interested in the history of U.S. scientific exchanges, ideologies, and psychological warfare campaigns during the Cold War.


Reviewed by Paweł Machcewicz, Institute of Political Studies, Polish Academy of Sciences, and founding director (2008–2017) of Poland’s Museum of the Second World War

Historical museums attract millions of visitors each year (or at least did until the coronavirus pandemic in 2020 severely affected operations). At a time when the reading of books has fallen out of favor with young people, museums play an outsized role in shaping popular perceptions of the past. The public role of museums also makes them relevant for conflicting political agendas that spark vocal controversies around museum exhibitions and their connection with other institutions and with audiences. This volume, edited by two German researchers, explores the recent landscape, focusing on museums and memorials exhibiting or commemorating the experience of the Second World War, mostly in Germany and Austria, but also including examples from the United Kingdom, France, Belgium, Poland, the Czech Republic, and Canada.

A recurrent theme in the volume is the fragile political position of museums, which are exposed, on the one hand, to pressures from politicians and institutions that supervise and fund them and, on the other hand, to the divergent expectations of civic or veterans organizations, media, and local populations. Jörg Echternkamp and Stephan Jaeger in their introduction refer to highly publicized political controversies of recent years: the House of European History in Brussels, contested by Euroskeptic politicians (mostly British, as the authors mention, but one should add that they were soon joined by Poles) who rejected the idea of a common European identity and the need for a common museum; the Museum of the Second World War in Gdańsk that came under attack from Poland’s ruling Law and Justice Party as allegedly “cosmopolitan” and not “Polish enough”; and the Memorial to the Victims of the German Occupation erected in Budapest. This last entity was the product of Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán’s use of history for his own political purposes, glossing over Hungary’s alliance with Nazi Germany and its role in the Holocaust. Other authors analyze less-well-known but very interesting conflicts around other museums and monuments. Karola Fings describes controversies related to the Museum Hürtgenwald 1944 und im Frieden, the museum commemorating the fierce battle in Hürtgen Forest in 1944. For many years the site was glorified, but under recent pressure from various political and civic actors some modifications to this “heroic” representation were introduced.
Peter Pirker, Magnus Koch, and Johannes Kramer analyze even longer controversies about monuments at two adjacent squares in Vienna, Heldenplatz and Ballhausplatz, the former being the place commemorating Austrian soldiers, including those from the Second World War, and the latter the site of a newly erected (in 2014) memorial devoted to deserters from the Wehrmacht. Jeffrey Luppes explores monuments dedicated to German civilians expelled after the end of the Second World War from several countries of Central and Eastern Europe, describing in detail the story of a monument in Postoloprty/Postelberg in the Czech Republic where tensions around this topic are still quite heated.

Luckily, historical museums are not all about politics and harsh memory battles. The bulk of the book consists of in-depth analyses of multiple scholarly, pedagogic, and aesthetic strategies of exhibiting war and violence. One of the most interesting observations is about the difference between most German and most Anglo-American museums. The former “still seem to be more documentary,” Echternkamp and Jaeger write. These museums convey mostly facts, remaining cautious about stirring visitors’ emotions and taking more restrained and conservative design choices. The emblematic example of this style might be the Topography of Terror in Berlin (a new permanent exhibition opened in 2010), presenting the Nazi terror apparatus and analyzed by Erin Johnston-Weiss. This approach was codified in 1976 (the so-called Beutelsbach consensus), when West German memorial sites agreed “to avoid emotionally overwhelming visitors and stress the need for cognitive distance so that visitors can reflect and learn from history,” as Echternkamp and Jaeger contend. They do not elaborate on this point, unfortunately. It would be interesting to see an analysis comparing that sort of approach with the broader context of memory culture in Germany, a country responsible for aggression and terrible atrocities in the Second World War and thus perhaps inclined to be more restrained in its visual representations.

On the other side are Anglo-American museums, here exemplified by the Imperial War Museum North in Manchester, England (analyzed by Jana Hawig) and the Canadian Museum for Human Rights in Winnipeg (Johnston-Weiss). They use bolder design solutions (e.g., sophisticated scenery and installations recreating places and situations from the past), seek emotional interactions with visitors, and encourage “experientiality”—understood as “reliving” past experiences or at least evoking empathy with people whose traces may be found in the exhibitions. Many of the newly created historical museums in East-Central Europe, especially Poland, which has been the most “fertile” land for museums in the 21st century, also follow this pattern, which deserves a separate analysis.

Jay Winter, in his afterword, highlights even deeper differences between public representations of the Second World War in Western and Eastern Europe: “The language of martyrdom, I contend, derives from a sacred memory regime, which frames the narrative in many museums of the Second World War in the Balkans, Poland, Ukraine, Belarus, and other parts of the former Soviet Union. That language of martyrdom, I believe, has virtually vanished from Second World War sites of memory in Western Europe, including Germany . . . , and from the Anglo-Saxon world.” This,
again, might have a lot to do with different experience of the Second World War in the West and the East.

Winter concludes with a pessimistic, if perhaps realistic, observation: “A shared memory regime in Europe is a utopian idea, as is a shared culture of remembrance of the 1939–1945 conflict. And yet, as socialists used to say, *la lutte continue.*” Scholars can modestly contribute to a shared culture of remembrance through solid comparative research, an example of which is this volume edited by Echternkamp and Jaeger.


Reviewed by Jeffrey W. Knopf, Middlebury Institute of International Studies

This admirably succinct monograph makes a useful contribution to our understanding of certain policy tools the United States and the Soviet Union adopted to try to curb the spread of nuclear weapons. Nonproliferation efforts have been based in part on international institutions such as the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). Analysts of a realist bent, however, have long been skeptical that such endeavors can effectively prevent proliferation. Realists view security concerns as the driving force behind nuclear weapons programs, and they argue that the only way to stop proliferation is to provide states with security guarantees that obviate their need to acquire nuclear arms. The United States, with its network of defense treaties, has been the primary source of such security guarantees, particularly through efforts to extend nuclear deterrence—or a “nuclear umbrella”—over its allies. If the assurances provided by an alliance with the United States do not do the job, then Washington can also apply coercive pressure on its allies by threatening to withdraw its protection. In recent years, Alexander Lanoszka points out, numerous studies have identified this combination of assurance and coercion managed by the United States as the primary source of nonproliferation success.

Lanoszka seeks to challenge this emerging conventional wisdom, and he does so persuasively. He examines the relationship between alliances and nuclear proliferation through a set of historical case studies. He examines in depth three key cases: West Germany, Japan, and South Korea. Lanoszka conducted archival research on each of these cases, and the primary sources he cites add nuance to existing understandings of all three. He supplements the three core cases with brief discussions of five additional cases: Great Britain, France, Norway, Australia, and Taiwan.

Lanoszka begins with the observation that alliances can be effective under some conditions but not others and advances two propositions about the circumstances under which alliances are likely to inhibit states from exploring a nuclear option. He identifies one key condition with respect to assurance and another with respect to coercion. Regarding assurances, Lanoszka argues that alliances are not automatically