



**Arfa Professional Development Conference on Holocaust Education**  
***Without A Trace: The Obligation of Memory***  
**March 27, 2022**

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**Carolyn Herbst**

Greetings. I am Carolyn Herbst, Executive Secretary and a Past President / Chairperson of the Association of Teachers of Social Studies / United Federation of Teachers, New York City.

We are the Social Studies Professional Committee of the United Federation of Teachers, the New York City Local Affiliated Social Studies Council of the National Council for Social Studies, and the New York State Council for Social Studies. We have proudly been the co-sponsors of this annual program with the American Society for Yad Vashem for 24 years and would be happy to continue to do so, in the future.

We are joined in Co-Sponsorship with The United Federation of Teachers Jewish Heritage Committee / The Educators Chapter of the Jewish Labor Committee. Our ATSS /UFT President / Chairperson, Ollie Fields-Thacker, sends her regards. I would also like to acknowledge a special person at the UFT, and the Chairperson of the UFT Jewish Heritage Committee / The Educators Chapter of the Jewish Labor Committee, David Kazansky.

In 2015 at our Annual Greater Metropolitan New York Social Studies Conference ATSS/UFT presented the American Society for Yad Vashem with our Special President's Award for being at the forefront of Holocaust Education in the United States, and for organizing its annual free Professional Development Conference on Holocaust Education for New York City Educators.

Our theme for this year's Arfa Professional Development Conference on Holocaust Education is "Without A Trace: The Obligation of Memory."

Holocaust Education, a key component to understand our current 'troubled' political times, can take several different paths: the Holocaust as history, specifically as the history of the Jewish People; and the Holocaust as a universal story of survival, particularly the survival of good over evil.

We live in a time in the United States where we are concerned about human rights, voting rights, racism, fake news, the big lie, media information control, organized book banning, governmental suppression of thought - all hinting at life problems in the Third Reich of Hitler's Germany.

We live in a time of increasingly autocratic rulers around the world, including the autocratic power such as the invasion of Ukraine by Russia's President Putin, and where rulers will look for scapegoats for their need to assert their autocratic powers.

Jews have often served such rulers, or aspiring rulers, as convenient scapegoats, eventually leading to the Holocaust. We are concerned about this happening again in the form of Antisemitism and Antisemitic Violence, which similarly led to the Holocaust. We are also concerned about the future of Holocaust Remembrance to ensure that it does not happen again, and that the memory of the Holocaust does not disappear.

Holocaust survivors are now quite elderly or have passed away. Children and grandchildren of survivors are keeping the memory and telling the historical story, but as the years continue what will happen to this memory and history? We must keep the memory and the history alive; we must keep the story alive.

The United Nations General Assembly, on January 20, 2022, unanimously condemned Holocaust denial and the distortion of the Holocaust. The United Nations General Assembly recognized the need for this action. However, Holocaust denial and Holocaust distortion are rising. Antisemitism is rising.

On March 3rd, the online news service amNY reported a 409% increase of reported Antisemitism incidents in New York City, from the previous year in the month of February

The Anti-Defamation League is keeping track of the dangerous rising of incidents in every part of the United States and around the world. It is a dangerous rising. Such incidents must be swiftly reported, investigated, and prosecuted as hate crimes. Therefore, we must also stand up for the understanding of the facts of the history of the Holocaust, and of the history of Antisemitism and Antisemitic Violence leading to the Holocaust.

We are obligated to study Antisemitism and Antisemitic Violence and combat Antisemitism and Antisemitic Violence. The best weapon of defense against Antisemitism and Antisemitic Violence is "Education," such as today's program. We also study the Holocaust as a universal survival story, the survival of a People over evil.

The need for the collective memory of the Holocaust goes beyond history. When we tell the story of the Holocaust for future generations, we must see it as an event that speaks of a human truth for all humankind. That is, the truth of the will to survive, the will to be free, and the will to combat evil. To this end, let us look at the obligation of memory, the role of memory, in telling the story of the Holocaust.

We must fight against evil, fight against lies and distortions. This is a universal mandate for knowing the story of the Holocaust for all time. This is a collective story for future generations. This is the collective memory we must preserve for future generations.

Memory is at the heart of the Jewish People, as seen in the discussion of the Exodus in the Torah and at the Seder meal in the yearly celebration of Passover, coming up soon. This memory has determined the continuity of the Jewish People. The story of Passover, the annual telling at the Seder, solidifies the collective memory of the Jewish People. Repeatedly, throughout history, Jews have suffered persecution and attempted genocide. Jews survived by the telling of collective memory, by telling the story.

But the story of Passover has a universal message. It is the movement from slavery to freedom, survival over evil. The memory of that story calls to all humankind. The memory of that story may be considered the Jewish gift to humankind, the gift of the value of collective memory.

Similarly, the story of the Holocaust is a story for all people. It is the collective memory of all people about the Holocaust that will determine the continuity of the fight against evil, of the fight of good against evil, of the fight against slavery, of the fight against scapegoating, of the fight against lies and distortions for future generations for all time.

The American Society for Yad Vashem, working with Yad Vashem, looks at both above paths of Education, continues to create the collective historical memory of the Jewish People, uses the testimony of survivors to keep the memory alive, explores the triumph of survival of a People, and the triumph of good over evil. By focusing on these important objectives, the knowledge of the Holocaust is sustained and perpetuated.

So, with these thoughts in mind, let me say thank you for participating in our Program, and have a very educational conference from wherever you are signing in.