Was Bleibt? What remains?
Visiting Nuremberg, you can never be sure.
The City was all but destroyed in a Jan 2, 1945 air raid. There was little of military value produced in the city, and certainly not in the historic narrow streets of the walled city with its 2,000 medieval buildings. But this ancient fortress and cultural centre was considered “the most German of cities” so it was destroyed.
The National Socialists, and Hitler, had used the city’s reputation as centre of Germanic culture to great effect in their Nuremberg rallies. They had started building a monumental, brutalist series of buildings to celebrate their version of German culture and history.
There may have been no military reason for the British bombing of 1945 but every reason psychologically to destroy an important city of the German heartland. By April of 1945 American troops occupied the city and finished eradicating any symbols of Nazi dominance.
After generations of rebuilding, a visitor finds what remains is sometimes painfully faithful to the medieval foundations of one of the ruling cities of the Holy Roman Empire and a centre of the German Renaissance.
What remains isn’t true. The city’s St. Lorenz Kirche, its’ main cathedral, looks like it survived the war without damage, but photographs from the time show a bombed out shell of a building.
Today it is impossible to tell where the remains of the old church stop and where modern reconstruction starts; what is reproduced and what is original art. The city’s historic treasures were hidden underground and protected during the bombing, but not all survived. There is even a museum celebrating the caves which sheltered the city’s art.
So what remains? What is true? Nuremberg diligently rebuilt the monuments and churches of the past, but not without the memory of a more recent past.
Take the Number Six tram to the end of the line—Doku-Zentrum—to discover something that remains. In a glass shard built upon the ruins of Hitler’s monumental delusions is a museum confronting Nuremberg and the National Socialists’ rise and fall. There, among the happy cacophony of German students on a day-trip, is a permanent exhibit that explains the jingoism and propaganda that allowed the rise of the Nazi’s, viewed through the dark lens of the Nuremberg Rallies.
In Germany coping with the past, or *Vergangenheitsbewältigung,* means students, as part of their eduction, will probably visit a concentration camp, a documentation centre or similar institution. So what remains is an educational system teaching children to cast a skeptical eye on their history.
And what to make of a city where one of the major tram lines is named after a documentation centre exploring the city’s shame? It would be easy to name the

tram line endpoint something less sinister like Dutzenrteich Park, but Nuremberg seems perversely proud—of all of its history.
Get back on the Number 6 tram to meet at a friend at the other end of the line. She's a proud *Bürger von Nürnberg* who is pleased to walk us about the most beautiful cemetery in Europe—Johannisfriedhof. For a millennium the city's prominent personages have been buried here amid the rose bushes and carefully tended family graves. Even today the owners of family plots pay landscapers to care for the graves and put out fresh flowers. Bavarians do not forget their graves or their family history.
"Let me explain the plaques to you," said our friend, bustling along the walkways separating the stone coffin graves. Retired, a short of history teacher, she is teacher dressed in stylish, if understated comfort, who ignores the most famous of the graves.
Instead she points to the oldest of the graves, from the end of the medieval period. "The bas-relief brass plaques on the oldest of the tombs contain a family history to the date the grave-site was purchased," she says, "The oldest plaques are from 14th and 15th Century. On the left is the family patriarch who bought the grave. He's depicted in renaissance clothing and a ruffled collar. Following his image is a long line of children, and grandchildren. On the far right is the wife, or rather wives. "Like today, prominent men marry more than one woman. But the reasons for serial monogamy among the upper classes in 16th Century Bavaria was because so many women died early in life."
The plaques, she said, matter-of-factly report death by placing crosses above the representation of the wives and children who died young. Many of the oldest plaques have a long line of 20 or more children, half of whom died early, before their father, maybe alongside their mother in childbirth.
"Over there is my family tomb," she gestures toward a nearby grave. "I'll be buried there one day."
What remains Was Bleibt