

“Using Memorials to Prevent Conflict and Promote Peace”

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• Overview

My Project for Peace focuses on enhancing the role that World War II (WWII) memorials in France play in preventing future conflicts and genocides. Many WWII memorials serve the crucial historical purpose of ensuring that future generations do not forget about the heroes and victims of the war. However, the memorial at Le Camp des Milles (LCDM), a former WWII internment camp in Aix-en-Provence, goes beyond remembering and honoring. The foundation that created the memorial at LCDM approaches memorialization through a reflective perspective that helps visitors understand the individual and collective processes that give rise to racism and genocide. It then draws on scientific research on individual and collective behavior to educate visitors on the capacity of people to fight against these forces.¹

My Project for Peace will be the development, in partnership with LCDM, of a written and digital guide to encourage and assist the curators of France's other WWII memorials to incorporate LCDM's strategies.² That is, the guide will encourage memorials to create an experience where visitors are inspired to actively remember, better understand and address the root causes of the tragedy being memorialized. Visitors can then extend these learnings to the modern-day context and use their knowledge of a particular history to ask: how did this happen, what should we do differently, and how can individuals play a role in promoting peace? I anticipate that the guide will prompt visitors to engage more meaningfully with memorials, with the goal that the experience will translate into vigilance and resistance against racism, anti-Semitism and injustice in their societies.

• Research and Demonstrated Need

A 2018 CNN poll found that more than 20% of France's population between the ages of 18 and 34 have never heard of the Holocaust.³ These results are not only shocking, but disconcerting given that, in the famous words of George Santayana, "*those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.*" Soon, all the survivors of WWII will be gone, so we are losing their first-hand testimonies about these events. In addition to the unnerving findings of this poll, countries around the world are currently experiencing a rise in nationalist tendencies against a social and economic backdrop that has alarming similarities to those that preceded WWII.⁴ France is seeing the rise in popularity of the Front National, a right-wing political party, and extreme right politicians, trends that are growing out of the nation's heightened racial tensions, particularly due to recent acts of terrorism and the European refugee crisis. Similarly, France's neighbors, including the former Axis powers Germany and Italy, are experiencing a disturbing rise in xenophobia and nationalist sentiment. As many countries slide toward nationalism, the importance of remembering and, even more significantly, *understanding* our past so we do not repeat tragic periods of human history takes on urgent importance.

The same CNN poll also found that two-thirds of Europeans polled believe that commemorating the Holocaust helps ensure that such atrocities will not happen again. The striking combination of the fading memory of the Holocaust and sociopolitical factors in France today, combined with the recognized importance of commemorating the Holocaust, demonstrates the important role memorials can play in combatting hate, xenophobia, anti-Semitism and the mechanisms that underlie genocide.

• Implementation Strategy

My Project for Peace will begin at LCDM. I will collaborate with the Foundation des Milles, the foundation that created the LCDM memorial. My project has the support of Bernard Mossé, head of scientific, education and cultural content at the memorial, and Coralie Pietrucci, head of the memorial's resource center. They have offered to answer my questions and provide their contacts for me to make connections with curators of other memorials in France. I will spend approximately two weeks immersing myself in LCDM's methodology for educating visitors, meeting with the curators and employees to further understand the nuances of the memorial's approach to memory that are not explicit in the memorial's design and taking advantage of the extensive resource center on commemoration, vigilance and resistance. LCDM has granted me access to its research and methodologies, as well as access to its workshops regarding complicity and resistance, which will

¹ LCDM has been internationally recognized for its pioneering work: in 2015, UNESCO named it as the global headquarters for the Chair of Education for Citizenship, Human Sciences and Shared Memories and other international memorials have expressed interest in replicating LCDM's reflective section in their permanent exhibits.

² I use the term curator to refer to individuals responsible for creating and maintaining WW II memorials in France.

³ <https://edition.cnn.com/interactive/2018/11/europe/antisemitism-poll-2018-intl/>

⁴ <https://news.harvard.edu/gazette/story/2017/02/in-europe-nationalisms-rising/>

further inform the questions that my guide will probe. With support from my hosts, I will also study how LCDM keeps the scientific research and information it presents to visitors timely and engaging.

After creating a preliminary draft of my guide at LCDM, I will explore several other WWII memorials in France, spending approximately one week at each. I will modify and improve my guide based on my study of these memorials. The first memorial that I visit will be *Le Mémorial du Camp des Rivesaltes*, which has expressed interest in my project. Like LCDM, Rivesaltes was an internment and deportation camp. My project continues at the *Mémorial du Débarquement et de la Libération de Provence*, which remembers the liberation of Provence by allied troops. Next, I will visit *Le Centre d'Histoire de la Résistance et de la Déportation* and the *Mémorial National de la Prison de Montluc*, which pay tribute to members of the resistance and deportation victims. I will continue to *Le Centre de la Mémoire d'Oradour*, which remembers the complete destruction of Oradour-sur-Glane by Nazi forces. My Project for Peace concludes in Normandy, the site of many WWII memorials. There, I will visit the Caen Memorial-Museum, which has also expressed interest in my project. Finally, I hope to visit *the Civilians in Wartime* memorial. In the event developing my guide takes longer than expected, I will prioritize which memorials I visit based on my communication with those responsible for each memorial.

I plan to disseminate my guide in both in print and in digital format and in English, French and Spanish, all languages in which I am fluent. I plan to disseminate my guide on a website that I create using squarespace.com. I will build on my experience as creator and former editor-in-chief of a multilingual digital newspaper to design the website for my guide. I will work with the memorials to make the digital version of the guide accessible through each memorial's website. From my discussions with LCDM and other memorials, I expect the memorials to be eager to assist in promoting the digital version.

• Preparation

I have a strong personal connection with my Project for Peace. I came across LCDM haphazardly during my semester abroad. I was on an afternoon run when I, quite literally, ran into the memorial. A cold chill ran down my spine as I descended through the narrow passageway that led to the prisoner bunks. I found myself unable to shake the harrowing thought that, 80 years ago, my grandmother, a six-year-old French Jew in hiding from Nazi pursuers, came perilously close to walking these same steps. Only those steps would not have led her, as they led me, into a captivating WWII memorial. Instead, the steps would have led her to deportation to a death camp. Fascinated by LCDM's unique approach to such a solemn moment in history, I decided to write my senior honors thesis on the history of the internment camp and the guiding philosophy of the modern memorial.

My thesis has provided me with an important foundation for how to understand memorials and how to work with curators to better learn about the purpose and capacity of each memorial, skills which I will use during my Project for Peace. In addition to working with curators and academicians at LCDM, I have also interviewed from numerous professors in the United States and Europe.⁵ To understand international work around WWII memorials, I have been in contact with curators at WWII memorials in Germany, Poland, Japan and Israel.

Additionally, I have studied the French language and culture since kindergarten. I will use my French language fluency to communicate with curators and to develop my guide.⁶

• Assessment and Reflection

While I am creating a preliminary version of my guide at LCDM, I will work with the employees to ensure that my guide is as detailed and complete as possible. I plan to continue to consult with Professor James Young and Ester Shalev-Gerz to obtain feedback. I will also gather feedback from LCDM's visitors on what was most impactful about their visit. While I am visiting different memorials in France, I will assess and revise my guide to make it as pertinent as possible by obtaining feedback from visitors, curators and employees and from my personal observations. I will meet with curators to understand how to best incorporate reflection and historical significance to their specific memorials, exhibits and visitor resources. The memorials that I have chosen include an exhibit component and offer tours, which will serve as potential opportunities for these sites to make more immediate changes to their programming.

⁵ I have met with Professor James Young and Ester Shalev-Gerz, both of whom have authored many books on the role of memorials and have participated in the design of important memorials, such as the 9/11 memorial. I have also met with Professor Ronald Rosbottom, who has published extensively on France during WWII, and historian Phillipe Rochefort.

⁶ I scored Superior Advanced, the highest level, on the Test du Connaissance de Français, and a 5, the highest score, on the French advanced placement (AP) exam.