

JOLANTA AMBROSEWICZ-JACOBS AND LESZEK HOŃDO, eds.

Why Should We Teach about the Holocaust?

Trans. Michael Jacobs

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Published initially in 2004 and expanded in its 2005 version, *Why Should We Teach about the Holocaust?* is an English translation of the Polish work *Dlaczego należy uczyć o Holokauście* (2003). The first part of the book consists of a series of short essays by Polish intellectuals (primarily university faculty but also representatives from other fields ranging from clergy to high-school educators) in response to the query in the book's title. This is followed by an article by one of the editors, Jolanta Ambrosewicz-Jacobs, on 'Attitudes of Polish Youth toward the Holocaust: Research from 1997–2000', a piece that seeks to demonstrate how antisemitism still persists in Poland. Ambrosewicz-Jacobs sums up her data with her closing sentence: 'Anti-Semitism should have disappeared after the Holocaust, but it did not, and that is one reason we should teach about the Holocaust' (p. 113). The book ends with an extensive annotated list of Holocaust-related Internet resources.

Perceptions of how or why the Holocaust should be taught cannot be disconnected from the backgrounds and identities of educators and their audiences. Although contributors such as Stanisław Krajewski discuss how and what should be taught, *Why Should We Teach About the Holocaust?* holds interest primarily as a means of understanding Polish views of the Holocaust. The book is as much, if not more, about Polish–Jewish relations, as the authors write extensively about Polish perceptions of Jews. For the majority of the essayists, the topic of the Holocaust is a vehicle for introducing instruction on the history of Jews in Poland. Jerzy Tomaszewski's essay, for example, emphasises the Jewish and Polish shared past.

The desire to teach about the Jewish minority and their destruction came from a variety of sources. For some contributors, the purpose of teaching the Holocaust is to promote tolerance in general but especially toward Jews and to learn to recognise and combat genocide today. Others place greater focus on Polish–Jewish relations and on changing Polish perceptions of Jews. Leszek Hońdo sums up this position by stating, 'Finally, an argument really very important to me is that we have a responsibility to teach about the Holocaust so long as the word "Jew" remains a term of abuse in the vocabulary of youth' (p. 81). Not only a common past but also shared geography is stated as a reason for teaching the Holocaust, particularly in Poland. For the majority of the essayists, the urgency to teach the subject comes from a desire to understand the place in which they live--the Polish landscape having served as both the home of the Jews and the site of their death.

Knowledge of the events is also viewed by some as a means for deeper understanding. For example, Zdzisław Mach considers study of the Holocaust as a way of confronting the more difficult issues of Polish action or inaction during the war years. For others, Holocaust education is a tool for Poles to educate themselves in order to engage in meaningful dialogue with Jews and others who have misconceptions about the roles of Poles during the Holocaust. An additional topic of interest raised by authors who received the majority of their education prior to 1989, is a discussion about Jews during the

communist era. Sergiusz Kowalski discusses the ‘huge gaps left from communist teaching’; simultaneously, Monika Adamczyk-Garbowska discusses how the absence of the mention of Jews during her pre-university education left her with feelings of disappointment and a sense of having been deceived.

In translating the text into English, the authors took the material out of its Polish context. Many of the book’s discussions require some background knowledge of recent debates in Poland, a topic that Polish readers might know about but which the average English-speaking non-specialist might lack. The translation of the book would have benefited from an overview outlining contemporary issues in Polish–Jewish relations and the recent debate in Poland about the Holocaust. The book will be of interest to those wishing to study Polish–Jewish relations, Polish perceptions of the importance of studying the Holocaust, or for insight into the background of how several important scholars came to study Polish Jewry.

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