

# Detroit Free Press

## Survey shows knowledge of Holocaust is fading. We can't let that happen.

Eli Mayerfeld May 3, 2018

Recalling and understanding the [Holocaust](#) is a serious issue now that we are three-quarters of a century beyond the World War II era. Many of the participants who witnessed the horrors of the Holocaust, including our own American veterans, are passing from the scene.



The Holocaust Memorial Center in Farmington Hills. (Photo: Kimberly Mitchell, Detroit Free Press)

A new [national survey of Holocaust awareness](#) among adults in the United States, conducted by Schoen Consulting and commissioned by the Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany (Claims Conference) on the occasion of Holocaust Remembrance Day illuminates these issues.

Overall, the [survey found](#) significant lack of Holocaust knowledge in the U.S. Four-fifths of Americans have not visited a Holocaust museum. And even though there were more than 40,000 concentration camps and ghettos in Europe during the Holocaust, almost half of Americans cannot name a single one. This percentage is even higher among Americans under the age of 40. Moreover, more than two-thirds of Americans say that fewer people seem to care about the Holocaust than they used to. The survey was compiled from 1,350 interviews conducted in February with American adults ages 18 and older.



Rabbi Eli Mayerfeld, CEO of the Holocaust Memorial Center (Photo: Supplied)

However, there are some bright spots in the survey results. More than nine-tenths of those surveyed believe all young people should learn about the Holocaust in school, while four-fifths of respondents said it is important to keep teaching about the Holocaust so it does not happen again.

Knowledge must yield understanding. The Holocaust happened more than 70 years ago. Memories fade and, as noted, we are losing Holocaust survivors that can tell their harrowing experiences. That is why it is so important to have institutions like our Holocaust Memorial Center — to make sure that those who perished are never forgotten as we teach the critical lessons of the Holocaust.

With the legislation signed into law by Governor Snyder in 2016 making Holocaust education mandatory in Michigan schools, the Holocaust Memorial Center continues to work to be the nexus for providing teacher training on the Holocaust and genocide to schools throughout Michigan. Nationally, Congress has recently introduced a bill to help schools teach about the Holocaust, called H.R. 5460, the Never Again Education Act. We encourage passage of that important legislation.

In support of this mission, which we have embraced for the past three decades, more than 35,000 students now visit the Holocaust Memorial Center each year. By engaging and educating young people and the adults who accompany them, both in our building and through the social studies curriculum being implemented across Michigan, we help empower students to develop critical thinking and engage in ethical decision making.

Study of the Holocaust remains relevant, not just to honor its victims, but also to understand its perpetrators. It is important because Nazi Germany's ultimate hatred shows how far human beings are willing to go to destroy those who are different in some way. Most importantly, we teach visitors at the Holocaust Memorial Center that events are not pre-determined: History is made by individuals making a series of choices, resulting in both negative and positive consequences. Through this principle, we talk about tolerance and the relationships among personal and collective choice and responsibility.

In a world less removed from what happened during the Holocaust than all those years might suggest, as ethnic and political "cleansings" large and small continue in many parts of the globe, this is the lesson we must emphasize to all. We must inspire each other to not be bystanders to hatred or prejudice. Each of us must have the wisdom and courage to choose for our own voice to be known in support of tolerance, respect, and doing what is right.

This will keep alive the lessons of the Holocaust.

*Rabbi Eli Mayerfeld is CEO of the Holocaust Memorial Center.*