

# The treptower park soviet war memorial history essay

[History](#)



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

The Treptower memorial became an arena for the political struggle that included the Soviet Union, its satellites, the United States, and the countries of Western Europe. Although veterans' cemeteries and memorials on foreign soil were built on the same grand scale as Treptower and have made use of equally triumphal imagery, Treptower distinguishes itself from other postwar European memorials by crafting a history of World War II that was broadly propagandistic and subtle in its diplomacy. Its value as a source of propaganda stemmed from the story it told of Soviet triumph in the Great Patriotic War. For decades the soldier's statue at the center of the Treptower complex was a major symbol in Soviet war commemoration. As a comparison, the primary war memorial in Moscow, erected in 1958, was not finished until 1995. Although massive in size, Treptower had a subtle diplomatic goal as well: to help establish and legitimize Soviet-German relations following World War II in such a way that would make a former mortal enemy become an ally. Following the war, several existing memorials in Berlin were considered for restoration. This depended on their relevance to military and authoritarian traditions in German history. Treptower was the result of the Soviet effort to imprint its version of victory on a conquered nation. MessagesThe strategy of the Treptower Soviet War Memorial design addressed the Soviet government and military, German communists, and German non-communists. Settling on a message that was acceptable to every group was problematic, necessitating the use of imagery that could support several interpretations. The central point of the memorial complex is the statue of a Soviet soldier with a crushed swastika at his feet and a child cradled in his arms. A seemingly unassailable representation of Soviet

victory, the statue's design allows for changing interpretations. The Soldier may stand for the Soviet army or the Russian people. The swastika may stand solely for the Nazis, or the entire German nation and population. The child could represent future Soviet generations or generations of Eastern European nations. This asks the question of whether Germany was or was not included in the latter representation. Was Germany simply liberated from Nazism, or further reborn into communism? The symbols could be for interpreted from a variety of political viewpoints, making some issues clear and obfuscating others. For example, the soldier was not, placed atop a fallen eagle, a recognizable and traditional symbol of the Germany. This would have implied that Germany, and not just the Third Reich and fascism, was to blame for World War II. The story of the war told on the sarcophagi also held some ambiguity by remaining vague or even silent on key themes. The range of possible interpretations is intentionally limited, as continued use of those themes in a seamless account would present a more constrictive and reductionist narrative. Soviet and German communist leaders seized upon Treptower's interpretive flexibility during commemoration ceremonies, during which they made specific interpretations to match their political agendas. Immediately after the end of World War II, the Soviet Military Administration of East Germany constructed numerous veterans' memorials and state cemeteries in greater Berlin and other occupied territories to commemorate victory and to honor the fallen. Tiergarten, the first Soviet memorial constructed in Berlin, held the graves of 2, 500 Soviet soldiers killed in the Battle of Berlin. It was dedicated on November 11, 1945. An architectural competition for a larger, more

encompassing Soviet memorial was held in 1946. The winning entries were chosen and scheduled for construction in the Pankow and Treptow districts of Berlin. German architects participated in the competition, but the winner was a Soviet team, which included Stalin's favorite sculptor, J. W. Wutschetitsch. The design team acknowledged the advice from the SMAD in Berlin. The site at Pankow held the remains of over 13, 000 Soviet soldiers. Although this significantly outnumbered the approximately 5, 000 Soviet soldiers interred at Treptower, the latter would become the primary Soviet war memorial in Germany. Built between 1947 and 1949, Treptower was the largest and most elaborate Soviet memorial. It became central point of Siegstag (Victory Day) and Befreiungstag (Liberation Day) commemoration ceremonies. Location and ease of access were deciding factors in selecting Treptow over Pankow. The fastest route from Pankow to any transit station in the Soviet sector was two miles. Treptower Park, was only one and a half miles from the nearest station. The Berlin blockade was approaching and tension between the east and the West were rising. As a result, the SMAD chose Treptower for its security secure and practicality. The Tiergarten memorial was passed over because it was located in West Berlin. Some architectural standards were avoided simply because they had been infamously appropriated by the Nazis. The North-South axis of city planning was excluded from urban renewal due to its use by Albert Speer in his Welthauptstadt Germania design. Locations in central Berlin were dismissed, as the SMAD worried that a gigantic Soviet soldier towering over the historic Prussian and German landmarks on Unter den Linden would significantly hurt their efforts to be accepted as liberators. The Treptower location gave the

Soviets their tradition of triumphal gestures while simultaneously allowing them to avoid political slip ups. The Treptower memorial was constructed in the socialist realism style, which became the Soviet state policy of expression under Stalin in 1932. A visitor's journey through the complex is a structured and choreographed experience, common to ritual landscapes. One enters the complex through a triumphal arch with Soviet imagery on which is inscribed a brief acknowledgement to the soldiers who fell defending the " socialist homeland." On the other side of the arch is the Motherland sculpture, a statue of a mother mourning for the son she lost to the war. Once passing Motherland, the visitor turns and proceeds up an incline between two enormous stone pylons representing lowered Soviet flags. The granite used in the pylons, and throughout Treptower, was taken from the ruins of the Reich Chancellery. A bronze Soviet soldier, each facing the center of the complex, takes a knee in front of each pylon. The view through the pylons stretches across a courtyard made up of manicured lawns, ending with the massive statue of the Soviet soldier. Visitors descend a set of stairs on the periphery to pass between the center plaza containing the soldiers' remains. Flanking this is a series of sarcophagi, which tell the story of the war through bas-reliefs and inscribed text. Eight sarcophagi on either side were made with identical pairs of bas-reliefs and quotations by Joseph Stalin. The north side is inscribed with Russian and the south side bears German text. The Soviet soldier stands on a pedestal containing a mausoleum, and the entire monument sits on a sloped hill representing a kurgan, an ancient Russian burial mound. Sacred Ground

The first series of Soviet war memorials constructed in Eastern Europe were meant to

represent the debt owed by liberated nations to the Red Army. They are also served to mark conquered grounds. Treptower became the largest and most elaborate of these memorials. This is compared other European capitals that were taken by the Red Army at great cost, such as Budapest, where Soviet war memorials did not approach the scale of Treptower. Only during the Leonid Brezhnev era were memorials of equitable size built in the Soviet Union. All of these "supershrines" however, were built for the purpose of emphasizing the invented tradition of Soviet military commemoration ceremonies. Michael Ignatieff identified this tradition as the "Soviet War Cult," a "conscious attempt to draw meaning for the rituals of the present from the