

Detroit Free Press

Study: Americans fear Holocaust could happen again as memories fade

[Frank Witsil](#),

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(Photo: Lex Dodson, Special to the Free Press)

As Holocaust survivors fade away, so are the memories about the efforts to wipe out the Jewish population in Europe, according to a survey released Thursday on Holocaust Remembrance Day, or Yom Hashoah.

"On the occasion of Yom Hashoah, it is vital to open a dialogue on the state of Holocaust awareness so that the lessons learned inform the next generation," said Julius Berman, president of the Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany, the group that commissioned the [survey](#). "We are alarmed that today's generation lacks some of the basic knowledge about these atrocities."

The national survey found gaps in basic facts and knowledge of the Holocaust and a consensus (93%) that schools should be responsible for providing Holocaust education, with eight out of 10 people saying that education can help prevent it from happening again.

Moreover, a majority of American adults (70%) said fewer people care about the Holocaust than they used to and more than half (58%) fear the Holocaust could happen again.

"In metro Detroit, we're lucky we have a Holocaust museum open to the public," said Rabbi Eli Mayerfeld, CEO of the Holocaust Memorial Center Zekelman Family Campus in Farmington Hills. "We'd encourage people to come here and learn about the Holocaust and the lessons they can learn about their own lives."

In 2016, a [law was passed](#) requiring public school children in Michigan [to learn about the Holocaust](#) as part of their social studies curriculum, spending at least six hours learning about genocide between sixth and eighth grades.

The 55,000 square-foot center has been teaching about the Holocaust and its legacy for more than 25 years. An estimated 35,000 school children visit the center each year. In addition to the museum, the center also includes a library archive and research center.



Ben Guyer, of Gombin, Poland, wore this concentration camp uniform while imprisoned at Auschwitz. (Photo: Patricia Beck, Detroit Free Press)

"The most important thing we teach visitors is that all history — the Holocaust in particular — is made through a series of choices," Mayerfeld said. "Every choice has a consequence and the choices made by every individual has power."

He added: "Life is lived forward, but you've got to be looking in the rear-view mirror, and that's where this idea of 'never forget' or 'never again' comes from: The idea of *zachor*, the Hebrew word that means remember. It's important that people understand what occurred before."

About 6 million Jews, nearly two-thirds of the Jewish population in Europe, were systematically targeted and killed as part a plan by Nazi Germany leading up to — and during — World War II. In addition to Jews, other groups were targeted, including gay men, Gypsies, Jehovah Witnesses, Catholics and people with disabilities.

The persecution took place in stages, starting with identifying Jews, excluding them from society, and then sending them to death camps.

Among the study's findings:

- Nearly one-third of all Americans believe that substantially less — 2 million or fewer — than the 6 million Jews were killed during the Holocaust.
- Nearly half of Americans, 45%, cannot name a single European concentration camp or ghetto.
- Eight in ten Americans have not visited a Holocaust museum.

The survey collected results from a random sample of 1,350 adult Americans representing various demographics. The conference is made up of representatives from museums, educational institutions, and leading nonprofits such as Yad Vashem and the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

"This study underscores the importance of Holocaust education in our schools," said Greg Schneider, executive vice president of the conference. "There remain troubling gaps in Holocaust awareness while survivors are still with us; imagine when there are no longer survivors here to tell their stories."

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Holocaust Memorial Center

The center, 28123 Orchard Lake Road, in Farmington Hills, is open from 9:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. on Sunday, and Tuesday through Thursday; from 9:30 a.m. to 8:30 p.m. on Monday; and from 9:30 a.m. to 3 p.m. on Friday. It is closed Saturday and on Jewish holidays.

Phone: 248-553-2400

Website: www.holocaustcenter.org

Admission: \$8 for adults, \$5 for children and students