

# Contested Commemoration:

## The Relationship Between Politics and the Memorialization of the Second World War in Polish Literature, Cinema, and Museums (1945–Present)

By: Alexandria Joyner • Advisor: Dr. Greg Shaya

### HISTORICAL QUESTION

How have government politics affected the memorialization of the Second World War in Poland?

### ARGUMENT

I argue that the memorialization of the Second World War has changed radically over the last seventy-five years as the Polish government, in both the communist and post-communist periods, pursued a politics of memory.

### METHODS

My study is broken into 4 narrative chapters that examine key political transitions and sites of contention.

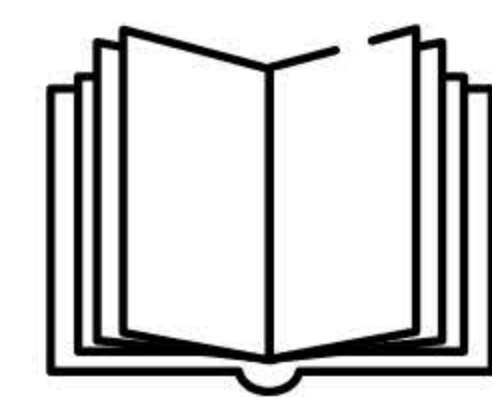
1945–1956, Literature  
1956–1967, Film  
1967–1989, Film  
1989–Present, Museums

### BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

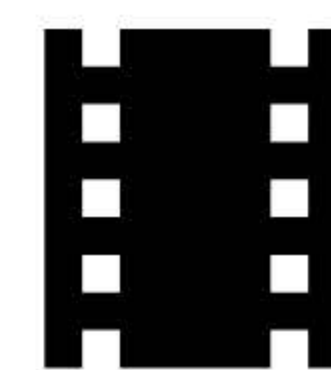
After WWII ended, Poland's newly formed communist government created a narrative about the war that treated its end as a victory over fascism brought on by the Soviet Red Army's liberation of Poland.

This narrative would be revised in 1956, 1967, and again in 1989 as a result of political changes within the country.

### RESULTS



1945–1956: Polish authors turned to prose as a way to make sense of what they had just lived through. These works challenged the official government narrative.



1956: De-Stalinization led to a gradual loosening of censorship laws in film.  
1967: Heightened antisemitism within Poland following a political speech reversed the 1956 liberalization of film.



1989–Present: Museums have become a way for the post-communist government to tell a story about Polish strength during the war.

### CONCLUSION

Politics have the power to shape memory, determining the stories that are told and the ones that are suppressed. Poland's memory struggle is not over and remains, even today, a site of political contestation.

Exterior  
Museum of the Second World War  
Gdańsk, Poland, 2019  
Photo by Author



Child Soldier  
Warsaw Rising Museum  
Warsaw, Poland, 2019  
Photo by Author