2021 Survey of North American Teens on the Holocaust and Antisemitism

Executive Summary
This study was conducted by Dr. Alexis Lerner, on behalf of Liberation75.

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Introduction

Background

Between the years of 1939 and 1945, in the series of events now known as the Holocaust or the Shoah, Nazis and their collaborators committed what we unequivocally understand to be a genocide. In concentration camps, killing fields, gas vans, manufactured ghettos, and town squares across Europe, they enslaved, imprisoned, abused, displaced, and systematically murdered those they believed to be racially inferior or politically subversive. This included over 6 million Jews, as well as 5.7 million Soviet civilians, 1.8 million Polish civilians, 312,000 Serb civilians, and hundreds of thousands of individuals from other identity groups, including Roma, people with disabilities, Freemasons, Slovenes, Jehovah’s Witnesses, and those with gay and lesbian sexual preferences.¹

The reverberations of the Holocaust echo across the world. Many families were completely erased; individuals that survived were left with grief and trauma over the loss of their former lives and loved ones. Nations grappled with the political crisis of where and how to place post-war refugees that had escaped the genocide. In both the United States and Canada, popular opposition to the local resettlement of refugees ensured that these nations only accepted a small percentage of those that applied for asylum. In all, approximately 200,000 Jewish refugees came to the United States between 1933 and 1945;² and, displaying the poorest admission record among western countries, Canada admitted 5,000 refugees between the years of 1933 and 1947.³

In the post-war era, national leaders worldwide embarked upon a perpetual campaign to ‘Never Forget’ the horrors, the suffering, and the indifference associated with the Holocaust. Museums dedicated to Holocaust education and memory were established by survivors across Canada, in locations such as Vancouver, Toronto, and Montreal. In the United States, 85 unique museums and monuments were designed to facilitate Holocaust memorialization and memory; and as recently as 2017, the National Holocaust Monument was installed in Ottawa, as a visual reminder to remain vigilant against antisemitism and bigotry. As time passes, and as fewer and fewer Holocaust survivors are alive to share their testimonies in person, organizations such as the USC Shoah Foundation turn to digital and computational solutions so that students, museum visitors, and users of the iWitness platform can continue to interact with pre-recorded survivor testimonies.

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holograms that can retrieve appropriate responses from an archive in response to each question in real time.⁴

The lessons of the Holocaust are clear: first, that we must always stand up to hatred, intolerance, and dehumanization of all people, and, second, that indifference to prejudice communicates consent for that prejudice. These takeaways can be applied universally.

Early in their schooling years, children learn about the dangers of bullying and the importance of kindness. However, in Canada and in the majority of U.S. states, genocide education is not yet a curricular requirement.⁵ While some teachers introduce Holocaust education through history or literature, many students first encounter the Holocaust and other state-sanctioned and systematic mass murders through nontraditional sources, such as though comic books, social media accounts, video games, and television shows. We use a pre/post-treatment survey design to assess knowledge and thoughts about the Holocaust and antisemitism among North American students in grades 8-12. This research facilitates our understanding of what students across Canada and the United States know about the Holocaust and how their knowledge relates to their understanding and thinking about antisemitism.

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⁵ United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. “Where Holocaust Education is Required in the United States.” Fundamentals of Teaching the Holocaust.
2021 Survey of North American Teens on the Holocaust and Antisemitism

Several surveys seeking to assess knowledge on Jews, the Holocaust, and antisemitism have been conducted in recent years. In 2018, Robert Brym, Keith Neuman, and Rhonda Lenton published their Survey of Jews in Canada, which reports on the identity, practice, views, and perceived connectedness of 2,335 Jewish Canadians from Montreal, Toronto, Vancouver, and Winnipeg. The Brym et al survey built upon the Pew Research Center’s 2013 Portrait of Jewish Americans Survey, which reached 3,475 Jewish respondents across the United States. Pew published the results of a follow-up survey with the same aims in 2020. While both surveys produce useful knowledge about Jewish life in the 21st century, they focus on Jewish, adult respondents. In their 2018 study Gen Z Now: Understanding and Connecting with Jewish Teens Today, Arielle Levites and Liat Sayfan conducted a similar survey of Jewish youth in the United States and Canada, however their findings cannot be generalized to a wider population in which Jews only comprise 1-2%.

Our survey differs from the aforementioned as we seek to learn about a general population’s understanding of the Holocaust and antisemitism, rather than one informed only by Jewish respondents. Other surveys that target a general population on the Holocaust are the 2018 Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany (Claims Conference) national surveys of Holocaust knowledge and awareness in the United States and Canada, as well as Becka Alper, Alan Cooperman, and Anna Schiller’s 2019 survey for the Pew Research Center on “What Americans Know About the Holocaust.”

While these surveys effectively measure a general population’s perspective on the Holocaust and antisemitism, our survey focuses exclusively on teenage respondents. In 2020, Alper, Cooperman, and Schiller also published a report on general youth understanding of the Holocaust for 1,811 respondents aged 13-17, however this report is limited to respondents in the United States.

To fill this gap, we introduce the 2021 Survey of North American Teens on the Holocaust and Antisemitism. Our objective in this survey is to assess what Canadian teens know and think about the Holocaust and antisemitism, and how this varies across demographic populations. This survey focuses on four key themes: Who is a Jew?, Thoughts on and Experiences with

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6 While the 2013 and 2020 Pew surveys produced similar results, they varied methodologically, as the former reached respondents by phone, whereas the latter conducted the survey online and by mail.
7 The Claims Conference conducted similar surveys in Austria and France in 2019.
Antisemitism, Knowledge about the Holocaust, and Thoughts about the Holocaust (such as whether it actually happened and whether it could happen again).

This survey was conducted in partnership with Liberation75. Founded by Marilyn Sinclair in 2018, Liberation75 is a not-for-profit organization dedicated to commemorating the 75th anniversary of liberation from the Holocaust through a series of public talks, educational events, and film screenings which showcase best practices in Holocaust programming from around the world. In partnership with the USC Shoah Foundation, Liberation75 is also involved in the collection of testimonies of Holocaust survivors that immigrated to Canada after the war.

A key component of Liberation75 is to use education as a tool to counteract antisemitism and Holocaust denial while promoting acceptance of diversity in all forms. To fulfill this objective, Liberation75 hosted two free Education Days programs: a professional development symposium only for educators on March 7th-9th, 2021, and one for students in grades 6 through 12 on April 7th and 8th, 2021. This global virtual gathering included educational programming about the Holocaust, antisemitism, and tolerance through a number of different pedagogical avenues, from survivor lounges where students could speak directly with a Holocaust survivor, to virtual tours of the Anne Frank House and the Vancouver Holocaust Education Centre, and to workshops led by organizations such as Yad Vashem World Holocaust Remembrance Center, the Ghetto Fighters' House Museum, and the Canadian Museum for Human Rights.

Education Days were opt-in. In order to promote the event and to mitigate the selection bias associated with an opt-in survey, Chelsea Sinclair, of Liberation75, sent individualized emails to every school board superintendent across Canada. Some administrators of school districts or school boards, such as the York Region District School Board (YRDSB) and the Toronto District School Board (TDSB), offered the learning to many schools in their jurisdiction. Other schools promoted the events to their individual teachers and permitted their teachers to determine whether the programming would fit into their classroom schedules or not. Still, other teachers learned about the event through colleagues, listservs, or other informal networks of educators, and signed up their classrooms entirely on their own. Approximately 13,500 students attended student Education Days. In the ‘Pre-Program Survey’ section of this report, we outline the descriptive characteristics of the teachers and students that participated in both student Education Days and in the Pre-Program and Post-Program surveys.

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8 For a full schedule, see: https://events.eply.com/EDUCATIONDAY
Survey Methodology

Focus Group Sessions
The principal investigator populated survey questions using the Qualtrics survey platform. Prior to the distribution of the survey, the principal investigator conducted 7 one-on-one focus group sessions with grade 8 students (UWO REB #116868). The principal investigator selected this target audience for the focus groups because 13 year olds represented the youngest demographic that would need to read and maneuver the general survey.

These one-on-one discussions were conducted on the Zoom video-conferencing platform from February 16th to March 12th and lasted approximately 30-60 minutes each. The Zoom calls were not recorded and participants were welcome to keep their cameras turned off to maintain their privacy. The principal investigator conducted the pilot study alone and took notes on participant answers to questions, such as “What did you think about the wording of this question?” and “What did you think about the buttons [referring to the Qualtrics buttons] on this question?” No data was kept on Qualtrics or Zoom. Participants were able to end their sessions at any time and were welcome to skip any questions that they preferred not to answer.

These conversations resulted in small changes to survey questions that benefited the readability and maneuverability of the survey. For example, in the pilot survey, one question asked respondents to define the Holocaust, choosing from a pre-populated list of both correct and incorrect options. Students in the focus group expressed concern that incorrect answers might cause problems for Holocaust education as, without an appropriate debrief for the survey, students might believe that the wrong answers to the question were the correct answers. Further, discussions from the focus groups helped to refine demographic questions in which respondents self-identified according to categories of age, race, ethnicity, religion, and socio-economics.

Program Registration
Liberation75 opened Education Days to registrants from March 7th through April 6th, using the ePly online event platform. Potential registrants were sent communications through their boards/districts, principals, and directly from Liberation75 (in the case of those teachers that had signed up for previous Liberation75 educational programming). Some teachers learned about the event through word-of-mouth and social media. Teachers were responsible for registering their entire classes. Upon registering, teachers were asked to answer the following categories of questions:

A. Basic information about the school (e.g., Name of School, School Board/District, City, State/Province, Country)
B. Basic information about the classroom (e.g., Grade level, Subject)
C. Basic information about the educator (e.g., Length of time teaching the grade level mentioned in B, Other grades taught in the past)

D. Topic engagement in the classroom: Educators could choose from a list of topics that they felt were covered in the classroom for the group mentioned in B. They could select as many topics as needed. This list included:
   a. The Holocaust
   b. Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion
   c. Genocide
   d. Antisemitism
   e. Racism
   f. Xenophobia
   g. World War II
   h. Human Rights
   i. Indigenous/First Nations Topics
   j. Bullying
   k. None of the above

E. Reason for topic education: Educators were asked why they taught the topics mentioned in D. They could select as many answers as needed. The options available were:
   a. A government mandate
   b. A provincial mandate
   c. District-wide curricular mandate
   d. School-wide curricular mandate
   e. Student interest
   f. Parent interest
   g. Personal interest
   h. Something else (Fill-in-the-blank)

F. Educators could specify the tools they used to teach the topics discussed in Question D. They could select as many tools as needed. The options available were:
   a. Texts and books
   b. Media
   c. Websites
   d. Prefabricated lesson plans
   e. Something else (Fill-in-the-blank)

Last, educators could indicate interest for particular types of Education Days sessions (e.g., survivor talks, educational sessions on the Holocaust, tours of Holocaust museums). This question helped Liberation75 to arrange the program schedule to accommodate more or less popular session types.

In Table One, we show the breakdown of registrants by country, as reported by teachers in the teacher registration questionnaire. The majority of those registered represent Canadian
classrooms. As shown in Table One, Canadian classrooms account for 266 of the 338 registered schools, and American classrooms account for 64 of the registered schools. Of these, 71.6% of registered classrooms come from Ontario schools. The remaining distribution is composed of 13.6% Florida (U.S.) classrooms, 4.1% Manitoba classrooms, 1.8% Saskatchewan classrooms, and outlier classrooms from nineteen other states and provinces.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Number of Classrooms</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Canadian Classrooms</td>
<td>266</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Classrooms</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unspecified</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table One: Breakdown of Registered Classrooms by Geographic Location, According to the Teacher Registration Questionnaire. (N = 338)

Students from these 338 classrooms were almost entirely from grades 6 through 12. Figure One shows the distribution of grade levels across registered classrooms. The majority of students were middle-school aged, with eighth grade representing the largest percentage of registered classrooms at 28.11%. Sixth grade classrooms represented 23.08% and seventh grade represented 14.79% of those registered. A small number of educators attended without students (2.66%) or with university-age students (0.59%). An additional 7.10% of teachers incorrectly specified or declined to specify the grade levels of their classrooms upon registration.

Figure One: Distribution of Grade Levels across all Registered Classrooms (N = 338)
Teachers were asked to self-report their students’ levels of knowledge prior to the event, according to four categories: Almost None, Little, Moderate, Advanced. As shown in Figure Two, teachers generally believed their students to have little-to-moderate pre-existing knowledge of the Holocaust. Nearly half of teachers (40.65%) reported that students had little knowledge of the Holocaust, while 28.78% reported moderate knowledge. Almost one in five classrooms came to Liberation75’s *Education Days*, self-reporting almost no previous knowledge about the Holocaust (18.40%). An additional 6.53% of teachers did not report on the believed pre-existing knowledge of their students.

![Figure Two: Distribution of Self-Reported Pre-Existing Knowledge about the Holocaust (N = 338)](image)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Percentage of All Classrooms Reporting</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Holocaust</td>
<td>58.28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion</td>
<td>75.44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Genocide</td>
<td>37.57%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Antisemitism</td>
<td>44.38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Racism</td>
<td>74.85%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Xenophobia</td>
<td>28.99%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>World War II</td>
<td>34.91%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human Rights</td>
<td>66.86%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table Two: Percentage of Teachers Reporting Various Curriculum Topics Taught Prior to Education Days (N = 338)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indigenous/First Nations Topics</th>
<th>65.38%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bullying</td>
<td>67.75%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

To provide greater clarity on pre-existing knowledge related to the Holocaust and genocide, teachers were invited to self-report about the types of lessons taught in their classrooms, and were able to select all that applied. In Table Two, we show the list of topics that we presented, as well as the number of teachers that reported including lessons on this topic.

Pre-Program Survey

After registering for Education Days via ePly, educators would receive the Pre-Program survey by email for distribution to their students. This survey remained available via Qualtrics from March 24th to April 6th. Some educators made time during class to complete the Pre-Program survey, while others assigned the survey as homework. After completion, the survey could also serve as a pedagogical tool for educators to use as they prepared their students to attend Education Days.

In this email, each teacher received an automatically assigned ‘Classroom Code’. All students in the class would use the same Classroom Code and each student needed to type in their teacher’s Classroom Code in order to access the Pre-Program survey. This ensured that each student’s Pre-Program survey would be connected to their classmates’ surveys, as well as to their teacher’s registration surveys. Using the Classroom Codes, we could track levels of preexisting knowledge on the topics, diversity in the schools, and so on. The Classroom Codes also link Pre-Program survey responses to Post-Program survey responses.

We encouraged completion of the Pre-Program survey with two reminders, sent on March 30th and on April 5th/6th (depending on when the educator signed up for the program). The first reminder was automated through the ePly platform; the second was a reminder sent personally from the principal investigator. The principal investigator sent targeted appeals to six specific sub-demographic groups that had registered for student Education Days but had not yet responded to the Pre-Program survey:

1. Targeted batch to non-responders in Florida (U.S.), as our response rate from Florida schools was surprisingly high

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9 The cover page and full list of questions are available in the Appendix of this Executive Summary.
10 In the case that one teacher registered two different classes (e.g., they taught both 7th and 8th grade classes and registered both groups), they received a separate Classroom Code for each class.
2. Individual emails to non-responders from all other states in the United States
3. Targeted batch to non-responders in Essex County (Canada)
4. Targeted batch to non-responders in Peel Region (Canada)
5. Individual emails to other non-Greater Toronto Area (GTA) non-respondents (e.g., Dufferin County) (Canada)
6. Targeted batch to non-responders from GTA school boards (Canada)

Following these targeted appeals in the days immediately prior to Education Days, the number of respondents increased by over 200%. Liberation75 also encouraged completion of the Pre- and Post-Program surveys by offering educators the opportunity to win one of two available Apple iPads. Educators with any student engagement in both the Pre- and Post-Program surveys were entered into a draw to win these products. The winners of the draw were announced on May 11th, 2021.

**Demographics**

A total of 3,593 respondents completed the Pre-Program survey. Below, we share the demographic breakdown of respondents according to characteristics of age, race, ethnicity, religion, and socio-economics.

**Age**

While we know what grades students are in from their teacher’s responses to the registration survey, we also asked students to self-report their ages. This was important as school birthdate cut-offs can vary between different provinces and states. As we expected, a small number of students reported being as young as 10 and as old as 19, however the majority of respondents reported their ages as 13 years old (23.48%). The breakdown of age is indicated in Figure Three.
Racial, Ethnic, and National Identity

Students were invited to self-report their racial and/or ethnic identities however they chose to self-identify. The word-cloud shown in Figure Four illustrates the variation of racial and ethnic identities that students self-reported in the Pre-Program survey. Given that students were invited to self-report on their heritages without guidance, we found that some chose to indicate their racial identities, while others wrote about ethnicity or religious identity. While the majority of respondents self-identified as ‘white’ (514), this was closely followed with those that wrote ‘black’ (159), ‘asian’ (159), ‘hispanic’ (158), ‘canadian’ (120), and ‘chinese’ (108). These responses are promising for the validity of our study as they illustrate substantial variation in the demographics of student respondents.

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11 A word-cloud is a visual illustration of a collection of words, where those words that appear more frequently are displayed as both larger and in a bolder font.
12 Students classified as ‘other’ often provided unrevealing answers that could not be clearly coded in the data cleaning process (e.g., ‘We are a small community that believes in g-d,’’ ‘Really cool and well cultured,’’ ‘Light skin,’’ ‘A proud race that was enslaved,’’ or some variation of ‘‘I don’t know/Not sure.’’
Figure Four: Word-Cloud of Self-Reported Heritage. Students wrote-in their racial, ethnic, or religious identities. Larger and bolder terms appeared more frequently in the data ($N = 2,476$)

We further assessed identity by inviting respondents to self-report whether they spoke a second (or third) language at home over 50% of the time and, if so, to identify that language. Figure Five shows that, of the 1,383 students who reported speaking another language at home the majority of the time, the largest numbers of students speak ‘spanish’ (262), ‘mandarin’ (89), ‘chinese’ (85), ‘punjabi’ (62), ‘tamil’ (55), and ‘urdu’ (52). Other commonly-spoken languages were ‘cantonese’ (49), ‘arabic’ (44), ‘hindi’ (42), ‘tagalog’ (39), and ‘russian’ (38). We asked this question in an effort to capture the identity and heritage of the student from another perspective, as language can help to add further nuance to categories of race or ethnicity.
Figure Five: **Word-Cloud of Second Language Spoken at Home More than 50% of the Time.**

Students were asked whether they speak another language at home *over 50% of the time* and, if so, to share what that language is. Larger and bolder languages appeared more frequently in the data (*N* = 1,383).

**Religious Identity**

Students were invited to self-report their religious identities, as well as those of the adults in their homes. In Figure Six, we show the breakdown of reported religion, with the largest percentage of respondents practicing the Christian, Catholic, Muslim, and Jewish faiths. There was a notable discrepancy between the number of students reporting any particular religion and the number of adults reported as practicing that religion, indicating that students are less observant within traditional organized religions than they observe their parents to be. As an exception, students are more likely to state their religious identity as ‘atheist’, ‘agnostic’, ‘spiritual but not religious’ or ‘nothing in particular’ than their parents (12.85% of students self-reported their religious identity as ‘nothing in particular’ while selecting this category for only 10.38% of the adults in their homes).
Figure Six: Distribution of Self-Reported Religious Identity for Student Respondents (Shown in Red) and the Adults in their Homes (Shown in Blue). \( N \) of students = 3,065. \( N \) of adults = 3,171

**Socio-Economic Status**

We used several metrics to assess socio-economic status. First, we asked respondents to self-report whether they had a parent or caregiver that went to college. Of those that answered this question, 75.81% reported having a parent or caregiver that went to college (11.62% said that no parent or caregiver went to college and 12.57% were not sure; \( N = 2,737 \)).

After asking whether a parent or caregiver went to college, we assessed socio-economic identification with the traditional survey question designed to capture this status: “If you had to guess, how many books would you say you have at home?” In addition, we included a similar question with revised contemporary phrasing: “If you had to guess, how many digital devices would you say you have at home?” Figure Seven shows a self-reported estimate of the number of books in a respondent’s house and Figure Eight represents the estimated number of digital
devices in a respondent’s house (including tablets, laptops, desktop computers, smart televisions, gaming devices, and cell phones). Given that these two illustrations represent the same respondents, there is variation in how one might measure socio-economic status using these metrics; in brief, a smaller number of digital devices (7-15) may adequately correspond to a larger number of books (100+).

Figures Seven and Eight: Measurements of Socio-Economic Status. On the left is an illustration of responses regarding the estimated number of books in one’s home ($N = 2,744$). On the right is an illustration of the estimated number of digital devices in one’s home ($N = 2,728$)

**Student Education Days**

Student Education Days took place on April 7th and 8th, 2021. This entirely virtual program was hosted on the Hopin event management platform. Approximately 13,500 students from grades 6 through 12 attended from across Canada, the United States, and from select international locations (e.g., India, Israel, South Africa). During the two-day event, Liberation75 hosted 40 unique sessions about the Holocaust and antisemitism. These 60-minute, age-appropriate sessions were presented or facilitated by best-practice organizations from across Canada and around the world, such as the Montreal Holocaust Museum, Yad Vashem, the USC Shoah Foundation, and the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM). Liberation75 also provided multiple opportunities for students to engage directly with Holocaust survivors, whether in a lecture format or in a discussion format, where students could ask questions to survivors in real-time. Instead of allowing the students to navigate the programs independently, almost every teacher broadcasted their programs of choice to their classes via their internal educational systems.

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COVID-19 Impact Statement

Student *Education Days* were initially intended to occur in tandem with “Liberation75: The Global Gathering of Holocaust Survivors, Descendants, Educators and Friends,” an event which was to be held in Toronto from May 31st-June 2nd, 2020, to commemorate the 75th anniversary of liberation from the Holocaust. Unfortunately, due to the COVID-19 global pandemic, this event was first postponed to occur in-person in Spring 2021. Ultimately, it was moved online in regulation with public health mandates. While the in-person program would be ideal for potential attendees from the Greater Toronto Area and southeast Ontario, the virtual format ensured that attendees from across Canada, the United States, and select international locations could also participate as attendees or speakers. This positively impacted our study as it increased the population and geographic distribution of respondents.

In addition to these changes in the dates and format of the event, COVID-19 also impacted the consistency with which the surveys were administered. If the event took place in person, our intent was to meet students at the entrance and exit of the event with tablets for them to complete the survey. As the event took place online, there was variation in not only the amount of time between the end of the program and when the student completed the survey, but also in how a student completed the survey. Some completed the survey on their phones while others completed it on a laptop. Some students completed the survey in class while others completed it at home. As a result, we could not control the degree to which students were susceptible to the influence of their peers, their teachers, and/or the adults in their homes, or whether students encountered technological issues when accessing the program or surveys online. Given these unique challenges, 27% of attendees from grades 6 through 12 completed the Pre-Program survey and 6% of attendees completed the Post-Program survey.

Post-Program Survey

Following the conclusion of *Education Days* on April 8th, teachers received a Post-Program survey to distribute to their students for completion. Teachers received a reminder via the ePly platform to complete the survey on April 23rd. Post-Program surveys were connected to Pre-Program surveys, as well as to teacher registration data, through each Classroom Code. The questions about the Holocaust and antisemitism were identical on the Pre-Program and Post-Program surveys, but the sections on ‘Who is a Jew?’ and demographics were removed from the Post-Program survey. Instead, the Post-Program survey included program evaluation questions about particular sessions and what could be improved about *Education Days* in future years. Again, teachers were incentivized to encourage Post-Program survey participation by being entered into a draw to win one of two iPads if their students participated in both iterations of the survey. In total, 848 students completed the Post-Program survey.
Topline Survey Results

This study provides the first empirically-based portrait of teen knowledge about, and attitudes toward, the Holocaust and antisemitism in Canada. It also contributes to existing studies about this topic and demographic group in the United States. Four themes emerge from the survey:

1. Who is a Jew?
2. Perspectives on Antisemitism
3. Holocaust Knowledge
4. Perspectives on the Holocaust

Theme One: Who is a Jew?

After entering their Classroom Codes, respondents were brought to Section One: Who is a Jew? In this section, our objective was to identify whether the respondent understood what it means to be a Jew. We also used this section to determine whether the respondent had Jewish friends or family members. As shown in Figure Nine, 69.28% correctly identified that Jews belong to the Jewish ethno-religious group, nearly one in five respondents on the Pre-Program survey stated that they were not sure what it meant to be a Jew, and an additional 12.58% of respondents answered the question incorrectly.

The wrong answers were designed to identify a number of biases about Jews. First, one wrong answer suggested that Jews are always from Poland, Belarus, or Germany, so that we could identify a so-called ashkenormative bias about the homogeneity of Jews as ashkenazi, or Jews whose ancestry is located in Central and Eastern Europe. Indeed, Jews come from all over the world, from Yemen and Iran to Uzbekistan and Ethiopia. A second wrong answer suggested that Jews always wear yarmulkes on their heads, alienating women, secular Jews, and Jews that wear alternate head coverings (e.g., knitted caps, fedoras, shtreimels, or baseball hats). Finally, we provided a third wrong answer that Jews can be identified by their dislike of Christmas, which simultaneously alienates Jews from the religiously pluralistic communities in which they live while negating the experiences of Jews that live in religiously-mixed homes. This question was not asked on the Post-Program survey.

![Figure Nine: What Does it Mean to Be a Jew? (N = 3,593)](image)

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When asked whether respondents had any Jewish friends, 31.59% said they did not and 30.46% said they were unsure \((N = 2,938)\). Of the 37.95% of respondents that reported having Jewish friends, 58.38% said that they had 1-3 Jewish friends, 21.62% estimated that they had 4-9 Jewish friends, and 20.00% stated that they had 10 or more Jewish friends \((N = 1,965)\). Further, only 16.22% of respondents reported having any Jewish family members, with the vast majority (85%) stating that these were members of their extended family (for example, a grandparent, an aunt, an uncle, or a cousin) \((N = 1,961)\). Of the 16.22% of the population that reported having Jewish family members, only 39% stated that they, themselves, identified as being Jewish.

These preliminary results indicate that the population of respondents is generally knowledgeable about what it means to be a Jew. According to the demographics shared previously in this executive summary, we also believe that this sample is, in general, ethnically, religiously, and racially diverse. That said, we also recognize that Jewish respondents, or respondents that live in areas where Jews make up a greater proportion than the national average, may be overrepresented in our sample. This is especially true when subsetting the data for respondents in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA). While Jews generally comprise approximately 2% of the North American population, they are estimated to comprise a larger percentage of the population in select wards of the GTA (e.g., Jews are estimated to comprise 15-17.3% of Ward 10 - York Centre, according to the Canadian Census).

This level of pre-existing knowledge bodes well for our exploration of what young people know and think about antisemitism and the Holocaust, as we would not be able to study their thoughts about discrimination against Jews if they did not know what it means to be a Jew in the first place.

**Theme Two: Perspectives on Antisemitism**

We also asked respondents to define antisemitism, according to a pre-populated selection of options. As shown in Figure Ten, the majority of respondents (53.98%) stated correctly that antisemitism is the hatred of Jewish people, just because they are Jews. A large portion of respondents (30.05%) perhaps reasonably conflated the term ‘antisemitism’ with the term ‘semitic’, which relates to speakers of all Semitic languages, including both Jews and Arabs. Slightly over 1-in-10 respondents misunderstood antisemitism as a synonym for xenophobia, or the hatred of all those that look and act differently than a person, and approximately 1-in-20 respondents incorrectly stated that antisemitism was a form of philosemitism, in which a person prefers Jews over other ethnic or religious groups.
Having defined antisemitism, we asked respondents to share whether they ever saw or heard something that they believed to be antisemitic, such as graffiti, slurs, bullying, property damage, or news stories. In response, 42% stated unequivocally that they had observed something of this nature, and 27% stated that they were uncertain whether what they had observed was antisemitic \((N = 2,709)\). This number is especially striking, given that Jews make up, on average, under 2% of the American or Canadian population. Students had the opportunity, if they were willing, to share what they saw or heard that they thought was antisemitic. In addition to the traditional antisemitic tropes, such as seeing a swastika carved into a wall or hearing a Jew being called a derogatory term like a ‘kike’, students also commented about: hearing jokes about Jewish people being put into ovens, the Pittsburgh synagogue shooting, athletes and celebrities making public antisemitic remarks, classmates bullying Jewish students for being Jewish, and reading hateful comments on social media or gaming platforms (e.g., slander such as ‘Jesus killer’ or ‘baby killer’, the latter reference to the libelous claim that Jews eat the blood of Christian babies).

In order to capture perceptions of antisemitism, we asked how often students believed that Jews experience antisemitism in the country where they currently live. Of the students that answered this question, 18.10% suggested that antisemitic incidents occurred frequently, 39.56% stated that they occurred occasionally, and 22.58% answered that antisemitic acts occurred rarely or never \((N = 2,839)\). Again, given the small population of Jews in America and Canada, the number of respondents that believed antisemitic events occur frequently or occasionally is noteworthy. In addition, the majority of respondents (76%) stated that antisemitism is a serious
problem when it happens. Less than 2% of respondents said that it is not really a problem or not a problem at all (N = 2839).\textsuperscript{13}

We asked students to rank how they might respond to an incident where they walked into a bathroom at school to find another student writing something bad about Jews on the wall. As shown in Figure Eleven, students had 4 choices available: To refrain from action altogether, to tell an adult outside of the school setting, to tell an adult inside of the school setting, or to confront the person directly and immediately. On the Pre-Program survey, 49% of students said they would confront the person immediately, 36% said they would tell an adult either within or outside of the school setting, and 16% stated that they would refrain from getting involved.

On the Post-Program survey, we observed that the number of students that would confront their classmate directly and immediately went up from 49% to 58%, the number of students that said they would tell an adult decreased from 36% to 30%, and the number of students that claimed they would do nothing also decreased from 16% to 13%. Further, while 66% of students ranked ‘do nothing’ last on the Pre-Program survey, this number increased to 71% on the Post-Program survey, indicating that Holocaust education correlates with an increased likelihood that students will act to protect minority communities when confronted with hatred or intolerance.

\textsuperscript{13} Here, there was a notable change from the AJC’s 2020 Survey of the General Public on Antisemitism, in which only 19% of adult respondents in the United States stated that antisemitism is ‘a very serious problem’, illustrating a potential shift between the adult population and the rising generation.
Figure Eleven: What Would You Do if You Saw Another Student Writing Something Bad About Jews on the Wall in the Bathroom at School? (N = 2,600 on Pre-Program survey. N = 596 on Post-Program survey)
Theme Three: Holocaust Knowledge

Prior to measuring student perspectives on the Holocaust, we sought to assess what students know about the Holocaust. To increase the comparative capacity of our study, we designed this section to reflect the questions asked on other surveys on the Holocaust. First, we invited students to share whether they had ever heard of the Holocaust. Among all respondents, 80% stated that they had definitely heard about the Holocaust and an additional 7% said that they might have heard of it but were uncertain ($N = 2,874$). Students who stated they had heard about the Holocaust were then asked to share where they had heard about the Holocaust. The list of options is shown in Figure Twelve; students were able to select all the answers that apply. The breakdown of their answers in Figure Twelve communicates both where students are learning about the Holocaust (e.g., 40% on social media) as well as where they are not learning about the Holocaust (nearly 1-in-3 stated that they had not learned about the Holocaust in History class and 1-in-2 stated they had not learned about the Holocaust in English Literature class).

Figure Twelve: Where Did You Learn About the Holocaust? (Check all that apply) ($N = 2,466$)
Students were asked to define the Holocaust in an open-ended question. Their answers, illustrated in the word-cloud shown in Figure Thirteen, indicate that their understanding is both factual (e.g., 6 million, Adolf Hitler, Europe, Germany, murder, torture) as well as emotional (e.g., terrible, horrible, bad). Students were then asked six fact-based questions about the timing, perpetrators, and victims of the Holocaust.  

In Table Three, we compare the percentage of respondents that selected the correct answer for the first four of these six questions: When did the Holocaust happen; How many Jews were killed; How did Hitler come to power; and How many concentration, death, labor, and transit camps were there? In regard to all four questions, the percentage of confirmed correct responses went up by at least six percentage points, indicating that some learning took place, whether during the formal Education Days program or as a result of taking the survey and becoming curious about the information on it.

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14 The disaggregated results of these survey questions can be found in the data repository associated with this paper.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Correct Answer</th>
<th>Pre-Program Survey Percentage Correct</th>
<th>Post-Program Survey Percentage Correct</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>When did the Holocaust happen? Between...</td>
<td>1930 and 1950</td>
<td>62.87% ( (N = 2,836) )</td>
<td>80% ( (N = 721) )</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In total, about how many Jews were killed in the Holocaust?</td>
<td>Approximately 6 Million</td>
<td>54.27% ( (N = 2,825) )</td>
<td>73% ( (N = 715) )</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How did Adolf Hitler become Chancellor of Germany?</td>
<td>He was elected</td>
<td>38.64% ( (N = 2,821) )</td>
<td>57% ( (N = 699) )</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How many Nazi concentration, death, labour, and transit camps were there?</td>
<td>More than 2,500</td>
<td>18.38% ( (N = 2,785) )</td>
<td>25% ( (N = 683) )</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table Three: Comparing Factual Knowledge of the Holocaust on the Pre-Program and Post-Program Surveys

We also asked students to outline the targets of Nazi genocide. In Figure Fourteen, we show the Pre-Program survey results in the upper panel and the Post-Program survey results in the lower panel. All possible answers were correct and students were invited to select all answers that they believed to apply. Nevertheless, while most students were able to identify Jews as a target of the Holocaust, less than half correctly identified other targets of Nazi violence, such as Jehovah’s Witnesses, Communists, and Trade Unionists.
Figure Fourteen: Who Were the Targets in the Holocaust? ($N = 2,551$ on Pre-Program survey. $N = 651$ on Post-Program survey)
Finally, in response to media headlines from 2018 that stated that young people know nothing about Auschwitz, we also asked respondents to identify what the term Auschwitz refers to: a concentration, labour, and/or death camp, a town in Poland, the location of Nazi headquarters, the site of a military conflict between the Jewish and Nazi armies, and/or a museum about the Holocaust. Students were able to select any answers that they felt to be correct. On the Pre-Program survey, and prior to the educational treatment, 65% of student respondents reported correctly that Auschwitz is a Nazi concentration, labour, and/or death camp \((N = 2,792)\). In the Post-Program survey, this number increased to 76% of respondents \((N = 691)\).^{15}

### Theme Four: Perspectives on the Holocaust

One form of antisemitism is Holocaust denial, or “any attempt to claim that the Holocaust/Shoah did not take place … including denying or calling into doubt the mechanisms of destruction or the intentionality of the genocide of the Jewish people” (International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance). As such, we asked respondents whether they felt that the Holocaust has been fairly described, exaggerated, or altogether fabricated. As shown in Figure Fifteen, 67.10% of Pre-Program survey respondents agreed that the Holocaust happened and that the number of Jews who died in it has been fairly described. However, 32.90% of respondents reported feeling that the Holocaust was an exaggerated or fabricated event, or that they were not sure if it actually happened. On the Post-Program survey, these numbers showed lower rates of Holocaust questioning or overt denial. On the Post-Program survey, 76% of respondents reported that the Holocaust happened and has been fairly described, and 23% reported feeling that it was exaggerated, fabricated, or that its truth was unconvincing \((N = 681)\).

Social desirability bias may encourage student respondents to answer that the Holocaust *did* happen when they remain, in fact, uncertain about its credibility. Not all those that hold antisemitic attitudes, whether consciously or subconsciously, are willing to share these attitudes with a surveyor. Therefore, we might assume that the number of respondents who stated that the Holocaust was exaggerated or fabricated may be larger than what is captured in these results.

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^{15} That this contradicts existing results speaks less about whether or not young people *know* about Auschwitz and more about how these questions are asked on surveys.
Students further commented on whether they believed that the Holocaust could happen again. Among all Pre-Program survey respondents, 33.53% stated a disbelief that the Holocaust could be repeated, 21.26% stated unequivocally that it could happen again, and 45.22% said that they were uncertain (N = 2,780). Those that said the Holocaust could happen again wrote about ongoing discrimination, genocide, and racism around the world; those that believed it could not happen again said that society would never allow systemic violence or the creation of concentration camps. And yet, we know that genocide has occurred after the end of the Holocaust in 1945: 400,000 have been killed and 2.5 million have been displaced in the Darfur region of Sudan; 800,000 were killed — over 1/10 of the population — in Rwanda; 200,000 Muslims were systematically murdered and 2 million were displaced in former Yugoslavia; and millions died in Cambodia, Nanking, Armenia, Namibia, and Ukraine during the Holodomor.\textsuperscript{16} Surely, society has allowed for systemic violence and the creation of concentration camps since the end of the Holocaust; greater knowledge about how fear and discrimination can escalate into hate-fueled mass violence is vital for preventing these events in the future.

The Impact of Holocaust and Genocide Education: Comparing Florida and Ontario Responses

Some jurisdictions mandate Holocaust and genocide education. For example, in 1994, the Florida Legislature passed the Holocaust Education Bill (SB 660), which requires school districts

\textsuperscript{16} “Modern Era Genocides.” The Genocide Education Project.
across the state to incorporate Holocaust and genocide literacy into the K-12 curriculum. As of 2021, while some individual teachers and/or schools offer Holocaust programming at various grade levels at the discretion of the teachers and principals, the Province of Ontario has yet to mandate a province-wide requirement that schools teach Holocaust and genocide literacy.\textsuperscript{17} Given this inverse policy and a sizable number of Pre-Program survey respondents from both Ontario and Florida, we use this section to compare some topline results from students across these two groups of respondents.

As shown in Figure Sixteen, when asked how often respondents believe Jews experience antisemitism in the place where they live, respondents from Florida responded ‘a lot’ 17\% more often than Ontario respondents. They were also less likely to state that antisemitism occurs either rarely or never. This is surprising because annual audits by the Anti-Defamation League in the United States (2021)\textsuperscript{18} and B’nai Brith Canada (2020)\textsuperscript{19} indicate that the number of antisemitic incidents reported was higher in Ontario than it was in Florida in 2020.\textsuperscript{20} This indicates that there is more concern about antisemitism where there is less antisemitic action, and less concern about antisemitism where there is more antisemitic action.

![Figure Sixteen: How Often Do You Believe Antisemitism Happens Where You Live? (N = 2,200)](chart)

\textsuperscript{17} The Toronto District School Board’s Call for the Province of Ontario to initiate a genocide education mandate can be found here: https://www.tdsb.on.ca/News/Article-Details/ArtMID/474/ArticleID/1487/Incorporating-Genocide-Education-as-Co mpulsory-Learning


\textsuperscript{19} B’nai Brith Canada Audit of Antisemitic Events. https://drive.google.com/file/d/1IqrqxVoO0tCXxMxyC0_12rsSn5xPgMpu/view

As shown in Figure Seventeen, Florida students were also slightly more likely (+3.93%) to agree that the Holocaust occurred, and less likely to express questioning or denial than students from Ontario schools. Further, as shown in Figure Eighteen, Florida students were more likely to state that the Holocaust could happen again (+11.75%) and less likely to state that it could not (-4.46%).

![Figure Seventeen: Did the Holocaust Happen? Comparison of Ontario and Florida Respondents (N = 2,200)](chart.png)
Finally, Ontario students demonstrated a clear interest in improving Holocaust and genocide literacy at school. As shown in Figure Nineteen, 92.64% of Ontario students said they wanted to learn more about the Holocaust and 87.19% reported interested in learning about other genocides.
Given these results, especially when compared with the Anti-Defamation League and B’nai Brith Canada annual audits of antisemitic activity, we suggest that the Government of Ontario initiates a province-wide mandate for the teaching of the Holocaust and genocide. We suggest that this would be well-placed within the existing civics curriculum. Many Canadian and international organizations have developed and organized curricular resources that Ontario teachers can use to implement this policy. We strongly believe that Holocaust and genocide literacy results in a student body more likely to prevent bullying, discrimination, and other intergroup conflicts at early, nonviolent stages, as well as a generation of future leaders positioned to prevent and mitigate conflict at late, violent stages.

**Conclusion**

In this research, we used a pre/post-treatment survey design to assess knowledge and thoughts about the Holocaust and antisemitism among North American students in grades 8-12. This population of respondents varied substantially based on ethnic, racial, religious, socio-economic, and geographical variables. Our treatment was a two-day virtual conference called Liberation75 Education Days, organized by the Holocaust education organization Liberation75. Based on the data we collected, we came to the following conclusions:

- **Students generally understand that Jews are defined as** belonging to an ethno-religious group (69.28% of respondents on the Pre-Program survey).
- **Slightly more than half of students understand that antisemitism** is hatred that is directed toward the Jewish people (53.98% on the Pre-Program survey).
- **Many students have seen or heard antisemitic acts** (42% said they unequivocally witnessed an antisemitic event and an additional 27% stated that they were uncertain if what they saw was antisemitic). The anecdotes students shared about these events were disturbing and occasionally violent.
- After experiencing the educational treatment, students were more likely to act if they observed an antisemitic event occurring (49% on the Pre-Program survey and 58% on the Post-Program survey). Inversely, students were less likely to refrain from action (+5% more likely to be ranked last on the Post-Program survey than the Pre-Program survey).
- **Students have an adequate baseline understanding** of the Holocaust.
  - 80% of Pre-Program respondents reported that they had heard of the Holocaust, whether in the classroom or in non-traditional settings, such as through books, television shows, and on social media.
  - 62.87% could state the general timeline of the Holocaust (e.g., which decades).
  - 54.27% knew how many Jews were killed.
  - 38.64% knew that Adolf Hitler was elected to a position of power.

*Executive Summary*
- 18.38% knew that there were over 2,500 Nazi concentration, death, labour, and transit camps.
- Each of these numbers increased by 6-18% after the educational treatment.
- 65% of student respondents reported correctly knowing that Auschwitz is a Nazi concentration, labour, and/or death camp. On the Post-Program survey, this number increased to 76% of respondents.

- **Holocaust denial is a real and concerning phenomenon.**
  - 67.10% of respondents agreed that the Holocaust happened and that the number of Jews that died in it has been fairly described.
  - However, 32.90% of respondents reported feeling that the Holocaust was an exaggerated or fabricated event, or that they were not sure if it actually happened.
  - On the Post-Program survey, 76% of respondents reported that the Holocaust happened and has been fairly described, and 23% reported feeling that it was exaggerated, fabricated, or that its truth was unconvincing.

- **Holocaust and genocide educational mandates are effective.**
  - When asked how often respondents believe Jews experience antisemitism in the place where they live, respondents from Florida responded ‘a lot’ 17% more often than respondents from Ontario (where no such mandate exists). Florida students were also less likely than Ontario students to state that antisemitism occurs both rarely and never.
  - Florida students were also slightly more likely (+3.93%) to agree that the Holocaust occurred and less likely to express questioning or denial than students from Ontario schools.
  - Florida students were more likely to state that the Holocaust could happen again (+11.75%) and less likely to state that it could not (-4.46%).

- **Students want to become more literate** in Holocaust and genocide studies.
  - 92.64% of Ontario students said they wanted to learn more about the Holocaust and 87.19% reported interest in learning about other genocides.

Overall, these findings suggest that students benefit substantially from Holocaust literacy. Not only does learning about the Holocaust improve understanding about the history of discrimination and violence in the 20th century, but it also seems to correspond with an increased likelihood that students will take necessary action to protect minority communities when confronted with hatred or intolerance, especially when that learning is implemented during one’s formative youth. We strongly believe that knowledgeable students will become better citizens by being more likely to prevent antisemitism, bullying, discrimination, and other intergroup conflicts at early, nonviolent stages. It is even plausible that this formative education will motivate today’s youth to lead tomorrow’s efforts to prevent and mitigate the deleterious effects of genocide and war.
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