

BEARING WITNESS:
THE CASE FOR HOLOCAUST EDUCATION IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS

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ABSTRACT

The United States is at a crossroads. At a time when anti-Semitism and Holocaust denial numbers are mounting once more, the number of living Holocaust survivors is dwindling. Thus, the responsibility for teaching future generations about the Nazi Holocaust falls to education. However, Holocaust education in public schools in the United States is severely lacking. Only 6 states in the United States mandate Holocaust education, and even those states do not teach the Holocaust the way it should be taught. This paper makes the case for mandatory Holocaust education in every public high school in the United States, and, in doing so, recommends how the Holocaust should be taught, so that students may experience the full impact that Holocaust education in the social studies has to offer.

Too often is the Holocaust taught in a five-minute section of a lesson on the effects of World War II. Too often is the Holocaust taught as if it is a horror movie filled with senseless violence. Too often is the Holocaust taught as the forces of evil fighting against the forces of good. The Holocaust was a human event filled with tough moral and ethical questions that each individual had to answer. If students are given the opportunity to come face-to-face with the tough moral and ethical questions of the Holocaust, real and powerful growth and change can occur. Education, at its core, is about making its students better people through personal growth, mastery of the disciplines, and gaining maturity by learning values in the classroom. With Holocaust denial, xenophobia, and anti-Semitism on the rise world-wide, and the number of living Holocaust survivors dwindling, our education system must create moral, ethical, and conscientious citizens that have the courage to act upon the values they hold and to affect positive change in our world.

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Introduction & Overview

Etched upon the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum walls is a Biblical verse from Deuteronomy 4:9, which reads: “Only guard yourself and guard your soul carefully, lest you forget the things your eyes saw, and lest these things depart your heart all the days of your life, and you shall make them known to your children, and to your children’s children.”¹ Implicit in this message is an imperative to all who witnessed the atrocities committed during the Nazi Holocaust, whether they are survivors of the Final Solution or students who are learning about it for the first time, to remember, understand, and hold in reverence those who were lost.*² This imperative resonates loudly today because of mounting anti-Semitism and Holocaust denial worldwide. Thus, the question is not only that people should recognize and understand the political, social, and cultural implications of the Holocaust, but also how current and future generations are to be informed about the importance of the Holocaust. In the United States, a potential strategy for confronting this disturbing trend may be found in public secondary education. Research has shown that Holocaust education has the potential to instill values in students that can combat ignorance, anti-Semitism (racially based hate of all Jews), and Holocaust denial. This is one reason some states have mandated the teaching of the Holocaust in public schools. Many scholars and educators have discovered that effectively delivered Holocaust education can be part of an effective strategy for preparing empathetic and knowledgeable young adults.

In order to fully analyze the role of Holocaust education in American public education, this paper will do the following. First, it will provide a historical overview of the

¹ *The Holy Bible: King James Version*. London: Oxford Classics, 2008.

² *For the rest of this paper, the capitalized “Holocaust” will be used in place of the longer “Nazi Holocaust.” They are synonymous for the purposes of this paper.

Nazi Holocaust. Second, data on current anti-Semitism and Holocaust denial will be summarized. The current state of Holocaust education will be reviewed along with a discussion of relevant educational theory. Fourth, this thesis will examine the effectiveness of Holocaust education as a part of the social studies curriculum. Finally, this body of research will analyze the impact, effectiveness, and viability of mandated Holocaust education in the United States.

Context

Historical Overview of the Nazi Holocaust

The Nazi Holocaust found its roots in many centuries of latent European anti-Semitism, stirred and encouraged by the advent of the NSDAP, or the German Nazi Party in the mid-to-late 1920's. At first, The Nazis pushed for harsher legal restrictions on Jews in Germany; later they encouraged the Jews to leave the country entirely.³ Once Adolf Hitler and his anti-Semitic Nazi Party had taken control in 1933, policy concerning Jews in Germany became much more violent and abusive. German Jews were subjected to pogroms, ghettoization, cold executions, and imprisonment in concentration camps.⁴ With the outbreak of World War II in 1939, anti-Semitic policies were extended to the Jews living in newly conquered areas, including France, Russia, Hungary, Poland, and Czechoslovakia. With the decision to undertake a "Final Solution" to the Jewish problem in 1941, killing squads called the *Einsatzgruppen* set out to exterminate any Jews that crossed their path. When the overwhelming numbers of men, women, and children being slaughtered by the

³ Doris L. Bergen, *War & Genocide: A Concise History of the Holocaust* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2009), 16-18.

⁴ Klaus P. Fischer, *Nazi Germany: A New History* (New York: The Continuum Publishing, 1997), 27.

Einsatzgruppen could not be sustained, the Nazi upper echelon convened a conference in Wannsee, Germany on January 20, 1942.⁵ This called for the creation of extermination camps, such as Auschwitz-Birkenau, Treblinka, and Majdanek. From 1942 to 1945, approximately 3.5 million people died in eight extermination camps, most of whom were Jewish. It was not until the Germans had been defeated in 1945 that all the death camps and concentration camps were liberated and surviving prisoners set free. All in all, over 6 million Jews were killed during the Holocaust, either through harsh treatment or systematic murder. The Holocaust left a tragic legacy of pain, death, and inhumanity.

Current Data on U.S Anti-Semitism & Holocaust Denial

Anti-Semitism did not begin with Hitler and the Nazis. The Oxford English Dictionary defines it as “hostility to or prejudice against Jews,” and notes that it has been one of the most enduring forms of racism and prejudice known to mankind. Rooted in the ancient Mediterranean, and thriving in medieval Europe, anti-Semitism manifested itself in many forms over time: anti-Semitic legislation, pogroms, the Holocaust, and, in modern times, Holocaust denial. While many who deny the Holocaust would consider themselves to be non-racist “history revisionists,” the Anti Defamation League, an international organization dedicated to fighting global anti-Semitism, considers Holocaust denial to be a symptom of systemic anti-Semitism, of a need to escape facing the tragedy the Jews suffered at the hands of the Nazis.⁶ While historian Deborah Lipstadt admits that a portion of Holocaust denial stems from a legitimate historical tradition of governmental criticism, she acknowledges that American Holocaust denial found its roots in the 1950’s among those who were anti-Semitic

⁵ Bergen, *War and Genocide*, 18.

⁶ Anti-Defamation League Global 100, “An Index of Anti-Semitism,” 2015. <http://global100.adl.org/#map>. Accessed Nov 3, 2015.

or had extremist group connections.⁷ Holocaust denial in America began to spread in the next several decades, thanks to the efforts of academics like Harry Elmer Barnes and Austin J. App. By the 1990's, college campuses across America were hubs for Holocaust denial. This was a symptom of a much larger systemic issue. Israeli historian Yehuda Bauer, one of the world's foremost Holocaust scholars, captured this sentiment of Holocaust denial perfectly:

I believe that this [denial of the Holocaust] is the work of a growing movement, as for extremely wide circles of people the very phenomenon of the Holocaust is incomprehensible, unintelligible and untenable, and an explanation claiming that it did not happen is accepted with relief.⁸

Anti-Semitism and Holocaust denial are serious issues that continue to plague society, and are growing problems as more and more individuals are found to hold these sentiments about Jews and the Holocaust.

As of the year 2015, 77% of the Americas' populations had heard of the Holocaust.⁹ While this may seem to be a high number, this indicates that nearly a fourth of North and South American populations had never heard of the Holocaust. Among those polled in the United States by the Anti-Defamation League, 9% registered on their index*¹⁰ of anti-

⁷ Deborah E. Lipstadt, *Denying the Holocaust: The Growing Assault of Truth and Memory* (New York: The Free Press, 1993), 31 & 65.

⁸ Yehuda Bauer, "'Revisionism' – The Repudiation of the Holocaust and its Historical Significance," *The Historiography of the Holocaust Period* (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 1988), 708.

⁹ Anti-Defamation League Global 100, "An Index of Anti-Semitism," <http://global100.adl.org/#map>. Accessed Oct 28, 2015.

¹⁰ This "Index of Anti-Semitism" uses a list of 11 negative stereotypes about Jews, and whether or not those polled agree with those stereotypes. An individual registers on their anti-Semitic index if they say that at least 6 out of the 11 stereotypes are "probably true." The negative stereotypes include: "Jews have too much power in the business world;" "People hate Jews because of the way Jews act;" "Jews still talk too much about what happened to them in the Holocaust;" "Jews are more loyal to Israel than to the countries they live in;" "Jews have too much power in international financial markets;" "Jews don't care about what happens to anyone but their own kind;" "Jews have too much control over global affairs;" "Jews have too much control over the United States government;" "Jews think they are better

Semitism in 2014, and 10% registered on their index in 2015.¹¹ This indicates that, currently, a tenth of the population of the United States holds anti-Semitic views, and that this number has risen since 2014, when only 9% of the population polled registered on the ADL Index. To put this into perspective, 24,000,000 individuals in the United States, according to the Anti-Defamation League, harbor anti-Semitic views and beliefs. Perhaps more insidious is the fact that 20% of those polled in the United States agreed that “Jews still talk too much about what happened to them in the Holocaust.”¹² This is indicative of a serious problem in modern America because this sentiment downplays the tragedy of the Holocaust and undermines the magnitude of the event. The Anti-Defamation League’s study also shows that, while younger people are less likely to be anti-Semitic than older people, younger people are more likely to either believe that the Holocaust has been “exaggerated,” or that the Holocaust is entirely a myth.¹³ These statistics indicate that Holocaust denial is a much larger issue among younger generations, and that this issue will continue to grow as more and more generations are exposed to mounting support for Holocaust denial.

In his 2010 study of Holocaust denial trends in the United States, Scott Darnell found similar data, noting that: “Today, two alarming and sobering trends demand a greater commitment to Holocaust education and confronting Holocaust denial. The visibility of Holocaust denial is increasing, at the same time that the number of living Holocaust

than other people;” “Jews have too much control over the global media;” “Jews are responsible for most of the World’s wars.” According to the ADL, their methodology indicates that those polled are accurate representations of the populations of the nations of those polled.

¹¹ Anti-Defamation League, “An Index of Anti-Semitism.” <http://global100.adl.org/#map>. Accessed Oct. 28, 2015.

¹² Ibid. Accessed Oct. 28, 2015.

¹³ Ibid., Accessed Nov 8, 2015.

survivors is dwindling.”¹⁴ In his study, Darnell found that, out of the 6 countries polled concerning knowledge of the Holocaust, the United States polled last, with only 44% correctly identifying Auschwitz, Treblinka, and Dachau.¹⁵ Darnell also notes that, from the year 2000 to the year 2008, the number of identifiable anti-Semitic hate groups had risen from just above 400 groups in 2000 to almost 700 identifiable groups in 2008.¹⁶ Darnell argues that this rise in anti-Semitism and Holocaust denial in the United States since the year 2000 is directly correlated with the expansion of Internet access and the advent of social media.¹⁷

In the years before Internet access, it seemed that only those with high level degrees, or artificial publishing credentials, denied the Holocaust. According to The American Jewish Committee’s report *Holocaust Denial*, written by Kenneth Stern, many of the attempts to spread Holocaust denial and anti-Semitism on radio and television in the late 1980’s and early 1990’s were launched by only a few individuals.¹⁸ Very few radio hosts gave deniers radio time; of the 900+ offers famous denier Bradley Smith sent out to local talk radio stations, only 6 were accepted.¹⁹ Thus, the number of anti-Semites and Holocaust deniers in this country was relatively low. However, with the advent of the Internet and social media, any individual could “Tweet,” post, or blog their thoughts, and those thoughts become public. Michael Shermer and Alex Grobman’s book *Denying History* notes that the advent of the Internet has accentuated the age-old problem of the “uncritical acceptance of anything in

¹⁴ Scott Darnell, *Measuring Holocaust Denial in the United States* (Boston: Harvard University, 2010), 5.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 13.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 16.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 32.

¹⁸ Kenneth S. Stern, *Holocaust Denial* (New York: The American Jewish Committee, 1993), 14.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 14-15.

print,” arguing that the Internet has caused history to be transformed into “pseudohistory.”²⁰ This is in reference to the increasing accessibility of written material denying the Holocaust. Groups on Facebook dedicated to Holocaust denial and anti-Semitism have been increasing in recent years, and Darnell has found that 31 Facebook groups, with cumulative membership of over 4,000 people, have Holocaust denial as their central tenet.²¹ As Darnell deepened his research, he found many racist/anti-Semitic/Holocaust denial/white-supremacist websites with unique visitors numbering in the hundreds of thousands. Likewise, the Anti-Defamation League has found that, in the year 2014, 28% of those polled worldwide believed the reported number of Jews who died in the Holocaust to have been greatly exaggerated, with 4 percent believing that the “Holocaust is a myth and never happened.”²² While these numbers are alarming, experts believe that they will only increase. As University of Indiana professor David Lindquist notes, the survivor generation is passing quickly from this world at the same moment that a massive influx of material has surfaced that attempts to undermine the validity of the Holocaust.²³ These trends threaten to undermine the impact of the Holocaust on future generations. That is why society must turn to public education to combat such trends.

Current State of Holocaust Education in the United States

Currently, more than 25 states include references to the Holocaust within their educational standards, with 6 of those states mandating the teaching of the Holocaust. The states that Holocaust education are Florida (1994), New Jersey (1991), Illinois (1989),

²⁰ Michael Shermer and Alex Grobman, *Denying History: Who Says the Holocaust Never Happened and Why They Say It* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 5.

²¹ Darnell, *Measuring Holocaust Denial in the United States*, 33.

²² Anti-Defamation League, “An Index of Anti-Semitism,” Accessed Nov. 8, 2015.

²³ David H. Lindquist, “Setting a Context for Holocaust Education in the United States: Past Trends and Future Challenges,” *International Journal of Social Education* 24, no. 2 (2010), 233.

California (1985), New York (1994), and, most recently, Indiana (2007).²⁴ Those states that have mandated Holocaust education have experienced positive results. For example, New Jersey, four years after mandating Holocaust education, New Jersey's public schools reported that 93% of its schools had successfully integrated Holocaust topics into the curriculum.²⁵ A few of the states that mandated Holocaust education, however, reported that teachers were seriously under-equipped to handle teaching such a challenging topic as the Holocaust. A 2001 survey of 254 public school teachers in Indiana, for example, showed that a large majority of the teachers in Indiana were "self-taught" about the Holocaust, and did not have sufficient materials or curriculum aids to effectively teach the Holocaust according to state standards.²⁶ This is indicative of a lack of equity between states concerning Holocaust curriculum and instructional materials. Lindquist argues that this stems from political limitations on Holocaust education mandates, rather than academic ones.²⁷ In stating this, Lindquist infers that many of the states that mandated Holocaust education in public schools did so for political reasons during the height of what WPU professor and author Thomas Fallace calls "Holocaustomania," the popular culture phenomenon surrounding the intense fervor of Holocaust movies, literature, and media that exploded 1980's and 1990's.²⁸ Thus, as both Fallace and Lindquist note, mandating Holocaust education for unprepared teachers and principals created an impossible pedagogical dilemma. Thus, as is indicated by the state

²⁴ United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, "Beyond Our Walls: State Profiles on Holocaust Education," <http://www.ushmm.org/educators/beyond-our-walls-state-profiles-on-holocaust-education>. Accessed Nov. 9, 2015.

²⁵ Thomas D. Fallace, *The Emergence of Holocaust Education in American Schools* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 139.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 140.

²⁷ Lindquist, "Setting a Context for Holocaust Education in the United States," 230.

²⁸ Fallace, *The Emergence of Holocaust Education in American Schools*, 92-94.

of schools in states that have mandated Holocaust education, mandated Holocaust education alone still leaves much to be desired.

In contrast to the “mandating” strategy found in some states, many state legislatures created commissions or councils on the Holocaust that were supposed to provide instructional materials and curriculum guides that would enable teachers to present the Holocaust and teach it effectively.²⁹ However, these councils have little or no power to actually implement Holocaust curriculum in the classroom. Due to the fact that Holocaust education is only “recommended,” or “suggested” by those state legislatures, many school systems across the United States have resisted the recommendations of their state councils/commissions to expand Holocaust education within their states. Mr. Michael Abramson, the chairman of the North Carolina Council on the Holocaust, stated in an interview that, when he attempted to encourage one school in North Carolina to include the Holocaust in school curriculum, he was rebuffed by the school principal, who stated that the Holocaust was “a Jewish issue,” and that she didn’t have any Jewish students in her school.³⁰ Noting that this sentiment was not uncommon among schools he visited, Mr. Abramson bemoaned his organization’s lack of authority to implement their own policies, stating that his pleas to the General Assembly of North Carolina have fallen on deaf ears.³¹ While councils and commissions like Mr. Abramson’s undertake important initiatives to equip teachers to teach the Holocaust through published material, teacher conferences, and coordinating guest speakers to attend various schools throughout their states, these councils/commissions can do little to ensure that the Holocaust is actually taught in schools.

²⁹ Ibid., 230.

³⁰ Michael Abramson (Chairman, NC Council on the Holocaust), in discussion with the author, March 2015.

³¹ Ibid.

Thus, Holocaust education in American public schools has remained quite limited, and unequal between states, school systems, and even between schools within the same school system. Some schools have classes specific to the Holocaust and/or genocide studies, while other public schools barely mention the occurrence of the Holocaust in their Social Studies and English curricula.³² Due to budget deficits, stringent accountability systems, and standardized testing, resulting from No Child Left Behind and Race to the Top legislation that focuses intently on STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math) classes, many state governments refuse to discuss changes to the current state of Holocaust education, and often resist what they consider to be “frivolous” topics like the Holocaust, now that “Holocaustomania” has worn off.³³ Fallace notes that now that Holocaust education has lost its edge as being a foil for the “conspiracy of silence” that surrounded the Holocaust prior to the 1980’s, political entities are much less likely to support the teaching of this topic.³⁴

The case for Holocaust education faces an uphill battle. In the past, changes to the social studies curriculum in U.S public schools have been met with extreme resistance due to ideological, pedagogical, and practical barriers to such progress. Harold Rugg, a Progressive Era educational pioneer who authored a number of extremely popular social-issues centered textbooks, was the target of extreme censorship efforts by the National Association of Manufacturers and the American Legion.³⁵ These groups accused Rugg of being anti-American due to his stance that social studies education should be focused on problems in the United States, and how to fix them. Rugg’s textbooks pointed out things that the United

³² Fallace, *The Emergence of Holocaust Education in American Schools*, 140-141.

³³ Lindquist, “Setting a Context for Holocaust Education in the United States,” 232.

³⁴ Fallace, *The Emergence of Holocaust Education in American Schools*, 139.

³⁵ Ernest F. Johnson, “Harold O. Rugg, 1886 – 1960,” *Educational Theory* 10, no.1 (1960), 176.

States had done wrong, and built lessons around what could be learned from those mistakes.³⁶ Many groups in the U.S found these textbooks to be pro-socialist and anti-American; censorship lobbying against Rugg began to whittle away at Rugg's extremely popular textbooks. These censorship efforts nearly ended Rugg's career, and severely limited the number of his textbooks that were available to the public.³⁷

Jerome Bruner, an educational psychologist and author, created the controversial curriculum, "Man: A Course of Study (MACOS)," in 1964 as part of an effort to create a functional and effective social studies curriculum. MACOS takes the humanist approach to history, asking the questions, "What is human about human beings?," "How did they get that way?," and "How can they be made more so?."³⁸ This curriculum was revolutionary due to its pointed emphasis on man's evolution, and its attempt to cultivate critical thinking about the state of man in the world. MACOS was met with fierce opposition due to its "godlessness," and because it dealt with such topics as sexuality and the theory of evolution.³⁹ Many claimed that Bruner was simply attempting to indoctrinate students into thinking like a social scientist. If the ideological tug-of-war was not enough to kill MACOS, shifting educational paradigms did. With the beginning of the Space Race and a new emphasis on science and patriotic history in public schools, MACOS had no place in the classroom.⁴⁰ Bruner's greatest work, perhaps the most revolutionary and controversial attempt at curriculum change in American history, was killed due to ideological and pedagogical conflicts. Mandated Holocaust education will face a similar battle. Many believe

³⁶ Ibid., 177.

³⁷ Ibid., 179.

³⁸ Paul G. Fitchett, and William Russell, "Reflecting on MACOS: Why It Failed and What We Can Learn From Its Demise," *Paedagogica Historica* 48, no. 3 (June 2012), 473.

³⁹ Ibid., 474-475.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 475-476.

that Holocaust education is not a matter of urgent importance, and that the STEM courses are where emphasis in schools needs to be. However, if change is to be made, it needs to be made clear that there is a serious misunderstanding about what the purpose of education is. Bruner and Rugg got it right, but were destroyed by a public that did not understand the true impact of education.

The Impact of Education

At the core of Holocaust education in public schools is the expectation that education is an effective means for social, moral, and ethical change. While this expectation is not unwarranted, a deeper inspection of education is needed to begin to understand the implications of Holocaust education as an antidote to the ever-growing problem of anti-Semitism, Holocaust denial, and xenophobia.

The Purpose of Education

In his philosophically comprehensive book, *What is Education?*, Philip W. Jackson, drawing on the philosophy of Dewey, Kant, and Hegel, gave this succinct definition of Education:

Education is a socially facilitated process of cultural transmission whose explicit goal is to effect an enduring change for the better in the character and psychological well-being (the personhood) of its recipients and, by indirection, in their broader social environment, which ultimately extends to the world at large.⁴¹

This definition comes at the end of Jackson's philosophical journey to answer John Dewey's ultimate question for educators: to find the purpose of education, at its core.⁴² Jackson insists, bringing to bear both Dewey's pragmatism as well as Kant and Hegel's German idealism,

⁴¹ Philip W. Jackson, *What is Education?* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), 95.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 7-9.

that even through the instruction of factual truths, education is a moral endeavor. By seeking the betterment of teacher and student alike, education's goal is to "effect beneficial changes in humans, not just in what they know and can do, but more important, in their character and personality, in the kind of persons they become."⁴³ Dewey himself admits that a good society begins with a school that epitomizes such ideals.⁴⁴ Likewise, Maria Montessori, an intellectual giant of Twentieth Century educational theory, argues that "Our principal concern must be to educate humanity – the human beings of all nations – in order to guide it toward seeking common goals."⁴⁵ In her claims, Montessori asserts that, in order to achieve peace within humanity, all people must be educated.⁴⁶ Her emphasis on "peace" education among young children corroborates this standpoint. Even Aristotle, that legendary Greek philosopher and scientist, insisted that children should be raised up in, and taught, virtue.⁴⁷ Only after children had been raised virtuously could critical analysis of society and societal norms occur safely.⁴⁸ The education of children, for Aristotle, was the foundation of society. Thus, it is not far-fetched to claim that, at its core, the very idea of education is a moral endeavor that is intrinsically connected to the betterment of, and progression within, society.

⁴³ Ibid., 94.

⁴⁴ John Dewey, *Democracy and Education* (New York: Free Press, 1917), 101.

⁴⁵ Maria Montessori, *Education and Peace* (Chicago: Henry Regener Company, 1972), 29.

⁴⁶ Jacqueline Cossentino & Jennifer Whitcomb, "Peace as a Premise for Learning: Maria Montessori's Educational Philosophy," *Ethical Visions of Education: Philosophies in Practice* (New York: Teacher's College Press, 2007), 115.

⁴⁷ Nel Noddings, *Philosophy of Education* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press 2007), 166.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 166-167.

Education as a Moral Enterprise

Isaiah Berlin asserts that morality is what constitutes humanity as part of “our essential nature.”⁴⁹ Knowledge of “The Good” and aspirations to meet that standard are intrinsic to human nature and the human experience. Even if the likes of philosophical giants such as Freud, Adler, Frankl, Cahn, Kant, and Hume disagree about the motivations behind the human tendency to ascribe moral judgments and to act accordingly, all seem to agree that morality and the questions of ethics and virtue transcend social, religious, and ethnic boundaries; to be human is to ask moral questions and to ascribe moral judgments on the surrounding world.⁵⁰ In a modern world, in modern America, the education system is a large part of each person’s formative years, the years in which they come to learn about themselves and the world around them. Thus, education plays a significant role in the moral and ethical development of every student that passes through the education system.

While many pundits argue that education is the realm of academic knowledge and pedagogic techniques, and that moral education is to be taught in homes and churches, overwhelming evidence indicates that this is simply not the case.⁵¹ Thomas Lasley argues that teachers simply cannot escape their role as “value transmitters” in the classroom.⁵² By bringing their own values, beliefs, and biases into the classroom, teachers, the very instruments by which the educational process is carried out, communicate values and expectations to students. Likewise, these students bring their own moral agendas into the classroom, a moral agenda, according to Robert Starratt, to “find, create, own, and be true to

⁴⁹ Joan F. Goodman & Howard Lesnick, *The Moral Stake in Education: Contested Premises and Practices* (New York: Longman, 2001), 85.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 85-98.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁵² Thomas J. Lasley II, *Teaching Peace: Toward Cultural Selflessness* (Westport, CT: Bergin & Garvey, 1994), 101.

themselves.”⁵³ Students that enter schools and classrooms do not leave their humanness at the door and become fact-absorbing automatons; students within the classroom are full human beings that are constantly attempting to find their place in society, and consistently seek out ways to answer their questions about themselves, society, and about humanity.⁵⁴ Mortimer Adler, a philosopher contemporary of John Dewey, succinctly sums up this idea: “The proximate ends of education are the moral and intellectual virtues.... The ultimate end of education is happiness or a good human life....”⁵⁵ Education has the opportunity to cultivate the moral exploration that every student undertakes, and it is imperative that teachers and students alike ensure that growth occurs. Thus, the question arises: how does education facilitate this growth from a fledgling student-learner to an educated, rational adult that is empathetic and ethical at her/his core?

John Dewey states that, in order to facilitate human growth, which, in his opinion, is the highest calling of education, classroom questions should be “large” enough for students to wrestle with and grow, but not too dense, so that students can grow and begin to grapple with issues they will face as adults.⁵⁶ Dewey’s “large” questions can be interchangeably referred to as “moral” questions. As Katherine Simon argues, moral questions are at the core of the educational disciplines, and moral and existential questions abound in classroom instruction, regardless of whether or not they are explicitly discussed.⁵⁷ Questions of right and wrong, of truth and fact, and of humanity underlie lessons in literature, history, even

⁵³ Robert Starratt, *Cultivating an Ethical School* (New York: Routledge Press, 2012), 92.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 93-94.

⁵⁵ George W. Noblit & Van O. Dempsey, *The Social Construction of Virtue: The Moral Life of Schools* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), 21.

⁵⁶ David T. Hansen, “John Dewey on Education and Quality of Life,” *Ethical Visions of Education: Philosophies in Practice* (New York: Teacher’s College Press, 2007), 22-27.

⁵⁷ Katherine G. Simon, *Moral Questions in the Classroom: How to Get Kids to Think Deeply about Real Life and Their Schoolwork* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2001), 12.

science and mathematics. These questions, such as, “What does it mean to be [insert people group],” and “Is [insert action] ever justified,” often appear in lessons that touch on the human experience, but are not always openly discussed. For good reason, it is not always considered good practice to deeply examine and fact-check students’ opinions on moral and ethical issues.⁵⁸ This can cause confrontations that lead students to reject instruction out of hand, resulting in a lack of intellectual stimulation. However, as Katherine Simon notes, moral and existential questions are fascinating, both for students and for the teachers.⁵⁹ Study of these moral questions, because students are likely to care about them due to intrinsic connections, causes student work, the curricula, and daily teacher input to be imbued with a sense of meaning and purpose. Otherwise, students may tend to see their studies as only fulfilling a checklist mandated by an administrator or legislative body. By fully empowering students to ask and answer tough moral questions, teachers and administrators alike can create intellectual stimulation while cultivating student interest and investment in the education process, thus achieving academic goals while holding student attention and encouraging student engagement.⁶⁰ Education that is built around the moral and ethical upbringing of its students need not sacrifice student attention or academic rigor; through the growth of its students both morally and intellectually, education as a moral enterprise fulfills the many expectations that society places upon it.

Human development in schools is paramount to ethical development. As students grow, they become more and more aware of their own selves, and begin to seek out their own

⁵⁸ Ibid., 3.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 2.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 14.

authenticity, to discover who they are as thinking, functioning people.⁶¹ Education, due to its function as one of the preeminent developmental forces in students' lives, can aid students in their ethical development just as much as, if not more than, their cognitive development. Of course, this kind of ethical development is almost never discussed in this age of standardized testing and statistical quotas; policy makers and the field at large constantly push cognitive development and the results thereof.⁶² Moral education struggles constantly against a society that places more emphasis on test results than human development, a blatant selling-short of the potential of education to affect real change in students.⁶³ However, ethical development and the moral questions it creates are always a part of the classroom experience. As students grow cognitively, they become more inclined to ask existential questions and are able to challenge themselves with moral problems due to their enhanced cognitive abilities.⁶⁴ This is such a large part of the educational experience that Gary Thomas calls this unspoken aspect of the classroom "The Hidden Curriculum" in his booklet *Education: A Very Short Introduction*.⁶⁵ "The Hidden Curriculum" is the underlying moral message in lessons, the results of teacher decisions and student responses, the intermingling of ethical ideals and moral dilemmas in the classroom. It is the unspoken change that occurs in students as they learn in the classroom. This change is inevitable if education is deliberate and forthright about its aims in ethical change in students for the better.

⁶¹ Starratt, *Cultivating an Ethical School*, 85.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 85-87.

⁶³ Robert P. Welker, "Searching for the Educational Imperative in Holocaust Curricula," *New Perspectives on the Holocaust: A Guide for Teachers and Scholars*, ed. by Rochelle Millen (New York: New York University Press, 1996), 102.

⁶⁴ Starratt, *Cultivating an Ethical School*, 84.

⁶⁵ Gary Thomas, *Education: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 90.

The Social Studies & Moral Education

Of all the educational disciplines, the social studies confront moral questions and ethical dilemmas the most. Covering controversial topics that run the gambit of civil rights movements to genocides, the social studies are widely agreed to be at the forefront of moral education in the United States. Daniel Byrd argues that the social studies, because they cover so many social, political, and ethical issues, have the unique opportunity to “create a space for transformative and meaningful learning to occur,” so long as standards and objectives do not get in the way or detract from the learning experience.⁶⁶ Consistently, social studies teachers encounter and confront student biases, preconceived political ideologies, and general racism and xenophobia. In a discussion of the American Civil Rights Movement and race relations in the United States, which is typical in an American History II classroom, it is inevitable that various and conflicting beliefs will clash. This clash, however, if handled properly, has the opportunity to cultivate positive change in students.⁶⁷ By presenting students with real historical examples of ordinary people, people they can relate to, making difficult moral decisions, for good or evil, the social studies engage in the moral and ethical development of students. Whether or not teachers and administrators realize it, this transmission and transformation is constantly occurring.⁶⁸ By tying in current events and modern political and social issues, social studies teachers can help students become conscientious, informed citizens able to fully and responsibly participate in society and the

⁶⁶ Daniel Byrd, “Social Studies Education as a Moral Activity: Teaching Towards a Just Society,” *Educational Philosophy and Theory* 44, no. 10 (2012), 1073.

⁶⁷ Jack R. Fraenkel, “The Relationship between Moral Thought and Moral Action: Implications for Social Studies Education,” *Theory and Research in Social Education* 9, no. 2 (Summer 1981), 48.

⁶⁸ Byrd, “Social Studies Education as a Moral Activity,” 1074.

democratic process.⁶⁹ A moral life is not determined by disjointed moral problems encountered along the path of life; a moral life is punctuated by everyday decisions and interpersonal relationships.⁷⁰ It is the responsibility of social studies (or other) teachers to enable and empower students to make those everyday decisions in a thoughtful and informed manner.

Historical empathy is the ultimate goal of social studies curricula, even in the face of legislation and policy. The social studies are just that: the study of society and social issues, and the impact of decisions made by individuals throughout history. Research has proven that, if issues-based curriculum is taught, and personal stories are taught, rather than the memorization of historical statistics, students respond positively and meaningful learning can be achieved. Meaningful learning is the process by which students learn by understanding how the subject material is relatable to their own lives; it is the highest form of learning, and the most likely to be retained in long-term memory.⁷¹ Thus, even if current policies present a moving away from such instruction, experts and research results alike attest to the power of the social studies to create and sustain lasting impacts on student lives through the examination and exploration of social and political issues, both past and present.

Education is a massive idea that cannot possibly be encompassed by any single educational philosopher or theorist; for every moral education theorist, there is an expert concerned with pedagogy. However, even the multi-faceted behemoth of education cannot

⁶⁹ C. Greg Jorgensen, "Moral Problems as Issues-Centered Social Studies Education: Discovering Dewey as a Guiding Foundation," *International Journal of Progressive Education* 9, no.1 (2013), 54-55.

⁷⁰ Betty A. Sichel, *Moral Education: Character, Community and Ideals* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1988), 26.

⁷¹ Larry Nucci, "Integrating Moral and Social Development Within Middle School Social Studies: A Social Cognitive Domain Approach," *Journal of Moral Education* 44, no.4 (2015), 496.

escape the revelation that, at its core, education is meant for the betterment of its students, and for the betterment of society as a whole.⁷² Holocaust education as a part of the social studies upholds this foundational pillar of education, encouraging students to become more empathetic, conscientious citizens. It is because of education's capacity for this growth that Holocaust Education has the potential to combat racism, xenophobia, anti-Semitism, and Holocaust denial. By its very nature, education combats these cancers; Holocaust Education merely focuses the direction of the transformative learning.

The Case for Holocaust Education

Dear Teacher:

I am a survivor of a concentration camp. My eyes saw what no man should witness. Gas chambers built by learned engineers. Children poisoned by educated physicians. Infants shot by trained nurses. Women and babies shot and burned by high school and college graduates. So, I am suspicious of education.

My request is: Help your students become more human.

Your efforts must never produce learned monsters, skilled psychopaths, educated Eichmanns. Reading, writing, and arithmetic are only important if they serve to make our children more humane.⁷³

Many educators/administrators have used this letter from a Holocaust Survivor as a means of motivation for all educators to help our students become more humane. How do we do this? For social studies educators, teaching the Holocaust is a means of teaching students to become more conscientious, empathetic, and humane. But just how important is the teaching of the Holocaust?

⁷² Jackson, *What is Education?*, 94.

⁷³ Quoted in David H. Lindquist, "Meeting a Moral Imperative: A Rationale for Teaching the Holocaust," *The Clearing House* 84, no.1 (2011), 26.

The importance of teaching the Holocaust cannot overstated; if the Holocaust is not taught, history becomes distorted, leaving gaps in understanding of how people perceive themselves and the world around them.⁷⁴ The Holocaust is widely considered to be a watershed event, a turning point in European history, and for the entire world. For historian Michael Berenbaum, the Holocaust represents something more:

The Holocaust has become the negative absolute in American society. In a world of relativism, we don't know what's bad, and we don't know what's good, but the one thing we can agree upon is that [the Holocaust] is absolute evil, and it has become the standard by which we judge evil and, therefore, the standard by which we begin to establish values.⁷⁵

This kind of emphasis on the Holocaust as a defining moment in the course of history is not lost on scholars or educators alike. Elie Wiesel, one of the most famous and influential survivors of the Holocaust and author of the bestselling book *Night*, argues that, “Auschwitz [used as a metaphor for the Holocaust in general] is a watershed event, a before and an after; after Auschwitz, nothing can ever be the same again.”⁷⁶ Thus, it seems clear that the Holocaust is an event in history that cannot be ignored. For schools, administrators, and teachers to pass over the Holocaust is to ignore, according to Berenbaum, “the standard by which we begin to establish values.”⁷⁷ For school systems and state legislatures to say there isn't enough funding, or that there are more important things to cover, is unsatisfactory, to say the least. There is nothing more important in education than to help students become better people.

⁷⁴ Lindquist, “Meeting a Moral Imperative,” 27.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 28.

⁷⁶ Jonathan Ward (Executive Producer), *The Holocaust: In Memory of Millions [Film]* (Alexandria, VA: The Discovery Channel, 1999).

⁷⁷ Lindquist, “Meeting a Moral Imperative,” 27.

Social Studies, The Holocaust, & Community Action

Moral thought leads to moral action. By teaching moral thought, the teaching of the Holocaust can encourage students to act morally, and even take community action to counter racism, xenophobia, and discrimination of any kind. This positive community action, as defined by the *C3 Framework for Social Studies Standards* created by the National Council for the Social Studies, is the highest level of student achievement within and outside the classroom. The 4th and highest dimension of the *C3 Framework for Social Studies Standards*, “Communicating Conclusions & Taking Informed Action,” states that:

Social Studies is the ideal staging ground for taking informed action because of its unique role in preparing students for civic life. In Social Studies, students use disciplinary knowledge, skills, and perspectives to inquire about problems involved in public issues; deliberate with other people about how to define and address issues; take constructive, independent, and collaborative action; reflect on their actions; and create and sustain groups.⁷⁸

Thus, the Social Studies is unique in its function as an agent of community action, and the teaching of the Holocaust presents itself as the foundation for proactive community action to counteract growing rates of anti-Semitism, racism, xenophobia, and discrimination of any kind. Many experts have looked deeply into the opportunities for positive action that teaching the Holocaust can create.

One such expert, Louise B. Jennings, conducted an ethnographic study of a bilingual fifth-grade classroom in Santa Barbara, California, implementing instruction on the Holocaust throughout the school year in the hopes of cultivating increased student awareness of “rights, respect, and responsibility,” as well as focusing intently on instruction concerning

⁷⁸ National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS), *College, Career, and Civic Life (C3) Framework for the Social Studies: Guidance for Enhancing the Rigor of K-12 Civics, Economics, Geography, and History* (Silver Spring, MD: NCSS, 2013), 60.

tolerance and intolerance.⁷⁹ Jennings found that, over the course of the year, students showed astounding growth in awareness of their own responsibilities as critical citizens that are empathetic and tolerant of others. This growth was confirmed by the final step of the study, an activity/project that required the fifth-grade students to engage in community action to promote tolerance and empathy.⁸⁰ According to the study, all students showed growth in their capacity to recognize acts of injustice, and many felt compelled to act in aid of those being mistreated.⁸¹ If this kind of study, even when conducted with fifth-graders, was extremely effective in transformative learning that promoted empathy and tolerance, the conclusion that Holocaust Education is effective as a means of positive social change is not a difficult conclusion to come to. A foil for racism and xenophobia, this instruction changed the lives of those students for the better. Jennings found that this study was done at the expense of other, possibly curriculum-based instruction, but that the positive effects of Holocaust education in this class were overwhelming.⁸² Thus, as Nel Noddings so aptly put it, Holocaust education fulfills one of the highest goals of education, to “encourage the growth of competent, caring, loving, and loveable people.”⁸³

Holocaust Education as a part of the Social Studies curriculum fulfills the highest potential of the discipline, intellectually challenging students while making connections with other historical events as well as current political issues concerning immigration, racism, and xenophobia, cultivating meaningful learning that leads to higher retention rates among

⁷⁹ Louise B. Jennings, “Challenges and Possibilities of Holocaust Education and Critical Citizenship: An Ethnographic Study of a Fifth-Grade Bilingual Class Revisited,” *Prospects* 40, no.1 (2010), 39.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 52-53.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 54.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 53-54.

⁸³ Claudia Katz & Sue Kuby, “America’s Most Wanted: Kids Who Care,” *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy* 41, no. 4 (1997), 317.

learners.⁸⁴ Multifaceted in breadth as well as depth, Holocaust education touches on many aspects of essential standards in public education while instilling moral and ethical values in students.

The Holocaust & Genocide Education

The Holocaust, when taught as an archetype of genocide, is extremely effective in teaching students the steps and factors necessary for genocide to occur. In 1996, Yale University's Gregory H. Stanton developed "The 8 Stages of Genocide," using the Holocaust as the archetype, discussing the stages by which genocide becomes a reality.⁸⁵ Identifying these stages is extremely important to instruction, as they provide students with a clear image of what can lead to the systematic destruction of a massive group of people if only because of ethnic and social differences.*⁸⁶ Stanton identifies *Classification* as the first stage of genocide, and it is this stage that is the most easily understandable for students. Teaching students that *Classification* stems from ideas of "us" and "them," a creation of group boundaries based on religion, ethnicity, or socioeconomic status, allows those students to explore their own natural biases and classifications that they make about themselves and other people. This classification, though natural and mostly benign, can turn into racism and xenophobia when negative classifications and biases enter into the perception of those doing the classifying. It is because of this reality that this first step is so important to teach to students; when students understand that racism, even their own biases, is the foundation of the process of genocide, they come face to face with just how easily their own biases can lead

⁸⁴ Fallace, *The Emergence of Holocaust Education in American Schools*, 181.

⁸⁵ Gregory H. Stanton, *The 8 Stages of Genocide* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1996), 2-3.

⁸⁶ The author has created a World History unit on the Holocaust that culminates in a Summative Assessment built around Stanton's work on Genocide, with much success.

to mass violence, just like the Germans did in the years preceding the Holocaust.⁸⁷ This confrontation of biases can be a powerful agent in the fight against anti-Semitism and other forms of racism by making students aware of their own biases, and having them understand.

The second stage of Genocide, as defined by Stanton, is *Symbolization*. This can include the naming of groups, like the Hutu and the Tutsi in Rwanda, or the identification of body features, like the stereotypically large nose attributed to Jews by anti-Semites.⁸⁸ *Symbolization*, much like *Classification*, is a natural element of humanity and society, but can become insidious. Students need to be made aware of their own symbols that represent people, and how that can create separation between people.⁸⁹ By making connections with current events, in which racial and ethnic tensions are at an all-time high, the teaching of the Holocaust as a form of education on the process of Genocide can open the eyes of students to see the reality of racism and dehumanization that is occurring all around them daily. This kind of teaching challenges students to face these dilemmas in their daily lives, challenges they will continue to encounter throughout their adult lives.⁹⁰

While the later stages of genocide are an inseparable part of the genocide process, the first two stages, “Classification & Symbolization,” are extremely important to the moral and ethical teaching of students. By focusing more on the social/interpersonal aspects of the genocide, this teaching can enable students to see these steps taking place in society. The teaching of the process of Genocide is paramount to teaching perception of the evils that abound around students every day, and Holocaust education is the greatest vehicle by which the tough questions that must be asked are approached.

⁸⁷ Stanton, *The 8 Stages of Genocide*, 3.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 3-4.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁹⁰ Lindquist, “Meeting a Moral Imperative,” 28-29.

Ease of Mandatory Holocaust Education

Making the teaching of the Holocaust mandatory would not be an extremely difficult task. While state legislatures, North Carolina's General Assembly being the most pertinent example, are quite unwilling to provide more funding for public education during this recovery period after the Recession, many states already have resources in place for teachers who want to teach the Holocaust in their classrooms. According to NC Policy Watch, North Carolina was given an F on two separate national studies of funding for public education in 2015, finding that North Carolina is on a trend of disinvestment in public education.⁹¹ Michael Abramson, the Chairman of the NC Council for the Holocaust, was adamant in his stance that making the teaching of the Holocaust a part of the standardized Essential Standards would take little-to-no extra funding from the state legislature.⁹² Since there are standing councils in many states that already provide materials and curricula for schools and teachers all across each state, it would not be a large jump to make the teaching of the Holocaust mandatory in many of these states. But to what extent should Holocaust education be made mandatory?

I propose that, in every World History class in public schools, a small 5-lesson mini-unit should be taught about the Holocaust and about Genocide. This lasts a week of instruction, and is long enough to cover and discuss the important topics of the Holocaust without requiring a large portion of the World History curriculum to be reworked, or for an entirely separate elective to be needed at the school. This would allow for teachers and students to achieve the kind of learning and growth possible and needed from Holocaust

⁹¹ Lindsay Wagner, "North Carolina Gets an F on Its Effort to Fund Public Schools," *NC Policy Watch* (June 10, 2015). <http://www.ncpolicywatch.com/2015/06/10/north-carolina-gets-an-f-on-its-effort-to-fund-public-schools/>.

⁹² Abramson, interview, March 2015.

education while not placing an undue burden on school systems and on the state legislatures, especially since the materials are already readily available to teachers and students. In conjunction with this paper, I have developed a five-day mini-unit on the Holocaust that touches on the important and complex moral and ethical issues that the Holocaust presents to students and educators alike. What follows is a description of the unit, and how it fulfills the essential standards while asking tough moral and ethical questions of the students about the Holocaust and about Humanity itself.

The Humanity of the Holocaust: A Mini Unit

The first lesson in the mini-unit is entitled “The Nazi Political Machine,” and is focused on teaching students about the rise of Hitler, the Nazi Party, and the power of propaganda. The lesson has students analyze Nazi propaganda and create propaganda of their own. Through this learning process, students see, first-hand, the propaganda the Nazis were using to cultivate a culture of hate, anti-Semitism, and xenophobia. Students prove this understanding by creating their own propaganda about something innocuous, while using many of the strategies used by the Nazis. Propaganda is an essential part of understanding the Holocaust, and is foundational in the ethical and moral growth of students as critical citizens. The lesson ends with a critical analysis of propaganda and politics in modern society. By tying in student experiences and the world around them, these lessons can help ensure that students become more conscientious of society’s issues and the world around them.

The second lesson in the unit is entitled “Conformity & Nazi Germany.” This is perhaps the most important lesson in the unit. In this lesson, students will analyze photos from the Holocaust depicting average citizens, German police, and officials from many conquered countries during WWII conforming to and complying with the wishes of the Nazi

government against the Jewish people. A study of *Kristallnacht* will follow. This will be juxtaposed with an excerpt from *The Diary of a Young Girl*, by Anne Frank, which depicts non-Jewish citizens helping Jews to hide from the Nazis. This lesson is extremely important, because it forces students to ask themselves the question: “What would I do in this situation?” This lesson emphasizes the dangers of “The Bystander Effect,” and encourages students to be critical citizens. This lesson is paramount for the ethical and moral growth of students who undertake this unit.

The third lesson is entitled “The Ghettoization of the Jews.” This lesson goes deeply into the process of ghettoization in Poland and Germany, and attempts to focus intensely on the survival of Jewish culture and the resilience of the Jewish people amidst such demeaning and cruel treatment. This lesson attempts to dispel the inaccuracy that the Jewish people were like cattle, tamely herded into pens across Europe. This lesson provides students with a deep introduction into Jewish culture prior to the Holocaust and its resilience during the ghettoization process.

The fourth lesson is entitled “The Holocaust: The Final Solution.” This lesson refuses to sensationalize the violence of the Holocaust, refuses to give cold statistics about the number of casualties, and attempts to show the human elements of the Final Solution, rather than to only include violence, death, and statistics. This lesson will delve into the experience of the concentration camps, suicide rates among the Einsatzgruppen, and the attempts of the Nazis to dehumanize their captives. By doing so, this lesson attempts to break the grip of sensationalized violence over the Holocaust, and bring students to the gripping and powerful moral and ethical questions the Holocaust offers up to those who would listen.

The final lesson brings to bear all that the students have learned about the Holocaust, and attempts to cultivate meaningful learning by linking the steps of the Holocaust to the 8 Stages of Genocide created by Gregory Stanton. By seeing how these puzzle pieces they have encountered fit together to create the tragedy of genocide, students can then apply that knowledge to other genocides that have occurred in recent history. By doing so, students prove that they have understood the steps necessary for the Holocaust to occur, and will have hopefully grappled with tough moral questions about society, government, religion, and themselves through the process.

Notice that none of the lessons above, with the exception of the Final Solution lesson, are typical lessons on the Holocaust. The creation of this mini-unit was an attempt to transcend the current trend in Holocaust education, which tends to sensationalize the violence of the Holocaust and relate the history of the event as a part of WWII, rather than delve deeper into the difficult human questions that the Holocaust presents.⁹³ If Holocaust Education is to be mandated, there are pitfalls and challenges that need to be addressed.

Pitfalls & Challenges

If Holocaust Education is to be mandated, the violence of the Holocaust cannot be, must not be, sensationalized by curriculum and educators. Lessons on the Holocaust must not be obsessed with the firing squads, gas chambers, medical experiments, and the graphic images depicted in surviving photos and Hollywood movies.⁹⁴ Doing so, and throwing graphic image after image in front of the students can overwhelm them, and create a sense of

⁹³ Welker, "Searching for the Educational Imperative in Holocaust Education," 104-105.

⁹⁴ Samuel Totten & Stephen Feinberg, *Teaching & Studying the Holocaust* (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 2000), 17-18.

horror that is more like watching a car wreck than closely examining a historical event. As Welker notes, students gain absolutely nothing from this horror, except for becoming desensitized to the violence of the Holocaust after being bombarded with it over and over again.⁹⁵ Thus, if Holocaust education is to be mandatory in every World History class, teachers need to be careful in the approach toward the violence of the Holocaust. Discussing the violence of the Holocaust is a very important part of Holocaust curricula, but must be approached carefully and with dignity, so as not to turn the tragedy of the Holocaust into an action movie.

The very atmosphere of modern public education presents a massive roadblock to effective Holocaust education. Thanks to this new age of standardized testing and intense teacher-accountability systems, in-depth forays into any historical topic in Social Studies classrooms have become extremely difficult to complete, if not entirely impossible.⁹⁶ Lessons on the Holocaust tend to be rushed, and tend to lean toward superficial coverage, rather than the in-depth investigation that the Holocaust demands.⁹⁷ Fallace notes that he has witnessed the Holocaust being taught in a high school classroom in only three minutes, in a PowerPoint on the effects of World War II.⁹⁸ If the Holocaust is to be taught in public schools, it must be done right or not at all. To gloss over the Holocaust in such a manner is to send a message to students that it was not important, or that it was merely an aftereffect of WWII, missing a powerful opportunity to effect change for the better in our students.

⁹⁵ Welker, "Searching for the Educational Imperative in Holocaust Education," 104.

⁹⁶ Fallace, *The Emergence of Holocaust Education in American Schools*, 185.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 185-186.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 186.

Conclusion

“An education without courage is useless... the course of human history is determined by what people believe, what values they hold, and most of all by whether or not they will act upon them.”⁹⁹ This statement concerning education gets to the heart of why Holocaust Education is so important, especially at this point in history. With Holocaust denial, xenophobia, and anti-Semitism on the rise world-wide, and the number of living Holocaust survivors dwindling, our education system must create moral, ethical, and conscientious citizens that have the courage to act upon the values they hold and to affect positive change in our world. In an education system that is so focused on test scores and accountability systems, Holocaust Education provides the opportunity for such positive change in students. Currently, only 6 states have made the teaching of the Holocaust mandatory, and many of those have missed the mark when it comes to the powerful ethical questions students face when they are properly taught the Holocaust. Education, at its core, is an ethical endeavor that is centered on the betterment of its students as people. Holocaust Education can fulfill that purpose, if we can only have the courage.

⁹⁹ H. Regenery, “The Responsibility to be Educated: A Graduation Address,” *The Intercollegiate Review* 31 (1996), 24.

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