

# The Merits of Memory

Concepts, Contexts, Debates

Edited by

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Universitätsverlag  
WINTER  
Heidelberg

that despite increased hostility against them, the contemporary legal immigration of Muslims is currently surpassing the pre-9/11 level.

The misleading and false memories of past immigration and immigration policies are not confined to the general public. Political leaders of both parties hold similarly flawed memories of the past. George W. Bush has, at the beginning of each of his terms, tried to implement a supposedly new immigration policy without any success whatsoever in contrast to most of his other legislative proposals. His inaccurate memory of some aspects of past policies and apparent amnesia about others is striking. In his 2004 State of the Union message he heralded “a new temporary-worker program” and went out of his way to distance himself from previous immigration programs. “I oppose amnesty,” he insisted—while carefully avoiding any discussion of past “amnesties.” Bush’s plan actually mimics a long line of past policies going back to World War I. His plan, like its predecessors, was drawn up with the needs of Southwestern agricultural interests and other low-wage employers, like the world’s largest retailer, Wal-Mart, in mind.<sup>21</sup> Like all of its predecessors, the unnamed Mexican labor program of World War I, the Bracero Program which operated from World War II into the Kennedy years, and the “amnesty” program associated with the IRCA legislation of 1986, it depends for its credibility on persons not eligible for the program—perhaps five million or more persons in 2006—going back where they came from if they do not qualify.<sup>22</sup> That has never worked in the past and enough legislators now remember, however inaccurately, that policy promised what it failed to deliver, and delivered, in many instances, the opposite of what its advocates promised.

<sup>21</sup> For more details see Roger Daniels, “An Old New Immigration Policy, Flaws and All,” *Chronicle of Higher Education*, 6 Feb. 2004: B20.

<sup>22</sup> For details of these programs see Daniels, *Guarding the Golden Door* 175–89 and 224–31.

JOACHIM BAUR

## Ellis Island, Inc.: The Making of an American Site of Memory

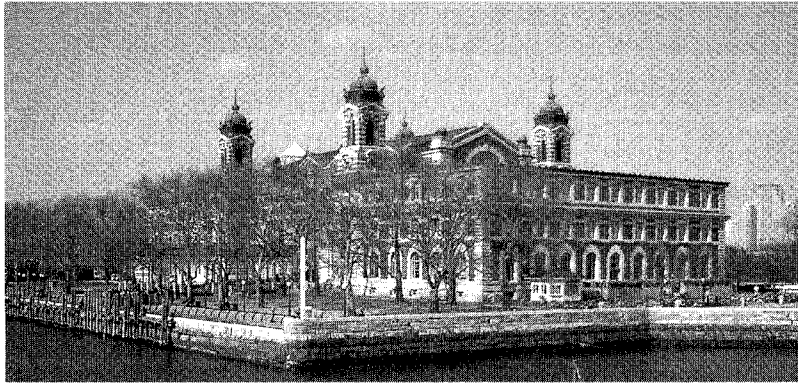
Ellis Island is without a doubt an American *lieu de mémoire*. The former immigration station in New York Harbor is widely viewed as the birthplace of American multicultural society, and as a site of cultural transmission between Old Europe and the New World, as a site of initiation into American society for millions of individuals. The immigration museum on Ellis Island, opened in 1990, is visited by over 3.5 million visitors annually, among them countless school groups and heritage tourists. It is often claimed that more than one hundred million living Americans can trace their US roots to an ancestor who passed through the immigration station between 1892 and 1924. As such, Ellis Island is an integral part of both American collective memory and the individual memory of thousands of American families.

This perception today appears in stark contrast to the situation only a few decades ago. The immigration station was finally closed in 1954, and the over 30 buildings rapidly deteriorated. After years of debate about how to deal with the site, and proposals ranging from a clinic for alcoholics to an oil storage depot, the island was handed over to the National Park Service (NPS) in 1965, which earlier had turned it down.<sup>1</sup> In 1968, the first “Ellis Island Master Plan” called for demolishing all but the main building, and a former director of the NPS, favoring natural over social history, suggested an even more radical solution: “Ellis Island could be cleared of all its present developments, be restored to its primitive condition and used by school classes and adult study groups. [...] This might be the only experience some people would have to better understand our natural environment.”<sup>2</sup>

Due to a lack of funds, Ellis Island was neither turned into a biotope, nor into a historic site at that time, and it took another ten years until the

<sup>1</sup> Barbara Blumberg, *Celebrating the Immigrant: An Administrative History of the Statue of Liberty National Monument 1952–1982*, Cultural Resource Management Study No. 10. (Boston: National Park Service, North Atlantic Regional Office, 1985) 96.

<sup>2</sup> Conrad L. Wirth, letter, *New York Times* 27 Mar. 1966: 201.



The Ellis Island Immigration Museum

island was made accessible to the public for tours of the buildings. The restoration effort that led to its present-day appearance finally started in the early 1980s.

Even more striking than the changing policy on the restoration and interpretation of the actual buildings is the change in the public's attitude towards Ellis Island. During the time of its operation as well as in the years following its closure the reputation of Ellis Island had always been extremely low, and the connection of one's own history or family history to it was anything but a source of pride. Even in 1984 there were still voices that called for forgetting the story altogether. A letter to the *New York Times* reads: "The immigration station was never more than a clearing house where prospective immigrants were subjected to humiliating physical, mental and moral examinations [...]. The symbolism of the immigration station is best forgotten."<sup>3</sup> For the most part, however, it *had* actually been forgotten. Ross Holland, who was involved in the restoration project from the beginning, relates that "[w]hen the Statue of Liberty-Ellis Island project started in 1982, few Americans could even identify Ellis Island."<sup>4</sup>

Why is it, then, that Ellis Island is so well-known and popular today; that it has come to be regarded as a "monument to the masses," and people travel there from all over the United States to pay tribute to their ancestors? What first comes to mind are changes in American society and attitudes towards history in general: The advent of the New Social History

with its focus on the experiences of "ordinary people," a growth in ethnic self-consciousness, the "Roots"-phenomenon and a new passion for genealogy, and what Michael Kammen called the "heritage syndrome" are probably the most important factors to consider.<sup>5</sup> Although certainly necessary conditions, I think that they are not sufficient to explain the site's surge in popularity. Instead, I would like to take a closer look at the concrete restoration and museum project—the Making of Ellis Island. In doing so, I do not intend to examine any possible aspect that played a role in the complex development, but will focus on a few that—as hinted at in the title—affected the appearance of the site from an economic standpoint.

First of all, however, it seems important to reject notions of a corporate take-over of the project as was often suggested during its early stages. The basis for this was the declaration of the Ellis Island project as the flagship of Ronald Reagan's neo-liberal public-private cooperation program.<sup>6</sup> The island has been run by the National Park Service since 1965, but there was no federal money spent on its restoration. All funds were raised by the so-called Statue of Liberty—Ellis Island Foundation under Chrysler's then CEO Lee Iacocca, through private donations and corporate sponsorship. Lynn Johnson exemplifies the concerns of historians in 1984: "Though hailed by many as an exciting new strategy for historic preservation, this plan raises serious questions about the role of the private sector in packaging our past."<sup>7</sup> And she continues: "Major commercial development of public areas may well blur the lines between formal historical interpretation and crass commercial replications of the past. In a worst-case scenario, Ellis Island could become a Disney-like 'Immigrant land'—with smiling, native-garbed workers selling Coca-Cola to strains of 'It's a Small World After All.'"<sup>8</sup>

Lynn Johnson's horror vision of an "immigration theme park" on Ellis Island did not come true. Certainly, the giftshop is full of kitsch, but not more so than in other museums,<sup>9</sup> and the decoration of the cafeteria with photographs of the immigrants' dining rooms might be a little bit tasteless, but in general all forms of "Disneyfication" were avoided. This is in part

<sup>5</sup> Michael Kammen, *Mystic Chords of Memory: The Transformation of Tradition in American Culture* (New York: Vintage Books, 1993) 618–28.

<sup>6</sup> Holland, *Idealists* x; Mike Wallace, "Boat People: Immigrant History at the Statue of Liberty and Ellis Island," *Mickey Mouse History and Other Essays on American Memory* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1996) 55–73.

<sup>7</sup> Lynn Johnson, "Ellis Island: Historic Preservation from the Supply Side," *Radical History Review* 28–30 (1984): 157–68; 158.

<sup>8</sup> Johnson, "Supply Side" 161.

<sup>9</sup> For an inspiring reading of the Ellis Island Immigration Museum that takes the giftshop as its starting point see Erica Rand, *The Ellis Island Snow Globe* (Durham, NC, and London: Duke University Press, 2005).

<sup>3</sup> Arnold H. Vollmer, letter, *New York Times* 14 Jan. 1984: 20.

<sup>4</sup> F. Ross. Holland, *Idealists, Scoundrels, and the Lady: An Insider's View of the Statue of Liberty-Ellis Island Project* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1993) 251.

due to the important role of the advisory History Committee and the design and research firm MetaForm, which worked closely with the historians and made an effort to ensure the scholarly seriousness of the presentations. So, for example, when Lee Iacocca put forward ideas of creating an “ethnic Williamsburg”<sup>10</sup> and a kind of “permanent world’s fair”<sup>11</sup> on the island he was met with considerable criticism that brought the plans to a halt.<sup>12</sup> On the other hand, it turned out that the fundraisers and corporate donors were simply not as keen on determining the nature of the project or the presentations at Ellis Island as some of the critics had assumed in advance.<sup>13</sup>

Still, I would argue that there were important influences from the economic sphere, albeit in a more subtle and less mechanic way than suggested above. In the following, I will look at two aspects of the project that colored the outcome in a specific way, namely the necessities of the fundraising campaign and the site’s character as a tourist destination.

I will begin with the fundraising campaign and in particular the strong link it established between Ellis Island and the Statue of Liberty. Of course, this link was nothing new in the 1980s. Since its opening in 1892, the immigration station was only a few hundred meters away from the famous Lady in the Harbor, erected in 1886. The association with immigrants had been implicit from the Statue’s inception and really took off after the passage of immigration restriction legislation in the mid-1920s.<sup>14</sup> When Ellis Island became a National Historic Site in 1965 it was affiliated with the Statue of Liberty National Monument, and till this day the two sites build one administrative entity. When the Statue of Liberty—Ellis Island Foun-

dation was established in 1982 in order to do the fundraising for the centennials of the two monuments it only followed in this tradition both with its name and its mission.

However, in the Ellis Island museum project there was also a strong effort to distance, if not separate, Ellis Island from the Statue of Liberty. The reason for this was the concern that a close association would bring about a one-dimensional perspective on immigration as an individual quest for freedom. Particularly the members of the aforementioned History Committee were anxious to picture immigration as a complex process including a multitude of motivations and meanings, and thereby counter uncritical and patriotic narratives.

This issue particularly came to the fore in the debate about how to deal with the so-called American Museum of Immigration (AMI), which displayed its exhibitions inside the pedestal of the Statue since 1972. Early on the historians recommended that the museum be moved from the Statue of Liberty to Ellis Island. They resolutely countered the argument of this older museum’s proponents that the Statue was the most appropriate location because immigrants came to the US seeking freedom, liberty and other values the statue symbolized. Instead the committee argued that they did not come primarily for that reason; they came because they wanted to make a decent living and many of them did not intend to stay forever. In the following, a balanced and critical approach (with the quest for political freedom being described as but one motivation for immigrants) became dominant in the exhibition planning—and as a result, references to the iconography of the Statue are relatively few in the museum.<sup>15</sup>

Quite the contrary in the fundraising campaign. Here a different logic dominated, necessarily dominated—based not on academic considerations, but on hard numbers. Early in the campaign a market survey showed the recognition factor for the Statue of Liberty to be 75 percent, whereas for the old immigration station on Ellis Island it was only about 20 percent. In Lee Iacocca’s words that meant: “The statue is an icon, a world symbol. Ellis Island is a much tougher sell.”<sup>16</sup> And Ross Holland contends: “Since there was no time to raise the profile of Ellis Island and no one knew if Ellis Island could ever become as beloved a symbol in the public imagination as

<sup>10</sup> Holland, *Idealists* 145–49.

<sup>11</sup> Qtd. in David Carr, “Ellis Island a Recreation Center?” *New York Times* 25 Aug. 1984: 23.

<sup>12</sup> On the conflicting agendas of different groups within the project see Luke Desforges and Joanne Maddern, “Front Doors to Freedom, Portal to the Past: History at the Ellis Island Immigration Museum, New York,” *Social and Cultural Geography* 3 (2004): 437–57.

<sup>13</sup> Johnson, “Supply Side” 159.

<sup>14</sup> David Glassberg, “Rethinking the Statue of Liberty: Old Meanings, New Contexts,” *National Park Service’s Planning Web Site for Statue of Liberty and Ellis Island*, 27 Aug. 2004: 1–14; 7, 8 Oct. 2006 <<http://www.libertyellisplan.org/docs/RethinkingTheStatue-Glassberg.pdf>>. See also Rudolph J. Vecoli, “The Lady and the Huddled Masses: The Statue of Liberty as a Symbol of Immigration,” *The Statue of Liberty Revisited: Making a Universal Symbol*, eds. Wilton S. Dillon and Neil G. Kotler (Washington, DC, and London: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1994) 39–69; Juan F. Perea, “The Statue of Liberty: Notes From Behind the Gilded Door,” *Immigrants Out! The New Nativism and the Anti-Immigrant Impulse in the United States*, ed. Juan F. Perea (New York and London: New York University Press, 1997) 44–58.

<sup>15</sup> Interestingly, the composition of the History Committee reflected a paradigm shift in immigration history and in the National Park Service’s way of dealing with it. Its chairman Rudolph J. Vecoli, for instance, was one of the most vehement critics of the AMI in the early 1970s. See Blumberg, *Celebrating the Immigrant* 68–72.

<sup>16</sup> Stanley Alessandra, “Redone Ellis Island: Burnished but Not Brash,” *New York Times* 2 Sept. 1990: 32.

the Statue of Liberty was, wisdom dictated focusing on the Statue of Liberty in appealing for funds.”<sup>17</sup>

This was done extensively and it always came with a decidedly upbeat patriotic tone. Three examples shall illustrate this: First, an advertisement in the *New York Times* under the heading “A report to the American people on the progress of the Statue of Liberty-Ellis Island restoration.” Some quotes read: “The Statue of Liberty was the symbol of freedom. But Ellis Island was the reality [...]. Liberty will be reborn. Ellis Island will be restored [...]. The progress of the restoration is an affirmation of the American people’s belief that these symbols stand for America’s future, not just its past [...]. Together we will Keep the Dream Alive.”<sup>18</sup>

The second example involves the invitations for a fundraising dinner. On the cover is a painting of an anonymous mass of people from diverse backgrounds in front of Ellis Island’s main building. The title is “Freedom,” and it is subtitled with the famous line from Emma Lazarus’ poem “The New Colossus:” “Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free....” In this composition, the line does not refer to the Statue of Liberty but to the immigration station; the one literally takes the place of the other. Here, it is not—as usually interpreted—that “immigration” is added as a new layer of meaning to the Statue of Liberty, but that “freedom” is added to Ellis Island.<sup>19</sup>

And as a third example, a short text from a PR-booklet called “Centennial for Liberty:” “Together, Liberty and Ellis Island represent two different orders of force which combined have produced the world’s most powerful and productive nation. That is why the Statue of Liberty and Ellis Island are two complementary parts of a single monument to our way of life. [...] They represent the spirit of freedom and hope that inspired our immigrant forebears and attracted new citizens from around the world. [...] It’s time we restored and rebuilt these monuments to our greatness [...]. Time is short. The costs are enormous. Join with us in this effort. There may be no more rewarding job in our lifetime. By our success we will show that the American dream is still alive. (signed) Lee A. Iacocca.”<sup>20</sup>

By emphasizing the connection to the Statue of Liberty, the fundraising campaign was very successful in making Ellis Island better-known and more

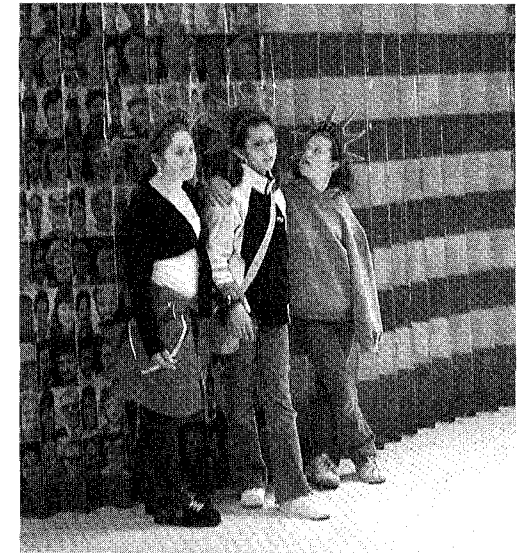
<sup>17</sup> Holland, *Idealists* 80.

<sup>18</sup> *New York Times* 23 Apr. 1986: B10.

<sup>19</sup> Invitation Card for the Ellis Island Medals of Honor Awards Dinner, 27 Oct. 1986, Ellis Island Archives, MetaForm Research Collection, New Box #93, File “Foundation.”

<sup>20</sup> *Centennial for Liberty: 1886–1986*. New York: Statue of Liberty-Ellis Island Foundation, 1984.

Visitors to the Ellis Island Immigration Museum, in front of the “Flag of Faces”

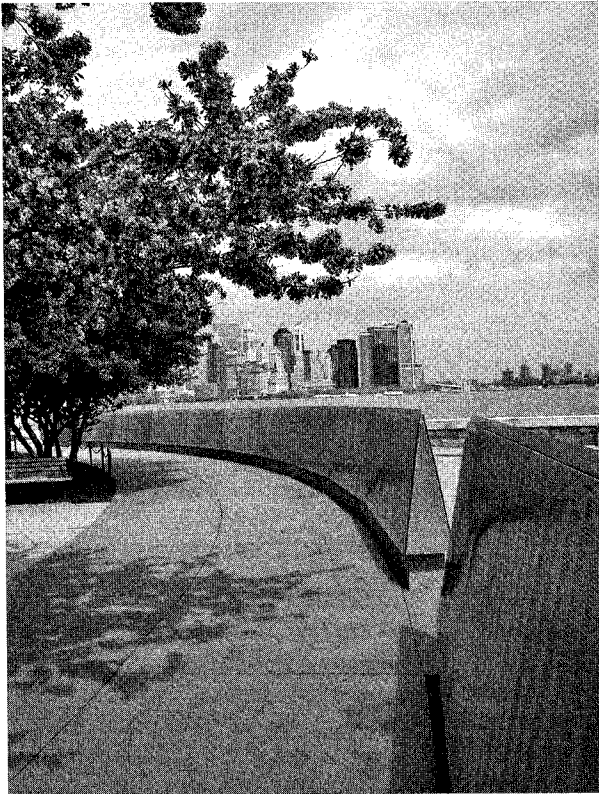


popular. The three examples should have made clear, though, that it thereby communicated a very particular view of the immigration station and of immigration history in general; one that was very much contrary to what the historians advocated. I would argue that this was the case not primarily because of a particular agenda of the people in charge, but because of the logic of the fundraising market, i.e. Ellis Island was a tough sell. And obviously, the association with the Statue and a fair deal of patriotism made it a lot easier.<sup>21</sup>

Since the opening of the Ellis Island Immigration Museum this link has become even stronger. The two islands are connected by the tourist ferry; one cannot visit the museum without first visiting the Statue of Liberty. And even if the historians and designers did not include a lot of references to Lady Liberty in the exhibitions, they are now there, and highly visible. By wearing the popular crown-shaped souvenir headdresses, visitors bring the Statue’s imagery with them *on* their heads—and it can be assumed that they do so *in* their heads as well.

The fundraising campaign also left its traces in another, physical way on Ellis Island, which brings me to my second point: the “American Immi-

<sup>21</sup> John Bodnar underestimates this more systemic aspect when he writes: “[T]he activities of the National Park Service represent a continuation of symbolic history at the expense of actual history because they refuse to move the immigrant saga outside the shadows of the island and the statue.” John Bodnar, “Symbols and Servants:



The Ellis Island Immigration Museum

grant Wall of Honor.” The “Wall of Honor” is many things at once: It is one of the “permanent exhibits at the Ellis Island Immigration Museum,” a “beautiful memorial,” “the largest wall of names in the world,” and one of the main attractions on Ellis Island.<sup>22</sup> Above all, however, it was and still is the “principal fundraising device,”<sup>23</sup> and technically it is a huge and aesthetically ambitious donors’ plaque. For a donation of \$100 or more anyone can have a name inscribed on the stainless steel plates of the wall, be it that of an ancestor or of one’s family, one’s own name or that of a another

Immigrant America and the Limits of Public History,” *Journal of American History* 73 (1986): 137–51; 143.

<sup>22</sup> Quotes from various official brochures.

<sup>23</sup> Holland, *Idealists* 244.

person. The respective person does not have to have come through Ellis Island; in fact he or she does not even have to be an immigrant. Asked, for example, about Native Americans and African Americans, Lee Iacocca proclaimed: “Nobody is being excluded from the wall.”<sup>24</sup>

The “Wall of Honor” drew a lot of criticism. Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, for instance, called it an “extraordinary example of purchasing history on credit,” alluding to the handling of the donations via American Express, and criticized that “the ease with which one can sign on to the American Immigrant Wall of Honor obscure[d] the very real obstacles of obtaining a visa and green card.”<sup>25</sup> The issue even caused some annoyance between the National Park Service and the Statue of Liberty-Ellis Island Foundation, which brought up the idea and runs the Wall. The deputy director of the Park Service reported: “Maybe we wouldn’t have done that wall, there are a lot of purists in the Park Service. [...] But the foundation raised \$300 million, and we owe a great deal to that process. We are in no position to second guess.”<sup>26</sup>

With the general public, however, the idea has been incredibly successful. Over 600,000 names have been collected so far and—apart from the revenue it generated—this served to popularize Ellis Island. In doing so, the advertising of the Wall, perhaps the most visible PR regarding the Ellis Island project, is based on fairly simple patriotic messages and disseminates an unambiguously positive image of Ellis Island. A few examples from the brochures shall suffice: The Wall of Honor “pays tribute to those brave individuals who risked everything for the chance to build a new life in the land of the free.”<sup>27</sup> “As a symbol of the hope, spirit, and determination of those who came before us, Ellis Island speaks for everyone who’s shared in the American dream.”<sup>28</sup> “We’re very proud of our heritage. This is a way for us kids to say thanks ... It’s like a recognition of the input of my culture in the melting pot.”<sup>29</sup>

In this regard, the PR follows in the vein of what I said earlier about the fundraising campaign in general. The significance of the American Immi-

<sup>24</sup> Marvine Howe, “Once Again, Ellis Island will Open its Arms in Welcome,” *New York Times* 9 June 1989: B4. This peculiarly democratized version of a “donors’-plaque-turned-memorial” was picked up by other immigration museums such as “Pier 21” in Halifax, Canada.

<sup>25</sup> Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, “Ellis Island,” *Destination Culture: Tourism, Museums, and Heritage* (Berkeley, CA, and London: University of California Press, 1998) 177–87; 181.

<sup>26</sup> Alessandra, “Burnished but Not Brash” 32.

<sup>27</sup> “The American Immigrant Wall of Honor,” brochure, 1987.

<sup>28</sup> Draft Amex-Letter 8/30/1990, Ellis Island Archives, Doc Bx. 14 (SToL-EIF, Inc.).

<sup>29</sup> “The American Immigrant Wall of Honor.”

grant Wall of Honor, however, goes further. In the words of Lee Iacocca: "The Wall of Honor is a way to personalize Ellis Island—to somehow give Americans a piece of their heritage."<sup>30</sup> In the first place, this is again the salesman talking. "Personalizing" means targeting individual consumers and giving something back is part of the deal. In this case, for \$100 you can expect to get at least "a *piece* of your heritage." But beyond that the statement hints at something deeper: The Wall of Honor aims at—and succeeds in—establishing personal relationships between Americans and Ellis Island, and even a sort of tangible affection, for instance, in the way visitors search for names on the actual wall. The "Wall of Honor" links individual persons to the site. The question is only: Which site?

The copy of the museum catalogue, which I bought used on Amazon, bore what I consider to be a telling dedication: "Merry Christmas, Mom. We'll go see the engraved wall in 1995. Love, Vicki, Tom, Nick and Tony." This random and—I just assume—typical family will not go and visit Ellis Island, the historic site, with its complex and multi-faceted history. No, Vicki, Tom, Nick and Tony promise to embark on a pilgrimage, to the "engraved wall," the memorial, in order to feel in communion with their ancestors and their fellow immigrants of the American nation.

So far, I have considered two aspects of the fundraising campaign. I have pointed to the image of Ellis Island it communicated and how this image conflicted with the agenda of the historians involved. Particularly my remarks on the "Wall of Honor" may be read as a continuation of the "heritage critique" established by David Lowenthal, Robert Hewison, and others since the 1980's.<sup>31</sup> For all their merits, however, it seems to me that their analyses all too often tend to construct a false dichotomy between a commercialized and thereby biased and distorted heritage, on the one hand, and an objective, clean history, on the other. I would like, therefore, to introduce an alternative conceptualization, recently put forward by Bella Dicks, that might be made fruitful for analyzing the making of heritage sites—or, for this matter, of sites of memory. In her book "Culture on Display" she writes:

If we think of heritage as *history made visible* we can avoid falling into the unproductive debates over truth vs. distortion. What this means is that heritage is produced within the cultural economy of visibility, in which the object is to

attract as many visitors as practicable to the intended site, and to communicate with them in meaningful terms.<sup>32</sup>

After fending off notions of deliberate distortion she continues: "What we can say, however, is that the principle of visibility works to produce particular kinds of historical representations, which need to be 'readable' by, and interesting to, a wide range of visitors who are there primarily for identity-oriented reasons."<sup>33</sup> This, of course, has far-reaching implications. In her view, for instance, "[p]laces whose identity seems inaccessible, confusing or contradictory do not present themselves as destinations. They do not, in other words, seem visitable. [...] To avoid such a fate, places should 'make the most of themselves.'"<sup>34</sup> How does that play out in the case at hand? I will briefly sketch a few observations beyond the fundraising issue of how Ellis Island, in my opinion, tries to "make the most of itself."

1. The museum presents a strong narrative: the story of immigration to the US with a focus on the decades around the turn of the century. It is clear for everybody from the outset: This is the Ellis Island *Immigration* Museum. It is not the Ellis Island Psychiatry and Public Health Museum, or the Ellis Island Detention and Deportation Center Site, or The National US Coast Guard Museum or a mix of all this and more. It is not even just the Ellis Island Museum. By establishing the dominant narrative of "immigration" and announcing this as the essence of Ellis Island, the place clearly becomes identifiable and less contradictory; the other aspects and historic layers of the place and their interconnectedness, although partially mentioned in the exhibits, at the same time become less visible.

2. The Main Building of the Immigration Station has been beautifully restored with a maximum of attention and money and now makes for a wonderful experience. However, not only that the sole focus on this building has left no funds for the restoration of other structures on the island; the beautiful "Registry Hall" has been turned into an icon, instantly recognizable, and at the same time a high-gloss version of itself. Lee Iacocca for the last time: "It's like a cathedral, a churchlike setting, a place to pray. It brings tears to your eyes."<sup>35</sup>

3. The exhibitions in the museum are in large parts structured according to the experience of the historic immigrants. Visitors are encouraged to follow the same path *they* once took through the building; some of the

<sup>30</sup> "Opening of Ellis Island Announced," press release, 19 June 1990, Ellis Island Archives, Doc Bx. 14 (StoL-EIF, Inc.).

<sup>31</sup> David Lowenthal, *The Past is a Foreign Country* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985); David Lowenthal, *Possessed by the Past: The Heritage Crusade and the Spoils of History* (New York: Free Press, 1996); Robert Hewison, *The Heritage Crusade: Britain in a Climate of Decline* (London: Methuen, 1987).

<sup>32</sup> Bella Dicks, *Culture on Display: The Production of Contemporary Visibility* (Maidenhead, Berkshire: Open University Press, 2003) 134.

<sup>33</sup> Bella Dicks, *Culture on Display* 134.

<sup>34</sup> Bella Dicks, *Culture on Display* 1.

<sup>35</sup> Peter Wyden, *The Unknown Iacocca* (New York: William Morrow & Co., 1987) 260.

exhibits are located in the very rooms where the respective part of the processing took place; and the narrative sequence of the main exhibitions follows their experience as well. This concreteness makes the presentations meaningful for visitors today and the possibility of positive identification with the life and fate of immigrants certainly contributes to the popularity of the museum. The more complex and abstract bureaucratic and political aspects of immigration control, in contrast, take a backseat in this perspective.

Finally, a headline from the New York Times announcing the opening of the museum points to the problematic implications of Ellis Island's transformation in general. It reads: "Once Again, Ellis Island will Open its Arms in Welcome."<sup>36</sup> Here, Ellis Island, the immigration station, and Ellis Island, the tourist destination, are fully identified. What is certainly appropriate for a tourist site—the cheerful "Welcome!" and the metaphor of the open arms—has an awkward ring to it when dealing with immigration control.

As a site of memory, Ellis Island is a result of many different factors ranging from developments in American society at large to the agendas of individuals involved in its creation. My concern here was to point to some aspects in the making of Ellis Island that grew out of the particular circumstances under which it was produced and that shaped its appearance in a certain way. I argued that the strong link to the Statue of Liberty emphasized in the fundraising campaign helped "sell" the less popular Ellis Island to the public and, at the same time, against the opinion of the historians and researchers, highlighted notions of patriotism. Similarly, the "American Immigrant Wall of Honor" along with the advertising for it, as a fundraising tool disseminates easy-to-digest feel-good messages, and thereby overshadows the more complex presentations inside the museum. Finally, the focus on Ellis Island as a tourist destination brought into view the "cultural economy of visitability" and some effects of the pressure to "make the most of itself."

Today, most *lieux de mémoire* in the narrow sense, i.e. as actual places, are tourist destinations, and are necessarily intertwined with PR and marketing. Against this background, my remarks on Ellis Island can be read as a suggestion for studying sites of memory with close attention to those systemic factors, i.e. on the one hand, a focus on the concrete *making* without, on the other hand, limiting the analysis to the agendas of individual *makers*.

<sup>36</sup> Howe, "Once Again" B1. Following in the same vein, see Paul Goldberger, "Gateway to America is Once Again Ready to Greet the Masses," *New York Times* 14 Aug. 1990: A1.

HEIKE BUNGERT

## Memory and Migration Studies

Over the past few years, memory has become a popular topic of research. Only few migration historians, however, have been interested in the topic although ethnic memory constitutes a vital element for the construction and maintenance of ethnicity.<sup>1</sup> This is in part due to the fact that migration history has been focusing on social history and only recently has turned more to cultural history.<sup>2</sup> At the same time, few scholars working on memory have been interested in migration history, apart from studies on forced exile and the traumatic memories of the Holocaust.<sup>3</sup> Thus, there is little research combining the themes of migration and cultural memory.

In addition, the international interchange on theories of memory is limited. In Germany and France on the one hand,<sup>4</sup> and in the United States and Great Britain on the other hand,<sup>5</sup> different theories of memory have

<sup>1</sup> *Geschichte und Gedächtnis in der Einwanderungsgesellschaft: Migration zwischen historischer Rekonstruktion und Erinnerungspolitik*, ed. Jan Motte and Rainer Ohliger (Essen: Klartext, 2004).

<sup>2</sup> See Russell A. Kazal, "Revisiting Assimilation: The Rise, Fall and Reappraisal of a Concept in American Ethnic History," *American Historical Review* 100 (1995): 437–71; 454–59; Olivier Zunz, "American History and the Changing Meaning of Assimilation," *Journal of American Ethnic History* 4.2 (Spring 1985): 53–84; 57.

<sup>3</sup> E.g. Aleida Assmann, "Stabilisatoren der Erinnerung: Affekt, Symbol, Trauma," *Die dunkle Spur der Vergangenheit: Psychoanalytische Zugänge zum Geschichtsbewusstsein*, ed. Jörn Rüsen and Jürgen Straub (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1998) 131–52; James Young, *The Texture of Memory: Holocaust Memorials and Meaning* (London: Yale University Press, 1993); *Re-Presenting the Shoah for the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Ronit Lentin (New York: Berghahn, 2004).

<sup>4</sup> See especially the works by Jan and Aleida Assmann as well as Maurice Halbwachs and Pierre Nora, cited below. Only recently, when an English translation became available, have Americans started to read Pierre Nora, see Pierre Nora, *Realms of Memory: Rethinking the French Past*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996–1998).

<sup>5</sup> E.g. John E. Bodnar, *Remaking America: Public Memory, Commemoration, and Patriotism in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992); *Commemorations: The Politics of National Identity*, ed. John Gillis (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994); Paul Connerton, *How Societies Remember* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).