"Disgraceful" Objects: Reacting to and Engaging with Perpetrator Materials in Archival Collections and Holocaust Museums

Kate Yanina Gibeault

1 In her book, *Exhibiting Atrocity: Memorial Museums and the Politics of Past Violence*, Amy Sodaro describes how the Al Qaeda operatives who hijacked the planes on September 11, 2001, are framed in the narrative at the 9/11 Museum in New York City. Sodaro observes many ways in which the presence of the perpetrators is intentionally minimized. For example, small photos of these men are displayed at knee-level in the exhibit space as a way to symbolically ensure that their status is lower than that of survivors, victims, and other people who were affected by the attacks. The same section of the exhibit also displays a reproduction of "The Last Night," an infamous letter that was written by one of the perpetrators on the day before the attacks. Though the letter might be of interest to visitors who want to understand the motivation behind the attacks, only one line of this document has been translated from Arabic into English. Such decisions, Sodaro argues, "[point] to an underlying fear that representing perpetrators or explaining their actions might lead to understanding or condoning them."[1] However, the author contends that the designers' effort to deny the perpetrators much space or voice in the exhibit also limits visitors' ability to understand "the deeper causes of the rise of global terrorism."[2] Sodaro's analysis raises important questions about what is at stake in whether or how the perpetrators of violence are framed at museums and other sites that seek to promote remembrance of and education about mass atrocities. Is there space for perpetrator materials at sites that seek to preserve the sacred memory of survivors and victims? Does the profane or unsettling nature of such materials threaten the perceived sanctity of the space, or might there be value in including them?

2 Such questions have also surfaced in my work as the Director of the **Cohen Institute for Holocaust** and Genocide Studies at Keene State College. The Institute, which was founded in 1983 as one of the oldest Holocaust resource centers in the United States, started off as a collection of books and other materials that were brought together by its founder, Dr. Charles Hildebrandt, to support the mission "to remember . . . and to teach."[3] Today, the Institute offers dozens of public-facing programs and events each year, as well as international study opportunities and resources and support for educators who teach Holocaust and Genocide Studies. One of the responsibilities tied to my role as Director of the Institute is working with the College Archivist to oversee the management and development of the Holocaust and Genocide Studies collection of the Mason Library on campus.

3 The Holocaust and Genocide Studies collection contains hundreds of original artifacts, documents, passports, and other materials, all of which constitute a "teaching collection." This means that, although materials are stored within a temperature-controlled room and treated gently when they are brought out for use, they are meant to

be handled and studied by students and community members. Although these items will inevitably deteriorate over time due to contact with human hands and light, they also serve an important role in giving people a tangible point of connection to the past.

4 The first time I visited the Archives, I was drawn in by a set of pen pal letters written to and from a young girl in the United States and another in Germany. The six letters dated from February 1933 through January 1934. Half a world away from each another, these two correspondents described the mundane realities of their everyday lives as well as the changing conditions in their countries over time. Each time I have visited the Archives since then, I have found new items of interest: passports written in different languages that can be deciphered using Google Translate, photos of a bombed-out Nuremburg, post-Holocaust photos and identification cards from Eva Gordon—who grew up under the Nazi regime as a *mischling* (a child with "half Jewish" blood)—and more. These are just a handful of the many items nestled in the heart of the library. Parts of the collection have also been **digitized** to make them accessible to wider audiences.[4]

5 Although it is not an official policy, the Institute and the Archives maintain a passive acquisitions approach. This means that staff members do not actively seek out or purchase materials for the collection. Rather, most items come to us through donors who are looking for a place to house their things. Since stepping into my job with the Institute in 2022, I have spent a significant amount of time traveling across New Hampshire alongside our College Archivist to meet with these prospective donors and help them decide if our special collection is the right option for them.

6 Given how many Holocaust museums and centers there are in our world today, one might wonder: what motivates these families or individuals to reach out to our Institute, which is located in a quiet city in southwestern New Hampshire? The first factor that often comes into play is proximity. Many of those who give materials to this collection are local to New England. Some have a personal connection to the Institute, its staff, or the College, and they want to either support our mission or know that they are entrusting their items to people who are part of their own network. Others have told me that they want their items close by, and they appreciate the convenience of being able to come in and see the materials without having to travel. This is especially the case when people are donating treasured family artifacts.

7 The more I have spoken with donors over time, the more attuned I have become to the affective relationships that they maintain with these "things." One woman told me that she had previously considered donating her grandparents' photo collections to a museum in Florida but, when she visited the museum, its storage facilities felt too much like a cold, "sterile" warehouse. She is one of many individuals who have expressed a desire for their items to be cared for lovingly and kept alive through engagement with or the companionship of a community. We are always careful to explain the nature of our teaching collection during meetings like these so that donors understand that their objects will be used in classrooms and available for workshops, events, and research. Most donors are attracted to our collection *because* this approach a good fit with what they want for their items.

8 But that is not always what motivates a donation. We also have had families and individuals approach us with items that they simply do not know what to do with—things, such as perpetrator paraphernalia, that they do not want in their possession but that others do not necessarily seem to want either. In some cases, they have reached out to other museums or institutions and have been turned away. Many Holocaust museums went through an initial wave of acquiring materials for exhibits or collections in the early 1990s but have become more selective in what they accept over time. For example, the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum's **website** states: "Due to the large number of Nazi flags and banners regularly offered to the Museum, we can only accept flags and banners of a specific size that accommodate our current exhibit needs."[5]

9 Thus, the Institute also receives inquiries from local residents who are looking to rid themselves of Nazi-related artifacts—flags, propaganda, and more. Oftentimes these items were unearthed while a family was cleaning out the attic of a recently-deceased loved one. Suddenly confronted with a symbol of a hateful ideology that has been packed away for years, they do not know what to do with it. Conversations with these prospective donors raise radically different emotions than conversations with those who treasure the items they are looking to donate. While materials such as photos of victims or survivors, yellow stars, or other items might evoke loving tenderness, grief, or joy, the donation of perpetrator materials more often carries emotions of discomfort, shame, or anger.

10 The remainder of this essay highlights specific examples and stories of perpetrator materials in archival or museum collections. The first three images that I share foreground the complicated emotions that such items have evoked for the donors and students who I have encountered through my work at the Cohen Institute for Holocaust and Genocide Studies. The remaining five images turn to consider some of the materials

Fig. 1 Photograph of Adolf Hitler and other uniformed officials that was donated to the Cohen Institute for Holocaust and Genocide Studies at Keene State College.

that are housed in the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum's collection. Ultimately, these cases, when taken together, raise two important questions: What emotions and reactions do these artifacts evoke for donors, students, and others? And what, if anything, might these objects teach us about the realities of war and genocide?

11 The owner of a thrift store in New Hampshire donated this original photograph of Adolf Hitler standing with other uniformed officials to the Cohen Institute.[6] She explained that she had found the photograph—already encased in a protective plastic sleeve—in a box of books that had been left at her shop. After misplacing the photo for a year, she met with me when it had reappeared.

12 "It's uncomfortable for me to hold this photo," she told me. "It was uncomfortable for me to even possess that [the photo]. I don't feel comfortable selling it." The thrift store owner expressed gratitude to the Institute for relieving her of the burden of ownership because, otherwise, she would not have known what to do with it. She ended the conversation by saying, "I wish I knew more about where it came from or who donated it. But maybe this was *their* way to pass it along because they didn't know what to do with it either."

13 Stories like this one raise interesting and important questions about provenance, or records of origin and ownership, as related to perpetrator materials. When people find an object unsettling to have in their possession, museum or archives professionals may be less likely to gain access to the full history or significance of an item. Who took this photo and why? Was it part of a set? How did it end up in southwestern New Hampshire? The lack of context also seems to be part of the reason why the store owner wanted to rid herself of this photo.

14 In other cases, the hate-filled content of the material itself is what evokes strong emotions from a donor.

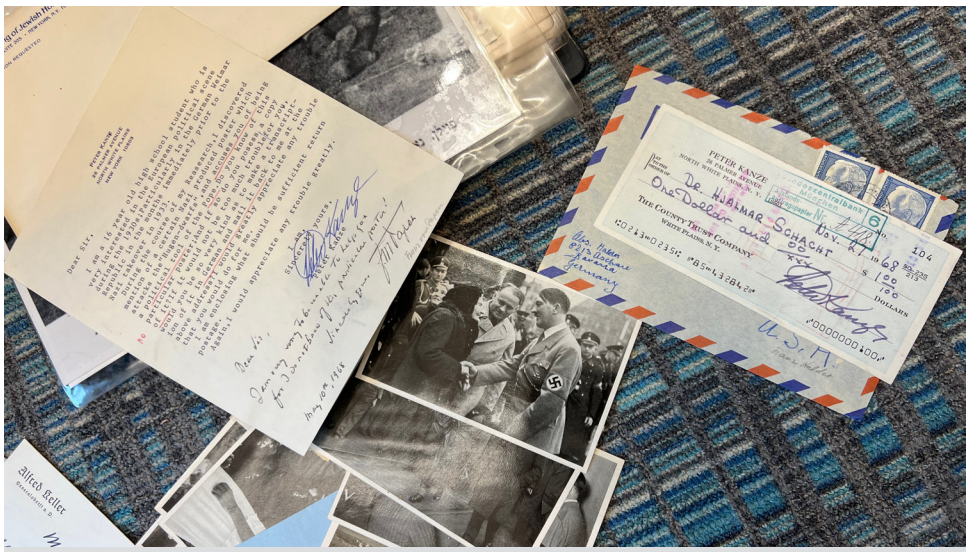

Fig. 2 Partial contents of the box of materials that was mailed to the Cohen Institute for Holocaust and Genocide Studies during the summer of 2023.

15 This box of photos, documents, and books was donated to the Cohen Institute during the summer of 2023. Before it arrived in the mail, the Institute received an email from its owner, who had inherited the contents from his father. The email read, in part: "I have a few boxes of anti-Semitic 'Hitleriana-Nazi' items. Nobody seems to want any of it except 'online Internet Nazis' . . . and that will never happen! I've shredded many boxfuls . . . others went to a landfill. If Keene State can use any of the material, I will ship it at no cost. You can burn or destroy this disgraceful nonsense if you want."

16 One thing that stands out in this note is the author's fear that these items will fuel neo-Nazism or other hateful ideologies in today's world. I have heard the same concern from others. One gentleman told me about visiting a flea market in southern New Hampshire and coming across a table selling Nazi propaganda from the late 1930s, propaganda that contained dehumanizing antisemitic imagery. He was so distraught about seeing this content out in the open—in a space where children and their families were wandering around no less—that he bought all the materials himself. He figured that this was the best way to keep it out of circulation and prevent it from gaining traction with new audiences.

17 But the donor of the box pictured above also expresses a complicated form of anger in his note. He maintains a desire to see the "nonsense" destroyed but is hesitant to be the one to shred all of it himself. These items are labeled as "disgraceful"—literally, that which brings shame or discredit on someone or something—but he also wonders if there is any educational value to be found within them. The irony that later came to light was that, when the donor did eventually ship his box to Keene State College, we discovered that there were only a few books containing antisemitic propaganda in the mix. There were a handful of photos of Hitler at speaking events and in other contexts. But the bulk of the box's contents was academic books about the Holocaust. So, this individual must not have sifted through the box in its entirety.

18 In some cases, donors possess a mixture of items that they treasure *and* other items that evoke shame or guilt. For example, one community member came to the Institute to donate photos of her two grandfathers, one who fought in World War II as a soldier in the U.S. Army and another who was among the persecuted Jews of Europe. We spent two hours getting to know one another during her visit, talking about her family's story and her children's own experiences as Jews in New Hampshire. Later on, I received a follow-up email from her thanking me for my time. The final sentences of the message read: "I wanted also to mention that we are interested in donating a nazi [sic] flag that my grandfather took [from Germany] . . . It's a really big (6 foot wide?) flag with heavy tassels . . . I didn't mention it to you in person because it's awkward to talk about." Although we had spent the afternoon building rapport and a sense of trust, this individual still felt uncomfortable telling me that she had this flag in her possession—as if the presence of this object might evoke my judgment or somehow negate her family's other stories and experiences.

19 Thus far, I have highlighted a few cases pertaining to the complicated emotions that can emerge for donors as they seek to dispossess themselves of perpetrator materials.

But I have also witnessed the complicated emotions and reactions that such objects can evoke for students who engage with the teaching collection. A colleague of mine who takes her classes to the Archives regularly for activities and workshops described one such incident from a few years ago. As she chatted with one of her undergraduates about a set of passports, she heard an archivist standing behind her exclaim, "Oh my gosh, take it off!" Turning around she saw that one of her students had donned the Nazi helmet that was part of the collection. When I asked the instructor what feelings were evoked by seeing a student wearing the attire of a perpetrator, she described herself as "flabbergasted" and "wide-eyed and confused." What would possess a student to put on a helmet like that, she wondered. While the collection is meant to be handled and examined, certain items seem to have the potential to evoke behavior that is shocking or unsettling.

20 Not all students are so quick to wear Nazi attire, though. Perpetrator materials can also unnerve the learners who confront these items during their time in the Archives.

Fig. 3 Undergraduate students at Keene State College (KSC) explore materials from the special collection in Holocaust and Genocide Studies in the KSC Archives.

21 The students seated at this table were enrolled in a class that I brought to the Archives last year to examine curated boxes of items for a workshop on primary source literacy. These young women quickly dove into the documents and photos in their box, but conspicuously avoided the large, folded Nazi flag that was inside. When I asked them why that was the case, one student told me: "Some of my family members were Jewish. I just feel weird about touching something with a swastika on it. I think my mom would find it strange if I told her I was handling it." Out of respect for those killed during the Holocaust and out of loyalty to her family's own Jewish identity, she stayed away from

this item. Sometimes the embodied reactions to that particular item are even stronger. A faculty member once told me about a student in her class who started shivering and hugging himself when he looked at that same flag during a workshop, saying that he could "sense the evil coming from it."

22 I could go on, but these anecdotes capture the essence of what I have seen play out in many different contexts over the past few years. What is at stake in our encounters with perpetrator materials? The question of why these objects seem to evoke such intense and widely ranging emotions has many possible answers. One obvious point to consider is that sometimes the content of a collection can prove traumatic in and of itself. In an article entitled "Working with Traumatic Material: Effects on Holocaust Memorial Museum Staff" that was published in the *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, the authors describe how museum workers who were preparing for the opening of the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum in 1993 were exposed to personal artifacts and other reminders of the horrors of the Holocaust that were "potentially disturbing."[7] As a result, interventions were designed to lower distress among staff and volunteers and help them process their reactions. If trained museum professionals may find themselves traumatized by artifacts of the past, the same might be true for others who confront such items.

23 Additionally, material culture grounds us in the *human* dimensions of genocide. That helmet that the student put on, for example, was worn by a *person* who was complicit in a system that claimed the lives of millions of people. The perpetrators of past violence were human just as we are human today. Some of the encounters described above seem tied to a distancing reflex similar to that which Peter Hayes describes in his book, *Why?: Explaining the Holocaust*.[8] In the introduction to this book, Hayes notes that many people describe the Holocaust as incomprehensible or unfathomable as an "almost instinctive recoiling in self-defense."[9] He goes on to write: "To say that one can explain the occurrence of the Holocaust seems tantamount to normalizing it, but professing that one cannot grasp it is an assertion of the speaker's innocence—of his or her incapacity not only to conceive of such horror but to enact anything like it."[10] In rejecting perpetrator materials in such visceral ways, perhaps people are actively working to reject the humanity of the perpetrators—as well as their own potential for committing hateful acts or crimes.

24 The desire to maintain boundaries between different types of people and different types of things may also explain why some students and donors seem to worry that the presence of perpetrator materials—say, for example, a Nazi flag stored alongside a collection of Jewish family photos—might pollute the sanctity of other items. Such logic evokes anthropologist Mary Douglas's framework for understanding how societies and religious communities deem certain things pure and sacred and other things unclean and out of place.[11] The human tendency to shun dirt, Douglas claims, is not merely about hygiene but rather about trying to impose order on chaos and about the maintenance of boundaries. "Dirt offends against order. Eliminating it is not a negative movement, but a positive effort to organize the environment."[12] Perhaps the ambivalence evoked by perpetrator materials is due in part to the manner in which they

can challenge the neat divisions of perpetrators, bystanders, and victims that have been so heavily reinforced in Holocaust and genocide research.[13] Some people may want to store Jewish family photos apart from Nazi flags because doing so helps to reinforce clear-cut lines of division between the objects themselves and the types of stories or experiences that they represent, even if history itself was much more layered and complicated than that.

25 These are but a handful of ways in which we might think about what is at stake in the encounters and reactions to which I have borne witness. But, as difficult as perpetrator materials might be for individuals to confront at times, can they also serve a purpose? What, if any, value might these objects hold in helping students and others better understand the realities of genocide and war?

26 When I had the opportunity to participate in the workshop on "Interrogating the Sacred: Holocaust Objects and Their Care," which was held at the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum during the summer of 2023, I decided to spend my time examining some of the perpetrator items in the Museum's exhibition and collections. I wanted to learn more about the things that might be construed as the opposed of sacred—the "disgraceful" perpetrator materials—and what is at stake in conserving and exhibiting them. The Museum's collections include, for example, more than 120 Nazi banners and flags, most of which are not on display as part of the permanent exhibition. But a staff member at the museum did point out one flag that is.

Fig. 4 A large Nazi flag hangs behind a photo display in the permanent exhibition at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

27 This massive red Nazi flag is situated within the portion of the permanent exhibition that discusses how the Gestapo maintained a climate of fear, hatred, and suspicion under Hitler's dictatorship. Despite its size, the flag is easy to overlook because it is placed behind a large metal grate and because there are enlarged photos with captions situated in front of it. The purpose of the grate, the same staff member told me, was to discourage pilgrimage and the leaving of votive candles or other items by neo-Nazi groups.[14] Whereas exhibit designers worked hard to call attention to other objects that might otherwise be overlooked—such as a famous **milk can** used to secretly hide archives from the Warsaw ghetto—it is clear that they thought equally carefully about how to prevent this flag from becoming too noticeable or prominent in the exhibition.[15]

28 As noted above, though, most of the Nazi flags and banners in the Museum's collection are not out on display but housed in its storage facilities. Conversations with one of the museum's textile conservators revealed how the flags—which, to the untrained eye, look very similar—have different stories to tell. Take, for instance, the flag pictured below.

Fig. 5 Nazi flag in the storage facilities at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum's Shapell Center.

Fig. 6 Price tag that was originally affixed to the Nazi flag pictured in Fig. 5. This price tag is also part of the collection housed at the Shapell Center.

29 According to the Museum's catalog, this **flag** was found by a U.S. soldier in an abandoned department store in Germany near the end of the war in May 1945.[16] It has a swastika emblazoned on both sides of the fabric, which the conservator told me means that it was designed to be displayed in the air on either a flagpole or a banister. The flag was brand new, unused, and it was once attached to a price tag for the Kaufhof Department Store.[17] The catalog further explains that Kaufhof Department Store was originally part of a Jewish-owned chain of stores founded by Leonard Tietz in the late 1880s when his family pioneered the concept of a department store in Germany. When the Nazi Party rose to power, the Tietz family's stores were boycotted because of their Jewish identity. Eventually, in the early 1930s, the family was forced to sell their shares in the business at a reduced value during a period of Nazi-enforced Aryanization. This

is when Tietz stores were renamed Kaufhof—literally "buying" *(kaufen)* and "building" *(hof)*—and it was at one of these locations in which this flag was stocked for sale in 1945.

30 Thus, although this flag initially looked indistinguishable from others in the collection, conversations about its materiality with conservators and analysis of the catalog listing elucidated how much it might teach us about the past. This object could open up meaningful conversations with students about Aryanization as part of the pathway to genocide as well as other rich questions like: What happened to the Tietz family during the Holocaust? Were they or their descendants ever compensated for their business losses after the war? Does the Kaufhof Department Store acknowledge the "origins" of the business today and, if so, how? And how have other businesses approached complicated ethical questions pertaining to their complicity in the Holocaust?

31 Two other flags in the collection that look similar to this one carry very different but equally important stories as well.

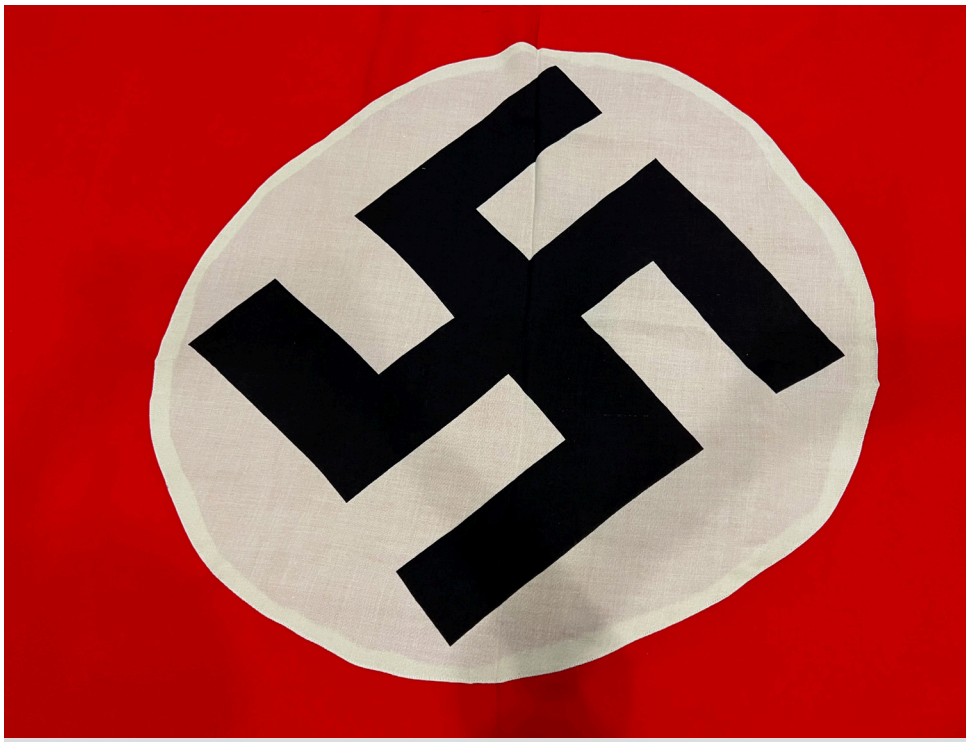

Fig. 7 Nazi banner in the storage facilities at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum's Shapell Center.

32 This Nazi **banner** was also found in new and unused condition by a U.S. soldier at the end of the war. A close examination of the material alongside conservators revealed that the white circle is slightly lopsided, and the material is not of a fine weave. It is made of rayon, a less common material for these banners, which may have been the result of supply chain issues at the end of the war. The metal grommets along the edge and printing on one side of the fabric tell us that it was likely intended to be hung against a wall. These points, when taken together, indicate that this banner was likely created in a

rushed—and perhaps desperate—fashion even as Nazi Germany was beginning to falter or experience strain during the war. An item like this might lead into a discussion with students about the changing course of the war and the conditions that ultimately led to Germany's defeat.

33 Equally insightful is the **catalog listing** for this item, which tells us more about the soldier who found the banner and brought it home with him to the United States.[18] This young man had been ordered to go to a small town in Germany and take the local townspeople to witness the unburied bodies of victims at a former killing center as testament to the atrocities of the Nazi government. Afterwards, the U.S. Army forced the townspeople to bury the dead themselves. The soldier had found this recently manufactured banner rolled in a bundle in a boxcar near the camp. Items like this one might raise important questions for students about early efforts to counter Holocaust denial through the witnessing of human remains, the relationships between American liberators and the German communities that they encountered, or the military practice of bringing home "souvenirs" from war.

Fig. 8 Nazi flag with black trim in the storage facilities at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum's Shapell Center.

34 The final flag that I examined during our workshop—though certainly not the only other flag in the Museum's collection—was the one pictured above. One conservator told me that it has the "classic weave of a military flag." Indeed, the **catalog** tells us that this flag was taken from an office at Dachau concentration camp in 1945 by Everett Fox, who was a soldier in the U.S. Army.[19] Soon after Fox acquired it, it was signed by members of the 158th Field Artillery Battalion and the 45th Infantry Division of the U.S. Army. Another

round of signatures took place around 1990 during a reunion of the 45th Infantry Division, and then the flag was eventually donated to the Museum by Fox's grandson. Names, addresses, and short notes are still legible on the fabric today. It resembles a yearbook; these young men knew that the war was ending and they were about to be sent home. This was a moment of change, and they wanted to keep in touch with their wartime buddies. Mixed in among the names and addresses are inside jokes, pleas to stay in touch, and more. Looking at this item, one begins to wonder more broadly about the experiences of both survivors and soldiers after the war. How did they grapple with the traumatic experiences they had had or horrific scenes that they had witnessed during the Holocaust or war? What networks of support were available, if any, in the years that followed?

35 Ultimately, conversations with Museum staff reinforced the idea that perpetrator materials, as difficult as they may be to encounter at times, can teach us important lessons—and open up important questions—about the past. This is true even for Museum staff themselves, who cultivate what one conservator described as "split brain" in order to disconnect from the story or history of an item so that they can focus on tending to the object itself. She and other professionals also adhere to ethical codes that demand that they maintain a "standard of care" in treating all objects equitably. This individual told me: "We have to remember that objects like these are needed in order to tell the full story of the Holocaust." She also mentioned that the work she had done on restoring flags like those pictured above had resulted in "useful learning" for her. For example, she is now better able to identify forgeries after so closely examining authentic flags and other artifacts.

36 We are living in a moment when the nature of Holocaust remembrance, memorialization, and education are shifting. Survivors and other direct witnesses to the Holocaust are a dwindling population as are those who had first-hand knowledge of perpetrators' actions and motivations. During the fall semester of 2023, I invited Dr. Martin Rumscheidt, a renowned theologian who was also the son of Nazi industrialists and perpetrators, to speak with students in my class. Martin was just a young boy during the war, but he went on to spend much of his adult life grappling with questions about Christian-Jewish relations in the wake of the Holocaust. His visit inspired deep thinking about why some Germans supported the Nazi party, the culture of silence that emerged in families like his after the war, and the possibilities for remembering, repentance, and reconciliation in the wake of genocide. And then, in January 2024, Martin passed away.

37 With fewer and fewer people who were directly impacted by the Holocaust here to share their stories with us, I believe that we must lean into items in the collections at museums and in archives. And, while perpetrator materials might evoke shame or anger at times, they also have important stories to tell. If we can cultivate broader appreciation for the educational value of such materials, we may be able to maintain better records of provenance to further enrich the lessons they have to teach us. All of these artifacts help to tell a nuanced story about the past as we work to avoid the greatest "disgrace" of all—forgetting or denying what happened.

Endnote:

38 I want to express my gratitude to those who facilitated the workshop on "Interrogating the Sacred: Holocaust Objects and Their Care" at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum during August 2023. Our workshop leaders, Dr. Laura Levitt and Dr. Oren Stier, skillfully guided our group through conversations about what makes an object "sacred" and what it means to care for such objects. They did so with deep intelligence and an even deeper generosity of spirit. Staff and affiliates of the Program on Ethics, Religion, and the Holocaust at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum were also gracious in sharing their time and expertise during the workshop. Dr. Rebecca Carter-Chand and Julia Liden played an especially critical role in the work we accomplished as did Dr. Robert M. Ehrenreich, Jane E. Klinger, and the dozens of other Museum staff members who we met during those two weeks. I also am grateful to the other workshop participants for the rich conversations and questions that we shared. Experiences like these are a rare gift. In my work at Keene State College, I am indebted to Dr. Rodney Obien, Caitlin Dionne, Dr. Celia Rabinowitz, Dr. Dana Smith, Michele Kuiawa, and student interns such as Amarrah Gates, all of whom have been powerful conversation partners as we collectively navigate the special collection in Holocaust and Genocide Studies. Additional thanks go to two anonymous reviewers whose suggestions strengthened the final version of this piece.

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NOTES

1 Amy Sodaro, *Exhibiting Atrocity: Memorial Museums and the Politics of Past Violence* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2018), 151.

2 Sodaro, *Exhibiting Atrocity*, 159.

3 "To Remember . . . and to Teach," Cohen Institute for Holocaust and Genocide Studies, accessed November 2, 2025, **https://www.keene.edu/academics/cchgs/**

4 "Holocaust and Genocide Studies," Special Collections, Keene State College, accessed April 19, 2025, **https://commons.keene.edu/s/KSCArchive/page/HGS**.

5 "Donate to the Collections," United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, accessed April 19, 2025, **https://www.ushmm.org/collections/the-museums-collections/donate-to-the-collections**.

6 Any identifying information pertaining to students, donors, and others mentioned in this piece has been anonymized or altered to protect their anonymity.

7 James E. McCarroll, Arthur S. Blank, and Kathryn Hill, "Working with traumatic material: Effects on Holocaust Memorial Museum staff," *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry* 65, no. 1 (1995): 66–75. doi:10.1037/h0079595.

8 Peter Hayes, Why?: *Explaining the Holocaust* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2017).

9 Hayes, *Why?*, xiii.

10 Ibid.

11 Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (London: Routledge, 1966).

12 Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, 2.

13 See, for example Robert M. Ehrenreich and Tim Cole, "The Perpetrator-Bystander-Victim Constellation: Rethinking Genocidal Relationships," *Human Organization* 64, no. 3 (2005): 213-224.

14 This is not an unfounded concern. The staff at a Holocaust Center in Detroit redesigned parts of their space—and removed a large photo of Hitler entirely—after some visitors were caught giving the Nazi salute and engaging in other problematic forms of behavior. Ralph Blumenthal, "One Hope From Changes at This Holocaust Museum: Fewer Nazi Selfies," *The New York Times*, published online January 26, 2024, accessed April 19, 2025, **https://www.nytimes.com/2024/01/26/arts/design/**

zekelman-holocaust-center-detroit.html.

15 "One of the three milk cans used by Warsaw ghetto historian Emanuel Ringelblum to store and preserve the secret 'Oneg Shabbat' ghetto archives," United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, last updated December 10, 2004, accessed April 19, 2025, https://collections.ushmm.org/search/catalog/pa1092486.

16 "Nazi red flag with a swastika with a price tag found by a US soldier in an abandoned German store," United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, last modified January 2, 2025, accessed April 19, 2025, https://collections.ushmm.org/search/catalog/irn36423.

17 The conservation team at the Museum opted to remove the price tag from the flag because, over time, the contact between different materials—fabric and paper—would have led to the deterioration of one or both. Thus, the price tag is now stored in a small clear envelope alongside the flag (see Fig. 6).

18 "Unused Nazi banner with a swastika found by Earl Kinne," United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, last modified October 13, 2024, accessed April 19, 2025, https://collections.ushmm.org/search/catalog/irn522575.

19 "Nazi flag from taken from Dachau and signed by over 50 US soldiers," United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, last modified January 2, 2024, accessed April 19, 2025, https://collections.ushmm.org/search/catalog/irn518590.

Suggestions for Further Reading

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