

What Happened to the Holocaust?



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With the rise in antisemitism plaguing our community... and the perversion of genocide claims applied to Israel's approach in Gaza, this begs a few questions.

Has our approach to Holocaust education been misguided or missed the mark? Or are there just lots of Jew-haters out there – and no amount of education or engagement will work with them?

The answer may be both.

As you have seen me comment in previous updates, there are a lot of haters out there. More than we thought. And the more “acceptable” such sentiment beco-

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mes, the less it is called out and castigated, the more antisemitism we see and hear.

This isn't only true of antisemitism, and there are (sadly) many other forms of hate at play, but it seems that there is a particular affinity for blaming the Jews. There are many reasons for this, which we will save for another time. Let's just call this a truism we all wish weren't true.

So...the question is: has all of this Holocaust education we have invested in made a difference?

I believe the answer is yes – but as with many things, there are often unintended consequences and counter reactions, which we need to learn from. Our situation is complicated because we now live in a day and age where authority and expertise are often discounted or denigrated. (While that may be in part because of overreach on the part of those ostensibly possessing these characteristics, that is also a discussion for another time...).

One reality is that many in our society today don't wish to be constrained by mores and judgments imposed on them by others. Another is that shock and click-bait generate ratings and impressions and make careers for people who entertain unfiltered and uninhibited opinions, regardless of veracity or propriety. Hello Tucker Carlson and others....

However, there is another factor that I think is at play here. While the Jewish community has viewed Holocaust education as relevant beyond our community and embodying universal values, I am not sure that this is how the message has been perceived/received. Especially at a time of “me too-ism” when every particular identity or interest group wants their recognition and rights and entitled standing. The Holocaust in this context isn't unique or even paradigmatic; this is one barbarism and injustice among many, such as slavery and colonialism, et al.

I think that for some, the message of the Holocaust is about Jewish victimhood. BTW - I think that is true for some in our own community as well. And, except for that subset of a subset, why should Jewish victimhood be unique or more important than anyone else's?

I think that helps explain why Holo-

caust education has missed the mark somewhat. And that also provides a rationale as to why the term genocide has been misappropriated and rebounded against the originators of the term – why should Jews have a privileged position in the pantheon of hate or evil; the Jews are just as profane as any other group, perhaps more so.

Of course, this is itself a manifestation of antisemitism. The question is what can be done about it?

The Jewish Federation of Ocean County's approach is one good way, recognizing local Heroes Against Hate and working with the County to engage and educate students to become upstanders. It is not enough for us to defend ourselves – we need to stand up for others who are targeted or persecuted.

That is also an effective way to think about Holocaust education – focusing on those who resisted and fought back and not just the perpetrators. This is one of the things that our partners at Chhange do very well. We, as a Jewish community, need to invest more in these efforts.

We have a lot more work to do. Thanks for being partners and helping make a difference.