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ABSTRACT

This essay addresses six pedagogical issues that English language arts teachers should consider in preparing to use Holocaust literature to address "intolerance and bigotry" in their teaching. Teachers should ask themselves: (1) Does the literature unit emphasize anti-Semitism as a cause of the Holocaust?; (2) Does the unit provide all relevant historical information?; (3) Does the unit make appropriate historical and structural distinctions, i.e. does it indicate what is unique about the Holocaust?; (4) Does the unit draw on appropriate comparisons to bring about these distinctions?; (5) Does the unit address contemporary anti-Semitism, here and elsewhere, as the first lesson of Holocaust study?; and (6) What other literary works are included to show the Jews as a living cultural group and to help students understand the basis for their identity as a people? The paper advocates an interdisciplinary approach to Holocaust studies with inclusion of appropriate readings from the Hebrew Bible and other appropriate moral education materials. (EH)

ACADEMIC AND PEDAGOGICAL ISSUES IN TEACHING THE HOLOCAUST

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Academic and Pedagogical Issues in Teaching the Holocaust*

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As most English language arts teachers are by now aware, social and political criteria increasingly guide the construction of literature programs in the schools. They not only guide the choice of literary works that students read in the English class and the connections students are encouraged to see among them, they also motivate the use of non-literary selections as well, often but not always primary source documents. These three volumes are but one reflection of this reorientation of the literature curriculum. As stated in the resolution at the 1994 annual conference of the National Council of Teachers of English sponsoring the development of these three volumes, their purpose is to help teachers use literature on "genocide and intolerance" to counter the "destructive forces of intolerance and bigotry," in this country and elsewhere. But a shift from the use of literary criteria to the use of social and political criteria in the construction of literature curricula for the purpose of advancing a moralizing pedagogy does not come without serious costs. Such a shift raises many academic and pedagogical issues for which English language arts teachers are unprepared by professional background and training. This is particularly the case with respect to the study of the Holocaust. English language arts teachers may inadvertently stumble across a number of academic and pedagogical minefields in teaching Holocaust literature, whether on their own or in conjunction with history or social studies teachers. These minefields are, for the most part, a result of the academic debates now taking place among those scholars--chiefly historians--who specialize in the Holocaust.

In one debate, conflicting interpretations of the causes of the Holocaust have been put forth. In the other, scholars have sparred over its uniqueness as a historical phenomenon. In addition, the pedagogy surrounding the study of the Holocaust in the schools has itself been severely criticized. Differences in interpretation about its major causes and its contemporary significance have serious implications for the curricular context in which a study of Holocaust literature is placed and for the lessons, if any, that English language arts teachers ask students to draw. Yet, because the parties to these debates and the authors of these critical comments on the

teaching of the Holocaust are for the most part historians, most English teachers are unlikely to be aware of the academic and pedagogical pitfalls in including a study of the Holocaust as part of their literature programs today.

English teachers need to understand the substance of these debates and what is at stake in them. It is not simply a matter of giving students a specific name--anti-Semitism--for what almost all scholars agree is one root cause of the Holocaust (even if they choose not to agree that it is its essential motivating element). Nor is it simply a matter of informing them of the latest theory about why negative feelings toward the Jews in one country at one point in time culminated in a still incomprehensible act of genocide unprecedented in intent and design. It is also a matter of making sure students understand that there are multiple academic perspectives on the Holocaust as a historical phenomenon and how the larger social and political context for these academic debates influences what they are asked to learn.

My own interest in these academic debates and in the pedagogy surrounding the study of the Holocaust in the schools began several years ago at the time I was examining how Jews as a people were portrayed in elementary school reading textbooks and secondary school literature anthologies in preparation for a seminar I gave at Hebrew College in Brookline in 1994. That survey raised a number of academic and moral issues that are fully explained in my essay in the February 1996 issue of the English Journal. In order to understand better the context for these issues, I decided to learn more about the academic debates among historians themselves and the contents of the Holocaust curricula used in the schools. I am grateful to the editors of these three volumes for the opportunity to lay out for the readers of these volumes the academic and pedagogical issues raised in and by these debates and these curricula. I fully share the view of historian Lucy Dawidowicz, author of The War Against the Jews 1933-1945, that the Holocaust should be taught with integrity and without political exploitation, whether in English or history classes.

The Cause or Causes of the Holocaust

The work of scholarship at the center of the current debate about the Holocaust, both in this country and in Germany itself, is Daniel Goldhagen's Hitler's Willing Executors: Ordinary Germans and the Holocaust, published in 1996. As is frequently pointed out, Goldhagen is the son of a Holocaust survivor. What is the thrust of his book? As Goldhagen himself explains in a counterresponse to several critics published in a December 1996 issue of The New Republic, the purpose of his book is to show that "the German perpetrators were ordinary Germans coming from all social backgrounds...", that the number was large, not small, and that "these ordinary Germans were...willing, even eager executioners of the Jewish people, including Jewish children." He attributes their motivation not to a general, run-of-the-mill European anti-Semitism but to an "eliminationist" anti-Semitism that was specific to German culture. At the core of this model of

anti-Semitism, Goldhagen explains, was the notion that "Jews and Jewish power had to be eliminated somehow if Germany was to be secure and to prosper." By making elimination of the Jews "necessary and just," this model of anti-Semitism motivated even ordinary Germans to kill the Jews not only without a twinge of conscience but indeed with "torturing, boasting, taking photographs, and celebrating" when circumstances allowed extermination as a means of "elimination." In essence, Goldhagen is postulating, as he states, "No Germans, no Holocaust."

As Jonathan Mahler, a reporter for the Forward, points out, Goldhagen's critics accuse him of dismissing the vast scholarship that has come before him and of offering a simplistic explanation for a phenomenon that has defied completely satisfying explanations for 50 years. Why do critics think his explanation is simplistic? What other theories have scholars proposed? In one critical review of Goldhagen's book, in an April 1996 issue of The New Republic, historian Omer Bartov lays out the range of theories that have been advocated over the years, noting that no one of them "seems to encompass the phenomenon as a whole." According to his analysis, some scholars, chiefly Germans, proposed that the Germans had followed a "special path" in its national history, taking a different turn in the latter part of the nineteenth century from such other Western societies as Britain and France and developing "unique and pernicious traits," reflected in their political, economic, and social institutions, that were at the root of Nazism's coming to power. Bartov points out that this theory was finally rejected. He does not say why, but David Gress, a historian participating in a symposium on modern Germany, notes that the critics of this theory recognized that its advocates wanted to inflict a "moralizing pedagogy" on West Germany to "cripple West German democratic self-confidence and self-assertion in the present, and to detract attention from a sober and proper understanding of the past..." (Gress, 1995, p. 539).

The theory proposed by "mainly Marxist" scholars, Bartov remarks, saw the Holocaust as one feature of European fascism, which was in turn seen as a product of capitalism. On the other hand, he continues, another group of scholars, of whom Hannah Arendt was the most prominent, saw the totalitarian state, best represented by both Hitler's Germany and Stalin's Soviet Union, as a pre-condition for genocide, a theory that disallows capitalism or European fascism as the chief cause of the Holocaust. Bartov then goes on to point out that still other scholars have argued that the source of the Holocaust was the Christian-European tradition of anti-Semitism, assigning a central role to a "pernicious anti-Jewish imagery, theology and demagoguery, dating back to the Middle Ages and greatly enhanced by the pseudo-scientific discourse of social-darwinism and eugenics in the modern era." Those holding this view, according to Bartov, have been "Jewish historians." Yet other scholars such as Lucy Dawidowicz and Gerald Fleming, who, as Bartov explains, represent what has been called "the intentionalist" school, placed Hitler at the center of the debate, arguing that he had always intended to murder the Jews and merely waited for the right moment to carry out the Final Solution. Finally, in contrast to the intentionalist school was

the "functional" school, arguing for "cumulative radicalization" as the explanatory factor, a process in which competing bureaucratic agencies offered more and more extreme solutions to a problem for which mass murder had not been the original policy of choice.

Bartov judges Goldhagen's work as a "powerful case for a version of one of the oldest, most traditional, and in recent years largely discredited interpretations of the Holocaust." Indeed, Bartov admits that anti-Semitism in its "traditional and modern, racist forms" is a "crucial" condition of the Holocaust and that it has been underemphasized in recent mainstream scholarship. He agrees that the demonization of the Jews over the centuries played a "significant role in their barbarous treatment by individual Germans, as well as in legitimizing their persecution and ultimate mass murder for much of the German population." Yet, he believes that ordinary men were turned into murderers less by their ideology than by "circumstances" and their "acclimatization to murder by repeated involvement in it." Bartov is interested in the role of modern science in the "industrial killing" that took place in the Holocaust, arguing for a probing look at what in "our culture" made the "concept of transforming humanity by means of eugenic and racial cleansing seem so practical and rational." He concludes his critique of Goldhagen's book by claiming that to see an eliminationist anti-Semitism as the root cause of the Holocaust is to make study of the Holocaust irrelevant to our times. Later on, in a response to Goldhagen's counterresponse to Bartov's original review of his book, in a February 1997 issue of The New Republic, Bartov goes so far as to characterize Goldhagen's views as reflecting "common prejudices about the role of anti-Semitism and the peculiarities of German history in the Holocaust."

In his first reply to Bartov and other critics in The New Republic, Goldhagen agrees that "no adequate explanation for the Holocaust can be monocausal" and that "many factors contributed to creating the conditions necessary for the Holocaust to be possible and to be realized" (p. 42). His central concern, he repeats several times, is the motivational element of the Holocaust--to explain why perpetrators "uncoerced, chose to mock, degrade, torture and kill other people, and to celebrate and memorialize their deeds." In his view, his critics seem to want to maintain that "most Germans were immune to eliminationist anti-Semitism, that the anti-Semitism did not substantially influence Germans' attitudes toward the persecution of the Jews, and that the anti-Semitism had little to do with the perpetrators' actions" (p. 45). Yet, as he points out, Germany was a country where "for generations there was a vast outpouring of institutionally supported eliminationist anti-Semitism, with virtually no institutionally supported positive public image of Jews available." He also notes that "many in Germany shared this view of Jews and that their beliefs informed what they were willing to tolerate and to do when called upon by the Nazi regime." In his reply in a February 1997 issue of The New Republic to critical comments on his first reply, Goldhagen correctly describes Bartov's characterization of his views

(as "common [anti-German] prejudices") as a clear "ad hominem" attack (p. 5), noting that his critics were avoiding a discussion of the details of "perpetrator" motivation that he had set forth in his book.

The Uniqueness of the Holocaust

The spectacle of an academic debate degenerating into an attempt to discredit the motives of scholars whose academic views are an obstacle to a different interpretation can be seen even more clearly in the debate about the uniqueness of the Holocaust. This debate has been going on for many years. But it attracted renewed attention because of the controversy that erupted between two contributors during the publication process of a collection of essays entitled Is the Holocaust Unique? Perspectives in Comparative Genocide, edited by Alan Rosenbaum. As reported by Christopher Shea in the Chronicle of Higher Education, Steven Katz, a professor of Jewish thought and history, threatened to withdraw from the project when he saw the galleys and found another contributor, David Stannard, a professor of American studies, arguing that Katz was "the moral equivalent of a Holocaust denier because he rejected the idea that people other than Jews had experienced true genocide." The book was eventually published with these and other ad hominem characterizations intact, even though Katz was given an assurance by Rosenbaum that they were inappropriate and would be excised. We look briefly at the contents of the book as Shea describes them to see what its contributors have to say about comparative genocide as well as each other.

The essays in Rosenbaum's book compare Hitler's Final Solution with the mass murder of Armenians in 1915, the starvation of Ukrainian peasants in the early 1930s during Stalin's forced collectivization, Hitler's campaign against Gypsies, slavery in the American South, and the deadly epidemics among the indigenous people in the Americas after contact with the European explorers and colonists. In his own essay, Katz, the author of The Holocaust in Historical Context, provides evidence to support his explanation of how the treatment of the indigenous peoples in the Americas, the famine in the Ukraine, and the killings in Armenia differed in structure or magnitude from the Holocaust. He also explains that he is not making moral comparisons because it is not possible to compare the suffering of peoples involved in mass murder, noting that in many cases the number of victims in other mass tragedies is far greater than in the Holocaust. He points out that most of the native Indians who died (a far larger number than that of the Jews during the Holocaust) did so from diseases spread unwittingly by the Europeans, that the 20% death rate in the Ukraine was not comparable to the death rate in the Holocaust, and that the Turks, while murdering hundreds of thousands of Armenians, sought to drive the Armenians out of northeast Turkey and to destroy Armenian nationalism and the threat it represented to Turkey, not to annihilate all Armenians in Turkey. His points are supported in an essay by Barbara Green, a political scientist, who argues that Stalin's chief goal in the Ukraine and elsewhere was

collectivization, not murder, and in an essay by Seymour Drescher, a historian, who argues that as evil as slavery was, the system depended on keeping its victims alive.

Those in opposition to Katz's points, Shea reports, argue that the "uniqueness theory is an attempt by Jewish scholars to claim a special kind of victimhood for Jews, and Jews alone," a claim Katz has explicitly denied in his writings. In his essay, Vahakn Dadrian, a sociologist of Armenian background, claims that the Armenian genocide "mirrors the Holocaust in all but the sheer number of dead and the technological proficiency of the murderers." Implying that he has risen above self-interest, he claims that concentrating on either the Armenian genocide or the Holocaust has "very limited value." He wants comparative studies of many genocides in order to discern "patterns" and to "generalize." The basic problem, he believes, is that "some scholars are actually resentful that Armenian scholars dare to compare the Armenian genocide to the Holocaust." His charge of ethnic resentment as the motivating factor in maintaining the uniqueness theory is echoed in an essay by Ian Hancock, a professor of English and linguistics. He claims that the lack of scholarship on Gypsy victims of the Holocaust is "due, in part, to efforts by some scholars to maintain the uniqueness of what happened to the Jews."

According to Shea, the "most scorching critique of the uniqueness of the Holocaust" comes from Stannard himself, who has detailed the fate of the indigenous peoples of the Americas "from the beginning of colonization to the present" in a book of his own, American Holocaust. In his essay, Stannard characterizes the effort of those who maintain the uniqueness of the "Jewish genocide" as a "self-serving masquerade" and charges Katz with looking at other genocides "with the sole purpose of minimizing them." Stannard goes even further in his attack on Katz, charging in an interview with the reporter that "by hanging on to all these finely tuned technicalities, and insisting on the priority of this one event, it [Katz's work] serves to legitimize the killing of other people."

How an insistence on the uniqueness of the Holocaust "legitimizes" other murders is not at all clear. What is clear is that we are faced with a very strange situation today. The motives of Jewish scholars who write about the Holocaust are apparently fairer game as the object of critical academic attention than the motives of the Germans who murdered the Jews. In one debate, a Jewish scholar who seeks to revitalize the theory that anti-Semitism was the crucial motivating element in the Holocaust is disparaged for holding "common prejudices" against the Germans. This effort to denigrate the worth of Goldhagen's book (and possibly to distract attention from its thrust) is like imputing anti-white prejudice to a black scholar who assigns a central role to white racism in an explanation of Southern slavery. In the other debate, Jewish scholars who seek to make phenomenological distinctions and to retain the integrity of the terminology coined by a Jew to describe the fate of the European Jews in World War II are attacked as resentful, duplicitous, legalistic, stubborn, mean-hearted, and indifferent to the suffering of others, even though Katz in

particular discusses the suffering of all victims with respect and without moral comparisons. Indeed, in a Foreward to Rosenbaum's collection of essays, Israel W. Charny, a psychologist and executive director of the Institute on the Holocaust and Genocide, in Jerusalem, writes that "some of the essays are valuable only in demonstrating the ugliness of much scholarship on comparative genocide." Too many parts of the book, he asserts, "are spun from the same cloth of all-or-nothing, ideologically driven thinking, prejudice, arrogance or degradation, and posturing for power," although he does not cite specific examples as support for his views.

An ad hominem attack on Jewish scholars and other Jewish writers for insisting on the centrality of anti-Semitism in the Holocaust and on the use of the study of the Holocaust to address contemporary anti-Semitism (an issue I will address below) can be found even in the writing of those who describe themselves as concerned with ethics. In an article in a quarterly newsletter from the Institute for Philosophy and Public Policy, Lawrence A. Blum, a professor of philosophy and member of the Center for Ethics and Social Policy, sets up a strawman and uses distortion in an attempt to discredit them. Claiming that those who want Holocaust curricula to address anti-Semitism want it addressed "exclusively" (a demand no one has made), he implies that they lack "a willingness to appreciate the sufferings of others." Further, he implies that in wanting to see the "Holocaust as a Jewish tragedy," they display a "possessiveness about a tragedy that affected millions of non-Jews as well." Apparently, Jews are uncaring and selfish to insist that Jews were the chief victims of the Final Solution. In his eyes, they are guilty of trying to have a "monopoly on suffering."

What these critics are doing in their own work, or supporting in others' work, is making use of the Holocaust for contemporary political purposes. In Gress's words, we see a "political use made of the past to constrain political choice in the present" (p. 535). It is an inherent feature of a moralizing pedagogy designed to induce endless "public apology and public humility about the past." The problem for the critics is that the Holocaust is not an integral part of the American past. It is part of the European past. In order to make political use of it elsewhere, one must obliterate or blur certain distinctions in order to generalize from it. And one must redefine or expand the scope of the terminology that refers to it. Thus, those (chiefly) Jewish scholars who stand in the way of others who want to appropriate the terminology of the Holocaust and the moral horror associated with it for intensifying American guilt about the fate of the Indians, slavery, and the continuing vestiges of white racism, and for debunking science, rational thinking, and the core of Western values, must be personally discredited if their ideas and their evidence are not easy to discredit.

I do not want to imply that Goldhagen's work is beyond legitimate criticism. It has been criticized by many historians, including Jewish ones. Robert Wistrich, for example, writing in the July 1996 issue of Commentary, explains why he believes that Goldhagen has not presented "a

persuasive case that [anti-Semitism] was what primarily or exclusively motivated ordinary Germans" (p. 31). In other words, a critic does not need to resort to an ad hominem attack in attempting to convince others that Goldhagen's thesis is flawed. However, Wistrich does believe that Goldhagen's work helps provide "an important counterweight to the tendency in some recent historical writing on the Holocaust to downplay the role of anti-Semitism itself," noting the work of another historian, John Weiss, who "discerningly points out that while German citizens openly dissented from specific Nazi policies they disliked--the euthanasia program, the removal of crucifixes from schools, Nazi party corruption, etc.--they were virtually silent about the treatment of the Jews..."

Nor do I want to imply that one cannot condemn other mass murders or slavery or the fate of the indigenous inhabitants of the Americas in equally strong terms. The point is that one can condemn all of them without distorting crucial aspects of the Holocaust or blurring historical, phenomenological, and structural distinctions. To repeat what Goldhagen has stated, "no adequate explanation for the Holocaust can be monocausal" and "many factors contributed to creating the conditions necessary for the Holocaust to be possible and to be realized." The Holocaust was a complex event and scholars continue to examine the adequacy of the explanations offered for it. Further, while some scholars believe it is possible to discern patterns in these various mass catastrophes and to draw generalizations, other scholars believe that it is not possible or useful to draw broad generalizations about their causes and that each grew out of a very different set of conditions. English language arts teachers should know that scholars profoundly disagree about the very definition of genocide as well as the validity of generalizations about the causes of these various mass catastrophes. They should also know that it is not necessary to revise the causes of the Holocaust or to appropriate its terminology in order to moralize about other catastrophes.

Why these Academic Disputes Matter

Why should these academic disputes about the causes and uniqueness of the Holocaust matter to English language arts teachers? They matter because what is driving them has already influenced the context in which the literature about the Holocaust is placed and the lessons which students are to learn from studying its literature. The desire to use the Holocaust for political purposes has affected the contents of pre-college curriculum materials, in the social studies and English class. We look first at the influence of these debates on Holocaust curricula.

The Historical Context for the Holocaust in Current Holocaust Curricula

Concerns about the context in which the Holocaust is now placed in the schools have been raised by Lucy Dawidowicz in the last essay she wrote before her death, and by Deborah Lipstadt, a professor of modern Jewish and Holocaust studies. One concern is the lack of appropriate historical background. In her critique of 25 Holocaust curricula used in American schools,

Dawidowicz found that 15 of the 25 never suggest that "anti-Semitism had a history before Hitler," and of those that do, "barely a handful present coherent historical accounts, however brief" (p. 26). The most serious failure, she deemed, was the omission of the history of anti-Semitism as a matter of public policy over the centuries and its roots in Christian doctrine. But she also found curricula that failed "properly to place the events of the Holocaust in the context of World War II" by not citing the belief of U.S. government and military officials that "the only way to stop the murder of the Jews was to defeat Hitler on the battlefield."

A different concern about the context in which the Holocaust is placed is the chief focus of Lipstadt's critique of one particular curriculum, Facing History and Ourselves (FHAO), a critique published in The New Republic in a March 1995 issue. Indeed, Lipstatdt states explicitly that her "discomfort" with this curriculum is mostly "with the context into which [the Holocaust] is placed." FHAO's concerted effort in its 1994 teacher manual to "bring the Holocaust into the orbit of the students' experiences" by connecting it to "racism and violence in America--though not contemporary anti-Semitism" is not for her a way to make history relevant but to distort it. As she points out, "no teacher using this material can help but draw the historically fallacious parallel between Weimar Germany and contemporary America." (p. 27). As a historian, not only is she critical of FHAO's efforts to insinuate this analogy, she also sees little to be learned intellectually from FHAO's efforts to link the Holocaust to Hiroshima, Nagasaki, the My Lai Massacre, or the mass murders in Cambodia, Laos, Tibet and Rwanda as other examples of "mass destruction." As a historian, she is interested in making careful distinctions, not careless or misleading generalizations. As was the case for Goldhagen, an important issue for her in studying the Holocaust is "what was at the root of the genocidal efforts."

Both Dawidowicz and Lipstadt express deep misgivings about the lessons they see drawn from a study of the Holocaust in the curricula they examined. Although almost all of the 25 guides Dawidowicz looked at "try to instill respect for racial, religious, and cultural differences, and to foster a commitment to democratic values" (p. 27), she found only a "bare handful" that discussed the sanctity of human life--from her perspective, the most important moral lesson to be drawn from studying the Holocaust. Most focus on "individual responsibility" as against "obedience to authority" as the key to moral behavior, a concept and a contrast she considers of dubious value. As she points out, why would any democratic society want to encourage disrespect for legal or moral authority and ask students to see obedience to the law as a negative trait . She also questions whether it is desirable to teach American children to use "their conscience" to distinguish between right and wrong, that is, to decide on their own what is a just or an unjust law. Consciences vary among people, she explains, and are not always moral. As we know, people who have murdered doctors or others working in abortion clinics have claimed they were following their consciences.

Lipstadt's criticism of the implications FHAO wants students to draw from a study of the Holocaust flows from her concern about the context it provides students in both its 1982 and1994 teacher guides. Although she acknowledges that she wants students in her own courses on the Holocaust to become more sensitive to ethnic and religious hatred, more aware that "little" prejudices can be transformed into far more serious ones, and more willing to speak out about injustice when they confront it, she opposes the use of "specious arguments" to draw connections between anti-Semitism and other forms of intolerance. Teachers, she concludes, must avoid sending the message that in its essence the Holocaust "is just one in a long string of inhumanities and that every ethnic slur has in it the seeds of a Holocaust." Instead, she suggests, teachers must help students see the distinctions among different forms of intolerance.

The Context for the Holocaust in Current Literature Anthologies

The context in which literature about the Holocaust is taught in secondary school literature anthologies also shows the effects of the debates at the academic level. In McDougal, Littell's 1994 Language and Literature for grade 8, Anne Frank's story is followed by a story about a black mother and her daughter who are humiliated by a white welfare worker. In Scott Foresman's 1991 America Reads, Classic edition for grade 8, Anne Frank's story is preceded by Yoshiko Uchida's short story, "The Bracelet," describing how she and her family were taken to an internment camp for Japanese Americans during World War II.[1] An analogy between the events portrayed in these contiguous selections is clearly implied. Yet, in neither anthology are students explicitly asked to discuss their enormous differences as historical phenomena, a clear moral lapse on the part of the editors.

On the other hand, two other anthologies show us appropriate literary contexts for Anne Frank's story. The 1989 McDougal, Littell grade 8 anthology uses an excerpt from the diary as an example of autobiography and then groups it with an essay by Helen Keller, an excerpt from Of Men and Mountains, by William O. Douglas and "The Rose-Beetle Man" by Gerald Durrell. These are then followed by several biographical pieces, including one by Carl Sandburg about Lincoln and an excerpt from John Gunther's Death Be Not Proud, all of which provide a broad context highlighting individual faith, strength of will, and courage in achieving personal or social goals despite extraordinary physical or intellectual challenge--if not the specter of death itself. In the 1993 Holt, Rinehard and Winston grade 8 anthology, the play about Anne Frank is grouped with Carl Foreman's script for High Noon, a dramatic work that also emphasizes individual courage and integrity in the context of a community that has failed to take a moral stance. The literary contexts in these two groups of anthologies clearly show us the difference between the use of literary criteria and the use of social and political criteria in constructing a literature program.

Pedagogical Issues for English Language Arts Teachers

The current academic debates on the causes and defining features of the Holocaust as well as the criticism of many of the Holocaust curricula now in the schools raise a number of questions for English language arts teachers to consider before using Holocaust literature for the moral education of their students. Some of these issues are raised explicitly in what these various scholars have to say on the topic, others are implied. All bear careful consideration but not just because the Holocaust is such a profoundly depressing and horrifying historical event to study. They also warrant thoughtful deliberation for a very different reason--the utter lack of disinterested research on the effects on young students of studying about the Holocaust.

It is stunning that educators have chosen to promote the teaching of an extremely difficult topic in the schools (because of its horrifying details and its religious roots), not as such a topic would be addressed as part of a course in European history or in a work of literature, but as part of an effort to advance their students' moral education. This is a highly problematic decision because there are no published studies whatsoever providing evidence that studying the Holocaust does in fact make students more tolerant of religious and ethnic differences. Nor is there evidence that such study increases their sensitivity to the anti-Semitic stereotypes that have long been a staple in many cultures and that still emerge in the media and elsewhere to this very day. It is even more stunning that many state legislatures have mandated study of the Holocaust in the curriculum, sometimes from grade 1 on, without any impartial evidence to confirm the benefits expected from such a mandate. Such research would be crucially important for assuring us that teaching about the Holocaust does not have unintended negative effects on any particular groups of schoolchildren.

I would like to think that exposure to the details of the Holocaust would cause students to ponder the sources of the barbaric behavior of the Nazis, "ordinary" Germans, and various Eastern European people toward the Jews as well as the sources of the indifference of otherwise decent people, there and in the West, to their plight. I would also like to think that exposure would sensitize students to the nature of anti-Semitic stereotypes wherever they emerge today, whether from the Right or the Left. But in the absence of impartial research on the effects of teaching about the Holocaust on young students, it behooves teachers to think about six issues raised by the current academic debates on the Holocaust and the criticisms of current Holocaust pedagogy as they plan or evaluate their unit of study on the Holocaust.

(1) Is Anti-Semitism Sufficiently Stressed as a Cause of the Holocaust?

At first blush, it may seem absurd to worry about whether anti-Semitism is being slighted as a cause, if not the cause, of the Holocaust, as no discussion of the Holocaust has ever failed to note that Jews were among its victims. But anti-Semitism as a cause can be slighted simply by avoiding use of the term itself. Dawidowicz discerned three ways in which anti-Semitism was de-emphasized as a cause of the Holocaust in the 25 curricula she examined. One common way was

by "camouflaging" anti-Semitism under such euphemisms as bigotry, prejudice, or scapegoating. Today the euphemisms include "racism" and "violence." Nevertheless, all these terms are inadequate substitutes for anti-Semitism and, as Dawidowicz suggests, serve as a way to ignore its distinctive nature and history. English teachers, because they tend to be sensitive to word choice to begin with, may well sense that prejudice and bigotry as terms are not equal to anti-Semitism in their capacity to evoke the pathology lurking in the specific term. And racism is a confusing and often misleading term today because many academics, for political reasons, have arbitrarily limited its meaning to refer to the prejudicial attitudes of white people toward "people of color."

Anti-Semitism can be viewed as a form of racism if racism is understood as the prejudicial attitudes of one social group toward another, whether or not there are differences in color. But despite this more scholarly definition of racism, such terms as racism or prejudice are often used in educational contexts today that exclude any reference to the long history of negative cultural images of the Jews predating the racial overlay of the nineteenth century. Moreover, their use often seems to lead to appallingly ignorant or absurd assertions. For example, in a videodisc entitled Historic America: Electronic Field Trips (1997), a chapter on the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum (which is itself out of place in a work on "historic America") locates the origins of the Holocaust in the 1800s and never uses the term anti-Semitism, referring only to "anti-Jewish sentiment" toward an "alien race." In addition, the teacher guide encourages students to view this chapter in the context of chapters on Frederick Douglass's home and the women's rights convention at Seneca Falls and to note that "prejudice is based entirely on superficial differences" of "skin color" and "gender." This material shows not only how the origins of the Holocaust can be distorted when curriculum writers avoid use of a term with clear historical resonance, but also how the Holocaust can be utterly trivialized by efforts to make it relevant to American history.

Anti-Semitism can also be diminished as a cause of the Holocaust by increasing attention to those victim groups the Nazis never intended to wipe out. As Dawidowicz observes, despite their incarceration in the concentration camps, there is no historical evidence that the Nazis intended to exterminate the Jehovah's Witnesses, homosexuals, and such social deviants as beggars, vagrants, and prostitutes as groups. Moreover, the Final Solution was not aimed at the Gypsies even though a large number of them were murdered too. Lipstadt points out that Nazi racial policy toward them was ambivalent--some were imprisoned, some annihilated, some left unmolested.

Finally, anti-Semitism can be de-emphasized by the very attempt to group the Holocaust with other examples of mass destruction or mass intolerance. Lipstadt notes that by presenting the mass murders in Cambodia, Laos, Tibet, and Rwanda as "examples of the same phenomenon,"

FHAO contradicts its earlier claim that the Holocaust is unique and makes it easy to forget that the roots of these catastrophes are distinctly different. One does not need to subscribe to Goldhagen's thesis to make sure students understand the name and nature of the specific pathology that paved the way for the Holocaust.

(2) Are Appropriate Distinctions Made?

The failure to make appropriate historical, structural, and phenomenological distinctions often follows upon the attempt to group the Holocaust with, in Lipstadt's words "all manner of inhumanities and injustices." The intention to wipe out as a matter of official government policy every man, woman, and child of one group of people for no demonstrable gain, territorially or politically, is not equivalent in intention or design to the other events with which it is frequently compared. It is not equivalent to, for example, the two-to-three year internment of about 100, 000 Japanese Americans on the West Coast by the U.S. and Canada during World War II, or the bombing of Hiroshima to end the war in the Pacific (with a death toll of about 150,000, of whom 20,000 were Korean slave laborers), or the enslavement of many hundreds of thousands of Africans in the South for almost 250 years. While slavery remains a profound deprivation of human rights (it continues in the Sudan and Mauritania, for example), it was and is not identical to murder. Moreover, the bombing of Hiroshima (and Nagasaki), whether or not one agrees with the decision to do so, was justified by a Democratic president as a way to prevent huge losses of life and did cause less loss of life than the earlier firebombings of Tokyo. Nor is it at all clear that the internment policy was necessarily motivated only or chiefly by "racial prejudice," since Japanese Americans living in Hawaii and in other regions of the United States were not interned. Indeed, an appropriate question for students to explore is the extent to which the internment policy was motivated by racial prejudice at the time and why most Japanese Americans were released well before the war ended. Nor were Japanese Americans the only people interned; about 6000 Italian and German nationals were also interned during the war (Irons, 1983). The legal violation was depriving those Japanese Americans who were American citizens of their constitutional rights.

I personally experienced the failure of several English teachers to make appropriate distinctions at a session of the New England Association of Teachers of English in October 1994. In an invited talk, I criticized the growing tendency by literature teachers and literature anthologies to use literature about the Holocaust for implying similarities between Nazi concentrations camps and the internment camps for the Japanese Americans during World War II.

In the question and answer period following my talk, several teachers in the audience expressed great concern about my remarks. They believed their students should see "the essential similarities" between Nazi concentration camps and the internment camps for Japanese Americans and felt that any discussion of differences would be "a whitewash."

But shouldn't students see a difference, I suggested, between an experience in which people left a confinement alive and in good health and one in which they left in the form of smoke and ashes? More important, I added, shouldn't they consider why there were differences and how our political principles and institutions might account for them?

Showing some annoyance at my questions, these teachers professed that they did not see the differences as significant. They further noted that they included information on the experiences of the indigenous peoples of the Americas and encouraged their students to see similarities between Nazi concentration camps and America's "concentration camps" for native Americans, and between the European Holocaust and the "Holocaust" perpetrated by European explorers and settlers on these peoples through the introduction of deadly contagious diseases.

These teachers had a particular point of view about Americans that they wanted to inculcate in their students and did not want their students' judgments colored by any ambiguity. I don't know whether they were aware of the closed nature of their "teaching" process and of the ethical line they had crossed in using the tragic history of a particular people for ends that had nothing to do with that people. But they were clearly building into their teaching material as givens or assumptions the very issues that their students should have been openly critiquing. These teachers were, in effect, manipulating the outcome of student thinking so that it reflected their point of view and glossing over the critical distinctions that an academic study of any phenomenon should bring out.

(3) Is the Holocaust Trivialized by Inappropriate Comparisons?

The Holocaust was an act of mass murder. By definition murder is deliberate. As all historians agree, its specific features cannot be fully appreciated without making comparisons with other mass murders in history. One academic argument has been over how one labels these other mass murders. The United Nations Convention on Genocide has one definition of genocide. Some historians like Steven Katz believe it is too broad because it includes the partial murder of a group of people, thus allowing the term to be used when the perpetrator of the mass murder let some of the members of the group live and may have done so deliberately. "Intent" and "totality" are key concepts in his definition. Whether or not English language arts teachers wish to abide by his definition, students should be made aware of it. And whether or not they wish to accept "totality" as a defining feature of genocide, the critical structural distinction is that the deaths of the members of the group were planned; they were not accidental, unintended, or an unfortunate by-product of a democracy's effort to win a war. This means that comparisons of the Holocaust with the mass murders in Cambodia, Tibet, Rwanda, or Bosnia are not inappropriate so long as teachers do the appropriate research and preparation for class discussion to make the different antecedents motivating the murders clear.

Most scholars agree that the Armenian genocide is probably the genocide most similar to the Holocaust. But if history and English language arts teachers wish to compare concentration camps, they could help their students understand the profound similarities between the two most influential "evil empires" in the twentieth century by providing literature on the gulag, considered by many to be the closest equivalent to the Nazi concentration camp. Although the gulags were forced labor camps, not death camps, both were massive instruments of terror that have received much literary as well as political attention Moreover, some of the literature on the Soviet terror would enable teachers to make a clear link to the Holocaust, as Stalin, too, had murderous intentions toward the Jews, and in the years after World War II. Writing in a February 1997 issue of The New Republic, Ruth Wisse, a professor of Yiddish and Comparative Literature, views a new book, The Bones of Berdichev: The Life and Fate of Vasily Grossman, by John and Carol Garrard, as providing the "ideal link between the Soviet terror and the Nazi terror." She speculates that "had Stalin not died on March 5, 1953, Grossman would have been murdered in the Lubyanka Prison, sharing the fate of most other prominent Jewish artists and writers." A comparison of the Nazi terror and the Soviet terror would also enable English teachers to use literary selections that are considered masterpieces (e.g., the novels or short stories by Solzhenitsyn and Grossman himself) . I particularly recommend Grossman's Forever Flowing. It is not a long novel, and two of its chapters (13 and 14), which deal with a young Russian woman's life and death in the gulag and the liquidation of the kulaks, are on a par with the work of a Tolstoy, Dostoyevsky, or Pasternak.

(4) Does the Study of the Holocaust Lead to a Study of Contemporary Anti-Semitism?

Why do we want students to learn about the Holocaust? What lessons does its study contain for American students today? The intention of these three volumes is clear: to help teachers use literature on genocide and intolerance to counter the "destructive forces of intolerance and bigotry," in this country and elsewhere. What forces of intolerance and bigotry should a study of the Holocaust be expected to counter? Logically, one might expect it to be used to address the roots of the Holocaust--anti-Semitism. However, as Lipstadt discovered in her analysis of the teacher manual for FHAO, the most popular Holocaust curriculum in this country, contemporary anti-Semitism is the only form of intolerance that students are not asked to examine. My own examination of the many activities in which FHAO engages confirms its lack of attention to contemporary manifestations of the very pathology that led to the Holocaust. Its current focus is on violence-prevention, but the violence it is concerned with does not seem to include violence to Jews, physical or verbal, in this country or elsewhere. And expressions of hatred toward Jews appear regularly, here and in other parts of the world.

It is true that there is no daily physical violence to Jews in this country, so far as I know. But it is not true that anti-Semitism is unknown in American public life. As I pointed out in my

essay in the English Journal, there are several virulent sources of anti-Semitism in American life today. They include Louis Farrakhan and the Nation of Islam as well as right-wing militia groups and Lyndon LaRouche's followers. (And one must remember that I wrote that essay long before Farrakhan's performance during the Million Man March.) The problem for many teachers is obvious; these groups constitute a truly multicultural array of anti-Semites, something that a good part of the academic world has decreed cannot exist by definition.[2] Nevertheless, intellectual honesty and a concern for a healthy civic life should compel English teachers to show students why vigilance about expressions of anti-Semitism is needed here as well as elsewhere, and to note the continuing existence of this pathology where it has appeared.

Of more relevance to the English language arts teacher, I believe, is the larger question of cultural sterotypes. Here is what the literature teacher is best trained to deal with. As Goldhagen's book emphasizes, German anti-Semitism needs to be seen in the context of a long tradition of hostile cultural images of the Jew. The Jew had been demonized in the very fabric of German public culture for centuries, with no positive images available. If the Holocaust is to help students understand anything about religious or racial prejudice, they must pay more attention to the major sources that fuel anti-Semitism than to the outpourings of fringe or crackpot groups, however appalling their propaganda may be. What are the common public images today of the person who can be unmistakably identified as a Jew? (And in this country, that person is most apt to be the devout Jew because he wears a skull cap.) These images, whether in the media or in current fiction or nonfiction, include not only those of American Jews but also those of Israelis, and of the religious Jew in Israel in particular. Are they favorable or not? How do they compare with the images that fed into the murderous fantasies of those Germans and non-Germans who carried out the Holocaust? I do not see how the English language arts teacher can justify a study of Holocaust literature in the classroom for the purpose of combatting prejudice and bigotry unless one of the first lessons based on it includes consideration of the power of cultural stereotypes in shaping people's attitudes and behaviors and an exploration of the contemporary images of those who are identifiable as Jews, here and elsewhere.

Exploitation of the Holocaust for contemporary political purposes can also be avoided by helping students explore why the Holocaust did not happen elsewhere. What forces may have prevented mass murder of the Jews elsewhere? Dawidowicz addresses that question in discussing the failure of the curricula she examined to distinguish between "individual behavior and state policies." Noting that many of them asked students whether "it" could happen in this country, with some even answering "yes," she judges as the deeper problem the failure to "instruct students in the fundamental differences between, on the one side, our pluralist democracy and constitutional government, ruled by law, and, on the other side, the authoritarian or totalitarian

governments of Europe that legitimated discrimination against and persecution of Jews." I was better able to appreciate Dawidowicz's point when I was in Lithuania during the week of September 20, 1994. That very week the Prime Minister of Lithuania formally apologized to the people of Israel on behalf of the Lithuanian people and a now independent Lithuanian government for the murder of the Jews in that country in the early 1940s, admitting for the first time that more Jews may have been murdered by Lithuanians than by the Nazis. Why was that so? In part, because there was no rule of law in the country for several months (I was told) between the time the Soviet troops had pulled out and the time the Nazis moved in. Armed gangs roamed through Jewish neighborhoods with impunity, murdering the defenseless inhabitants in unorganized spurts of violence. The political lesson to learn from a study of the Holocaust is that bigotry does not easily turn into violence when a rule of law based firmly on individual rights is observed and enforced.

(5) Are Students Given All the Relevant Historical Information They Need?

To understand why the Jews were the chief intended victims of the Nazi death factories, there are certain basic questions students ought to discuss. These were questions I myself asked when I first learned about the Holocaust years ago, and the answers to them are as relevant today as they were then.

First, students need to know why the Jews were without a homeland. Why were they seen as an alien race? Why did they have no place to flee? Why were they at the complete mercy of the people among whom they lived? Where did they come from if they had no place of their own in Europe? They did not emerge from thin air during the Middle Ages (indeed, they had been living in parts of Germany since 300 C.E.). Yet many Holocaust curriculum guides do not explain why they were in Europe to begin with, as well as in other countries in the world. Some information about the destruction of the Second Temple in Jerusalem in 70 C.E. and the Diaspora is necessary. The two most detailed accounts for middle grade students I have found appear in Globe Fearon's The Holocaust (1997) and Glencoe's Life Unworthy of Life (1991).

Second, students need to know that the Jews had been demonized and persecuted before the Middle Ages and exactly why. Students should learn about the religious roots of anti-Semitism and its effects on what Jews could do, what they could or could not own, how they dressed, where they lived, and what they spoke in order to understand the racial overlay in the nineteenth century. Again, the two Holocaust curricula noted above provide information on these issues.

Third, students need to know why most of the European Jews were in Eastern Europe, not Western European countries, why the largest number of Jews in Europe before World War II lived in Poland, and why few countries were willing to accept Jewish refugees. It is useful for

students to learn how attitudes toward the Jews often shifted in different countries over the course of Jewish history.

Fourth, the first lesson students need to ponder after studying the Holocaust is what the remaining Jewish communities in the world themselves learned from the Holocaust. The lack of interest in many Holocaust curricula about the post-Holocaust attitudes of the Jews themselves is a curious omission at a time when "multiple perspectives" are urged. The link between the Holocaust and the rebirth of the state of Israel needs to be made clear to students. Two lessons for students that address this link well are in Globe Fearon's The Holocaust (1997) and Ruth Ann Cooper's "From Holocaust to Hope," a middle school teaching guide for a Holocaust unit prepared for the Tulsa Public Schools, 1995-1996. Cooper provides this lesson explicitly "to relate the lessons of the Holocaust to contemporary world situations." Students should also learn why most survivors did not want to return to their home countries in Eastern Europe at the end of World War II and what happened to many who did return.

(6) What Should Students Read Besides Accounts of the Death of the Jews?

Students who are asked to read about the death of the Jews should also be asked to read about the life of the Jews. By this I do not refer to the literature about the life of the Jews whose communities and culture were consumed in the Holocaust. The stories of I.B. Singer and Sholem Aleichem belong in a well-rounded literature curriculum. But a study of the Holocaust should be complemented by at least one piece of literature that is set in the context of a living Jewish community, identifiable as such. No other group in America today would accept a literature curriculum that implied that it was a dead culture, and there is no reason why that implication should emerge from a study of the Holocaust. In my article in the English Journal, I supplied a list of titles of literary works and films that can address this problem, and teachers should feel free to go beyond that short list.

More fundamental than a literary work that portrays live Jews positively are selections from the Hebrew Bible. Many English teachers (as well as parents and other citizens) may think that it is a violation of the separation of church and state to teach the Old or New Testament as literature, but it is not. This is made clear by Marie Wachlin in a comprehensive report on the place of the Bible in public high school literature programs in the February 1997 issue of Research in the Teaching of English. In fact, the curriculum framework for the English language arts just approved by the Massachusetts Board of Education in January 1997 contains a suggested reading list that recommends, among many other titles, selections from the Bible at all grade levels. It does so because the Bible has been one of the major influences on the literature of the Western world, serving as a greater source of literary allusions than any other work of literature. It is thus completely appropriate from a literary perspective for English language arts teachers to include selections from the Hebrew Bible as part of a Holocaust unit.

Summary and Concluding Remarks

In this essay I have elaborated upon six pedogogical issues that I believe English language arts teachers should consider in preparing to use Holocaust literature to address "intolerance and bigotry," in this country and elsewhere. Teachers should ask themselves: (1) Does the literature unit emphasize anti-Semitism as a cause of the Holocaust?, (2) Does the unit provide all relevant historical information?, (3) Does the unit make appropriate historical and structural distinctions, that is, does it indicate what is unique about the Holocaust?, (4) Does the unit draw on appropriate comparisons to bring out these distinctions?, (5) Does the unit address contemporary anti-Semitism, here and elsewhere, as the first lesson of Holocaust study?, and (6) What other literary works are included to show the Jews as a living cultural group and to help students understand the basis for their identity as a people?

As all those educated in the West know, the moral code formulated by the ancient Israelites is one of the foundations of our civilization. It is therefore unscrupulous to use the Holocaust to discredit Western Civilization. Both Hitler and Stalin attacked religion and Judeo-Christian morality in particular as a way of justifying their mass murders. Both their ideologies represent a suspension of the moral code of Western Civilization with the supreme value it places on individual human life. In this connection, one should also take note of yet another mass catastrophe of the twentieth century whose details have just come to light. Jasper Becker's Hungry Ghosts provides the first substantive account of the deaths of 30,000,000 Chinese in famines deliberately caused by Mao in the 1960s.

From this perspective, teachers might well ask what moral teachings are developing, or can develop, our students' consciences today. In a world where the ten commandments are despised or, as Lucy Dawidowicz wryly noted, cannot be mentioned in an American public school in a unit on moral education because (she was told) that would violate the separation of church and state, what guidelines can there be for moral behavior? In what can the sanctity of individual human life be based if not in a divinely sanctioned moral code or in the notion of natural rights that arose from the Enlightenment, another milestone in Western Civilization?

If the study of the Holocaust is now to take place in the English language arts class as part of our students' moral education, then it is even more meaningful from this perspective for teachers to include readings from the Hebrew Bible. A growing number of students in this country do not know who the Jews are as a people. They do not know what the Jews contributed to world civilization and history, what it is they wrote that formed the basis for their identity. At the high school level, the Book of Job is one selection that is appropriate for the profound moral issues it raises. But to fully appreciate the tragic irony of the Jews' long history of persecution and martyrdom in the West, students should also read the Ten Commandments. They should all

learn that the Holocaust was directed against the very people who gave the world a moral code that contained as one of its ten commandments "Thou Shalt Not Murder."

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*Author's Note: I am grateful to Steven Katz, Professor and Director of Judaic Studies at Boston University, Michael Kort, Professor of Social Science at Boston University, and Ronni Gordon Stillman and David Stillman of Philadelphia for a close reading of an earlier version of this essay. I remain responsible, of course, for everything I have written in this essay.

Endnotes

[1]Scott Foresman does not bracket the two selections together in the same thematic unit. Uchida's story is the final one in a unit on the short story. The very next unit is on drama, and the first selection is the play based on Anne Frank's diary, followed by a selection on the resistance movement in France during the Nazi occupation, which is an appropriate companion to the Anne Frank play.

[2]The influence of this arbitrary definition was visible in the first print-out of the 1994 FHAO teacher manual. It contained material that actually rationalized Louis Farrakhan's behavior, never mentioning that he vilifies the Jews. After Deborah Lipstadt expressed her outrage at this passage in her essay in The New Republic, the page was taken out of the remaining copies of that first edition and a new page inserted. However, the authors neglected to remove Farrakhan's name from the index. It is still there even though the page to which it refers contains nothing on him.

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