Good evening everyone. Thank you, Rabbi Adam and Cantor Linday, for the opportunity to speak tonight. It is an honor to be a part of this meaningful Yom Hashoah commemoration at Temple Emanuel.

By way of introduction - I'm Ilana Weinberg. I work at the US Holocaust Memorial Museum to develop international education programs. I am mom to Leo and Callie, who are Temple Emanuel regulars in the religious school and the ECC. I've lived in the DMV for over 20 years now, but still instinctively call NJ my home. And I am the granddaughter of Lee and Isador Weinberg, who were young Jews in Poland in the 1930s, and survived the Holocaust.

Although I am not speaking on behalf of the Museum tonight, I will start by talking about my work. My job is to develop education programs in partnership with educators and policymakers all over the world to introduce the Holocaust in ways that resonate with their own audiences, in their own specific contexts. The guiding question of our work is - why should a young person anywhere in the world today, learn about the Holocaust? Why is it relevant?

Many of the places I work are not in the lands where the Holocaust happened, or where large survivor communities sought refuge and emigrated to build new lives. They are not places that have developed a culture of commemoration, memory and education over the past several decades. They are not places where there are well understood historical connections to the Holocaust, or to the Jewish people.

I work with partners in places like India, Nigeria, and Brazil - where this history can seem very far away in place and time. What does this have to do with us? We sometimes hear. These are countries with some of the largest populations on earth, with enormous regional and global impact, where the Holocaust has either not previously been taught, or where the lack of historical context can lead to distortion, minimization or politicization of the history of Nazi crimes.

I also work with partners in places like Rwanda and Cambodia, countries with their own more recent histories of genocide and mass atrocity, where the wounds are still open and societies are grappling to understand transitional justice not 80 but 30, or 50 years later. Why should they learn about the genocide of the Jews in Europe when they don't yet understand how to memorialize the atrocities that happened on their own soil?

In helping to establish the relevance of the Holocaust in each specific context, we must begin with a rationale. For a federal minister of education, or a teacher in a public school, why should I take valuable time from my overwhelmed curriculum for my students to learn *this* history? For parents, why should I burden my child with this unbearable human tragedy? For young people anywhere - why does this history matter? What does it have to do with *me*??

These questions encompass the biggest universal lessons to the most specific and local connections.

So perhaps we should start here in the US, in our nation's capital. At the USHMM, we are often asked why the nation's living memorial to the victims of the Holocaust is located on our national mall - amongst our great monuments to freedom and democracy. This is not a history that happened on US soil. The US Congress created our museum because it believed that everyone in the United States should have a place to come and learn how and why the Holocaust happened. What made it possible? After all, Germany in the 1930s was an economically and technically advanced nation of well educated citizens, with a democratic constitution and a free press. Berlin was the world capital of art, culture and liberal intellectual thinking. Adolf Hitler was appointed chancellor of Germany through a legitimate and democratic process.

Our Museum serves as a warning that democracy is fragile, and we must not take it for granted. The history of the Holocaust teaches us the dangers of hate and dehumanization of the 'other' in any society, and of the fragility

of institutions and social solidarity. If it happened in Germany in the 1930s, it could happen anywhere.

At the most basic level - it is important to learn about the Holocaust *because it happened...* And this is a historical truth that many continue to deny or distort; to minimize or dismiss; to use or abuse for political opportunity. And so it is essential for learners the world over to know that the Holocaust happened, and to understand what made it possible.

The Holocaust was a WATERSHED event in human history, that happened … and it shaped the world that we live in today. The aftermath of the Holocaust and the Second World War ushered in a new world order, defining international crimes and accountability and establishing international institutions and universal norms for the protection of human rights.

And because of the global reach of the second world war and the Holocaust, there are specific and unique historical connections to almost any country that establish this history as part of *their own* history.

This might be the story of a Jewish refugee fleeing Nazi persecution in India, who went on to compose the signature tune of All India Radio - think the NPR of its place and time.

Or a newspaper editor who would become the first president of the independent Republic of Nigeria, who wrote extensively in the national newspaper of the plight of the Jews in Europe in the 1930s and 40s, and what it might mean for Nigerians - for Africans - if the dangerous Nazi racial ideology were to prevail and the former German colonies of West Africa were returned to Nazi subjugation.

Or it’s taking a critical look at what your government, and ordinary citizens of your country knew about the Holocaust as it was unfolding and how they responded - - A lot was known in many parts of the world, and little was done while policies of isolationism and indifference prevailed.

These distinct historical connections tie this global history to a specific place and time. And these connections can create an opening for learners to think more critically about their own societies today, in places where it can be difficult or sensitive to teach about a national past or present. Like in India, where the Holocaust is often taught out of context, blurred by an outsized focus on the Nazi's rise to power and a national myth of Hitler as a strong leader and a powerful orator. Mein Kampf is widely available to buy, and has been a national bestseller. I was in New Delhi for education workshops last year, and heard students quote the text from memory. You can find clothing shops, restaurants and even an ice cream flavor named 'Hitler' in towns across India. This is not necessarily because of strong antisemitic sentiment or approval of Hitler's intentions for the final solution -- in fact many do not even understand that the Holocaust is part of this story. Instead it's admiration of a leader who is understood as a powerful force in defending and unifying his people. This is the dangerous void that is left open when Holocaust education is not effectively introduced, or when teachers lack the context and training to make it relevant to their students. This myth also supports a dangerous nationalist, anti-minority narrative that has taken hold in India today.

So we worked with a team of local partners to develop the first ever Holocaust education guide for teachers in India, with the support of the National Ministry of Education. This has created an opening to better educate about the Holocaust, establishing relevance to India, and ultimately fostering critical thinking among learners to reflect on their society today.

In Nigeria - a country fractured by the legacy of civil war, instability and insecurity fueled by a variety of identity based conflicts - the senior government minister in charge of curriculum development - Prof. Ismail Junaidu - came to our Museum and said - young people in Nigeria MUST learn this history. Our children need to understand what hatred of the other can lead to. And so he began the development of a national Peace Education Curriculum - which will include the Holocaust as a case study. I

went to Lagos when this curriculum was introduced to a variety of government, community and educational leaders - and Prof. Junaidu turned to my colleagues and I to say - you must bring everyone here to your museum to see for themselves why this history matters. And so we did, and there was unanimous understanding among this group of stakeholders that young people in Nigeria need to learn this history, and they left with renewed investment in peace education, which is coming to fruition in the Ministry of Education in the most populous country in Africa.

Understanding the expansive reach of Nazi racial policies and ideology – and the totality of Nazi persecution of anyone who did not advance their goals of territorial expansion and racial purification – helps diverse audiences better see themselves in this history. Jews were considered the biggest threat and therefore the primary target, but the Nazis also persecuted and killed a variety of other groups considered to be racial, social or political outsiders, including Roma, Slavic peoples, Afro Germans, gay men, Jehovah's witnesses, and political opponents like communists, socialists and others.

Learning about the Holocaust also forces us to examine the roles and responsibilities of ordinary people, and to think about the choices people make in difficult circumstances. The Holocaust was not carried out by Hitler and the Nazi elite alone. They in fact counted on the collaboration and complicity of friends and neighbors on a continental scale to carry out the final solution. Through this lens we reflect on our own roles - in our schools, our places of work, in our communities and neighborhoods - and the consequences of the choices that we make.

The Holocaust is the most well documented genocide in human history. And so it serves as a powerful case study of the dangers of unchecked hate speech and propaganda. The warning signs that can lead to genocide and mass atrocities. A history that unfortunately resonates strongly in any country that has experienced its own violent past. The field of education and memorialization that has risen from the ashes of the Holocaust - although it took decades to build - can serve as a model in places like

Cambodia or Rwanda as to how they can begin to address their own violent past through education and memory, and situate it within a broader global context.

That there are universal lessons the world must learn from the Holocaust is undeniable - -80 years after liberation, as the world order we know seems to be seismically shifting and fewer and fewer survivors and eyewitnesses are left to testify to this history - these lessons seem more relevant and more important than ever.

But this history is also a very particular one. It is the history of the genocide of the Jewish people. The culmination of centuries of antisemitism manifesting in the most dangerous of racial ideologies and the indoctrination of an entire continent to defend against a common enemy - the Jew.

Author Ruth Franklin wrote about this balance through the lens of Ann Frank's diary in a NYT op ed on January 27 - international Holocaust remembrance day. She said *“Anne’s iconicity requires her story to achieve a difficult balancing act. It warns powerfully against all persecution, but must remain true to its character as a Jewish work ”*

Franklin goes on to invoke a powerful example from South Africa, a place where we have close partners who have found impactful approaches to teaching and learning about the holocaust alongside their own more recent history of apartheid:

*‘Broadening the meaning of Anne’s story doesn’t have to cheapen it.’* she wrote *… “In 1994, when an exhibition about Anne Frank came to South Africa, several former prisoners, including Nelson Mandela, spoke publicly about the diary. While acknowledging the historical uniqueness of the Holocaust, they celebrated Anne’s book as a personal inspiration. It “kept our spirits high and reinforced our confidence in the invincibility of the cause of freedom and justice,” Mandela said.*

*Rather than simply equating Nazism with apartheid, they recognized Anne as an individual experiencing extreme discrimination. They could sympathize with her while avoiding the distortion of identification without context.*[1]*"*

Franklin goes on to write *"In an age of sound-bite-length opinions and viral hot takes, nuance is difficult to achieve. But we owe it to Anne to try. Without also appreciating her individuality, to say that today's Anne Frank is a refugee from the Middle East, a Latin American migrant or whomever else we might imagine her to be, plays into the hands of those who persecuted her. The erasure of the specifics of Anne Frank's life and death risks implying that antisemitism is no longer a destructive force."*

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I am here tonight perhaps as the embodiment of this balance between the important universal lessons the world must continue to learn from the Holocaust, and the heir of this very specific history. I am the granddaughter of Polish Holocaust survivors - the third generation who grew up listening to my Grandma Lee talk of her experience since before I can remember. Her childhood growing up in Chrzanów, Poland - a small town not 20 miles from Auschwitz which, if you took her word for it, was the center of Jewish life and culture until the Nazis marched into their town square in September 1939 when she was 14 years old. She talked of the ghettoization of her town of Chrzanów, where she and her family were forced into crowded living conditions and forced labor, and no longer allowed an education. The liquidation of her beautiful town in 1943, when my Grandma Lee was deported along with most of the Jews of Chrzanów - her parents to Auschwitz, and she and her brother to Markstadt, the first of a series of concentration camps and labor camps, where she would see her brother for the last time. My grandmother forcibly labored in German mess halls, and then cleaning factories and then munitions factories. In Klettendorf, where she met her future husband, my grandfather, who would find her again after liberation and pick her up on a bicycle to start their new lives

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[1] https://www.nytimes.com/2025/01/26/opinion/anne-frank-today.html?smid=nytcore-ios-share&referringSource=articleShare

together. In Ludwigsdorf, where she formed unbreakable bonds with women who would become sisters.  And this community of survivors who eventually made their way together to Linden, NJ to start a new life and build a new sense of family, since they had none left of their own. This was the family and community and legacy that I was born into.

My Grandma Lee survived the Holocaust through a series of tiny acts of resistance - stealing a piece of soap and burying it with the help of a gardener; smuggling raw dough into her barracks to celebrate a yontiv; sneaking letters out to share news of her whereabouts with her future husband; holding up the women who were too weak to make the daily 8 mile march each way from the barracks to the munitions factory in the depth of winter so they wouldn't be punished or left for dead.

This was her experience because she was a Jew who lived in Poland in the 1930s. This was one of a multitude of experiences of the 9 million Jews who lived in Europe when the Nazis came to power - and this was their experience for the singular reason that they were Jews.

My Grandma Lee spoke often and openly about her experiences during the Holocaust. And she never missed an opportunity to warn of the dangers that still exist. If you're intelligent - she used to say - you can't help but be afraid that it could happen again.

80 years after the end of the second world war, we are faced with all too familiar reminders that antisemitism has not gone away, and that it can take many forms; striking reminders that our democracy is fragile and we must not take it for granted; and urgent reminders of the consequences of indifference.

I carry this warning with me - when I tour visitors through the Museum, when I meet with policymakers in far flung corners of the world, and when I share my grandmother's story - my family's story.

Today, as we commemorate Yom HaShoah - a day of remembrance to honor the 6 million Jews who were murdered in the Holocaust - we also honor the resistance and resilience of the Jewish people. This *particular* day marks the anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, the most significant act of Jewish resistance during the Holocaust. The selection of this date for Yom HaShoah recognizes the AGENCY of the Jewish people - when on the eve of Pesach 1943, the Jews of the Warsaw ghetto organized their final act of armed resistance against the German army, holding them off for 27 days, well understanding their ultimate fate.

It is now our collective responsibility to bear witness to this history and continue to pass its lessons onto the next generations, in honor of the victims and survivors of the Holocaust. It is our responsibility to stand up against polarization, dehumanization and indifference, and to safeguard our democratic rights and values. To remember our agency as individuals and as a Jewish community - to practice tikun olam, toward a future in which the aspiration of ‘Never Again’ might someday become a reality.

Thank you.