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Untruth in the Classroom

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“Untruth in the Classroom,” by John A. Drobnicki

A recent survey by the Roper Organization, conducted for the American Jewish Committee, revealed that more than a fifth of all Americans say that it seems possible that the Holocaust never happened. There are probably two reasons for this: (1) our schools and textbooks fail to cover the Holocaust in enough depth; (2) the Holocaust revisionists are reaching more people.

Historical revision is a valid practice. As historians reexamine past events, new interpretations are put forth and new documents are discovered; what was once the standard interpretation often becomes discredited. Holocaust revisionism, however, is based on deliberate fabrications of the historical record and does not reinterpret a past event. Holocaust revisionists either deny outright, or *greatly* minimize, the Jewish Holocaust (and by extension also the other peoples who suffered at the hands of the Nazis), and many of them have ties to Neo-Nazi groups in the United States and Europe. America’s largest distributor of this material is the Institute for Historical Review/Noontide Press, run by Willis A. Carto, whom the Anti-Defamation League of B’nai B’rith once described as “the leading anti-Semitic propagandist in the United States.”

The idea that millions of people could have been put to death is an almost incomprehensible idea, particularly for young people. It is for this reason that college students are a special target of the revisionists. For example, in late 1991 and early 1992, Bradley R. Smith placed ads in several campus newspapers asserting that the Holocaust did not happen, causing a media uproar.

This generation did not live through World War II, and with each year that passes, fewer and fewer Holocaust survivors remain alive. In another twenty years, there will be none left at all. It is therefore up to you, the teachers, to instruct our children that *yes*, these terrible things did happen fifty years ago. If the school textbooks do not devote enough space to the Holocaust, assign readings from the library. Lucy Dawidowicz lamented over the sparse treatment given to the Holocaust in an article in the Spring 1990 *Social Studies Review* and quoted an example from one textbook: “The Jewish population, in particular, suffered greatly.”

The present writer believes that Holocaust revisionist materials should not be ignored by teachers, but should be used in classrooms, especially in the upper grades. Holocaust revisionism, like the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, is an important example of anti-Semitic writing and can easily be worked into lessons as primary source material on anti-Semitism and intolerance. Teachers should be able to expose revisionism for what it really is.

Some might argue that publicizing this material will only make it available to a wider audience who would otherwise never have come into contact with it. However, it is the secrecy and the forbidden nature of this literature and these groups that make them so attractive to some

young people. By bringing the material out into the open and rebutting it, the teacher will not only be showing the students what prejudice looks like first-hand, but will also be removing the mystery and allure from it by exposing it as the garbage that it is.

If the school textbooks are not up to the challenge, teachers can easily supplement them with actual survivors' diaries and testimonies from Nuremberg. This would serve to further educate students about the terrible suffering during the Holocaust, would discredit the revisionists, and would expose students to the use of primary documents.

As the Roper survey demonstrates, whatever methods that have been used in the past to educate people about the Holocaust have simply not been working. In a few years, there will be no one who will be able to respond to the revisionists by saying, "I was there!" It is up to you to combat the lies of those who deny the Holocaust.