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LLC

[BEACHLLOYD@erols.com](mailto:BEACHLLOYD@erols.com)

SAN: 255-4992

PO Box 2183, Southeastern PA 19399-2183

Phone: (international 001) 610-407-0130 / toll free U.S. 866-218-3253, PIN 8668 / Fax (775) 254-0633

## **HOLOCAUST RELEVANCE**

### **A Rationale for Administrators, Supervisors and Teachers**

Many educators are profoundly moved when they learn more about the Holocaust, and some decide to incorporate it into foreign language, social studies, history or literature curricula. However, educators and students alike may consider this a “dark period,” but relegated to the past. Indeed, with the number of aged survivors diminishing rapidly, the Holocaust risks being seen as an event too far in the past to have educational relevance.

Yet it is still with us. We know that some survivors are still publishing works on the Holocaust, and child Holocaust survivors continue to share their stories. More compelling yet, genocides belong to the present, and human liberties and dignity are violated regularly. If we believe that the media exaggerates, we need only to check the statistics.

Governmental policies have resulted in over 170 million deaths during this century (1900–1987) and this figure excludes war deaths (R. J. Rummel, 1995—published in 1997). Rummel states that the figure of 170 million surpasses the 1987 population of all but six nations in the world. These statistics of course do not include the more recent deaths due to genocide/democide<sup>1</sup> and underestimates the additional toll on human life from physical and psychological scarring.

While most individuals are aware of the Holocaust (although they often do not realize the extent of the brutality and actual cost in terms of human life), many are not aware of other past or current genocides/democides such as the Armenian genocide in Turkey, the killing fields of Cambodia, the disappearances in Argentina and Chile, the death squad killings in El Salvador, or Stalin's purges.

More recent events have resulted in genocides in Bosnia and Rwanda/Burundi and the extreme violations of human rights and genocidal policies by the governments of China (including Tibet), Myanmar (Burma), Laos, and Indonesia (including the genocide of the East Timorese).

The Holocaust, the genocides in Turkey, Cambodia, Bosnia, and Rwanda ...the disappearances in Argentina, the death squad killings in El Salvador,...violence, torture, the

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<sup>1</sup> The original definition of genocide is the systematic destruction in whole or in part of a national, ethnic, racial or religious group, as such. A particular form, democide, has been named for crimes against political groups.

mistreatment of human beings.... All of these raise questions about the roots of human behavior.

Rummel says that education is not the key to preventing atrocities, and points out that Germany, at the outset of World War II, was a highly educated nation with well-rooted religious beliefs and a history of outstanding writers, philosophers, artists and scientists. Marcel Jabelot, the Parisian survivor whose documentary and books are available from Beach Lloyd Publishers, and who spoke regularly to young people, said:

The Holocaust happened in Europe, in an ultra-civilized continent and, in addition, it happened in Germany, the country that has given us the greatest philosophers, the greatest thinkers, the greatest musicians. How was that possible? The great lesson is that neither religion nor culture prevented anything. (21)

Rummel believes that a concentration of power in a dictatorship is the single most important warning that violation of human rights can follow. Indeed, Marcel Jabelot joins this belief to respect of one's neighbor:

The great lesson of the Holocaust is that the moment that one no longer respects one's neighbor—no longer looks at him as a human being, a worthy, respectable person—that is the beginning of Nazism. [...] And if a politician begins to take power and to discriminate against individuals because one is black, the other is Jewish, the third is a Gypsy, the fourth is Asian—that's the beginning of a dictatorship. It's the beginning of fascism. (26)

So the goals for educators are clear: examining the nature of bystander behavior and its impact on the perpetration of genocide, and examining the question of what can be done to prevent human cruelty, mass violence, and genocide.

This is why we teach the Holocaust.

Joanne S. Silver, July 2007