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To cite this article: Willa Witherow-Culpepper & Timothy Williams (15 Apr 2025): Learning about and from the Holocaust? on the limits of Holocaust education as civic education, Holocaust Studies, DOI: [10.1080/17504902.2025.2481687](https://doi.org/10.1080/17504902.2025.2481687)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/17504902.2025.2481687>



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Published online: 15 Apr 2025.



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Learning about and from the Holocaust? on the limits of Holocaust education as civic education

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ABSTRACT

Policymakers promote Holocaust education for achieving civic and anti-racist outcomes, yet the empirical efficacy of Holocaust education is questionable. We suggest that Holocaust education remains politically popular in the USA and UK as the Holocaust's framing as an exceptional event allows framing education as non-partisan and apolitical. However, such focus on the Holocaust as universalized, ahistorical and apolitical constitute core weaknesses as an educational device. Also, we argue that Holocaust education grounds suffering in a unique historical moment that lack clear ties to today's issues. The article suggests a more cautious reliance on Holocaust education for civic and anti-racist outcomes.

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 10 December 2023

Accepted 14 March 2025

KEYWORDS

Holocaust education; civics education; USA; UK; racism

Introduction

Social upheaval and political crises – Brexit, contested elections, the COVID-19 pandemic, and social justice protests surrounding highly public police killings – create (geo)-politically challenging and societally polarized times. Schools respond with special assemblies, dedicated crisis and counselling staff, or topical lesson plans in subjects like Social Studies and Civics in the United States or Citizenship and PSHE (Personal, Social, Health, and Economic Education) in the United Kingdom. Education systems prepare young people to make sense of the wider world and their place within it, and in the process shape young citizens. In this context, many politicians and practitioners expect Holocaust education (referred to in some literature as ‘teaching and learning about the Holocaust’¹) to convey civic values, with Holocaust education enjoying broad institutional and political support often denied to more contemporary frameworks of anti-racism and tolerance education. Academia has progressed from the primacy of the Holocaust towards comparative analysis, but this is not widely reflected in classrooms.

In an increasingly divisive social climate, legislators and policymakers in the USA and UK have been capitalizing on social discontent surrounding ‘identity issues’ related to

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race, sexuality and gender. In the UK, the former government cracked down on syllabus expansions that included minority voices and perspectives, then education secretary Nadhim Zahawi labeling it ‘cultural vandalism’ (*Financial Times*, July 15, 2022). Further, former UK Women and Equalities Minister Kemi Badenoch told the House of Commons that schools teaching about white privilege or supporting ‘the anti-capitalist Black Lives Matter group’ would be doing so illegally, although the legal foundations of this statement remain questionable (*The Guardian*, October 26, 2020).

In the US, Wisconsin’s legislature furthered a bill outlawing the use of terms and concepts like ‘equity,’ ‘systematic racism’ and ‘multiculturalism’ in schools and corporations (*The Hill*, September 9, 2021) until vetoed by the state’s Governor Tony Evers (*WiscNews*, February 5, 2022). Similar bills targeting DEI (diversity, equity and inclusion) initiatives in state-funded schools or outlawing critical race theory were introduced across the majority of the United States, with Utah, Texas, Florida, Tennessee, Alabama, Idaho, Kansas, South and North Dakota each adopting laws as others continue processing through state legislatures as of May 2024 (*BestColleges*, May 22, 2024). The state government of Florida passed legislation titled ‘Stop W.O.K.E.’² (Wrongs to Our Kids and Employees), that necessitated the suspension of school classes on African American studies which were deemed to be ‘lacking educational value’ (*The Guardian*, January 20, 2023). In Florida, state legislation forces school bookfair operators to remove anything engaging with identity issues and school districts to pursue punitive action against educators who discuss race or sexuality. Other nationwide legislative actions removed lesson requirements on Martin Luther King Jr and the civil rights and women’s suffrage movements (*ABC News*, July 23, 2021), while requiring teachers discussing controversial topics to do so by giving ‘deference to both sides’ (*The Texas Tribune*, June 16, 2021), even though this could problematically facilitate moral relativism such as in one Texas school district’s instruction to include ‘opposing views’ on the Holocaust, raising fears of denialism (*The Guardian*, October 19, 2021).

While recent controversial educational initiatives in Florida generated headlines worldwide, it was also one of the first states to adopt mandatory Holocaust education, then also framed in the language of social justice. Intriguingly there has been little to no backlash against Holocaust education even though right-wing inclined politicians criticize and seek to limit other social justice initiatives. Unlike other standardized school subjects, the efficacy of Holocaust education is not expected to be measured just in *what* information students learn about the Holocaust, but also *how* they can learn *from* the Holocaust as a form of moral education and engagement.³ This can cause tension for educators when teaching the Holocaust as a historical event but with ‘social, moral and/or civic teaching aims.’⁴ These learning goals may not be aligned, making it difficult to measure success or failure of Holocaust education in both knowledge gain and civics and anti-racist outcomes, such as empathy building, tolerance or respect for human rights. As discussed below, previous studies suggest that Holocaust education performs ineffectively in building knowledge and is also limited in attaining these broader goals. Holocaust education is widespread as a mandatory historical and social studies subject in state-funded education across the USA, and is the only compulsory historic event in the curriculum in England,⁵ with high voluntary engagement among the devolved education systems of Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland.⁶ This contrasts the lack of consensus on how contemporary education addressing civics

and anti-racist outcomes such as tolerance, empathy and human rights should be achieved, especially given the comparable political hostility to race- and identity-based education initiatives. Politicians instead expect Holocaust education to fulfil this role. Though few studies suggest that Holocaust education succeeds in achieving these civic and anti-racist outcomes, teachers frequently remain convinced of the educational appeal and importance of teaching the Holocaust as a universally applicable lesson about prejudice and the civic duty of countering intolerance.⁷ Reacting to this contradiction in this article we ask: *Why do policymakers advocate Holocaust education despite limited evidence of its efficacy and in contrast to the political hostility towards race and other identity-based forms of education?*

Holocaust education is cited by policymakers hoping to combat hate crimes or other discriminatory behavior, suggesting prevention as a desired civic outcome. For example, one member of Virginia's state Commission to Combat Antisemitism recommended expansive education on the basis that 'studies have shown that when people participate in Holocaust education, when they know something about the Holocaust, they're far less likely to be involved in antisemitic activities' (WVTF, December 10, 2022). It should be noted that while the Virginia commission's report did not cite any of the said studies, it did recommend legislation prohibiting 'partisan political or ideological indoctrination in classrooms and curricula at state-supported K-12 schools and higher education institutions' and associated political advocacy with 'subsequent antisemitic actions.'⁸ While politicians and practitioners clearly expect Holocaust education to convey civic values as illustrated in this example, they remain considerably less clear on the mechanisms they assume to be at work in facilitating this. Despite the opacity of the reasoning behind these programmes, they remain popular. We argue that there is a moral foundation to these claims based on popular beliefs rather than actual outcomes, which are lacking as we explain later. Given that policymakers make vague references to studies on the links between Holocaust education and increased tolerance among its recipients, it is worth interrogating the substance of relevant studies and literature further.

This article focuses on pre-teen and adolescent education (predominantly middle and high schools in the USA, secondary schools in the UK) and draws on examples from existing studies and recommendations made in the last twenty years of Holocaust education in the USA,⁹ UK¹⁰ and EU.¹¹ These studies note limitations in measuring Holocaust education's effectiveness resulting in a curious disjuncture between the political appeal of Holocaust education, what it promises, and how these have endured despite limited evidence of efficacy. Given that a generation has passed since Holocaust education's first introduction to US and UK schools, a critical discussion of its role in facilitating civics outcomes and countering intolerance is important and timely. Though education is meant to transmit values of good citizenship like tolerance, empathy and bystander intervention, it is increasingly divisive which topics this should be related to and how it should be discussed. And thus the Holocaust functions as a useful framework as it remains simultaneously a historical and dehistoricized educational paragon. To answer our research question, we first explore the extent of Holocaust education in the USA and UK through legislative mandates, before investigating how policymakers and practitioners hope that Holocaust education should attain civic and anti-racist outcomes, and whether these are supported by academic studies attempting to measure these

outputs. Finally, we discuss possibilities as to why Holocaust education is still popular despite its limitations.

Holocaust education in the USA and UK

In reaction to a rise in antisemitic incidents, in 2002 and 2003 the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) announced a commitment by member states (including the US and UK) to promote educational programs to combat antisemitism, including remembrance and education of the Holocaust with resources and evaluations of best practice carried out by the OSCE's Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights. While this connection between combatting antisemitism and Holocaust education is commonly invoked today, awareness of the Holocaust and education and memorialization efforts did not ensue for a long time after the Holocaust's end. Historian Mary Fulbrook identifies a process of three stages in emerging acknowledgment of the Holocaust: the 'era of the witness' when survivors were considered too unreliable or inconsistent with the limited information immediately available, the 'era of the survivor' as children of perpetrators and victims began to interrogate their parent's experiences, and the 'era of the victim.'¹² This final era began with the 1961 Eichmann trial in which survivors became increasingly centered in justice proceedings and memorialization and were invited to share their stories. Soon after, the topic became publicly discussed through the critically acclaimed *Shoah* documentary and the 1978 NBC fictionalized miniseries *Holocaust*.¹³ While Holocaust survivor Elie Wiesel deemed *Holocaust* 'untrue, offensive, cheap: as a TV production, the film an insult to those who perished and to those who survived,'¹⁴ it was watched by an estimated 120 million viewers in the US and 20 million West Germans (*BBC*, January 30, 2019). Six months later President Jimmy Carter established the President's Commission on the Holocaust, with Congress unanimously voting to implement the report's recommendation for a national museum in 1980. The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM) opened in 1993, the same year Steven Spielberg's *Schindler's List* was released and has since been part of the cultural imaginary of the Holocaust.¹⁵

The emergence of political and media engagement with the stories of Holocaust victims and memorialization lent itself to increased educational engagement, adhering to Theodor Adorno's plea that 'the premier demand upon all education is that Auschwitz not happen again.'¹⁶ By the 1980s Holocaust commemorations were no longer the domain of Jewish spaces like synagogues but being held in major cities and the capitol, integrating non-Jewish religious leaders and politicians.¹⁷ Educational adoption was uneven given the decentralized state system of American governance, requiring localized advances. Two New Jersey school districts developed a curriculum piloted by the Anti-Defamation League in 1983, including sections on 'the nature of human behavior,' 'views of prejudice and genocide,' 'resistance and intervention' and 'related issues of conscience and moral responsibility.'¹⁸ A 1990 Gallup survey conducted on behalf of the ADL found that between 80 and 90% of American respondents believed there were valuable lessons to be learned from studying the Holocaust, and that it 'would encourage students to become more tolerant of minority groups in general, not only Jews.'¹⁹ By 1994, New Jersey, New York and Florida became the first US states to adopt mandatory Holocaust education, each invoking similar logics for their mandates. For example, the

wording of the legislation in New Jersey suggests a link between Holocaust education and prevention:

New Jersey has recently become the focal point of national attention for the most venomous and vile of ethnic hate speeches. There is an inescapable link between violence and vandalism and ethnic and racial intolerance. ... national studies indicate that fewer than 25% of students have an understanding of organized attempts throughout history to eliminate various ethnic groups through a systematic program of mass killing or genocide.²⁰

Early adoption in New Jersey and other states may be tied to communities of resettled survivors and their children,²¹ while the timing markedly follows a rise in hate speech and hate crime, characterized as 'ethnic' or 'racial' in the New Jersey mandate. Interestingly it is not characterized as antisemitic, suggesting that Holocaust education is viewed as an antidote to other forms of hate besides antisemitism. In recent years many more states have introduced compulsory Holocaust education in schools, including those as politically and geographically diverse as Arkansas, Wisconsin, Arizona and Massachusetts.²² A generation after Holocaust education was first introduced, now 17 other states have dedicated education commissions and task forces exploring the possibility of similar mandates,²³ and five states have introduced 'permissive statute' recommendations that are non-binding. This highlights both the popularity of Holocaust education as well as concomitant hopes for civic and anti-racist outcomes.

Education historian Thomas D. Fallace²⁴ suggests that this development of US Holocaust consciousness originated in the 'affective revolution' of education that sought to provide moral frameworks and value processing for students. This approach positions the Holocaust as a historical event second to the universal lessons that could be gleaned from it as an 'extreme example of moral corruption ... in learning about the Holocaust, these teachers hoped, students would explore the relationship between the individual and society in a way that would be relevant to their own lives.'²⁵ The Holocaust provided a backdrop of evil Nazis and innocent Jewish victims against which progressive educators of the 1970s could develop the moral reasoning and values of students no matter their ethnicity or religion. Despite its origins among educators in New Jersey, Fallace links the endurance and growing breadth of Holocaust education in the United States to the bipartisan importance placed on it by both liberal and conservative legislators and policymakers.²⁶ As an 'affective revolution' identity and emotions among students were key, and yet despite the political shift towards rejection of so-called 'identity issues,' legislative language often reflects the 'affective revolution' and its principles.

By contrast, other states frame the Holocaust as one of a series of world events instructive in producing cosmopolitan citizens, global interconnectedness, and responsibility for human rights. Such an approach can be found in a recent New York extension of Holocaust education that included it under the rubric of 'Courses of Instruction in Patriotism and Citizenship and in Certain Historic Documents,' now taught alongside the Irish potato famine, slavery and the Underground Railroad, prescribing 'courses of instruction in patriotism, citizenship, civic education and values, our shared history of diversity, the role of religious tolerance in this country, and human rights issues, with particular attention to the study of the inhumanity of genocide.'²⁷ This is similar to approaches recommended by the United Nations and European Union that encourage 'human rights education' as a multifaceted effort of which the Holocaust is a central but not lone

pillar,²⁸ thus ‘cultivating the cognitive, socio-emotional and behavioral outcomes associated with Global Citizenship Education.’²⁹

In the US there is a marked focus on the Holocaust as expected to have an intrinsically significant impact due to moral value. For example, recent mandating of Holocaust education in North Carolina stipulates that ‘[k]nowledge of the Holocaust is essential to provide students with the fundamental understanding of geography, history, and political systems necessary to make informed choices on issues that affect individuals, communities, states, and nations.’³⁰

Holocaust education is explicitly justified as both a moral duty to learn about but also an ethical need to learn from the Holocaust, as exemplified in the 2018 Kentucky mandate requiring every public middle and high school curriculum to include instruction on the Holocaust:

Through these studies, students can understand that genocide is preventable and not inevitable. Bearing witness to the Shoah enables students to ‘Never Forget’ so that events such as these may never happen again. This becomes a central and compelling reason to engage in Holocaust and genocide studies so that students become informed and critically literate, socially connected, respectful of diversity and ethically responsible and engaged.³¹

The introduction to the New Jersey Holocaust education mandate explains this in more depth:

The instruction shall enable pupils to identify and analyze applicable theories concerning human nature and behavior; to understand that genocide is a consequence of prejudice and discrimination; and to understand that issues of moral dilemma and conscience have a profound impact on life. The instruction shall further emphasize the personal responsibility that each citizen bears to fight racism and hatred whenever and wherever it happens.³²

This implicit link between the Holocaust as required instruction and the molding of young people into engaged citizens as determined through tolerance (and therefore upholding democratic society) appeared in Holocaust mandates from their inception, such as Florida’s 1994 Required Instruction:

A watershed event in the history of humanity, to be taught in a manner that leads to an investigation of human behavior, an understanding of the ramifications of prejudice, racism, and stereotyping, and an examination of what it means to be a responsible and respectful person, for the purposes of encouraging tolerance of diversity in a pluralistic society and for nurturing and protecting democratic values and institutions.³³

These examples suggest a very broad remit of learning outcomes expected from knowledge on this historical event. Similarly, the Congressional ‘Never Again Education Act’ in 2020 expanded the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum’s (USHMM) educational programming nationwide. A banner reading ‘Never Again’ in large letters is a common sight over the entrance of USHMM, a building that many legislators and their staff members will regularly pass on their way to work on Capitol Hill, and appears in much of the museum’s literature and merchandising. A common inscription on Holocaust memorials and sites of memory, the phrase ‘Never Again’ has become synonymous with the perceived preventative power of Holocaust memory, as reflected in the wording of the 2020 Act:

Holocaust education provides a context in which to learn about the danger of what can happen when hate goes unchallenged and there is indifference in the face of oppression of others; learning how and why the Holocaust happened is an important component of the education of citizens of the United States.³⁴

As exemplified by these excerpts, much official government communication shares the same language emphasizing the timeliness of lessons that foreground tolerance, civics and responsibility among school-age young people while also promoting Holocaust education's universal applicability. This weighty expectation can be found across all US state mandates: words such as 'diversity,' 'bigotry,' 'hatred,' 'responsibility,' 'protection,' 'stereotyping,' 'prevention,' 'intolerance,' 'democracy,' 'understanding' and 'institutions' occur frequently across state mandates and highlight the broad remit that politicians attribute to Holocaust education.³⁵ Here we can thus see a conceptualization of Holocaust education as a component of civics education, that otherwise focuses on US-centric issues of democracy, the Constitution, and the role of government in American life and citizenship. Through demonstrating the extreme effects of discrimination and prejudice, policymakers believe the Holocaust can instill values of tolerance in young people. As such, this builds on ambitions for Holocaust education to move from 'learning about' the Holocaust to 'learning from' the Holocaust,³⁶ as conceived in the affective revolution of the 1970s.³⁷

At a similar time to early developments in the USA, in 1991 England became the first European country to include the Holocaust as a mandatory subject within the curriculum at all state secondary schools.³⁸ Although there is no statutory requirement in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, schools widely teach the Holocaust there too.³⁹ Citing the rise of antisemitism and Holocaust denial, in September 2024 British Prime Minister Keir Starmer pledged £2.2 million to the Holocaust Education Trust's student visitor program to Auschwitz and promised the expansion of mandatory Holocaust education to schools that do not follow the national curriculum (*Haaretz*, October 17, 2024). In parallel, the teaching of 'British Values' (democracy, rule of law, individual liberty, and mutual respect and tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs) was introduced alongside the launch of the PREVENT intervention and deradicalization scheme following the 2005 terror attacks in London to improve 'the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils.'⁴⁰ One educational resource describes the inclusion of the British Values into lessons plans as 'fundamental to British society and as promoting cohesion and integration ... a way to protect children from extremist ideologies and to help prepare them for life in modern Britain'⁴¹ with the integration of British Values recommended in many of the same subjects in which Holocaust education is taught.

While the Holocaust is a mandatory part of the History curriculum for state schools in England, it is also taught in English and Religious Education (RE).⁴² As such, a survey revealed that for relevant subject teachers in English secondary schools (PSHE, Citizenship, English, RE and History) historical knowledge ranked among the lowest objectives, while five other aims were deemed most important.⁴³

1. *To explore the implications of remaining silent and indifferent in the face of the oppression of others*

2. *To reflect upon the moral and/or ethical questions raised by events of the Holocaust*

3. *To explore the roles and responsibilities of individuals, organisations and governments when confronted with human rights violations and/or policies of genocide*

4. *To learn the lessons of the Holocaust and to ensure that a similar human atrocity never happens again*

5. *To develop an understanding of the roots and ramifications of prejudice, racism and stereotyping in any society*

If teachers do not prioritize learning historical facts about the Holocaust as an educational objective, then the perceived moral and social lessons from the Holocaust and its application to the student's own society and their responsibilities as emerging citizens within it become key, reinforcing our above argument that Holocaust education goes beyond other scholastic subjects in seeking to instill values. Overall, teachers report the teaching of the Holocaust as an experience distinct from other topics or units covered in the same courses,⁴⁴ but one that is difficult to assess for 'higher-order thinking' and moral reasoning as outcomes rather than focusing on test information retrieval.⁴⁵ The United Kingdom also phrases the mandate applying to English schools in preventative terms:

The Government believes it is important that pupils are taught the history and understand the appalling events of the Holocaust, and to understand how society can prevent the repeat of such a catastrophe ... At its best, Holocaust education can lead students towards being active and informed citizens.⁴⁶

From its inception, Holocaust education was clearly intended to do so much more than teach students facts or test them on statistics of its events. The process of delving deeper-to explain and ideally help students understand the factors that contributed to the Holocaust- was assumed to be a transformative one whose lessons students could extend to intolerance and prejudice within their own society. The actual mechanisms of this process require closer examination, before discussing their efficacy within the context of politically popular longevity.

Mechanisms for Holocaust education's effects: empathy and upstanding

There is decidedly more emphasis *that* Holocaust education is important in creating more empathetic citizens than *how* this education is supposed to achieve this. While teachers and education specialists are often consulted in the process of forming Holocaust education policy, they are also tasked with executing it after it has undergone political review and rewriting. Policies on Holocaust education and educational materials used by practitioners seldom specify precisely the mechanisms through which they expect Holocaust education to affect civics and anti-racist outcomes. Nonetheless we now turn to two potential mechanisms, discussing how they can affect change through Holocaust education as well some of the limitations they experience in practice: fostering empathy with the victim and encouraging upstanding.

First, empathy with the victim is implicitly writ large as the key mechanism.⁴⁷ 'Historical empathy' is an established teaching practice; for example, the American Historical Association defines as one of its core missions to 'develop empathy toward people in the context of their distinctive historical moments.'⁴⁸ However, there is also debate about appropriate conceptualization and operationalization of historical empathy in

sensitive areas like teaching about the Holocaust or the transatlantic slave trade. In asking students to remove themselves from a purely cognitive standpoint and sense of historical superiority, the process intends historical contextualization, followed by perspective asking and understanding resulting in affective connection.⁴⁹ This approach is not without peril, and can risk students identifying with historical actors, sympathizing and even condoning behaviors of the past rather than engaging in critical thought about diverse points of view.⁵⁰ To avoid these pitfalls, cognitive–affective approaches stress the role of ‘ethical judgement’ and ‘caring’ to draw a connection with present and future dimensions.⁵¹ The past-present connection is one that practitioners feel passionate about and as two curriculum specialists vowed that ‘if they [students] do not care to use history in the present, then we should put away our packets of primary sources and allow students to double up on their study of French or chemistry’⁵² despite the lack of data on how historical empathy might translate to current practice.

In asking students to ‘consider personal similarities’ between themselves and historical figures to contextualize the materials as relatable and important,⁵³ ‘the ultimate purpose in promoting such moral responses is to foster a desire to prevent similar wrongs or to perpetuate similar rights in the present.’⁵⁴ That ‘historical empathy’ can develop students’ sense of agency and assist them in drawing parallels with their current world is the operational assumption of practitioners tasked with creating engaging lesson plans and classroom exercises around historical source material, as well as the dual agenda of both historical and moral/civic learning goals.⁵⁵

Survivor testimonies play a particular role alongside other emotionally engaging materials expected to not only transmit information about the Holocaust but elicit emotional and moral change. First-hand testimony of Holocaust survivors had long been considered an optimal method of engagement for students,⁵⁶ but with relatively few survivors left alive, policymakers and education practitioners have become anxious about how to replicate the power of in-person oral history through recordings or other documentary forms. This attributed power becomes clear, for example, when former UK Prime Minister David Cameron lamented, ‘There will be a time when it won’t be possible for survivors to go into our schools and to talk about their experiences, and to make sure we learn the lessons of the dreadful events that happened.’⁵⁷ Museums dedicated to the Holocaust or that host specialized exhibits sometimes seek to offer an immersive learning experience using new technology to hear survivors outside of a classroom lesson (*NPR*, April 10, 2022), although this can provoke other limitations. In a study of class visits to USHMM, students found artifacts or graphic audiovisual cues most memorable; but when asked about them later their knowledge was reductive and focused emotionally rather than intellectually on one aspect.⁵⁸ In feeling ‘swept up’ by the disturbing content on photographic and video displays, students risk meeting an ‘empathy ceiling’ in which they are overwhelmed by provocative depictions of atrocity and subconsciously decrease both their emotional and intellectual information intake.⁵⁹ And yet this is suggestive that empathy can serve as a mechanism for how Holocaust education can affect civics and anti-racist outcomes, albeit in a limited fashion.

Attempts to bridge the gap between the current generation of students and the absence of survivors providing in-person oral testimony have seen the development of technologically cutting-edge tools like artificial intelligence and holograms to allow students to ask now-deceased individuals questions. The senior vice president of education and

exhibitions at the Illinois Holocaust Museum & Education Center told a journalist that museum visitors were ‘more comfortable with the holograms than the real survivors, because they know they won’t be judged’ (*The Atlantic*, April 3, 2023). The museum also offers virtual-reality tours of Auschwitz (a project piloted so far in three schools), with headsets providing audio from survivors alongside computer generated recreations of familial houses and a boxcar to Auschwitz, detailed with the outlined shapes of animated figures and soundtracks of crying babies (*The Atlantic*, April 3, 2023). While such immersive approaches that suggest authenticity can be viewed critically,⁶⁰ they are certainly centered on provoking empathy.

The second suggested mechanism relates to discussions of rescuers, tying into a recent shift to include or prioritize ‘upstanding’ through moral responsibility and intervention. This approach is a conscious and innovative departure from the empathy norm.⁶¹ For example, Facing History and Ourselves (FHAO) offers modules and examples such as ‘How to be an Upstander: Acting Against Indifference’ and ‘a young upstander stands up to hate.’⁶² Holocaust survivor and psychologist Ervin Staub has transitioned this approach into a peer intervention training program for civil society actors, focusing on ‘active bystandership.’⁶³ Some promising results of this approach can be seen for 10–11-year-olds in Jennings’s study of a multilingual fifth-grade classroom in California where the Holocaust was included in a program on Rights, Respect and Responsibility.⁶⁴ While engagement was mainly demonstrated by asking students to link it with designed ‘community action’ projects, the author identifies an unscripted ‘authentic action step’ when English-speaking students challenged being separated from their Spanish-speaking peers: ‘the students in Room 18 had grown in their capacity to recognize acts of injustice, to articulate and deliberate the issues, and to take collective action to make a difference.’⁶⁵ While Jennings asserts that this year-long education program has provided students with the vocabulary to communicate their feelings and objections around injustice, the research design does not allow us to conclude that Holocaust education lessons were a sole driver considering interpersonal relationships, emotional maturing and other contributing factors over the course of a year in a classroom.

While this narrative has been reframed through a shift in terminology to describe Jewish resistance and survival as ‘self-help’ in academic research,⁶⁶ educators rarely categorize Jewish resistance as ‘upstanders’ in these lessons and instead consign them to the status of victims (*The Atlantic*, April 3, 2023). Teaching materials from Yad Vashem and FHAO both using the phrase ‘spiritual and physical’ resistance and emphasizing dignity and humanity when describing the experiences of Jews within the ghettos and camp.⁶⁷ The Holocaust Education Trust recognizes the prevalence of Jewish survival narratives highlighting non-Jewish rescuers, recommending that students over the age of 13 and taking History, Religious Education, or Citizenship as scholastic subjects reflect on the different possible forms of resistance, and that educators should consciously avoid stereotyping Jews as passive victims.⁶⁸

Limited success of Holocaust education

Systematic research in this area is a relatively new phenomenon, primarily conducted after 2000 with the intention of measuring knowledge levels and attitudinal change, but without a field-wide consensus on what is ideal or adequate knowledge regarding

the Holocaust that could be expected as an educational outcome.⁶⁹ Fundamentally, measuring how Holocaust knowledge is supposed to affect civics and anti-racist outcomes is empirically challenging and relatively under-researched, with a recent bibliometric study on Holocaust education identifying only 117 research publications in post-1945 scholarship,⁷⁰ of which most studies are qualitative and results remain disparate.⁷¹ Furthermore, scholarship that draws on survey methods to measure attitudinal change as a result of Holocaust education is lacking, and rarely include control groups.⁷² So, while there are some insights into Holocaust education's suggested impact and efficacy, these remain relatively detached. Nonetheless, in this section we discuss some of the studies that have engaged the efficacy of Holocaust education.

A minimal expectation of Holocaust education is that it should increase knowledge of the Holocaust while helping students to understand this complex and horrific event, which policymakers and educators assume will result in less antisemitism within a society through better knowledge.⁷³ However, academics and specialists invited to inform on policy have been skeptical as to this intended effect. Historian Nicholas Kinloch warned against a 'dangerously non-historical set of assumptions' that would burden teachers and students with 'making the world a better place' instead of 'what happened and why,' and cautioned that 'racism will not be eradicated by drawing false comparisons with Nazi Germany.'⁷⁴ Educator Paul Salmons told the UK government that it was difficult to prove a link between increased tolerance and Holocaust education, a latent problem in measuring the effects of any 'values education,'⁷⁵ while historian Debórah Dwork supplied a memorandum that while 'there is no empirical evidence that Holocaust education either is needed to serve as a vaccination against racism, or in fact does so function, students clearly believe that is its role.'⁷⁶ Survey data from the UK found 83% of student respondents believed studying the Holocaust at school was important, but the report does not inform on why they believe this, and 81.8% found it an interesting subject, although this did not result in sufficient knowledge or understanding as measured by the survey's authors.⁷⁷ This is complemented by qualitative data on US student motivations for learning about the Holocaust that indicated four reasons: personal interest, to achieve good grades, fulfill family expectation, and for the good of society.⁷⁸

Even at the level of mandatory education, surveys of student knowledge on the Holocaust have indicated weak retention. A 2016 survey of 10,000 UK secondary school students revealed that one third of respondents underestimated the number of Jewish victims as two million or fewer, and 68% of pupils did not know what antisemitism was.⁷⁹ This is echoed in the results of a 2020 Schoen Cooperman survey conducted in all fifty US states testing the awareness of American millennials and Gen Z in which almost half of respondents (45%) could not name a single concentration camp or ghetto.⁸⁰ However, this is based on open-ended questions ('Can you name any concentration camps, death camps, or ghettos you have heard of?') that necessitate active recall and several of the questions tapped into (a lack of) factual knowledge rather than ascertaining an actual understanding about the historical past and its meaning. Furthermore, critics highlight that the sensationalist framing of the survey results supports the Claim Conference's mission to secure restitution for victims of the Holocaust and raise awareness (*Slate*, October 1, 2020). Greg Schneider, executive vice president of the Claims Conference, responded to the criticism: 'Auschwitz is synonymous with evil. And to not

know what Auschwitz is [*sic*] an indication that you really don't have a sense of what the Holocaust was or what happened during the Holocaust' (*Slate*, October 1, 2020). Yet it was unclear whether the majority of millennials and Gen Z respondents did not know what happened at Auschwitz, or couldn't name a concentration camp when asked. According to the survey, a further one in three (31%) estimated that only two million Jews or fewer had been killed and nearly 20% of respondents believed that the Jews had caused the Holocaust.⁸¹ While the findings caused public alarm, the fact that many of the states with low-performing respondents have had mandatory Holocaust education for decades was less widely discussed. Instead, the Schoen survey results have been cited by states passing recent mandates as pointing to an imperative need for specialized education. For example, the survey was cited by Arizona legislators on signing their 2021 education mandate: 'it's troubling that two-thirds of millennials don't know the Holocaust happened. We must teach the atrocities of the past to make sure that it never happens again' (*Tuscon*, July 9, 2021).

Moreover, teaching on the Holocaust seems to have little impact not only on knowledge but also on a crucial civics and anti-racist outcome: combatting antisemitism. A Scottish study measuring the attitudes of 11–12-year-olds across two schools found surprisingly few (22%) students knew what antisemitism was after learning about the Holocaust or considered it to be a historical issue not relevant to their contemporary society.⁸² Furthermore, a study of English secondary schools by UCL's Holocaust Education Center found that 68% of respondents did not know what antisemitism meant and more than half solely attributed the Holocaust to Hitler, with very few students understanding the connection between the Holocaust and WWII.⁸³ Alarming, when students were posed the question 'why the Jews?' their explanations cited negative stereotypes and misconceptions such as 'being rich' and 'having power.'⁸⁴ A possible explanation could be that antisemitism does not feature strongly in many Holocaust education initiatives discussed in the academic literature, with 43% not discussing the issue at all, choosing to focus on discrimination in general.⁸⁵ This failure of compulsory Holocaust education to adequately convey antisemitism to students significantly reins in hopes for extending outcomes to tolerance of other minority groups. Antisemitic statements in textbooks and unfavorable attitudes by parents were shown to be barriers to Holocaust education in various European states, particularly during a rise in right-wing politics.⁸⁶ This is especially important given the presence of Roma and other minorities in those students' classrooms or societies.⁸⁷ However, fears that Muslim students within British classrooms would be resistant to Holocaust education (indicating some kind of failure of integration or multiculturalism) were dispelled.⁸⁸

And yet, advocates of Holocaust education can point to some demonstrable gains: the FHAO educational non-profit embeds Holocaust education in a broader context with a comparative history of eugenics in the US, the Armenian genocide and includes civils rights activists and gay police officers as guest speakers.⁸⁹ Among urban and suburban eight-grade social studies and language arts classes in public schools, participation in the program was shown to increase relationship maturity and decrease racist attitudes and self-reported fighting.⁹⁰ However, the same study reported no significant change in civic and anti-racist attitudes and moral reasoning between the participating and non-participating students, and found gender a significant contributor to score variables,⁹¹ possibly due to earlier maturity. Similarly, when higher levels of Holocaust

education retention correlated with higher scores on citizenship values in one US-based study, demographic factors like gender and suburban/urban versus rural locale were also identified as key predictors.⁹² While the authors of that study do not specify hypothesis for these demographic differences, one assumption might be that urban and suburban residents may have had more normalized or at least regular contact with diverse neighbors than rural residents, particularly given the citizenship values metrics concerning immigration and rights for ethnic groups.⁹³

In testing the purported mechanism of empathy, research has interrogated whether students' support for civil liberties and other civics outcomes were affected by trips to Holocaust-dedicated museums.⁹⁴ A study in Houston, Texas demonstrated an increase in civic attitudes, but combined with decreases in religious tolerance for students in middle school and from low-income households. Racial/ethnic identity impacted the attainment of civics outcomes, suggesting that historically marginalized groups are more likely to identify with persecution, while students from the dominant culture group are more likely to draw more negative connotations of acting as accomplices.⁹⁵ These results suggest a positive impact of Holocaust education on knowledge, but at the cost of some of the desired lesson in empathy and tolerance.

Most comprehensive reviewers of Holocaust education remain hesitant to identify a positive relationship between higher levels of Holocaust knowledge and higher level of tolerance, cautioning the possibility of selection bias or that better attitudes as causation may misconstrue more open-minded students who are already more receptive to Holocaust education as correlation.⁹⁶ As such, existing studies show that Holocaust education is expected to both teach students about the Holocaust as well as use that knowledge to produce more civically engaged individuals, rarely succeeding at either. While this section has demonstrated some contingent elements of success in Holocaust education, knowledge about the Holocaust is low and anticipation of extensive civics or anti-racist outcomes appear overly optimistic.

Why does Holocaust education fail to contribute to civics and anti-racist outcomes?

In this section we present three main arguments as to why Holocaust education fails in achieving broader civic and anti-racist goals. First, contrary to broader human rights education approaches, Holocaust education falters because it focuses on the Holocaust as the 'most horrific event in history' and positions contemporary issues such as police violence, discrimination in schools, hate crimes and even terrorism as less important. Thus, lessons do not appear immediately applicable to student's daily lives and anxieties, especially if they have no generational or familial relationship to the Holocaust. To explicitly link Holocaust education to civics and anti-racist outcomes, the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (EUFRA) recommends that 'the Holocaust, whether presented in a subject-specific, integrated or cross-curricular approach, can most effectively be connected to human rights issues if this period of history is discussed in a broad historical context and in relation to its significance to contemporary society.'⁹⁷ However, there is a longstanding resistance to moving beyond the Holocaust paradigm,⁹⁸ even when comparative approaches by programs like FHAO demonstrate success.⁹⁹ Fears of 'diluting' the poignancy and power of the Holocaust risk historicizing it while

simultaneously attempting to universalize it. Students who assume antisemitism is a phenomenon bound to 1930s and 40s Germany can come to see it as irrelevant to their daily lives. Awareness of current political and societal relationships should be accounted for; the OSCE found that asking students to empathize with those fleeing persecution half a century ago was not as effective in more diverse classrooms with refugees from contemporary conflicts.¹⁰⁰

The poignancy of the Holocaust is presented in its scale and scope as unique in nature and the ultimate example of evil beyond compare, despite academic advances which advocate for its comparative analysis and discussion. Dubiel¹⁰¹ discusses this as a widely embraced 'symbolic repertoire' and meta-narrative of evil, pain and suffering.¹⁰² Yet its perceived enduring relevance rests on its ability to act as a model of the warning signs of state and social disintegration. This was not an educational approach easily embraced: shortly after its inception in the 1980s, historian Lucy Dawidowicz complained that programs like FHAO were vehicles instructing thirteen-year-olds 'in civil disobedience and indoctrinating them with propaganda for nuclear disarmament.'¹⁰³ She was concerned that the educational space dedicated to studying the Holocaust was 'shrinking' in the face of competing demands by students of color seeking inclusion in the historical curricula (which she deemed 'special interest groups' and 'oppression studies.'¹⁰⁴)

With 'Never Again' and even the mention of the Holocaust, Hitler, yellow stars or concentration camps in political debates as highly contentious, it is not surprising that its policy-directed role in moral lessons for modern society are not entirely clear in function, delivery, or effect. Debórah Dwork posits that it is the political instrumentalization of Holocaust education that minimizes its impact; 'the Holocaust, for those pushing the mandate, is not the Holocaust that I study ... a sanitized and sanctified event, detached from historical reality.'¹⁰⁵ This speaks to a politicization of history in Holocaust education although 'educators have few problems accepting that history should strive toward objectivity, yet treating the Holocaust as something disconnected from contemporary politics and ideology seems irresponsible and even dangerous.'¹⁰⁶ Education does not take place in a vacuum, and when teachers tell students the Holocaust is a vital lesson in remaining vigilant against future injustice and atrocity, then comparisons with contemporary events are inevitable and far from a settled matter among academics and memory practitioners. In 2018 USHMM published an op-ed titled 'Why Holocaust Analogies are Dangerous'¹⁰⁷ following comparisons of detention facilities on the US border to concentration camp, prompting a response by over a hundred historians, including notable figures like Omer Bartov and Timothy Snyder. In their letter, they called the Museum's decision to 'completely reject drawing any possible analogies to the Holocaust, or to the events leading up to it' as 'fundamentally ahistorical. It makes learning from the past almost impossible' (*New York Review*, July 1, 2019).

Second, temporal and geographic distances remove the lessons learned from understandings of students' own experiences and isolate atrocity as an historical account, impeding potential empathy drawn from more modern cases of genocide or other human rights abuses.¹⁰⁸ Despite having been home to large numbers of resettled Holocaust survivors, the US and UK did not have the direct geographical experience that European nations did of concentration camps, ghettos, and mass graves. Yet both employ state education that utilizes memory as a tool of government, binding Holocaust

remembrance as a duty to democracy itself while focusing on a 'single story' and experience of European modernity. This contrasts resistance to wider efforts to confront colonialism in memory politics, history, and global governmentality¹⁰⁹ and states are hesitant to officially acknowledge domestic legacies of injustice, particularly when it might result in liability and the financial burden of reparations and legal compensation. Given the lack of consensus over permissible discourse at official levels, these areas of history are unlikely to enter the national curriculum at least through institutional design and direction. This fear is not without merit: in 2013, Mau Mau claimants suing the British government for abuses during the colonial occupation of Kenya were awarded £19.9 million, and there is an ongoing redress scheme for victims of the Windrush deportation scandal in the UK. Given the lack of a consensus over permissible discourse at official levels, these areas of history are unlikely to enter the national curriculum at least through institutional design and direction.

In particular, this is relevant for diverse classrooms which find it challenging to integrate students from a background that does not identify with domestic history or its relationship to World War II and the Holocaust,¹¹⁰ although these studies also suggest that the real obstacles lie elsewhere in sociocultural narratives, classroom curriculum and tools, and professional development of teachers teaching the subject.¹¹¹ An additional critique of Holocaust education is that its exclusive emphasis on Jewish victims leads to the exclusion or shallow treatment of other minorities targeted by the Nazis, for example against Sinti and Roma.¹¹² A focus on Jewish suffering – while undeniably important – may (inadvertently) mask these other abuses, removing the possibility of studying crucial continuities of discrimination beyond antisemitism or the well-rounded and universally relevant lesson in citizenship that had been promised. It also tends to freeze the Holocaust and those who participated or were impacted by it in both time and categories of victims, perpetrators and bystanders/upstanders,¹¹³ overlooking the lesson impressed upon by many genocide scholars and even the Holocaust survivor Primo Levi that in reality 'gray zones'¹¹⁴ occur in which individuals move between categories in a way that defies easy simplification.

Finally, a banal reason for the limited effect of Holocaust education – as for all educational endeavors – is undoubtedly that, despite its extraordinary premise and diverse methods of delivery, it remains an academic subject constrained by resources and time like any other. Within the first decades of Holocaust education in the US, Totten and Riley¹¹⁵ highlighted that school education materials were already inaccurate and outdated despite advances in scholarship. For example, one popular teaching tool is the novel *The Boy in the Striped Pajamas* – read by 74.8% and the film adaptation watched by 84.4% of UK students who had consumed media about the Holocaust¹¹⁶ – but contains numerous inaccuracies and anachronisms. The work of fiction is widely used in UK Holocaust education creating a complicated and confusing narrative for students learning it alongside historical facts.¹¹⁷

A common complaint among teachers was the time allotted to teaching the Holocaust, with the UK averaging six hours and sometimes as few as two.¹¹⁸ This is instructive as student visits to museums alone might have far less impact on knowledge or understanding of the Holocaust than hoped¹¹⁹ with an academic assessment of USHMM's own comprehensive evaluation of school groups finding interest and preparation (including number of lessons spent on the Holocaust) were the greater contributors to educational

outcomes. Furthermore, although students cited the stickiness¹²⁰ of graphic or moving photographs and artifacts from the museum, their interpretations were often limited, hyper-focused on specific visual aspects devoid of complex contexts.¹²¹ Clearly teachers are instrumental in helping students see beyond the ‘empathy ceiling’ of horror-provoking and emotional material, and critical in effectively connecting it to the intended wider lessons of the Holocaust. However, one UK Department for Education investigation found that teachers felt perplexed by the aims of Holocaust education and ill-equipped to deliver it deriving from confusion over top-down guidance and the expectations of abstract educational policies.¹²² One could argue that while teachers are very aware of the civics and anti-racist outcomes expected of their Holocaust education, they are not provided adequate time or resources to effect the change desired. Similarly, while its delivery (whether simultaneous or staggered depending on the school system and age group) across a diverse array of subjects - PSHE, Social Studies, Citizenship, English, Religious Education and History - may be intended to offer a well-rounded and universal approach, time, training and other resource restraints may contribute to a more uneven and piecemeal execution.

Why is Holocaust education still an enduring political policy despite its inefficacy?

We now broach the core issue of this article and unpack why policymakers continue to view Holocaust education as the best approach to combating racism and discrimination, when it has been demonstrated to be empirically ineffective at creating such outcomes.

First, there is an idealized primacy of the Holocaust that suggests that it alone can and should serve as the foundation for moral lessons surrounding discrimination. As the epitome of horrendous political violence, many understand the Holocaust as the *non plus ultra* of discrimination, thus making it the best lesson to be learned in terms of prevention. There is considerable political resistance to any contextualization or comparison as this is deemed as minimizing the meaning of the Holocaust – ideas rooted in discussions around the uniqueness of the Holocaust¹²³ that have today become less dominant.¹²⁴ Narratively, the Holocaust nonetheless remains framed as the most important event when narrating human evil and violence, the epitome of horror. Considering the Holocaust within the context of other genocides and mass atrocity is current practice in relevant fields, but like all areas of research there is a gap between advances in academia and their dissemination into classroom materials. This is further complicated by the oversight of school boards or Departments of Education that may pass curriculum through a political prism with its own concerns and priorities besides student’s knowledge.

Second, the Holocaust is thought to transcend partisan divides and can thus be a suitable vehicle for civics and anti-racist education. The Holocaust can be politically projected upon as the ultimate morally negative landscape; it also benefits from geographical and historical distance and a seemingly easy victim/villain binary, while domestic history in the USA and UK are more fiercely contested.¹²⁵ As such, in the UK and several US states, antiracism education has been periodically portrayed as ideological and partisan, claims not levied against Holocaust education. This ties into the long-time refusal of the UK government to fund a memorial to the victims of the

transatlantic slave trade while simultaneously pledging £75 m to a new national Holocaust education center and memorial in London (*The Guardian*, December 10, 2019). ‘This year the government gave £1 m for the maintenance of Auschwitz, but has continued to tell me that no funds are available for our memorial,’ slavery memorial founder Oku Ekpenyon told the media. ‘I find that insulting. They would rather acknowledge another’s atrocity than one’s own atrocities’ (*BBC News*, June 10, 2020). Similarly, USHMM has enjoyed US federal funding and support since its inception in 1979, but the first and only national memorial for victims of lynching did not open until 2018, is funded by private donations and is based in Montgomery, Alabama rather than alongside other notable monuments and memorials in the capital Washington D.C. (*The Art Newspaper*, April 16, 2018). Policymakers deem Holocaust education successful while unintentionally eclipsing more expansive alternatives competing for funding and support, rendering it vulnerable to politization or being hijacked by lobby groups.¹²⁶

Portraying the Holocaust as apolitical is valuable to lawmakers. It lends moral-social capital, even to those who may otherwise be resistant to classroom discussions around tolerance, as they can claim transformative educational initiatives while bypassing current political issues and debates around racism and colonial history. This process is not without friction: a 2021 attempt to establish a Holocaust education mandate in the state of Louisiana was abandoned over fears by Republican sponsors that the Holocaust might be taught alongside histories of other minorities, and criticism from Jewish groups that the discourse surrounding the bill’s justifications ‘deploy Jews rhetorically, without involving Jews’ (*Jewish Telegraphic Agency*, July 7, 2021). Despite the good intentions of Holocaust education mandates, they can exist visibly at odds with a government’s own lack of commitment to acknowledgment of historical misdeeds at home that would likely be of greater impact or meaning to students continuing to live, learn and grow in that environment. Rather than complex classroom conversations about slavery or colonialism and state culpability, including the potential for reparations, the Holocaust offers a seemingly easy binary of ultimate Jewish suffering and ultimate evil in the form of the Nazi and the heroism of the Allies, even though this is less of a reflection of actual simplicity and more a reflection of the banality with which the topic is taught. Conversely, policymakers simultaneously universalize the systematic injustices and violence of the Holocaust but also safely compartmentalize them. However, the perceived safety of these politically palatable strengths (universalized, ahistorical and apolitical) are often its weaknesses as an actual educational device.

Conclusion

This article has addressed that Holocaust education is expected to provide civics and anti-racist outcomes and failing in this endeavor – as well as at more basic knowledge building. Overreliance on the Holocaust as one-size-fits-all civics and anti-racist education may not be best suited to the increasingly diverse demographics of Europe and the USA or the realities of everyday life and tensions in those societies.¹²⁷ We suggest that Holocaust education struggles to achieve these broader outcomes due to its presentation as the *non plus ultra* of political violence that diminishes the impact of other more contemporary issues. Educators present the Holocaust as having occurred ‘elsewhere’

geographically and temporally, narrowing conceptions of perpetrators and victims and lessening its societal relevance and saliency.

In this article we have sought to expand on the few, but noteworthy studies that find Holocaust education often fails in conveying knowledge of the Holocaust, much less civics and anti-racist outcomes and interrogate why this happens and why politicians remain enthusiastic to pursue Holocaust education for civics and anti-racist outcomes nonetheless. Policymakers continue to advocate for Holocaust education and its projected goal of civic and anti-racist education, primarily because most people still understand the Holocaust as specially possessing a universally applicable form of moral lesson, while at the same time being perceived to be incomparable and thus easier to politically advocate for.

Even despite Holocaust education's tendency to focus solely on certain victims, it has failed to teach students relevant facts surrounding Jewish persecution and death tolls while excluding other victim groups. A more complete picture of National Socialism's targeted discrimination and killing could effectively link the lesson to wider themes of intolerance familiar to students and shift erroneous perceptions of antisemitism as a historical phenomenon towards current, recognizable forms of hatred. As such, the aim of Holocaust education could be not only an emphasis on the unfathomable horror of the time, but to bring the fundamental socio-political factors underlying the Holocaust and perpetration within it temporally and geographically closer to the target audiences. Only by allowing those in education programs to relate the horror to their lived experiences of discrimination, racism, and antisemitism today, will Holocaust education be able to unfold its full potential. A current concern among specialist educators, voiced by the director of education initiatives at USHMM, is that history education is declining while reliance on social media rises and, as a result, partners at Holocaust centers nationwide have reported an increase of students asking whether the Holocaust was even real, a departure from 20 years ago (*The Atlantic*, April 3, 2023) despite decades of mandated Holocaust education. Furthermore, while there has been strong polarisation around positions towards the Hamas attack on 7 October 2023 and Israel's subsequent military offensive against the Palestinian population in Gaza, we have – as yet – not seen much effect on how politicians might utilize Holocaust education as a solution to these broader issues, although this may change. Besides additional anxieties in teaching the subject in polarized schooling contexts, some anecdotal evidence suggests a resistance or hesitancy to engage with Holocaust education in the short-term. For example, the Anne Frank Trust reported three schools across England and Scotland had postponed their educational partnership while citing 'local community tensions,' but that the overall number of participants had increased in comparison to the previous year (*The Jewish Chronicle*, January 22, 2024). In the summer of 2024, Yad Vashem's International Conference for Educators recognized increasing antisemitism as the biggest challenge to Holocaust education, but also proof of both its timely and enduring necessity. Yad Vashem's chairman Dani Dayan said the conference represented 'a message of commitment to the history and a signal to our educational leaders that Holocaust education is essential not only for knowledge and awareness about the history but is a vital tool in fostering a more tolerant and open society' (*The Times of Israel*, July 2, 2024). Given this context, political support and direction of Holocaust education seems unlikely to wane or adapt to a more diversified approach in the near future.

We do not aim to denigrate Holocaust education itself and we recognize the fundamental importance of teaching this historical event. Instead, we question how and why after decades of mandatory teaching Holocaust education and concomitant struggles to deliver civic and antiracist outcomes, but remains so popular among policymakers. This is particularly worrying given a resurgence of far-right violence and hate speech, and the necessity of increased education and awareness (WVTF, December 7, 2022). 2022 marked the highest rate of antisemitic incidents in the US since reporting began in 1979¹²⁸ and while education cannot fairly be assumed to be the sole restraint on attitudes and behavior, we have here questioned the outsized assumptions given to its abilities.

Notes

1. Eckmann and Stevick, *Research in Training and Learning*.
2. Florida Office of the Governor, "Governor DeSantis Announces Legislative Proposal."
3. Chapman, "Learning the Lessons."
4. Pettigrew, "Limited Lessons from the Holocaust?", 50.
5. United Kingdom Department for Education, "How We Ensure Young People."
6. Holocaust Educational Trust, *Holocaust Education in the UK*.
7. Pettigrew, "Limited Lessons from the Holocaust?"
8. Virginia Commission to Combat Antisemitism, *Combating Antisemitism in Virginia*, 21.
9. Downey "Findings and Implications;" Schultz et al. "The Value of a Developmental Approach;" Totten and Riley "Understanding Matters;" Lindquist "Not Facing History;" Jennings "Challenges and Possibilities;" Starratt et al. "Holocaust Knowledge and Holocaust Education;" Bowen and Kisida "Never Again: The Impact."
10. Cowan and Maitles "Addressing Prejudice and Discrimination;" Holmes "I've Always Not Been a Racist;" Foster et al. *What Do Students Know*.
11. Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe: Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights *Education on the Holocaust*; Stevick *How Does Education about the Holocaust Advance*; Eckmann et al. *Research in Teaching and Learning*; Vitale and Clothey "Holocaust Education in Germany;" European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, *Discover the Past*.
12. Fulbrook, *Reckonings*, 361–2.
13. Novick, *The Holocaust in American Life*.
14. Wiesel, "TV View: The Trivializing of the Holocaust."
15. Novick, *The Holocaust in American Life*.
16. Adorno, "Education after Auschwitz."
17. Wyman, "The United States."
18. New Jersey Department of Education, "Commission on Holocaust Education."
19. Gordon et al. "The Effects of Holocaust Education," 58.
20. New Jersey Department of Education, *Holocaust Education Mandate*.
21. Fallace, *The Emergence of Holocaust Education*.
22. Weiner, "Moving Toward Never Again."
23. Freedman, "The State of Holocaust Education."
24. Fallace, "The Origins of Holocaust Education."
25. Ibid., 84.
26. Fallace, *The Emergence of Holocaust Education*.
27. New York State Senate, "Instruction in Certain Subjects: Article 17, Section 801."
28. Stevick, "How Does Education about the Holocaust Advance?"
29. Ibid., 4.
30. North Carolina Senate, "Bill 105: Gizella Abramson Holocaust Education Act."
31. Kentucky Department of Education, *Required Instruction of the Holocaust*.

32. New Jersey Department of Education, *Holocaust Education Mandate*.
33. Florida Department of Education, "Holocaust Education Bill SB 660: Section 1003.42f."
34. United States Congress, "H.R. 943- Never Again Act."
35. For overview of state mandates studied, see Appendix.
36. Chapman, "Learning the Lessons of the Holocaust."
37. Fallace "Origins of Holocaust Education;" Fallace, *The Emergence of Holocaust Education*.
38. Foreign and Commonwealth Office, *International Task Force Country Report*.
39. Holocaust Education Trust, *Holocaust Education in the UK*.
40. United Kingdom Department of Education and Lord Nash, "Guidance on British Values."
41. Votes for Schools, "Everything You Need to Know."
42. Foster et al. *What Do Students Know*.
43. Ibid., 14.
44. Stevick, "Teaching the Holocaust," 220.
45. Ibid., 221.
46. United Kingdom Parliament, "Written Evidence: HOL0053."
47. Eckmann and Stevick, "General Conclusions."
48. American Historical Association, "History Discipline Core: Tuning Project."
49. Endacott and Brooks, "An Updated Theoretical and Practical Model."
50. Karn, "Historical Empathy."
51. Ibid.
52. Barton and Levstik, *Teaching History for the Common Good*, 238.
53. Endacott and Brooks, "An Updated Theoretical and Practical Model," 47-48.
54. Ibid., 45.
55. Cunningham, "An Empirical Framework for Understanding."
56. Prime Minister's Holocaust Commission Report, "Britain's Promise to Remember," 38.
57. Ibid., 19.
58. Downey, "Findings and Implications," 13-16.
59. Lindquist, "Not Facing History."
60. Buckley-Zistel, "Detained in the Memorial."
61. Jennings, "Challenges and Possibilities."
62. Facing History and Ourselves, *Upstander: Discover What it Means*.
63. Staub, *EPIC* and *ABLE*.
64. Jennings, "Challenges and Possibilities."
65. Ibid., 52.
66. Moore, *Survivors: Jewish Self-Help*.
67. Facing History and Ourselves, *Jewish Self Resistance*; Yad Vashem, *Education & E-Learning: Resistance*.
68. Holocaust Education Trust, *Jewish Resistance During the Holocaust*.
69. Simó et al. "Students Learning about the Holocaust."
70. Pistone et al. "Teaching and Learning about the Holocaust."
71. Pistone et al. "Teaching and Learning about the Holocaust."
72. Starratt et al. "Holocaust Knowledge and Holocaust Education."
73. Simó et al. "Students Learning about the Holocaust."
74. Chapman, "Learning the Lessons of the Holocaust," 61.
75. Commons Select Committee on Education, *Holocaust Education*.
76. Ibid.
77. Foster et al. *What Do Students Know*, 80, 86.
78. Simó et al. "Students Learning about the Holocaust."
79. University College London, *Opinion: Most UK Adults*.
80. Claims Conference, *First-ever 50-State Study*.
81. Ibid.
82. Cowan and Maitles, "Addressing Prejudice and Discrimination."
83. Foster et al. *What Do Students Know*, 105.
84. Holmes, "I've Always Not Been a Racist," 23.

85. Pistone et al. "Teaching and Learning about the Holocaust," 11.
86. European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, *Discover the Past for the Future*.
87. Cowan and Maitles, "Addressing Prejudice and Discrimination," 115, 121.
88. Foster et al. *What Do Students Know*, 71.
89. Schultz et al. "The Value of a Developmental Approach," 5.
90. Ibid., 6, 20.
91. Schultz et al. "The Value of a Developmental Approach," 20- 24.
92. Starratt et al. "Holocaust Knowledge and Holocaust Education," 185-7.
93. Ibid.
94. Bowen and Kisida, "Never Again: The Impact."
95. Ibid., 16.
96. Simó et al. "Students Learning about the Holocaust."
97. EUFRA, *Discover the Past for the Future*, 11.
98. Lipstadt, "Not Facing History."
99. Schultz et al. "The Value of a Developmental Approach."
100. OSCE: ODIHR, *Education on the Holocaust*, 166.
101. Dubiel, "The Remembrance of the Holocaust."
102. Bromley and Russell, "The Holocaust as History and Human Rights."
103. Dawidowicz, "How They Teach the Holocaust," 25.
104. Ibid.
105. Milwicki, *Holocaust Education: A Mixed Bag*.
106. Karn, "Toward a Philosophy," 225.
107. Friedberg, "Why Holocaust Analogies are Dangerous."
108. Mihr, "Why Holocaust Education."
109. Antweiler, *Memorialising the Holocaust in Human Rights*.
110. Vitale and Clothey, "Holocaust Education in Germany."
111. Foster et al. *What Do Students Know*.
112. Holmes, "I've Always Not Been a Racist," 22.
113. David, "Review: Memorializing the Holocaust."
114. Levi, *The Drowned and the Saved*.
115. Totten and Riley, "Understanding Matters: Holocaust Curricula."
116. Foster et al. *What Do Students Know*, 78.
117. Jackson, "I Know it's Not Really True."
118. Foster et al. *What Do Students Know*, 13.
119. Downey, "Findings and Implications," 13-16.
120. Stickiness is an anthropological concept on the capacity of something to stick with a person, the retention of an idea or a concept.
121. Downey, "Findings and Implications."
122. Prime Minister's Holocaust Commission Report, "Britain's Promise to Remember."
123. Bauer, *Rethinking the Holocaust*. Rosenbaum, *Is the Holocaust Unique?*
124. Bloxham, *The Final Solution*, 181.
125. There is a dominating conservative narrative that integral historical figures such as the founding fathers, confederate generals or others cannot be judged by today's moral standards, but need to be understood in highly contextualised terms. And yet, there is no such call for nuance when judging German perpetrators of the Holocaust.
126. Mihr, "Why Holocaust Education," 540.
127. Vitale and Clothey, "Holocaust Education in Germany;" Holmes "I've Always Not Been a Racist."
128. Anti-Defamation League, *Audit of Anti-Semitic Incidents 2022*.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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Appendix

ORGANIZED BY ALPHABETICAL ORDER

AZ- House Bill 2241, signed 2021

<https://www.azleg.gov/legtext/55leg/1R/bills/HB2241P.pdf>

AR- SB160/Act 611, signed 2021

<https://www.arkleg.state.ar.us/Bills/Detail?id=SB160&ddBienniumSession=2021%2F2021R>

CO- HB20-1336, signed 2020

<https://leg.colorado.gov/bills/hb20-1336>

CT- Senate Bill No. 452/ Public Act 18-24, signed 2018

<https://portal.ct.gov/SDE/Publications/Teaching-the-Holocaust/Introduction>

DE- House Bill 318, signed 2020

<https://legis.delaware.gov/BillDetail?LegislationId=47968>

FL- Holocaust Education Bill (SB660), passed 1994

<https://www.fldoe.org/core/fileparse.php/19868/urlt/FL-HolocaustMandate.pdf>

IL- 105 ILCS 5/27-20.3, 1989

<https://www.ilga.gov/legislation/ilcs/fulltext.asp?DocName=010500050K27-20.3>

KY- House Bill 128, signed 2018

<https://apps.legislature.ky.gov/record/18rs/hb128.html>

MA- S 2557, *signed 2021*

<https://legiscan.com/MA/text/S2557/2021>

MI- *Public Act 170, passed 2016*

<https://www.legislature.mi.gov/documents/2015-2016/publicact/pdf/2016-PA-0170.pdf>

NC- *Gizella Abramson Holocaust Education Act, signed as part of 2021 budget*

<https://casetext.com/statute/general-statutes-of-north-carolina/chapter-115c-elementary-and-secondary-education/subchapter-iv-education-program/article-8-general-education/part-1-courses-of-study/section-115c-8157-education-on-the-holocaust-and-genocide>

NJ- *Holocaust Education Mandate, signed 1994*

<https://repo.njstatelib.org/bitstream/handle/10929.1/9084/L1994c13.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>

NY- *Legislation A.472C /S.121B, signed 2022 as enhancement to original 1994 law*

<https://www.nysenate.gov/legislation/bills/2021/S121>

OK- *Senate Bill 1671, signed 2022*

http://www.oklegislature.gov/cf_pdf/2021-22%20AMENDMENTS/hasb/sb1671%20hasb.pdf

OR- *Holocaust & Genocide SB664, passed 2019*

https://oregon.public.law/statutes/ors_329.494

RI- *2016-H 7488A, 2016-S 2396A, signed 2016*

<http://webserver.rilin.state.ri.us/BillText/BillText16/HouseText16/H7488A.pdf>

<http://webserver.rilin.state.ri.us/BillText/BillText16/SenateText16/S2396A.pdf>

TX- *SB 1828, signed 2019*

<https://legiscan.com/TX/text/SB1828/id/2026267/Texas-2019-SB1828-Enrolled.html>

WI- *Act 30, signed 2021*

<https://legiscan.com/WI/text/SB69/2021>