

HB20-1336

Rosh Hashanah 2021 (5782)

“There is nothing new in the world except the history you do not know.”

Harry Truman

“To forget would be not only dangerous but offensive; to forget would be akin to killing them a second time.” Elie Wiesel, Night

Wednesday, June 10, 2020. *The Colorado State Senate unanimously passed House Bill 20-1336 mandating Holocaust education in Colorado’s public schools. It had passed unanimously in the House the prior week. HB20-1336 requires the State Board of Education to adopt standards related to Holocaust and genocide studies as a requirement for high school graduation on or before July 1, 2021, to be implemented in the classroom by July 1, 2023 (school year 2023-2024). Sources: Intermountain Jewish News; Colorado Legislature*

Saturday, April 24, 2021: *“President Joe Biden on Saturday formally declared that the massacre of 1.5 million Armenians by the Ottoman Empire [Ottoman Turks] a century ago was ‘genocide.’ It is a deceptively simple move, carrying no force of law. Yet it’s a bold move for Biden, who has gone beyond what any American president has ever been willing to do. His announcement coincided with the date, April 24, 1915, when the Ottoman Empire began its genocide. Until now, presidents have declined to formally apply the term ‘genocide’ for fear of sparking a backlash from Turkey...however, the evidence is clear the Turks engaged in a years-long (1915-1923) ethnic cleansing campaign, conventionally considered to begin April 24, 1915 [during WW I] that included forced death marches into the Syrian desert of the southern [Ottoman] Empire and mass murder and starvation. Biden’s declaration represents an important step toward fulfilling America’s commitment to human rights across the world. At home, it begins to close the open wound at the center of the Armenian American experience” (Sources: Politico, CNN, MSNBC). While a direct relationship between the Armenian genocide and the Holocaust is not proven, it has been suggested (and endorsed by many scholars) that Holocaust perpetrators were inspired by the Ottoman example and legacy of impunity. (Hitler’s Obersalzberg speech, August 22, 1939: “Who, after all, speaks today of the annihilation of the Armenians?”). Both the Holocaust and the Armenian Genocide are considered pragmatic cases of genocide in the 20th Century, with the Armenian Genocide considered to be the prototype for the Holocaust.*

A cartoon, published by Newsweek May 28, 1990, sits framed on a table in my family room. Done in black ink, it depicts two men, considerably older in years, one leaning on a cane, both standing on a hill overlooking a bustling city on a river—building cranes, smokestacks, tall buildings, refineries crowd the landscape—a productive, thriving metropolis. One of the men remarks to his companion, “They’ve done it! They’ve rebuilt a unified, powerful, industrial giant! What more can you ask dedicated young Germans to do?” His companion replies, “Read the diary of Anne Frank.”

18 months ago, prior to embarking on a river boat cruise to Holland and Belgium, then still scheduled to occur in the spring of 2020—before COVID caused its cancellation—and wanting to try to see the Anne Frank House in Amsterdam, I called the cruise company to ask for their help in obtaining a ticket and finding time in the itinerary to see that almost sacred space. The young woman from their staff was very diligent and conscientious in her efforts to help, but finally, said, “Jean, I’m so sorry but I just can’t see a way for you to get to see the Anne Frank Show.” I paused a moment, taking note, letting it sink in, then said to her, “You have been very diligent and helpful and I give you kudos for that, but I don’t think you know what the Anne Frank House is, do you?” To her credit, she answered, “No, I don’t.” And I said, “You have been very professional and helpful but for someone working for a company doing river boat cruises in Europe and, specifically, this one in Holland and Belgium, it is unconscionable that you do not know what the Anne Frank House is.”

Other than my personal experience, a nationwide survey released September 2020 showed “a worrying lack of basic Holocaust knowledge: among adults under 40, including only 1 in 10 respondents ever having heard the word ‘Holocaust’ before. The survey, done by the Claims Conference, a non-profit that seeks to secure material compensation for Holocaust survivors, reported that many respondents were unclear about the basic facts of the genocide. 63% did not know that 6 million Jews were murdered. Nearly half could not name a single death camp even though 40,000 such camps were established in WW II. 11% indicated they thought the Jews caused the Holocaust; in New York that number climbed to 19%—in New York! 90% said they believed the Holocaust happened; 7% were not sure and 3% denied that it happened. The majority of adults in the poll said they felt the Holocaust could happen again. Stated Deborah Lipstadt, author of Denying the Holocaust, “When you learn about the history of the Holocaust, you are not just learning about the past. These

lessons remain relevant today in order to understand not just anti-Semitism, but all the other ‘-isms’ of society. There is real danger to letting them fade.” The survey’s data came from 11,000 interviews, collected across the country via phone and online with a random sample of respondents ages 18-39. The report posting these statistics indicated that “teachers are the real heroes in this story and are often overwhelmed with lack of time to teach and lack of available resources. Nothing can replace the learning from survivors but they are aging and dying and educators are preparing for the day when there are no more living survivors.”

Twenty states in the U.S. mandate Holocaust education. I was pleased to hear that bill HB20-1336 had unanimously passed both houses of the Colorado Legislature and that now public schools of Colorado will be mandated to set standards for the study of the Holocaust and genocide, making it a requirement for high school graduation. Some concerns? Fear that not enough time will be allowed for adequate coverage of this critical issue as well as fear of too many restrictions. Nevertheless, I found myself wondering how I would create a curriculum for such a project. How would I teach the Holocaust to high school students? I started to formulate. What follows is my own “lesson plan” for the teaching of the Holocaust. Since I do not have a degree in education, this is admittedly an amateurish attempt. My apologies to readers and friends who are teachers who may wince at efforts of *le amateur* and who may have better ideas of how to teach the subject. If so, go for it! But I plunge ahead. Following, there are several goals listed, source: UNESCO. Additional personal goal: after reading this, the reader will have a very clear understanding of what the Jewish people mean when we say, “Never again!” And, a warning: some of the following may sound disturbingly currently familiar.

Curriculum for the study of the Holocaust and Genocide

Introduction: It is important we define our reason for the study of the Holocaust and goals we hope to achieve. “Education about the Holocaust is the historical study of the systematic, bureaucratic, state-sponsored persecution and murder of six million Jews by Nazi Germany and its collaborators (1933-1945). It also provides a starting point to examine warning signs that can indicate the potential for mass atrocity. The study raises questions about human behavior and our capacity to succumb to scapegoating or simple answers to complex problems in the face of vexing societal challenges. The Holocaust illustrates the dangers of prejudice, discrimination, antisemitism and dehumanization. It also reveals the full range of human responses raising important issues about societal and individual motivations and pressures that lead people to act as they do or to not act at all.”

Why teach the Holocaust? “Teaching and learning about the Holocaust demonstrates the fragility of all societies and of the institutions that are supposed to protect the security and rights of all. It shows how these institutions can be turned against a segment of society. It emphasizes the need for all, especially those in leadership positions to reinforce humanistic values that protect free and just societies. It demonstrates the dangers of prejudice, discrimination and dehumanization, be it the anti-Semitism that fueled the Holocaust or other forms of racism and intolerance. It teaches about the human possibilities in extreme and desperate situations, by considering the actions of perpetrators and victims as well as other people who, due to various motivations, may tolerate, ignore or act against hatred and violence.

“Our goals of teaching the Holocaust: Understanding how and why the Holocaust occurred can inform broader understandings of mass violence globally, as well as highlight the value of promoting human rights, ethics and civic engagement that bolsters human solidarity. Studying this history can prompt discussion of the societal contexts that enable exclusionary policies to divide communities and promote environments that make genocide possible...It helps young learners identify the roots of prejudice and enhance their critical thinking against racism, antisemitism and all forms of prejudice.” Source: UNESCO, policy guide on Education about the Holocaust and preventing genocide, 2017.

Suggested viewing: “Judgment at Nuremberg,” 1961 courtroom drama depicting the trial of judges accused of crimes against humanity for their involvement in atrocities under the Nazi regime. Also depicts how the judiciary in Nazi Germany lost its independence and was turned against a segment of society. Highlights how judges went along with Hitler’s policy because of the effects of the Versailles Treaty post WW I even though they knew it was wrong. Starring Burt Lancaster as accused judge, Ernst Janning, who states, “Those people; those millions of people—I never knew it would come to that [mass murder of innocents].” To which Spencer Tracy as chief judge Dan Haywood of the military tribunal [at Nuremberg] replies, “It came to that the first time you sentenced a man to death you knew to be innocent.” The film is an excellent example of the complicity of passive observers and the turning of the judiciary against a minority in society—and “the value of a single human being.” Running time: 3 hours. Suggestion: two students may wish to discuss the tactics of prosecution (Richard Widmark) and defense (Maximilian Schell) attorneys in the movie. One student to discuss speech by Ernst Janning (Burt Lancaster); one student to discuss sentencing statement by Judge Dan Haywood (Spencer Tracy).

How and why did the Holocaust happen?

When the Nazis (National Socialist German Workers’ Party) came to power in Germany in 1933, Jews were living in every country of Europe. A total of roughly 9 million Jews lived in the countries that would be occupied by Germany during

WW II. Three million Jews lived in Poland and by the end of WW II, 90% of them had been murdered with the rich culture of Polish Jews gone forever. By the end of the war, two out of every three of the 9 million Jews of Europe would be dead and European Jewish life would be changed forever. The largest Jewish population was concentrated in Eastern Europe including Poland, Russia, Hungary, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Czechoslovakia, and Romania. They often spoke Yiddish, a combination of German and Hebrew, and lived in small villages and towns, called shtetls, where the population was predominantly Jewish with traditional religious practice/observance. In comparison, the Jews of Western Europe—Germany, France, Italy, the Netherlands and Belgium—made up much less of the population and tended to adopt the culture of their non-Jewish neighbors. They were more likely to assimilate, dress and talk like their countrymen, and traditional religious practices played a less important part in their lives. They tended to have a more formal education and lived in towns and cities.

A rich tapestry of Jewish life and culture existed prior to WW II. Jews could be found in all walks of life: farmers, tailors, seamstresses, factory workers, accountants, doctors, teachers, small-business owners, professors in top universities. Many excelled in the secular world of literature, music, theater, and art. Some were wealthy; some were poor. In one respect, they were all the same: by the 1930's with Hitler's rise to power in Germany, they all became potential victims. Two-thirds of them would be murdered.

How did the Holocaust happen? How did the leaders of a modern, educated society—Germany—come to murder millions of men, women and children because of their Jewish identity? To begin, the Holocaust was not a single event. It did not happen all at once. Its horrible destruction was incremental. It was the result of circumstances and events as well as individual decisions played out over years. Key political, moral and psychological lines were crossed ending in a "Final Solution," a systematic, concrete plan to annihilate all the Jews of Europe. The conditions that made this possible began with the mass destruction and loss of life of WW I (1914-1918) which ushered in an era of instability. In the wake of such instability, extremist movements (Communism, Socialism and Fascism) emerged and centuries-old monarchies dissolved in the midst of social unrest. The Russian revolution of 1917 led to the downfall of the Russian Czar and stoked fears of revolution in Western societies. In Germany, people of all political leanings were traumatized by World War I—the nation's humiliating defeat, the harsh terms of the peace settlement, i.e., the Treaty of Versailles. The Weimar Republic, Germany's first democratic institution which replaced the monarchy, struggled to gain support. Criticized by many Germans for their fall from greatness, it was hit from all sides: debilitating inflation, a horrible world-wide depression that hit Germany particularly hard, inability to control street violence, no political party that was able to gain control. The inability of old political parties to give Germans hope gave the Nazi party the chance. The leader of the young extremist and openly anti-democratic party, Adolph Hitler, skillfully played on the grievances of Germans. In 1933, leading conservatives lobbied for Hitler's appointment as head of government. Having lost faith in their democratic institutions, many Germans went along when the Nazis suspended the constitution and replaced the German republic with a dictatorship. In exchange for loss of individual rights and freedoms, they hoped Hitler would improve the economy, put an end to communist threat and make Germany great again. Many have said that Hitler was elected in a legal election. Yes and no. He became Chancellor via a democratic, constitutional process after the Nazi party used elections to form a mass base. Paul von Hindenburg, President of Germany, old and tired and pressured politically by a right/conservative/nationalist coalition, appointed Hitler as Chancellor, thinking he could control him. He was wrong.

When Hitler came to power in 1933, Germany was a republic with democratic institutions. Its constitution recognized and protected equal rights of all individuals. The Nazis established a dictatorship that limited basic rights and freedoms (advocating totalitarian government, territorial expansion, anti-Semitism, racism and Aryan supremacy). They promoted the ideal of the Aryan Nation—white, blonde, German-blooded people—that excluded others viewed as threats such as Jews. Gypsies, individuals with physical and mental disabilities, homosexuals, communists, socialists and others seen as racially inferior or whose beliefs (ideas) were not tolerated by the Nazis represented the groups originally imprisoned by the regime. The Nazi regime sought first to remove Jews by forcing them to emigrate. But very few countries, including the United States, were willing to accept Jewish immigrants (United States' FDR administration refused to ease already restricted immigration). In May 1939, the ship, MS St. Louis, filled with 900 Jewish refugees was rejected by Cuba, the United States and Canada and forced to return to Germany—and to their likely death. Jews were also excluded from Germany's political, social and cultural life—excluded from citizenship rights, professional life, from businesses, from their property. Jewish people, a tiny minority in Christian Europe (1% in Germany) had long been the subject of discrimination in Europe and Russia for centuries. However, once the Nazis took power, anti-Semitism became a very public, official government policy. Additionally, the Nazis' abolition of freedom of speech and a free press ensured that Germans heard no voices advocating tolerance.

The genocide of Europe's Jews and murder of other targeted groups could not have happened without WW II and Germany's military successes. The war, which Hitler declared was for the survival of the Germans, provided the Nazi regime with the motive as well as the opportunity to commit systematic mass murder. This began with disabled patients living in mental health facilities and other care institutions in Germany. Because the Nazis believed the Jews were the Germans' most dangerous enemy, they undertook efforts to destroy them entirely. With the failure of forced emigration and under the cover

of war, the Nazis' ideological hatred of the Jews became genocidal. And, hence, the "Final Solution" took shape. After the *Anschluss* (annexation of Austria) and *Kristallnacht* (Night of Broken Glass, a national pogrom destroying synagogues and Jewish businesses) in 1938, the program of concentration camps intensified. Dachau, the first concentration camp built in 1933, was originally used to imprison political prisoners as well as gypsies, Jehovah's Witnesses, homosexuals and persons accused of "socially deviant" behavior. However, with the invasion of Poland in 1939, the Nazis opened forced-labor camps and the camp system expanded rapidly with Nazi doctors experimenting on the prisoners. With the invasion of Russia in 1941, more camps were built, resulting in the development of "killing centers" to help carry out the "Final Solution," (the mass destruction of the Jews) most efficiently. The killing centers were designed for efficient mass murder with the result of the murder of 6,000 Jews per day at Auschwitz alone—not to mention the other killing centers—using gas chambers (and mobile gas vans) and the pesticide, Zyklon B. Of the six million Jews who were murdered, 1.5 million were children. In an effort to punish the villains of the Holocaust, the Allies held the Nuremberg Trials (1945-46) which brought the atrocities of the Nazis to horrifying light. Following the Balfour Declaration of 1917 during WW I, and in the aftermath of WW II and the horrors of the Holocaust, growing international support for Zionism led to the official declaration of the State of Israel in 1948. "We Jews have had our age of ash, and we have survived, barely, but we have survived...we have found our way to Jerusalem the Golden [Israel], and we are rebuilding it. From this wonder of history, all men can take hope," (Herman Wouk, *This Is My God*).

Suggested viewing: "Cabaret," 1972 movie with Joel Grey and Liza Minnelli. Depicts the rise of the Nazi Party and collapse of the Weimar Republic. "Conspiracy," 2001 drama starring Kenneth Branagh and Stanley Tucci. Dramatizes/documents the 1942 Wannsee Conference and delves into the psychology of Nazi officials involved in the "Final Solution." Underscores the maxim that evil prospers when good men do nothing. "Schindler's List," 1994 drama of industrialist Oskar Schindler's rescue of Jewish workers; "The Pianist," starring Adrien Brody, 2002 drama of a Warsaw radio pianist's hiding. Suggestion: two students to discuss Oskar Schindler as a righteous Gentile (non-Jew) and The Avenue of the Righteous Among the Nations at Yad Vashem (Holocaust Memorial, Jerusalem, Israel). Discussion to include other righteous Gentiles honored in the Avenue of the Righteous. What led Oskar Schindler to the actions he took? His gold ring was inscribed with "To save one life is to save the world entire." What significance is this in Judaism? What is its source?

Suggested Reading: "I Never Saw Another Butterfly," collection of children's art and poems from Terezin; "Sophie's Choice," by William Styron; "Night," by Elie Wiesel; "The Diary of a Young Girl," by Anne Frank; "The Book Thief," by Marcus Zusak; Man's Search for Meaning, by Viktor Frankl; poem by Protestant Pastor Martin Niemoller, 1946, "First they came for the Socialists and I didn't speak up because I wasn't a Socialist.." Niemoller was a self-described anti-Semite, conservative, supporter of Hitler. One student to discuss his poem in light of current-day anti-Semitism/racism. What changed his mind?

What is the urgency to teach?

August 2017. 89-year-old Holocaust survivor, Marianne Rubin, walks in a protest in New York protesting the event of "Unite the Right" white supremacist rally in Charlottesville, Virginia, 2017. She holds a placard high which says, "I escaped the Nazis once. You will not defeat me now!" Her photograph appears in a blog by Deborah Fripp of the Times of Israel. Deborah Fripp notes "The Holocaust did not begin with gas chambers, killing pits, or slave labor. The Holocaust began with discriminatory laws that treated Jews like second-class people...Although every act of bias will not lead to genocide; it is important to realize that every historical instance of genocide began with acts of bias." (Deborah Fripp, The Times of Israel, June 25, 2018.) **The urgency?** Charlottesville. Pittsburgh. Voter suppression. Racism. American xenophobia. Global anti-Semitism. White supremacy. American anti-Israel sentiment.

September, 2017. Five teenagers leave a party, saying, "We 'bout to go exterminate some Jews!" Cherry Creek High School, Denver, Colorado. **The urgency?** Uneducated Americans—youth, adults and the United States Congress. Uneducated Americans vis-à-vis the State of Israel.

October 30, 2020. Fanny Starr, 98, Holocaust survivor, helped write/pass/sign HB20-1336. Speaker for decades at Colorado schools of countless lives lost. Died October 30, 2020. "I pray we are not forgotten." **The urgency?** Survivors are dying.

***Auschwitz Birkenau Dachau Sobibor Treblinka Lodz Babi-Yar Maidanek Kovno Theresienstadt Chelmno
Sachsenhausen Ravensbruck Buchenwald Vilna Bergen-Belsen Mauthausen Oranienberg
Never Again***

It is unthinkable what we endured. Unthinkable that we survived. Unthinkable that we still raise the glass and say, "L'Chaim! (To Life!) But we do. For we are "captives of hope."

L'shanah tovah tikatevu ve techatemu

(May you be inscribed and sealed in the Book of Life for a good and sweet year)

Jean Guthery