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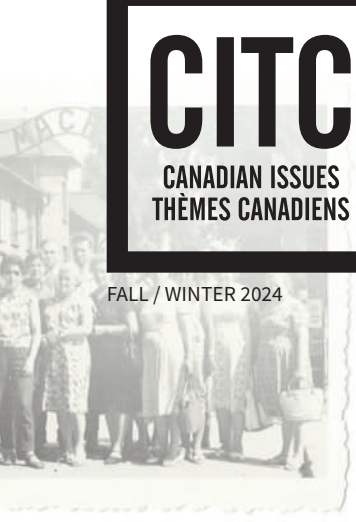

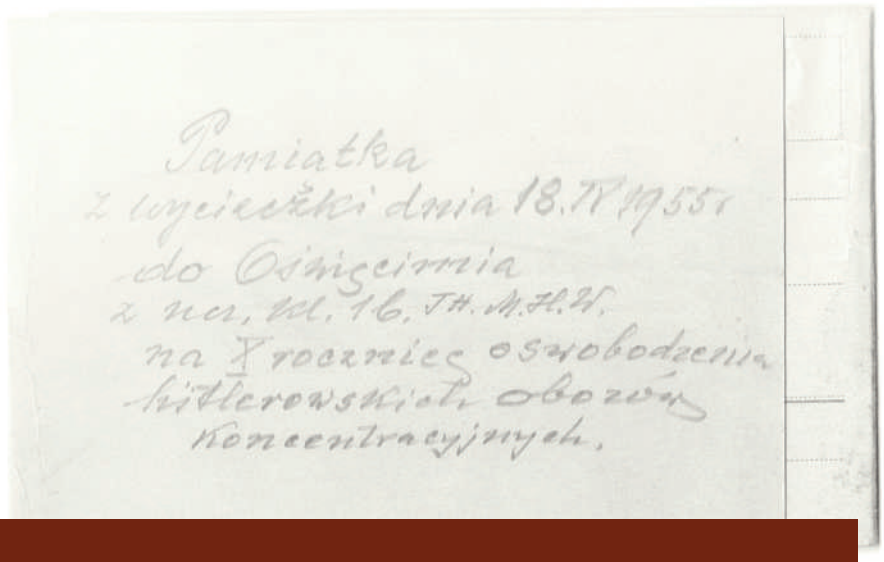

HOLOCAUST MEMORY AND LEARNING

Canadian Perspectives on Contemporary and Future Challenges

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ANNETTE WILDGOOSE
RIVKA AUGENFELD
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LETTERS

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INTRODUCTION

REMEMBERING, RECTIFYING AND REIMAGINING: CANADIAN PERSPECTIVES ON HOLOCAUST MEMORY IN A CHANGING WORLD

MIRIAM TAYLOR

Miriam Taylor is a special advisor to the Metropolis Institute on community outreach and an independent researcher whose work focuses on human rights protection and the social costs of prejudice & discrimination. Miriam holds a doctorate in Religious Studies from Oxford University.

As we approach the 80th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz, Holocaust remembrance faces a critical juncture. The passing of survivors, coupled with the rise of new generations distanced from the lived experiences of the Holocaust, has made preserving its memory both urgent and complex. The articles in this collection provide Canadian perspectives on the challenges of maintaining Holocaust memory and ensuring that its lessons resonate in today's society. Each of the contributors brings a unique perspective to the table, drawing on years of experience in diverse fields of endeavour, thus enriching the interdisciplinary focus of the publication. The reflections gathered here are built on expertise in such diverse fields as Holocaust remembrance, refugee rights, interethnic violence, genocide prevention, philanthropic leadership, historical education, and community engagement. Contributors draw from backgrounds in political science, law, history, public service, and nonprofit leadership, combining scholarly research, practical advocacy, and pedagogical experience to address the complex challenges of preserving Holocaust memory and combatting misinformation. Many authors are also personally connected to the Holocaust or driven by a deep moral responsibility to fight hatred and injustice. These articles collectively offer a powerful reflection on the importance of remembering the Holocaust and acting to convey its universal lessons for the future.

This special issue is divided into three sections. The first, **Honouring Legacies**, includes the testimonies of three authors whose personal connections to the Holocaust have shaped their lives and vocations. The second section **Educating for Empathy**, addresses the evolving challenges and strategies in Holocaust education, focusing on how to engage students in meaningful learning. In the final section, **Confronting Misinformation**, experts discuss

the ongoing threats of Holocaust denial and distortion, and the actions needed to combat these disturbing trends in the digital age.

SECTION 1: HONOURING LEGACIES

As children of Holocaust survivors, Annette Wildgoose and Rivka Augenfeld draw on their personal family histories to shape their commitment to preserving Holocaust memory and advocating for justice. Wildgoose, as President of the National Holocaust Monument in Ottawa, highlights the Monument's role not only in commemorating victims but also in educating future generations about the dangers of hatred and the importance of tolerance. Her dedication to remembrance is deeply personal, rooted in the legacy passed down by her mother and her unique way of honoring the family that was lost. Augenfeld, guided by her parents' legacy of resilience and social justice, channels this inheritance in her work with refugees and immigrants. Her article reflects on how the values of solidarity, dignity, and resilience, instilled by her parents, have guided her work in human rights and refugee advocacy. Augenfeld's commitment to justice is informed by her upbringing, where Holocaust memory was not only a historical lesson but a personal, moral calling to protect the vulnerable and fight for social justice. Annette and Rivka's shared sense of responsibility reflects a commitment to continuing the lessons passed down from their parents, ensuring that the memory of the Holocaust informs today's ongoing struggles for human rights and dignity.

Similarly, Jeffrey Kopstein, deeply influenced by his upbringing in Toronto surrounded by survivors, explores the lasting psychological and cultural impacts of the Holocaust on Jewish identity and memory. In his article, Kopstein examines how the Holocaust continues to shape Jewish identity, collective memory, and perceptions of antisemitism, even as Jewish communities have recovered demographically. Kopstein warns that as living memory fades, the lessons of the Holocaust risk becoming abstract or marginalized. He emphasizes the need for vigilance in preserving its memory through education and storytelling, especially as survivors and their children pass on.

SECTION 2: EDUCATING FOR EMPATHY

Holocaust education faces both traditional and modern challenges as educators seek to impart its lessons to younger generations. Naomi Azrieli and Jody Spiegel's article tackles one of the most pressing issues facing contemporary Holocaust education: "Holocaust fatigue." This phenomenon describes a growing disengagement with Holocaust narratives among students who are overwhelmed by the abundance of media portrayals of violence and trauma. Azrieli and Spiegel emphasize the crucial role of Holocaust testimonies in combatting this fatigue, as survivor accounts provide personal and deeply human insights that help students connect emotionally with the history. The authors argue that these testimonies should be central to Holocaust education, as they offer invaluable perspectives that transcend statistics and historical facts. However, they also caution that technological innovations like virtual reality should be used sparingly, ensuring that they complement rather than replace the profound impact of survivor narratives.

In their article on teaching the Holocaust in Quebec's secondary schools, Sivane Hirsch and

Sabrina Moisan provide a detailed analysis of the complexities involved in bringing Holocaust education into the classroom. They argue that teaching genocide requires an interdisciplinary approach, drawing on ethical, political, social, and pedagogical dimensions to help students engage with the sensitive nature of the subject. The authors highlight how Holocaust education challenges students' values and forces them to confront difficult questions about power dynamics, human behavior, and the dangers of dehumanization. Their pedagogical guide aims to foster critical thinking and empathy, ensuring that students grasp not only the historical facts of the Holocaust but also its relevance to contemporary issues such as racism and political oppression.

Frank Chalk's article considers Holocaust education both in and outside the classroom, focusing on university-level teaching and the role of museums and other institutions in preserving memory. Chalk argues that universities play a crucial role in Holocaust education, particularly in fostering critical thinking and analytical skills. He highlights the importance of survivor testimony as a pedagogical tool, alongside more innovative teaching methods such as online courses and virtual exhibitions. Museums like the Montreal Holocaust Museum are essential to creating a space for public education, where the history and lessons of the Holocaust can be experienced firsthand. Chalk also stresses the significance of connecting Holocaust education to broader studies of genocide, allowing students to draw parallels and apply the lessons learned to other human rights issues. His article suggests that innovative teaching methods, when integrated thoughtfully into curricula, can ensure that the Holocaust remains a powerful and relevant part of students' education.

SECTION 3: CONFRONTING MISINFORMATION

The rise of Holocaust denial and distortion presents one of the greatest challenges in ensuring that the lessons of the Holocaust continue to resonate. Deborah Lyons, Canada's Special Envoy on Preserving Holocaust Remembrance and Combatting Antisemitism, addresses these threats directly, outlining the Canadian government's initiatives to combat denial and antisemitism. She emphasizes the importance of mandatory Holocaust education, teacher training, and public programs to safeguard historical truth, while also highlighting the role of digital literacy in empowering young people to critically evaluate historical claims and combat misinformation. As part of Canada's National Holocaust Remembrance Program, these efforts aim to protect democratic values and foster a society where hatred and prejudice are not tolerated. Lyons stresses that combatting hatred and intolerance is not just about historical remembrance, but requires active vigilance to protect democratic values in the present, underscoring the urgency of preserving the Holocaust's moral imperatives for future generations.

International Chair of the Raoul Wallenberg Centre for Human Rights and Canada's first Special Envoy on Holocaust Remembrance and Combatting Antisemitism, Irwin Cotler, echoes this call for action in his article on the universal lessons of Holocaust remembrance. Cotler emphasizes that remembrance is not just an act of commemoration but a call to action, urging individuals and governments alike to fight against hatred, intolerance, and injustice. He outlines key lessons from Holocaust memory, including the importance of standing up for the vulnerable, combatting state-sanctioned

hate, and holding those in power accountable for their actions. Cotler's article serves as both a warning and a call to arms, reminding us that preventing future atrocities requires active engagement and the courage to speak out against evil.

Jack Jedwab's analysis of a 2024 Canadian survey reveals a troubling rise in Holocaust skepticism, particularly among younger Canadians. His research shows that one in six Canadians aged 18–24 believe the Holocaust is exaggerated, with similar trends observed in the U.S. This skepticism is linked to the over-publicization of the event, confusion about the exact number of victims, and misinformation circulating on social media. Jedwab highlights the significant role of viral content in shaping historical perceptions, especially among young people, and notes that Holocaust skeptics often claim to have a good knowledge of genocides in history. This trend undermines trust in established historical facts and contributes to the normalization of denial and distortion. Moreover, Jedwab highlights that the influence of social media on undermining trust in historical information plays a pivotal role in driving skepticism, as an increasing number of young people turn to online sources for their information. He calls for more robust Holocaust education, critical media literacy, and efforts to engage younger audiences in order to preserve the historical truth and combat misinformation effectively.

CONCLUSION: ADAPTING HOLOCAUST EDUCATION TO A CHANGING WORLD

The articles in this collection highlight both the challenges and innovative strategies shaping Holocaust education and remembrance in Canada. As survivor testimonies become more distant and Holocaust denial grows, educators, advocates, and policy advisors are increasingly turning to creative solutions to preserve memory and combat misinformation. Central to this effort is the need to address the rising skepticism among younger generations, particularly in the context of social media, where much of this distortion is nurtured. To effectively counter this, a combination of continued research, strategic educational innovation, and engagement with emerging views is necessary. Through thoughtful pedagogy, public policy initiatives, and a steadfast commitment to justice and human dignity, the universal and timeless lessons of the Holocaust can endure, guiding our ongoing fight against hatred and ensuring that we learn the vital lessons of the horrors of the past.

2 in 5 Canadians regularly face discrimination.

TOGETHER, LET'S CHOOSE

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Source: ARI, Canada ad the Culture Wars (2023)

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Montreal Holocaust Museum

COMMEMORATING THE 80TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE LIBERATION OF AUSCHWITZ: A PERSONAL REFLECTION

ANNETTE WILDGOOSE

Annette Wildgoose is President of the National Holocaust Monument in Ottawa and a consultant specializing in leadership, management training, governance, and event planning. A former senior Public Service of Canada official, she served as Director of Legacy and Special Projects for the FIFA Women's World Cup Canada 2015. Annette has appeared in documentaries such as *39-45 en sol canadien*, a French TV5 series, and *Hear Their Voices; Écoutez nos Voix*, a bilingual online course on the Holocaust and antisemitism developed by Carleton and Ottawa Universities.

COMMEMORATING THE 80TH ANNIVERSARY OF AUSCHWITZ'S LIBERATION

As President of The National Holocaust Monument, Ottawa, and as a second-generation witness, I am honoured to share with you my personal thoughts as we commemorate the 80th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz-Birkenau on January 27, 2025. This event marked not only the end of one of the darkest chapters in human history but also served as a powerful symbol of hope, resilience, and the triumph of good over evil.

THE NATIONAL HOLOCAUST MONUMENT: A SYMBOL OF REMEMBRANCE

The National Holocaust Monument, Ottawa, was inaugurated by the Prime Minister of Canada, The Right Honourable Justin Trudeau, in 2017 and has since become a significant landmark in our country. The National Holocaust Monument Committee, volunteer-led by individuals with experience in the business, legal, and public service sectors, was established in 2019 with the sole objective of enhancing awareness and promoting the National Holocaust Monument through meaningful commemoration events that preserve the memory of the Holocaust.

OUR FLAGSHIP EVENTS

Over the past three years, our flagship events, International Holocaust Remembrance Day on January 27 and Yom HaShoah, held in April or May each year, have been the most important events at The National Holocaust Monument. The National Holocaust Monument Committee strives

National Holocaust Monument, Yom HaShoah, 2023

Meister Family Stolpersteine, Leipzig Germany

to honour the survivors, pay tribute to the millions of lives lost, and educate future generations about the Holocaust. Through education, remembrance, and the dissemination of historical facts, we can honour the victims and survivors and work toward a future free from hatred and discrimination. Our goal is to ensure that future generations never forget the importance of tolerance, compassion, and the preservation of human dignity.

THE POWER OF MEMORY

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks explains my sentiments so eloquently:

> *History is about facts; memory is about identity. History is about something that happened to someone else, not me. Memory is my story, the past who made me who I am, of whose legacy I am the guardian for the sake of generations yet to come. Without memory, there is no identity, and without identity, we are mere dust on the surface of infinity.* (Sacks, 2020)

A PERSONAL LEGACY

My mother, Alice Meister, was born in Leipzig, Germany. Her family was deported from Leipzig on May 10, 1942. My grandfather, Moritz Meister, and my uncle Alphonse would both perish in Auschwitz-Birkenau. My grandmother, aunts, and uncles perished in Majdanek death camp. A total of 15 members of my mother's immediate family were never seen again. My mother set sail on The St. Louis Ship in May 1939 and would be the sole survivor of her family, first arriving in Southampton and then making her way to Scotland. In her memoirs, she wrote: "I have no idea why I would be the only one to survive. All I can say is that it was as if a secret hand was guiding me throughout my life."

CONTINUING THE LEGACY

My mother taught me the importance of never giving up, and I continue this legacy on her behalf and for those who came before us. I hold my volunteer position with the National Holocaust

Alice Meister, Scotland, 1964

Monument close to my heart and am honoured to be a member of the National Holocaust Monument Committee. Working alongside such a dedicated group of individuals, the significance of legacy and the imperative act of remembrance is more important than ever. We are compelled to confront the depths of human cruelty and the consequences of unchecked hatred. So much has changed, and yet so much remains the same. Forgetting is not an option.

> **“My mother taught me the importance of never giving up, and I continue this legacy on her behalf and for those who came before us. I hold my volunteer position with the National Holocaust Monument close to my heart and am honoured to be a member of the National Holocaust Monument Committee.”**

CONCLUSION

As we reflect on the lessons of the Holocaust and the memory of its survivors, we are reminded of the importance of preserving history and confronting hate. The National Holocaust Monument stands as a testament to that commitment, ensuring that future generations will carry forward the legacy of remembrance and education.

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SHAPING A SOCIAL JUSTICE VOCATION: LESSONS FROM MY PARENTS' HOLOCAUST LEGACY

RIVKA AUGENFELD

For over 50 years, Rivka Augenfeld has been active in the fields of refugee and immigrant resettlement, advocacy for refugee rights and the creation of municipal, provincial and Canadian bodies to monitor and advance human rights. She has been a consultant and trainer in these fields for various community, para-public and government bodies. In 2015, to mark the 40th Anniversary of the Quebec *Charter of Rights and Freedom*, Rivka was one of 40 activists honoured for their work. She has also been active for many years in various Jewish community organizations, particularly the Montreal Jewish Public Library. Her mother tongue is Yiddish and she often serves as an advisor, translator and coach for a variety of musical, literary and other cultural projects. Rivka was born "stateless" in a Displaced Persons Camp in Austria and came to Canada with her parents at the age of two.

Growing up as the child of Holocaust survivors, I always knew my life was shaped by the past, even though it took a long time to grow into my role as a 2nd generation witness to their experience. My parents, Liba Magarshak from Vilna (now Vilnius) and David Augenfeld, from Warsaw, carried with them the weight of a world that had been destroyed – the "khurbn" (the destruction) as they called it in Yiddish. Through their stories and the values they instilled in me, I found not only an anchor to a history filled with pain, grief and resilience but also a guiding light for my own path in fighting for social justice.

THE GIFT OF MEMORY AND LEGACY

In our home, the Holocaust was ever-present, not just as a historical event but as a personal narrative. My parents talked freely about life before the war in Poland, painting vivid pictures of family gatherings, bustling streets, and the cultural vibrancy of Jewish life. These stories gave me a sense of continuity with a world I had never known. Their accounts of loss – the family members who perished, the lives abruptly halted – instilled in me an awareness of what was taken and what must be remembered.

> **"In that liminal space between survival and rebuilding, they taught me the importance of solidarity and resilience. These lessons carried forward into my work, and they remain the bedrock of my understanding of justice: the need to see people as individuals, to honor their dignity, and to remember that every name and every story matters."**

But they did not stop at recounting tragedy. My parents spoke of their years in Displaced Persons (DP) camps in Austria, where I was born. In that liminal space between survival and rebuilding, they taught me the importance of solidarity and resilience. These lessons carried forward into my work, and they remain the bedrock of my understanding of justice: the need to see people as individuals, to honor their dignity, and to remember that every name and every story matters.

A FOUNDATION OF VALUES

Social justice was not an abstract concept for my parents; it was a lived reality. Both were deeply involved in the Jewish socialist Bund movement before, during and after the war, believing in the principles of equality and solidarity. My mother, a member of a socialist youth group called the SKIF, lived by their motto: "Fresh, free, strong, and true." My father, a union activist in Warsaw and a Bundist his whole life, embodied these values in both his public and private life.

These principles were passed down to me, not through lectures but through example. My father believed that values must be lived every day, not deferred to some ideal future. My mother's quiet kindness and her ability to connect with others modeled the compassion at the heart of justice. Their experiences taught me that while we cannot erase the scars of history, we can work to ensure that others do not suffer in silence or isolation.

"WHERE WAS THE WORLD?"

One of the most haunting questions of my childhood was, "Where was the world?" This question, often asked by survivors, demanded an answer – not just from history but from me personally. It became a challenge and a responsibility. I knew that I could not undo the past, but I could be part of creating a future where others would not be abandoned.

In 1974, I began working for Jewish Immigrant Aid Services (JIAS) of Canada, initially out of practical need. Over time, I realized that the work I was doing – helping refugees and immigrants navigate a new life – was my way of responding to that question. Guided by my mentor, Dr. Joseph Kage, I learned to advocate for those in need and to build networks of support. His example, coupled with my parents' teachings, showed me that justice is not about grand gestures but about consistent, compassionate action. And he also believed in the importance of networks, of building partnerships with like-minded people from very different backgrounds.

PRESERVING THE MEMORY OF THE HOLOCAUST

As the years passed and the survivors grew older, the weight of preserving their stories became more

urgent. I learned to understand memory as a collective responsibility. This is not merely about recounting horrors but about humanizing history. My mother once said, "The Holocaust did not start in 1939; it ended many lives then." Her words remind me that the victims were people with rich lives, dreams, and communities before the war.

Commemoration has evolved. In my childhood, ceremonies were intimate gatherings of survivors and their families. Today, as we lose first-hand witnesses, the challenge is to find effective ways to keep the memory alive for a broader audience. This involves not just recounting facts but finding ways to connect emotionally. The story of the "Heart of Auschwitz," an intricate paper heart crafted by a group of young women in that death camp as a 20th birthday gift for a dear friend, exemplifies this approach. Its simple but powerful message of love and hope amid unimaginable horror resonates deeply, especially with younger generations. It lives on as a timeless inspiration in the Montreal Holocaust Museum.

LESSONS FOR THE PRESENT

Working with refugees and immigrants has reinforced the parallels between my parents' experiences and those of others fleeing persecution. I have met people from all over the world who, like my parents, carried their scars with quiet dignity. They continue to teach me that survival is not just about endurance but also about finding ways to rebuild and thrive.

I learned to approach people with humility, knowing that their stories, like my parents', are deeply personal. As a child of survivors, I could relate to the mistrust that comes from trauma. I understood why someone might hesitate to tell their story to a stranger in authority. These lessons informed my advocacy, reminding me always to honor the humanity of those I served.

"I learned to approach people with humility, knowing that their stories, like my parents', are deeply personal. As a child of survivors, I could relate to the mistrust that comes from trauma. I understood why someone might hesitate to tell their story to a stranger in authority. These lessons informed my advocacy, reminding me always to honor the humanity of those I served."

BUILDING A FUTURE WORTHY OF MEMORY

"My parents' lives taught me that the fight for justice is both a privilege and a responsibility. It is a way of living – and a way of remembering that what is most precious is a compassionate open heart."

The legacy of my parents compels me to act. Every day, I try to honor them by embodying the values they lived: compassion, justice, and solidarity. Their lives were a testament to the power of community and the resilience of the human spirit. By working to answer the question, "Where was the world?" I strive to ensure that, one day soon, despite all obstacles blocking our way, no one else will have to ask it again.

Through preserving the memory of the Holocaust and applying its lessons to the present, we honor not just the past but also the promise of a better future. My parents' lives taught me that the fight for justice is both a privilege and a responsibility. It is a way of living – and a way of remembering that what is most precious is a compassionate open heart.

THE PAST IS NEVER PAST

JEFFREY S. KOPSTEIN

Jeffrey S. Kopstein is the Dean's Professor of Political Science at the University of California, Irvine. His work focuses on interethnic violence, voting patterns of minority groups, antisemitism, and anti-liberal tendencies in civil society, paying special attention to cases within European and Russian Jewish history. These interests are central topics in his latest books, *Intimate Violence: Anti-Jewish Pogroms on the Eve of the Holocaust* (Cornell University Press, 2018) and *Politics, Memory, Violence: The New Social Science of the Holocaust* (Cornell University Press, 2023).

THE DEMOGRAPHIC LEGACY OF THE HOLOCAUST

The Jewish people may never recover from the Holocaust. Consider the basic demographic facts. Today there are roughly as many Jews in the world as before 1941, approximately 15.5 million. It's perhaps not surprising that Jewish demographers have extensively studied the counterfactual question: how many Jews would there have been if there had been no Nazi extermination effort. Had there been no Holocaust, had the six million European Jews not been murdered, demographers estimate the global Jewish population would have been somewhere between 25 and 30 million.

THE PSYCHOLOGICAL AND CULTURAL WEIGHT OF MEMORY

But perhaps even more devastating than the number of Jews, the murder of the six million infects the very core of Jewish psychology and spiritual life. What Jew has not considered the game Nathan Englander describes in his short story "What We Talk About When We Talk About Anne Frank"? In the story, two couples, old friends from college days get stoned, get paranoid, and play the "Anne Frank game," in which the object is to identify which of their gentile friends could be counted upon to hide them in the event of a second Holocaust. The resonance of the game and the story is testimony to the continued centrality of the Holocaust in Jewish collective memory.

In some sense, we are always living in 1938, and the question is, when will it be 1939? What sort of fool – I'm tempted to invoke the Hebrew word "freyer" or sucker – would not think about this? I admit, I do. I sometimes plan out routes of escape before I go to sleep at night – devise ways of protecting my family, transferring my money, and

figuring out how to get to safety (yes, how to get to Israel from California!).

GROWING UP AMONG SURVIVORS

I realize how weird this sounds and I hesitate to commit these words to paper but I grew up in a world of Holocaust survivors. I was born in 1961 and most survivors I knew had joined the North American middle class. But not all. In my neighborhood, Stubbie ran a small burger shack, but we all knew he had genuinely carried someone dozens of kilometers to safety during a death march. There were others. My father owned a small furniture shop and his associates included a number of survivors: Laibel the framemaker who survived the war in the sewers of Lviv. Malnourishment yielded a grown man of 150 centimeters and my father couldn't figure out how the guy made a living. My sister dated a guy whose father had survived Auschwitz. He never travelled anywhere without taking his entire family with him. Five kids, always, everywhere.

> **"In my neighborhood, Stubbie ran a small burger shack, but we all knew he had genuinely carried someone dozens of kilometers to safety during a death march."**

THE COMPLEXITY OF SURVIVOR NARRATIVES

My favorite, however, was Itchy whom my father employed as a bill collector. He was paid a percentage of what he collected from deadbeat small stores who were constantly trying to stiff my father. I never found out exactly which hellhole Itchy survived. It was not discussed but my dad said the stories were horrific. After the war Itchy worked in Detroit as an "enforcer" for the remnants of the Purple Gang – gangsters who wrapped tefillin in the morning and killed in the afternoon. When I knew Itchy, he was in his fifties and my father often let me tag along with the two of them for lunch. I once asked whether Itchy ever hit anyone to collect unpaid bills. My father responded, "when Itchy asks for money, he never has to hit anyone." But Itchy smiled a lot, he spoke with a thick Yiddish accent and really butchered the English language in a sweet way, he listened to me, and treated me like an adult. He was huge, tough as nails, and had the largest hands I'd ever seen. He was charismatic and never revealed much about himself. That smile shielded a towering temper, I think. He had some money, he frequently wore a jacket and tie, but the world of violence, both "there" and "here," never washed off him.

THE TRANSITION FROM LIVING MEMORY TO HISTORY

Fifty seemed old to me at the time, but it's not – I'm 62. When we think of survivors today, we think

> **"But it's easy to forget that these survivors were once young with decades still ahead of them. They needed love and passion as much as anyone, perhaps more so, to forget, to rebuild, or simply to go on with their lives."**

of elderly and infirm people who are primarily repositories of memories of the most horrific experience in the history of the Jewish people, a tragedy of biblical proportions. We think of secular saints with grey hair. But it's easy to forget that these survivors were once young with decades still ahead of them. They needed love and passion as much as anyone, perhaps more so, to forget, to rebuild, or simply to go on with their lives. Sometimes the scars were external, as with Laibel the frame maker; other times they were internal, such as the unbearable grief of so many of the older people I knew as a teenager.

THE ENDURING IMPACT OF THE HOLOCAUST

I recently read that approximately 245,000 Holocaust survivors are still living. They must have been children in 1945. When they leave the scene, the Holocaust will pass from living memory to the realm of history. But I also recently read that when the Israeli soldiers arrived at the Kibbutzim on October 7, 2023, they lacked the intellectual and emotional language to understand what had happened. Inevitably they drew upon the categories of anti-Jewish violence and the Holocaust itself. The slaughter carried out by Hamas evoked much older categories: pogroms and death marches. How could it be otherwise? The Jewish people may never recover from the Holocaust.


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FROM HOLOCAUST FATIGUE TO INSPIRING EMPATHY: BALANCING MEMORY AND INNOVATION IN CANADIAN EDUCATIONAL SETTINGS

NAOMI AZRIELI & JODY SPIEGEL

Naomi Azrieli, O.C., DPhil, is Chair and CEO of the Azrieli Foundation, which supports education, healthcare, research and the arts in Canada and Israel. Naomi has developed and launched several unique programs at the Foundation, including the award-winning *Holocaust Survivor Memoirs Program*, for which she serves as Publisher. She also created an initiative to provide sustainable financial support for low-income Holocaust survivors. A respected business leader, social entrepreneur and community advocate, Naomi has co-developed and established numerous innovative initiatives in the areas of brain health, neurodiversity and caregiving. She holds a doctorate in Modern History from the University of Oxford and is an Officer of the Order of Canada and a recipient of France's Legion d'Honneur.

Jody Spiegel is the Director of the Azrieli Foundation's *Holocaust Survivor Memoirs Program* – a national, bilingual program that publishes the first-person accounts of Holocaust survivors who immigrated to Canada. She works with teachers and academics to share these important stories. Jody is a member of the Canadian delegation to the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance, where she sits on the Education Working Group and the Committee on Antisemitism and Holocaust Denial.

INTRODUCTION

In contemporary Canadian educational settings, Holocaust fatigue has presented a unique challenge for educators, policymakers, and memory institutions striving to preserve and impart the lessons of one of history's most profound atrocities. Over the past decade, educators have been confronted with Holocaust fatigue in students who feel that the Holocaust is being taught too much and that it is no longer academically interesting or emotionally engaging. This fatigue is exacerbated by a broader cultural saturation with narratives of violence and trauma in digital media. Students have become disengaged or indifferent, perceiving the Holocaust as a distant historical episode rather than a relevant

part of today's moral landscape. Indeed, shifting attitudes and responses to studying the Holocaust are not new in the educational sphere. Pedagogical expert Simone Schweber observed this trajectory in her own teaching career, noting that her students were no longer approaching the Holocaust with a sense of reverence, what she calls Holocaust awe.

ACKNOWLEDGING HOLOCAUST FATIGUE

Acknowledging Holocaust fatigue does not imply a lack of respect for the gravity of the subject; rather, it signals a challenge in capturing attention and provoking the meaningful reflection necessary for deep understanding. This challenge is particularly strong in a culture that is obsessed with technological innovation and uses these tools to improve education. While educators often search for new ways to make history resonate with a generation further removed from the events, there is always a risk of prioritizing technological novelties over substantive learning.

GROUNDING EDUCATION IN SURVIVOR TESTIMONIES

To effectively counter Holocaust denial, distortion, and the broader dangers posed by misinformation in the digital age, Canada's approach to Holocaust memory and education must remain steadfastly grounded in the voices of those who endured its horrors and had the courage to share their stories. First-person accounts serve as a bridge from the past, imbuing the facts of history with the lived experiences that give them personal meaning.

The decline in the number of Holocaust survivors able to share their testimonies in person marks a critical juncture for Holocaust education in Canada. As we enter the post-survivor era, the shift from living memory to recorded history becomes inevitable. This shift is more than a temporal change; it signifies a transition from witnesses speaking their lived experience to second-hand retellings from family members and a reliance on archival accounts. In this context, the memoirs and personal narratives of survivors become invaluable resources, offering insights that facts alone cannot convey. Their accounts do not merely complement the historical record; they are the vital threads that weave it into a tapestry of individual and collective memory.

"To effectively counter Holocaust denial, distortion, and the broader dangers posed by misinformation in the digital age, Canada's approach to Holocaust memory and education must remain steadfastly grounded in the voices of those who endured its horrors and had the courage to share their stories."

THE ROLE OF THE AZRIELI FOUNDATION'S *HOLOCAUST SURVIVOR MEMOIRS PROGRAM*

The memoirs we publish through the Azrieli Foundation's *Holocaust Survivor Memoirs Program* capture the voices of those who lived through the Holocaust, providing a personal connection to the past. These stories are not just testaments of suffering and loss but also of resilience and hope. They present a counterpoint to the dehumanizing statistics and depersonalized accounts that can characterize some historical study. Meaningful

> **"The memoirs we publish through the Azrieli Foundation's *Holocaust Survivor Memoirs Program* capture the voices of those who lived through the Holocaust, providing a personal connection to the past. These stories are not just testaments of suffering and loss but also of resilience and hope."**

engagement and understanding happen when students connect with a personal account and work to understand someone's experience within the broader context of exploring moral and ethical questions. By grounding education in these narratives, educators can foster empathy and a deeper understanding of the impact of the Holocaust, making it more than a chapter in a textbook.

THE PROMISE AND PITFALLS OF TECHNOLOGICAL INNOVATION

As Holocaust education evolves and responds to the needs of a diverse community of learners, there is an increasing push toward integrating new technologies, such as virtual reality (VR), augmented reality (AR), and interactive exhibits. These tools offer the promise of immersing students in historical events, trying to provide a sense of "being there." The desire for innovation is understandable as educators seek to capture the interest of digitally native students, but can technological innovations and immersive exhibits truly convey the substance of Holocaust memory without sacrificing depth for spectacle?

CAUTION WITH IMMERSIVE EXHIBITS

As interest in using immersive exhibits to bring history to life grows, caution is warranted when these experiences aim to simulate what Holocaust victims endured. Some initiatives rely on the replication of traumatic elements to evoke a strong emotional response yet fail to foster deeper understanding. For instance, exhibits that invite visitors to walk through recreated environments connected to the Holocaust — like a cattle car — risk reducing the events to "shock value" moments. Such approaches can detract from a nuanced engagement with history and instead centre the narrative on the tools of perpetrators rather than the lived experiences and resilience of the Jewish community. The allure of "shiny objects" in educational technology can dangerously pull focus away from the critical examination of the Holocaust's lessons, glorifying the artifacts of trauma instead of honouring those who endured it. When virtual and immersive experiences are used without thoughtful integration into a broader curriculum, they risk reducing the Holocaust to a sensationalized moment rather than a profoundly significant event that reshaped human history — the Disneyfication of the Holocaust.

COUNTERING MISINFORMATION AND DENIAL

The digital environment also allows for the rapid dissemination of falsehoods, where the line between fact and opinion is often blurred. Denial and distortion are not merely acts of historical revisionism — they are attempts to delegitimize the experiences of victims and survivors, undermining the very foundation of Holocaust memory and history.

Educational responses play a crucial role in preventing the spread of misinformation. This underscores the importance of grounding Holocaust education in the voices of those who lived through it. Rigorously researched and fact-checked survivor narratives provide a powerful counter to denial and distortion. They affirm the truth of history through personal experience, making it harder for denial to gain a foothold.

THE IMPORTANCE OF CRITICAL THINKING

The challenge of misinformation is further compounded by the rise of "alternative facts" and the perception that all opinions are equally valid, even in matters of historical truth. Educators must teach students to critically evaluate sources and recognize the difference between informed analysis and deliberate misinformation. Holocaust education, therefore, becomes not just about teaching what happened but also about instilling the skills needed to navigate a world where information is weaponized and history is contested.

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HOLOCAUST EDUCATION IN A MULTICULTURAL CANADA

As Holocaust education in provinces across Canada evolves to become an integral part of the country's commitment to human rights and multiculturalism, first-person survivor narratives and memoirs are particularly well-suited for the curriculum. In the range of books published by the Azrieli Foundation's *Holocaust Survivor Memoirs Program*, students encounter narratives as diverse as Canadians themselves. Our publications tell of young people who defied the Nazis through resistance activities, families who struggled to hold on to their values and traditions despite persecution and attempts to dehumanize them, and people who formed deep friendships with those who experienced these events with them. Students discover not only the depths of inhumanity but also the height of humanity as they learn about the courageous non-Jews who held tight to their moral values and rendered aid to Jews during the Holocaust. They learn about Canadian Jews who, after immigrating to a democratic country to rebuild their lives, not only recovered and healed from intense suffering and trauma but also contributed to the fabric of Canadian society, combatting antisemitism and shaping the country's values of diversity and inclusion.

NAVIGATING THE COMPLEXITIES OF HOLOCAUST EDUCATION

Educators are increasingly facing challenges and uncertainties in addressing the complexities of teaching the Holocaust. While new technologies may offer innovative approaches, they cannot replace the impact of narratives written by

survivors, which provide authentic engagement and empower students to think critically about first-person experiences. When students take an active role in their own learning, they are prepared to address misinformation and become present-day witnesses. Equally, when survivor narratives are centralized, technology can assist and enhance learning.

CONCLUSION: THE LIVING LEGACY OF HOLOCAUST MEMORY

The memory of the Holocaust must remain vibrant — not a relic of the past but a living legacy carried forward by the stories of those who endured it. Holocaust education in Canada should continue to prioritize the narratives of survivors, ensuring that their voices are heard amid a cacophony of misinformation and denial. The transition from Holocaust memory to history reinforces the responsibility to teach it with accuracy, empathy, and a commitment to truth. As educators, historians, and custodians of memory, we owe it to the six million Jewish victims and to those who lived through the Holocaust to ensure that their stories continue to shape our understanding of history and our commitment to a more just future.

MEMORY AND THE TEACHING OF THE HOLOCAUST: ADDRESSING CONTEMPORARY AND FUTURE CHALLENGES[1]

SIVANE HIRSCH & SABRINA MOISAN

Sivane Hirsch is a professor in the Faculty of Education at Université Laval. She is interested in how ethnocultural and religious diversity is taken into account in schools, both in teaching practices and in the school system as a whole. Her research projects question the social role played by schools in addressing sensitive themes such as genocide and racism in the Culture and Citizenship in Québec program, and by adopting pedagogical practices that encourage dialogue.

Sabrina Moisan is a professor in the Faculty of Education at the Université de Sherbrooke. Her research is rooted in critical theory and focuses on the promotion of pluralist, justice-oriented democracy. Her recent research projects focus on multiperspectivity, the indigenization of social science teaching, and the teaching of difficult and sensitive topics such as genocide and racism. Her work also focuses on the impact of collective identities on the teaching and learning of history in secondary schools.

Although the Holocaust is covered in a distinct section in the History and Citizenship Education curriculum at the Quebec secondary school level (the "elsewhere" section of the 12th theme at the end of the second year of secondary school), it can also be presented in the fifth year of secondary school within the Contemporary World, 20th Century History, and Quebec Culture and Citizenship programs, which explore the concept of "genocide" and other themes related to racism. However, genocide – in this instance, the Holocaust – is a sensitive topic for teachers and students alike (Hirsch & Moisan, 2022) due to its nature and its complexity. It comprises ethical, social, political, and pedagogical dimensions.

In this text, we initially seek to understand why the Holocaust is a sensitive subject in the classroom and the pedagogical challenges that this poses. We then briefly present the approach proposed to meet

1 This text is inspired by the article: Moisan, S., & Hirsch, S. (2024). "*Étudier les génocides, un outil pour comprendre et prévenir.*" *Didactica Historica (10/2024)*, *Enfance menacée, enfance protégée*, 171–178.

these challenges in our pedagogical guide *Studying Genocides*.[2]

GENOCIDE AS A SENSITIVE TOPIC

The teaching of genocides in general, and the Holocaust in particular, are sensitive topics. Our research has identified these topics as "difficult objects of knowledge, mobilizing social values and representations that are complex and multifaceted, involving distinct ways of life in a plural school environment where reaching a consensus is not always possible. By entering the classroom, often unexpectedly, they can call the status quo into question by virtue of their strong subversive potential" (Hirsch & Moisan, 2022, p. 69). By analyzing genocides through the prism of this definition and the four dimensions it raises – ethical, political, social and pedagogical – we can better understand their sensitivity and thereby reveal the different challenges that these dimensions raise. We can then design instruction that makes room for complexity and discomfort, while enabling a sensitive understanding of the phenomena studied (Moisan & Hirsch, 2022).

- **The ethical dimension of teaching about genocide challenges social values and representations**

Studying genocides forces us to see that humans are capable of inhuman acts. By analyzing the racist ideologies behind genocides, students understand their impact on the ethics of societies, showing that good and evil can be interpreted differently. The conflict between Israel and Palestine makes the study of the Holocaust even more sensitive, as it often leads to ineffective comparisons and historical shortcuts, which do not allow for an in-depth study of the event itself.

Addressing different interpretations and Holocaust denial in the classroom can be just as perilous. All the aspects addressed – recognizing a genocide, understanding its consequences, reflecting on the ethical dilemmas of the actors involved, analyzing the underlying issues of justice – can become topics for debate in the classroom.

- **Through its political dimension, teaching about genocides reveals the power relationships at play in the past and present.**

Understanding how power relations are established and maintained – within and between societies – is a fundamental part of learning. As citizens of the world, students are invited to be attentive to what is happening around them, and to act for the common good of all. Unequal power relations between different social groups are an integral part of the study of genocide. Here too, the conflict between Israel and Palestine threatens to divert our attention from the context of the Holocaust and the power relations that governed it.

- **Through its social dimension, genocide education highlights diversity in all its forms**

Society is characterized by the diversity of the individuals and social groups that make it up. This diversity, whether real or perceived, sometimes

2 This guide is available at www.education-genocide.ca.

gives rise to divisions and categorizations that need to be reflected upon. The study of genocides forces us to take a stand against the use of dehumanizing (e.g. extermination, cancer, vermin), racializing and consistently subordinating vocabulary. Reflection on language and the choice of words is an indispensable step to be taken prior to teaching, as well as with pupils themselves. It helps us to understand how harmful otherness is constructed. The very presence of social diversity in the classroom can increase discomfort for both teachers and students in discussing these topics.

- **Through its pedagogical dimension, the teaching of genocides invites us to consider complexity in an interdisciplinary way**

Genocides are complex phenomena involving a wide range of geopolitical, historical, identity-related, ethical and cultural issues. Consequently, their study may require an interdisciplinary approach in the classroom. The abundance of information and resources available makes teaching this subject simultaneously simple and difficult. How can it be taught to foster students' democratic education? Where to start? How do we go about it?

This is also a complex subject, because the questions raised cannot be answered in a single, simple way. We need to take the time to develop an answer that examines all the aspects involved. In this respect, the abundance of more or less reliable online documentation, offering more or less acceptable answers, can also present a challenge.

Finally, the complexity is also of a pedagogic nature. Teachers are faced with the need to master a great many things, both theoretically and pedagogically, and the questions raised are numerous: at what age should we start talking about it with pupils at school? How should the issue be approached? Is it possible to compare genocides? Is it legitimate to do so? Answering these questions requires a certain amount of expertise on the part of those who plan to teach the subject. It requires taking risks and deciding which knowledge and tools are relevant.

- ***Studying Genocides:* A Tool for a Comparative Approach to the Holocaust**

It is with these challenges in mind that we developed the Studying Genocides guide. The guide consists of three complementary sections. In the theoretical section, three tools offer a better understanding of what genocide is. The UN definition of genocide serves as a starting point for understanding the concept as it is used in international criminal law. To this definition of the concept, which serves primarily to determine whether or not the phenomenon under study can be considered genocide, we add a tool for thinking about the process. Our six-stage genocidal process grid enables us to understand genocide in a systematic and analytical way, so that we can compare different forms of genocide and identify ways of resisting and preventing this crime. This grid, inspired by that proposed by Gregory Stanton,[3] includes the following stages: categorization, dehumanization, polarization, organization, persecution, extermination, and denial.

3 www.genocidewatch.com/tenstages

Since genocides are marked by the presence of a racist ideology, a third analytical tool on racism is proposed. Racism is understood as a social construct that can take different ideological forms (Wieviorka, 1993). This schematization (and its accompanying explanatory supplements) helps to understand this concept and its manifestations.

The second section presents the study of nine cases of genocide, including the Holocaust, by summarizing the facts and providing a problematization and contextualization of each, followed by an analysis of the genocide through the six stages of the genocide process. These texts are accompanied by testimonies, historical documents, etc.

Finally, the third part focuses on pedagogical goals and suggests teaching approaches based on didactic foundations (problematization, contextualization, agency, multiperspectivity), analytical tools (UN definition, genocide process, racism definition), and a small guide to teaching practices that support teachers in their choices of content, materials, and resources, including images available to students.

Under these conditions, teaching about the Holocaust can be based on a comparative approach with other cases of genocide. By enabling an analysis of racist ideologies, the genocidal process and issues of justice, this comparative approach has the advantage of highlighting the similarities and distinctions between these cases of genocide, without falling into a clumsy comparison of suffering or genocidal mechanisms. The tool also allows for a study focused on the Holocaust, where historical, legal and ethical analysis is privileged.

CONCLUSION

Although the political debate over the Israeli-Palestinian conflict accentuates the pedagogical challenges identified here, leading many to hesitate about the relevance of talking about it in class, the Holocaust remains a historical event that can be described as fundamental to understanding contemporary society.

> **“Racism is also present in democratic societies, and the approach of this guide allows us to tackle the issue without falling into the trap of catastrophism [...]”**

While for students living in a pluralist democratic society and a state governed by the rule of law, such as Canada, the world in which genocides occur may seem remote, many of the stages of genocide are observable in these societies (such as categorization, dehumanization and polarization). This observation helps us to understand the crucial role played by the ramparts of democracy, however imperfect they may be. Racism is also present in democratic societies, and the approach of this guide allows us to tackle the issue without falling into the trap of catastrophism or other sophisms, by giving students the tools to understand and act against these manifestations.

Understanding the sensitivity of this teaching and the complexity of the event can enable both teachers and students to meet these challenges.

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THE FUTURE OF HOLOCAUST EDUCATION IN CANADA

FRANK CHALK

Frank Chalk[1] is a historian and educator specializing in Holocaust studies, genocide prevention, and human rights. He is a professor emeritus at Concordia University in Montreal and co-founder of the Montreal Institute for Genocide and Human Rights Studies (MIGS). Chalk's extensive work includes research on the origins and dynamics of mass violence, as well as innovative approaches to teaching the Holocaust. His publications and advocacy focus on fostering critical thinking, combating denial and misinformation, and preserving the memories of survivors through education and community engagement.

INTRODUCTION

Yehuda Bauer, one of the most distinguished historians of the Holocaust, never intended to make the study of the Holocaust his life's work. Although he recognized that Nazi annihilation of some six million European Jews was one of the most important historical events of the twentieth century, as a young scholar the significance of the subject frightened him. It was Abba Kovner – the Jewish poet and wartime partisan leader from Vilna – who gently nudged Bauer towards his lifelong path. Yet in October 2024, at the age of 98, Bauer confessed that the Holocaust had never ceased frightening him. Today, after many years as an historian of genocide, I understand the reasons for Bauer's fear. In the enormous challenge that the Holocaust poses to Western values from within our society, the Holocaust stands alone in the modern history of the West and in the history of genocide. As I first wrote in 1988:

> *Only by comparing the Holocaust with other cases of genocide can one fully grasp the fact that the*

1 As I look forward to the next 10 years in Holocaust education, I base my recommendations on four sets of experiences as a professor of history at Concordia University: 1) co-authoring one of the earliest textbooks on the history and sociology of genocide, a book which introduced students to some two dozen cases of genocide from ancient times to 1990; 2) designing and teaching a two-semester intermediate level undergraduate course on genocide from antiquity to the present and several graduate seminars about genocide; 3) researching and writing scholarly articles on the role of monitoring the national radio broadcasts of fragile countries to protect targeted groups against genocide by offering them early warning and survival advice based on my studies of the Holocaust in Hungary and the genocide to destroy the Tutsis of Rwanda; and 4) teaching a one-semester introduction to the history of the Holocaust at Concordia to classes of 80 students each for over 15 years. I also write as an historian who worked side by side with Concordia sociologist Kurt Jonassohn for over 30 years and believe that the contributions of other disciplines to our understanding of the Holocaust and of other genocides are vital.

Holocaust was the most carefully conceived, the most efficiently implemented, and the most fully realized case of ideologically motivated genocide in the history of the human race and that it is characteristic of aberrant quests for a "perfected" society in our time.

UNIQUE FACETS OF THE HOLOCAUST

Three facets of the Holocaust are unique among the genocides that I have studied:

1. Hitler's definition of all Jews as members of a subhuman race and his insistence that they be annihilated immediately and totally in order to save Germany and the Aryan race from racial pollution and death;

2. That the roots of the Holocaust lay in Germany, one of the most scientifically and industrially advanced countries of Europe; and,

3. That Hitler's weapons for carrying out the Holocaust included Germany's modern bureaucracy and involved the direct participation in the running of the machinery of mass murder of every highly skilled professional group in German society from railroad administrators and train crews, diplomats and lawyers, and engineers, and police, to military personnel, scientists and physicians, and economists and anthropologists.

HITLER'S CAMPAIGN AGAINST THE JEWS

Hitler launched his program to exclude, segregate, and isolate the Jews of Germany when he came to power in 1933, for he deeply believed in the myth of Judeo-Bolshevism and its equally phantastic twin, the theory that 'Judeo-Bolsheviks' were conspiring to destroy the German people. Then, in 1939, to fulfill his ideological beliefs, Hitler initiated the second world war, occupying western Poland and declaring war against France, first, to conquer more fertile soil for German settlements in the east and, second, to prepare to seize, hold, and exploit the Soviet Union's vast treasure trove of natural resources. Starting in June 1941 with his invasion of the Soviet Union, Hitler distributed the stolen household goods that his armies robbed from Jewish families in the newly conquered territories of the west and the east to cement the loyalty of ordinary Germans to the Nazi state.

As worshippers of Western culture and the enlightenment prior to the Holocaust, German Jews had convinced themselves that human nature was fundamentally benevolent and rational. Theologian Richard Rubenstein argues that the mass slaughter and brutality that occurred in the trench warfare of World War I foreshadowed the coming of the Holocaust, but this is true only in retrospect. Nothing about the killing of soldiers by other soldiers allowed the West to anticipate the Holocaust, a catastrophe in which Hitler mobilized the full might of a modern industrialized state to accomplish the total annihilation of a group of unarmed men, women, and children living under the supposed protection of their own government, as in the case of the German Jews, or under the humanitarian provisions of international conventions governing a military occupation, as in the case of Jews in other parts of Europe. Himmler eventually paired the intimate, face to face violence of the Einsatzgruppen, which moved systematically from town to town in eastern Europe mowing

down Jews, with the carefully coordinated transportation of Jews in railcars to centrally located factories of death, killing camps equipped with gas chambers and crematoria ovens, a cheaper method also designed to reduce stress disorders among the members of his killing squads.

These brutal facets of the Holocaust challenged Bauer's understanding of western history and they challenge all of us today. Unlike the dead of ancient genocides, unlike the Cathars, the Japanese Christians, the Pequots and the Hereros, unlike the Armenians and the victims of Stalin's terror, the Jews and the Sinti and Roma were murdered in post-Enlightenment Europe by Germans, a people steeped in Western culture and rich in rational scientific knowledge. As theologian Irving Greenberg writes, "No assessment of modern culture can ignore that fact that science and technology – the accepted flower and glory of modernity – now climaxed in the factories of death."[2]

Hitler's terrible war against the Jews – the incarnation of his eliminationist antisemitism – highlights his delusional thinking and the core motives of the Germans who supported his ideological objectives, but we must acknowledge that what motivated many other Germans was simple greed and their lust for the spoils – Jewish property and Jewish money. By the end of world war two, Hitler's war had not only killed some 6 million Jews – it had also ended the lives of some 29 million non-Jews. Reviewing that "butcher's bill," Yehuda Bauer concluded in 1994 that:

> *antisemitism, and the Holocaust, were basic reasons for the death of many millions of non-Jewish Europeans. It thus is a central issue for all of civilization [not only Jews], and certainly for European civilization; it is the most extreme form of genocide so far – again, not because the victims suffered more than other victims of other genocides, but because of its unprecedented motivations and character, and the global impact it had and has… That is why we teach it.*[3]

"It is now clear in our time that every succeeding generation has the duty to educate young people about the history of the Holocaust and, whenever possible, the history of other genocides, for it is only then that we can redirect the public's focus from punishing the perpetrators of genocide to preventing genocides before they begin."

It is now clear in our time that every succeeding generation has the duty to educate young people about the history of the Holocaust and, whenever possible, the history of other genocides, for it is only then that we can redirect the public's focus from punishing the perpetrators of genocide to preventing genocides before they begin. Thus, it is

2 Irving Greenberg, "Cloud of Smoke, Pillar of Fire" in Eva Fleischner, ed., *Auschwitz: Beginning of a New Era? Reflections on the Holocaust* (New York: Ktav, 1977), 310–311.

3 Yehuda Bauer, "On Holocaust Education," Lecture for the Vancouver Holocaust Education Centre, n.d. (probably presented in November 1994).

most troubling that recent surveys reveal growing skepticism in Canada and the United States about the scale and seriousness of the Holocaust among persons between the ages of 18 and 34. And it is truly shocking that "32.9% of [teenage] students [in Canada and the United States] don't know what to think about the Holocaust, think the number of Jews who died has been exaggerated, or question whether the Holocaust ever happened." How are students learning about the Holocaust? At least "40 percent of students reported learning about the Holocaust through social media," one of the least reliable sources of information and one of the most important sources of "false news" in today's media world. As historian Doris Bergen insightfully concluded in the most recent edition of her widely used university textbook, *War and Genocide: A Concise History of the Holocaust* (4th edn., 2025):[4]

> *Decades after the war, Holocaust memory is contested and, some observers fear, fading… Distortion and denial are rampant on the internet and sometimes, fueled by antisemitism, racism, and misogyny they burst through the screen. The German shooter who went to the synagogue in Halle in Germany on Yom Kippur in 2019, intent on murdering Jews at prayer, articulated the connections in his manifesto: "I think the Holocaust never happened. Feminism is the cause of declining birth rates in the West, which acts as a scapegoat for mass immigration, and the root of all these problems is the Jew."*

CHALLENGES TO WESTERN HISTORY AND CIVILIZATION

The profound significance of the Holocaust for western civilization and for Jews and non-Jews alike requires us to expertly teach its history and meaning to each new generation of students even as we confront the rising denial that the Holocaust ever happened. The quality of the teachers we graduate and the methods that they choose to teach the history of the Holocaust will determine if we succeed. Some 23 American states have already mandated focused assignments, whole courses or parts of courses on the history of the Holocaust for middle school and high school students. Simultaneously, state legislatures and state departments of education have extolled Holocaust education for "encouraging tolerance of diversity in a pluralistic society and… nurturing and protecting democratic values and institutions."[5] As well, many American state education department officials, teachers, and school administrators now look to Holocaust history courses as tools for "combating anti-Semitism and prejudice, fostering civic virtues at a time of intense polarization, creating awareness for the Holocaust as public knowledge recedes, and preserving the memory of the events as more and more survivors sadly passed away."[6]

In early 2025, here in Canada, two provinces, British Columbia and Ontario, are moving rapidly

4 Doris L. Bergen, *War & Genocide: A Concise History of the Holocaust*, 4th edn. (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2025), p.353.

5 Lindsey Stillman, "Executive Summary" in *Mandates on Holocaust and Genocide Education in the United States*, Phoenix Holocaust Association, September 2021, p.1 shprs.asu.edu/sites/default/files/2021-10/207547%20-%20Holocaust%20Mandates%20Booklet%20FINAL%20DIGITAL%20%281%29.pdf

6 "State of Florida, 1994 bill," Ibid., p. 5.

towards implementing Holocaust education mandates for their students, while Quebec is preparing to introduce a sophisticated treatment of the Holocaust within a broader genocide curriculum. The Quebec curriculum results from an interesting grass roots movement. It originated in a 2022 pedagogical guide called *Studying Genocide*, which is now posted on the Internet.[7] Professors Sivane Hirsch (Laval University) and Sabrina Moisan (University of Sherbrooke) have developed the guide, in collaboration with the Montreal Holocaust Museum, the Foundation for Genocide Education (Heidi Berger, the daughter of Holocaust survivors) and organizations from the communities affected by the featured genocides. The curriculum is aimed at secondary cycle 2 (grade 9) History and Ethics classes, but the Museum has actually trained teachers and used the guide in different high school levels and CEGEP. It received financial support from the Quebec Ministry of Education. The curriculum can be taught to 343,000 students in 800 schools, enabling them "to study the history of nine significant genocides of the 20th century" (News release, Foundation for Genocide Education, April 26, 2022).[8] Berger wants the nine part genocide curriculum to be taught in Quebec high schools as a "mandatory separate module – maybe even a full course."[9]

Yale law professor Samuel Moyn argues in his book *The Last Utopia: Human Rights in History*, that in today's world "The morality of individual rights substituted for the soiled political dreams of revolutionary communism and nationalism as international law became an alternate to popular struggle and bloody violence."[10] Today, the Holocaust symbolizes absolute evil; it serves as an example of why human rights are vital, and as an illustration of the importance of establishing guardrails against racism, antisemitism, and all other forms of discrimination against minorities. But the Holocaust is also the prime example of what can happen when politicians and voters in a flawed, polarized democracy like Weimar Germany's distort and jettison checks and balances in their constitution designed to bar the road to autocracy, monarchy, and dictatorship, followed by tolerating and even encouraging the suppression and elimination of the opposition through intimidation, censorship of the media, and suppression of civil rights. Today, as Samuel Moyn argues, "the program of human rights faces a fateful choice: whether to

"The Holocaust symbolizes absolute evil; it serves as an example of why human rights are vital, and as an illustration of the importance of establishing guardrails against racism, antisemitism, and all other forms of discrimination against minorities."

7 https://oraprdnt.uqtr.uquebec.ca/portail/gscw031?owa_no_site=1026

8 https://thecjn.ca/news/canadas-first-guide-to-teaching-about-genocide-is-launched-in-quebec-high-schools

9 Philip Authier, "Expand genocide education in schools, group tells Quebec," *The Gazette*, September 3, 2024. www.montrealgazette.com/news/article416330.html

10 Samuel Moyn, *The Last Utopia: Human Rights in History: Human Rights in History* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010), Abstract and "Epilogue: The Burden of Morality," pp. 211–227.

expand its horizons so as to take on the burden of politics more honestly, or to give way to new and other political visions that are yet to be fully outlined."[11] I believe that the death of Germany's nascent democracy in 1933 and the Holocaust still have important lessons to teach us about the critical importance of "the path from morality to politics," as Moyn phrases it. For, as Bertold Brecht put it in the epilogue to his 1941 parable play, *The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui*, "Although the world stood up and stopped the bastard, The bitch that bore him is in heat again."[12]

THE GROWING NEED FOR HOLOCAUST EDUCATION

It is essential in my view that we help students today to learn – as I believe Vaclav Havel wrote after the 1968 Prague Spring many years ago – that "evil does not present itself to us with a stamp on its forehead." Students need to be trained in critical thinking and learn from history. Teachers should never teach the Holocaust as if the road to Auschwitz was obvious from the moment Hitler came to power in 1933 and as if everything was foretold; that would be wrong and play tricks on the dead. They need to emphasize the German state's slow, blundering evolution through the disorganized steps which the Nazis and their collaborators groped towards their sabotage of Germany's new democratic institutions and the eventual destruction of the Jewish communities of Europe, proceeding by trial and error to implement the new policies of segregating and isolating Jews, followed by refining the concept of "racial hygiene" until, by a circuitous route, they gradually arrived at the 'final solution to the Jewish question' and the destruction of their political enemies.

> **"An introductory course on the history of the Holocaust will also highlight that Joseph Goebbels manipulated the German public's fear and anxiety by widely disseminating "false news," that he urged Hitler to "Lie, lie, lie until people believe in you, then lie, lie, lie until you believe [the lies] yourself."**

An introductory course on the history of the Holocaust will also highlight that Joseph Goebbels manipulated the German public's fear and anxiety by widely disseminating "false news," that he urged Hitler to "Lie, lie, lie until people believe in you, then lie, lie, lie until you believe [the lies] yourself." It will highlight the rewards which Hitler used to bribe the German people and to bind them to his messianic view of the world. Above all, it will emphasize the Jewish victims' perspectives as the Holocaust gradually engulfed them one by one and help students to grasp that as Jews struggled to survive and to resist they faced what Holocaust literature professor Lawrence Langer, writing about Auschwitz, accurately called in 1982 "choiceless choices," choices that the Nazis overwhelming and

11 Moyn, Ibid. pp. 225–226.

12 Quoted in the epilogue to Frank Chalk and Kurt Jonassohn, *The History and Sociology of Genocide: Analyses and Case Studies* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990). The play, a satirical allegory, depicts the struggle of a Chicago gangster to control the cauliflower trust and his brutal murder of his rivals. The audience sees the parallels between Brecht's characters and Hitler, Goring, Rohm, Goebbels, von Papen, and von Hindenburg.

perverted use of power almost always converted into "bad" choices despite the best intentions of the victims.[13]

EDUCATION INITIATIVES IN CANADA

Until recently, those of us teaching the history of the Holocaust in high schools and universities invited Holocaust survivors into our classes to share their experiences and answer students' questions. Time and age have taken their toll and in 2025 most of the witnesses we can invite to accompany us in meeting with students were children during the Holocaust. To augment in the future what their parents can no longer testify to in class, we have for many years recorded and transcribed video interviews with adult and child Holocaust survivors. The outstanding interview work of Steven Spielberg's Shoah Foundation, the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, and Yad Vashem is widely known. Less well known are the valuable accomplishments of local Holocaust memorial associations and university oral history programs all across Canada and the United States. Montreal is fortunate to have 890 interviews completed by the Montreal Holocaust Museum, the Centre for Oral History and Digital Storytelling of Concordia University, and the Alex Dworkin Foundation for Jewish Archives. These collections are now digitized and searchable. And in addition to the survivor memoirs published online and in hard copy by the Montreal Institute for Genocide and Human Rights Studies at Concordia University and the Azrieli Foundation memoir series, thousands of Holocaust survivors have published their memoirs and students are using them, too, in their research assignments.

INNOVATIVE TEACHING APPROACHES

We are incredibly fortunate that university professors and high school teachers can now ask their students to complete research essays adopting the perspectives of Jews during the Holocaust, confronting their challenges and recounting their daily dilemmas. The assignment is modeled on the inspiring work of Oyneg Shabes, a team of volunteers led by Warsaw Jewish historian Emanuel Ringelblum, who from 1940 until his death at the hands of the Germans in 1944, led a team of historians, sociologists, scientists, teachers, and writers who struggled to record the details of every facet of life in the Warsaw Ghetto. At Concordia University, I divided the 80 students in my introductory Holocaust course into 20 groups of four students each, and assigned each four person team to a specific ghetto in eastern Europe. Within each four person team, one student mastered that ghetto's administration and economy; another student studied housing, health, and the ghetto's food supply; a third student reported on cultural life, resistance and accommodation to the Germans in their ghetto, and, finally, a fourth student became an expert on their ghetto's experience of German terror, deportations, and the eventual destruction of the ghetto. The four students in each of the 20 ghetto teams distilled their 1,000 word ghetto reports into combined PowerPoint presentations and wall posters, which they presented in class as research reports. All the students supplemented their study of

13 In chapter 2, "Auschwitz: The Death of Choice," Lawrence Langer, *Versions of Survival: The Holocaust and the Human Spirit* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1982), pp. 127–189.

survivor testimonies and published memoirs with reading specialized histories of their ghettos by professional historians. To synthesize each team's reports, every team collectively wrote a 250 word essay summarizing for future generations the most important lessons the team members learned by studying life and death in their ghetto. Finally, each team member wrote a 150 word paragraph stating what they had learned about themselves and how they thought and operated as a member of a team research project, concluding with suggestions to improve the assignment for next year's class. This assignment was one of the most productive and fulfilling for me as a teacher in my 59 years as a university professor. It generated empathy for the ghettos' victims, understanding of the Germans' goals and ruthlessness, and led students to reflect on the value of team research, while also honing their skill in communicating Holocaust research results with a wider audience.

THE ROLE OF MUSEUMS AND SURVIVOR TESTIMONIES

Another important resource in our toolbox for transmitting the history of the Holocaust is the extensive network of Holocaust museums dotting North America. Inspired by Yad Vashem in Jerusalem, great museums like the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, DC, the Museum of Jewish Heritage in New York City, and the Museum of Tolerance in Los Angeles have developed strong educational programs. Canada's small museums in Montreal, Toronto, and Vancouver have already forged strong bonds with teachers in their regions, and regularly schedule visits to their exhibitions by elementary and high school students, local adults, tourists, and groups of fire and police officers, among others.

The Montreal Holocaust Museum (MHM) is leading the way in Canada among smaller Holocaust museums working to increase the number of their visitors and modernize their exhibitions. By 2027, it will inaugurate a new, stand-alone Montreal Holocaust Museum building on St. Lawrence Boulevard, north of Sherbrooke Street, close to the St. Urban area that housed many of the first Holocaust survivors to arrive in Canada and more accessible to tourists and francophone Montrealers. The new museum will feature a brand new, thematically-organized, artifact-based, and enlarged permanent exhibition co-curated by Professor Robert Jan van Pelt (Cultural History, School of Architecture, University of Waterloo) and Professor Marie-Blanche Fourcade (MHM and Museology, UQAM), who are supported by an international committee of renowned Holocaust experts. It will also feature a children's exhibition, a memorial room, an auditorium, classrooms, an interactive, artificial intelligence powered, immersive encounter with survivor testimony, a bookstore, and a cafe. The MHM's plans also include space for visiting temporary exhibitions and room to create temporary exhibits in Montreal for loan to other museums. Whereas the existing Montreal Holocaust Museum attracts 22,000 visitors a year, the new museum hopes to host 100,000 visitors annually.[14]

Paying for the design and construction of the new

14 View a short video portraying the award-winning design of the new Montreal Holocaust Museum by clicking the following URL and scrolling down to "Your New Holocaust Museum Here" just below Discover our new downtown Museum. museeholocauste.ca/en/give-voice

and much larger Montreal Holocaust Museum was only possible thanks to the generosity and forward looking commitment to Holocaust education of large and small Montreal donors supplemented by very large contributions from the Azrieli Foundation (Toronto) and the governments of Canada and Quebec. Altogether, the MHM has so far raised $115 million dollars to pay for the new building and future museum programs. The new museum represents one strong component of Canada's answer to the renewed threats we now face to the values of western civilization and Canada's democracy posed by the repeated lies of "truth effect" propaganda, Holocaust denial, neo-Nazism, bigotry, and antisemitism. The new museum's exhibitions will expose the assault on truth pioneered by Nazis like Hitler and Goebbels and strengthen the foundations of Canadian democracy by advancing the thoughtful and critical education of young and old visitors seeking to discover the true history of the Holocaust. It will also challenge visitors to the Montreal Holocaust Museum to ponder the significance today of post-Holocaust genocides, crimes against humanity, and serious war crimes.

CONCLUSION

I believe that the future of Holocaust education in Canada is in good and steady hands, the hands of people who never give up, who persist, plan well, and wholeheartedly give their energy, their intelligence, and their money to raising the excellence of Holocaust education and education for democracy in Canada. I understand, too, that there is always a risk of failure but I find comfort in recalling the spirit embodied in Samuel Beckett's famous lines from Worstward Ho: "Ever tried. Ever failed. No matter. Try again. Fail again? Fail better!" Brothers and sisters, together, and with your help, we are getting the job done.

TORONTO HOLOCAUST MUSEUM

A MUSEUM BY UJA

torontoholocaustmuseum.org

CARVING A PATH FORWARD: A CANADIAN RESPONSE TO HOLOCAUST DENIAL AND DISTORTION

DEBORAH LYONS

Deborah Lyons is Canada's Special Envoy on Preserving Holocaust Remembrance and Combatting Antisemitism. She is a diplomat with 25 years of experience in international relations, political affairs, security management, and development. Ms. Lyons previously served as Ambassador of Canada to Israel (2016 to 2020), Ambassador of Canada to Afghanistan (2013 to 2016), and Deputy Ambassador of Canada to the United States (2010 to 2013). She also held several senior positions at Global Affairs Canada, Natural Resources Canada, the Privy Council Office, and the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency. Prior to joining the Government of Canada, she owned and managed an environmental consulting firm.

The Holocaust remains one of the most well-documented atrocities in human history. Yet, Holocaust denial and distortion persist in Canada and worldwide undermining both the memory of the victims and the fight against antisemitism. Holocaust denial and distortion are more than just a perversion of the truth; they are dangerous forms of antisemitism used to delegitimize Jewish suffering and attack Jewish communities.

According to the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) working definition of antisemitism,[1] Holocaust denial and distortion are explicitly recognized as forms of antisemitism. Holocaust denial involves efforts to negate the reality and scope of the Holocaust, including denying the existence of Nazi death camps or downplaying the number of victims. Holocaust distortion, while often more subtle, includes minimizing the atrocities, falsely equating the Holocaust with other historical events, or shifting the blame onto the victims.

Both forms of Holocaust revisionism share a common goal: to erode the legitimacy of Jewish history and identity while perpetuating antisemitic

1 holocaustremembrance.com/resources/working-definition-antisemitism

myths and conspiracy theories. They also erase and deny the memory of the 500,000 Roma and Sinti, along with the many LGBTQ+ persons, persons with disabilities, and political dissidents who were persecuted and killed by the Nazis and their collaborators in horrific crimes against humanity. Holocaust denial is often used by extremists on all sides of the political spectrum to attack Jews and the legitimacy of the State of Israel, which occurs far too often in a post October 7th world.

THE IMPACT OF HOLOCAUST DENIAL AND DISTORTION

Holocaust denial and distortion have been weaponized against Jews in Canada and globally, used to delegitimize their historical experiences and promote antisemitic conspiracy theories. It causes the uninformed to ask, "if the Jews are lying about the Holocaust, what else are they lying about?" As we approach 80 years since the liberation of Auschwitz and witness the dwindling number of Holocaust survivors, the passage of time makes Holocaust denial and distortion more dangerous, as the loss of firsthand testimonies creates a vacuum that allows false narratives to spread more easily.

Denialists often accuse Jews of fabricating or exaggerating the horrors of the Holocaust for political gain, particularly in relation to the existence of Israel. This rhetoric is deeply tied to classical antisemitic tropes, painting Jews as deceitful and manipulative.

These attacks go beyond distorting history; they aim to sow distrust of Jews and foster a climate of hate and divisions amongst society, ultimately increasing the risk of antisemitic incidents and violence.

"The internet has made it easy to get information in a matter of seconds. Unfortunately, it's often misinformation. The digital world has allowed for hate to spread, often unchecked and Holocaust denial and distortion is no exception."

THE ROLE OF INTERNET AND SOCIAL MEDIA

The internet has made it easy to get information in a matter of seconds. Unfortunately, it's often misinformation. The digital world has allowed for hate to spread, often unchecked and Holocaust denial and distortion is no exception. Social media platforms, where content moderation can be inconsistent, have become fertile ground for Holocaust denialism to spread and to impact those accept what they learn online as the truth and don't fact check.

In Canada, alarming trends show that Holocaust skepticism is particularly pervasive among younger generations. A study by the Association for Canadian Studies (ACS) revealed that Canadian youth between the ages of 18 and 24 exhibit the highest rates of Holocaust skepticism compared to other age groups. Worryingly, this same demographic also reports higher rates of negative views toward Jews, suggesting that a lack of knowledge about the Holocaust may contribute to antisemitic attitudes.

These findings underscore the urgent need for enhanced Holocaust education, especially for younger generations who are most vulnerable to the spread of misinformation online.

THE POWER OF EDUCATION IN COMBATING DENIAL

Education is the most powerful tool in the fight against Holocaust denial and distortion. It was heartening to see that most provincial governments have taken significant steps toward ensuring that students across the country receive a comprehensive understanding of this dark chapter in human history. Starting in the fall of 2025, most provinces across Canada will begin implementing more robust, mandatory Holocaust education programs in their school curricula.

To assist in the success of these initiatives, my office convened a symposium in September 2024 with Canada's leading Holocaust educators. This event provided a platform for experts to discuss best practices and identify challenges for implementing the new mandatory, robust Holocaust education being rolled out for grade 10 students in most provinces.

One of the key takeaways from the symposium was the importance of teacher training. Teaching the Holocaust is an emotionally and intellectually challenging task. If teachers are uncomfortable or unfamiliar with the material, they risk passing on false, inaccurate or incomplete information to their students. The symposium attendees emphasized the need for comprehensive professional development programs that will help educators feel confident and prepared to teach the complexities of the Holocaust in an age-appropriate way, ensuring that the historical truth is preserved and effectively conveyed to the next generation.

Students need to gain factual understanding of the Holocaust from teachers who are equipped to provide these important lessons. Teachers of today need the proper training as do the teachers of tomorrow. Teachers' colleges need to bring in specialized courses to ensure that all teachers who graduate are prepared to educate their students about the Holocaust in an accurate and meaningful way. There is a plethora of sources out there on the Holocaust and teaching the Holocaust that many may not know where to start looking for information. The IHRA website[2] provides resources for education professionals including a toolkit against Holocaust distortion that make for a great starting point for educators to turn to for information on best practices in Holocaust education.

THE NATIONAL HOLOCAUST REMEMBRANCE PROGRAM

However, Holocaust education cannot be confined to the classroom. Recognizing this, the Department of Canadian Heritage launched the first call for proposals for the National Holocaust Remembrance Program (NHRP) on November 8, 2024. This program will provide funding to support initiatives that seek to preserve the memory of the Holocaust and help improve Canadians' understanding and awareness of the Holocaust and contemporary antisemitism.

The NHRP will offer grants to schools, museums, community organizations, and cultural institutions to develop projects that engage the public in Holocaust education and remembrance.

2 holocaustremembrance.com/for-education-professionals

This national effort represents a critical step in ensuring that Holocaust remembrance remains an integral part of Canadian society. By supporting programs that foster awareness and understanding, Canada is reinforcing its commitment to remembering the past while combating the rising tide of Holocaust denial and antisemitism.

THE CANADIAN HANDBOOK ON THE IHRA WORKING DEFINITION OF ANTISEMITISM

Another tool in the fight against Holocaust denial and distortion is the Canadian Handbook on the IHRA Working Definition of Antisemitism,[3] released in October 2024. This comprehensive guide includes real-life Canadian examples of Holocaust denial and distortion, providing practical insights on how these forms of antisemitism manifest in modern society. By illustrating how Holocaust denial is not just a form of historical revisionism but a dangerous attack on Jewish communities, the Handbook underscores the importance of recognizing antisemitism in all its forms. We cannot effectively combat antisemitism if we do not have the tools to identify it. This resource will help educators, policymakers, and institutions understand and confront these insidious threats.

THE NEED FOR A MULTIFACETED APPROACH

While these initiatives are vital, addressing the challenges posed by Holocaust denial and distortion requires a multifaceted approach.

More needs to be done outside of the classroom to reach the younger Canadians who get their information online. Crucial in countering the spread of Holocaust denial and distortion is the need for more innovative solutions to reach youth where they are by creating and promoting accurate and accessible resources online. For example, countries like Finland with a high degree of media literacy – particularly among youth – are more resilient to mis/disinformation, including Holocaust denial and distortion.

Outside of the digital world, there are many resources that play an important role in combatting Holocaust denial and distortion. Public memorials, museums, and community events play an essential role in keeping the memory of the Holocaust alive. Institutions like the Toronto Holocaust Museum, Montreal Holocaust Museum, the National Holocaust Monument, and Holocaust Education

“More needs to be done outside of the classroom to reach the younger Canadians who get their information online. Crucial in countering the spread of Holocaust denial and distortion is the need for more innovative solutions to reach youth where they are by creating and promoting accurate and accessible resources online.”

3 holocaustremembrance.com/for-education-professionals

Centres in Winnipeg and Vancouver, offer important spaces for education and reflection, and they must continue to be supported and expanded.

CONCLUSION

Holocaust denial and distortion remain potent forms of antisemitism in Canada, undermining historical truth and perpetuating hatred against Jews. When Holocaust denial and antisemitism go unchecked, it creates a dangerous environment where hate is normalized, and historical truth is distorted. This emboldens those who seek to spread falsehoods and conspiracy theories, allowing extremist ideologies to flourish.

We are seeing this play out in real time as similar tactics of denial are used in response to contemporary atrocities, such as the October 7th terrorist attacks. This refusal to acknowledge truth, whether about the Holocaust or modern-day violence against Jews, is not merely a matter of historical or political debate – it fuels ongoing antisemitism, undermines justice, and threatens the safety of the Canadian Jewish communities and the fabric of Canadian democracy.

The lessons of the Holocaust remind us that silence and denial in the face of evil only encourage hate. As Holocaust denial and distortion persist, and as new forms of historical erasure emerge, it is critical that Canada continue its commitment to robust Holocaust education and remembrance, while actively combatting all forms of antisemitism, both historical and contemporary. By safeguarding truth and confronting denial, we can honor the memory of the victims, protect future generations, and stand firmly against the resurgence of hate.

HOLOCAUST REMEMBRANCE: UNIVERSAL LESSONS

IRWIN COTLER

Irwin Cotler, PC, OC, OQ, is the International Chair of the Raoul Wallenberg Centre for Human Rights, an Emeritus Professor of Law at McGill University, former Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada and longtime Member of Parliament, and an international human rights lawyer. He was Canada's Special Envoy on Preserving Holocaust Remembrance and Combatting Antisemitism from 2020 to 2023. A constitutional and comparative law scholar, Professor Cotler is the author of numerous publications and seminal legal articles and has written upon and intervened in landmark Charter of Rights cases in the areas of free speech, freedom of religion, minority rights, peace law and war crimes justice. He is known for his advocacy on behalf of political prisoners, combatting genocide, and fighting antisemitism.

The Holocaust remains one of the most catastrophic and defining events in human history. Beyond its historical significance, it carries universal lessons that extend far beyond the Jewish community, offering guidance for all people in recognizing and confronting hatred, bigotry, and atrocities. The atrocities of the Holocaust, committed during World War II, were not only a tragedy for the Jewish people but for humanity as a whole, as they serve as a stark reminder of the destructive potential of racism, dehumanization, and unchecked power.

The global community must continue to honor the memories of the six million Jews, as well as other marginalized groups, who perished during the Holocaust. However, this remembrance must not be confined to commemoration alone; it must also translate into action to prevent similar atrocities from recurring. This commitment to remembrance and action is vital in safeguarding democracy, human dignity, and peace.

These universal lessons of Holocaust remembrance, which should form the foundation of the humanitarian, moral, legal, and international principles guiding our democracies.

LESSON 1: 'ZACHOR' – THE DANGER OF FORGETTING AND THE IMPERATIVE OF REMEMBRANCE

The first lesson is the danger of forgetting – the killing of the victims a second time – and the imperative of remembrance, zachor (the duty to remember). As Holocaust survivor and Nobel

Laureate Elie Wiesel stated, "The Holocaust was a war against the Jews in which not all victims were Jews, but all Jews were targeted victims." This same lesson applies to the tragic events of October 7th, which saw the mass killing of innocent people. To understand the atrocity fully, we must never forget its causes or its victims.

LESSON 2: THE DANGER OF STATE-SANCTIONED INCITEMENT TO HATE AND GENOCIDE – THE RESPONSIBILITY TO PREVENT

The second enduring lesson is that the genocide of European Jewry was not merely a product of death machines but of a state-sanctioned ideology of hate. The depiction of Jews as enemies of humanity, the incitement to hate through political rhetoric, and the promotion of genocidal ideologies allowed this hatred to grow into mass violence. As the Canadian Supreme Court affirmed, the Holocaust began with words. This highlights the catastrophic effects of hate speech and racism, making it clear that preventing such ideologies from spreading is an essential responsibility.

LESSON 3: HOLOCAUST DENIAL – FROM ASSAULTIVE SPEECH TO CRIMINAL CONSPIRACY, THE RESPONSIBILITY TO UNMASK THE BEARERS OF FALSE WITNESS

The third lesson addresses Holocaust denial, a form of antisemitism that continues to poison historical understanding and perpetuate hatred. Holocaust denial is not only an attack on Jewish memory but a criminal conspiracy aimed at erasing the truth of history. It is our duty to challenge these falsehoods, expose the deniers, and protect the dignity of the victims whose experiences are denied by these lies.

LESSON 4: THE PROLIFERATION OF HOLOCAUST DISTORTION, TRIVIALIZATION, MINIMIZATION, REVISIONISM, AND INVERSION – THE RESPONSIBILITY TO COMBAT

The fourth lesson is about the rising phenomenon of Holocaust distortion, trivialization, and revisionism, often spread through social media. This includes minimizing the atrocities of the Holocaust, glorifying Nazi collaborators, or distorting the historical facts to serve contemporary political agendas. The responsibility falls on all of us to combat such distortions and to ensure that the lessons of the Holocaust are preserved accurately for future generations.

LESSON 5: THE DANGER OF SILENCE IN THE FACE OF EVIL – THE RESPONSIBILITY TO PROTEST INJUSTICE

The fifth lesson underscores the peril of silence in the face of evil. As Wiesel famously stated in his 1986 Nobel Prize address, "Neutrality helps the oppressor, never the victim; silence encourages the tormentor, never the tormented." When confronted with injustice, we must take a stand. The failure to speak out against oppression and hatred emboldens the aggressor and diminishes the victim's chance of survival.

LESSON 6: INDIFFERENCE AND INACTION IN THE FACE OF MASS ATROCITY AND GENOCIDE – THE RESPONSIBILITY TO PROTECT

The sixth painful lesson is that the Holocaust was not just the result of active persecution but also of global indifference. The international community stood by as atrocities were committed, fully aware

of the events unfolding, yet failed to intervene. The indifference and inaction in the face of mass atrocity are not just failures of moral conscience—they are complicity with the aggressors.

LESSON 7: SPEAKING TRUTH TO POWER

The seventh lesson is the importance of speaking truth to power. The Holocaust was facilitated by the complicity of elites—scientists, doctors, lawyers, judges, and others who enabled the genocide through their actions or inaction. We must hold those in positions of power accountable and ensure that they uphold the truth and human rights, especially when these are threatened.

LESSON 8: THE ASSAULT ON THE VULNERABLE AND POWERLESS – THE RESPONSIBILITY TO GIVE VOICE TO THE VOICELESS

The eighth lesson is about the vulnerability of the powerless and the responsibility to give voice to the voiceless. The first groups targeted for extermination in the Holocaust were often the most vulnerable—children, the elderly, the disabled, and the poor. We must protect and empower those who are most vulnerable in society, ensuring that they are not silenced or oppressed.

CONCLUSION: A CALL TO ACTION

The lessons of the Holocaust are not just for remembrance – they are a call to action. As we honor the victims and survivors, we must commit ourselves to never allowing such atrocities to happen again. This means standing against antisemitism, racism, and all forms of hatred. It means fighting for the rights of the most vulnerable, speaking out against injustice, and taking action when faced with evil.

> **“To the survivors of the Holocaust, we owe not only our remembrance but our continued vigilance and our determination to act.”**

To the survivors of the Holocaust, we owe not only our remembrance but our continued vigilance and our determination to act. Their resilience and strength serve as an example to us all, and it is through our actions that we honor their legacy. Never again should we stand by in the face of hatred, and never again should we allow the world to be indifferent to human suffering.

May we remember, and pledge, to act with courage and conviction against hatred, racism, and oppression, ensuring that the horrors of the past are never repeated.

THE RISE OF HOLOCAUST SKEPTICISM AND ITS SOURCES: A CANADIAN CASE STUDY

JACK JEDWAB

Jack Jedwab is President of the Association for Canadian Studies (ACS) and the Metropolis Institute, which oversees Canada's largest conference on immigration and integration. He is also the Director of Metropolis Americas, and founder and publisher of Canadian Diversity and Canadian Issues. He holds a Ph.D. in Canadian History from Concordia University, and he has taught at McGill University and the Université du Québec à Montréal. From 1994–1998 he served as Executive Director of the Quebec branch of the Canadian Jewish Congress where he spoke on behalf of the interests of the Jewish community and other identity groups.

INTRODUCTION

Some one in six Canadians between the ages of 18 and 24 believe that the Holocaust is exaggerated. These are among several worrisome findings from a Fall 2024 survey (Leger for the Association for Canadian Studies). It's a view shared by a similar percentage of Americans in the same age group (overall, this view is held by five percent of Canadians and eight percent of Americans). Denial and distortion about the Holocaust remain critical concerns in Canada and elsewhere. Holocaust denial is widely subjected to legislative sanction, and there is a continued need for vigilance in this regard. But addressing the view that the Holocaust is exaggerated may present a different challenge for contemporary educators and policymakers.

> **"Some one in six Canadians between the ages of 18 and 24 believe that the Holocaust is exaggerated. These are among several worrisome findings from a 2024 survey that highlight a troubling trend of Holocaust skepticism."**

We use the term "Holocaust skepticism" to describe the view that the Holocaust is exaggerated. Its proponents are referred to as Holocaust skeptics. This study examines the extent of such beliefs, their potential sources, and the underlying sentiments driving these worrisome perspectives.

THE DATA

As observed in the Table 1, five percent of Canadians agree that the Holocaust is exaggerated, with the percentage dropping below four percent

among Canadians over 45 years old. Overall, over one in seven Canadians (13%) say they don't know or prefer not to answer. The extent to which this view is held by persons aged 18 to 24 stands in stark contrast to those in the 45+ cohort.

Persuading skeptics will not be simple. As seen in Table 2, Holocaust skeptics often believe they have a good knowledge of genocides across history. Among those who think the Holocaust is exaggerated, two-thirds claim good knowledge about historical genocides.

WHY DO THEY BELIEVE THE HOLOCAUST IS EXAGGERATED?

To better understand the reasoning behind Holocaust skepticism, we asked individuals holding this view to explain their stance in one sentence. As shown in Table 3, the responses are vague, with the principal observation being that the Holocaust receives too much attention.

TABLE 1.

I THINK THE HOLOCAUST IS EXAGGERATED	CANADA TOTAL	18–24	25–34	35–44	45–54	55–64	65+
Yes	5%	16%	8%	5%	4%	3%	2%
No	82%	69%	78%	78%	81%	85%	91%
I don't know / Prefer not to answer	13%	15%	15%	17%	15%	12%	7%

Source: Leger for the Association for Canadian Studies, September 22–24, 2024.

TABLE 2.

I HAVE A GOOD KNOWLEDGE ABOUT GENOCIDES IN HISTORY	I THINK THE HOLOCAUST IS EXAGGERATED (YES)	I THINK THE HOLOCAUST IS EXAGGERATED (NO)
Yes	66%	55%
No	32%	35%
I don't know / Prefer not to answer	2%	10%
Total	**100%**	**100%**

Source: Leger for the Association for Canadian Studies, September 22–24, 2024.

TABLE 3.

WHY DO YOU THINK THE HOLOCAUST IS EXAGGERATED?	PERCENTAGE
Overreacting/Overly publicized (in media, books, movies, etc.)	19%
Lack of access to the full truth/Need for unbiased history	8%
Discrepancies in numbers/Difficult to verify the exact figures	7%
Not the worst event in history/Not just Jews suffered	6%
Attracts too much attention/empathy	5%
We should focus on the present/Move on from the past	4%

Source: Leger for the Association for Canadian Studies, September 22–24, 2024

PERCEPTION OF THE NUMBER OF JEWS MURDERED

More than one in three Holocaust skeptics think fewer than three million Jews were murdered during the Holocaust, compared to just one in ten among those who reject Holocaust skepticism (Table 4).

Between 2019 and 2024, there has been a notable increase in the number of Canadians who believe fewer than six million Jews were murdered. This rise is particularly significant among the 18–24 age group (Table 5).

HOLOCAUST SKEPTICISM AND NEGATIVE ATTITUDES TOWARDS JEWS

There is a clear connection between Holocaust skepticism and negative attitudes toward Jews.

TABLE 4.

HOW MANY JEWS DIED DURING THE HOLOCAUST?	I THINK THE HOLOCAUST IS EXAGGERATED (YES)	I THINK THE HOLOCAUST IS EXAGGERATED (NO)
Less than one million	8%	1%
One million to three million	26%	9%
Three million to five million	15%	11%
Six million or more	16%	50%
I don't know / Prefer not to answer	35%	29%
Total	**100%**	**100%**

Source: Leger for the Association for Canadian Studies, September 22–24, 2024

TABLE 5.

APPROXIMATELY HOW MANY JEWS WERE KILLED?	NOVEMBER 2019	MAY 2024
18–24	11%	27%
25–34	22%	31%
35–44	23%	21%
45–54	16%	23%
55–64	15%	21%
65–74	16%	21%
Total	17%	24%

Source: Leger for the Association for Canadian Studies, September 22–24, 2024

Among those aged 18 to 24, one in six believes that Jews exaggerate the Holocaust (Table 6).

SOCIAL MEDIA AND HOLOCAUST SKEPTICISM

Social media has fundamentally transformed how young people consume information. Among those who believe the Holocaust is exaggerated, 44% say the popularity of an online source affects their level of trust, compared to 26% of those who do not hold this view (Table 7).

Similarly, 37% of Holocaust skeptics say they are more likely to trust viral information, compared to 11% of those who disagree with Holocaust skepticism (Table 8).

CONCLUSION

Holocaust skepticism is not due to a lack of available resources but rather an increased reliance on social media for historical information. These findings underscore the need for further analysis of how social media impacts trust in historical facts. Addressing Holocaust skepticism requires strategic engagement with younger audiences and efforts to build critical media literacy to preserve collective memory and combat misinformation.

“Holocaust skepticism is not due to a lack of available resources but rather an increased reliance on social media for historical information.”

TABLE 7.

POPULARITY OF AN ONLINE SOURCE AFFECTS TRUST	YES	NO
Agree	44%	26%
Disagree	56%	74%

Source: Leger for the Association for Canadian Studies, September 22–24, 2024

TABLE 8.

TRUST IN VIRAL INFORMATION	YES	NO
Agree	37%	11%
Disagree	63%	89%

Source: Leger for the Association for Canadian Studies, September 22–24, 2024

TABLE 6.

JEWS EXAGGERATE THE HOLOCAUST	TOTAL	18–24	25–34	35–44	45–54	55–64	65+
NET Agree	8%	16%	7%	10%	7%	5%	6%
NET Disagree	70%	56%	64%	65%	64%	79%	80%
I prefer not to answer	22%	28%	29%	25%	28%	16%	14%

Source: Leger for the Association for Canadian Studies, September 22–24, 2024