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Preventing the Holocaust: A special presentation at DEIA Summit | Guest Commentary

By Mark James Miller

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Auschwitz. The site of man's greatest inhumanity to man.

This is where somewhere between one and one-half million people were murdered. This is where Dr. Josef Mengele did his unspeakable experiments on human beings. This is where slave laborers toiled until they were too exhausted to work another day and were sent to the gas chambers where their mothers, fathers, sisters and brothers had gone before them. This is where the average life span was two hours.

And yet a recent survey showed nearly half of Americans do not know or can't identify a single concentration camp. Fifty-six percent of Generation Z and Millennials do not know what Auschwitz was. Others believe the number of people killed in the Holocaust is inflated or exaggerated.

Even worse, around 25% either believe the Holocaust did not happen at all or are doubtful that it did.

The Nazi Holocaust is the greatest and the most documented crime in history. At the Yad Vashem Holocaust Remembrance Center in Israel are 58,000,000 pages of documents — 290 tons — proving that it happened.

But knowledge of this terrible event is fading with the passage of years. The survivors, and the perpetrators, are nearly all gone, and the number of deniers and doubters is

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growing — witness the man photographed at the Jan. 21, 2021 riot wearing a sweatshirt with the words, “Camp Auschwitz” stenciled on the front.

This made the presentation “Preventing The Holocaust” at Allan Hancock College’s DEIA Summit on Feb. 7 all the more important, and it was pleasing beyond measure that there was standing room only in the Film Room in the new Fine Arts Complex.

Given that knowledge of the Holocaust is declining and our current political climate, there is no subject more important.

The attendees were a mixture of students, instructors, classified staff, administrators, even a member of the board of trustees — a cross section of the campus community.

The presentation began with a slide show, and the very first one reads, “A warning from history,” accompanied by a picture of the gates of Auschwitz. This is where prejudice, bigotry, and scapegoating can lead.

In Arthur Miller’s play Incident At Vichy, Von Berg, the anti-Nazi prince, tells his fellow prisoners, “If you really despise Jews, the most honest thing to do is burn them up.”

Equally important is to understand the thought and planning that went into an undertaking as vast as “The Final Solution.” Some intelligent people, with degrees in fields like architecture and engineering, spent significant amounts of time designing equipment meant to kill the maximum number of people as quickly as possible, then dispose of their remains.

An important part of the presentation are pictures of the architects’ drawings and bids they submitted — the most famous of which was J.A. Topf and Sons, of Erfurt, Germany.

Another point important to note is that the Holocaust had priority over other matters. The directive from Hermann Goring to Reinhard Heydrich, the master planner of “The Final Solution,” dated July 31, 1941, states plainly, “Where the competency of

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other central organizations touches on this matter, these organizations are to collaborate.”

Trains that could have been taking soldiers to the front were commandeered to take the Jews to their deaths; men who could have been fighting instead were used to round up and send Jews to the death camps.

Hancock’s DEIA Summit was a wonderful success, as was the presentation “Preventing The Holocaust.” If this horrible event teaches us anything, it is that prejudice and intolerance can have terrible consequences, and that tolerance of others is more important now than ever before.

If we are to prevent future Holocausts, we must study the past, learn from it, and not repeat the mistakes made by those who came before us.

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