

Never a Bystander &

Other Enduring
Lessons for Holocaust
Remembrance

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Introduction

Each spring, the community of Battle Creek, Michigan, has taken part in the nationwide effort established by Congress to honor victims of the Holocaust and Nazi persecution.

The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM) defines the Holocaust as the systematic, bureaucratic, state-sponsored persecution and murder of six million Jews by the Nazi regime and its collaborators. During the Holocaust, German authorities targeted groups because of perceived racial and biological inferiority: Roma (Gypsies), people with disabilities, and those of Slavic background (Poles and Russians). Other groups persecuted on political, ideological, and behavioral grounds included Communists, Socialists, Jehovah's Witnesses, and those in the LGBTQ community.

As Lakeview Schools district librarian in Battle Creek and as a USHMM Teacher Fellow, I have welcomed the opportunity to organize annual Holocaust Days of Remembrance events to support Holocaust instruction, which was mandated in Michigan in 2016. The following Holocaust Remembrance collaborative projects can be replicated or adapted by other school librarians.

Holocaust Education Requirement

There has been an alarming rise in anti-Semitism in the United States and worldwide. In addition, a January 2020 Pew Research Center survey found that fewer than half of American adults could answer basic questions such as how many Jews were killed in the Holocaust or the way Adolf Hitler came to power (2020).

Educators are among those most concerned with confronting the continuing cycle of hatred and violence from anti-Semitism. Nicole Korsten explained why Holocaust education should be mandatory, noting that teaching the Holocaust promotes tolerance and acceptance (2019).

Due to this rise in anti-Semitism and the lack of knowledge, there is a need for federal and state initiatives to teach the Holocaust. Twelve states currently require Holocaust instruction (USHMM 2020).

One encouraging sign is that legislation is now in place to support Holocaust instruction. The Never Again Education Act (H.R. 943) was signed into law by President Donald Trump on May 30, 2020. The bill expands United States Holocaust Memorial Museum education pro-

gramming, requiring the museum to develop and nationally disseminate accurate, relevant, and accessible resources to improve awareness and understanding of the Holocaust. It also authorizes various Holocaust education program activities to engage prospective and current teachers and educational leaders ("H.R. 943 - Never Again Education Act" 2020; Richman 2020).

Holocaust Collaborative Projects

In my community incidents of anti-Semitism underscore the need to continue bringing awareness to the Holocaust for both students and adults. Two documented acts of vandalism were committed against Temple Beth El over the past two years (Christensen 2019). A Nazi flag was also raised on the premises of an elementary school building in the Lakeview District (Buckley 2019).

Through a collaboration with Battle Creek's Hart Dole Inouye Federal Center, the Lakeview High School Library began to address this problem, securing keynote speakers for Holocaust Remembrance observances in 2016, 2017, and 2018. Each year's event featured a different speaker. Holocaust survivor and artist Dr. Miriam Brysk spoke to students at Lakeview High School

and adults at the federal center in 2016; *New York Times* investigative reporter Edwin Black presented in 2017; and University of Michigan Professor Dr. Henry Greenspan spoke in 2018. Grant support from the Ravitz Foundation Initiative for Michigan Small Communities helped fund the guest speakers' visits.

Dr. Greenspan's 2018 visit was especially meaningful. A psychologist, oral historian, and playwright, Dr. Greenspan has taught, interviewed, and written about Holocaust survivors since the 1970s. He gave a keynote address at the federal center titled "Secrets and Revelations: From Forty Years of Listening to Holocaust Survivors." Dr. Greenspan also performed *REMNANTS*, his acclaimed one-man play, at Lakeview High School for some 350 students.

A supplemental and replicable student activity associated with Dr. Greenspan's visit included "History Unfolded: US Newspapers and the Holocaust," a USHMM citizen history project that promotes historical thinking and media literacy via primary sources. For Dr. Greenspan's address, learners helped curate a federal center lobby exhibit of Battle Creek historic newspaper coverage of World War II era events.

Holocaust Remembrance and Never a Bystander

Another successful Holocaust Remembrance collaborative project relevant to school libraries took place in 2019 when I arranged for two survivors to speak in Battle Creek. Both were Michigan residents who helped learners connect the lessons of history to today's world. Irene Miller, author of *Into No Man's Land: A Historical Memoir* published by the University of Michigan, Dearborn, gave

the keynote address at the federal center's Holocaust Remembrance Observance. She spoke of the need to promote tolerance and diversity while empowering others to overcome life's obstacles.

Holocaust survivor Dr. Irene Butter also visited Battle Creek in 2019. She too shared a message on the importance of learning from the Holocaust to bring about needed change and to heed the call of "Never a Bystander." Dr. Butter is a distinguished professor emerita of public health at the University of Michigan and an author and well-known peace activist. She has recounted her story in *Shores Beyond Shores*, a finalist in the Autobiography and Memoir category of the 2019 National Jewish Book Awards. Background on her life and accomplishments was shared with learners and staff prior to her visit (Butter 2020).

In 1990 Dr. Butter cofounded the annual Raoul Wallenberg Medal and Lecture at the University of

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Michigan to honor the Swedish diplomat who rescued Hungarian Jews and to highlight humanitarian role models. Recipients have included Eli Wiesel, the Dalai Lama, and Archbishop Desmond Tutu. Inspired by the Wallenberg Medal project and in conjunction with Dr. Butter's visit, my social studies



Dr. Henry Greenspan views WWII era Battle Creek Enquirer newspaper articles. (Photo courtesy of John Grap)



Dr. Irene Butter congratulates Abigail Caswell, recipient of the “Never a Bystander” grant project. (Photo courtesy of Battle Creek Shopper)

teacher colleague Scott Durham integrated Dr. Butter’s story and presentation into the curriculum for his World at War: WWII class. Learners were challenged to create a community action-oriented project modeled after “Never a Bystander” that addressed a community issue and presented a solution.

The “Never a Bystander” project launched in March 2019 (prior to Dr. Butter’s presentation) when students heard community members talk about their work to bring about change for the better. At this gathering, students who served on the Battle Creek Community Foundation’s Youth Alliance Committee explained the grant cycle process and how the committee could help fund projects to improve the Lakeview/Battle Creek community.

A special one-time “Never a Bystander” grant was created, funded by money collected by the Lakeview High School Library. For March is Reading Month and April is School Library Month the library donated fine money to one community action-oriented project created by a student in connection with Dr. Butter’s visit. Matching funds were provided by Lakeview staff and community members. Learners could apply for the grant by completing a one-page grant application.

The grant recipient (announced during Dr. Butter’s April 2019 visit) was Abigail Caswell. Abigail’s project allowed for the creation of an Irene Butter Collection in the Lakeview High School Library and the libraries of three other area city

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high schools. The set of books is meant to inspire young adults to take action in the face of adversity and to encourage literacy. Each book in the collection has a unique, emotional, and provoking story meant to uphold Dr. Butter’s legacy of courage. Dr. Butter’s memoir *Shores Beyond Shores* and Abigail’s own previously published young adult novel *Women of Questionable Morals*, written under the penname Abi Lynne, are included in the collection.

Although not able to attend the events in person, State of Michigan Librarian Randy Riley sent words of greeting to area students. Riley commended Abigail for helping open eyes and make a lasting difference.



Students Hannah Oo and Sarah Lyon present their poems to Dr. Butter.
(Photo courtesy of John Grap)

Poems for Dr. Irene Butter from Lakeview High School Students

Never A Bystander

By Hannah Oo

Never a bystander, even at fifteen
For dogs and wire were still not enough

To watch them wither, naked and unseen
A girl, a friend held captive by the same cuff

Never a bystander, even when alone
Forced to leave the bodies, told to go ahead
Though physically able, soul sought stone
But soon she arose, a lack of an instead.

Never a bystander, even in strange life
With perseverance and dedication guiding
the way

To each new role: graduate, mother, or wife
Stories took shape, all necessary to say

Never a bystander, even in the presence of hate
In fear's dark shadow, in tolerance's feigned
security

We take up our pen, our pedestal without wait

Gratitude beyond Measure

By Sarah Lyon

When they give you their sympathies,
You may smile and say thanks,

But they don't know what you've seen.
They don't know what you've lost,
they don't understand the cost.

Family torn apart,
surviving with a broken heart.

Your story is an incredible one,
One we could only begin to imagine.
One that I can't even fathom.
But your strength through it all
Is what really outshines and stands tall.

So to you I want to say, you're amazing.
Thank you for sharing what you've seen,
even when you were at the tender age of a
teen.

For that time may have taken so much,
but I'm so glad we're in touch.

A copy of Abigail's book was added to the Michigan Collection of the Library of Michigan.

Other learners similarly embraced the challenge of "Never a Bystander." During Dr. Butter's presentation, students Hannah Oo and Sarah Lyon offered heartfelt poems of appreciation to our honored guest. Senior Zach Baker gave Dr. Butter an original framed poster he designed in tribute to her.

Following her morning, Dr. Butter took part in a well-attended lunch-and-learn event at Battle Creek's Willard Public Library. She was subsequently invited to give presentations in nearby Kalamazoo, Sturgis, Marshall, and Coldwater, Michigan, based on the warm and welcoming reception she received in Battle Creek.

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Holocaust Remembrance during COVID-19

Building on the positive outcomes of “Never a Bystander” and other successful Holocaust initiatives, we began the 2019–2020 school year intent on continuing to bring Holocaust awareness to our community. The “Never a Bystander” community action-oriented proposal in the World at War: WWII course was again the final project for students to complete (“Never a Bystander Project” n.d.). This final course assignment remains an effective instructional activity for Holocaust studies, while supporting AASL’s *National School Library Standards*.

For 2019–2020, the Lakeview High School Library joined with Battle Creek’s Kellogg Community College (KCC) Morris Library to embark on a yearlong collaborative endeavor titled “Remembrance in Action: Responding to the Holocaust in Today’s Battle Creek.” The Ravitz Foundation again provided grant funding.

The collaboration’s goals were to foster community awareness about the Holocaust and highlight the need to remain vigilant against discrimination, hatred, and persecution. The project would launch with a return visit from Edwin Black, who would speak to Lakeview and KCC students on the topic of confronting the Holocaust and the continuity of hate on March 26, 2020. Unfortunately, the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in postponement of Black’s address.

Another event that is similarly being rescheduled for the 2020–2021 school year is a combined Holocaust education/anti-bias training workshop for area teachers. This professional development offering, which I organized, will be conducted by Michigan’s Holocaust Memorial Center and the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) either in person or



Student Zach Baker presents his framed poster to Dr. Butter. (Photo courtesy of John Grab)

Artist Statement by Zach Baker

From what I’ve seen, and what I have interpreted, Never a Bystander is about hope. The hope that individuals can stand up for others, and do something to change a situation. With my Poster, I wanted to express that hope in a colorful way. Yellow is the color of hope, and its bright yellow rays lead our eyes to the goal that everyone and everyone can go from a bystander, to someone that makes a difference. Dr. Butter is looking upon hope, and so will we.



Dr. Butter receives sincere thanks from Lakeview Librarian Margaret Lincoln. (Photo courtesy of John Grab)

virtually. In spring 2021 the Battle Creek Art Center will host the Detroit Jewish News Foundation's exhibit "The Holocaust Unfolds" (Chessler 2018) and a USHMM traveling poster set "Some Were Neighbors: Choice, Human Behavior, and the Holocaust," which had been on display at the United Nations (UN 2020).

Throughout the school closings due to the coronavirus, I continued to provide critical services and instructional support for students, focusing on gathering Holocaust materials. A resource list that I created and shared via the ALA Connect Forum proved helpful in spring 2020 for those organizing virtual Holocaust Remembrance observances and would be useful for planning events in the upcoming year (Lincoln 2020).

The table below provides contact information for individuals mentioned in this article who supported Holocaust Remembrance projects in Battle Creek, Michigan, who can assist with events in other locales.

In light of current political realities and social unrest, there is an ongoing need to educate both students and adults about the significance of the Holocaust. A year after Charlottesville came the unprecedented tragic shooting at the Tree of Life Synagogue in Pittsburgh. The ADL recorded 2,107 anti-Semitic incidents in the United States in 2019, the highest on record since ADL began tracking anti-Semitic incidents in 1979 (ADL 2019).

We must never be afraid to fight for the values that make us a just society. We must stamp out hate and racism.

Teaching about the events of the Holocaust raises awareness of our responsibility to take a stand against prejudice, discrimination, and injustice and to protect and care for others. The powerful message of "Never a Bystander" remains an enduring lesson of the Holocaust and a promising guideline for action in our world today.



Dr. Margaret "Gigi" Lincoln has been district librarian and National Honor Society Advisor at Lakeview

High School in Battle Creek, Michigan, since 1973. She is an American Memory Fellow with the Library of Congress and a Teacher Fellow with the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. Under her leadership, the Lakeview High School library received the Michigan Department of Education's 2018-2019 Model 21st Century School Library Award for its outstanding dedication to collaborative instruction among school library staffers, educators, and community groups. She presented sessions on Holocaust education at the ALA and AASL 2019 Conferences. In April 2019, Gigi received a four-year appointment to Governor Gretchen Whitmer's Educator Advisory Council.

Table 1. Holocaust remembrance observances.

NAME	BACKGROUND	CONTACT
Edwin Black	NY Times investigative reporter	https://edwinblack.com
Dr. Miriam Brysk	Holocaust survivor, artist, scientist, author	https://www.miriambrysk.com
Dr. Irene Butler	Holocaust survivor, professor, peace activist	http://irene-butter.squarespace.com
Dr. Henry Greenspan	Historian, psychologist, playwright	https://lsa.umich.edu/rc/people/retired-faculty-and-staff/hgreensp.html
Irene Miller	Holocaust survivor, author	www.irenemillerspeaker.com

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Holocaust Remembrance Resources:

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