

Chapter 7

GERMAN JEWISH REFUGEE TRAVEL TO GERMANY AND WEST GERMAN MUNICIPAL VISITOR PROGRAMS



How about a nice long drive through the countryside? We deliver the country. And the car. And a good amount of free kilometers. With Pan Am's three-week "Freewheeler Holiday Tour" to Germany—for only \$338. And that's not all you get for this low price. You'll get the round-trip jet flight from New York to Frankfurt, 20 overnight stays in a lovely guesthouse in Paderborn, and a car with 1000 kilometers free of charge.

Think about how wonderful it will be to once again experience the beauty of Germany.¹

This Pan Am advertisement, printed in German and accompanied by a photo depicting a Volkswagen Beetle in front of a castle on a hillside, is taken from a May 1969 edition of *Aufbau*. There, it appeared in the company of German-language ads from Lufthansa offering "low-priced non-stop flights to Germany," and from Swiss Air promising "Our Service to Germany is twice as good. To and fro. Our non-stop flights from New York to Frankfurt are as comfortable as you can only wish for."² While perhaps they were not originally written solely for the still German-speaking audience of the mostly Jewish *Aufbau* readers, the regular presence of such advertisements in the main newspaper of the community suggests that these companies saw a potential customer base of travelers to Germany to be found among former German Jewish refugees in the late 1960s, and that *Aufbau* editors largely agreed, or at least considered the idea to be acceptable to their readership. Was this so? Why would German Jewish refugees want to travel there, given their not-too-distant past? Was visiting Germany just a matter of finding the best travel bargain? If so, how could Germany be considered just another European destination?

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This chapter answers these questions by examining German Jewish travel to West Germany, the reasons behind it, and its consequences, focusing particularly on the development of West German municipal visitor programs for former Jewish citizens from the 1960s to 1988.³ I argue that these programs emerged in a climate of ongoing individual travel that German Jewish refugees undertook to Germany prior to their inception. The trips to Germany were important for the refugees and German organizers of the programs alike, though for different reasons. The German Jewish community in the United States supported them because they reconnected many refugees with their German Jewish identity at a time when this was fading. For West Germany, these programs, framed as efforts of reconciliation and *Wiedergutmachung* (restitution, literally: “making good again”), were an important part of its democratization process. In this way, the programs were both motor and symptom of German attempts at confronting the Nazi past, happening in these instances on the local level.

Individual Travel to Germany in the 1950s and early 1960s: Attitudes

German Jewish refugees began to travel to West Germany in the 1950s.⁴ Among them were leaders from the United States refugee community who frequently traveled to manage issues connected with their official standing: to attend meetings with German officials about restitution matters, for example, or to meet representatives of Jewish communities in West Germany. At the same time, some “ordinary” refugees also traveled to Germany, mostly also in order to take care of some sort of business, such as attending to restitution or family property issues, to look after family graves, occasionally in the context of their profession, and sometimes to visit relatives or friends. Most of these visits were not undertaken for the primary purpose of vacationing, and they were usually embarked upon with some degree of suspicion toward West Germany and the people one would likely encounter, especially people in the refugees’ former hometowns. In contrast to those refugee leaders who were invited to go to West Germany, whose schedules were busy and who often spent most of their time meeting selected officials, those who went individually encountered ordinary Germans in ordinary life situations. Without the structure of an invitation program, it was easier to feel overwhelmed by difficult emotions connected to one’s own past in Germany. Ruth Nussbaum, Rabbi Max Nussbaum’s wife, remembered her first encounter with Germany after the war in 1957 as very traumatic. Returning from a visit to Israel, she stopped over in West Berlin, where her husband had already arrived a few days earlier as a guest of the Jewish community. In an interview she gave many years later, Ruth Nussbaum recalled her arrival in Berlin’s airport:

I became so nauseated that I said to my husband: “I have to, well I have to leave, I cannot do it.”—I got sick. And I am not a hysterical person per se. This was my first return to Berlin . . . yes, to Germany. And—well they somehow managed to tow me to the hotel and of, of the five days in Germany, I was about three days in the hotel. I just could not go outside. And then I walked around a bit and showed my son where we had lived and my school and so on.⁵

Stories of ordinary and individually traveling refugees’ direct encounters with West Germany, and of their encounters with their individual pasts, were not part of the larger refugee discourse on Germany as it was taking place in the 1950s and the early 1960s, however. Rather, in the community’s major newspaper, discussions on Germany were dominated by reports of journalists and leading community figures. Moreover, these trips seem not to have been topics of widespread private discussion among the refugees.⁶ However, personal testimonies reveal how some refugees experienced their visits.

One such example is that of Ernest Wolf, a professor at San Diego State University. He returned to Germany in the 1950s in the context of one of the European study tours he organized for the university. He recalled,

The first time I brought students to Dortmund was in 1955. It felt terrible. I couldn’t believe that people could be so self-satisfied and carry on the old ways as if nothing had happened. For me, it was like visiting a huge cemetery. That’s what I told one of my friends. He asked why I didn’t move back to Germany. “I can’t live in a cemetery.” This was a non-Jewish person, but he could understand.⁷

The symbol of Germany as a cemetery was not infrequently used by Jews when talking about Germany at this time. Ernie Sommer went to visit his former hometown Soest in 1954; speaking of his visit, he said,

It was like digging in graves. It was very, very depressing. There were a few people left who we had known before. One neighbor showed us a book with something written in it. She said, “Your father gave this to me.” We went across the street to another neighbor. There was a crystal bowl on the table and she said to look at that bowl. “That was yours. Your father gave it to me when he was driven out of his house. The Jews were all put together in a ‘ghetto house,’ and then sent to extermination camp.” And so, I heard a report about the end of the Jewish people in my town. They had been on the last transport.⁸

Yet both Ernie Sommer and Ernest Wolf, while recounting these somber stories and emotions of their first trip to Germany during interviews in the 1990s, also revealed that there remained Germans with whom they had agreeable relations. Ernie, for example, trusted that the people who had his father’s things spoke the truth about how they acquired them, stating that they had been well acquainted with his family since his childhood. Other people in the town he

distrusted, however, knowing firsthand that they had been Nazis or because they—as many Germans did—denied having had anything to do with the Nazis.⁹ In this regard, Ernest Wolf found that it was easier for him to engage with Germans who were honest about their past actions and regretted them: “We later met people that had been in the SS, but they turned around and were sorry. Others were not. With those that were not, I didn’t make contact for long. But the others I took as persons.”¹⁰

The first uncomfortable trip that Ernie Sommer and Ernest Wolf took did not remain their last one. Both returned again, their attitude being that not all Germans were the same and that particularly the younger generation was different. Ernie Sommer explained that he could continue his relationship with Germans and travel back again because “things had changed.” He said, “I had made up my mind, more or less, not to forget but to forgive the German people.”¹¹ The behavior of individual West Germans—the willingness of some to face the past and perhaps attempt to make up for it, in combination with the perception of a generational change in West German society—were important factors that influenced refugees’ decisions to travel to Germany, at least to do so more than once.

More significant in this regard were, however, the individual perspectives and attitudes German Jewish refugees adopted. John Best from Los Angeles explained how different these attitudes could be, even among people who were close to each other. He and his business partner and brother-in-law, Max Ponder, had completely different relationships to Germany, something they themselves found somewhat puzzling. Ponder and Best’s company, dealing in photographic equipment, did business with West German manufacturers. On his first trip to Germany, John Best “hate[d] every second of it,” a feeling that did not substantially change after going a second time. When he went to Germany, he could not “get out fast enough and away from it.”¹² Ponder on the other hand, as represented by John Best, “loved to go back to Germany. He enjoyed doing business with the Germans.” Best’s explanation for their difference in attitude was his partner’s older age and the enjoyment he got out of returning “as a big business man,” a situation in which “he was a customer, and they [the Germans] had to bow and to cater to him and to make overtures to him.” Best said, “I think that gave him the biggest thrill.” Also, Best recalled that his partner turned these trips into “fun” experiences, going to theaters and night clubs, something Best could not relate to. Although he was engaged in business with German companies, he told his interviewer, “I personally have no love for the whole German enterprise.”¹³

A refugee’s personal attitude toward Germany and toward visiting it certainly depended on various factors, but, as Best suggests, age was one particularly significant variable. People who had been older when they left Germany retained much stronger ties to the country than did younger refugees. Their family’s graves

were there; they had good memories of life before the Nazis, and of friends and communities. In an interview that Hedy Wolf, born in 1910, gave in the 1990s, she recalled, “It is terrible that that had to happen to us. Germany is a beautiful country. I loved it. I *loved* it. I had those wonderful friends which I had to give up. I loved it there.”¹⁴ Older refugees simply retained more points of connection to their old country, and though they often hated Germany in the initial years after emigration, these sentiments frequently abated with time. Moreover, traveling to West Germany did not necessarily imply approval of the country, but rather, as with much travel in general, was an exploration. Wolf said, “A lot about Germany still bothers me. But I still went there.”¹⁵ In her case, it was the friends she mentioned who made a difference in her decision to visit: “Somebody in that little town of Laupheim got my address here, and they all started writing to me. Very good friends. I visited them three times when we were in Europe.”¹⁶ Traveling to Europe in general for vacation purposes was something that the older generation of refugees in the United States did increasingly in the 1960s, and it was on these trips that not a few decided to also visit Germany.

Germany as a Tourist Destination? Individual Trips in the 1960s

Both *Aufbau* and the *Mitteilungsblatt*, the publication of the Jewish Club of 1933 in Los Angeles, were paying a great deal of attention to the topic of travel by the end of the 1960s. *Aufbau* included a regular column on the topic, “Travel and Traffic,” and published special vacation guide supplements for the summer months.¹⁷ Spring of 1969 editions of the newspaper featured a large number of advertisements by airlines, travel agencies, and guest houses. Besides upstate New York, Israel, northern Italy, and Switzerland—unexceptionable destinations for a refugee from Nazi persecution—trips to Germany and Austria were also regularly advertised.¹⁸ The interest in travel took place in the context of a general growing popularity of mass tourism in the West, which accelerated rapidly in the postwar period for a number of reasons, most especially the full flowering of the U.S. economy and the increasing wealth of its middle class, the associated extension of interest in travel from the wealthy to the middle classes, and the rapid development of transport technologies, particularly mass air travel.

By the late 1960s, the older generation among the refugees had reached an age at which some could afford to no longer work, which allowed more time for travel. The attention paid to travel in two main refugee press organs suggests that a considerable number must have been able to afford to travel and—considering particularly the costs for intercontinental trips—bespeaks economic success in the United States and a comfortable standard of living.¹⁹ In addition, restitution payments that some of the older people received monthly, as compensation for the salaries they would have gotten in Germany, also made a considerable

difference to their financial wellbeing.²⁰ This was particularly the case for people who had been—or would have been, if the Nazis had not interrupted their career paths—higher officials and state employees.²¹

Many of those refugees who could afford it thus traveled during their later years. Frank White from Los Angeles, for example, a board member of the Jewish Club, was a particularly avid traveler who went to South America, Southeast Asia, the Mediterranean, Iceland, Israel, Germany, and Austria.²² Upon returning from these trips, he regularly shared his experiences abroad with other refugees in the group's newsletter or at presentations organized by the Club, as other refugees did about their travel as well. White's travel activities were certainly an exception as far as the number of trips and breadth of locations are concerned, but he was not the only one from Los Angeles who vacationed in Europe. When he visited his "*alte Heimat*" (old home) Austria in 1966, he "ran across many friends and Club members from L.A." in Bad Gastein.²³ Judging from the article, meeting fellow Los Angeles refugees there did not seem to have come as a surprise to him. At the time, spa vacations were very popular among a certain age group, and in some cases, refugees received subsidies for treatments and stays at health spas from the West Germany restitution offices. Thus, many older refugees spent their vacations in European spa towns like Bad Gastein for health treatments.²⁴ One of them was William Niederland, who explained in an interview in the 1980s that he enjoyed going for spa treatments in Bad Kissingen—near Würzburg, where he had grown up—because his parents used to do that once a year. For him, going there was a "sentimental" and "emotional" matter.²⁵ This form of vacation and destination resonated with many refugees' European heritage, and for those who never had completely become comfortable in the United States, going to a German-speaking destination, and perhaps a familiar one, may have even been a more comforting experience than traveling in the United States. In addition, charter and group flights to Europe, offered by various airlines and regularly advertised in *Aufbau* and the L.A. Club newsletter, made such trips affordable to many in the 1960s.²⁶ White's article and the advertisements for travel to Germany and Austria convey a sense that it was normal for refugees to travel there. This was a new phenomenon, as in prior years trips of refugees to Germany were primarily reported on in conjunction with an evaluation of German conditions, always with a view to the past, while, at the same time, individual trips purely for vacation purposes were virtually nonexistent in public discourse.

This sense of normalcy was also communicated in other reports about travel. In 1968, a group of refugees from Los Angeles took advantage of a charter flight to visit West Berlin. The article about this trip that one Club member wrote for the Los Angeles newsletter is free of any reference to Germany's National Socialist past and did not contain any hint at a difficulty of encountering the country and city that some of the travelers must have left under dire circumstances. There is no reference to emotional discomfort or to problems encountering Germans. In

the report's estimation, the only thing that seemed to have clouded the Berlin visit was the cold weather: "not one of the 169 charter passengers came back with less than two nice warm woollies that they probably won't look at again until their next trip."²⁷ One wonders whether warm sweaters were the only thing they took back from Germany. That a "next trip" is mentioned is yet another indicator that travel to Germany does not seem to have been so unusual then, nor was it perceived to be so, at least among certain refugees. A survey of 513 refugees in Manhattan's Washington Heights community showed that more than half of them had visited Germany by the 1980s.²⁸

The recognition of German Jewish refugees as potential tourists to Germany, as signified by the efforts German companies like Lufthansa took to attract their business, perhaps reached its apotheosis in the advertisements that Berlin hotels and businesses posted in *Aufbau* on the occasion of the Jewish New Year in the late 1960s under headlines such as "Hier gratuliert Berlin" (Congratulations from Berlin). Some, like the Hotel Kurfürstendamm, even printed their new year's greetings in Hebrew. This expenditure of advertising budgets on advertisements tailored toward such a particular consumer group makes it clear that Berlin businesses saw (German) Jews as valued clientele.²⁹

The notable absence of criticism and apparent normalization of travel to West Germany in the main German Jewish press organs does not mean, however, that the overall relationship between German Jewish refugees and Germany had become "normalized" and that all refugees went and had a wonderful time. Many would not go to Germany—if we take the data from Washington Heights as representative, perhaps as many as half. One of those who would not go was Hilde Kracko:

I go to Italy every year and I have been in Europe a few times, but I can't go to Germany. My husband wouldn't go near it and that sits in me too. I can't get myself to go back. Because if I would see the people and would to shake hands with the ones who could be the same age as the ones who killed my parents, or my . . . I just can't do it. They say you should forgive but not forget. You can't forget what they did to us. I lost more than twenty people in my family. We had a very big, close family and all of a sudden you are only three. You miss a lot of love. And I suffered because my husband suffered.³⁰

It seems only natural that such experiences and memories of the Holocaust would inhibit the desire to return to Germany. Those refugees that suffered more than others had usually much less incentive to return and every reason not to. However, the way people dealt with their past and how it affected their relationships to Germany inevitably varied from person to person. Ernst-Günther Lilienstein, whose parents and younger brother were killed in Auschwitz, went back nine times before then taking part in the official visit organized by his hometown of Usingen in 1985. He expressed his close relationship to the town

with the following words: “I was, I am and I will be a Usinger, wherever I live.”³¹ While he held a particular bond with his hometown, for others going there was particularly difficult. Annelise Bunzel recalled that she enjoyed going to Germany but not to her hometown of Hamburg:

Annelise Bunzel (AB): And there it comes. There is a division within myself. Hamburg I remember. I grew up in it. There was my family, and if I am in Hamburg, I feel very uncomfortable. It all comes back.

Interviewer (I): In the rest of Germany you are a tourist.

AB: I am a tourist, and I just happen to be able to speak the language. This is, I mean, so people say, why don't you go to Hamburg. I mean, I did, with my husband I did it. I did it, as matter of fact, once after he died. I went to the cemetery. You know, I had to, I wanted his name engraved on the . . . what is it? . . . in the cemetery where his . . .

I: The gravestone.

AB: Yes. The gravestone. And I couldn't get fast enough away from Hamburg. I couldn't . . . I just called the airline. I said, any plane that is leaving just put me on it. I didn't want to stay there. The appointments, the dates that I had, I just canceled them all. I just wanted to get away. But the rest of Germany, I am a tourist. Exactly. I enjoy it.³²

Other testimonies of refugees who went to West Germany in the 1960s and '70s reveal that individual experiences varied widely in a spectrum from wonderful to horrible, frequently with both positive and negative occurrences, memories, and emotions happening during the same trip. Even so, refugees increasingly did travel to Germany, and though not all people enjoyed it, the idea of it became less unusual, as the treatment in publications demonstrates. A significant contribution to this image of normalcy in regard to travel was a general change of discourse on Germany in the two refugee publications that reached the largest number of refugees: *Aufbau* and the Los Angeles *Mitteilungsblatt* began to feature a new engagement with Germany outside of the topic of its National Socialist past. One such article appeared, for example, in *Aufbau*'s women's section, “Welt der Frau” (World of the Woman), in May 1969. Under the title “Berlin Was Worth a Trip,” it reported about an international fashion fair held in Berlin, noting the exhibitors at the fair and that it was good for the city to have that event there. Such reporting without any reference to the past was rare; its existence at all was a novelty.³³ Most of the coverage on Germany in *Aufbau* still followed the familiar discourse of criticism and praise. However, a steady rate of articles appeared in the late 1960s that featured the journalists' praise of developments in Germany: as they announced the reopening of a synagogue, for example, or gave credit to Germans, frequently Social Democrats holding posts in municipal governments, who engaged in projects

that addressed the Nazi persecution of Jews and other groups—for example, through commemoration publications.³⁴

This new discourse largely occurred because influential leaders in the community supported the development of good relationships with the Federal Republic. Hans Steinitz, the successor of Manfred George as editor of *Aufbau*, was a key figure in developing this narrative.³⁵ In 1947, with Hitler gone, it seemed logical to him that German Jews would continue relationships with Germany:

Naively, I thought that. I was completely overwhelmed and flabbergasted to find I was totally isolated, totally alone with that kind of attitude. In fact, I was almost lynched by people who were outraged [about the idea of return to Germany]. For all of these people, the idea of going back to Germany, for a visit, to recuperate lost property, buying German goods, was completely out of the question. They were deadly enemies forever. It took me years—and I take some credit for that—to change that attitude.³⁶

As editor of *Aufbau*, Steinitz was a driving force behind the newspaper's postwar editorial stance of "comradely openness" (*kameradschaftlicher Offenheit*) toward the democratic forces in postwar Germany.³⁷ His interest in a democratic reconstruction of Germany partly followed from his political engagement with the Socialist Youth before the Nazis had come to power.³⁸ Now he was invested in bringing the refugee community and West Germany closer together and saw himself as an active "bridge-builder." He recalled that when Lufthansa advertisements first appeared in *Aufbau*, people objected to them but that this criticism "disappeared completely over the years."³⁹ With him as editor in chief, *Aufbau*, while it remained an institution that observed developments in Germany critically, nevertheless adopted a much more German-friendly bent. The number of advertisements that it published, not only for issues related to travel to Germany, but also German products such as brandy or beer, increased, even though there were many refugees—not to mention many American Jews—who boycotted German goods.⁴⁰

The German newspaper *Die Welt* also posted a one-page announcement stating the corporation's sociopolitical principles:

We want Germany to be reunited in peace and liberty. We reject any type of totalitarianism from the right or the left. We advocate for reconciliation between the German and the Jewish people. We approve of a socially oriented free market economy and free world trade. We support the parliamentary democracy grounded in the basic law of the Federal Republic. We support international cooperation according to the Charter of the United Nations.⁴¹

This particular outreach from a large German institution proclaiming desire for German Jewish reconciliation was another way in which a positive image of Germany received promotion in *Aufbau*. The placing of the ad was no

coincidence, as Hans Steinitz served as the foreign correspondent for the Axel Springer publishing group to which the newspaper *Die Welt* belonged.⁴² Here, German business interest and the economic benefit that advertisements brought for *Aufbau* coincided with the less critical views on Germany of the newspaper's editor in chief.⁴³ As a result, these ideological and economic factors created a strong narrative in the major refugee newspaper that it was common and acceptable for German Jewish refugees to travel to Germany and to want German products.

The city of West Berlin figured particularly prominently in *Aufbau* in the late 1960s and after, not only in the advertisements devoted to it, but also the more general attention it received, even to the extent of publishing the season program of Berlin's Opera and theater stages.⁴⁴ This sort of coverage afforded the paper, according to Steinitz himself, the character of a Berlin newspaper in the United States.⁴⁵ This notion, that a newspaper with the character of a fundamentally German city paper could cater to a community of refugees from Nazi oppression, contributed dramatically to the growing discourse of a normalization of relations between German Jewish refugees and the new Germany. Berlin's prominence in the paper, and the success of this coverage, was the result of Steinitz's fondness of and connections with the city, combined with the fact that a great number of refugees, including other *Aufbau* staff, were also from Berlin, which before the war had been home to the largest Jewish community in Germany.⁴⁶

It is in this context of increasing individual travel and the reestablishment of personal ties to Germany, as well as a public discourse normalizing such travel and relationships, that the organized visitor programs for former Jewish citizens of German cities were introduced and must be understood.

The Emergence and Development of German Municipal Visitor Programs

There was no official call from any German government office that initiated municipal visitor programs, nor one for German cities to be in touch with their former Jewish citizens. Yet support for the programs did tend to fall along party lines: Social Democrats tended to support them because of their own persecution by the Nazis, while the other major parties were initially rather more reluctant. In many cases, the programs came about through the refugees' travels to Germany and the Jewish presence this reintroduced, and sometimes their involvement and advocacy in combination with certain German groups, individuals, and grass-roots initiatives who sympathized with the refugees and were interested in reconciliation. Moreover, the manner in which the programs developed in different cities varies, even though, over time, many were inspired by successful projects of other towns.

The first city to invite German Jewish refugees to visit their former hometown was Munich, which received three individually traveling visitors in 1961.⁴⁷ The invitation happened in the wake of an outreach initiative from the city in December 1960, published in various refugee media outlets, which called on its former citizens to send a “*Lebenszeichen*” (sign of life) because Munich was interested in renewing contact with them. Some of these former citizens responded and expressed an interest in visiting the town. While it is not clear whose idea the outreach campaign was initially, it was begun as part of a larger municipal project intended to address issues of anti-Semitism as well as to create positive relations with Israel.⁴⁸ Initially, however, uptake among refugees was somewhat hesitant, and, by 1965, the open invitation still resulted in only thirty-five program visitors. Their trips were not purely touristic adventures but, much like the visits many refugees had been undertaking on their own, were a *Mittel zum Zweck*, or means to an end: business, with some culture mixed in. The city paid for their accommodation, gave them theater tickets, and also provided assistance with restitution issues. As such, the invitations were an official recognition that refugees had significant relations with their hometown—an interest that was primarily pragmatic (restitution) but also cultural. In the early 1960s, several other southern German towns also extended invitations to their former Jewish citizens. In these cases, invitations were not actively initiated by city officials, but were solicited, being responses to requests by individual refugees who had previously dwelled there.⁴⁹

Hamburg

Of the larger cities, the emergence of the Hamburg and Berlin programs, which were initiated in 1965 and 1969 respectively, are more easily traceable. In Hamburg, the initial idea to establish connections between the city and former citizens came from the Social Democratic senator of finance, Gerhard Brandes. While his motives do not seem to have been made public, one can speculate that they might have been connected to his own history of persecution by the Nazis.⁵⁰ The city’s Social Democratic Mayor, Herbert Weichmann, himself a Jew who had returned to Hamburg after spending the war years in the United States, did not immediately agree that outreach to Hamburg’s former citizens would be a good idea.⁵¹ Whether this hesitancy resulted from a belief that outreach would not be welcomed by the refugees or that it would be too out of line with the contemporary German memory culture, which focused more on perpetrators (based on some of the major trials held at that time) and “moderate” remembrance, is not clear.⁵² However, the precedent set by Munich, connections with individual refugees (including one who had requested an invitation), and the recognition that refugees were traveling to Germany—which was interpreted as an expression

of their bond to Germany—all influenced Weichmann’s eventual decision to support the outreach.⁵³ Consequently, the Senate Chancellery sent out a call to all former Jewish citizens of Hamburg on the occasion of the publication of a memorial book for the Jewish victims of the “National Socialist terror,” based on the research of the head of Hamburg’s Jewish community. The call was published in several newspapers in and outside of West Germany over the course of 1965 and 1966. Its message was that Hamburg was not only remembering the dead but also wanted to express that “we”—though the we in this case was mainly a select few, as the interest of the general populace of Hamburg was rather low—“had never lost the bond” to the living members of the Hamburg Jewish community.⁵⁴ The call asked for the refugees to contact the city so the Senate could inform them about political, cultural, and economic developments that had taken place in Hamburg.⁵⁵ While some supporters of the project argued, altruistically, that it would be a nice idea for the refugees to see that they had not been forgotten, the major result the Senate hoped for was that they would think positively about their old home and project that positivity to their communities.⁵⁶ In taking this approach, the Hamburg Senate was pursuing a similar image campaign for its city in refugee communities throughout the world to the one that the German Foreign Office was engaged in on a larger scale for the entire country. The response from refugees to the call by Hamburg was significant: in 1967 more than six hundred letters reached the city.⁵⁷ To those who had responded, the Senate Chancellery then sent out the book of commemoration, to which it received an overall positive response. Some refugees were bewildered and distressed when they received it, however. In an interview conducted with Irene Brouwer from Argentina in 1991, she recalled that the arrival of the book, documenting Hamburg’s murdered Jews, caught her off guard: “And then I was in such desperation that I wrote that letter that they should kindly leave me alone, I don’t want to see and hear anything else. I thank you for the orderliness with which you noted the extermination.”⁵⁸ While Hamburg’s outreach may have initially caused interest, and perhaps fostered positive associations to the Hamburg before the Nazis, the book brought direct confrontation with the murderous past. Thus, German outreach and commemoration efforts, even if well-intended, evoked misery for some people and actually prevented rapprochement. In voicing her sentiments to Germans who reached out, Brouwer is an exception, and how many refugees felt similarly but abstained from communicating it remains unknown.

Other refugees were encouraged enough by the initiative that they expressed a desire to be invited by the city to visit, wishes that the Hamburg Senate did not fulfill at this time, apparently due primarily to financial considerations.⁵⁹ Hamburg’s first invitations, in fact, were finally issued only in the 1970s, and this had much to do with the establishment and success of the municipal visitor program that was launched by West Berlin in 1969 and that paid for the visits of

its former citizens. Refugees would invoke Berlin's example in asking Hamburg for invitations, and members of Hamburg's city government—in particular the acting Social Democratic senator for social issues and head of the restitution office, Ernst Weiß—also pleaded for invitations to be extended after the Berlin model.⁶⁰ In the end, strategic considerations concerning the prospective positive effects of invitations on the city's image abroad were decisive, as they had been in Munich and West Berlin. Even so, the Hamburg program developed only very slowly, initially extending only individual invitations, and even these not without complications.⁶¹ An open invitation program came into being only in the early 1980s, by which time an increased public interest in the Nazi past had created an atmosphere in which various actors, introduced later in this chapter, pushed for a full-fledged program.⁶²

Berlin

The Berlin program, meanwhile, though it had its beginnings later than either Munich or Hamburg, was by far the most extensive of the German municipal visitor programs. Berlin's prewar Jewish population had been the largest in Germany with about 160,500 Jews in 1933, about half of whom were able to leave between 1933 and 1939, while fifty thousand Berliners were deported and murdered.⁶³ The origins of the Berlin visitor program sprang from the connection that existed in the 1960s between individual German Jewish refugees and German officials, most particularly that between *Aufbau* editor Hans Steinitz and Hanns-Peter Herz, speaker of the Berlin Senate.⁶⁴ Steinitz and Herz shared a Social Democratic as well as a Jewish background, and both retained a particular fondness for their home city of Berlin.⁶⁵ Both men also shared the sense that a special relationship to Berlin also remained among refugees in various communities in the United States and Israel.⁶⁶ Out of this insight, along with their mutual and strong interest in German-Jewish understanding, the idea emerged in the late 1960s to invite for a visit—through a formal city program—Berliners who had been forced to leave the city because of Nazi persecution.⁶⁷

Herz also found support for the idea from the leader of the West Berlin Jewish community, Heinz Galinski, with whom he seems to have been friends.⁶⁸ In his capacity as speaker of the Senate, Herz then brought the idea before his superior, Social Democrat Heinrich Albertz, who was West Berlin's mayor from 1966 to 1967. Albertz, a theologian by training, who as a follower of the Confessing Church had himself been arrested several times during the Third Reich, was sympathetic to the idea.⁶⁹ As in Hamburg, however, money was the difficulty. Herz recalled that while he convinced Albertz that such a program would be a good idea, Albertz said, "But it cannot cost anything."⁷⁰ This did not meet Steinitz and

Herz's conception of the program, however, which had included sponsorship for the former Berliners' trips, particularly those who did not have the means to come on their own. This matter of finances was a most delicate one for visitor programs and was an issue for many cities, often significantly delaying the process from the genesis of the idea to its realization.

The West Berlin program eventually began in 1969, by which time Klaus Schütz had become the Social Democratic *Regierender Bürgermeister* (governing mayor) of Berlin. Schütz was a protégé of Willy Brandt's, had worked in the Foreign Office before becoming mayor, and was sensitive to issues of German Jewish relations. Speaking in 2011, he recalled that the financial question was solved with the support of the federal government, on which West Berlin was financially dependent. In his recollection, the invitation project laid "in a realm for which we did not have difficulties to receive means, because it is partly foreign policy, it has effects also in America and Israel, as such it can even support German foreign policy."⁷¹ According to Hanns-Peter Herz, there were initially some unenthusiastic voices raised in the Berlin Senate, coming mainly from the right wing of the Christian Democratic Party, about the idea of the program inviting former Jewish Berliners in particular. The eventual outcome of the vote on 10 June 1969, however, was unanimous.⁷² In the end, strategic considerations of how the invitations could "improve the status and prominence of Berlin," as Klaus Schütz put it, were a significant factor for their realization.⁷³ In the public announcement launching the program, the invitations were framed as a form of *Wiedergutmachung*.

Considering Schütz's references to the role of positive publicity for Berlin, it is an interesting side note that the Foreign Office, while reaching out to individuals of the German Jewish refugee community in the United States for exactly these reasons of public relations, initially took a rather hesitant stance when they first heard that the city of Frankfurt published a call to its former citizens in Israel. From the newly established West German Embassy in Tel Aviv—the opening of which had been met with some protest—a representative warned in October 1965 that such a call might be taken as "an unwanted effort of ingratiating" (*unerwünschter Anbiederungsversuch*) and "inappropriate importunity of Israeli citizens" (*untunliche Bebellion israelischer Staatsangehöriger*).⁷⁴ After a difficult year of German-Israeli relations, Bonn's concern over public criticism of Germany in Israel was great, and even after reports from Tel Aviv that the call had been received positively, officials in Bonn hoped that no other cities would follow Frankfurt's example.⁷⁵ The German embassy in Washington, D.C., had a different perspective on the matter. When Hanover issued a call for invitations in 1967, the diplomats welcomed it, believing that it might work effectively in "overcoming the distrust against Germany." They even suggested engaging the *Deutsche Städtetag* (association of German cities) to propose similar programs to other German cities as well.⁷⁶ As for Mayor Schütz's comment regarding

financial support, by the time the Berlin program was implemented, the supportive stance of the Foreign Office was clear.

The news about the Berlin invitation program was publicized to former Berliners through German consulates worldwide and through refugee publications, and increasingly made its rounds by word of mouth. The first announcement in *Aufbau* appeared in a small article in the 20 June 1969 edition. The author noted that a speaker of the West Berlin Senate had declared that the decision for the invitations was based on the fact that by the end of 1969, a majority of restitution cases would be completed, but that the city of Berlin, “however, would like to carry on the fundamental idea of the West German restitution legislation in a ‘meaningful way,’ and offer former citizens the opportunity to render their own judgment about the present conditions in the city.”⁷⁷ It was added that invitations were particularly addressed to former Jewish Berliners and those who were financially not well off. The announcement came to the refugees at a time and in a context when, as we have seen, physical ties to Germany and public discourse on travel to Germany were at a heretofore unknown height, and refugees already had a general interest in travel to the country.

The response to Berlin’s invitation was overwhelming. On 11 July 1969, *Aufbau* reported on the great number of visit application letters that had reached the Berlin Senate Chancellery from all over the world, which Berlin’s Mayor Klaus Schütz interpreted as “impressive evidence for a bond to the old *Heimat*.”⁷⁸ *Aufbau* also promoted the program by publishing articles, some written by Steinitz and Hanns-Peter Hertz (the former did not mention his personal involvement) that presented the city and the program itself in a very positive light.⁷⁹ By 1 February 1970, 11,146 applications for visits had reached Berlin.⁸⁰ Many of the applicants wrote that they had long held the wish to see “their Berlin” once more but that they did not have the finances to make the trip.⁸¹ Not all included a reference to their suffering under the Nazis, but some made specific mention of Berlin wanting to make a contribution to the *Wiedergutmachung* of past wrongs with the invitations. A typical phrasing was, for example, “You can understand that I have the greatest interest to follow this invitation to my home country. It is precisely the invitation and the return to my home country that will help to heal the wounds that a Hitler afflicted in unfound and unjust ways”—wording that appears verbatim in a number of letters from Los Angeles.⁸²

The organizers of the program had not expected such an overwhelming response, and it became clear that it would require a permanent administrative structure as well as an ongoing, higher budget for the invitations to continue over many years. Because of the vast number of applications, the organizers decided to streamline the program and hierarchize the applicants. They decided to grant early invitations based on several criteria: first would be the oldest applicants and those who had been interned in a concentration camp or survived in hiding, and

initially only people who had not been back to Berlin after the war on their own would be invited.⁸³

The news about Berlin's invitation program spread quickly within the refugee community, and refugees from other cities (as in the example of Hamburg, above) began to use Berlin's example to ask their own towns for invitations. The motivation for many to contemplate returning was born of emotional memories of place and home, of family and childhood, as Liselotte Levy-Weil's letter from Louisiana exemplifies: "My dear sir: I have a very good life here in this 'blessed America' but my thoughts often return to the house in Engerser Street 12 in Neuwied on the Rhine. This is where my parents ran the butchery Levy. Perhaps, I can come to visit one day."⁸⁴

Refugees' Influence on Visitation and Commemoration

The examples of Berlin and Hamburg demonstrate how German Jewish refugees both figured in and influenced city policy decisions through their interest, their individual visits to Germany, their involvement in drawing attention to a lack of care on the part of municipalities, their pleading for invitations, and their using the Berlin program as negotiating leverage. Numerous examples from other cities all over West Germany confirm the significant role refugees themselves played in the development of municipal visitor programs. In some places, rabbis who returned were important idea givers. Rabbi Dr. Kurt Metzger, for example, who, beginning in 1964, made annual trips to his former hometown of Landau in Rhineland-Palatinate, became an advocate for German Jewish reconciliation and also made a proposal to the city council to invite all former Jewish inhabitants for a visit.⁸⁵ Refugee rabbis held a special position of influence on opinion regarding Germany in their communities, and their positive inclination likely encouraged others to allow an interest in Germany or even accept invitations.

The example of Ilse M. Wolfson from North Hollywood, who undertook a private trip to her former home of Krefeld, North Rhine-Westphalia in 1971, demonstrates that refugees who did not hold such special positions also contributed to the development of relationships between German towns and their former Jewish citizens. Wolfson reported on her experience of returning to Krefeld for the first time after thirty-two years in a letter to *Aufbau*. Her letter is a particularly strong example of how Jewish travel affected this process, as it illustrates her relative lack of awareness of, or interest in, a Jewish past and its annihilation in many smaller German cities at that time. Further, it shows how, through their travels, individual refugees explicitly and implicitly called attention to that past, their own presence as former Jewish citizens, and their interest in their former hometowns.

I seethed with indignation when I quickly became aware of the total oblivion to which the Jewish community of the pre-Hitler era was relegated. The site of the burned-out synagogue had been completely swallowed by the renovation of the central city, and nowhere was there any sign that Jewish citizens had ever played an important part in the city's growth. Apathy and defensiveness reigned supreme, even among some of the survivors of the holocaust. I felt compelled to voice my personal feelings and several suggestions at a press conference called for that purpose. The article which ensued seemed to give impetus and courage to those in the community who themselves had suffered from Nazi persecution, and they began to put pressure on the City to implement some of the suggestions. The erection of the "Mahnmal" [memorial] near the site of the synagogue is a direct result of our continuing effort to prod a very reluctant municipal government into action. Several other suggestions, such as an invitation to a group of former Krefelder Jews and the publication of a history of the Jewish population of that city, also materialized.

I take some pride in having had a hand in this outcome and having spoken up when conscience dictated it. I urge "Aufbau" readers to follow a similar course in every German city with which they have contact. I realize full well that the only purpose monuments serve is as a historical landmark, a constant reminder of events which tend to get blotted out with time . . . lest they forget.⁸⁶

Wolfson points out that her visit and initiative eventually led to the invitation of other former Jewish citizens of the town. Her pride in having caused this, and in rectifying the absence of a memory of a Jewish past in that town and filling that memory with new life, pushing for a perpetual reminder that Jewish life there was wiped out, signifies the attitude of someone who believed in the importance of educating Germans. While her motivations on the one hand derived from a moral duty to her ancestors and her community, her words reveal that she also believed it to be significant to incite the Germans in her hometown to engage in morally correct actions.⁸⁷

German Supporters of Visitor Programs

As in the case of Hamburg and Berlin, Wolfson, while speaking of a "total oblivion" in regard to the Jewish past, nevertheless found people in Krefeld who were receptive of her desire to change that. Her allies, similar to those who supported the outreach actions in Hamburg and Berlin, were people who had their own history of persecution by the Nazis. In cities with Jewish communities, those communities often became major supporters of invitations to former refugees, sometimes initiating contacts with former residents and making inquiries about whether they would be interested in visits.⁸⁸ The initial "apathy" and "defensiveness" of local Holocaust survivors that Wolfson mentions in the case of Krefeld can perhaps be explained by a general attitude of "laying low" that existed among

some Jews in Germany, sensing that their history was likely to meet disinterest, if not rejection. Additionally, Jews residing in West Germany, as well as the Central Council of Jews in Germany, frequently disliked the intervention of Jews from abroad in what they considered their issues. For others, their political affiliation was more important than their Jewish background. Hanns-Peter Herz in Berlin or Herbert Weichmann in Hamburg, for instance, each de-emphasized their Jewish background while stressing their Social Democratic identity, which in the 1960s and early 1970s offered a more direct engagement with Germany's Nazi past and its victims as part of its platform. In fact, Social Democrats were, in general, among the most constant supporters of outreach activities to Jews during this time.⁸⁹

The refugees were distinctly conscious of who the people in Germany were that supported their interests. The clearest example of this appears somewhat later in a special 1994 edition of *Aufbau*, which documented 120 different visitor programs. Reporters paid special attention to emphasizing which groups and individuals within the city governments were for and against the programs. Again and again it is pointed out that members of the conservative Christian Democratic Union, and occasionally the liberal Free Democratic Party, were reluctant to adopt visitation plans, while representative of the SPD and the Green Party were usually in favor of such programs.⁹⁰

It is notable, particularly because in hindsight and from a removed perspective the invitation programs are identified with the city and its image, that in many cities the supporters of the idea of the visitor program were individuals and small groups outside of the political establishment of the municipal governments. These groups or individuals—in no way representing a majority of the city's inhabitants—were instrumental in exerting influence on the city's governments. One group that was frequently involved in the development of visitor programs was the Gesellschaft für Christlich-Jüdische Zusammenarbeit (Society for Christian-Jewish Cooperation, GCJZ).⁹¹ The first German chapters of this organization, which already existed in the United States, Switzerland, Great Britain, and France, were founded in 1948–49 with the assistance of the U.S. Occupation Administration, which thought it useful for Germany's democratization. Regional chapters all over the FRG followed, financed subsequently with federal and state money, and lay persons and clerics—both Catholics and Protestants—began in the 1950s to organize regular activities and an annual *Woche der Brüderlichkeit* (Week of Brotherliness) to foster understanding and good relations between German Christians and Jews.⁹² Acknowledging “the historic guilt” of Germans and the responsibility for the annihilation of Jewish life in Europe, the society had two major concerns: to bring Nazi perpetrators to trial and to find “adequate *Wiedergutmachung*” for the survivors of the Holocaust.⁹³ The GCJZ's involvement with the visitor programs were part of this effort, and in some cases they initiated their establishment, since the societies had frequently

taken up contacts with emigrated Jews already in the early postwar period. Sometimes, as in the case of Marburg, the local GCJZ chapter even organized and administered the entire program, while the city only covered the finances.⁹⁴ The group's support of the program must be seen as connected to a West German desire for "normalization" of German-Jewish relations and the betterment of Germany's image. However, the involvement of people who were genuinely interested in dialogue makes this more than ritualized philo-Semitism.⁹⁵

Most important for the development and success of many local visitor programs were the initiatives of teachers, city archivists, local historians, university students, and doctoral candidates, who in the 1960s began to be interested in topics related to the Third Reich. The Auschwitz trials from 1963 to 1965 and public debates about the statute of limitations for German war criminals in the mid 1960s and again in the 1970s contributed to a perspective that brought an increased focus on the Holocaust as a central element of the Nazi past.⁹⁶ The Third Reich also became a more important topic in various media representations such as dramas, literature, and—very importantly, because of their reach to larger segments of the population—television programs during this time. While these representations often focused on different actor groups of Nazi perpetrators, the new level of exposure of the topic of the Nazi past in several realms of public life left its mark on wider audiences, particularly younger generations of Germans who had not lived through the Third Reich themselves.⁹⁷ In this respect, the American television miniseries *Holocaust*, airing in Germany in January of 1979 and watched by about one-third of the West-German population (and circa half of West German adults), was of great significance in steering attention toward the Jewish victims of the Nazi regime.⁹⁸ It was the visual representation of the persecution and extermination of a German Jewish family in particular that made a great impression on people: surveys showed that two-thirds of those polled were "deeply moved" by what they had seen and more than one third "were 'appalled' that 'we Germans committed and tolerated such crimes.'"⁹⁹ For some people, these emotions translated into greater interest in Jewish history and also an interest in reconciliation.

In addition, the time between 1933 and 1945 was instituted as a mandatory part of a regular school curriculum in 1962. This included the Holocaust, and though inevitably not all teachers covered the topic with the same intensity, the annual number of school group visits to the Dachau concentration camp site increased from 471 in 1968 to well over five thousand yearly at the end of the 1970s.¹⁰⁰ In this atmosphere of increased awareness, many history workshops emerged, often centered around *Volkshochschulen* (adult education institutions) and high schools, which sought to investigate everyday life under the National Socialist regime. These workshops frequently researched topics and molded projects around the Jewish past of their towns and cities.¹⁰¹ City archivists also often became involved in such research projects, which regularly yielded small

publications. Visiting refugees often had engaging interactions with these archivists, such as in Soest, where Ernie Sommer was “received with open arms.”¹⁰² There, the archivist had published a study on *The Persecution of Our Jewish Co-Citizens in Soest*, and Sommer was able to offer a lot of information on the fate of the Jewish community that the archivist had not been able to obtain.

In other cases, archivists, amateur historians, and students—in order to obtain information for their research projects—searched for and reached out to surviving members of their town’s Jewish community even before they traveled to Germany. Sometimes these contacts by German researchers actually renewed interest on the part of the emigrants and refugees to visit their hometowns.¹⁰³ For many refugees, such outreach activities were a sign of the existence of people on the German side who were genuinely interested in their very personal histories. While German politicians had publicly communicated a general message acknowledging responsibility and desiring reconciliation since the 1950s and increasingly in the following decades, these researchers were interested primarily in the refugees as individuals, and in the very personal, detailed, uncomfortable, and tragic histories of the refugees themselves and their family members and friends. While much of the official communication from politicians to the community was about sending the message that the Germans wanted reconciliation, this was a different, deeper level of engagement, which did not require refugees to absolve the Germans, and as such touched many in a very different way.

In this regard, the emigrants were often most impressed by the attention and curiosity concerning their individual experiences that German high school students showed. It compelled some to reconsider their perspective on Germany, as another example from Krefeld from the early 1980s demonstrates. Here, on the occasion of the fifty-year anniversary of the Nazis coming to power, a high school religion teacher encouraged her students to write to the fifty-four Jewish refugees whose addresses they had been able to obtain. Conceptualized as a form of memorialization of forced emigration, the student’s letters read, for example, “We can imagine that the memories of that time must be difficult for you. . . . However, we would like to make a contribution so your fate will not be forgotten in this year of remembrance. . . . What were your experiences in Krefeld before and after 1933? . . . What were the conditions under which you left the city?”¹⁰⁴

The letters were well received by the addressees, and the ensuing relationship inspired the students to support the idea of municipal invitations to these people in order to “not forget Krefeld’s Jews.” For many refugees, meanwhile, it was the contact with the high school students that convinced them to accept the invitation. Rolf Gompertz, living in North Hollywood, explained that whenever he had in the past heard of Germany or only thought of it, he had automatically started to shudder. This had not changed in the forty-seven years that had passed since he had left Krefeld as an eleven-year-old boy. It was the efforts of the young

students that “moved him,” affected how he felt about Germany, and eventually made him accept the invitation to visit the town of his birth.¹⁰⁵

Student projects like the one in Krefeld became more frequent in the 1980s, a time which is widely understood to represent “the climax of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*” (working through the Nazi past) in the FRG.¹⁰⁶ Thirteen years of Social Democratic governments had left their mark on the country’s intellectual and educational infrastructure: now people who believed that the Holocaust was to be a significant part of the country’s “cultural memory” held positions of influence.¹⁰⁷ When the Christian Democrat Helmut Kohl became chancellor in 1982, this became an issue of political contention played out over various different issues throughout the 1980s, such as the Bitburg affair and the *Historikerstreit*, to name but two.¹⁰⁸ These debates, while they were primarily led by politicians and intellectuals, received attention across all major media outlets and created an atmosphere in which the Holocaust became a topic of public interest. Under the Kohl government, the Third Reich as a whole became subject to federally directed memory politics. While local historical and educational initiatives, as well as grassroots movements, engaged in research, and artists created memorials in different communities throughout the 1980s, the FRG government planned a more centralized memory policy.¹⁰⁹ Prior to this move, conservatives had typically been inclined to steer attention away from the Nazi past, but under the Kohl government it became “not just a factor to be reckoned with but an opportunity to create a new, positive German historical consciousness.”¹¹⁰ Initiatives such as the building of museums and the support for the planning of a central Holocaust memorial involved ideas of public remembrance and official contrition, and were targeted to create an atmosphere combining “reconciliation and normalization.”¹¹¹

In this climate of a federally prescribed Holocaust awareness with a purpose, many more cities instituted visitor programs for their former Jewish citizens. Frequently, as we have seen in the case of Hamburg, the establishment of such a program had been considered for quite some time, brought up and supported by people outside of the municipal governments. While cost and organizational efforts were certainly factors that influenced the decision for or against a visitor program, the question of the *value* of the program was paramount in many cases. This idea of value was in the first place evaluated from the perspective of city officials. If they were of the persuasion that the city’s residents “do not want anything to do with the whole shebang [referring to the Nazi past] anymore,” as the CDU mayor of the city of Oldenburg believed in 1985, then they saw no obvious value to be found in establishing one of these programs.¹¹²

Even in such cases, however, pressure from the political left and from citizens and interest groups led some city governments to eventually establish programs in spite of popular opposition or apathy. In addition, an increasing motivation that aided in the realization of invitation programs in many cities during the

1980s was the concern not to be seen as a “Nazi town.” The strategic value that conducting an invitation program carried for a town’s image became ever more important, not only from a foreign political perspective, as it had been for those supporting the early programs in Munich and Berlin, but also in terms of inner German pressure. From an outside international perspective, municipalities that established visitor programs increasingly conformed to the larger discourse of “reconciliation and normalization” that was being adopted nationwide. In some cities, however, public statements and speeches given by mayors and other city officials revealed a lack of understanding of the Jewish experience, as examples below illustrate. Yet, because of a heightened awareness in general and the influence of a new generation of Germans who were sensitive to this issue in a different way than their forebears had been, there were also more people who supported these initiatives for moral reasons.¹¹³ Ultimately, the experiences of Jewish visitors on their invited trips depended heavily on the motivations and characters of the individuals involved in the programs on the side of the German cities. The next section will give an insight into these experiences.

Invitations and Pre-visit Perspectives

In order to evaluate the effects of invitation programs on the broad population of German Jewish refugees, it is necessary to take a brief look at the response rate. While the response to the Berlin call for invitations was overwhelming in the eyes of its organizers, no numbers are available to determine how many people chose to not respond because they did not want to go. In Hans Steinitz’s opinion, it was “only a very small circle” of people who held deep-seated resentments that prevented them from wanting to go.¹¹⁴ A refugee living in Massachusetts who had accepted the invitation to Berlin in 1972 had his own thoughts concerning the attitudes that German Jewish refugees in the United States held toward Germany. In a letter to the Senate Chancellery, he wrote that he believed that the German Jews in the United States could be divided into three different groups when it came to their perspective on Germany. In contrast to Steinitz, he thought that there existed actually a “rather large” group of people who would not accept an official invitation to their German hometown because they still hated Germany. A second, “rather small group,” among which he counted himself, comprised people who would accept the invitation because they believed that the majority of the German population of the 1970s had “absolutely nothing to do with the Nazi ideology anymore.” The third and largest group he characterized as being made up of people who do not really know “where they stand.” For them, the invitation of the Senate could really make a difference, the man wrote encouragingly in his thank-you letter to Berlin: “I believe that with the invitation to Berlin and the subsequent opportunity to come into contact with Germans again, you

will be able to influence a fraction of these people in a positive way and lead them back to a normal thinking toward Germany.”¹¹⁵ Interestingly, this refugee thinks that a “normal” relationship with Germany was possible and favorable, something that, as we have seen, *Aufbau* had to some degree begun to promote as well.

Numbers from smaller cities, which often sent out invitations directly to former citizens, suggest that there were, in fact, many people who did not accept them. The city of Stuttgart, for example, reported that 30 to 40 percent of those who received invitations declined them.¹¹⁶ In Ulm, Baden-Württemberg, 78 of 127 people accepted. In Fürth, near Nuremberg, 120 out of 350 people accepted. In Laupheim, 19 out of 60 went when the city sent out invitations on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the destruction of the synagogue.¹¹⁷ In most cases, we do not know why people decided not to come. Outraged rejection letters referring to German crimes were either rare or just not archived by the cities. In the northwestern city of Aurich, however, city officials preserved such a letter. Rosel Sievs, living in Ireland, responded to the mayor with the following words:

I have to tell you that I do not have the wish to ever return to Aurich or to ever set foot on German soil again—because my memories are very, very sad and bitter. My whole family was annihilated in Auschwitz, Buchenwald and Theresienstadt, only my sister survived after terrible suffering in the extermination camps. She had become a total physical wreck. . . . My family, my youth, and my education were taken from me, and by God, why should I return to Aurich? . . . Have things really changed? I have abandoned this idea [*Ich bin davon abgekommen*], Mr. Mayor. 63 members of my family died by the hands of the Nazis, and you invite me to return? No, sir, I will never return.¹¹⁸

While the majority of the rejection letters I have been able to view stated that the refugees would not come because they were too old or in poor health, we know, mostly from interviews, that many refugees felt like Rosel Sievs and never wanted to return to the “country of the murderers.” They either found it too painful to visit their former hometown in particular (see the example of Anneliese Bunzel above) or felt that going on this trip would send the wrong message to the Germans. Larry Greenbaum, who settled in San Diego, pointed out that he did not want to accept the free trip and then have to be grateful to and shake hands with people who had kicked him and his family out. In an interview, Greenbaum said that he did not need the Germans to pay for him to go to his town and see what they wanted him to see.¹¹⁹ He did, however, visit the city on his own terms with his wife and another refugee couple when he was on a European tour.

Often, people who were younger when they left Germany were more critical of the idea and less enthusiastic about going than were older people, who, as mentioned above, had many more reasons to go. Older refugees often felt more connection to Germany because living under Nazi rule had only made up a

small part of their life there. For some, this made a difference, even though in other cases this short time period and its gravity crowded all other good memories of Germany out. Moreover, with age, people frequently develop a nostalgia for their youth and past places.¹²⁰ In addition, it is more likely that refugees who had arrived in the United States at an advanced age and did not adjust as successfully as younger ones—those who had never become quite comfortable in the United States—were more enticed by the idea and prospect of traveling to Germany.

Those refugees who were interested in accepting the invitations often felt that they were entitled to receive this more or less financially covered visit to their former hometown. Correspondence between refugees in the United States and the Berlin office responsible for that city's invitation program makes clear this sentiment of strong interest, echoing the initiatives of those refugees who participated in constructing the programs in the first place. Because of the many applications to visit Berlin and the long waiting list, some refugees who were most keen on going sent several letters asking to finally be considered, often stating that if they would not get an invitation soon, they might never see Berlin again because before long they would either be too old or even dead.¹²¹ Many refugees were particularly sensitive to how Berlin handled their cases, protesting when they felt they had unjustly been waiting for too long. In some instances, they pointed out people they knew who had already received invitations, even though they were younger than themselves. The program's manner of prioritizing the invitations was confusing to the applicants at times, as the Berlin office could frequently not make predictions as to when applicants could expect to receive a date for their trip. When receiving a generic letter to a very specific question about the timing of his trip, one man answered disapprovingly, "I assume that you were not very interested in my letter and I do not really feel like coming to Berlin only with the help of bureaucracy, I thought this would be a bit more personal. So many thanks for your answer but I think I will postpone my trip for a while."¹²²

Responses like this illustrate the sensitive nature of the invitations and the process surrounding them. They also show that some refugees took Berlin's outwardly projected goal of *Wiedergutmachung* (making good again) very seriously. "Making good" could not happen if there were not people in Berlin who also took this matter very seriously and who were morally invested in it. Certainly, communications that made the refugees feel unwanted, burdensome, or otherwise uncomfortable were not conducive to creating an atmosphere that would make people want to go back to a place that they had been forced to leave. Yet, through their expressions of criticism and suspicion as to the virtuousness of German motivations, some refugees also made it clear that they would hold the people of West Berlin accountable, and would not accept a functionalist bureaucratic approach to their visits.

The administrators in the Berlin office, which employed between one and three permanent staff at various times, were indeed sensitive to the emotional context that the invitation process meant for many former Jewish Berliners. While the great volume of requests and limited manpower made it difficult for the staff to avoid using form letters, they generally seem to have made an effort to be personable and not too bureaucratic. This was particularly the case with certain employees with whom refugees developed friendly relationships, which were sometimes even continued after the visits.¹²³

In order to foster the positive relationships between West Berlin and the visitors and also to keep those who were still waiting for their invitation informed and positively inclined—the Berlin organizers, after all, wanted to present a positive image to the wider world—the Berlin Press and Information Office (under Hanns-Peter Herz) published the magazine *Aktuell* beginning in 1970. The magazine, which appeared one to four times a year, reported organizational information on the visitor program and publicized its success by regularly printing thank-you letters from participants. Beyond that, it always included a greeting by a politician or official, reports about Jewish life in Berlin, and articles on cultural, economic, political, and historical topics connected to Berlin. The magazine was well received by many emigrants and prompted some to communicate their views on it to Berlin. After its first appearance, one man living in New York wrote to Berlin, “May I congratulate you to this paper and its idea and thank you for it! For all of us—inveterate Berliners—these articles, information, and images . . . are a source of greatest delight, because we are and will remain Berliners, no matter how many decades separate us from this city.”¹²⁴

This statement of endorsement was published in *Aktuell* as well, declaring to the wider readership that the city of Berlin, with its intention to keep the refugees connected to the city, was doing a great job. Endorsements by refugees were certainly the best advertisements for Berlin, and this was, as mayor Klaus Schütz had stated, one result the city had hoped for: to receive good publicity abroad. While surely not all those who received the magazine were so unprejudiced toward Berlin, voices critical of the manner in which Berlin reached out to the emigrants through this magazine and its visitor program were almost completely absent from the publication.

Berlin Program Structures

Traveling to Berlin as part of a large group was the most common visitor experience for refugees, even though in some years individually traveling guests made up about one-third of the visitors.¹²⁵ In the 1970s, the Berlin Senate organized multiple charter and group flights from destinations in Israel, North and South

America, South Africa, and Australia. From the United States, group flights departed from New York, Los Angeles, and Chicago.

To convey goodwill, remembrance and acknowledgment of the Jewish sufferings, and make an attempt at reconciliation, program organizers tried to make the visits as pleasant and comfortable as possible. Invitations from Berlin included the costs of travel, accommodation in first-rate hotels, pocket money, and a program of informative and cultural events. During their one-week stay, the visitors—generally the emigrants and their spouses—would have an official reception with the mayor, meet other Berlin politicians, go on sightseeing tours, often with specific stops at the (former) synagogue or memorials dedicated to victims of Nazi oppression (in later years, specifically dedicated to Jewish victims), have a boat tour on the Spree or Havel river, and meet representatives of the local Jewish community. In the program's early years, the farewell reception would even be held at the Jewish community center. In addition, there would be tickets to the opera or the theater, a cabaret, or a concert. People were also given the opportunity to visit the Weissensee cemetery in East Berlin. Visitors who came as individuals, rather than as part of a group, whether or not they paid for their own travel (paying for one's own travel was sometimes a way to gain an invitation outside of the group visits but was still subject to the priority list of age, etc.), would also receive free accommodation and tickets for cultural events. Because documents about the development and administrative side of the Berlin program no longer exist, it is difficult to trace the decision-making process regarding what the officials thought the visitors should see. Overall, the Berlin program was very similar to that of most other cities. They all aimed to familiarize the visitors with the city again. Thus, they took them to famous sites and places the refugees would have known before they left. They also aimed to showcase memorials in order to indicate that people in the city had not forgotten about the Jewish population.

Reactions to the Visits

The visits to Berlin—whether the refugees took part in one of the larger group visits or came as individual guests—were hailed as a success in press outlets reporting about the trips—*Aufbau*, *Aktuell*, Berlin newspapers, and occasionally a local American paper—and this perspective is frequently supported by personal testimonies from emigrants who participated.¹²⁶ While many of the written testimonies began with a few sentences about the mixed feelings that accompanied the decision to go to Berlin, the next few lines would explain that these fears and uncomfortable feelings quickly subsided upon arrival and were eclipsed by more positive experiences. The letter one of the first visitors in 1970 sent to Berlin is representative for many that followed:

To be honest, I returned with reservations and inhibitions to my home town after 31 years. Because of the kindness, graciousness and especially the good will from all participants to make this stay pleasant and informative in every way, many memories of sad times in the past were alleviated. While one says that it is difficult to forget and forgive, one should not hold a new generation and decent people responsible for past sins.¹²⁷

Aufbau, in particular, with its editorial stance of reconciliation and bridge building, welcomed such positive impressions of the visitor program and changed perspectives on Germany.

Voices that were more critical of such change of heart, meanwhile, seem to have been rare, or not openly publicized, but they did exist, as one example from Los Angeles demonstrates. There, Walter Bucky, a very active member of the Jewish Club of 1933, complained that the people who had returned from their 1971 trip were “brainwashed.” An excerpt from an interview with Bucky reveals this sentiment:

Interviewer (I): What is your attitude towards Germany? Do you have any connections with the Germans here?

Walter Bucky (WB): I tell you, I had bad, bad experiences with the last trip of the 175 people invited from Berlin.

I: Were you there?

WB: No, for heaven’s sake not [in an agitated, angry voice]. It was all [not comprehensible] and they came back 100 *Prozent* brainwashed. They came to me, on Saturday we have our Kaffeeklatsch in the, we have a daycare center in the Jewish Community Center . . . and there we have every two weeks a Kaffeeklatsch, or Chanukka Feier.

. . .

I: Yeah, well is there anything, do they think a lot about Germany?

WB: People came back brainwashed. One woman came back, you know, with an *Aktenmappe* [folder] full of papers and pictures, and we should love them and they gave us the red carpet treatment and we shouldn’t say no, and I told them she wanted to have my mic, and I said you can’t get my mic. You can’t get my, we have no right to hate them, but you have no obligation to love them.

I: What do you mean get your mic?

WB: She wanted to talk with the people! Propaganda! They were, they were brainwashed!

I: What is your feeling about the Germans?

WB: That's what I tell you. I have no right to hate them but I don't need to love them.

I: Yes.

WB: You know, but I can forgive them but I don't have to forget. That is my standpoint.¹²⁸

For those people who Bucky characterized as brainwashed, the trip to Berlin had done exactly what the organizers had wished for: the visitors enjoyed overwhelmingly positive experiences that changed their attitude toward Germany, or at least Berlin more particularly, and they were eager to spread this message upon their return home. Frequently, emigrants were eager to share this enthusiasm with the organizers of the program in Berlin, and letters like the following example from a couple in Florida were not unusual. After writing that their trip had left “a very good and unforgettable impression” on them, they went on to assure the Berlin organizers: “We told our children and grandchildren, all friends and acquaintances about the exceedingly nice visit in Berlin. About the enormous efforts of the Senate so that everything went so well and beautifully. We are your ambassador for the new Berlin.”¹²⁹ With letters such as this, their writers expressed not only their approval of the Berlin of the present, but also made clear that they felt included in the project of making Germany a better place—part of which, as they made clear, was to give it what they thought was its due reputation. At least one refugee remarked that it “pained” her to only ever hear about Germany in negative terms in the United States.¹³⁰

The organizers in Berlin, for their part, appreciated such messages. In an *Aktuell* article in 1976, Johannes Völcker, for a long time the main administrator responsible for the program in the Senate, explained that these messages, which suggested there existed a generally increasing readiness of the visitors to renew or create personal relationships with Berlin, filled him with “thankful gratification.”¹³¹ Thus, both visitors and organizers showed a mutual interest in the relationship—in being connected and in gaining something valuable out of this connection.

Positive Experiences

Thank-you letters some refugees sent to the organizers of the Berlin program reveal that while they appreciated the care that had been put into the organization of these events and activities, what left the biggest impression on them were the ways that the German organizers welcomed and interacted with them. The letters overflow with references to the warmth and cordiality with which the

emigrants were welcomed by the organizers and the volunteers, who accompanied the groups to most of the events and throughout their stay. This warm care of the organizers not only made the biggest impact on visitors to Berlin but also in programs all over the country. In Freiburg, some visitors observed, “Never in our lives have we been sheltered and protected in such a way, and not because the ladies felt obligated—no, one could feel their warm affection.”¹³² This feeling that German organizers treated them with utmost sincerity, “coming from the heart,” was important in the visiting refugees’ evaluation of the programs as an authentic act of morality, something that was of highest significance to them.¹³³ In this regard, a Berlin visitor wrote, “What touched me personally most was the atmosphere. All speeches to us reflected dignity, non-concealment of what happened in the past—and a serious, warm willingness and empathy for a new present and future.”¹³⁴

In addition to the recognition of the past through words, the refugees also commended—and were often quite surprised by—the existence of memorials to the atrocities of the National Socialist past, especially in light of the importance of the remembrance in Jewish tradition. In Berlin, sightseeing tours for the visiting emigrants included the memorial in Plötzensee (the prison and execution center for opponents of the Nazis) and, increasingly, other memorials that emerged in the city and were dedicated to commemorating the Nazi past and particularly its Jewish victims.¹³⁵ In smaller cities, the emigrants visited the synagogue, or its former site, which generally had a plaque commemorating the events of the November Pogrom of 1938 or the town’s Jewish community. Whereas Jews on personal visits had often found the synagogue or the Jewish cemetery in poor condition in the 1950s and ’60s and early 1970s, through the initiatives of such visiting refugees or civic interest groups—and a decree of 1956–57 stipulating that federal and state institutions would take over half of the costs necessary for upkeep of Jewish cemeteries—by the end of the 1970s, this situation had improved in most places. In any case, many cities made sure that there was some recognition of Jewish sites before an official visit of former Jewish citizens. In several cities, the visitor programs were even planned around the renovation of a synagogue, and some municipalities staged exhibits in which they presented the history of the Jews of that particular town.¹³⁶ Sometimes cities also decided to name streets and squares after Jewish places or individuals, frequently before or on the occasion of the official invitations.¹³⁷ As such, the restoration of such places was to serve as an indicator that the cities valued and remembered their former Jewish citizens, something that was, when well done, very well received by the visitors.¹³⁸

Negative Experiences

Actions, events, and memorials which seemed to signify an authenticity of feeling figured most significantly in positive experiences of the refugees' visits. It is perhaps unsurprising, then, that it was the absence of authentic cordiality and appropriate acknowledgment of responsibility for the wrongs of the past that produced the most ill feeling. While it is difficult to find reference to such occurrences in the letters collected at the Berlin Senate Chancellery, the special edition of *Aufbau* documenting 120 different visitor programs featured a number of critical voices.¹³⁹ In some cities, refugees realized from public statements and speeches given by mayors and other (sometimes church) officials that despite the existence of the visitor program, there were individuals in influential positions in Germany whose attitude toward the National Socialist past was not especially condemnatory. This became particularly apparent when speakers neglected to address the fact that it was the government and citizens of their towns that had actively participated in the discrimination against and persecution of Jews during the Third Reich. The mayor of Crailsheim, for example, in his speech at the Jewish cemetery in 1987, explained, "Not buried here are 50 Crailsheimers who during the years 1939–1945 were somewhere in the world, disdained by a misguided ideology and killed, driven by a terrible world war."¹⁴⁰ In Aurich, the mayor's speech similarly revealed his complete lack of understanding of history when he explained that Jews had been persecuted because they were "*andersartig*" (of a different kind) and "different minded" than other Germans.¹⁴¹ In response to this, one refugee stood up and, to the applause of the attendees, corrected the mayor's statement. Still, such comments, distancing the crimes of the war from the people, showed the visitors that despite official narratives of German responsibility, more sinister popular narratives and stereotypes concerning Jews were persistent. Such situations demonstrated to the refugees that some Germans did not in every sense take on a more personal and local responsibility. The existence of visitor programs alone, then, did not necessarily lead people to engage in a critical look at history, or to make a serious effort at understanding what had happened to these Jewish visitors. Especially in the 1980s and later in the '90s, they had become the politically correct thing to do, a standard practice of many municipalities. Inevitably, some participants engaged in them without serious consideration for their meaning, while others, who participated for one civic or bureaucratic necessity or another, even held personal beliefs that were antithetical to the ostensible aims of the programs. Nevertheless, in spite of these dubious examples and the ill will they engendered, existence of the programs contributed to the general restructuring of German society. In this way Germans were still learning to be citizens of a country that took responsibility for its past.

A criticism perhaps related to that of German rote participation in visitor program events was the absence of spontaneous contact with regular Germans

during visits. Some refugees criticized their cities' programs because they were often so tightly packed with activities that the visitors felt there was no time to meet "normal" inhabitants, which put them in doubt about the extent to which the warmhearted engagement and interest of those directly involved in the programs was representative of the broader population.¹⁴² In smaller towns, however, meeting "ordinary" citizens—often people the refugees had known before the war—was frequently unavoidable, and it created a different, more difficult atmosphere than in large cities such as Berlin. While, generally, refugees appreciated it when Germans paid attention to their history of persecution, some visitors were put off by too much sudden focus on it. Ann Ikenberg recalled in an interview such an incident during her visit to her hometown of Wuppertal: "We went to a meeting in the city hall and met with a council man who wanted to know the story of my family, about what my parents did for the city. It got to be too much." At another point in the interview, she said she found in the outreach activities of the city too much "greasy sweetness." While, on the one hand, people's insensitivity to the Jewish persecution history, or the sense that they were merely fulfilling a duty in acknowledging it, caused revulsion in some refugees, on the other, philo-Semitism, or a sense of it, did not sit well either.¹⁴³

Finally, a related point of criticism was raised by refugees when they felt that the West German efforts were so focused on making their stay a pleasant experience that they neglected the deeper emotional context these trips held for the visitors. Even if the German participants were doing and saying all "the right things," facing the old hometown, and the memories connected with it, in itself required courage and was difficult and painful to varying degrees.¹⁴⁴ One visitor said of her trip to Laupheim, for example, that the reporting about the program made it seem like "everybody simply had fun." She explained that in her case, she had had to leave the town for Switzerland after two and a half days because she could no longer bear looking at her childhood home, which lay directly across from her hotel window.¹⁴⁵ Some refugees criticized that the "*Vergangenheitsbewältigungsjargon*," the jargon that Germans had developed for the discourse on "mastering the past" and which became filled with words like "bridge building" and "reconciliation," plastered over the horrific nature of the very events that made these visits necessary. In some cases, refugees felt that the German satisfaction over the good deed of inviting the refugees to their city was greater and more real than their realization of the broader context of forced emigration and genocide.¹⁴⁶

Impacts—The Meaning and Value of the Visits

In their original conception of the visitor programs, those who created and ran them intended them to be an important event for the refugees, and a contribution

to German Jewish understanding and reconciliation. What then did the visitors draw from these experiences? What were the actual, as well as long-term, effects of these visits on the (Jewish) participants, on their identity, and on the German Jewish relationship? It seems clear that, in general, positive experiences on the visitor programs improved the relationship to Germany of those that experienced them, while negative ones tended to confirm suspicion and dislike of the country. This was not always the case, however, and an overview of different reflections and emotional reactions to the visits shows the complexity of the impact they made on people.

As with reactions to the invitations, experiences and reactions frequently differed among different age groups. For older people, who had spent a great portion of their lives in Germany, and who, as we have seen, often responded enthusiastically to the invitation programs, returning to Germany was one of the most important events of their later lives, as they frequently asserted. Forced emigration had been a painful experience, and for many older people, especially if they did not have a fulfilling life in the United States, their life in Germany remained an important reality and reference point for them. While they suffered from the rejection and persecution they had experienced in Germany, they nevertheless often sorely missed the familiar places and circumstances of their former home. This ambivalence or contradiction of feelings was not an easy one to bear, especially when the predominant discourse concerning Germany in the greater American Jewish community of which they were a part was one of utter rejection or, at best, intense criticism that tended to not leave any place for nostalgia.¹⁴⁷ Visiting and seeing that their former hometown was a place in which one could feel safe and good again legitimated their longing for the place in their own eyes, as well as to some degree in the eyes of the larger community. In the thank-you letters to Berlin, many of the older refugees testified to their feelings of being at home in Berlin during their visit and the continuity of the beauty of the city.¹⁴⁸

For many visitors, then, their trip to Germany reconciled their painful experiences with their love for their former city or country. One couple described how going to Berlin—which they “used to love so much”—and seeing it in a positive light, cared for by well-meaning Germans, “put balsam on [their] still burning wounds.” This description of the healing effect of the visitor program, while it simultaneously suggests that the trauma of Nazi persecution can never really be cured or forgotten, is representative of many responses the refugees shared with the German organizers. Having been treated well by Germans was not only an important experience during the visit, however. As the couple’s letter implies, their visit produced a more general feeling that they could take back to their home: “It did us so much good to be able to believe that there still existed human love in Germany.”¹⁴⁹ For many, to be able to relate to their former home as a place that they had most recently experienced as “good” was soothing.

The personal interactions with morally decent and warmhearted Germans that made the biggest impact on the refugees also had their therapeutic effects in a different way. Ruth Wertheimer-Shurman's words exemplify the transformation that numerous other participants of the visitor programs experienced: "The open conversations have released us from the hate that we had carried within us for so long."¹⁵⁰ While one intention of the German visitor programs had been just that—to deconstruct negative feelings for Germany in the visitors and contribute to German-Jewish reconciliation—the revelation for the refugees that there existed moral goodness in Germans created also a reconciliation with their own history in Germany. Wertheimer-Shurman's words show that the hatred of Germany had sat hard with her and it was a relief to be able to release this emotion and let it fade. The visits thus allowed for some refugees to look at Germany, and also their own German Jewish past prior to the Nazis, with more positive eyes.

Even good visits, however, did not always lead to good feeling. For most older refugees, the renewal of a positive connection to Germany did not mean that they wanted to return to Germany permanently, as they felt that their place and future, and that of their families, was now in the United States. For some, however, especially those who had not adjusted well to life in the United States, returning to the old places, seeing them in beautiful shape and being cared for by nice people to whom one could relate effortlessly, both linguistically and culturally, increased the pain over having lost that place. One woman wrote to the Berlin Senate that while she had enjoyed the visit, it left her husband, who had originally asked for the invitation, "very sad."¹⁵¹ Two years after his return to the United States, this man again wrote to Berlin, asking to be invited a second time. Referring to Germany as his beloved fatherland, he stated, "Life here is very hard. I beg you to give me the opportunity to let me see my fatherland again I did not file restitution many years back."¹⁵² The collection held at Berlin's Senate Chancellery includes other similar letters from people whose good experiences on their official visit incited or increased homesickness for Germany but who could not afford to return again either temporarily or permanently. For them, the Senate had no solution to offer, just apologetic words. Even though, in their speeches and press outreach, the politicians and administrators in Berlin communicated the message that they considered the refugees still part of the city, as belonging to Berlin—by calling them co-citizens or fellow Berliners, for example—they nevertheless remained only virtual or imagined Berliners. The exclusion of the past remained the reality of the present, and the Senate was not in the position to change that in practice; only those who could afford to come back by themselves could potentially make that change.¹⁵³

Similarly, the losses that the refugees endured could not be repaired, even if the visits were "good." The story of a couple from Orange County, south of Los Angeles, also exemplifies this. When they received an invitation to Nuremberg,

the woman, even though she had worked in a travel agency for many years that specialized in trips to Germany—and was also frequented by many German Jewish refugees for that reason—hesitated to accept the invitation. The couple eventually did go, and Lisa, the German born (non-Jewish) owner of the travel agency, recalled a visit by her employee's husband after the couple had returned. He brought with him a book of photographs of Nuremberg before the war that the couple had been given during their trip. But he had found that looking at these photographs was too painful for him and did not want the book in his house. Knowing that Lisa was from southern Germany as well, he brought it for her as he thought she would cherish it.¹⁵⁴ The assumption on the side of the organizers that such a book would bring joy to the refugees as they looked at these pictures was mistaken in this case.¹⁵⁵ These examples clearly show the limitations of these programs: that though they may sometimes have ameliorated pain or hatred in refugees, they could not make good again (*wiedergutmachen*), could not give back what had been taken and destroyed, and could not restore those who had been killed. In this way, reconciliation with Germans of the present was one thing, but such outreach did not always lessen the pain and loss that refugees carried with them. For some people, in fact, the program offered no lasting solace, but rather renewed or extended their pain. In fact, the programs owe their overwhelming success in the first place to the strength of the refugees in confronting their losses, and this should be kept in mind when considering the more positive impacts the programs made on people, as they are described in the following sections.

For refugees who had been younger when they left Germany, positive experiences in Berlin often meant a connection to their parents' and families' past that had frequently not received much attention during their life after emigration. In their efforts to Americanize, many younger people did not want to have much to do with Germany, and a generally critical attitude dominated their perspective on the country. Even in cases where the parents were more positively inclined toward Germany, children frequently either had no interest in this heritage or held a strongly critical attitude of rejection toward the country. West Germany's democratization process—restitution in particular, and more personal acknowledgements of guilt and a public desire to atone—permitted a reasonable interest in Germany, but for many, a visit at the invitation of their former hometown was not the result of the same sort of heartfelt desire as it was for older people.

However, with age, and aging or dying parents, family connections became more important to some, and their interest in their past increased. For Albrecht Strauss, for example, going to Marburg and staying in touch with people in the city was significant for him and made him "happy and proud," as it meant keeping up a "direct connection with my father's and grandfather's Marburg."¹⁵⁶ For many refugees, while it was a melancholic trip to visit the city where they had spent wonderful time with their parents, they nevertheless cherished the

memories of family that their trip brought back to them.¹⁵⁷ Such memories had sometimes faded over time and were overshadowed by the dominating public memory, especially in the 1980s in the United States, of Nazi persecution and the Holocaust. The testimonies of many refugees reveal that personal experiences in these towns and the retrieved positive memories that resulted could, in turn, ameliorate the larger, more impersonal discourse. This, also in turn, (re)created a personal connection to the city, which frequently extended to an overall more positive evaluation of the present Germany.

Furthermore, encountering the places of the past not only invoked memories of the past, but also that of past selves.¹⁵⁸ While this, as we have seen in the examples above, could for some translate into very painful experiences of loss—of the person one had been before the Holocaust (with a family, etc.)—for other refugees this could mean the retrieval of something they had missed. Discussing this, one visitor, a professor of psychology at the University of California at Berkeley, said, “The honesty with which [the] citizens [of Nidderau] sought to approach the past made it possible for me to rediscover my German-Jewish roots.”¹⁵⁹ Thus, for some refugees the trip brought a renewed identification with their German-Jewishness. For one woman, this manifested itself in a new embracing of the German language, and her remark in a letter to Berlin, that she would make an effort to not forget it again, reveals the value this held for her.¹⁶⁰

For people who had left Germany as very small children and who retained very few memories of the place, the effects of their travels to Germany on their own identity could be even more surprising. Hannah Goldrich, who had left Germany in 1937 as a two-year-old child, had for the longest time refused to travel to Germany. Her parents, on the other hand, had been back several times, something she could never really understand, as her relationship to Germany was predominantly shaped by the very German-critical New York Jewish environment she surrounded herself with. However, when she returned from having finally taken part in an organized visit to Heilbronn, she wrote,

It was good for me that I went in 1985 because I now do not have the feeling anymore that all Germans are bad and this is a lot for me. I had an extremely strong feeling of peace after the trip. . . . First of all, I found out that I am German . . . It still seems weird when I say that, but I felt at ease there. . . . Until about five years ago I did not know that I had scars, which is interesting. I grew up with lots of Jewish cultural connections, but I did not give my children Jewish schooling. Now I think the reason was my feeling that being Jewish would mean to be killed. I know that war influences children in many respects and I know that these years of my life really had influence on me. The results of this stupid war reach for generations into the future. To have made this trip does not take away from this but it helps. It helps to heal.¹⁶¹

Interesting in this case is that Goldrich had, prior to her trip, a comfortable relationship with neither her German nor Jewish background. For her, both

Germanness and Jewishness existed primarily in the context of the Holocaust. However, her positive experiences in Germany not only allowed her to better understand her parents—something that many young refugees felt was really important to them—but also allowed her to engage with her own heritage of being German *and* Jewish, which in turn created a new understanding of self.¹⁶²

How intimately this discovery was linked to being in Germany and how powerful and transforming it could be is further exemplified by the experiences of a man who returned to Berlin with his mother. He recounted his thoughts upon seeing his grandparents' former house and their synagogue:

Something became clear to me that I had not understood my entire life: The stories about Berlin were not fairytales, because this is the place where I am from. We were no refugees or vagrants as people had seen us but we were part of a family with an old rich Jewish culture. What I am today I owe to those who did not survive the hell; but their spiritual and cultural heritage resisted the brutal annihilation. My deep gratitude to the Senate of Berlin for the opportunity of this special, touching experience. We had to and could again step on German soil so that I could see with my own eyes where my roots are.¹⁶³

As this example shows, for young German Jewish refugees and children of refugees, the places of the past were often very abstract, and their own identity as German Jews beset with negative connotations. In this light, going to the actual places that one's family had left behind and seeing that current German citizens were interested in the German Jewish past could be life-changing for some.¹⁶⁴ This acknowledgement of a positive German-Jewish heritage in people who had theretofore neglected it was particularly resonant in a self-proclaimed nation of immigrants like the United States, where one's background and heritage was and is accorded much public interest. Because of this, for many refugees, especially those who did not marry other German Jews, it was important then to not only connect with their past, but also to include their partners and children in this personal history. While most West German visitor program invitations included the refugee's spouse or partner, many refugees also requested that they be able to bring their children or, later, grandchildren too. Visitor programs were often unable to accommodate this wish, but in Berlin, people who paid for their own airfare and came outside of a group often brought their children. Even when children did not go on the trip themselves, parents often related their positive experiences in Germany to their families. That some felt this connection to Germany should live on in the future is apparent in Lore Rasmussen's letter to Germany, assuring the friends she had met and made in her native Lampertsheim during her visit in 1988 of their impact: "These ten days will remain among the deepest memories of my life and will continue to live on in our children and grandchildren."¹⁶⁵ In this way, the effects of the invitation programs extended

their influence into the future and fostered a relationship between Germany and a generation of people who had often had few connections to the country or their parents' or grandparents' heritage.

Bearing Witness to German Youth

The future-oriented connection that sometimes resulted from these visits not only applied to the offspring of German Jewish refugees, but also extended to German children. Similar to the refugees who had engaged in the memorial initiatives not only for themselves but also to teach Germans, some refugees who came through visitor programs also wanted to engage in such education efforts. Before visiting Berlin through the visitor program in 1983, Gerald Jeremias sent a letter to his former school indicating that he was interested in seeing it again during his upcoming trip. The school headmaster's response was to invite Jeremias to speak to the students about his experiences.¹⁶⁶

For some people, such as the Grünbergs, who visited a high school in Leer (East Frisia), it was speaking to students that made coming to Germany possible and worthwhile. During their official visit to their hometown, Mr. Grünberg told the students about his imprisonment in Auschwitz. Upon the students' question of how the couple was able to return to Germany after that experience, Mrs. Grünberg answered that it had been a difficult decision but that they had accepted the invitation "because they owed it to their children to do everything in order to prevent their own history being repeated."¹⁶⁷ Going back to talk to young Germans was one way many refugees felt that goal could be accomplished. In this way, some German Jewish refugees viewed and portrayed Germany's integrity and future as intrinsically connected to their own and their families' future. This stake in West Germany made their presence in the country crucial and also justifiable—to themselves and to potential critics. For some, it was a way to combine their interest in, or fondness for, their hometown, or Germany more generally, and their feeling of somehow belonging to that place, with a critical and empowered position of authority on the German past and future.

The case of one woman, Gerda Lowenstein, who had lived in the United States for thirty-five years before returning to Germany for the first time in 1971, exemplifies this investment particularly well, even though she is exceptional given the extent of her dedication.¹⁶⁸ In the school years 1975/76 and 1979/80 she worked as a governess, upon invitation of the headmaster, at the Max-Rill girls' boarding school near Bad Tölz. At this school, Lowenstein found her "mission" of "educating and speaking about the time of horror, which back then was still gladly left out of history education."¹⁶⁹ It was her conviction that "we Jews who emigrated can offer today's youth so incredibly much. Not only in the realm of culture but also as personal witnesses of a time which has now

become history.”¹⁷⁰ For the sixteen- and seventeen-year-old girls at the school, Lowenstein was the first Jewish person they ever saw, and her becoming something of a “substitute mother” was an important revelation for them. Deep connections developed between her and the girls, and Lowenstein was proud to have “built a small bridge” and to have “opened many young people’s eyes to an unfathomable chapter of German history.”¹⁷¹

Increasingly in the 1980s and 1990s, both refugees and Jews who had survived concentration and extermination camps acted as similar witnesses of the past, and many visitor programs arranged or included the opportunity to speak to German youths.¹⁷² After a trip to Germany in the late 1980s, Hans Sahl, writer, critic, and regular contributor to *Aufbau*, praised the zeal with which young Germans were interested in the “authentic” experience of the Nazi past, and hinted that there was a duty to make it available to them: “[The youth] are on a quest for authenticity and this authenticity is a human being. They are looking for an answer; one cannot forsake them again, one has to bear witness.”¹⁷³ While bearing witness was certainly not an easy task, many refugees were proud of this role they acquired in educating young Germans.

By the 1980s, there existed a sense of a mutually felt responsibility among some German citizens—especially a younger generation of teachers—and German Jewish refugees to remember and teach the National Socialist past, often with the belief that this would prevent a repetition of such atrocities in the future. In this vein, Berlin’s mayor Eberhard Diepgen wrote an *Aktuell* article on the occasion of Berlin’s 750-year anniversary in 1987, titled “Berlin—History for the Future,” which told of the great democratic and peace-loving city that Berlin had become and the memorials and projects that stood for it. Addressing former Jewish citizens of Berlin, he offered his hope to greet many more of them during the anniversary year so they could not only witness the city’s transformation but, at the same time, strengthen it through their presence.¹⁷⁴ Indeed, the budget for Berlin’s visitor program in 1987 was the highest ever, signaling a particular effort to include those who had been victims during Berlin’s darkest years in the celebration. That year brought eighteen hundred visitors, the highest number ever for a single year, and the twenty-thousandth guest to the city.¹⁷⁵ The year 1988, meanwhile, the fiftieth anniversary of the Kristallnacht, the pogrom of 9 November 1938, saw a significant rise in the number of visitor programs in Germany country-wide, with forty cities inviting their former Jewish citizens for the first time.

Final Considerations

Fifty years after the pogrom that forced many German Jews into the decision to emigrate, a significant number of them either had been or were back in their

hometowns, which had invited them in commemoration of the events. Most German Jewish refugees, while embarking on the trips with mixed emotions, returned to their countries of residence or new homelands with a stronger connection to Germany and to their own German Jewish heritage and identity. For the organized refugee community in the United States, this reorientation toward a German Jewish identity was significant. The majority of German Jewish refugees had become well integrated into American life, seeing themselves as Americans first. Many of the older refugees had by the 1980s passed away, and the younger generation had less of a connection to their heritage. The interest from Germany in German Jewish refugees, I contend, which was mainly expressed through the visitor programs, contributed to a boost in individual and communal German Jewish identities in the United States in the 1970s and particularly the 1980s. For the organized community, people working for *Aufbau*, for example, who had an interest in keeping this community together and strong, the visitor programs were significant as modes of promoting and preserving German Jewish identity and an interest in this heritage.¹⁷⁶ *Aufbau* articles reporting on the trips appeared regularly, portraying German ambitions to commemorate the past and honor its Jewish victims. The discourse in *Aufbau* was not one of victimhood in a lachrymose sense, however, but rather focused on the German Jewish refugees as witnesses, as experts on the past, who had an important message to spread and heritage to preserve.¹⁷⁷ The time of great outreach from German cities coincided also with a general rise in public interest in the Holocaust in the United States and a reformulation of an American Jewish identity, in which the Holocaust was a defining (and uniting) element.¹⁷⁸ While their particular history had been a topic of interest to the German Jewish refugee community ever since their arrival, it was in the context of these larger developments of a Holocaust discourse that an interest in their specific history of persecution and efforts at the preservation of the German Jewish heritage increased.¹⁷⁹ As the Holocaust story in the United States focused primarily on Jews who had survived concentration and extermination camps, the refugees' story was one on the sidelines. Partly as a consequence of this, they valued a reestablished connection to Germany. This was so particularly in light of some German citizens increasingly valuing their particular knowledge of the Nazi past and their roles as witnesses to it, something that emerges most distinctly in the visitor programs on occasions when refugees were invited to speak to students. As such, being a German Jewish refugee held positive connotations of being a person who held the ability to educate, to make a positive change in the world, particularly in relation to Germany.¹⁸⁰

While the connection to Germany was important for individuals and the community to varying degrees then, for Germans, the visitor programs and their connections to German Jewish refugees was also exceedingly—perhaps even more—important. In an individual and communal search for disassociation from the Nazis and their atrocities—for moral or political reasons, or

both—acknowledgment of this past and its events, demonstration of contrition, and desire for reconciliation and “normalization” were primary expressions.¹⁸¹ In the 1980s, the Holocaust was evolving as the focal point of West German memory culture in relation to the National Socialist past. National and international events such as the Auschwitz and the Eichmann trials of the early and mid-1960s, the Arab-Israeli War of 1967, Willy Brandt’s genuflection honoring the victims of the Warsaw Ghetto in 1970, and the airing of the American miniseries “Holocaust” in 1979 had brought public attention not only to perpetrators but also to Jewish suffering.¹⁸² As a consequence of this confrontation with Jewish pain and the horror of the German crimes, certain people—I have pointed out several groups—and especially the younger generation, longed for reconciliation with Jews. Notwithstanding what was frequently a genuine personal desire for reconciliation, with the intensification of Holocaust discourse, it also became a pressing concern to avoid being identified with the Nazis. Doing good things for Jews and having good connections with Jews, particularly those who had been wronged in the past, was a good way to know and show that one was neither a Nazi nor an anti-Semite. Hence the increased efforts in the 1980s to make it possible for the German Jews to visit their native hometowns, to “send a signal of remembrance and acknowledgment of their [Jewish] suffering in an attempt for reconciliation.”¹⁸³ Part of these efforts was to show the visitors that towns had changed.¹⁸⁴ Whether they were motivated primarily morally or politically, many German municipalities attempted to represent a “transformed town” engaged in active memory creation. They did this by removing physical traces of the violent Nazi past and rebuilding demolished synagogues and cemeteries, thus referring back to a time when Jewish life had existed in those towns. In synagogues and cemeteries, Jewish visitors could either remember or develop (depending upon their age) a sense of a good life in Germany before the rise of Nazism and also potentially, if there were Jews in these places, in the present. Where there was an absence of Jewish buildings and Jewish communities, as in many locations, additional efforts were required to present a positive image of the cities to the Jewish visitors and other Germans during the 1980s. Through memorial ceremonies and exhibits, often put on by history working groups or by the city archives, the Nazi past was publicly condemned and distance was established between the Germans who had carried out and supported the persecution of the Jews and the current populations of towns—even though among the current population were still many who had lived under the Third Reich, albeit as children. Thus were bad and painful memories associated with Germany or a specific town marginalized, to be replaced by new memories which were actively created by German preservation and restoration of Jewish structures and construction of places of remembrance on the one hand, and refugee presence and witnessing (and its local support) on the other. The naming of streets after native Jews was another attempt to combine an honoring of these individuals with the offering of this

honoring to Jewish visitors. In these ways, the identity and memory of the towns and the people who lived in them were redefined in the eyes of their own citizens and presented to the refugees and the world at large as good places in which lived good Germans.¹⁸⁵ While these actions of memorialization cannot be detached from certain political interests and particular ulterior motives of image and representation for German cities and their inhabitants, and while the presence of such material sites cannot be understood to translate directly into moral understanding, these memorials and their associated meanings were lasting.¹⁸⁶ In this way, the German Jewish past of these towns was visible and no longer hidden. Compared to children growing up in the 1970s, German children in the 1980s were much more likely to become aware at some point in their school life—likely at an event to commemorate the pogrom of 9 November 1938—whether a Jewish community had existed in their towns and where the synagogue had been, if the town had had one. In these transformed local geographies of towns all over West Germany, which were partly a result of the visitor programs, and the changed meanings and understandings they reflect, lies another example of how German Jewish refugees affected German identity construction.

In the efforts some German citizens undertook in making these changes and raising more awareness for the German Jewish past, it was frequently very important for them that these were seen and acknowledged by Jewish visitors. After all, the idea was that the Jewish presence and acknowledgment would validate the German efforts, absolve the people of the crimes of the past (or their parents' past), purging from them the guilt of the perpetrators, and approve their democratic and tolerant identity. German Jewish refugees who were very open to dialogue were usually welcomed and sometimes received certain honors. Those who were more critical on the other hand, were not welcomed with open arms.¹⁸⁷ Observing the language with which German officials addressed Jewish visitors in *Aktuell* in the late 1980s, and increasingly in the 1990s, reveals a transformation in the discourse concerning the visitors, one which shows that Jewish connections had become ever more important. In previous years, the West German message had been one of wanting to make up for the past and offering something good to the Jewish refugees: to invite them back, make it possible for them to see their former hometown, in an attempt at reconciliation. Increasingly, official addresses to Jewish visitors, for example in *Aktuell* or in letters or speeches from mayors, expressed a sense of intense German need for the visitors, a plea to come, and gratitude when they did.

This intensification of German Jewish interactions on the local level, and the rising pressure for them across this time, must also be understood in the context of an intensification of national memory politics, which was partly influenced by American developments. In the 1980s, West German diplomats in the United States worried that the popular attention the Holocaust was receiving would influence American public opinion negatively toward Germany.¹⁸⁸ That this had

been an ongoing concern for the German diplomats I have shown previously. It now, however, reached a new height, and West Germans responded to it in a familiar way: by trying to foster good connections with Jews. What on the federal level was an extended visitor program involving relationships between the government and American Jewish organizations was, on the local level, carried out between refugees and their former towns and citizens.¹⁸⁹ Thus, with increasing Holocaust consciousness, nationally and internationally, the relationship with German Jewish refugees played an increasingly important role for West Germany's international image, as well as its image of itself, while for German Jews it, in many cases, offered a new understanding of both Germany and of themselves.¹⁹⁰

Notes

1. Excerpt from Pan Am advertisement, *Aufbau* 35 (23 May 1969).
2. *Ibid.*
3. In cities with a large Jewish population, German Jewish visitor programs were carried out on a yearly basis. Berlin is the prime example of this. There, the last large group of visitors came in 2010. Individual visitors are still received by the city government, however, and frequently accompanied by volunteers. Interview Margit Mücke. Interview Barbara Boehm-Tettelbach.
4. The Israeli government did not permit Israeli citizens, and thus German Jews who had emigrated to Israel, to travel to Germany until after 1956. Nikou, *Zwischen Imagepflege*, 7.
5. See interview with Ruth Nussbaum conducted in German by Alexander von der Borch-Nitzling, in Borch-Nitzling, *(Un)heimliche Heimat*, 504.
6. Stefanie Fischer suggests that the trips to Germany were not very much discussed in the refugee communities abroad, and points in particular to an "absence of [such] trips in the Jewish family memory (*Familiengedächtnis*).” "Entangled Transnational Relationships: Former Jewish and Non-Jewish Neighbors in the Postwar Era," German Studies Association Paper Presentation, Denver, October 2013.
7. "Ernest Wolf," in Wolman, *Crossing Over*, 248.
8. Sommer did not say in the interview why he decided to visit. "Ernie Sommer," in Wolman, *Crossing Over*, 159.
9. *Ibid.*, 158–59. See also Betty Gradmann-Josef's experience during her visit to Nuremberg in 1961. "Besuch in der alten Heimat—Eine Dokumentation des AUFBAU über Besuchsprogramme deutscher Gemeinden für ihre ehemaligen jüdischen Bewohner," *Aufbau* 60 (28 October 1994): 15.
10. "Ernest Wolf," in Wolman, *Crossing Over*, 247.
11. *Ibid.*, 160.
12. Interview with John Best, conducted by Herbert A. Strauss, Los Angeles, January 3, 1972, LBI NY, AR 25385, <http://www.lbi.org/digibaeck/results/?qtype=pid&term=1326485>.
13. *Ibid.*
14. "Hedy Wolf," in Wolman, *Crossing Over*, 237.
15. *Ibid.*, 239.
16. *Ibid.*, 238.

17. E.g., "Reise und Verkehr," *Aufbau* 34 (13 September 1968); and *Aufbau* 35 (13 June 1969).
18. E.g., *Aufbau* 35 (23 May 1969).
19. See *Aufbau* and *Mitteilungsblatt*. Herbert Strauss pointed to the economic success of the refugees; they themselves frequently point out in interviews that while the beginnings were difficult, they were able to build a comfortable life in the United States. Strauss, *Jewish Immigrants*, 6:298ff.
20. Grossmann, "Family Files," 61.
21. "Ann 'Annchen' Ikenberg," in Wolman, *Crossing Over*, 104–5.
22. "Travelogue Frank White" and announcement of event, *Mitteilungsblatt* 20, no. 3 (March 1966); and "Frank White Reisebericht 1. Forts." *Mitteilungsblatt* 21, no. 1 (January 1967).
23. "Frank White Reisebericht 1. Forts." *Mitteilungsblatt* 21, no. 1 (January 1967).
24. "Die Wiedergutmachung in der Laien-Perspektive 4. Forts." *Mitteilungsblatt* 21, no. 6 (June 1967).
25. Niederland was born in 1904 in East Prussia and grew up in Würzburg, where his father was a rabbi. Via England, he came to the United States in 1940. Trained as a physician, he worked as a professor of psychology after the war and with people suffering from persecution and survival experience. "William Niederland," in Hartwig and Roscher, eds, *Die Verheissene Stadt*, 168.
26. E.g., *Mitteilungsblatt* 23, no. 1 (January 1969); *Aufbau* 34 (9 August 1968).
27. Margret Collin, "From the Editor's Desk: Easter Parade," *Mitteilungsblatt* 22, no. 6 (June 1968).
28. Lowenstein, *Frankfurt on the Hudson*, 242, 328. Lowenstein sent out 1,629 questionnaires in total, covering "a fairly large proportion of the middle of the religious spectrum in Washington Heights (excluding only the most Orthodox and the unaffiliated)." Of the 513 returned to him, 53.4 percent indicated that they had traveled. *Ibid.*, 267. He also found that it was more common for Reform Jews to travel to Germany (71.6 percent) than for Orthodox congregants (44.0 percent). *Ibid.*, 342.
29. See *Aufbau* 34 (20 September 1968); and *Aufbau* 35 (5 September 1969).
30. "Hilde Kracko," in Kirchheimer and Kirchheimer, *We Were So Beloved*, 229.
31. *Aufbau* 60 (28 October 1994): 28.
32. Interview with Annelise Bunzel, conducted by Joan C. Lessing, Los Angeles, March 15, 1985, LBI NY, AR 25385, <http://www.lbi.org/digibaeck/results/?qtype=pid&term=1326565>.
33. C.F., "Berlin war eine Reise wert," *Aufbau* 35 (30 May 1969).
34. See "Das Beispiel Oberhausens: Gedenkbuch für die Opfer des Faschismus"; and "Synagogenöffnung in Osnabrück," both *Aufbau* 35 (4 July 1969).
35. Steinitz came to the United States in 1947—he had been interned in Gurs in France and survived in Switzerland. Unlike most *Aufbau* readers, he did not spend the war years in the United States.
36. "Hans Steinitz," in Kirchheimer and Kirchheimer, *We Were So Beloved*, 224.
37. In the original German: "kameradschaftlicher Offenheit." See Steinitz, "Aufbau, Neubau, Brückenbau," 17.
38. Kotowski, ed., *Aufbau: Sprachrohr. Heimat. Mythos*, 33.
39. "Hans Steinitz," in Kirchheimer and Kirchheimer, *We Were So Beloved*, 225.
40. Ads featured, e.g., Rheingold Bier, Asbach Uralt, and many real estate companies. *Die Welt* was founded after World War II by the British occupying forces and then taken over by Axel Springer and his publishing company. *Aufbau* 35 (23 May 1969).
41. *Ibid.*
42. For Axel Springer, reconciliation with Jews and support for Israel were of great personal importance. See Backhaus et al., eds, *Bild dir dein Volk!*
43. *Aufbau* was not a for-profit newspaper and needed advertisements to fund its publication. Especially when readership dwindled in the 1960s, this became more important.

44. *Aufbau* 35 (5 September 1969).
45. Steinitz, "Der 'Aufbau.'"
46. *Ibid.*
47. "München reicht die Hand," *Aufbau* 31 (20 August 1965).
48. Nikou, "Coming Back Home?"
49. Kräutler, *Dieselbe Stadt*, 13.
50. Nikou, *Zwischen Imagepflege*, 17.
51. Weichmann had spent the war years in New York City and was brought back to Hamburg in 1948 by the former mayor Max Brauer, a Social Democrat who had also been an emigrant in New York. *Aufbau* 33 (30 June 1967); Nikou, *Zwischen Imagepflege*, 27.
52. Nikou, *Zwischen Imagepflege*, 27–28.
53. *Ibid.*, 18–19.
54. *Ibid.*, 21, 26.
55. In this approach, the Hamburg senate followed the approach of the city of Frankfurt, which had been sending out information materials since early 1960s. Nikou, *Zwischen Imagepflege*, 25.
56. *Ibid.*, 25–26.
57. *Ibid.*, 23.
58. The name is an alias. Interview conducted by Beate Meyer, 1 August 1991. See Nikou, *Zwischen Imagepflege*, 23 and note 37.
59. *Ibid.*, 28, 24.
60. *Ibid.*, 28–30.
61. See *ibid.*, 32–34, for more detail on problems with early invitations.
62. See *ibid.*, 38–61, for details. Also, see the examples of Constance and Heilbronn, where former Jewish citizens asked whether the city would not want to follow the precedent of other cities and invite them. *Aufbau* 60 (28 October 1994).
63. In June of 1933, there were 160,564 people of Jewish faith registered in Berlin. Beyond that there were "a considerable number" of people who had been baptized, were from mixed marriages, etc., who would later also be subject to Nazi race laws: Annegret Ehmann, "Verfolgung—Selbstbehauptung—Untergang," in Ehmann et al., *Juden in Berlin, 1671–1945*, <http://www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/article.php?ModuleId=10005450>.
64. This section relies on two recent interviews of two Berlin politicians of the time, Hanns-Peter Herz and Klaus Schütz. While their recollections, as they acknowledged themselves, were not always entirely clear, and were occasionally contradictory, I have attempted to produce a coherent narrative conveying the general sense of their roles in the beginning of the Berlin visitor program and the various difficulties they faced.
65. Interviews with Hans Steinitz in Kirchheimer and Kirchheimer, *We Were So Beloved*, and interview with Hanns-Peter Herz, conducted by Lina Nikou, Berlin, 8 April 2011, provided to me by Nikou. In an interview with Leo Katcher in the 1960s, Herz, who is a Christian by religion, speaks about his Jewish background and treatment by the Nazis, which had a lasting effect on him: "I had enough of a Jewish background for the Nazis to call me a Jew and send me to a work camp, from which I was liberated by Americans in 1945. The effect of that imprisonment, of my suddenly finding myself included among Jews, has stayed with me." Katcher, *Post-Mortem*.
66. Interview Klaus Schütz. Schütz recalled that Hanns-Peter Herz had many relationships with former Jewish Berliners because of his family background (his father was Jewish). Schütz also recalled from his later ambassadorship in Israel that refugees were fond of Berlin.
67. Steinitz, "Der 'Aufbau,'" 37–38. Both Herz and Steinitz were very proud of this idea in hindsight. See also "Hans Steinitz," in Kirchheimer and Kirchheimer, *We Were So Beloved*, 225–26. There is no official documentation from the Berlin Senate Chancellery on the origins and early years of the program.

68. Interview with Hanns-Peter Herz, conducted by Lina Nikou, Berlin, 8 April 2011. Galinski was also close to Klaus Schütz.
69. Heinrich Albertz was governing mayor (*Oberbürgermeister*) of Berlin from December 1966 to October 1967. More details on him can be found at “Heinrich Albertz: Regierender Bürgermeister vom 2.12.1996 bis 19.10.1967,” *Der Regierende Bürgermeister: Senatskanzlei, Berlin.de* website, <http://www.berlin.de/rbmskzl/regierender-buergermeister/buergermeister-von-berlin/buergermeistergalerie/artikel.4626.php>, accessed 27 February 2014. It cannot be determined whether Albertz’s background was decisive in his approval of such a program.
70. Interview with Hanns-Peter Herz, conducted by Lina Nikou, Berlin, 8 April 2011. Also see section on Hamburg above.
71. Interview Klaus Schütz. The administrative costs connected to the program were covered through the general Berlin budget. Schütz held his post as mayor from 1967 to 1977.
72. *Der Senat von Berlin: Senatsbeschluss Nr. 1720/69* from 10 June 1969 re. “Einladungen an in der nationalsozialistischen Zeit verfolgte ehemalige Mitbürger,” cited in Nikou, “Coming Back Home?” Herz recalled a resistance to the focus on Jews that did not, in his view, derive from anti-Semitic attitudes, but because some people thought that Germany had already done a lot for Jews but nothing for other people who had had to leave Berlin. Klaus Schütz remembered no significant resistance: “It is in the nature of things, all things that [have to do] with emigration and Nazi things and Nazi persecution, it goes without saying that one deals with them together with everybody else and from my point of view there was never any fight or difference in opinion over this.” In his opinion, this was a clear decision also because, as he put it, Berlin was a Social Democratic stronghold and there was no doubt that it was a political effort.
73. Interview Klaus Schütz.
74. PA AA B5, F49: Letter from Tel Aviv Embassy to AA Bonn, Oct. 25, 1965. See Lavy, *Germany and Israel*, 130ff.
75. PA AA B5, F49: Letter from Deutscher Städtetag to AA, Dec. 28, 1965; Letter from Tel Aviv Embassy to AA Bonn, Jan. 6, 1966.
76. PA AA B5, F49: Letter from Washington Embassy to AA Bonn, Feb. 16, 1967. The Association of German Cities represents the interests of German municipalities and municipal self-government vis-à-vis the federal government, the federal council, the federal parliament, the European Union, and other organizations. See Kräutler, *Dieselbe Stadt*, 15, 55.
77. *Aufbau* 35 (20 June 1969).
78. “Viele Emigranten wollen Berlin besuchen,” *Aufbau* 35 (11 July 1969).
79. Between 1933 and 1939, about eighty thousand Jews left Berlin. For more information on the response, see, e.g., Hans Steinitz, “Berlins zweite Wiedergeburt: West-Berlin: ‘Boomtown’ hinter dem Eisernen Vorhang,” *Aufbau* 35 (3 October 1969); Hanns Peter Hertz in a letter to the editor *Aufbau* 35 (19 September 1969). See also *Aufbau* 35 (3 October 1969) and (17 October 1969).
80. Völckers, “Eine Chronik der Berlin-Besuche emigrierter Mitbürger,” 35.
81. See Schlör, “In weiter Ferne: Berlin.“
82. Original German. Several refugees from Los Angeles used these exact lines in their letters to the Berlin Senate Chancellery in the fall of 1969. SK (Senatskanzlei) Berlin, Charter und Dankschreiben, Folder: Frühjahr 1973 Charter Amerika Montreal / Los Angeles – Signatur 128.
83. “Viele Emigranten wollen Berlin besuchen,” *Aufbau* 35 (11 July 1969).
84. In German. *Aufbau* 60 (28 October 1994): 45.
85. *Aufbau* 60 (28 October 1994): 49. Rabbi Leo Trepp also traveled from California to his former hometown of Oldenburg in Lower Saxony every year starting in 1954. He also became involved in German Jewish reconciliation, something his widow celebrates on a website: <http://leotrepp.org/en/>.

86. "Re: 'Mahnmal' in Krefeld," *Aufbau* 34 (5 October 1973).
87. See also the case of James May *Aufbau* 60 (28 October 1997): 6; and that of Mrs. Putziger *Aufbau* 60 (28 October 1994): 24.
88. The Jewish Communities in Konstanz and Weiden, e.g., *Aufbau* 60 (28 October 1994): 17–18.
89. See, e.g., Herf, *Divided Memory*, 245, 284.
90. "'Besuch in der alten Heimat'—Eine Dokumentation," *Aufbau* 60 (28 October 1994).
91. See also their involvement in Hamburg, Nikou, *Zwischen Imagepflege*.
92. Michael Brenner and Norbert Frei, in Brenner, ed., *Die Geschichte der Juden in Deutschland*, 259ff.
93. *Ibid.*
94. *Aufbau* 60 (28 October 1994): 25.
95. Michael Brenner and Norbert Frei, in Brenner, ed., *Die Geschichte der Juden in Deutschland*, 263–64.
96. Kansteiner, "Losing the War," 113.
97. *Ibid.*, 116ff.
98. Tom Dreisbach, "Transatlantic Broadcasts: Holocaust in America and West Germany," *Penn History Review* 16, no. 2 (Spring 2009), Article 7:77. Accessed at <http://repository.upenn.edu/phr/vol16/iss2/7>.
99. *Ibid.*, 89.
100. Judt, *Postwar*, 810–11.
101. While the 1970s saw less public and media attention to Nazi topics than the 1960s—partly due to the oil crisis in 1973 and domestic Red Army Faction terrorism, interest in the history of National Socialism once again increased in the late 1970s. Kansteiner, "Losing the War," 121–22.
102. "Ernie Sommer," in Wolman, *Crossing Over*, 160.
103. *Aufbau* 60 (28 October 1994); or, e.g., "Das Schicksal der Nauheimer Juden," *Aufbau* 53 (19 June 1987). Kurt Shuler became friendly with the archivist of his hometown Nuremberg and contributed two articles to the series *Transit Nürnberg*. http://www.rjjo.homepage.t-online.de/pdf_2/DE_NU_JU_shuler.pdf. In Crailsheim, an initiative from the Volkshochschule and a working group Jews in Crailsheim prepared the visits. *Aufbau* 60 (28 October 1994).
104. *Aufbau* 60 (28 October 1994): 40–41.
105. See *ibid.*
106. Part of a subtitle in Kansteiner, "Losing the War."
107. See Meng, *Shattered Spaces*, 197–98.
108. See, e.g., Frei, *1945 und wir*; Funke, "Bitburg, Jews, and Germans"; Baldwin, ed., *Reworking the Past*; Eder, "Ein 'Holocaustsyndrom?'"
109. See Till, *The New Berlin*, 20.
110. Kansteiner, "Losing the War," 126.
111. *Ibid.*, 127; and Meng, *Shattered Spaces*, 199. It is important to note that this attempt at "normalization" was not only of interest within the confines of the West German state but also with regard to Germany's place on the international scene. Kohl wanted to escape the special position (*Sonderrolle*) that the FRG still held because of its National Socialist past and the atrocities of World War II. See Eder, "Ein 'Holocaustsyndrom?,'" 634, and the extensive literature he cites on this larger topic.
112. *Aufbau* 60 (28 October 1994): 33.
113. See Falk Pingel, "From Evasion to a Crucial Tool," 139. The special visitor edition of *Aufbau* includes reports of several high school projects on Jewish history that won prizes in such competitions—e.g., Lüdenscheid won the first prize in a state-wide competition.

114. "Hierauf kann jeder Mithelfer stolz sein," *Aktuell* 23 (September 1977). By 1994, Henry Marx, Steinitz's successor as *Aufbau's* editor in chief, believed that "by far the greatest part of those invited" had accepted the invitations to their cities. *Aufbau* 60 (28 October 1994).
115. Original German, 10 August 1972, to SK Berlin, Dankschreiben 1975–76 (L-W).
116. Benz, "Rückkehr auf Zeit," 201.
117. *Aufbau* 60 (28 October 1994).
118. Rosel Sievs lived in Ireland and wrote this letter in English. It was subsequently translated into German and upon the initiative of the city's public relations officer published not only in the commemoration brochure for the invitation program but also in the local newspaper. The invitation program in Aurich was carried out in 1992. *Aufbau* 60 (28 October 1994).
119. Interview Larry Greenbaum.
120. On nostalgia, see, e.g., Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia*; and Fritzsche, "How Nostalgia Narrates Modernity."
121. Different letters sent to the Berlin Senate Chancellery. One typical example reads as follows (orig. in German): "In the meantime I had heart surgery and my health is not the best. Since, as of today, I unfortunately still have not received an invitation, I would be very grateful if you could make it possible that I can once more see my old hometown before it will be too late." Letter from January 1987, SK Berlin, Folder 1988 (S).
122. Original German. Letter from 20 March 1983, SK Berlin, Folder 1983 (L).
123. In Berlin we see this in particular with Brigitte Roeper. When she died, rather young, in 1996, one former visitor wrote an obituary for her, which was published in *Aktuell* 58 (1996).
124. Originally in German. *Aktuell* 2 (June 1970).
125. This was the case in 1972 and in the mid-1980s. "Bilanz" documents provided by Rüdiger Nemitz, SK Berlin.
126. The 1994 special edition of *Aufbau* also includes critical voices, but the main tone by editor in chief Henry Marx was positive. See Henry Marx, "Fast 120 deutsche Städte laden ein," *Aufbau* 60 (28 October 1994): 1.
127. *Aktuell* 4 (December 1970).
128. Walter Bucky had himself been back to Germany three or four times. To the question of how long he stayed, he answered "two weeks, three weeks, until my restitution was settled, you know." Interview with Walter Bucky, conducted by Herbert A. Strauss, Los Angeles, January 2, 1972, LBI NY, AR 25385, <http://www.lbi.org/digibaeck/results?qttype=pid&term=1326552>.
129. SK Berlin, Letter from 13 August 1979.
130. After the *Aktuell* office sent out four little publications on the topic of persecution and resistance in Berlin, one woman from Berkeley wrote that she hoped they would receive a lot of publicity. She and her daughter would make sure to pass them around in their circles because she found it painful that it was always the image of the bad Germany that got publicity. *Aktuell* 37 (November 1983).
131. *Aktuell* 21 (Oktober 1976).
132. *Aufbau* 60 (28 October 1994).
133. *Ibid.*, 8.
134. SK Berlin, Letter from 1 July 1974 (T).
135. On the memorial landscape in Berlin see Till, *The New Berlin*.
136. As happened in Aschaffenburg, *Aufbau* 60 (28 October 1994).
137. *Aufbau* 60 (28 October 1994): 40, 33.
138. Jack de Löwe praised the efforts of his former hometown of Norden, Lower Saxony. *Aufbau* 60 (28 October 1994): 33.
139. This is also the case for Hamburg in the 1980s (Nikou, *Zwischen Imagepflege*, 57ff). Visitors either did not share their criticism with the German organizers of these programs or these letters were not kept.

140. *Aufbau* 60 (28 October 1994): 5.
141. The example from Aurich actually dates from a visit in 1992. I use it because it illustrates my point of the divergence of official narratives and the persistence of more sinister ones very well. Even after Holocaust consciousness had become so central in public discussions and particularly in the context of German unification in 1990, the mayor still held this particular outlook.
142. *Aufbau* 60 (28 October 1994): 15.
143. “Ann Ikenberg,” in Wolman, *Crossing Over*, 113, 104.
144. Almost all reports include a reference to this. See, e.g., report “Ein Besuch in Lahr,” *Aufbau* 53 (31 July 1987).
145. “Laupheim,” *Aufbau* 60 (28 October 1994): 11.
146. See, e.g., *ibid.*
147. See Diner, *We Remember with Reverence and Love*.
148. Frequently letter writers used popular phrases such as “Ich bin ein Berliner” or “I still have a suitcase in Berlin” to express their bond with the city. One woman from New York expressed in a letter to Berlin, seemingly without any resentment: “I myself am 85 years old today and my thoughts are often in my beautiful Berlin. I am happy that Berlin is so beautiful again and has blossomed through the fabulous government. I wish my old Germany only the very best.” Letter from 20 March 1976, from New York to Berlin Senate, SK Berlin, Dankschreiben, 1977–1978 L-W.
149. Letter from 10 November 1979, from New York to SK Berlin, Dankschreiben 1979.
150. *Aufbau* 60 (28 October 1994): 13.
151. Letter to SK Berlin from 1983, SK Berlin, Folder 1983 (W).
152. Letter to SK Berlin from 21 November 1985, SK Berlin, Folder 1985 (W); letter from 22 June 1975 to SK Berlin, Folder: Dankschreiben 1975–76.
153. Only very few people did return after visiting Germany. The story of Margot Friedlander, who returned to Berlin when she was in her late 80s, has received quite a lot of publicity. There is a film about her first trip to Berlin, *Don't Call it Heimweh* (2005), and her story of return has received much press coverage in Germany, particularly in Berlin. See Thomas Lackmann, “Ein Leben im Zwischenraum,” *Jüdische Allgemeine*, 1 April 2010, <https://www.juedische-allgemeine.de/politik/ein-leben-im-zwischenraum/>.
154. Conversation with Lisa Schmitt, Los Angeles, 7 February 2014.
155. On the other hand, there are a great number of refugees to whom such pictures are very dear. The homes of refugees I visited often displayed historic images of German cities. Also, refugees often expressed their joy over receiving an issue of *Aktuell* that featured photos of historic Berlin.
156. Albrecht Strauss from the University of North Carolina wrote to Marburg on 18 August 1985, one and a half years after his visit. *Aufbau* 60 (28 October 1994): 25.
157. SK Berlin, letter from 21 August 1979 (F), R. K. *Aktuell* 44 (August 1986).
158. See Till, *The New Berlin*, 15.
159. Letter from Hilde Burton to the mayor of Nidderau, *Aufbau* 60 (28 October 1994): 26.
160. 21 August 1979 SK Berlin (F).
161. Translation mine. *Aufbau* 60 (28 October 1994): 6–7.
162. See also Darlene Leiser-Shely, “Courage,” *Newsletter of the Benefactors of the Jewish Club of 1933* (September/October 2008).
163. Translation mine. *Aktuell* 44 (August 1986).
164. Marianne Spitzer’s concept of “postmemory” is related to this in some respect; see <http://www.postmemory.net/>. In this case, however, it is often not the parents’ memory but the wider memory culture on Germany, German Jewish refugees, and the Holocaust that affected the memory and identity of those who left Germany as young children.
165. Excerpt from a letter in German by Lore May Rasmussen, *Aufbau* 60 (28 October 1994): 22.

166. *Aktuell* 37 (November 1983).
167. *Aufbau* 60 (28 October 1994): 32.
168. Gerda Lowenstein is an alias I invented.
169. Letter in German to Eberhard Diepgen, 1 September 1986, SK Berlin 1987 (B-C).
170. Letter in German to SK Berlin, 17 March 1979, SK Berlin 1987 (B-C).
171. Letter in German to Eberhard Diepgen, 1 September 1986, SK Berlin 1987 (B-C).
172. For a general overview of the phenomenon of the historical witness (*Zeitzeuge*), see Sabrow and Frei, eds, *Die Geburt des Zeitzeugen*.
173. Hans Sahl, "Hier wächst eine Jugend heran, die sich nichts vormachen lässt," *Aufbau* 53 (18 December 1987).
174. *Aktuell* 46 (February 1987).
175. "Bilanz" and "Etat" documents provided to me by Rüdiger Nemitz, SK Berlin.
176. In regard to the second generation of German Jewish refugees, Henry Marx writes (in German) in 1994: "There would be thousands of people who one must bring to look with pride at their German Jewish heritage. The German cities should make themselves acquainted with such a task—a mission for the 21st century, through which Germany could win new friends, which it urgently needs. "Fast 120 Städte laden ein," *Aufbau* 60 (28 October 1994): 2.
177. At the same time, efforts to preserve German Jewish heritage increased within the community. Herbert A. Strauss of the Research Foundation for Jewish Immigration conducted over one hundred interviews together with colleagues. Also, Michael A. Meyer, born in Berlin and an immigrant to Los Angeles, became one of the leading historians of German Jewish history.
178. See Novick, *The Holocaust in American Life*, 207–38.
179. On the rise of Holocaust consciousness in the United States, see *ibid.*; Diner, *We Remember with Reverence and Love*; Greenspan, *On Listening to Holocaust Survivors*.
180. This only grew stronger with German unification, when the recognition of a "historical responsibility" became a founding principle of the united Germany making a particular commitment to Jews around the world.
181. On normalization discourse, see Goschler and Kauders, in Brenner, *Geschichte der Juden in Deutschland*, 360ff.
182. Judt, *Postwar*, 811. See the last chapter, "From the House of the Dead: An Essay on Modern European Memory," in *Postwar* for a more detailed but still concise overview.
183. Kräutler, *Dieselbe Stadt*, 18–19.
184. See *ibid.*, 34.
185. This renaming of streets and other city features has been referred to as "naming as geography" by Joseph Massad, although Massad refers to how this process is used to exclude certain groups and I use it to include people. Massad, "The 'Post-Colonial' Colony," 315.
186. For a discussion of ideas of national redemption through reconstructions of Jewish sites and the resulting passivity toward and ignorance of present problems, see Meng, *Shattered Spaces*, 163ff.
187. See, e.g., the stories of how Bert and Siegfried Kirchheimer were invited and hosted by Bremerhaven and Saarbrücken on several occasions. Kirchheimer, *We Were So Beloved*, 181ff.
188. Eder, "Ein 'Holocaustsyndrom?'" 633.
189. See *ibid.*; and Eder's book *Holocaust Angst*.
190. A memoir that gives a powerful account of the complexity of problems and emotions that a refugee's return to her former hometown caused, not only for her but also her daughter and the Germans involved in the program, is Chapman, *Motherland*.