this revised approach will further draw on and creatively adapt the German state's policy of *Vergangenheitsaufarbeitung* – a policy which has already served as a model for other states' coming to terms with the "dark" chapters of their national pasts and consequently turned, as it were, into a successful German export article – to German-America's own ethnic ends.

As of now, however, any mention of the existence of pro-Nazi elements on American soil is evidently still considered a taboo subject by the GAHFUSA's leadership. Or how else can the complete absence of any reference to the German American Bund in the organization's various media outlets, including its museum, its website, and (cultural) outreach program be explained? With its current cherry-picking approach to German-American history, the German-American Heritage Museum of the U.S.A. – as other German-American museums such as the DANK Haus in Chicago (cf. Lange, "German-American") – is a far cry away from its self-proclaimed goal of providing a center for learning and historical awareness-building.

Notes

[1] In accordance with its dominant interpretation, the term "German-American" here refers to an "imagined community" (Anderson) defined by its common German-speaking background (cf. Conzen et al.). In contrast to a narrow definition based on the criterium of national belonging to the state of Germany or its historic equivalents, the term thus also encompasses immigrants and their descendants from Switzerland, Austria, and other (previously) German-speaking areas.

[2] A museum that has sometimes been credited as the first German-American museum established in the United States is the Germanic museum at Harvard University – now the Busch-Reisinger Museum – which was founded in 1901. Strictly speaking, it does not qualify as an ethnic heritage museum, though, as it dealt with the "Germanic cultural heritage of Europe" as opposed to the "German heritage of America" (Tolzmann 190). It is hence more fitting to view the Germanic Museum as an important precursor to the later developing generic form of German-American heritage museums.

[3] The museums referred to here are the German American Heritage Center & Museum in Davenport, Iowa (est. 1994), the German Heritage Museum in Cincinnati, Ohio (est. 2000), and the DANK-Haus German American Cultural Center museum in Chicago, Illinois (est. 2009).

[4] At the time of this writing, at least a dozen German-American sites of memory that distinctly describe and market themselves as German-American heritage museums exist in the United States. If the numerous German-American historical societies with integrated small(er) exhibition sections were to be included in this statistics, the overall number of German-American museum spaces would be even higher.

[5] Marc Fisher's article in the *Washington Post* on the opening of the German-American Heritage Museum of the U.S.A. in March 2010 is one of the exceptions to the rule. Fisher's article is essentially a critique of the increasing "balkanization" of the commemorative

landscape in the U.S. capital. However, he also points out the shortcomings of the GAHM's curatorial approach by observing that the history of the German-American Bund is not mentioned in the permanent exhibition. The German magazine *Der Spiegel* and the weekly newspaper *Die ZEIT* also devoted articles to the opening of the GAHM in which the lack of a critical assessment of German-American immigration history is equally, however briefly, problematized (see Schmitz; Klingst). Critically informed examinations of German-American heritage museums other than the GAHM in D.C. are scarce. For a critical semiotic reading of the DANK Haus museum's permanent exhibition, see Lange, "German-American."

[6] Although a small number of critical journalistic texts on the GAHM's founding were published on both sides of the Atlantic as pointed out above (Fisher; Schmitz; Klingst), the analysis of the museum space in these texts remains rather cursory, not least due to the space constraints of the respective media outlets for which the texts were produced. A closer investigation of the GAHM's representational politics and the more recent shifts in its permanent and temporary exhibitions as well as its wider cultural program thus remains outstanding.

[7] For a succinct overview of the function and specific potential of museums as media of collective memory, see Roth and Lupfer 171-6; on the construction of history in museums, see A. Assmann 6-13.

[8] On more recent dynamics in contemporary American identity politics and its relation to today's "memory boom," see Winter 69-92.

[9] For a version of this argument in German, see Lange, *Herman* 106-11.

[10] This thesis is supported by the fact that the multimedia booth, through which today's Germany is represented at the GAHM, was developed in cooperation with the German Embassy in Washington, D.C., the *Deutsche Welle*, and the *German National Tourist Board*.

[11] The "Americanization of the Holocaust" describes a combination of discourses that led to a "centering" of the Holocaust in U.S.-American collective memory since the 1970s and the 1990s, in particular, see Novick 1-15 as well as Flanzbaum.

[12] On the white ethnic revival and its underlying structural race politics, see Jacobson 1-17.

[13] The "Battle of the Teutoburg Forest," also known as the "Hermann Battle," refers to the victory of an alliance of Germanic tribes, led by the Cheruscan chieftain Arminius, over three Roman legions under the leadership of General Publius Quinctilius Varus in what is now central Germany in 9 AD. Since the Renaissance period, the battle has been ascribed the status of a German founding myth and functionalized for varying interests and purposes over the course of the centuries. For a more detailed account of the legendary battle and its political instrumentalization, see Doerner as well as Dreyer. For the Hermann Monument, see Lange, *Herman*.

[14] The week-long film event was meant to "celebrat [e] one of the great stars of the silver screen, and an important figure in the shared history of Germany and the United States: Marlene Dietrich" ("Four"). The film series was meant to complement a special exhibit on "Marlene Dietrich: Dressed for the Image" at the National Portrait Gallery in Washington, D.C.

[15] The lecture, entitled "Kaisertreu: The Descendants of Jewish-German War Veterans Speak," was delivered by two descendants of Jewish-German war veterans whose ancestors had fought for Kaiser Wilhelm II during World War I and subsequently fallen "victim to the total dismantling of German democracy and exclusion from civic life" ("Reminder"). The talk specifically addressed the persecution of German Jews under the Third Reich, which resulted in complex issues of restitution for the affected émigrés and their descendants in later decades.

[16] In fact, there is an entire tradition on the part of German-American and German institutions in the United States of highlighting German resistance to National Socialism in an attempt to spread a positive view of Germany and "Germanness" in America. Besides the persistent – and ultimately doomed – efforts on the part of the (West) German government under Chancellor Helmut Kohl to introduce a chapter on German resistance into the permanent exhibition of the USHMM, the Bonn government's successful initiative to host a temporary exhibition entitled "Against Hitler: German Resistance

to National Socialism, 1933-1945" at the Library of Congress's Madison Gallery in Washington, D.C. in the year 1994 stands out (see Eder 84-129 and 180-2).

[17] The cultural program caters to both GAHFUSA members and the interested (and paying) wider public.

[18] An overview of the films screened at GAHMUSA since its opening in 2010 supports this assessment. Though several films shown at the museum facilities, such as *The Book Thief* and *The Reader* display a thematic focus on the Second World War, these at first sight progressive and laudable efforts at confronting the horrors of World War II carry problematic underpinnings, as evidenced by the severe criticism the screened films partly drew from cultural and film critics for their euphemistic and hence distorted representation of German history (see e.g. Bierich; Assheuer; Stone).

[19] On ethnic museums in the United States and their tendency to represent the past in a celebratory manner, see Conn 483-4.

[20] See e.g. the UGAC's newsletters from March 1986 and April 1987 ("Another Reading;" "Indoctrination"). Similarly, the Chicago-based German-American National Congress (est. 1958) frequently lamented anti-Germanism in the U.S. media and explicitly stated as one of its main founding goals to "stand up against every slander and defamation of the American and German name, and especially every anti-German propaganda" ("History of DANK").

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