

THE VIENNA PROJECT: HIGHLIGHTS OF THE WIENER RINGSTRASSE

Site 2: Wiener Staatsoper/The Vienna State Opera House Opernring 2, 1010 Wien



The Vienna State Opera House represents the memory of musicians from the State Opera Company and the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra, whose members were chosen from among musicians in the State Opera. It was the one of the first places where Jewish artists were fired from their jobs, later to be persecuted and some murdered. Beginning in 1938, Jews, Roma and Sinti, and other groups were banned from attending operas in the theater as part of new laws restricting their access to Viennese society.

Questions to Consider

What was the fate of musicians in the Vienna State Opera and the Vienna Philharmonic who did not count as “Aryan” under Nazi laws (Jewish, foreign, etc)?

How did the Vienna State Opera and the Vienna Philharmonic show support for National Socialism?

Wilhelm Jerger was the Director of the Vienna Philharmonic during the Nazi era. During this period, he both supported Nazi persecution of his colleagues and also acted to help some of them. What do you think of his actions? Is he sympathetic, a guilty party to Nazi crimes, or some combination?

How willing were the Vienna State Opera and the Vienna Philharmonic to interact with their Nazi history in the years since then? What actions have they taken recently to deal with this history?

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Site 3: Mahnmal gegen Krieg und Faschismus/The Monument against War and Fascism Albertinaplatz, 1010 Wien



Foto © Kate Melchior

In German, *Mahnmal* signifies a specific type of monument meant to act as “a warning to future generations.” The *Mahnmal gegen Krieg und Faschismus* was designed by Alfred Hrdlička and unveiled in 1988. There are four separate sculptural entities spread across the plaza: a two-column structure called the Gates of Violence; the “street washing Jew”; an abstract image of “Orpheus Entering Hades,” or the victims of the war encountering death; and a tall column engraved with passages from the Austrian *Staatsvertrag*, the 1955 treaty that established Austria as an independent and neutral country.

In several portions of this monument, chunks of granite from the Mauthausen concentration camp quarry were used in the sculptures. A plaque informs visitors that in March 1945, a bomb destroyed the Phillipshof apartment house on this site, trapping and eventually killing several hundred citizens inside.

Questions to Consider

What are some of the images on the Gates of Violence? What message do they send about war and fascism?

What specific event/image in Viennese history does the “street washing Jew” recall? Why might it be important that viewers stand looking down at the figure? Why is **barbed wire** (Stacheldraht) on the figure’s back?

Some members of the Jewish community found the “street washing Jew” **offensive** (beleidigend). Why did they not like it? What is your opinion—do you think it is a successful part of the monument?

1938

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The monument inspired a lot of controversy when it was first built. What were some of the reasons that people did not want the monument behind the opera house? Why did Alfred Hrdlička insist that it go there and not to some other part of the city?

This monument was the first prominent WWII/Holocaust to be built in public in Vienna. Why do you think that this monument was built in 1988? What other events were taking place in Vienna at this time?

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Site 4: Heldenplatz 1010 Wien



Foto © Kate Melchior

On the 12th of March 1938, German troops entered Austria. This event, which incorporated Austria into the German Third Reich, became known as the “Anschluss”. The **annexation** (Anschluss) received the enthusiastic support of a large number of Austrian citizens, and the German army’s march through Austria was met with such joy that it was nicknamed the “Blumenkrieg,” or the War of the Flowers. The march through Austria ended in Vienna on March 15th, and Hitler joined the troops in a parade through the center of Vienna, which ended in the Heldenplatz (Hero’s Square). There, Hitler stood in the balcony and gave a speech in front of over 200,000, saying “As Führer and Chancellor of the German Nation and the Reich, I report before history the entry of my homeland into the German Reich.”¹

Questions to Consider

What were some of the difficulties that Austrian people faced after WWII? What were some of the reasons that many Austrian people welcomed Hitler and the annexation of Austria? What changes had Hitler promised to make?

Why do you think Hitler chose to make his speech in the Heldenplatz? What symbolism does this place hold? What message was he trying to send?

On the 8th of May 2013, the first Fest der Freude (Festival of Joy) was celebrated in Heldenplatz to honor the liberation of Austria from National Socialism. What are the goals of this festival, and why is it celebrated? Who used to celebrate in Heldenplatz on May 8th before the festival began to be celebrated there? Why do you think the first Fest der Freude was in 2013?

¹ Lehrer, Steven. “Heldenplatz.” *Books by Steven Helrer*. N.p., n.d. Web. 17 Sept. 2014. <<http://www.stevenlehrer.com/heldenplatz.htm>>.

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Site 5: Naturhistorisches Museum / Natural History Museum Burgring 7, 1010 Wien



In 1939, the Museum of Natural History organized the anti-Semitic exhibit “The Physical and Spiritual Attributes of the Jews” („Die körperlichen und seelischen Eigenschaften der Juden“). It used many objects that had been confiscated from the Jewish Museum, and the head of its department of anthropology, Dr. Josef Wastl, wanted its science to serve Nazi ideology about race.

Questions to Consider

What materials were included in the exhibit “The Physical and Spiritual Attributes of the Jews”? Along with Jews, which other victim groups were put on display?

What were the goals of the exhibit? What did it tell people about Nazi beliefs about race (particularly about race in regard to Jewish, Slavic, Roma and Sinti people?)

What took place at the 1939 racial survey of Polish Jews that the Museum carried out in the Vienna Soccer Stadium?

What happened to the contents of the museum exhibit after 1945?

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Site 6: Parlament/Parliament Dr. Karl Renner-Ring 3, 1010 Wien



In this building, the laws that prepared the way to the “Anschluss”, the annexation, were passed. Many demonstrations took place here. This building, the seat of today’s Parliament, served after March 1938 as the “Reich commissariat for the reunification of Austria with the German Reich”. From 1940 to 1945 it was called the “Gauhaus”, the seat of the Gauleiter, the Viceroy for the province, called a “Gau” in the Nazi terminology. It was also the main office for handling racial-political and family-descentance matters, both used to “scientifically” justify the murderous Nazi policies. The “Gauhaus” was also the seat of the NSDAP, the National Socialist Workers’ Party, (official name of the Nazi party) for the Gau, i.e. the province, of Vienna.

Questions to Consider

What sort of government was set up in Austria after it was annexed by the German Reich? How much power did this new government have, and how much power was left to the government in Germany?

Who were the Gauleiters of Vienna? What sort of actions did they take against various victim groups in Austria?

How did family descentance issues affect Nazi policy? How did it affect various victim groups in Austria?

In the past year, the Austrian Parliament Library has been involved in a restitution process. What has taken place, and why is it important?

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Site 7: Universität Wien / University of Vienna Universitätsring 1, 1010 Wien



At the University of Vienna in 1938 – the year National Socialism, the Nazi party, took power – 2,700 members of its community were fired for racial and/or political reasons, and consequently exiled or murdered. Most of these people were Jewish, but this group also included anyone with a political, racial, or national background that the Nazis disapproved of. This process included professors, students, administrative personnel and over 200 graduates whose academic credentials were set aside.

Questions to Consider

Describe in more detail the students and professors who were expelled from the University of Vienna. For what reasons were they exiled? What percentage of students and professors at the University had they been?

Nazi ideology played a key role in education at the University of Vienna between 1938 and 1945. How did it affect departments such as Medical, Psychology, and Anthropology? Look at Dr. Eduard Pernkopf in the Dept. of Medicine and Dr. Hans Bertha in the Dept. of Psychology.

In 2008 and 2009, the University completed two memorial projects: one is a Memorial Book, and the other is a memorial space in what used to be the campus Jewish Prayer Pavilion. Describe these two projects. What are the goals of each project, and how do they work in different ways to remember the same group of people?