

S2E07 Transcript

Why do many young people lack basic knowledge about the Holocaust and how do we fix this?



Emily Tran: From the University of Wisconsin–Madison, this is *Ask a Historian*. I'm Emily Tran.

Today on the show: Why do many young people not know about the Holocaust, and how do we fix that? Professor Dan Stolz talks to Professor Brandon Bloch about recent surveys that produced concerning statistics on deficits in Holocaust knowledge among American millennials.

They discuss the historical development of Holocaust education in the United States, how recent literature reframes our understanding of the Holocaust as part of American history, and why it's necessary to rethink the goals of Holocaust education within a multicultural United States.

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The question we're taking to a historian today comes from our listener Scott, who is a teacher in Wisconsin.

Scott Phillips: My name is Scott Phillips. I'm from Fort Atkinson, Wisconsin, and my question is: I've read recently that there are studies indicating millennials, a third of them don't know what Auschwitz, is. So, I'm wondering, as a historian, do you think these surveys are accurate, and how do you think this is possible, that so many people wouldn't know what Auschwitz is, and how do we fix that?

Emily Tran: To answer Scott's question, Professor Dan Stolz talked to Professor Brandon Bloch.

Dan Stolz: Hi, my name is Dan Stolz. I'm an assistant professor in the History Department at UW–Madison. I'm in my third year here at UW. I research and teach Ottoman and modern Middle East history, with a focus on the history of science and technology as well as finance.

Brandon Bloch: So, I'm Brandon Bloch. I'm an assistant professor of History at the University of Wisconsin–Madison. I just came here in August, so looking forward to getting to know Madison a little bit more soon hopefully. And I teach on the history of modern Germany and Europe, and also the history of human rights in comparative perspective.

[MUSICAL INTERLUDE]

Dan Stolz: Thank you, Brandon, first of all for inviting me to join you for this conversation. I thought it might be helpful if we began by providing some context for the survey that produced this statistic. What was that survey, and what do you think that survey and this statistic can really tell us, and maybe also what, what can't it tell us?

Brandon Bloch: Sure. Well, thank you so much, Dan, for agreeing to record this interview with me, and thanks to Scott for posing this really important question.

So, over the past three years, there have been two surveys on Holocaust knowledge and awareness among U.S. millennials conducted by the Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany. This is an organization that was founded in the early 1950s to negotiate with the German government on behalf of Holocaust survivors for reparations and property restitutions.

In 2018, some of our listeners may be more familiar with this, they did a survey that was widely publicized was written up in both the *Washington Post* and the *New York Times*. It surveyed 1,350 American adults and found that millennials—in that case defined as people born between 1984 and 2000—have significantly less knowledge of the Holocaust than older generations. For instance, in that first survey, 11% of adults overall but 22% of millennials had never heard of the Holocaust, or we're not sure whether they had heard of it.

More recently in 2020, the Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany conducted a more extensive survey, this time only with millennials and Gen Z, defined as people born between 1981 and 2002. The survey was conducted with demographically representative samples of millennials across all 50 states about overall Holocaust awareness and they produce some truly stunning results.

So, 56% of millennials in the survey were not able to identify Auschwitz, which was the largest and deadliest of the Nazi camps during World War II, responsible for the murder of over one million Jews. 63% of those surveyed did not know that six million Jews were murdered. 36% believed that two million Jews or fewer were murdered. And perhaps the most disturbing result of the survey was that 11% of those surveyed believed that the Jews themselves were responsible for the Holocaust.

I think these are certainly our results to be concerned about. I would absolutely agree with, with Scott there. I think certainly the fact that millennials know significantly less about the Holocaust than older generations is quite significant and tells us something, perhaps, about the trajectories of public and private memory of the Holocaust in the United States.

Interestingly, millennials—and I belong to this generation as well—sort of grew up amidst this kind of boom in Holocaust memory in the United States in the 1990s, if you think about things like *Schindler's List*, made in 1994, the growth of Holocaust education programs in the 1990s. And yet, despite this increased attention to the Holocaust within public memory culture, within public education, nevertheless that's not translating in terms of actual historical knowledge. So, I think this suggests a cause of concern that there's certainly a deficit of Holocaust knowledge.

I would also add, though, that we might want to contextualize this as well—and then maybe this is something we can talk about. Are we talking about here a deficit of Holocaust knowledge in particular, or perhaps more broadly a deficit in historical education among millennials in particular surrounding very challenging topics like genocide?

Dan Stolz: That's a really interesting question. I think it raises the point that, taken by itself, the survey doesn't necessarily tell us that knowledge of the Holocaust is declining or has declined relative to other kinds of historical knowledge, right? It may in fact be a symptom of a broader decline, right, in, in history education and historical awareness.

So, maybe in connection with that, it would be helpful, Brandon, if you could speak a bit more about the trajectory of Holocaust education in the United States. At what point in time did it become expected that people would learn about the Holocaust, say, in a public educational setting, that Auschwitz took on this iconic status in American culture as a kind of almost, we could say, a metonym for evil, and, and for what reasons was Holocaust education first broadly taught in American schools?

Brandon Bloch: I think the answer is a little bit counterintuitive, right? One might think that Holocaust education, Holocaust memory would go all the way back to the end of the Second World War. In fact, it's a much more complex and, in some extent, much more recent story.

I think certainly within American Jewish spaces in the decades after World War II, there already was a significant degree of Holocaust memory. Yizkor books or memorial books, for instance, that commemorated specific communities of Eastern European Jews that were destroyed in the Holocaust, were produced by American Jewish communities as well as in Israel already beginning in the mid 1940s. I mean, certainly within the context of synagogues or Jewish educational institutions or Jewish summer camps, there was an effort to make the postwar generation aware of what happened in Europe already in the 1950s and 1960s.

So, Holocaust education begins quite early after the war specifically within Jewish spaces but only much later as a phenomenon within American culture and education more broadly. I think it begins, sort of, in the late 1970s and continuing on into the 1980s, there's a number of important milestones that I think, sort of, historically would be significant to mention.

So, in 1978 on the 30th anniversary of the foundation of the State of Israel, President Carter formed the President's Commission on the Holocaust, chaired by the Holocaust survivor Elie Wiesel, which first made plans for the creation of a United States Holocaust Museum on the National Mall, for which construction began in the late 1980s and it was dedicated in 1993.

This also corresponds to a famous, at the time widely viewed, TV series called *Holocaust* produced by NBC in 1979 which told the intertwined stories of a fictional family that had been victimized by the Holocaust, as well as the story of a perpetrator.

And so, these combined to bring wider attention to the Holocaust and by the 1980s the first states have begun to require Holocaust education as a mandatory element within middle and high school history education. So, California was the first state to introduce genocide education as a mandatory subject in 1985, and then Illinois first introduced Holocaust education specifically in 1989, which in part was a response to the rise of Neo-Nazis. There was a famous march by Neo-Nazis in the town of Skokie, Illinois, which had a high proportion of Holocaust survivors in the late 1970s, and then this push within the Illinois legislature.

And then in the 1990s really, you see this further expanding with *Schindler's List*, with new efforts of which Steven Spielberg, the director, was a part to interview survivors and record their testimonies.

And today we have, I believe, 17 states according to the U.S. Holocaust Museum, that require Holocaust education. So, this is actually still hardly universal. Only 17 of the 50 states require it. But

it's really a more, I think, recent phenomenon of the 1980s and 1990s where the Holocaust really takes on this more iconic status within public memory.

Dan Stolz: You know, it strikes me, a couple of things, Brandon. First of all, as we're recording this conversation here in Madison, I believe the state legislature is currently considering legislation to require a new Holocaust education mandate in the schools here. So, it's certainly a very current topic for us.

But the more I hear you go into this history, Brandon, the more it seems to me that we have a bit of a puzzle here, which is that it seems like, based on everything you've said, that the generation which grew up since the late 1980s should in some respects—we should expect them to be the *most* educated, and the *most* aware of, of Holocaust history, both in terms of the, the number of states that have put it in their curricula and in terms of elements of popular culture like, like films of Steven Spielberg.

So, it does seem like there's a bit of a puzzle to explain there. And so, maybe we can return to this question in a little more detail of how you think what's happened to Holocaust education, and we could say Holocaust awareness more broadly, relates to broader trends and deficits in history education more generally.

Brandon Bloch: Yeah, I mean, I think this is an important question. And again, unfortunately, based on the survey results themselves, right, it's difficult to establish with any kind of precision the reasons why these deficits are there, why this new expectation of Holocaust education has not led to greater awareness.

But I think there's a few different factors one could point to, right? So, in terms of Holocaust education specifically, I think there very well could be a gap between kind of what's expected by state legislatures on the one hand, versus what's being actually done in classrooms on the other. It may very well be that even though there are these kind of broad mandates from states to include Holocaust education within the curriculum, that doesn't necessarily mean that history teachers feel well-equipped or well-prepared to undertake that and to teach. You know, they might feel that they personally lack a sufficient degree of, sort of, knowledge and education on the subject.

Of course, it's a very heavy subject and, you know, difficult certainly to introduce to K-12 students. So, simply the presence of these, sort of, laws on the books, right, we can't necessarily assume that that's going to necessarily translate into an effective presentation in the classroom.

Certainly the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum which I mentioned—again, is dedicated in 1993, really the major institution of the United States for Holocaust memory—does have programs for teacher education, working with secondary school teachers throughout the country to actually equip them to implement these standards. And actually just recently, the U.S. House and Senate in 2020 passed a bill allocating \$10 million in funding to the Holocaust Museum over the next five years in order to provide more training to secondary school teachers on Holocaust education, as well as digital resources for Holocaust pedagogy.

So, I agree there's certainly a kind of discrepancy between the kind of legal ideal and the, and the actual practice.

And then in terms of broader trends in historical education, I mean, I think this is a great question because, you know, it really goes to, to some extent what, you know, statisticians would kind of see as, you know, the control for the survey or something like that, right? We have this, sort of, survey that only deals with this particular variable of Holocaust awareness, but without comparing it to historical awareness of other topics, it's difficult to kind of measure what this is really telling us.

Certainly, we've seen, you know, over the past decade since I was a student in the schools and even more so, right, a sort of push for more, kind of, test-driven education. And of course, the state testing standards in K-12 tend to be focused around, sort of, mathematics or language arts. You know, the SATs or other college admissions exams tests math and English writing skills but not history. So, history tends, I think, to maybe left a bit too much on the back burner in, kind of, test-focused curriculums. And this certainly could be— I mean, again, we don't have a way of establishing a direct correlation, but I think that could be, could be one thing that's also suggested by the surveys.

Dan Stolz: You know, you raised the issue of standardized testing, which of course always raises the issue of what we think it's important for people to know, right, and then what people are expected to know and how they demonstrate knowledge.

The survey itself, the Claims Conference survey, they asked specific questions, right, to try to measure Holocaust knowledge. So, "Do you know what Auschwitz is?" right, "How many people were killed in the Holocaust?"

I wondering, Brandon, for you as a historian, what do you think is important for people to understand about the Holocaust? What is the importance of knowing the significance of a specific concentration camp like Auschwitz or of knowing the number six million, or other, you know, specific things that you would look for?

Brandon Bloch: Right, that's an excellent question. You know, what's the significance of these particular measurements the survey has created for, for Holocaust awareness?

I mean, I think certainly as a historian, as a history educator—and I think you would agree with this as well—that we always want to push our students toward more, kind of, conceptual or interpretive or connective thinking rather than reducing history to this kind of collection of names and dates and facts, right? I think that sometimes, you know, students have the impression that history is a kind of boring subject because it's all about kind of memorizing these specific details and then regurgitating them on the test. And I think, as, as history educators we always want to push back about that stereotype of history as this kind of subject of, you know, just one thing after another that has to be memorized.

Having said that, having done a bit more research on this topic in preparation for this interview, I would argue that some specific knowledge—for instance, the statistics, the, the fact that approximately six million Jews were killed in the Holocaust—is important to know in particular due to the rise of Holocaust denialism both in the U.S. as well as in Europe and elsewhere around the world, claims that can be spread on social media on as well.

One of the key claims of Holocaust denial is, right, they don't necessarily deny that *any* Jews were killed in Europe during the Second World War; many will try to cast doubt on the, sort of, findings

of historical research, try to cast doubt on things like the fact that six million Jews were killed in the Holocaust. So, this, this fact that 41% of millennials in the 2018 survey believe that two million Jews or fewer were killed in the Holocaust, that's concerning because that might suggest the, sort of, presence of Holocaust denialism in our culture, right, which precisely trucks in these kinds of historical inaccuracies to cast doubt on the very historical fact of the genocide.

Similarly, being able to identify Auschwitz, the most significant concentration camp, right— The existence of Auschwitz, or the, the status of Auschwitz as this horrifically deadly killing center is something else that is cast into doubt by Holocaust deniers. So, I do think actually having this baseline factual knowledge is important.

But of course, I would also suggest, right, and I think you would agree, that in Holocaust education we want to go beyond just the facts, simply countering Holocaust denial and making, you know, Holocaust denialism the kind of benchmark by which we measure whether we're effective.

Instead, we want students to be able to think more conceptually about the causes of the Holocaust. And I think that, you know, at one level it sensitizes students to the worst that human beings are capable of, right, what can happen when a democracy falls apart, what can happen when norms of the rule of law fall apart, what can happen when the very basis of a state moves from protecting the individual rights and the well-being of its population—which we think of as the, kind of, bedrock foundation of political legitimacy—to having a state whose very core principle of existence is the destruction of part of its population. These are very important historical themes that I think it's worth delving into with students beyond simply knowing that six million Jews were killed, or being able to identify Auschwitz, though again, I think these are also important goals.

Dan Stolz: Which brings up also the question of, more broadly, the purposes of Holocaust education, doesn't it? So, if you would, could you talk a bit more about how different generations have actually understood the purpose of Holocaust education, how that's been construed differently over time, is it changing today, and do we need to, to rethink the purposes of Holocaust education in the current moment?

Brandon Bloch: So, I would say that, you know, certainly there are many different groups, right, sort of engaged with Holocaust education. The U.S. Holocaust Museum being among the most prominent; the Institute for Visual History and Education, formed by Steven Spielberg that collected video testimonies of survivors; [Facing] History and Ourselves, which is a really important program based in Brookline, Massachusetts, which develops curriculum for students. And, and, so these all have, kind of, different ideas of what the purposes are.

But I think one important strand within this, within the theme of the Holocaust education community, right, is that it's not simply about looking toward the past, learning about historical facts. But rather that Holocaust education can also be a form of civic education, right, that it's about learning democratic values, it's about learning the importance of human rights and what happens when human rights are not respected.

I think the concept of—now I'm drawing a bit on my own personal experience, sort of, in Holocaust education growing up both in Jewish settings and in public school settings—I think the concept of the bystander was really crucial through a lot of Holocaust education, right? Sort of sensitizing students to the fact that, when we look at the Holocaust, it's not simply this dichotomy of

perpetrators—people actually physically involved in the killing and planning the killing—and then victims. But we also have to pay attention to these wide swaths of German society of people who may not have been directly implicated, but nevertheless had knowledge of the Holocaust either through, through rumors that circulated, through knowledge from, from family members who *were* perpetrators, that didn't do anything to try to stand up for the victims. So, thinking about bystanders in countries occupied by, by Germany during the war.

And so, sensitizing students to the problem of the bystander, right, and that it's not simply enough *not* to engage in atrocities or just, you know, not enough *not* to commit, kind of, immoral acts against people, but that as human beings, right, we have the responsibility to stand up when we see some kind of moral or ethical or human rights violation being breached. And that as being the, kind of, lesson for our own world.

I think that was oftentimes a crucial element of Holocaust education as well as, sort of, educating toward, toward democracy and human rights. And I think that that set of values *does* still have a place in Holocaust education. Certainly, they powerfully speak to values that I think we all want to promote in our society today.

Having said that, I would argue that, you know, in the 21st century, right, rethinking what is the purpose of Holocaust education specifically within a multicultural United States that's engaged in ongoing, and recently intensifying debates about our own national past.

That Holocaust education can't become the *only* means of civic education in the United States, right, that we need to also think about how we're teaching the extraordinarily difficult aspects of the *American* past. How is slavery being taught in schools? How is Native American genocide being taught? And that, sort of, histories of race and genocide in relation to the United States may have a more direct bearing than the Holocaust on questions of, sort of, democracy and human rights in our own country, too.

I think when we're thinking about how to make Holocaust education relevant for our 21st century, multicultural context in the United States, we also have to think about how to integrate the Holocaust with themes that are challenging within our own national past in the United States, rather than seeing the Holocaust as somehow an American triumph, right, in some sense. You know, the United States won the war in Europe, you know, and helped to liberate the camps and therefore, the Holocaust in the U.S. can be taught as part of this heroic narrative, right, affirming American democratic values.

But I think the story is much more complex from an American point of view and it's important to bring those complexities to students.

Dan Stolz: I'm wondering if you could speak a bit more about that, actually. You know, when you mentioned slavery and the destruction of Native American peoples and communities, it reminds us, of course, that the Holocaust happened overseas, right? It didn't happen in the United States. But you're also reminding us that the Holocaust can still be understood very much as a part of American history.

So, I'm wondering, how has that changed over time and how is that maybe also changing today, right, the way in which we understand the Holocaust as a part of, of American history, specifically?

Brandon Bloch: I think in the earlier postwar decades and probably also with, sort of, the institutionalization of Holocaust education in the 1980s and 1990s, sort of, in relation to this project of civic education of democratic education, the United States could be framed in this kind of heroic and liberatory role. And I think that that idea of seeing, you know, American democracy and, sort of, American human rights ideals as the antithesis of the Holocaust, that kind of [*indistinct*] story, I think, has been challenged in various ways by historical scholarship certainly over the past couple of decades in ways that I think could be integrated and be productive in in Holocaust education.

I would point to, kind of, two particular sets of challenges.

So, one is that a lot of recent scholarship on the Holocaust has focused much more on the eastern European side and the war between Germany and the Soviet Union, right, and pointed out that in fact it was not the United States that was primarily responsible for winning the war against Germany and liberating the camps, though of course American soldiers did liberate camps like Dachau in Germany. But rather, the Soviet Union bore the lion's share of the casualties in the fight against Nazi Germany and of course that was the, sort of, problematic narrative during the Cold War. That that's sort of come to the fore, I think, in some senses problematizes the idea that the United States can be seen as the primary or the most important sector of World War II.

There's been another really interesting strain of recent scholarship showing that the relationship between Nazi Germany and the United States was actually more complex than we may have thought because the Nazis themselves modeled some of their racial legislation—such as the Nuremberg Laws, right, which stripped Jews of their citizenship and prevented Jews from marrying or engaging in relationships with non-Jews and so called Aryans—some of those laws were, if not kind of directly modeled after, at least inspired by or participated in the same kind of thinking as so-called anti-miscegenation laws in the United States, Jim Crow era laws that promoted racial segregation or, again, prevented marriages and relationships between people of so-called different races in the United States.

And in some sense, Adolf Hitler and the Nazis saw the U.S. and the Jim Crow system as a kind of model for the racial state that they aimed to establish in, in Germany. Again, there's important differences. We don't want to, sort of, overdraw the comparison, right? Jim Crow was not necessarily a genocidal system or, sort of, bent on the complete destruction of one population like the Nazi system that actually was. But nevertheless, there are, there are connections in terms of racial ideas between, between the two regimes and both participate in this wider proliferation of racial thinking and white supremacy both across Europe and in the United States in the late 19th and early 20th century.

So, I think that framing the Holocaust in that context, right, absolutely implicates Americans in ways that, you know, simply talking about the United States victory in the Second World War does not.

And I think again, sort of, thinking about the world that Holocaust education *could* play in a multicultural United States in the 21st century, the Holocaust can become a vehicle for thinking about the power, the genocidal power of racism and racial thinking in ways that are not at all distant from our own national past and present in the United States.

Dan Stolz: You touched on the history of white supremacy in the United States, and I wanted to circle back to a point you made earlier about the fact that we're seeing this decline in Holocaust knowledge at the same time as we're seeing today rising denialism, Holocaust denialism, and more broadly antisemitism in American society.

And I have to ask you in connection with that: what was your reaction to seeing the infamous Camp Auschwitz sweater at the Capitol riot in January?

Brandon Bloch: Yeah, that's such an important question. I mean, so honestly, I was a bit shocked and perhaps maybe more than I should have been, and perhaps that just shows that, you know, I've been fortunate enough to be kind of insulated from, you know, a lot of kind of direct antisemitism in my own personal experience.

Having said that though, going back and looking at this survey from 2020 by the Claims Conference and circling back to the initial question, I think we really *shouldn't* be surprised about the role of antisemitism and Holocaust denialism in the Capitol riots. One of the findings, in fact, of that that survey was that 39% of millennials reported seeing Holocaust denial or distortion posted on social media, while 30% had seen Nazi symbols on their social media platforms or in the community. So, in fact, these, these kinds of symbols are very widespread.

You know, I think one could also point back to the Charlottesville riots in 2017, right, where the, the rioters were shouting, "The Jews shall not replace us." It shows how racism and xenophobia in United States is very tied up with antisemitism and with, with Neo-Nazism and with Holocaust denialism.

And I think this is really a wake-up call and I think, you know, one could argue that on both the left and the right in contemporary culture, to some extent these issues have not been dealt with as much as they could be.

Of course, many on the right sort of see antisemitism in contemporary life, and narrowly—in contemporary American life in any case—primarily as the phenomenon of, sort of, critiques of the State of Israel, right? So, you know, many on the right will say really that the main source of antisemitism is kind of the left and critiques of policies promoted by, by the State of Israel, without acknowledging the real problem of Neo-Nazism and white supremacy as a very strong embedded element in far-right politics in the United States.

On the other hand, on the left, I think, you know, antisemitism has not gotten the same kind of recent attention as racism or, or other kinds of xenophobia have in the United States, certainly for, for appropriate reasons. I would certainly not claim that antisemitism or Neo-Nazism is as serious a threat today as anti-Black racism in the United States.

But I think we do see in recent events how intertwined these hatreds are, right? Thinking back, you know, again to the Charlottesville riots from 2017 to the Tree of Life shooting in Pittsburgh the following year, or to the Camp Auschwitz sweatshirt. So, I think these are signs of a very disturbing trend that really lead us to what rethink the problem of Holocaust denialism and Neo-Nazism and perhaps it's much more widespread than many would like to believe.

Dan Stolz: Brandon, I want to make sure that before we wrap up, we touch on the part of this question that Scott submitted. He asked, "How do we fix this?" I'm curious to know if you have ideas on that part of the question.

And in particular, it strikes me that, you know, we're talking here primarily, really, about the way that history is taught in the United States. You're also someone who works, you know, very centrally on German history and European history. So, if you have any thoughts on how the model of teaching Holocaust history in Europe and particularly in Germany might bear on this question, that that might be a place to start

Brandon Bloch: So, I think there's sometimes misunderstandings, right, in the U.S. about Germany's culture of Holocaust memory, right? We oftentimes, you know, we see Germany—and to some extent, rightly so—as a very, sort of, successful case of having confronted this horrifying past of, of Nazism and sort of established a stable democracy and we see, you know, let's say the Holocaust memorial in the center of Berlin as a kind of symbol of Germany having recognized its past. I think that that's true, I mean the, the Germans deserve to be commended and in certain ways certainly have engaged much more seriously with their past than many other countries in Europe have engaged with their past either during Nazism or with colonialism.

Having said that, there are also limits to the German model as well. I mean, today, the third largest party in the German parliament is the so-called, is the far-right Alternative for Germany, which itself has elements within it that have denied and minimized the Holocaust.

And in Germany, also, I think that Holocaust education is not as extensive as perhaps it should be. I mean, I taught, I was an English teaching assistant at a public high school in Germany for a year from 2011 to 2012, and there I was quite surprised that, even more so than in the United States, really, history is kind of de-emphasized as a subject there. History is only taught for two class periods per week and then only up until the tenth grade, right? So, the Holocaust education will be a part of that, but I think history is not as prominent a subject as it should be.

But again, the memorial culture, I think, is important. There are many teachers in Germany who do make a great effort in this area, and in [taking] their students to Holocaust memorials.

So, in terms of adopting the, kind of, best aspects of the German model, right, I think certainly expanding the role of Holocaust education in schools in the U.S. I mean, I would certainly favor initiatives toward making the Holocaust a mandatory subject in middle and high school education in all 50 states.

In Wisconsin there's now a Holocaust education bill before the state legislature that would make Holocaust education mandatory in Wisconsin. I think the new initiative in the U.S. Congress, providing \$10 million of funding for the Holocaust Museum to support its teacher training programs is an important one.

But again, I would suggest that beyond providing more funding and more, kind of, legal mandates to Holocaust be engaged with in public schools, we also have to think about—as I, sort of, suggested earlier—how can we rethink the goals and purposes of Holocaust education within a multicultural U.S., right?

The Holocaust, you know, in some sense can be an easier subject to deal with than difficult aspects of our own national past, because after all we can hopefully all agree that [*indistinct*], you know, Nazism should absolutely be condemned. We can see, you know, the U.S. again as, you know, as a victor in the Second World War, as a liberator of Europe from Nazism.

But to make Holocaust education relevant today and speak to today's generation of students, I think it needs to be more integrated with questions of contemporary white nationalism in the United States, with Neo-Nazism, with a critical discussion of what happened in the Capitol, with an intersectional approach that looks at how antisemitism in this country also intersects with and is amplified by racism and homophobia and xenophobia.

So, there has to be a, sort of, broader contextualization that will ultimately, sort of, link the Holocaust with some of these challenging topics in our own national past and in our own present. I think that's going to be harder to, kind of, gain any sort of consensus around and I think that the way the Holocaust will be taught is, you know, it's going to be different in different states and different local communities. But I do think that a broader rethinking of the mission of Holocaust education is in order so that, again, it becomes not just about knowing the number of people who were killed the Holocaust or being able to identify Auschwitz, but also being able to think about what are the legacies and ramifications that we're still living with and that are still ongoing today.

Dan Stolz: Brandon, do you think it would be fair to say that we're not going to do a better job of teaching the Holocaust to the next generation if we don't do a better job and invest more in doing historical education in general?

Brandon Bloch: Yes, I think that would be, I think that's absolutely right.

Students need some kind of framework and context for thinking about the Holocaust, right? Whether we're trying to put it within a longer history of racism or antisemitism or violence and genocide, students need to be taught frameworks within which to understand these historical phenomenon, and that can only come through deepening historical education and making it more prominent as an element of our schools.

Dan Stolz: Brandon, thanks so much for speaking with me today.

Brandon Bloch: Yeah, thanks so much, Dan, for taking the time to talk and thanks again to Scott for posing such an important question.

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Emily Tran: Listeners, do you have an idea for an episode? send your question for a historian to outreach@history.wisc.edu.

Today's episode of *Ask a Historian* was produced and edited by me, Emily Tran, with editorial consulting from Christina Matta. Special thanks to Liz Hauck, April Haynes, Reed Trueblood, and Andrew Wells.

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Thanks for listening, and take care.