



Holocaust Education The Way to Prevent Genocide

In “Anti-Semitism on the Rise” (page 104), I share a lot of statistics on the increase in anti-Semitic incidents, especially in K-12 schools. I write about the lack of Holocaust knowledge in America, particularly among millennials (those ages 18–34). I also note that while Indiana mandates schools teach about the Holocaust and genocide, how and what is taught and how much time is spent on it is left up to individual school systems. The students I spoke with for the story said there is little coverage given to the Holocaust in any class, and no single class is dedicated to discussing the Holocaust as a subject.

There are those who feel public schools shouldn’t teach the Holocaust at all, for any number of reasons. Or that the emphasis should be on genocide generally, with little or no mention of the Holocaust specifically.

But while genocide has, sadly, been a part of human history long before the Holocaust, it was the scale and scope of the Holocaust that gave us the very word “genocide.” Raphael Lemkin, a Jewish lawyer from Poland, first coined the term, combining the Greek word *genos* (race, tribe) with the Latin *cide* (killing), in a 1944 book he wrote describing Nazi Holocaust atrocities.

The Holocaust is our own horrible, hateful history and we are doing our children a disservice when we try to downscale, deny, or ignore it.

I don’t remember learning about the Holocaust; it was simply part of what I knew as I grew up in a small, central Indiana town in the ’60s and ’70s. I do remember that *The Diary of a Young Girl* by Anne Frank was required reading at some point in my public school education. I remember discussing the Holocaust in high school history classes. My dad subscribed to *Life* magazine and we had Time/

Life books around the house, so there were plenty of gruesome Holocaust photos to look at, too. The Holocaust was something everyone knew about.

My own daughters, who are now in their 30s, learned about the Holocaust in much the same way. My older daughter, was, as her sister said recently, “obsessed” with the Holocaust for a time. It started when she read Lois Lowry’s Newbery Medal-winning novel *Number the Stars* in elementary school. She continued reading other books on the Holocaust and, in middle school, asked to watch *Schindler’s List*. I was unsure but finally relented, with the understanding that we would watch it together and discuss it afterward. Her comments were insightful and, despite my fears, she wasn’t traumatized.

Teaching children about the Holocaust may be more important now than ever. With increasing anti-Semitism around the globe—and an increase in hate crimes generally—teaching children about the Holocaust might prove to be a deterrent. “Never Again” wasn’t meant to be a marketing campaign. It was supposed to be a promise.

Genocide continues today. The website genocidewatch.org lists five countries in its “genocide emergency” category: Syria, Sudan, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia, and Burma/Myanmar. Fifteen other countries are listed under the “watch” and “warning” categories.

With that and all of the grim statistics concerning the rise in anti-Semitism, it appears we didn’t learn the lesson we hoped the Holocaust had taught. And, sadly, it seems “Never Again” means nothing to younger generations.

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