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EMORIA

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ABOUT THE FATE OF POLES IN THE CAMP AND THE STORY OF

"THE LOST SHTETL".
OPENING THE NEW
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GRANT CALL
WINNERS 2024

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FAREWELL TO TAD TAUBE

We invite all of you to work closely with us. We would be grateful to receive information about events, projects, publications, exhibitions, conferences or research that we should share with our readers. We also accept proposals for articles.

Paweł Sawicki, Editor-in-Chief

Our e-mail: memoria@auschwitz.org

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NEW PERMANENT EXHIBITION DEDICATED TO THE FATE OF POLES AT KL AUSCHWITZ

On 2 September, a new permanent exhibition dedicated to the fate of Poles in the German Nazi camp Auschwitz was opened in Block 15 on the grounds of the former Auschwitz I camp. It consists of two parts: "Poles in KL Auschwitz" and "In the Shadow of Death – Oświęcim during the German Occupation 1939–1945."

The exhibition was authored by Dr. Piotr Setkiewicz, head of the Auschwitz Museum Research Center. The designers were the consortium Adventure Sławomir Mazan, Jarema Szandar Sp. J., Koza Nostra Studio sp. z o.o. and Biuro Usług Architektonicznych "Profil" sp. z o.o.

Present at the opening were five Auschwitz Survivors: Barbara Doniecka, Bronisława Horowitz-Karakulska, Ewa Machaj-Antosiewicz, Bogdan Bartnikowski, and Janusz Rudnicki.

"This exhibition, which is extremely valuable, tells the whole story of Poles in Auschwitz. What is most important to me is that it also speaks about the beginnings of this camp, which existed from 1940. The history of the Holocaust is an unimaginable tragedy, but after all, the Holocaust began two years later, while from 1940 Poles were being murdered here, in these very streets, and it lasted until the very last moments of the camp. This exhibition documents our fate," said Bogdan Bartnikowski.

The project was financed thanks to extraordinary support from the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage of Poland, amounting to just over 22.5 million PLN. At the opening, Deputy Minister of Culture Bożena Żelazowska spoke: "A permanent exhibition is an extremely





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The project was financed thanks to extraordinary support from the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage of Poland, amounting to just over 22.5 million PLN. At the opening, Deputy Minister of Culture Bożena Żelazowska spoke: "A permanent exhibition is an extremely demanding undertaking, something that will remain for many years, something to which those who see it will return. Above all, it is important also for our youth, who are with us today, which gives us great joy."

She also read a letter addressed to participants of the event by the Minister of Culture and National Heritage, Marta Cienkowska: "I wish to thank the Museum's director, Dr. Piotr Cywiński, as well as all the creators of the new exhibition, its curator Dr. Piotr Setkiewicz, project coordinator Robert Płaczek, and all staff and volunteers involved in carrying out this endeavor. Thanks to your work, an exhibition has been created that not only commemorates, but also



people deported from a given country or national group. They are not independent entities detached from context – rather, they function as a complement to the main exhibition and the guides' narrative. They co-create the exhibitionary introduction to understanding the historical post-camp space. Because of both content and location, the exhibition dedicated to the history of Poles in KL Auschwitz is a very good introduction before entering the authentic grounds and hearing the story told by guides," emphasized Robert Płaczek, who coordinated the work on the exhibition.

In the introduction to the exhibition catalog, Museum Director Dr. Piotr Cywiński wrote: "If during the pre-war period the Oświęcim region lay almost on the southwestern border of Poland, then the Auschwitz camp—although built on territory incorporated into Germany—lies at the very heart of the Polish experience of the Second World War."

Of the approximately 1.3 million people deported to KL Auschwitz, the largest group were Polish citizens – mainly Jews, victims of Hitler's racist policies, and Poles who were sent to the camp as a result of repressive actions carried out by the German authorities. The first prisoners who arrived at Auschwitz in June 1940 were Poles – political prisoners, and from the spring of 1942, large transports of Polish Jews began arriving. In the spring of 1943, Roma from Silesia, Greater Poland, and the Białystok region were also deported.

In addition, transports included people who had fled forced labor, including Ukrainians and Belarusians – Polish citizens from the eastern provinces of the Second Republic. In total, around 450,000 people were deported.

"After the war, Auschwitz became a symbol of collective martyrdom for Poles, unprecedented in the thousand-year history of the Polish state. The former camp terrain, which became the Memorial, served as a reminder to subsequent generations of a time when the Polish nation

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INDUSTRIAL PARK PERMANENTLY DESTROYS SITE OF FORMER HIRTENBERG CONCENTRATION CAMP

Since 2021, after building plans became known, the Mauthausen Memorial and the Mauthausen Committee Austria, together with the local initiative Mauthausen Memorial – Hirtenberg Subcamp, have been strongly advocating for the preservation of artifacts and remembrance of the victims of the Hirtenberg women’s concentration camp. Around 400 women and girls were imprisoned here and forced into labor. This was one of only two larger subcamps with exclusively female prisoners, and the only one where substantial historical remains still existed—the other, Lenzing, was demolished after the war.

Construction on the former camp site will inevitably destroy its material traces, erase another place of Nazi terror, and consign it to oblivion. For this reason, together with the Jewish Community of Vienna and the local initiative, we appealed to abandon the plans to erect commercial halls at this very location. Instead, the site should be used to create a dignified place of remembrance together with the local memorial initiatives and ourselves. The Mauthausen Memorial is already involved in several initiatives to preserve remains of former subcamps, is currently carrying out the large-scale redesign of the Gusen Memorial, and continues to support further development of the site in Leobersdorf.

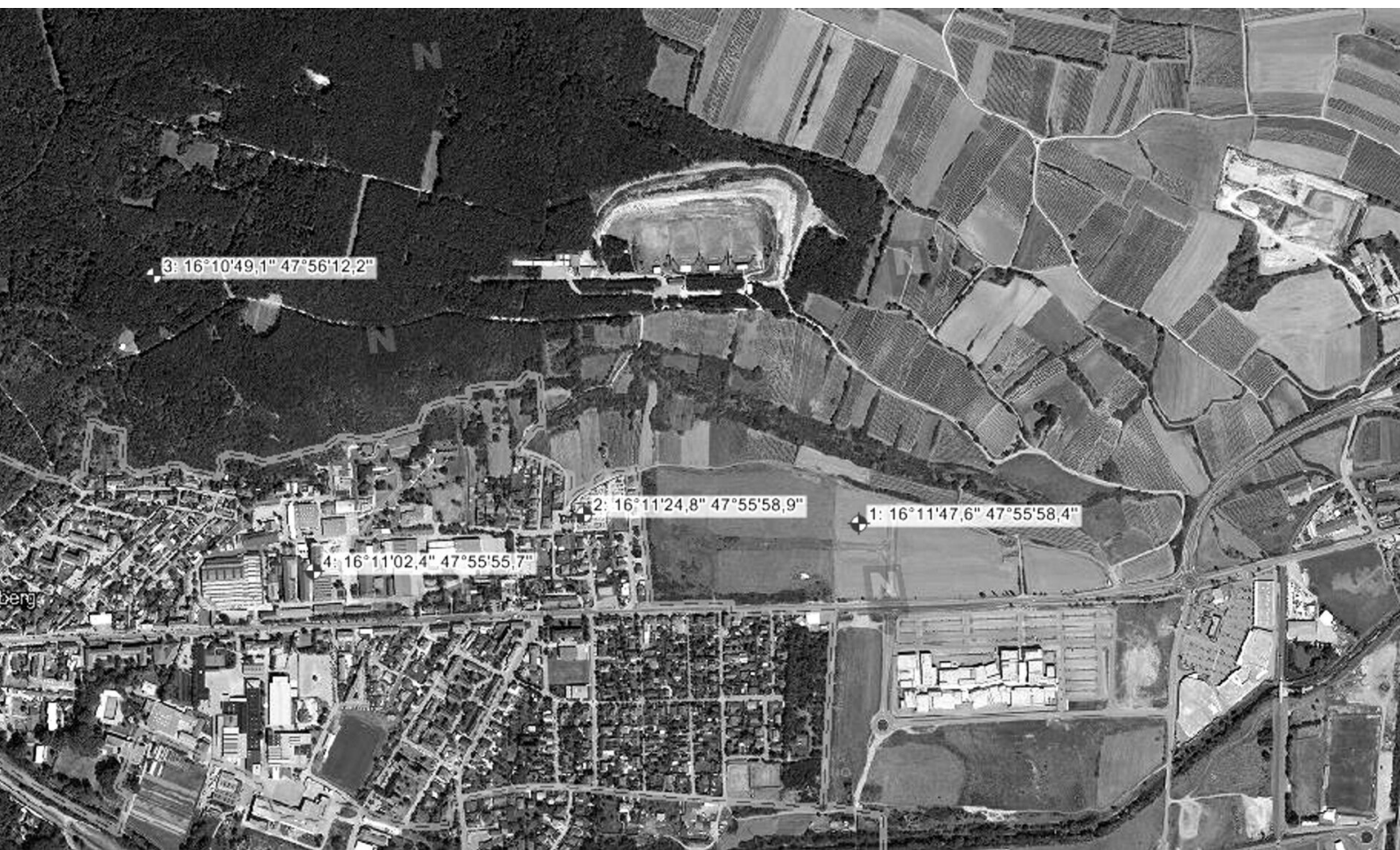
In a time after direct testimony from survivors, architectural remnants are becoming increasingly important. We therefore see it as our duty to use the potential of these rare remains for education in cooperation with locally engaged people—as is currently the case in Guntramsdorf—or at least to defend them against commercial interests that make dignified commemoration impossible.

The mistakes made after 1945—when many camp sites were demolished and built over—should not be repeated. Every remnant of a former concentration camp bears witness to the injustice that occurred there and is worthy of preservation. We cannot understand contrary assessments. The argument that the remains of the Hirtenberg camp are “from today’s perspective” not sufficient to warrant protection should not be a free pass to destroy them and their topographical context irretrievably.

“It is telling that in 2025, of all years—the anniversary year in which we commemorate 80 years of liberation—such a backward step is being taken, subordinating the memory of Nazi victims to financial interests by building over the site of their suffering,” said Willi Mernyi, chairman of the Mauthausen Committee Austria. “Clearly, much work remains to be done to raise awareness.”

The Mauthausen Memorial was informed only very briefly and half-heartedly on August 15 about a site inspection on August 20, at which we learned that construction would begin immediately—the very next day.

This approach leaves no doubt that there is no willingness to face historical responsibility and that further discussion is to be suppressed. We must now acknowledge that the site of the former Hirtenberg camp is lost and will no longer hold any social relevance in the future. All the more important it becomes to work with energy and combined efforts to ensure that the women and girls who were



Satellite Camp Hirtenberg | Mauthausen Guides - Mauthausen Komitee Österreich

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"THE LOST SHTETL". OPENING THE NEWS MUSEUM IN ŠEDUVA LITHUANIA

On September 20, the Šeduva Jewish History Museum "Lost Shtetl" will officially open its doors. As the largest museum in the Baltics dedicated to shtetl culture and history, it will offer free admission during its first year, allowing visitors to explore the exhibits, take guided tours, and participate in educational activities. Next to the museum, guests will also find the newly unveiled Memory Park – a striking living memorial designed by Italian landscape architects Enea Landscape Architecture, honoring the memory of Šeduva's once-vibrant Jewish community.

"The museum's opening to the public and its first visitors mark the culmination of a long and collaborative journey involving hundreds of individuals – experts, creatives, and historians from Lithuania, the United States, the Netherlands, Poland, Finland, and Switzerland. On behalf of the entire team, I want to thank everyone of – each contribution that has helped reconstruct the lost shtetl of Šeduva, restoring the faces and names of a community that once lived here and was tragically destroyed. This is the core mission of the museum – and I hope every visitor leaves carrying at least one name, one story of someone who once lived here. May these names never be forgotten again," says Jonas Dovydaitis, Director of The Lost Shtetl museum.

A Decade-Long Project of Remembrance

The creation of this museum dedicated to preserving shtetl culture and memory has spanned over a decade. The idea was developed and realized by an international team of historians, architects, and Jewish cultural experts.

Innovative curatorial solutions were harmonized with the architectural vision of renowned Finnish architect Rainer Mahlamäki. The museum structure resembles a small town, its rooftops visible from afar across the flat Lithuanian landscape. While architecturally unified, the museum encompasses a series of distinct exhibition halls beneath the gabled roofs of "individual houses," each designed to house a specific part of the exhibition.

The exhibition design was created by Ralph Appelbaum Associates (RAA), a U.S.-based firm known for designing the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C. For this project, the RAA team drew inspiration from Grigory Kanovich's novel "Shtetl Love Song," which tells the story of another lost shtetl – Jonava.

A Walk Through a Town That No Longer Exists

The word "shtetl" is rarely heard today, yet over 200 shtetls once dotted the Lithuanian landscape just over 80 years ago. Derived from Yiddish, the word means "small town" – and it is how Jews referred to their local communities. These were not separate enclaves but the same towns and villages also inhabited by Lithuanians.

"For centuries, Lithuanians and Jews lived side by side in these towns – but the Holocaust obliterated Lithuania's Jewish population. With their destruction, the shtetl disappeared as well," says Sandra Petrukonytė, the museum's Chief Curator.

According to her, the museum's very name – The Lost Shtetl – encapsulates its essence: it tells the story of what no longer exists. "You cannot recount the history of the Šeduva shtetl without speaking of how the Jewish community that lived here was annihilated."



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"The Holocaust is the darkest part of the narrative – one we cannot skip over or sugarcoat. We've worked with historians to present the facts, leaving space for visitors to draw their own conclusions. The exhibition includes historical photos, documents, eyewitness testimonies, and silent witnesses – four WWII-era shell casings found during the 2015 restoration of the Liaudiškiai mass grave site," says Petrukonytė.

She stresses that original historical artifacts form the foundation of the museum – many donated or loaned by descendants of Šeduva's Jews, institutions, and other museums. Yet, modern technology and interactive features are also used. Each gallery has its own soundscape – some even feature unique scents or changes in temperature. Stories unfold on screens through video and audio. One of the most powerful experiences awaits in the "People of the Book" gallery, which resembles a synagogue and features an immersive installation showcasing Judaic symbols and sounds.

Storytelling Through Film

Some stories are told through the language of cinema. The museum commissioned a series of documentary re-enactment films that chronicle the life of a Jewish family from Šeduva. The opening film is narrated in Lithuanian by actress Jovita Jankelaitytė and in English by renowned Jewish-American actor Liev Schreiber, whose family hails from Ukraine. The films were directed by Roberta Grossman, a member of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences.

"We are honored to have Roberta Grossman involved. Her films bring the shtetl of Šeduva to life, centering on characters inspired by real historical figures. Through these films, visitors follow the full life story of Paja-Chaja and her daughter Frida, experiencing the milestones of a Jewish family's life – a story that, sadly, ends with the Holocaust," Petrukonytė shares.





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Visitor Information

The Lost Shtetl Museum reminds guests that the museum has a limited visitor capacity at any given time. To plan your visit, please reserve a free ticket in advance for individual or group visits. The museum opens to the public on September 20.

More information is available at www.lostshtetl.com or by phone at +370 628 01 742 (Museum Information Center).

IHRA GRANT CALL WINNERS 2024

We are pleased to announce the winners of the 2024 IHRA Grant Program. These 11 projects will collect and publish new survivor and witness testimonies, develop new toolkits and guidelines for educators and policymakers, tackle online Holocaust distortion, and locate and publish undiscovered historical archives.

This year, the IHRA Grant Program once again drew applications from new organizations who had not previously worked with us. These projects are aligned with one of two central IHRA objectives: safeguarding the record of the Holocaust and the genocide of the Roma, and countering distortion.

Since 2001, the IHRA's Grant Program has played a critical role in advancing Holocaust remembrance, education, and research across its Member Countries and beyond. Following an external evaluation and a major relaunch in 2023, the program was further strengthened with additional strategic focus, improved outreach, and a simpler application process.

Recording the Bessarabian "Roads of Death"

The project will digitally document existing information and monuments of the "Roads of Death" in Northern Moldova and from Chisinau to Transnistria, honoring the memory of 80,000 Jews who died there. The project focuses on mapping Moldavian sites connected to the Holocaust, including killing sites. Once these sites are mapped, they will be shared as part of a virtual tour and exhibition, involving field research, interviews, and the translation of content into multiple languages. The tour will also take place on site, with the visits of several groups of people who will physically walk the routes. With the tour and exhibition available physically in Moldova and globally via the internet, the project will commemorate the Holocaust in Moldova, combat Holocaust distortion, and contribute to Yad Vashem's virtual exhibitions.

Applicant: Agudath Israel in Moldova.

Memory of the Roma genocide in Eastern Europe

The project aims to discover archival documents and establish evidence of the genocide of the Roma in Eastern Europe during the Second World War. The project team will collect testimonies from the oldest surviving generation of Roma individuals across all partner countries, establish archives to preserve personal histories, and identify execution and mass grave sites within these regions. A special toolkit will be created to support educators and researchers in multiple languages. The project's online collection will include selected archival documents, recorded testimonies of individual witnesses, and a list of identified killing sites. These materials will be made available on a website featuring an interactive map illustrating the project's findings. Seeking to establish proper memorials at genocide sites, the project promotes public recognition of the genocide of the Roma in Eastern Europe.

Applicant: Roma Community Center (RCC)

Holocaust and Roma genocide: education for and about Balkan region

The project consists of four online courses on the Holocaust and the Roma genocide, antisemitism, and antigypsyism in the Balkan region, along with an in-person seminar in



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Preserving history: the Riga Jewish Ghetto model

The project will result in the creation of a detailed model of the Riga Jewish Ghetto during the Second World War. The former Riga Ghetto territory is a rare piece of living history, spans nearly 2500 square meters, and has since been transformed into a residential area. The scale of the model will not only capture the layout and dimensions of the area accurately but will also offer visitors a comprehensive understanding of life in the ghetto through the usage of digital media and other features. Information will be gathered through research in Latvian and foreign archives. The completed model will become part of the permanent exhibition at the Riga Ghetto Museum in Latvia. The project also includes the creation of a website with the 3D model, digital content alongside traditional forms of interaction with visitors at the Museum, educational programmes, and scientific publications.

Applicant: Shamir Association

Research into the persecution of Roma, Sinte, Manouches, Gitanos, Yéniches and travellers in France from 1940 to 1946. Collection of written and oral testimonies (2019-2025)

The project will result in a collection of filmed, oral, and written testimonies from witnesses and witness descendants of the persecution of Roma communities in France during the Second World War. 40 interviews have been filmed with the last living witnesses and descendants of witnesses since 2019. The project has brought together a collection of recorded or written testimonies from 33 testimonial collections, representing several hundred hours of audiovisual recordings and involving around 280 witnesses. The collection will be permanently preserved at the French National Archives. A website will be created to feature project objectives, achievements, testimony extracts, and historical data. The project will symbolically mark the entry of the featured testimonies into the heart of French national memory.

Applicant: École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales/School of Advanced Studies in Social Sciences (EHESS)

Safeguarding oral history of the genocide of Roma in Ukraine

This project will be a continuation of the work that ARCA started in 2022 in collaboration with "Aid Network for Survivors of Nazi Persecution in Ukraine." A database was established that includes contacts of over 100 Roma Holocaust survivors in Ukraine, and 8 survivors among them already were interviewed during 2023 with the support of the EVZ fund. The project will result in the creation of a digital archive of video and audio testimonies of Roma survivors collected during individual recording sessions across Ukraine. The project aims at recording 30 interviews by visiting the residences of elderly survivors. Using testimonies, the team will plan online and offline workshops with the project partners. The project ensures the preservation of at-risk archival materials and engages decision-makers to promote recognition of the Roma genocide in Ukraine during the Second World War.

Applicant: Youth Agency for the Advocacy of Roma Culture "ARCA"

Using non-invasive technologies to further explore the history of Holocaust sites in Latvia

This project will safeguard the Holocaust record by mapping and documenting unidentified and poorly known Holocaust-related areas, including killing sites, in Latvia and Lithuania. It will use a multidisciplinary approach to find and analyze remnant features of Holocaust related sites using non-invasive technologies such as

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"VOICES(S) OF ALINA SZAPOCZNIKOW"

AT THE POLIN MUSEUM

The POLIN Museum invites you to explore an exhibition featuring the sculptures of Alina Szapocznikow, a Holocaust Survivor, a pioneer of modern women's art and one of the most original contemporary artists. The intimate exhibition, titled 'The Voice (s) of Alina Szapocznikow', is open until March 9, 2026, and includes the premiere presentation of a new addition to the museum's collection. The exhibition is curated by Dr Renata Piątkowska.

"The Voice(s) of Alina Szapocznikow" showcases two original sculptures: 'Vowels' and 'Consonants'. These sister works, created in 1962, are reunited for the first time in many years. One of the pieces, "Vowel", will remain in Poland permanently as part of the POLIN Museum Collection.

This exhibition not only marks the first public display of a new work from the collection but also offers a glimpse into how the artist utilised the organic forms of stone, influenced by nature, in the early 1960s. Szapocznikow analysed the crevices and edges of stone as a valuable source of inspiration for her sculptural creations, shaping her unique artistic language.

In her work, we can hear and pronounce sounds that Szapocznikow attempted to capture in stone. "Vowel" is a sandstone block sculpted into the shape of the letter U, with a crevice filled by an organic form cast in bronze. This piece is complemented in both content and history by "Consonant", which is made from the same material and was created in the same year.

The sculpture exhibition is accompanied by a screening of Krzysztof Tchórzewski's film, which documents the artist's studio in its original state, right after her death.

This film not only provides a broader context for the sculptures on display but also invites reflection on the artist's life and work in relation to the Holocaust.

Alina Szapocznikow was born in 1926 in Kalisz and passed away in 1973 in Praz Coutant near Paris. Before the war, she lived in Pabianice. From 1940 to 1942, she, along with her mother and brother, spent time in the local ghetto. They were later sent to the Łódź ghetto and then transported through Auschwitz to the camps in Bergen-Belsen and Theresienstadt. After the war, she studied art in Prague and France. In the early 1950s, she returned to Poland, where she continued her artistic career.

Alina Szapocznikow was a highly original contemporary sculptor. Drawing on her personal experience of many years battling an incurable disease, she developed a unique language of forms to reflect the changes occurring in the human body. She boldly experimented with new materials, and thanks to these innovations, she created poignant and intimate works that possess rare expressive power.

Throughout her diverse body of work, the artist remained true to herself.

"I enjoy working with malleable materials, where every touch leaves a mark. [...] This physical contact gives me the sensation of transferring myself into the sculpture" - she stated in a 1961 interview with "Zwierciadło" magazine.



MUSINGS ON SCIENTIFIC MEMORY CULTURE

Fellowships at Auschwitz for the Study of Professional Ethics (FASPE) promotes ethical leadership for today's professionals through annual fellowships, ethical leadership trainings, and symposia, among other means. Each year, FASPE awards 80 to 90 fellowships to graduate students and early-career professionals in six fields: Business, Clergy & Religious Leaders, Design & Technology, Journalism, Law, and Medicine. Fellowships begin with immersive, site-specific study in Germany and Poland, including at Auschwitz and other historically significant sites associated with Nazi-era professionals. While there, fellows study Nazi-era professionals' surprisingly mundane and familiar motivations and decision-making as a reflection-based framework to apply to ethical pitfalls in their own lives. We find that the power of place translates history into the present, creating urgency in ethical reflection.

Each month one of our fellows publishes a piece in Memoria. Their work reflects FASPE's unique approach to professional ethics and highlights the need for thoughtful ethical reflection today.

The night after visiting Auschwitz I, I sat in my hotel room and stared at a diagram depicting a wastewater outflow system constructed there. This figure, so similar to ones I had calculated in multiple fluid mechanics classes, stopped me in my tracks and lingered at the periphery of my mind for the rest of my time in Poland. I felt that my relationship with chemical engineering had changed. And yet, upon my return to Chicago, it was disturbingly easy to let the experiences and conversations fostered by the FASPE program fade into the background of daily life.

The first few days were filled with little reminders. I nearly cried cooking dinner two days after returning because the image of the pots and pans brought to Auschwitz by Jewish families in hope of a life afterwards flashed before my eyes. But as soon as I stepped back into the workplace, those thoughts receded, replaced by more mundane concerns about experiment timelines and conference preparations. This rapid ability to disconnect from painful truths has left me contemplating the role of memory in science.

We decouple history and contemporary life no matter the society we come from or our professional field. The Trail of Tears ran through my hometown. Small metal placards dot the streets, marking the historic route alongside modern roads and the occasional bike path. One of my childhood homes stood less than 700 feet from the route. Despite this fact, no history class mentioned a connection between our town and the Trail. I did not even know a memorial park stood across the street from my high school until earlier this year.

In Berlin, buildings that used to house forced laborers during the Nazi regime now serve as bowling alleys, bonsai tree shops, and kindergartens. Only through recent efforts have euthanasia sites, labor camps, and other locations of atrocities been converted into documentation centers and memorials. Even with bronze Stolpersteine, or stumbling blocks embedded in the sidewalks, it is easy to avoid directly facing the history of the city.

Separated by time and an ocean, the relationships each society has cultivated with its past ethnic cleansing and genocide resemble one another. There is a desire to forget, a hope that



Science for the sake of science	"I'm just a lab rat"	Complaining about regulations	Primarily funded by defense or industry grants	Casual acceptance of unethical systems
Blatant product endorsement	Strong advocacy for everything open source	Taking photos of confidential slides or posters	No mention of external applications	Euphemistic language
Gratuitous cost mentions (savings or amount spent)	Passing off big-picture responsibility to supervisors	FREE SPACE	Dual-use research	Strong derision directed at anything open source
Explicit military applications	No consideration of resource provenance	"Move fast; break things"	Depicting a problematic application as a great thing	"I just want to do xyz because it's cool"
"I just want to build a platform for the community to use"	Concerning application(s) never addressed	Hiding the science behind a paywall, IP, or other copyright	Unnecessary reliance on AI or big data	No credit to the people who did the work

Note: Satisfying any of these squares does not inherently mean the work or presenter is unethical. Instead, this bingo card is meant to draw attention to potential pitfalls or warning signs in scientific development and encourage questions about professional ethics in STEM.

reckoning with the fact that past events are deeply intertwined with the present. Modern life is built on these painful foundations. This fact includes our science and technology.

At some point in their education, most engineers are forced to grapple with times when technology has caused harm. From Bhopal to Tuskegee, every field has its incidents. The way we discuss these events varies substantially depending on who is participating in the conversation, but they are almost always presented as single moments in history. Classes neatly summarize what happened, where past technologists went wrong, and the design lessons that can be learned from previous mistakes. This method of framing tragedies outside their full historical contexts prevents us from understanding the foundations on which our current work is based.

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Universities often try to bridge this gap between technology and context by requiring engineering majors to take humanities courses. Many engineering students respond by doing the bare minimum to pass these classes with an acceptable GPA. Modern STEM jobs primarily reward technological prowess, so there is no incentive for scientists or engineers to learn about anything else. From the start, we have constructed this system to discourage the contextualization of science.

The intricacy of scientific thought and practice also contributes to this disconnect. Science is too complicated to consider every single detail at every single level. As we dive into the technical development process, a necessary reliance on numbers and abstract processes emerges. Teams focusing on hyper-specific subject areas solve problems with varying levels of inter-team communication. These mechanisms, which we must apply to make any progress, obscure our impact.

Proponents of this engineering model underscore the significant advances modern science has made. These improvements in our quality of life and access to food, medicine, and technology are undeniable. But valuing technological advancement above all else creates an environment in which scientists and engineers are incentivized to forget. Names like Wernher von Braun, J. Marion Sims, and James Watson continue to adorn buildings, and their respective fields build upon that influence. We celebrate scientific figures for their discoveries while simultaneously ignoring the circumstances in which those discoveries were made.

There are myriad issues associated with forgetting or simply never learning the history of science. We often neglect to attend to the impact of each mistake or disproven, bigoted idea within the overall march of progress. Seemingly innocuous design choices can then further encode decades of biased decisions without technologists realizing. Viewing tragic events or problematic research as isolated moments prevents us from exploring the foundations of our disciplines and questioning our assumptions about how science should be done and who can benefit from it. If we refuse to acknowledge this history and the damage science can cause, we will inevitably perpetuate further harm.

Two weeks after returning from the FASPE trip, I attended a synthetic biology conference. The

2026 Fellowships Now Accepting Applications

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SCIENTIFIC CONFERENCE

"DEATH TRAINS"

The Sobibór Museum and Memorial recently hosted a scientific conference titled "Death Trains – Rail Transport to German Extermination Camps. Current Knowledge and Research Proposals". From September 8 to 10, researchers, historians and museum curators came together to discuss the crucial role that railways played in the systematic extermination of Jews. Between 1942 and 1944, millions of Jews from across Europe were transported by train to various death and concentration camps.

The conference kicked off on September 8 with a panel discussion entitled "40 Years After 'Shoah'. The Holocaust Through the Lens of Claude Lanzmann's Documentary". Panellists Bartosz Kwieciński (Jagiellonian University), Katarzyna Person (Warsaw Ghetto Museum) and Piotr Witek (Maria Curie-Skłodowska University) explored the artistic significance of the film and its profound influence on shaping European memory of the Holocaust. They also tackled some of the criticisms that the documentary has faced, particularly within Poland. Director of the Majdanek State Museum (PMM), Tomasz Kranz, moderated the discussion, emphasising that "it's essential to understand that the victims' ordeal began much earlier – in the places of deportation where the trains set off".

The programme for the next two days of the conference included the following presentations:

- Marcin Przegiętka, IPN (Institute of National Remembrance), Models of cooperation between the Reich Railways, the Eastern Railway, and the SS and police regarding the transportation of displaced persons to the GG (General Government), as well as prisoners to concentration and extermination camps.
- Jan Hlavinka (Holocaust Documentation Centre in Bratislava), From Slovakia to District Lublin: The Mass Deportations of Slovak Jews during Operation Reinhardt
- Jakub Strýček (Slezské univerzity v Opavě), Organisation and course of deportations from the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia to the Lublin District.
- Dariusz Libionka (PMM), Recognising transports to the "Operation Reinhardt" and Auschwitz-Birkenau death camps by the intelligence structures of the Polish Underground State
- Andrzej Grzegorzczak (Museum of Polish Children - victims of totalitarianism in Łódź), The role of the railways in the Wartheland during the deportation of Jews to the extermination camp in Chełmno nad Nerem.
- Bartłomiej Grzanka (Museum of the former German extermination camp Kulmhof in Chełmno nad Nerem), "After a short drive we stop at the KULMHOF station". The role of the Sompolno-Dąbie section of the Kujawska Kolej Dojazdowa (Kujawska Commuter Railway) in the transport of victims to the German extermination camp in Chełmno
- Stefan Michał Marcinkiewicz (University of Warmia and Mazury in Olsztyn), "PJ-39" (16 XII 1942) and „RSHA Augustow" (3 II 1943). Death trains from Prostki



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AUSCHWITZ PLAN

We may see and feel the fullest and irrefutable inhumanity of Auschwitz concentration camp.

Piotr M. A. Cywiński, Director of the Auschwitz Memorial.

-I-

In The Book of Names of the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum, among more than 4,800,000 names, our gaze falls on one name and two dates: Madrich Berliner Luftig (2-8-1938 / 12-9-1942)².

-II-

A young woman named Golda Luftig (1903-1942), with her parents, four brothers, and two sisters, leaves the Polish town of Chrzanów, approximately 20 kilometres from Oświęcim. Together, they head to Belgium. They settle in Antwerp. While there, they find out that the Spanish town of Guernica has been bombed by German air forces allied with the rebels against the Spanish Republic. It is April 26, 1937. This is the reason why Golda and her sisters decided to enrol in the International Brigades³. "The European left saw clearly what the democratic right chose to ignore for three years: Spain was the last bastion against the horrors of Hitlerism"⁴. Thus, and with more routes, finally the Luftig sisters arrived at the International Military Hospital of Ontinyent (Albaida Valley, Valencia, Spain). The hospital is run by the Workers' and Socialists' International and the International Federation of Trade Unions. Their duties included serving as nurses in the group of brigadiers known as "Las mamás belgas"⁵. They cared for all the wounded who arrived, also arrived those injured in the Aviazione Legionaria attack on the Xàtiva railway station (Valencia)⁶.

-III-

Golda becomes pregnant. On August 2, 1938, she gives birth to a baby girl. She will be named Madrich. They can celebrate life amidst the horrors of the Spanish Civil War. But if a life is born in an oppressed context and without freedom, then life is a gift that cannot develop⁷. The inhuman living conditions soon get worse: Golda and little Madrich are in a critical situation⁸. Writing about this mother and daughter is an act of necessary memory and resistance: "the history of Auschwitz [...] is above all, the history of people"

-IV-

Starting on January 26, 1939, after the fall of Barcelona to dictator Franco's troops¹⁰,

¹ PhD in Philosophy (Valencia, Spain).

² Throughout the article, this second date is the subject of a reflection that should not be concluded for now.

³ Tuytens, Sven, Las mamás belgas. La lucha de un grupo de enfermeras contra Franco y Hitler. Editorial El Mono Libre. 2019. Madrid. Tuytens published this study in 2017 in Dutch. The article has also been consulted is "Las brigadistas judías en la Guerra Civil: de España, rumbo a la tragedia europea", El País, 3-3-2019.

⁴ Preston, Paul, La Guerra Civil española. Penguin Random House. 2017. Page 20.

⁵ The expression is of Spanish origin; in English it would be: "The Belgian mothers".

⁶ The level of destruction and the murders were so immense that Xàtiva has also been known as the Valencian Guernica. In relation to it, Sven Tuytens offers more relevant information in the documentary he directed in relation to his book and of the same name, Las mamás belgas (2016). For additional information, the book by Joan J. Torró Martínez, Solidaritat en temps de guerra. Hospital Militar Internacional. Ontinyent 1937-1939. Institució Alfons el Magnànim-Centre Valencià d'Estudis i d'Investigació, 2023.

⁷ Eger, Edith, The Choice. Even in Hell hope can flower. Penguin Random House. 2017. UK. In a conversation between Edith Eger (1927) and a teenager, the psychologist and Holocaust survivor states: "When the only thing you can think is I don't know, that saddens me. It means you're not aware of your options. And without options or choices, you aren't really living" (page 245). In The Choice are developed reflections based on her own experiences and books The Ballerina of Auschwitz. A dramatic retelling of The Choice and The Gift.

⁸ The concept of "extreme situation" was described by Karl Jaspers in Psychological World Views to refer to situations in

-I-

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Plan Auschwitz: Bolesna materia
i Stalpersteine dla Madrich.
Kompozycja 30VI/2-VIII/2025,
Oświęcim (Polska).



¹ PhD in Philosophy (Valencia, Spain).

² Throughout the article, this second date is the subject of a reflection that should not be concluded for now.

³ Tuytens, Sven, *Las mamás belgas. La lucha de un grupo de enfermeras contra Franco y Hitler*. Editorial El Mono Libre. 2019. Madrid. Tuytens published this study in 2017 in Dutch. The article has also been consulted is "Las brigadistas judías en la Guerra Civil: de España, rumbo a la tragedia europea", *El País*, 3-3-2019.

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⁷ Eger, Edith, *The Choice. Even in Hell hope can flower*. Penguin Random House. 2017. UK. In a conversation between Edith Eger (1927) and a teenager, the psychologist and Holocaust survivor states: "When the only thing you can think is I don't know, that saddens me. It means you're not aware of your options. And without options or choices, you aren't really living" (page 245). In *The Choice* are developed reflections based on her own experiences and books *The Ballerina of Auschwitz*. A dramatic retelling of *The Choice* and *The Gift*.

⁸ The concept of "extreme situation" was described by Karl Jaspers in *Psychological World Views* to refer to situations in which life is at risk and death is a real threat. Piotr M. A. Cywiński uses this expression to focus his valuable study *Auschwitz. A Monograph on the Human*, where the author says: "Auschwitz cannot be fully understood in terms of dates, figures and facts. The history of Auschwitz is above all a massive human tragedy whose unique dimension goes beyond the confines of chronology and exists in parallel with, but apart from central historical statistics, facts and dates" (page 9).

⁹ Cywiński, Piotr M. A., *Auschwitz. A Monograph on the Human*. Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum. Oświęcim. 2023. Page 9.

¹⁰ Although quickly, like Paul Preston, Primo Levi in *The Table Periodic* (1975) also refers to the immense importance of this fact. Highlighting it enhances the relationship between World War II and the Spanish Civil War to reconstruct the journey of Madrich and his mother.

¹¹ Tuytens, Sven, *Las mamás belgas. La lucha de un grupo de enfermeras contra Franco y Hitler*. Editorial El Mono Libre. 2019. Madrid. Pages 186 and 223-225. This itinerary is also referenced in the book by Amalia Rosado Orquín, *Españolas en los Campos Nazis* (2024), Ed. Catarata. Page 289.

¹² Arendt, Hannah, *Los orígenes del totalitarismo*. Alianza Editorial. 2022. Madrid. Page 535.

-VI-

In the National Archives in Brussels, there are lists of names of those deported from the Dossin Barracks; on a wall are photographs of the 25,836 deportees. There's Golda's, but not Madrich's, as no photographs of her exist¹⁵. We will never know her face, the colour of her hair and eyes, or her smile.

-VII-

Today, on the lieu where Madrich Berliner Luftig was born, there is a memorial. It is a Stolperstein¹⁶. 10 cm x 10 cm are the dimensions of the memorial. Observing this cubic brass surface provokes our reflection. A girl's name, the dates, the names Auschwitz and Birkenau, everything merges in a conflagration. This inscription on a street pavement is a shock. One night we found a small, proportionate, colourful hopscotch board drawn with care and delicacy as an extension of the Stolperstein. We guess it wasn't made for playing, it was a fragile and defenceless exercise of memory that the rain would erase again if it weren't for these trembling words. It was like seeing a small yellow flower grow next to the barracks at Auschwitz and Birkenau or in the last few meters of the train track that came from Warsaw and stopped at the terrifying platform of the Nazi Treblinka camp. Before our eyes, a colossal and unconscious exercise in memory unfolded. This innocence continues to fragment our souls, and words are still slow to return from the silence. The image still forms in our minds as a very complex plan¹⁷. That of horror. That of the camps created by Nazi Germany. The small memorial for Madrich contains within it an enormous terrain and the abyss of millions of murdered lives. And their ashes.

-VIII-

The article's opening quote is preceded by the expression "In this respect." With this expression, Cywiński alludes to childhood and to those born in the camps¹⁸. As recorded in The Book of Names, Madrich Berliner Luftig was a girl whose life was robbed at the age of four. One day, reflection on Auschwitz

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¹⁵ Tuytens, Sven, Las mamás belgas. La lucha de un grupo de enfermeras contra Franco y Hitler. Editorial El Mono Libre. 2019. Madrid. Page 225.

¹⁶ The Stolperstein are the memory project of the artist Gunter Demnig (b. 1947).

¹⁷ This term, which appears in the title of this article, intentionally seeks to maintain the ambiguity of its meaning. One meaning is "plan," understood as the design of a space, a building, etc. Another meaning is "plan" as the organization and preparation of the most optimal way to execute an idea, a plan. This second meaning echoes the terrible Wannsee Conference (Berlin) held on January 20, 1942.

¹⁸ The allusion corresponds to the Chapters "Children" (pages 329-341) and "Births" (pages 341-351) of from the cited book of Cywiński.



Studies of Painful Mater behind the Guernica. Composition 30-VI / 2-VII / 2025, Oświęcim (Poland)

79th ANNIVERSARY OF DISCOVERING THE RINGELBLUM ARCHIVE

On September 18, 1946, the first part of the Underground Archive of the Warsaw Ghetto, now known as the Ringelblum Archive, was found amidst the ruins of the former ghetto in Warsaw.

Metal boxes hidden at 68 Nowolipki Street contained thousands of documents, including accounts, diaries, photographs, official letters, and everyday items. This collection stands as one of the most significant testimonies to the lives and extermination of Jews in occupied Poland.

The archive consists of three parts:

- The first part was discovered on 18.09. 1946.
- The second -accidentally 1.12.1950
- The third part is still missing

Today, the Underground Archive of the Warsaw Ghetto forms an essential part of the Emanuel Ringelblum Jewish Historical Institute's collection.

It represents a unique collection of documents that serves as one of the most vital testimonies to the Holocaust of Polish Jews.

In November 1940, historian Dr Emanuel Ringelblum initiated the establishment of a group known as Oneg Shabbat (Joy of the Sabbath - referring to the meetings held on Saturdays). This small group, made up of around a dozen individuals, took on the crucial task of gathering and documenting the experiences of Jews living under German occupation. The activities of Oneg Shabbat were shrouded in secrecy; the residents of the ghetto were entirely unaware of its existence. To disguise their activities, Oneg Shabbat operated under the auspices of the Jewish Social Self-Help (ŻSS), an overt organisation tolerated by the occupiers, but also engaged in extensive underground activity. The ŻSS offices were situated in the building housing the Main Judaic Library, right next to the Great Synagogue on Tłomackie Street. Since 1947, this building has served as the home of the Jewish Historical Institute and as the repository for the Ringelblum Archive.

At the beginning of 1942, as news of mass murders of Jews began to emerge in Warsaw, the activities of Oneg Shabbat took a significant turn. Rather than collect material for a comprehensive monograph about Jewish life in Poland, the group redirected its efforts to document the extermination of Jewish communities and disseminate this crucial information to the public. They maintained connections with the Polish resistance movement (including the Government Delegation for Poland) and provided them with copies of the documentation they had gathered. By 1942, Oneg Shabbat's reports on the Holocaust had reached the West through various Polish and Jewish organisations.

Oneg Shabbat employed modern methods for collecting scientific materials. The team prepared questionnaires and outlines in advance, which served as the basis for accounts and studies. Care was taken to ensure that the collected information provided a complete and objective picture of reality, including all relevant facts and details. For selected localities, efforts were made to gather various types of documents and reports. Notes were taken during interviews and later used to write more detailed reports. The Archive included original



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EXPLORING HOLOCAUST LITERATURE IN THE CLASSROOM

Holocaust literature can immerse students in the past, helping them consider how the events of the Holocaust affected people and communities. During this free virtual program, seasoned educators will discuss the importance of incorporating accurate historical context when teaching about the Holocaust in middle and high school classrooms.

The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum invites to a virtual event on October 23, 2005 (7 p.m. ET).

The program will highlight instructional strategies that strengthen literacy skills and will explore resources based on the Museum's primary source collection that help students understand how and why the Holocaust happened.

REGISTRATION ONLINE

After registering, on the confirmation page and in your confirmation email, you will receive the virtual event link to watch the program.

Key Takeaways:

- Approaches for learning essential historical context while building literacy skills
- Effective strategies to develop key skills, such as close reading, writing, analysis, research, listening, speaking, and reflection
- Introduction to foundational teaching resources supporting the use of Holocaust literature
- Information about professional development opportunities
- Advantages of cross-curricular connections

Panelists will share strategies for examining Holocaust literature. For example, Lois Lowry's *Number the Stars* is one of many valuable works that can engage students in the classroom. To support the discussion, a copy of *Number the Stars* will be mailed directly to program registrants (available for educators with a US or US territory mailing address).

Panelists:

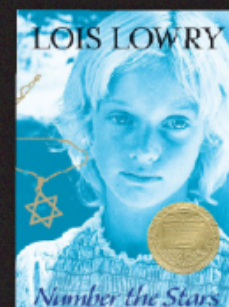
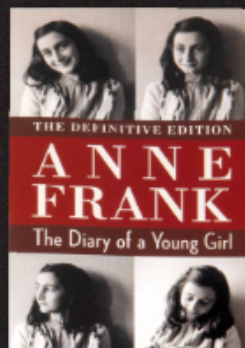
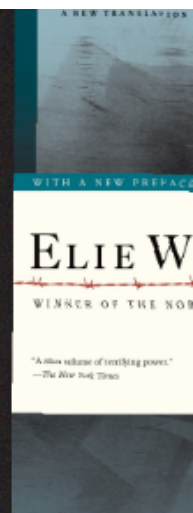
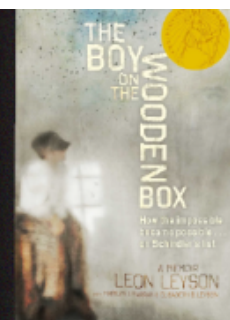
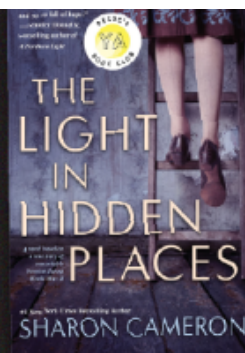
Kim Blevins-Relleva, Educator Programs Manager, William Levine Family Institute for Holocaust Education, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

Sarah Schurman, High School English Teacher, Fairfax County Public Schools, Virginia; Museum Teacher Fellow

Dorian Stuber, English Professor Emeritus, Hendrix College, Conway, Arkansas;

VIRTUAL EVENT

Exploring Holocaust Literature in the Classroom



FAREWELL TO TAD TAUBE

It is with great sadness that we share the news of the passing of our dear friend Tad Taube, an American businessman and philanthropist born in Krakow. He was one of the three founding donors of the POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews and a generous supporter of our Association, the Jewish Historical Institute, and numerous other institutions, projects, and initiatives in Poland, the United States and Israel.

Tad Taube was the founder and president of Taube Philanthropies, which includes the Taube Family Foundation and the Taube Foundation for Jewish Life and Culture. Additionally, he served as the long-time president of the Koret Foundation and was the president and founder of Woodmont Companies, a real estate investment and management firm. He was president and CEO of Koracorp Industries from 1973 until the company's merger with Levi Strauss in 1979.

For nearly 30 years, Tad was dedicated to rebuilding Jewish life in Poland and enhancing relations between Poland and both the Jewish and American communities, including serving as the Honorary Consul of the Republic of Poland in California. In recognition of his remarkable contributions, he was awarded the Commander's Cross of the Order of Merit of the Republic of Poland by the President of Poland in 2004. In 2018, he received an honorary doctorate from the Jagiellonian University in Cracow.

"The realisation of the vision for the Museum of the History of Polish Jews feels like a dream come true for me.

In 1939, I left Poland as a young boy, miraculously escaping the horrors of the Holocaust. As I built my life in the United States, I began to reconnect with my past and focus on revitalising Jewish culture in Poland, particularly through this museum. Now, I visit Poland as an American citizen, a leader in the Jewish community, and as the Honorary Consul of Poland, dedicated to the mission of the Museum of the History of Polish Jews. It stands as a powerful testament to Poland's transformation into a dynamic landscape of Jewish renewal, belonging, memory, and heritage".

(Tad Taube)



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