

Gretchen Jennings
Editor

Dear Readers,

Our current issue, published ten years after the events of September 11, 2001, examines museums and memorials in the United States and in a number of countries around the world. The array of sites includes memorials still in the making (Bhopal), recently opened (Heart Mountain, 9/11 Memorial) and decades old. The term “decades” is illustrative: while commemorative statues and monuments have been around for a long time, memorial museums seem to have come into their own during the 20th century, even if, like the Maison des Esclaves in Senegal, they commemorate events that are centuries old.

Some other observations that these articles generate about memorial sites:

- If there is a distinction between a “museum” and a “memorial,” it seems fairly blurry. Collections might be one difference. We might also say that a museum should be more objective than a memorial, which usually has a very pronounced point of view about its subject, but we know that all museums come at their collections and stories from specific viewpoints and perspectives. A number of sites call themselves “memorial museums,” perhaps to cover all bases.
- Memorials and memorial museums appear to document almost exclusively the darker side of life, human suffering, and the violation of human rights. The concept of human rights is relatively recent in world history, coming to fruition in the 20th century. This may be one reason why museums with this theme have proliferated in our time. And of course the 20th century is without parallel (so far) in providing multiple examples of “man’s inhumanity to man.”
- The role of survivors, family, and descendants is crucial both for the creation and the sustenance of a vibrant memorial site. Almost every article in this issue attests to the importance of the participation of these groups—and the significance goes in both directions: it enriches the site and appears to bring a measure of comfort and healing to those most touched by the event.
- When looking at memorials that have been around for a number of years, it is clear that the most powerful continue to reinvent themselves, as new evidence about old events comes to light, and as new examples of what was supposed to be “never again” appear. The International Coalition of Sites of Conscience in particular aims to inspire visitors not only to remember but to be aware of contemporary human rights violations wherever and whenever they may occur.

As you read these articles, we hope you will come away with other insights and new understandings of memorials, museums, and sites of conscience.

Sincerely,

Gretchen Jennings

from the editor



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Exhibitionist is working to address your interests and concerns: in response to reader comments, we have increased the font size for easier reading; our production is greener at almost no cost increase—cover and pages are printed with soy ink on recycled paper. And we inaugurate a feature that will appear every Fall: an article highlighting the winners of AAM’s annual Excellence in Exhibitions competition.
