Mandatory Holocaust education legislation in the state of Illinois: a historical study

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1990: Illinois became the first state in the country to mandate each public elementary school and high school to include in its curriculum a study of Holocaust history. 2005: The mandate, Public Act 094-0478, was expanded to include other cases of genocide. 2010: The Illinois General Assembly passed the Illinois Holocaust and Genocide Commission Act and Governor Quinn signed it into law. The Commission became effective on January 1, 2011. Commission Mission Statement. Agenda. Introductions. Presentation by Cameron Hudson, Director of the Simon-Skjodt Center for the Prevention of Genocide at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. Future of the Commission. Adjourn. Meeting. Holocaust and Genocide Study. Every public elementary school and high school shall include in its curriculum a unit of instruction studying the events of the Nazi atrocities of 1933 to 1945. This period in world history is known as the Holocaust, during which 6,000,000 Jews and millions of non-Jews were exterminated. One of the universal lessons of the Holocaust is that national, ethnic, racial, or religious hatred can overtake any nation or society, leading to calamitous consequences.

Abstract: This dissertation explores the historical development of the Holocaust as an event essentially unknown to a significant portion of people living in the U.S. to an event that presently is a mandatory subject in several states, permeates several aspects of popular culture, and is the subject of scholars from a cornucopia of academic disciplines. Beginning with the development of the term “genocide,” the second chapter begins to acknowledge the subtle but increasing awareness of the Holocaust through the first attempts by educators to begin teaching the subject, as well as how a series of events in popular culture engaged significant portions of the U.S. population, exposing them to the Holocaust. The third chapter focuses on the specific context of the rise of Holocaust consciousness in the state of Illinois, noting specific events like the neo-Nazi march through the village of Skokie, a suburb of Chicago home to one of the largest populations of Holocaust survivors outside of Israel. The development of the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Commission followed by the creation of a legislative mandate in the state of Illinois requiring, “a unit of instruction,” on the Holocaust is the subject of chapter four, drawing on the accounts of the legislators, as well as their arguments for and against the bill. Much of their motivations were drawn specifically on the “lessons” that the Holocaust could teach, and routinely are accounted. In chapter five, the central focus is the implementation of the Illinois mandate and how it was received. By 2005, efforts were underway to include another unit of instruction listing several cases of genocide that teachers could choose to teach alongside the Holocaust. The final chapter concludes with efforts to the present to continue to amend the Holocaust mandate in the state of Illinois. Other states followed suit as well, either mandating or including learning standards for their school age students. Continued concerns regarding the implementation and a discussion of the educationally appropriateness for various age groups are explored, in addition to the continued existence of Holocaust denial. Despite concerns, the subject of the Holocaust continues to provide educational opportunities to teach students a wide range of lessons.

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