



December 17, 2019

## 20 years of Place of Remembrance: permanent exhibition investigates early history of Volkswagen and Nazi forced Labor

- Eyewitnesses Sara Frenkel-Bass and Jean Baudet remember and warn on the occasion of the 20th anniversary of the inauguration of the permanent exhibition
- Following their tour of the Place of Remembrance, apprentices and former trainees speak about their impressions and their responsibility for the future
- Every year, about 3,500 people visit the publicly accessible permanent exhibition in the former air raid shelter Bunker 1

**Wolfsburg – This December, the “Place of Remembrance of Forced Labor in the Volkswagen Factory” reaches its 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary. The historic exhibition explores the early history of Volkswagen and forced labor during the Nazi dictatorship. The permanent exhibition in a former air raid shelter of the present Volkswagen plant at Wolfsburg is visited by about 3,500 people each year. Guests from across the globe not only come from the Volkswagen Group but also from other companies, schools and universities. They are guided through the exhibition by members of the Volkswagen Heritage team. To register for a tour, potential visitors only need to send an email to [history@volkswagen.de](mailto:history@volkswagen.de).**

### Media contact

Volkswagen Communications  
Hans-Rüdiger Dehning  
Spokesperson Heritage  
Phone: +49 5361 9-77173  
[hans-ruediger.dehning@volkswagen.de](mailto:hans-ruediger.dehning@volkswagen.de)



More at  
[volkswagen-newsroom.com](http://volkswagen-newsroom.com)



Place of Remembrance: Volkswagen apprentices learning about the past in Bunker 1



Stone of remembrance : Volkswagen employees lay white roses for the forced laborers on the stone at entrance 2

During the Second World War, about 20,000 forced laborers worked for the former Volkswagenwerk GmbH. Nowadays, the Volkswagen Group, with about 660,000 employees at more than 120 locations, stands for tolerance, internationality and cosmopolitanism. From 1986 onwards, Volkswagen was one of the first companies in Germany to have its history during the Nazi period comprehensively investigated by historians. These efforts also included meetings and interviews with former forced laborers including Sara Frenkel-Bass (Antwerp, Belgium) and Jean Baudet (Nice, France).



On the occasion of the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the inauguration of the Place of Remembrance on December 17, 1999, Sara Frenkel-Bass (97) says: "Up to the 1980s, it was difficult for Volkswagen to work honestly on its past and to make direct contacts with former forced laborers. Now we have the exhibition and I and others are invited to Wolfsburg by Volkswagen. Many things have changed. The people in Wolfsburg are highly interested and provide me with great support on difficult visits, for example to the graves." She emphasizes: "My message to younger people is: no one can deny other people the right to live. The death of so many people warns us that we must remember. It is the task of young people here to ensure that this is not forgotten. I place my trust in you, thank you!"

Jean Baudet (97) says: "As one of the last survivors and speaking on behalf of all my dead colleagues who were forced laborers at the Volkswagen plant between 1943 and 1945. I would like to express my gratitude to Volkswagen for establishing such a great Place of Remembrance of Forced Labor at the plant in what is now Wolfsburg some 20 years ago. This place reminds us of the suffering of forced laborers during those troubled years. I am very proud that I was able to make a contribution by giving my memories and possessions from that time to the company. My most heartfelt wish is that there should never be such a bad time again."

On the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary, 12 apprentices and two former apprentices, Miriam Hilger and Alexander Silbermann, who had been selected to help in shaping the Place of Remembrance, met in the Corporate Archive forum. Following a tour of the exhibition in Bunker 1 together, they discussed the significance of reappraising the beginnings of the company and the crimes committed during the Nazi period on the grounds of the former Volkswagenwerk GmbH from 1943 to 1945. They also talked about topical issues such as right wing populist tendencies in societies characterized by liberal democracies and the growth in anti-Semitic violence.

### **Statements on "20 years of Place of Remembrance for Forced Labor"**

**Alexander Silbermann (42), employee in the company printing shop and volunteer integrity ambassador:** "Back then, working on the history of the company was a very moving experience. Like many people here in the area, Volkswagen had been a key element in my life from childhood onwards, almost as if it were a family company. When the company was looking for volunteers to develop the Place of Remembrance, I came forward immediately."

**Miriam Hilger (38), trained bookbinder and employee in the company printing shop:** "This topic was very important back then. 20 years ago, there were already neo-Nazi graffiti on the walls. Nowadays, I feel that people stand up against these things much more openly."



**Helene Hannah Jacksch (19), future IT specialist:** "A visit to the Place of Remembrance is very moving. Nevertheless, we will never be able to entirely understand how forced laborers really felt."

**Timo Klante (25), young people's and apprentices' representative:** "It really is appalling: 20,000 forced laborers. A whole football stadium full. Nowadays, we must stand up against racism and fascism."

**Marlon Müller (20), apprentice IT specialist:** "The atmosphere in Bunker 1 is oppressive. I was very moved by the exhibition, especially by the fact that former forced laborers had made personal possessions available."

**Anne Mundstock (22) apprentice industrial clerk:** "We are the last generation who will be able to meet eyewitnesses. That is why we should learn as much as we can and pass it on to future generations. It's great that we have this Place of Remembrance and that such a large, influential company like Volkswagen is opposing the shift to the right in society."

**Niko Parlow (20), apprentice IT specialist:** "It is good to have this Place of Remembrance so that we can learn from the past."

**Nora Siems (20), apprentice industrial mechanic:** "It is important for us to stand up against the shift in society towards the right."

### **Note for editors:**

You will find a comprehensive [report on "20 years of Place of Remembrance"](#) on the Volkswagen Group's website. This text, an overview on "Remembrance work at Volkswagen", and the latest photographs are available for downloading at [www.volkswagen-newsroom.com](http://www.volkswagen-newsroom.com).

You may download the catalogue of the Place of Remembrance [here](#) as a PDF file.

---

### **About the Volkswagen brand:**

The Volkswagen Passenger Cars brand is present in more than 150 markets throughout the world and produces vehicles at over 50 locations in 14 countries. In 2018, Volkswagen delivered 6,2 million vehicles including bestselling models such as the Golf, Tiguan, Jetta or Passat. Currently, 195,878 people work for Volkswagen across the globe. The brand also has over 10,000 dealerships with 86,000 employees. Volkswagen is forging ahead consistently with the further development of automobile production. E-mobility, smart mobility and the digital transformation of the brand are the key strategic topics for the future.

---