

April 30, 2019

Dear Members of the Oregon House of Representatives:

The February 24 issue of The Medford Mail Tribune carried a front page article by reporter Kaylee Tornay: "Bill would require Holocaust education in Oregon schools." According to the article, the bill, SB664, is co-sponsored by 29 House members. Hate crimes against Jews in America rose by more than a third last year and accounted for 58 percent of all religion-based hate crimes, according to data released last November by the FBI.

(<https://www.jta.org/2018/11/13/united-states/hate-crimes-jews-rise-37-fbi-reports>.)

As a former educator, I was shocked to learn that no such curriculum exists in Oregon public schools, especially given our history of discrimination in this state toward indigenous peoples, African Americans and Asians. White supremacist hate groups are on the rise in our nation, including Oregon which has a Ku Klux Klan group, a White Nationalist group, and two "General Hate" groups (Source: *Intelligence Report*, Southern Poverty Law Center, Spring 2019//Issue 166, p.43) We are fortunate, however, in that many other states have developed outstanding curricula resources that can be used. California, for example, has a "Model Curriculum for Human Rights and Genocide."

My own direct experience was in Connecticut with the development in 1987 of "Human Rights: The Struggle for Freedom, Dignity and Equality." I worked closely with Eve Soumerai, a human rights educator, author and Holocaust survivor in a pilot program sponsored by the Endowment Foundation of the Jewish Foundation of Greater Hartford and implemented by the University of Connecticut. Graduate students from UCONN tracked attitude changes of students in my classroom as we piloted the curriculum in our rural district. The results showed sometimes dramatic changes in students' attitudes and values. This was especially meaningful as the KKK held a rally in one of our three feeder school towns that very same year. (Yes, hard to believe that in a liberal New England state such an event would take place.) Given the circumstances, the Hartford Courant carried the story of my classroom experience on its front page and UPI picked it up. I know this because someone from Oregon (I knew no one in Oregon at the time) sent me a clipping from *The Oregonian*.

Nine-hundred and twenty students, grades 7-12, in nine Connecticut school districts were involved in the study which included quantitative and qualitative analysis. Students came from a wide range of socioeconomic backgrounds and academic ability levels. The results of the study confirmed that a curriculum based on human rights:

- "significantly increases sensitivity, concern and a sense of responsibility toward one's fellow human beings
- promotes students' abilities to think on their own, using many higher-level thinking skills
- encourages spirited discussion, without the usual competitive aspects, which results in great trust among students, as well as between students and teachers; and
- increases teachers' energy and enthusiasm for the profession"

(Source: Human Rights: The Struggle for Freedom, Dignity and Equality, A Teacher Resource Guide, Connecticut State Board of Education, 1998)

I thank the House in advance for I am confident they will pass this important bill which will enable students to fathom, by understanding the ethnic genocide of the Jews, how the ethics of a nation can be easily compromised by what Hannah Arendt has called "the banality of evil." As Elie Wiesel has presciently said: "Just as memory preserves the past, so does it ensure the future." We can forgive, but we must never forget.

Sincerely,  
Andrew Seles  
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Ashland