Art of Darkness: Berlin's Holocaust Reminder
Exhibit on Nazi Persecution of the Jews Offers a Walking Tour Of History

By Rick Atkinson
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Seattle as a punch in the face, the sign says from a lamppost along a busy street in central Berlin: "Jews are excluded from sports groups." Around the corner, another lamppost with another sign: "Jews may no longer work as independent craftsmen."

And another: "Jewish authors are forbidden from all literary activities in Germany."

On virtually every block throughout the Schoeneberg neighborhood of Berlin, passersby are warned of yet another prohibition imposed on non-Aryans: 80 regulations in all that preclude Jewish doctors from practicing medicine, Jewish children from playing with non-Jews, Jewish women from buying cigarettes or cigars.

The neatly lettered signs are not evidence of a new wave of anti-Semitism, but rather a stark memorial to the systematic oppression of German Jews that began in 1933 and persisted through the deportations and gas chambers of the 1940s. In Schoeneberg, an annihilation history.

The main project, titled "Plaques of Remembrance," and sponsored by the Berlin Senate at a cost of $30,000 (125,000 marks) for the commission of the signs, took about two years to complete. The 80 lampposts are among the many signs the city has erected for the "art exhibition" that will last about a year.

Signs from the "Plaques of Remembrance" project in Berlin read: "Jewish managers can be fired without any compensation," one of the Nazi-era regulations. The sign's creation: "It's intended to make people think of the time."

Signs of Remembrance, From Dl.

"No fresh milk for Jews. July 10, 1942."

After an initial uproar—including denunciations from those who considered the project a bad taste and calls to the police from residents who thought neo-fascists had run amok—the signs have become part of the landscape in Schoeneberg. Schoolchildren on field trips marvel from lamppost to lamppost with their cameras and notebooks. None of the signs has been defaced.

"This was an important step to get people to think about what happened, to get them to go back into the past," Schoen said.

Although Berlin's small Jewish community has generally supported the project, few Jews here have any illusions that the evils of a half-century ago have been eradicated. In late March, for example, a synagogue in the north German town of Luebeck was defaced, the first such attack on a Jewish house of worship in Germany since World War II.

The attack triggered an ugly and unusually public bout of name-calling between the German for right and Jewish leftists. Ignatz Busch, head of the Central Council of Jews in Germany, accused right-wing parties of being the 'spiritual ashamed' behind the firebombing. That provoked Franz Schoenberger, leader of the proponent Republican Party and an SS veteran, to charge that "the real cause of anti-Semitism can be found in people like Busch."

Equally disquieting was a nationwide opinion survey released last month that indicated that more than 20 percent of Germans harbored negative feelings toward Jews and nearly half believe anti-Semitism in Germany is likely to increase.

A more recent opinion poll by the Allensbach Research Institute reported that 43 percent of all Germans believe that Jews are not in great danger in Germany. Nearly half also believe that banning far-right political parties will help safeguard the country's Jewish communities.

For Shlomo Schonberg, the Schoeneberg project was an opportunity to preserve that which will soon pass from living memory. "It's been 60 years since these laws were first passed," Schon said. "That's three generations, and that's the limit of memory. Many of the people who experienced this directly are dead already, . . . but it's something that we just can't forget."