

## Texas Liberator App User's Guide

*We left Dachau later that morning, having assisted the relief organizations in their efforts to bring some semblance of humanity back to this place that had endured so much tragedy and sorrow. Our hearts were burdened by what we had seen but somehow lifted by the passionate gratitude of the liberated, who had blessed us with their joy and rewarded us with unexpected insights into what we had achieved.*

*Now, after a year of combat, each of us finally and forever understood why destiny had called us to travel so far from the land of our birth and fight for people we did not know. And so it was here, in this place abandoned by God and accursed by men, that we came to discover the meaning of our mission.*

- Jack Sacco, *Where the Birds Never Sing*

### Welcome to Users

The Texas Liberator App is a joint initiative of the Texas Holocaust and Genocide Commission and a team of academics and programmers led by Dr. Aliza Wong, Associate Dean of the Honors College and Associate Professor of History at Texas Tech University. The App seeks to broaden students' understanding of the Holocaust by highlighting its connections to Texas, particularly through firsthand testimonies by soldiers who helped liberate Nazi camps. We begin with the premise that eyewitness testimonies are invaluable resources, and along with technological innovations, they are essential to the task of bridging the distance between today's young Texans and a history that might otherwise seem far removed from their lives.

Only several decades ago, roughly half of the victims of the Holocaust, amounting to millions of men, women, and children, were murdered within a network comprised of thousands of camps that the Nazis established across much of Europe. Gaining an appreciation of the Holocaust's historical significance necessarily involves examination of not only the murders, but also the various other atrocities that the SS and their accomplices intentionally committed against prisoners at these camps. That is to say, the camps were not only venues where millions of innocent people were murdered, but also places of systematic assaults on victims' minds and spirits. By starving and otherwise abusing camp inmates in virtually unspeakable ways, the Nazis became masters at destroying more than bodies: they placed targets on compassion, trust, memory, honor, love, faith, and hope – indeed, all of the things that we are taught can transcend the physical aspects of the world and confer transcendent meaning on human life.

Any worthwhile study of the Holocaust will delve into questions of personal ethics, beginning with the principles that human life has inherent value, and therefore, that human beings' treatment of one another matters. But the Holocaust also turns our attention to more subtle

complexities with regard to ethical issues. Through their camps, the Nazis succeeded in creating an anti-world where our familiar rules of normative living seem almost wholly foreign. It is surely no accident that the Nazi camps denied inmates the ability to make ethical choices. Prisoners' individual acts of selfless bravery, such as trying to nurse the dying, feed the hungry, clothe the naked, or shield the defenseless, led to harsh collective punishments against the many; acts that would otherwise have served the greater good were perverted into serving the murderers. The camps demonstrate that when the most basic popular assumptions about how human beings should behave are directly attacked, there will be lasting repercussions. The foundational principles of Western civilization will not easily be restored. Survivors of the camps still wrestle with adjusting to everyday life and reconciling common assumptions about human nature. As Holocaust survivor Walter Kase observes in the App, the camps were places where emaciated corpses sat piled up mere feet from storehouses and train-cars that were full of food. Even after being freed and fed by liberators, how does one get mentally and spiritually "liberated" from the experience of forced starvation? Or from having seen loved ones reduced to ash? Following the Nazi onslaught, could compassion, trust, memory, honor, love, faith, and hope ever be restored to survivors' lives? What did the victims feel, and how did they react to the various forms of Nazi assault? What made everyday people choose to starve, shoot, and gas their fellow human beings? With what special knowledge did liberators return to Texas? And how can lessons from the Holocaust inform our own lives all these years later in Texas?

Designers of the Texas Liberator App are confident that the firsthand testimonies of Texans who helped liberate camps such as Dachau can help students begin to explore the complexities that surround such issues in ethics education.

### **What is the Holocaust?**

Scholars have struggled to come to a consensus regarding what constitutes the most accurate definition of the Holocaust, but effective pedagogy demands that educators clearly define the term for their students. The Texas Liberator App adopts the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum's definition: "The Holocaust was the systematic, bureaucratic, state-sponsored persecution and murder of six million Jews by the Nazi regime and its collaborators." The Texas Liberator App acknowledges that the Nazis and their accomplices also employed the camps to commit genocide against many members of other victim groups. These groups include the Roma and Sinti, the disabled, Poles, Soviet Prisoners of War, communists, homosexuals, Catholic clergy, and Jehovah's Witnesses. Although not all victims died there, the Nazi camps were an integral and horrific component in the execution of these mass murders.

### **Why is Learning about the Holocaust Important?**

The systematic, bureaucratic, state-sponsored persecution and murder of millions of innocent people is worth remembering if our culture is to learn from the terrible mistakes of the past. This truth is especially resonant today, when news of ongoing genocides is often widely reported. But it is fair to note that the Holocaust is not the only horrific event that is worthy of attention in the classroom. This begs an important question, for if it is true that there are many other examples of atrocities and genocides in human history, including in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, then why does the Holocaust warrant special attention, even over 70 years after the camps' liberations, and even here in Texas, which is geographically so far removed from Europe?

History indeed contains a shameful record of human behavior across the ages, and any instance involving the murder of innocents should always matter to us. There can be no denying the value of all human lives. Thus, the importance of studying the Holocaust is not based on the false premise that somehow the lives of its victims were more valuable than those of others.

Instead, the singular importance of the Holocaust can be said to refer to the event's undeniable impact, which is felt far beyond what statistics such as "6 million victims" can convey. The Holocaust continues to shape the world in which we live in significant ways. When Allied troops liberated many of the Nazi camps, they made a point to film emaciated survivors and piles of corpses. Such images shocked everyday Americans, who ever since have tried to grapple with the trauma of secondhand witnessing. Once many survivors resettled here in Texas, they contributed to their new communities and eventually opened up about the horrors they experienced and saw. Acknowledging the importance of bearing witness on behalf of the murdered millions, Holocaust survivors around the world, including here in Texas, continue to share their testimonies in the hope that nobody else will have to experience such cruelty. In this manner, the wider culture has been forever changed.

#### *Examples of The Holocaust's Enormous Impact:*

- Antisemitism and the discrimination against and persecution of Jews did not begin with the Holocaust. However, by targeting the Jews of Europe for total annihilation on the basis of a dubious race theory and then making wholesale efforts to follow through on that plan, the Third Reich greatly altered Jewish demographics. Before the Holocaust, most of the world's Jews lived in Europe. Two-thirds of Europe's Jews were killed in the Holocaust, including most of the world's rabbis and over a million children. The Yiddish-speaking world, which for hundreds of years had comprised the center of Jewish learning,

was destroyed. In the wake of the Holocaust, Jewish survivors frequently had no homes to which they could return: neighbors had moved in, and Jews who tried to go back after liberation were assaulted, and in some cases, murdered in places such as Kielce, Poland. Many survivors took refuge outside of Europe. Israel (established in 1948) and the United States emerged as new centers of Jewish learning.

- The Holocaust's impact is not confined to the world's Jewish population. People of various backgrounds have taken note that the Holocaust demonstrates what is possible when a totalitarian regime assumes control of a modern state. It is the first time a state systematically and bureaucratically targeted every man, woman, and child for mass murder. Because it happened, it shows that it can happen. Those who have studied the rise of totalitarianism have felt an ethical obligation to be on the lookout for any signs of its return.
- While the Holocaust is not the only genocide in history, it claimed the largest number of victims and occupied the largest international scope. It has become one of the most studied topics in modern world history.
- The Holocaust has widely come to serve as a template for measuring evil. When genocides have been perpetrated in Cambodia, Rwanda, and the Balkans, and continue in Darfur, Iraq, and Syria, many people look closely at the Holocaust as a model for determining how best to respond. The Nuremberg trials, where several top-ranked Nazis faced justice after the war, have similarly served as a model for some nations to confront perpetrators in the aftermaths of genocides.
- The Holocaust began in Germany, the heart of Christian Europe. This fact has challenged long-held popular assumptions that religious people will make moral choices, and that religious institutions will selflessly lead the fight to protect the innocent. Many people have therefore questioned what they had been taught about and by organized religion. The Holocaust is by no means the only reason this trend emerged, but it is a factor in several communities.
- The Holocaust raises metaphysical and ethical questions about human nature, the value of all human life, and the obligations of the individual and the community to come to the aid of the helpless. Many people refer to the Holocaust when faced with ethical choices in contemporary world events.
- The Holocaust has reframed the way many people view education. Before the Holocaust, advanced degrees and familiarity with the "high arts" were often interpreted as evidence of strong moral development. However, firsthand accounts from the Nazi camps recount that many of the cruelest killers had doctorates, medical degrees, and knowledge and appreciation of Kant, Goethe, and opera. In reaction, experts in pedagogy have stressed the importance of ethics education as a vital component in classroom curriculum.
- During the Holocaust, several German scientists experimented on camp inmates, and many doctors and nurses killed patients who were deemed "life unworthy of living."

Medical ethics has emerged as a field of study in response to those abuses. Today in Texas, students studying to become doctors and nurses are required to take courses in medical ethics.

- The Holocaust dealt a strong blow to the eugenics movement, which until then had been popular with not only German scientists and doctors, but also many of their British and American counterparts.
- The Holocaust inspired the creation of a new term, genocide, which names a crime that can now be prosecuted under international law. A Holocaust refugee, Emmanuel Lemkin, coined and defined the word and campaigned for holding the 1948 United Nations Genocide Convention. This convention calls on signatory nations to take action to stop genocides wherever they occur. The United States ratified the UN Genocide Convention in 1988.
- The Holocaust brought immediate attention to human rights issues. Eleanor Roosevelt and others worked to develop the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights at the United Nations.
- The Holocaust has challenged artists of various genres to develop a means of communicating unspeakable acts of horror. Survivors have frequently and virtually unanimously referred to the failure of traditional language to convey the complexity of their firsthand testimonies. Many survivors have relied on language through memoirs, poetry, short stories, and novels that tell their stories, though these works have often been interpreted as subverting the conventions of the genres. Many of the works are widely read and taught. Partly because the Nazis turned torture and murder into a spectacle, many Holocaust survivors and scholars have been distrustful of visual media's ability to describe this particular history with authenticity. Even so, the Holocaust has inspired a multitude of paintings, drawings, and sculptures, and films about the Holocaust have often met with great popular and financial success. Several scholars contend that the Holocaust marks a point where reality exceeded human imagination, and art has struggled to catch up.
- The Holocaust has inspired new models for commemoration in the aftermath of atrocity. The establishment of Holocaust museums, the many travel programs to former Nazi camps, the Reading of the Names at ceremonies to honor victims, and the blaring of a siren every year on Yom Hashoah in Israel are but a few examples. Survivors of subsequent genocides have sometimes turned to these models to build public awareness of their own experiences.
- The Holocaust has helped to elevate the status of survivors in the popular imagination. Today, many Americans are used to hearing survivors of various abuses speak publicly about whatever horrors once befell them, but this level of sharing is a relatively recent phenomenon. This was not an immediate change after the war. In the first years after the Holocaust, survivors were largely ignored wherever they went. Although Holocaust memoirs were published as early as the 1940s, most people did not want to hear about

what survivors had experienced. The war years had been hard on many people, who now had little desire to look back. Few films about the Holocaust were made. In the 1970s and '80s, the American public grew much more receptive to learning about the topic. Some survivors, such as Elie Wiesel, the author of *Night*, were deemed authorities on broader issues of human rights; Wiesel was even awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. Arguably, at no time in human history has the word, "survivor," had so positive a connotation as in the present day.

- The Holocaust has helped undermine the public's trust in authority and traditional institutions. The Nazi leadership set out to lie to everyday people through propaganda. Even the most educated members of society typically believed and defended the lies. In reaction to the many instances of the German public's seemingly blind trust in their leaders, Americans and others have become emboldened to question their own.
- The Holocaust has compelled believers in many world religions to ask, "Where was God?" when the victims cried out. While some have lost faith, others have worked to revise theologies in an effort to reconcile traditional dogma with the knowledge that so many innocents were victimized while so many religious leaders stood by.
- The Holocaust inspired a push for tolerance between various religious, ethnic, and racial communities. For example, the American Roman Catholic nun, Sister Rose Thering, worked to fight the Church's "Teaching of Contempt" for Judaism and the Jews. Her research moved the pope to issue "Nostra aetate" at Vatican II in 1965, which set a new tone of respect and cooperation between Catholics and other faith communities, particularly Jews.
- Popular interest in the Holocaust is evident in the growth of college and high school course selections, at movie theaters, on lists of bestselling books, and elsewhere.

## **Challenges in Learning about the Holocaust**

The study of the Holocaust inevitably presents many difficult challenges:

- Holocaust education is fraught with disturbing firsthand testimonies, themes, and images, and most educators would reject any curriculum that leaves students feeling hopeless about the world.
- The Holocaust is in most instances grossly misrepresented on the Internet, in popular media such as films and novels, and even in many classroom textbooks.
- There are many books, films, and other educational resources on the Holocaust. Exploring and evaluating them can be a time-consuming, daunting endeavor.
- Educators sometimes struggle to present a suitable frame of reference for students to approach the Holocaust. Many educators have reported difficulties in reaching students who have previously been sheltered from learning about the more disturbing aspects of world history. Other educators lament that today's students are curiously hard to engage precisely because they have grown numb to hearing about atrocities; getting them to care about something that happened over 70 years ago, and far away from Texas, becomes the challenge.

## **Why Use the App?**

The Texas Liberator App helps educators by assisting in compliance with several curricular requirements.

- **Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS)**

The state of Texas requires that high school students are taught about the Holocaust, including camp liberations, as stated in the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS). The Texas Liberator App contains content that relates to the following TEKS:

- **World History Studies:**

- (12) History. The student understands **the causes and impact of World War II**. The student is expected to:
  - (A) describe the emergence and characteristics of totalitarianism;
  - (B) explain the roles of various world leaders, including... Adolf Hitler... prior to and during World War II; and
  - (C) explain the major causes and events of World War II, including... the Holocaust...
- (22) Citizenship. The student understands the historical development of significant legal and political concepts related to the rights and responsibilities of citizenship. The student is expected to:
  - (F) assess the degree to which American ideals have advanced human rights and democratic ideas throughout the world.

- **United States History Studies Since 1877:**

- (7) History. The student understands the domestic and international impact of U.S. participation in World War II. The student is expected to:

- (D) analyze major issues of World War II, including the Holocaust...
  - (E) analyze major military events of World War II, including... the liberation of concentration camps...
  
- **Advanced Placement (AP)**

The Advanced Placement (AP) curriculum also requires that students be taught about the Holocaust, including camp liberations. The Texas Liberator App contains content that relates to the following AP standards:

  - **AP United States History**
    - 7.2.II.A  
Immigration from Europe reached its peak in the years before World War I. During and after World War I, nativist campaigns against some ethnic groups led to the passage of quotas that restricted immigration, particularly from southern and eastern Europe, and increased barriers to Asian immigration.
    - 7.3.II.D  
In the years following World War I, the United States pursued a unilateral foreign policy that used international investment, peace treaties, and select military intervention to promote a vision of international order, even while maintaining U.S. isolationism.
    - 7.3.II.E  
In the 1930s, while many Americans were concerned about the rise of fascism and totalitarianism, most opposed taking military action against the aggression of Nazi Germany and Japan until the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor drew the United States into World War II.
    - 7.3.III.A  
Americans viewed the war as a fight for the survival of freedom and democracy against fascist and militarist ideologies. This perspective was later reinforced by revelations about Japanese wartime atrocities, Nazi concentration camps, and the Holocaust.
  
  - **AP European History**
    - 4.1.II  
The conflicting goals of the peace negotiators in Paris pitted diplomatic idealism against the desire to punish Germany, producing a settlement that satisfied few.
    - 4.1.II.A  
Wilsonian idealism clashed with postwar realities in both the victorious and the defeated states. Democratic successor states emerged from former empires and eventually succumbed to significant political, economic, and diplomatic crises.  
Illustrative examples, democratic successor states:
      - Poland
      - Czechoslovakia



- Hungary
    - Yugoslavia
  - 4.1.II.C
 

The Versailles settlement, particularly its provisions on the assignment of guilt and reparations for the war, hindered the German Weimar Republic's ability to establish a stable and legitimate political and economic system.
  - 4.1.III
 

In the interwar period, fascism, extreme nationalism, racist ideologies, and the failure of Appeasement resulted in the catastrophe of World War II, presenting a grave challenge to European civilization.
  - 4.1.III.D
 

Fueled by racism and anti-Semitism, Nazi Germany—with the cooperation of some of the other Axis powers and collaborationist governments—sought to establish a “new racial order” in Europe, which culminated with the Holocaust.

Illustrative Examples, Nazi establishment of a new racial order:

    - Auschwitz and other death camps
  - 4.2.II.B
 

... Hitler rose to power by exploiting postwar bitterness and economic instability, using terror and manipulating the fledgling and unpopular democracies in [his country.]
  - 4.2.II.D
 

After failures to establish functioning democracies, authoritarian dictatorships took power in central and eastern Europe during the interwar period.

Illustrative examples, authoritarian dictatorship in central and eastern Europe:

    - Poland
  - 4.2.III
 

The Great Depression, caused by weaknesses in international trade and monetary theories and practices, undermined Western European democracies and fomented radical political responses throughout Europe.
  - 4.4.I.B
 

World War II decimated a generation of Russian and German men; virtually destroyed European Jewry; resulted in the murder of millions in other groups targeted by the Nazis including Roma, homosexuals, people with disabilities, and others; forced large-scale migrations; and undermined prewar class hierarchies.
- **AP World History**
- 6.2.III.C
 

The rise of extremist groups in power led to the annihilation of specific populations, notably in the Holocaust during World War II, and to other atrocities, acts of genocide, or ethnic violence.
  - 6.2.IV.B

The sources of global conflict in the first half of the century varied and included imperialist expansion by European powers and Japan, competition for resources, the economic crisis engendered by the Great Depression, and the rise of fascist and totalitarian regimes to positions of power.

Additionally, teachers of Texas history can appreciate that the Texas Liberator App's content focuses on the experiences of Texans serving in the US military.

However, designers of the App are also mindful that many educators choose to teach about the Holocaust even though they do not teach the courses named above. Curricular requirements are not the only reason to teach with the App.

- Many educators in disciplines outside of social studies teach about the Holocaust. Teachers of ELAR, Theater, Music, Speech, and other disciplines can still find the App useful in supporting their teaching of Holocaust-related content.
- The App employs primary sources, including interviews, letters, and passages from memoirs and speeches.
- The App is designed to help busy teachers engage students.
  - It is free.
  - It is efficient. Running the App should take less than an hour, and it is up to the individual educator to decide how much discussion time should follow.
  - It saves educators the trouble of researching and outlining detailed lessons on the Holocaust.
  - Along with this users' guide, it will help dispel commonly held myths about the Holocaust. At a time when there is an abundance of misinformation about the Holocaust, especially on the Internet, the App has been designed in consultation with people who know the subject matter.
  - It has been designed by people who know technology and understand how to engage young people.
  - It puts the experience of learning about the Nazi camps at the user's fingertips.
  - It is presented in English and from an American perspective, helping young Americans understand what it was like to encounter Holocaust victims and

survivors in person in 1945. Several of the App's testimonies are from liberators and survivors who were teenagers at the time of liberation.

### **Limitations of the App**

This user's guide anticipates many of the questions that students are likely to ask once they have worked through the Texas Liberator App. Like any teaching tool on a subject as vast and complex as the Holocaust, the App cannot cover every fact or theme that is worth knowing. While this guide means to fill in gaps, it, too, cannot cover the whole subject. Creators of the App have sought to strike a balance between including vital items of content, and sustaining young people's interest over the course of an independently completed homework assignment. The hope is that the App will be a springboard to their further exploration of the subject.

### **How to Use the App**

The Texas Liberator App is found at the URL, <https://texasliberators.org>.

Click the tab: “Interact,” and then the tab: “Launch the App.”

To pause the App, click the Spacebar key. To play, click the Enter key.

Creators of the App recommend that teachers assign it for homework (or in some other form of independent study). At the next class meeting, teachers can then lead a discussion of the App’s content and ultimately guide students towards a clearer understanding of the Holocaust’s history and ethical ramifications. This user’s guide can assist in helping teachers foster discussion.

The App is meant to take 30-60 minutes.

### **Walkthrough Alternative**

Creators of the Texas Liberator App appreciate that some users may be put off by the technological components of this sort of learning experience. For users who do not want to be concerned with navigating screens and selecting from options in the form of arrows, we offer a walk-through edition of the App. This model minimizes the interactive experience and just asks users to play and watch a YouTube video. The video’s content is the same as most of the App, but the user does not have to make any decisions about where to click to move through the App. Also, with the walkthrough, the user is free to move the cursor back to replay a section at any point.

Please note that the walkthrough does not include the App’s closing credits or introductory content, including the narration and fly-through. The walkthrough begins with the App’s animated conversation: “Halt! Identify yourself!” (See “Journeying into the App” in the guide below.)

The walkthrough, like the App, is hosted at the URL, <https://texasliberators.org>.

Click the tab: “Interact,” and then the tab: “Walkthrough.”

Educators may also use the walkthrough as a teaching tool by going directly to the sections that they wish to address with students or by instructing students to go to particular oral testimonies, artifacts, or interactions. They may play, pause, and rewind as necessary to engage students in discussion.

### **The App’s Organization and Components**

The App has several components to offer students an array of perspectives.

- Introduction
  - Most of the introduction is narrated from the perspective of an unnamed soldier from Texas. To remind students of their prior knowledge, it briefly recounts events, personalities, and themes regarding WWII.
  - This narrated portion is followed by textual information about the App and Dachau.

- The textual information is followed by an animated fly-through that offers viewers a sense of the layout and design of Dachau.
- Framing Quotations
  - These are taken from a memoir and a speech by Nobel Peace Prize Winner, Elie Wiesel, who was liberated by Americans at Buchenwald.
  - Wiesel's words succinctly convey important ideas that are then supported by details in the App's other components.
- Animated Conversations – These computer-generated animations frequently punctuate lengthier presentations of primary sources, helping users appropriately frame them.
- Letters Home – The App includes two letters from American soldiers to their families back in the states. These are authentic primary sources used with permission by the Dallas Holocaust Museum.
- Interviews with Liberators – These are clips from interviews with Texans who participated in the liberations of Nazi camps. Most interviews were conducted through a partnered project between the Texas Holocaust and Genocide Commission and Institute of Oral History at Baylor University. Interviews with Lee Berg and Ben Love were conducted by Holocaust Museum Houston.
- Interviews with Survivors – These are clips from interviews with camp survivors. Three of the interviews (Abraham Lewent, Bella Jakubowicz Tovey, Ruth Webber) were used with permission by the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum. The Walter Kase interview was made available by the Holocaust Museum Houston.
- Credits – The closing credits include biographical details and photographs of the Texas liberators, as well as photographs of Dachau in 1945 and 2017 used with permission by the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum.

## **Journeying into the App**

Educators may want to highlight some of the following relevant details, themes, and matters of clarification as discussion points.

- **Narrated Introduction**

- The App opens with camera shots taken from a train on its tracks. This is not meant to suggest that the viewer is on a cattle car to a camp. Instead, the train should be seen as a metaphor for each soldier's journey from Texas, to the liberation of a camp, and back to Texas.
- The narrator immediately states that to understand the experience of liberation, the viewer will need to study the Treaty of Versailles in 1919. Students should also be told that German resentment towards the Treaty of Versailles was not the sole factor that led to the persecution of the Jews. The treaty's blow to German national pride and the ensuing unstable economy undoubtedly contributed to widespread suffering and desperation, but they were not the only reasons that Hitler rose to power. Other factors, especially the long history of antisemitism, also played a part. To varying degrees, Jews in Europe had faced a thousand years of prejudice, discrimination, and even violence before the Nazis ever came to power in Germany. This pattern of Jew-hatred goes back to the medieval Crusades, when tens of thousands of Jews were murdered, or even earlier in some parts of Europe. However, neither the Teaching of Contempt for the Jews by the Church in the Middle Ages nor the Treaty of Versailles in the 20<sup>th</sup> century made the Holocaust inevitable. Both factors helped lay a foundation that helped make the Holocaust possible.
- The map that shows German invasions in black is not meant to be taken literally. For example, Germany did not invade Sweden or Switzerland. It is best to read the map as representative of the large threat that Nazi Germany posed to Europe.
- The narrator refers to Germans turning to their Axis partners, and then describes the Japanese bombing of Pearl Harbor. Students should be told that Germany did not pressure Japan to attack the US naval base; this was a Japanese decision.
- The narrator refers to the Germans fighting for a home for their "superior race." This is better phrased as what the Germans *believed* to be their superior race. We do not want to imply that our point of view is the same as that of the Nazis.
- The narrator refers to the Germans fighting for a home as an explanation for WWII. Nazism's essential goal of annihilating the Jewish people, however, cannot be explained as a mere land-grab. Students should be encouraged to grasp that the Holocaust was not a simple byproduct of German expansionism.
- The narrator lists several groups that the Nazis persecuted. It is important to acknowledge that the Nazi attitude towards the Jews was different in two important ways: first, the Nazis saw the Jews as the chief enemy of the Reich, Hitler explicitly referred to them far more than he did other targeted groups in

political speeches and radio addresses, and the government made thousands of German laws that explicitly targeted the Jews. Second, the Nazis targeted the Jews for total annihilation, meaning the plan was to murder every Jewish man, woman, and child.

- The narrator refers to “*Nacht und nebel*” [Night and Fog] to name the sudden disappearance of members of several groups that were targeted by the Nazis. The *Nacht und nebel* program targeted political dissidents. The rounding up of large numbers of Jews in Eastern and Central Europe during the 1940s was typically conducted out in the open, where many bystanders were able to see what was happening. In a pedagogical context, terms like “night,” “fog,” and “disappeared” create a certain mystique around the persecution of victims. This lends the Nazi menace an almost supernatural, faceless character, effectively diverting our attention from the central issue that real perpetrators made real choices. Educators should therefore be careful to help students recognize that most Holocaust victims were not persecuted under this a shroud of secrecy.
- The narrator states: “But we weren’t ready for the true horror of *Hitler’s* Germany. We weren’t ready for this.” The camp name, “Dachau,” is then highlighted and enlarged on the screen. It is easy for students to jump to the conclusion that Dachau must have been the worst of all the camps and the greatest example of the Nazis’ “true horror.” Educators should make clear that Dachau was chosen for the Texas Liberator App not because it was the worst of the camps: several other camps held and killed more victims, for example. Rather, Dachau was selected for this project because it was the first of the Nazi camps to be constructed; it lasted until liberation and was liberated by Americans, many of whom came from Texas.
- **Textual Introduction**

**By design, this App refrains from depicting victims’ corpses, survivors’ emaciated bodies, and other visible markers of physical atrocities. There are key reasons for this decision. First, no artistic representation can ever sufficiently convey such horrors to the extent that victims experienced or liberators witnessed them. Moreover, many survivors of the Nazi camp system, along with several Holocaust scholars, have explicitly rejected the notion that art should even attempt to portray the terrible effects of the Nazis’ systematic assault on prisoners’ bodies. As the survivor and Nobel Peace Prize recipient, Elie Wiesel, once wrote in the New York Times, “Why this determination to show ‘everything’ in pictures? A word, a glance, silence itself communicates more and better.... In the Jewish tradition, death is a private, intimate matter, and we are forbidden to transform it into a spectacle.” Because Holocaust education is bound up in the teaching of ethics, this App means to demonstrate that respect for the victims and their suffering must be a higher priority than any evocation of verisimilitude in historical depictions. However, historical accuracy remains a high priority in other aspects of this project.**

**This App highlights a particular camp, Dachau, which was situated near the city of Munich in southern Germany. Dachau is featured in this App because, of all the Nazi camps, it was liberated by the largest number of Texans. From Dachau's opening in March, 1933 until the arrival of American liberators in late April, 1945, its size and purpose changed as the Nazis mapped out their "Final Solution" to the Jewish Question. Originally constructed to hold many of the Reich's political prisoners, including communists, and later expanded to hold victims of the Final Solution and others, Dachau bears the distinction of being the first of the Nazi concentration camps. Eventually, the camp held Jews, Roma, and others. Over the years of the Nazi regime, an estimated 200,000 people were imprisoned at Dachau. Although Dachau was never one of the 6 death camps whose primary mission was to murder prisoners, killing did take place there. Tens of thousands of innocent victims were murdered at Dachau, which contained a gas chamber and a crematorium. Prisoners who survived selections were typically subjected to brutal treatment, such as starvation and beatings. Many prisoners were forced to work as slave laborers, while others were used as live subjects in notorious experiments by Nazi doctors.**

**As a camp located within Germany, Dachau took on added importance late in the war. Knowing that they would soon lose the war to the Allies, Nazi authorities ordered that outlying camps be evacuated, with prisoners forced into death marches to Dachau and elsewhere in Germany. Many prisoners at Dachau were also forced to march deeper into Germany. The Nazis did not want their victims to live to see liberation or to tell their stories. The roads near Dachau were littered with the corpses of those too weak to march. Decomposing corpses, not just emaciated survivors, greeted American soldiers upon their arrival at the camp. These liberators scrambled to give medical care to the camp's survivors.**

**A common theme running through the testimonies of the Texas liberators is that their first encounters with Dachau were unexpected, even shocking, and almost indescribable. These soldiers had set out to win a war, not to liberate camps that they could never imagine existed. What the liberators confronted at Dachau continues to test the very limits of language and visual representation, even several decades later. But fortunately, the Texas liberators have come to understand that sharing their testimonies is worth the struggle.**

**By employing the voices of many of these Texas liberators, this App seeks to do more than celebrate their accomplishments in the war, though there is no denying the historical and ethical significance of the soldiers' heroism. Just as importantly, the App also strives to foster in today's youth a clearer understanding of what was lost in the Holocaust, and of what challenges camp survivors faced at the point of liberation.**



**The following rendering means to portray the layout of Dachau.**

- **Fly-through**

- This computer-generated animation gives the user a sense of the layout of Dachau. On the computer screen, this depiction of Dachau looks like a pleasant retreat. Students should be reminded that this is not what Dachau looked like at liberation. Out of respect for the victims, all visual depictions of emaciated inmates and piles of corpses were intentionally omitted from the App.
- Those who are not fluent in German will no doubt have questions about the meaning of the writing on the roof of one of the buildings. This translation is provided later in the App: “There is one path to freedom: Its milestones are obedience, honesty, cleanliness, sobriety, hard work, discipline, sacrifice, truthfulness, love of the Fatherland.”

- **Quotation: Elie Wiesel, “Preface” to *Night*, 2006**

**“For the survivor who chooses to testify, it is clear: his duty is to bear witness for the dead and for the living. He has no right to deprive future generations of a past that belongs to our collective memory. To forget would be not only dangerous but offensive; to forget the dead would be akin to killing them a second time.”**

- Elie Wiesel was the world’s most famous Holocaust survivor, and *Night* remains the most widely read Holocaust memoir. An earlier, much longer draft of this book bore the title, *And the World Remained Silent*. That version, which was written in Yiddish, was not published. Students might find it interesting to discuss the deeper connotations of each title. For example, the original title seems far more bitter and accusatory than the title that was selected for publication.
- Wiesel was born in the town of Sighet in what was then Romania. He grew up in a very religious Jewish household.
- Wiesel was a teenager during the Holocaust, in which he lost most of his family. He emigrated to the United States, became an author and professor, and won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1986. He passed away in 2016.
- The quotation from Wiesel’s memoir highlights the significance of remembering the dead, which has a special place in Jewish tradition. By writing that forgetting the victims amounts to a second attack on them, Wiesel implies that just by remembering the murdered, we can play an active role in fighting Nazism today. Wiesel’s life work was to bridge the gap that stretches from the victims and survivors to the rest of us. That gap reflects the ability to perceive acts of brutality that had been virtually unimaginable before the Nazis. Holocaust education centers on a conscious acknowledgment of the ethical imperative that human beings should not murder or torture because human lives have worth. Like many Holocaust survivors, Wiesel knew that by trying to listen to the dead, whom the

Nazis set out to silence, we define ourselves as ethically different from those who embraced Nazism.

- Another quotation from Wiesel is found near the end of the App.
- **Animated Conversation:**  
**“Wait! Somebody’s here!”**
  - As this conversation means to reflect, Allied troops typically had no idea about the camps until they stumbled upon them. At that point, the soldiers had to devise plans to help the inmates, most of whom were dying. In other words, the act of liberation involved far more than capturing guards and tearing down fences.
  - The German phrase, “ARBEIT MACHT FREI,” means, “WORK MAKES YOU FREE.” This adorned not only a gate at Dachau, but also one at Auschwitz. Like many of the sayings that the SS posted around the camps, it had the intention of mocking the inmates. At the camps, Jews and Roma did not receive time off for working hard or for demonstrating good behavior.
- **Interview: Dr. J. Ted Hartman (liberator)**
  - Dr. J. Ted Hartman helped liberate the Buchenwald and Mauthausen camps. Buchenwald was one of the largest concentration camps to be established in Germany. Elie Wiesel was taken from Auschwitz to Buchenwald. Mauthausen-Gusen was in Austria. Both camps had reputations for being especially harsh. Mauthausen was notorious for the brutal treatment of inmates forced to work at its quarries and factories. Simon Wiesenthal, who later became a well-known Nazi hunter and author, was an inmate there. Mauthausen was the last camp to be liberated by the Allies.
  - Hartman recalls his surprise when newly liberated camp inmates saluted American soldiers and kissed tanks. Such greetings were common when American troops arrived. Camp survivors were grateful: most had expected to be killed and forgotten, as their loved ones had been. The sudden shock of seeing liberating troops aroused emotional outbursts.
  - Hartman describes seeing piles of corpses and furnaces containing human remains that were still burning. Students should be reminded that in 1945, when he had these encounters, nobody had studied the Holocaust. The very notions that people would stack corpses like cordwood and then burn the remains were even more shocking than they are today.
- **Animated Conversation:**  
**“I can’t believe what I’m seeing. How many prisoners? How many people?”**

These words are meant to express what the screen refrains from displaying for users’ eyes: the overwhelming spectacle of seemingly countless bodies having been burned or left to rot.

- **Interview: Ben Love (liberator)**
  - Love says he saw “human skeletons holding onto the wire fence.” He does not mean actual skeletons, but rather human beings who were so emaciated they seemed to be all skin and bones.
  - Love describes seeing men, women, and children during the liberation of Mauthausen. Students should be helped to realize that children were usually a rarity at the camps. In most instances, the young and the elderly were immediately killed upon entering the Nazi camp system.
  - Love raises the question of how “civilized” people like the Germans could treat others so cruelly. Students might not already be aware that German culture had a reputation for being the pinnacle of civilization in the modern world. Many other Europeans and Americans considered Germany to be a nation of musicians, philosophers, and poets. Thus, when news of the Nazi camps got out, a great many people were startled to learn that Germans could have been capable of playing such a big role in the Holocaust.
  - When Love refers to the surprise that Germans could behave that way “in this [20<sup>th</sup>] century,” he gives voice to another common assumption. Before the Holocaust, it was widely assumed that progress was virtually inevitable. The sight of the camps thus produced another shock.
- **Animated Conversation:**  
**“Mueller, can you ask those survivors what they experienced here?”** – It was not enough for soldiers to see the survivors; that is, just seeing them was not enough to explain what had happened. From the first moments of liberation, Allied troops spoke to as many people as possible to find out what had been done at the camps. Survivor testimonies have provided invaluable insights regarding the Nazi camps.
- **Interview: Abraham Lewent (survivor)**
  - Abraham Lewent was liberated by American troops at Dachau. As he recounts, most of the others did not live to see Liberation. Most of those who were still alive at that point were too weak to walk, and had to be carried.
  - As Lewent describes, the problem of assisting survivors was not always just a matter of bringing them food. Quite a few inmates who lived to see liberation died after obtaining food from the Red Cross. The foods were too rich or substantial for them to digest. Survivors could not even take the basics for granted: they had to learn to eat again.
- **Animated Conversation:**  
**“This feels more like a nightmare than reality. How will we get them to believe us?”**  
**“Because we will remember. And we will honor these stories. And we will insist that they be heard!”**

Following the war, the Texas liberators returned to a country that did not want to hear many details about the horrors of the Holocaust. While many veterans wanted to share what they had witnessed, it would often be several decades before they encountered people who were ready to listen.

- **Letter from Paul Pftzschner (liberator) to Mom and Dad**
  - Paul Pftzschner's letter home is an authentic primary source. In it, we encounter a soldier's communication to his parents back in the States.
  - The letter refers to "Krauts," which was a pejorative term for Germans in the 1940s.
  - The letter states that a large number of slave laborers were Poles. The Nazis did not have a plan to kill all of the Poles in Europe, but they still murdered and otherwise mistreated many Poles. Hitler did not respect the idea that Poles deserved their own nation. To him, the Poles were to be viewed as Slavs, most of whom should be destined to serve their Aryan masters.
  
- **Animated Conversation: "What does that say on the roof?"**
  - The Third Reich liked to pride itself on embodying the principles listed. By contrast, it depicted Jews, Roma, and Sinti as vermin who were biologically predisposed to destroy the same ideals.
  - As was the case with other sayings posted around the camps, the intent here was to mock the inmates, who knew full well that working hard, staying sober, etc., would never lead to their freedom. According to the testimonies of survivors, a more common saying among inmates asserted that the only way out was up the crematorium chimney.
  - A soldier labels this sign "more propaganda." The Reich invested a great deal of time, manpower, and money in creating and disseminating propaganda. Some of the most famous examples are found in films of the Nazi era, in periodicals such as *Der Stürmer* [*The Stormer*], and in books such as *Der Giftpilz* [*The Poisonous Mushroom*]. Joseph Goebbels served as Reich Minister of Propaganda.
  
- **Animated Conversation: "Soldier, what do you have there?"**
  - One of the many disturbing aspects of Nazism is that many of the killers were regular church-goers who sincerely believed that they were performing God's work. As the belt buckle attests, Nazi propaganda contended that God was with Germany. Nazism viewed its War against the Jews as nothing less than a holy war. While Allied troops, the Nazis' victims, and Holocaust survivors by no means adopted the Nazis' perspective on God, many Holocaust scholars have noted that the question of "Where was God while the innocents were tortured and slaughtered?" resonates in firsthand accounts of the horrors.

- The reference to *All Quiet on the Western Front* and the Great War, as well as the soldier's question, "Are we repeating the same thing now?" should not be taken to mean that the Nazi evil was no different from what the United States fought in WWI. Examples of cruelty are certainly apparent in any war, but the systematic and bureaucratic torture and annihilation of a people, as seen in the Nazi camps, was something new.
- Soldiers on both sides in WWII believed that God was with them. Also, like the United States, the Third Reich chose the eagle for a symbol, as the App shows on the screen. This was a matter of German tradition, though, and not of intentionally copying the US. "Reich" means "empire," and the First Reich (the Holy Roman Empire) and the Second Reich (the German Empire of 1871-1918) had also displayed the eagle.
- **Interview: Robert Anderson (liberator)**  
Robert Anderson expresses his dismay at learning that his enemy in the war also claimed to believe in God. Students might not already recognize that matters of faith often assume heightened importance during a war, especially on a battlefield. In that sense, it is perhaps no surprise that an American veteran would weep over a memory of first realizing that his enemy had also laid claim to his God.
- **Animated Conversation: "Let's keep checking that camp, Mueller."** – Learning about the basic makeup of each camp was not easy, and often took days or weeks. The war did not stop just because camps were being liberated, so soldiers were still on the lookout for ambushes and boobytraps, even within the camps.
- **Interview: Bella Jakubowicz Tovey (survivor)**
  - Bella Tovey's initial comment contrasting Bergen-Belsen with Auschwitz might be confusing, particularly when she seems to say that the former was the real death camp. She is correct that the camps were not the same: no two camps were. Auschwitz was by far the largest of all the Nazi camps, and was one of 6 camps that Holocaust historians have labeled "death camps" because their primary purpose was murder. (Technically, three main camps comprised Auschwitz, and Birkenau was where its gas chambers were located.) The other death camps were Chelmno, Belzec, Sobibor, Treblinka, and Majdanek. By contrast, most of the Nazi camps, including Bergen-Belsen, have been called concentration or labor camps, and there were also some transit camps. It is important that students understand that victims were targeted and murdered at all of the Nazi camps. In other words, the death camps were not the only places where the perpetrators murdered, but they were the places whose chief purpose was murder. Atrocities were perpetrated at all of the camps, and Auschwitz and Bergen-Belsen are both notorious for their treatment of inmates.
  - When Tovey states that unlike Auschwitz, Bergen-Belsen did not "need" to gas in order to kill, students should be instructed that gas was not the only means of killing at Auschwitz.

- Tovey, like many survivors, was forced to clear corpses from her barrack. This was a daily chore for camp inmates, who were constantly surrounded by death as they struggled to survive. At many camps, corpses might sit outside in stacks for weeks before finally being cremated or dumped into mass graves; in winter, frozen bodies could be hard to move, and the crematoria also frequently broke down.
- As Tovey describes, inmates had to develop mental strategies for coping with horrors every day; for Tovey, this meant not looking at corpses' faces. The famous survivor, Gerda Weissmann Klein who was eventually liberated by American troops in May, 1945, has stated that as a prisoner of the Nazis, she once spent a full day thinking only about whether she would prefer to wear a blue or red velvet dress if she ever made it out alive. Such attempts at distraction were often all that stood between holding on and giving up.
- Bergen-Belsen is where Anne and Margot Frank died of typhus in early 1945.

- **Animated Conversation:**

- **“What are we witnesses to, Mueller? How will we tell the story?”**

- The burden of bearing witness is more than a fight against being overcome by emotion; it also necessarily entails a difficult search for the appropriate words or images. Like liberators, survivors have stated that they are simply unable to find sufficient means of conveying their memories to those of us who were not there to witness the atrocities in person. And yet, they have persisted in trying to convey their testimony anyway.

- **Letter from Othniel Alsop (liberator) to Mom and Dad**

- Othniel Alsop's letter is an authentic primary source. In it, we encounter a soldier's communication to his parents back in the States.
    - The town of Bad Hersfeld is located almost exactly at the center of Germany. Liberation there would have occurred very late in the war.
    - The letter is highly unusual for including many such matters as the dimensions of a barracks. Not many soldiers would have thought to record details like that in 1945. Clearly, the author anticipated that people in the United States would have an interest in the camps.
    - The letter refers to an “old man” from Yugoslavia who allegedly helped Tito. Students might not realize on their own that the man had been accused of being a communist sympathizer, for Josip Tito was a famous communist who would later lead Yugoslavia. The Nazis had actively struggled with German communists all through the 1920s and '30s, and viewed communists everywhere as an enemy. Even so, students should be encouraged to grasp that victim groups at the camps were treated differently. An elderly Yugoslav would be imprisoned at a Nazi camp for supposedly helping a known communist, whereas an elderly Jew would

typically be sent straight to the gas: to the Nazis, his “crime” was merely being alive.

- The letter refers to “Jerries,” which was a pejorative term for Germans during the 1940s.
- The letter lists the components of meals at the camp. While servings varied from camp to camp, it was typical that servings tasted awful and did not come anywhere close to minimal caloric intake requirements for a human body. Some survivor accounts describe “bread” filled with sawdust. An inmate’s ability to steal a potato or a turnip from the kitchen could sometimes make a difference in being able to live another day, though the penalty for the crime was execution.
- The letter mentions inmates lining up to be counted. At many camps, roll calls were held twice daily, and could take hours. Because of starvation and fatigue, many inmates found it impossible to stand for such sustained periods, and were then deemed unfit for work; this assessment meant that they would be murdered.
- According to the letter, inmates at this camp could bathe once a week. This was not typical of the inmate experience at most camps. While the Nazis through their propaganda claimed to promote cleanliness, they kept inmates at most camps in unspeakably filthy conditions. Those who were not sent to their deaths discovered that they might be forced to go more than 6 months without a change of clothes or a shower. Fania Fénelon, the vocalist for the women’s orchestra at Auschwitz, writes in *Playing for Time* that orchestra members were the only inmates to be permitted daily showers; this was because the SS came to their concerts and did not want to pick up lice. In Primo Levi’s celebrated memoir, *Survival in Auschwitz*, a fellow inmate advises the author that he should take care to wash his face every day because surrendering to the filth was akin to giving up.
- The letter mentions that inmates at this camp were paid virtually nothing for their labor. Not all camps paid prisoners anything. Slave labor was the norm at most camps.
- The letter refers to how a doctor murdered inmates at the camp. Many doctors and nurses used their training to end many lives during the Holocaust. Additionally, several doctors conducted experiments on living human subjects at Dachau and other camps. Jews and Roma, including children, were typically the subjects. Medical ethics has emerged as a field of study largely in reaction to those crimes.
- The letter describes how the camp’s crematory was operated. At Auschwitz, Jews selected to work at the crematories were members of the *Sonderkommando*. Because there were so many corpses to burn, a single *Sonderkommando* consisted of several hundred men. Members were able to eat to their fill while the assignment lasted, until they were themselves gassed and cremated by a new *Sonderkommando*. One of the *Sonderkommandos* is known to have led an

ultimately unsuccessful revolt against the SS. Filip Müller's *Eyewitness Auschwitz: Three Years in the Gas Chambers* presents gruesome details of how bodies were burned.

- The letter states that victims' relatives could purchase their ashes, but never actually received the right ones. This arrangement excluded Jewish victims, of course, because their relatives would also have been victims.
- The letter recounts several grotesque scenarios. It is important that educators try to focus students' attention on the human element rather than on the sordid details of the murders. The survivor interviews in the App are a good place to redirect students' attention.
- **Animated Conversation: "Mueller, this is unbelievable. The scale of this operation is incredible. None of the civilians said anything about this camp? How could no one have known about this? How could word not have gotten out about this?"**
  - Reports of large numbers of Europe's Jews being murdered and cremated appeared in the American press during WWII, including the *New York Times*, though these stories were never given space on the front pages.
  - World leaders, including FDR, Churchill, and the pope were aware of the camps' existence. FDR had been criticized by anti-Semites all through the Great Depression; they alleged he was too close to American Jews. He was determined that his critics would not accuse the United States of entering the war to save the Jews, so his administration helped point the media's attention towards the war in Europe and the Pacific, not to the slaughter of Europe's Jews.
- **Interview: William Dippo (liberator)**

Many civilians did know about the camps. The smell from the crematoria was noticeable 10 miles away from some of the camps, and grease from the ashes in the air covered clothes and houses.
- **Animated Conversation:**

**"Who Are These People?"**  
**"I'll ask, sir. They're Polish prisoners, sir. They were just imprisoned here a few weeks ago."**  
**"Polish Jews?"**  
**"No, sir, these are Polish political prisoners. Many of them are Christians. Many of these men are pastors and priests. They were imprisoned for speaking out against the Nazis. They said three of them had been killed since their arrival." "They aren't Jewish? But I thought..." "No, sir. Antisemitism was a focal point of the Nazi platform and the 'Final Solution' was a plan to take care of what they called the 'Jewish Question.' There were mobile killing squads and later killing centers. Death camps. This camp, Dachau, was a concentration camp. Here we have Jewish**



**prisoners, but we also have political prisoners, undesirables. The Nazis rounded up people they saw as enemies of the state and that included Jews, communists, the Roma, homosexuals, Jehovah's Witnesses, and many others."**

**"This is wrong. This is inhuman."**

- There are many facts that are worth exploring when the Nazis' many targeted groups are listed. While details matter in the study of history, educators should help students bear in mind the central theme, as stated here in the App's dialogue: "This is wrong. This is inhuman." The many facts and details matter little if Holocaust education fails to emphasize issues of right and wrong.
- A common myth after the Holocaust is that the Nazis set out to kill anyone who was different from the Aryan ideal. This is not true. For a variety of reasons, several groups were targeted for persecution, often in different ways, and to different extents. Policies and actions provide insufficient evidence that the Nazi leadership set out to murder all Poles, all Christian clergy, all homosexuals, etc. However, when individual members of those groups were murdered, their suffering was no less than that of the Jews, who were targeted for total annihilation. While being careful to acknowledge certain important differences in Nazi policy, educators should also take care to direct students away from making comparisons of pain between groups. Not all groups were victimized to the same extent, but all victims suffered. The lives of all victims matter and deserve to be remembered. Any differences in treatment are worth remembering not as a matter of determining who suffered the most, but rather as a means of building our understanding of what Nazism was truly about. Classroom instruction should avoid blurring the distinct experiences of individual groups, which arguably all deserve students' attention.
- Even today, studies show that most Poles view the Holocaust primarily as a crime against the Polish people, not against the Jews. There is no doubt that the Nazis murdered well over a million non-Jewish Poles, in many cases through gassing at Auschwitz. Hitler denied that Poland was a valid country and that the Polish people were a true nation.
- Christian clergy in Eastern Europe were targeted when they publicly opposed the Reich or were caught aiding members of other victim groups. Many Christians have found inspiration in remembering the lives of Christian clergy who chose to act selflessly to help other victim groups, and therefore paid with their lives.
- The Roma (and Sinti) are distinct ethnic groups that have long called Europe home. Educators should discourage students from referring to these groups as "gypsies," which is a derogatory term based on a popular but mistaken belief that they had originally immigrated from Egypt. The Nazi leadership viewed the Roma and Sinti as "vermin." Like the Jews, they were dubiously identified as a racial group. Historians estimate that at least 500,000 victims were murdered for being members of those groups. Auschwitz, the largest camp, had a separate "Gypsy Family Camp" on its premises. Unlike Jewish families, the families of the

Roma and Sinti were often kept together for a period at Auschwitz, but most were still eventually gassed.

- The Nazis persecuted German homosexual men because homosexuality did not actively contribute to Nazism's express goal of increasing the Aryan population. Most Holocaust historians have estimated that about 5-10 thousand victims were murdered by the Nazis for being homosexual. German homosexuals who survived the camps often stayed silent after being liberated: they knew that, as homosexuals, they could still be prosecuted under German law.
- Jehovah's Witnesses were targeted because the Nazis questioned their loyalty to the Third Reich. Members of that religion refused to swear oaths of allegiance to Hitler or to fight in the war.
- The Nazis did not invent "the Jewish Question" (What should be done with the Jews?). Every society where Jews have been a minority has had to answer that question. During the Middle Ages and Renaissance, many European monarchs answered the Jewish Question by saying that Jews could live among Christians only if they wore special clothing that marked them as different. Other European rulers forbade Jews from living among Christians; the Jews in many of those kingdoms were expelled. Other areas, such as Venice, required Jews to live in separate areas from their Christian neighbors; these areas were called "ghettos." Later, the French and Russian Revolutions also came up with responses to the Jewish Question. In the United States, the law gives Jews the same rights as others, and this is by design. While the Nazis reintroduced older policies, such as physically marking Jews' clothing, and forcing them into ghettos, Nazism was different in that it defined Jews as a blood group, not as a religion or ethnicity. To the Nazis, Jews (like the Roma) could never be successfully assimilated because their blood would always predispose them towards behavior that would be dangerous to the wider society. The Nazis' "Final Solution" to the Jewish Question was total annihilation of the Jewish population.
- **Interview: Chester "Chet" Rohn (liberator)**
  - Chet Rohn is correct to draw distinctions between the SS, who ran the Nazi camps, and the "average German soldier" fighting in the war. For one thing, the SS was an organization for which enthusiastic Nazis volunteered, while the German military was in great part comprised of men who were drafted. All the same, in recent years most Holocaust historians have concluded that the German military actively engaged in the targeted murder of civilians, particularly Jews. For example, Wendy Lower of Princeton University gives a statistic that the average German soldier in Ukraine during the war murdered 27 Jews.
  - Rohn refers to a "blank look" on prisoners' faces. This was a common mark of starvation, according to many survivor memoirists. Hollywood depictions that show inmates leaping and singing in joy are largely the product of creative license by those who were not there.

- Rohn provides a vivid description of emaciated inmates' appearances, only to conclude, "It's almost impossible to describe." His words speak to how liberators and camp survivors have felt pressure to communicate a memory of sights that had never before been seen.
- **Animated Conversation:**  
**"This is why my family left Germany, sir. My family was worried. They read newspaper reports, they listened to the radio. When they felt tension and the increase in prejudice on the streets, we left for the States."**  
 It is easy to see in hindsight that there were warning signs of what was to come under Hitler's leadership. About half the Jews of Germany left for other countries before the mass killings started, though many were later rounded up once their places of refuge were occupied by the Germans. Many simply trusted that their neighbors were good people, and that Hitler was merely fanning the flames of antisemitism to win votes. In other words, most Germans did not believe that he would actually act as harshly as he spoke, and even still, he did not publicly map out a plan of gassing millions in camps. By the 1938 Kristallnacht pogrom, most Jews in Germany and Austria could see that their lives were in danger. Why did so many stay? Educators should emphasize to students that people living under the Nazi regime did not have the advantage of hindsight. Moreover, it is hard to leave a country that one calls home, especially when one's job (such as attorney or professor) requires a native fluency in the language, or when one's beloved family members would be left behind. Additionally, moving costs money, and this was the era of the Great Depression. Finally, strict immigration quotas during the Depression kept most European Jews from entering the United States, even when they tried. Anne Frank's family was among the tens of thousands who were not approved for American visas in time.
- **Interview: Gerd Miller (liberator)**  
 Gerd Miller states emphatically that "everybody knew" about the camps in the 1930s because the Nazis wanted people to live in fear of being sent away. Certainly, most Germans were aware that camps existed, and that people were murdered there. Fear of being shipped East was widespread. The enormity of the network of camps, the huge number of victims, and the daily operations of the camps were more shrouded in mystery to many civilians.
- **Animated Conversation:**  
**"Captain, the camp is in order and ready for the Red Cross. We found no other enemy soldiers, sir."**  
**"Good. Inform the general the camp is secure."**  
**"They survived this camp, but what next? How do you live with this horror? This camp is literally tattooed in their skin."**  
 Not every camp tattooed its inmates, but all camps engaged in the systematic dehumanization of living human beings. Most survivors could wear long sleeves to cover tattoos, regrow hair that had been shaved, and put on weight by eating. But many, particularly those who had been sterilized or subjected to forced experimentations, had to

deal with physical ailments that could never be alleviated. Of course, emotional, psychological, and spiritual health also proved difficult and in some cases impossible to recover after liberation. There are many accounts of survivors who decades after liberation overstocked the pantries in their houses because they still feared being starved; similarly, several survivors continued to sleep with shoes under their pillows, just like in the camps, where they feared the theft of these items. All survivors have had painful memories of what they endured and lost. Some, including the poet, Paul Celan, and the author, Primo Levi, chose suicide. Others, while still carrying enormous sorrow, still somehow managed to thrive by building families, careers, businesses, and communities in Texas and elsewhere.

- **Interview: Ruth Webber (survivor)**

- Ruth Webber remembers being confined to a Krakow orphanage because the streets were still not safe for Jews in the spring of 1945. Not only Nazis, but several Polish civilians made clear that they wished every Jew had been killed. On July 4, 1946, Jewish Holocaust survivors at a boarding house in Kielce, Poland, were accused of blood libel and attacked by civilians while police refused to come to the victims' aid. Dozens of Holocaust survivors were killed that day. Many survivors concluded that there could be no justice, nor any chance of staying alive, for any Jews remaining in Europe.
- Webber confesses that she harbored revenge fantasies against the Nazis after the war. While such fantasies are understandable, few survivors ever carried out acts of revenge after liberation. Educators should be aware that many students have had their image of Jewish Holocaust survivors shaped by the X-Men film series, where the fictional survivor of Auschwitz, Magneto, devotes his life after liberation to vengeance. Students should be reminded that Magneto is fictional, and they should be exposed to firsthand accounts of how real survivors actually behaved in the immediate postwar period. Elie Wiesel and Primo Levi are among the several survivors who write about those years in their memoirs. Despair, not pursuit of revenge, is a main theme in their testimonies.

- **Animated Conversation: “If you will please move over here, we will make sure we get you the help that you need. Sir, this survivor would like me to translate for you. Go ahead... Sir, he wants you to go across the bridge and visit the building on the other side. He said you must see ‘the ovens’; he’s very insistent.” “Tell him we will go. Ask him if there is anything we can do for him.”** – This brief scenario illustrates survivors' desperation. In a moment when we would expect their thoughts to be on food and freedom, many survivors were more concerned with making sure that others would also bear witness to the Nazis' crimes.

- **Interview: Wilson Canafax (liberator)**

Wilson Canafax describes meeting a request from Elie Wiesel at Buchenwald. Wiesel was only 16 years old at liberation, and had lost most of his family in the Holocaust. Having been brought up in a very religious household, Wiesel would almost naturally turn to prayer at such a moment. However, students should be made aware that many

Jewish victims came from far more secular traditions. In other words, not all of the Jews wore beards, kept their heads covered, followed a kosher diet, or spoke Yiddish or Hebrew. Some “Jewish” camp inmates were atheists, and some even considered themselves Christians. Because the Nazi regime defined Jews by blood, and not by faith or observance level, some victims that the Nazis had designated as Jews had never set foot in a synagogue. Even the religiously devout did not all have the same reaction to being liberated. Some saw it as God’s saving hand in history, while others now rejected faith.

- **Animated Conversation:**

**“How far have these people been pushed? How much have they been tested? Tell him we’ll help him. For now, he needs to stay with his group and wait for the Red Cross. But tell him we will be going across that bridge... That smell, so strong here. What is this place?”**

Crossing the bridge represents taking up part of the survivor’s burden. By going in person to see the ovens, the soldiers are making sure they will be able to say they witnessed with their own eyes some of the evidence. By learning about their experiences and those of the victims and survivors, we make ourselves secondhand witnesses.

- **Interview: William A. Womack (liberator)**

- Landsberg was a subcamp of Dachau.

- William Womack’s interview highlights how the liberators were unprepared for what they suddenly came across at Dachau. Without food to share with the starving inmates or enough translators on hand to facilitate communication, the soldiers at first could do little but stare in disbelief.

- **Animated Conversation:**

**“This can’t be. This just can’t be.” “There are bodies, so many bodies. So many lives.”**

When it became apparent that Germany would lose WWII, the SS hurried to murder as many victims as possible. As many as five hundred thousand Hungarian Jews were killed at Auschwitz from May to August of 1944. So many bodies were burned on any given day that the crematoria would back up; when this happened, the SS typically forced inmates to burn human corpses in fiery pits. Under orders from the Nazi leadership, the SS destroyed evidence of the camps: some camps were entirely razed, and many of the written records were burnt alongside victims’ corpses. In 1944 and well into 1945, the SS worked to evacuate many camps, starting with outlying ones. Armed guards compelled inmates on “death marches” in treacherous weather towards and eventually into Germany. Prisoners lacked adequate clothing and footwear, and would go days without anything to eat or drink. Anyone who could not walk on, or who tried to escape, was shot and left beside the road. Gerda Weissmann Klein, a survivor, gives a famous account of such a march, though she was eventually rescued. Sometimes, however, there was simply no time for prisoners to be evacuated or for all of the bodies to be burned when the Allies approached a camp, especially late in the war. According to several eyewitness accounts from survivors and liberators, SS officers slipped into civilian clothes and took off into

the chaos to escape capture by the Americans or British, or worse, the Soviets (who had a reputation for wanting revenge for all of the carnage on Soviet territory during the war). Although thousands of inmates were forcibly marched from Dachau, tens of thousands were still there when American troops arrived. Stacks of seemingly countless rotting bodies could be seen and smelled; still others were uncovered in boxcars.

- **Interview: Jerry B. Morgan (liberator)**

Jerry Morgan describes helping to liberate bodies, where he found corpses still in their camp uniforms. It is unlikely that the bodies would have been burned in this way. Bodies were typically stripped naked before being burned. One reason that prisoners at Auschwitz were told to disrobe to shower, when they were really being directed into the gas chamber, was that SS officers had realized that this was more efficient than having others strip bodies after they were gassed. That scenario makes plain that the Nazis put a great deal of thought and organization into the daily operations of mass murder.

- **Animated Conversation:**

**“Mueller! Mueller! How is this possible? How many have died here?”**

Approximately 6 million Jews, and at least 5 million non-Jews, were systematically murdered by the Third Reich and its accomplices. Millions were murdered at the camps, with Auschwitz-Birkenau being by far the largest of the killing centers. Although the exact murder count at Dachau is not known, it is believed to be over 30,000.

- **Interview: Walter Kase (survivor)**

- Walter Kase was born in Poland, and at the age of 12 was deported to Nazi camps. He eventually settled in Houston, became a successful businessman, and was active at Holocaust Museum Houston. He was a beloved speaker on the Holocaust at many schools in Texas, and the Anti-Defamation League bestows its annual Walter Kase Educator Excellence Award to Houston-area teachers. Kase passed away in 2015.
- Kase regularly carried a Hershey bar with him wherever he went in Texas. An American soldier who liberated him gave him one, and it was ever after his favorite food.
- Kase weeps in this interview. When he would speak before audiences, he would warn that he still always cried when talking about the Holocaust.
- Kase’s younger sister, Risya, was shot in front of him and their parents before they were deported. He later named his daughter, Risha for her. Risha lives in Houston with her family.
- As a 12-year-old, Kase was typically the youngest and smallest at the camps where he was imprisoned. When emaciated inmates were hanged by the SS, he was ordered to hang on the bodies to make their necks snap.

- Kase describes an American soldier who broke into tears at the sight of inmates. Other firsthand accounts confirm that many soldiers cried for the first time during the war when they saw the camps.
  - Kase refers to 24,000 prisoners being taken to Gunskirchen, which was a sub-camp of Mauthausen-Gusen camp.
  - Kase describes SS guards taking off their uniforms and fleeing the camp as Allied troops approached. This happened at many camps. Most SS officers could still be identified by a tattoo under their arms, which gave their blood type. Its purpose had been to make sure that SS could easily receive blood transfusions in the event of an injury during the war.
  - Kase states that of the 24,000, all but 2,000 would die within less than a month. He says that “nobody was killed,” but his claim requires some explanation for students. He means that at this point the SS did not shoot or gas these prisoners, who instead died of starvation, disease, and exposure to the elements. In that context, there can be little doubt that these prisoners were in fact killed by the Nazis.
  - Kase recounts that of the 2,000 prisoners who survived to see liberation, most (“about 1200”) died soon after liberation because of malnutrition. His father was one of these victims. At all the camps, a great many prisoners were already too weak to be saved when the Allies arrived. Many died because they were no longer able to digest food once they had a chance to eat.
  - Kase describes feeling lost and overwhelmed when his father died. At the time, he was a teenager who had not been to school in several years. He would later find his mother, with whom he emigrated to the United States. While she, too, survived the Holocaust, she remained broken in spirit over the deaths of her husband and daughter. She was the only family Kase had until he married. As was the case for many other survivors, Kase had never expected to survive the Holocaust. Liberation was an unexpected blessing, though it could never erase the unspeakable suffering he had experienced and witnessed.
  - Students should be encouraged to understand Kase’s story in its proper historical context. He had an exceptional experience in that he was one of the relatively few Polish Jews to survive. Poland had by far the largest Jewish population in Europe before the Holocaust, numbering 3 million. The vast majority of Polish Jews was murdered. Only several thousand survived, and most emigrated after the war.
- **Animated Conversation:**  
**“All of us, we will never be the same.”**  
 This statement recurs as a theme throughout Texas liberator testimonies. Although many of these men did not share their stories with anyone, not even their own families, until

late in life, they all have conveyed that what they saw at the camps has stayed with them for the rest of their lives.

- **Interview: Lee Berg (liberator)**

- Berg was the father-in-law of Fran Berg, a founding member of the Texas Holocaust and Genocide Commission. He passed away in 2006.
- Berg’s interview frequently reflects his incredulity. He was unable to believe what he saw. In that respect, his reaction resembles that of other liberators and that of survivors. A recurring theme in firsthand accounts of the camps is that people grappled with trusting their five senses. The world in front of them exceeded anything they had ever imagined, so confronting it proved to be a challenge.
- Berg describes how the experience of liberation aged him, so that he reached manhood by seeing a camp up close. It is important that students appreciate the importance of distinguishing between the experiences of soldiers and those of survivors. Unlike liberators such as Berg, most survivors did not see the camps as having helped them mature or become better people. Because most students have already been taught to see life as a series of trials that offer lessons, they might not realize that Holocaust survivors typically insist that their own experiences defy that model. More typical of survivors’ perspectives are the words of Charlotte Delbo, who calls one of her camp memoirs, *Useless Knowledge*, and of Isabella Leitner, who calls her camp memoir, *Fragments of Isabella*. These titles point to recurring themes of victims’ life lessons remaining incomprehensible, and of victims’ minds being scattered outside of a meaningful chronology.
- Berg shares a primary source from 1945 in the form of a letter from Rabbi Lefkowitz, his rabbi in Dallas. The rabbi’s letter demonstrates remarkable sensitivity and insight for the times. Most people learning about the camps lacked any frame of reference for comprehending the nature of survivors’ suffering.

- **Quotation: Elie Wiesel, Nobel Peace Prize Acceptance Speech, 1986.**

**“I swore never to be silent whenever and wherever human beings endure suffering and humiliation. We must take sides. Neutrality helps the oppressor, never the victim. Silence encourages the tormentor, never the tormented. Sometimes we must interfere. When human lives are in danger, when human dignity is in jeopardy, national borders and sensitivities become irrelevant. Wherever men or women are persecuted because of their race, religion, or political views, that place must – at that moment – become the center of the universe.”** – Wiesel’s words can be read as advice to governments and international organizations, and also as a call to action for all of us. Educators might consider discussing with students how Wiesel’s position can be applied to current world events, as well as how logistical problems and other constraints can affect the pursuit of such lofty goals.

- **Credits**



- The closing credits profile the 21 Texas liberators whose testimonies shaped the App and its accompanying exhibit and book.
- The final screen shot shows a memorial sculpture which now stands at Dachau. Nandor Glid, whose parents were murdered at the camp, designed the monument in 1968.

### **Learning More:**

The Texas Liberator App is meant to inspire users to learn more about the Holocaust. Several other resources are available:

- Visit the Texas Liberator website at <https://texasliberators.org>.
- Explore the interactive maps on the <https://texasliberators.org> website – they can be a valuable resource as students may use the camps to identify Texas liberators or may learn how many people from a particular place in Texas were involved in the liberation.
- Visit the THGC website at <https://thgc.texas.gov>.
- Read the accompanying book, *The Texas Liberators: Veteran Narratives of the Second World War* (Texas Tech University Press, 2017), based on the oral testimonies of the liberators who inspired this project.
- If you are an educator in Texas, register to attend a free THGC educator workshop at <http://thgc.texas.gov/about/educator-workshop-registration>. If there is not a workshop currently scheduled in your area, contact THGC staff about setting one up.
- Visit Texas's Holocaust museums and their websites:
  - Dallas Holocaust Museum/Center for Education and Tolerance  
<http://www.dallasholocaustmuseum.org/>
  - El Paso Holocaust Museum and Study Center  
<http://www.elpasoholocaustmuseum.org/>
  - Holocaust Memorial Museum of San Antonio  
<http://hmmsa.org/>
  - Holocaust Museum Houston  
<https://www.hmh.org/>
- Visit other museums that focus on Holocaust education:
  - Museum of Tolerance, Los Angeles  
<http://www.museumoftolerance.com>
  - United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Washington, D.C.  
<https://www.ushmm.org/>
  - Yad Vashem, Jerusalem  
<http://www.yadvashem.org/>
- Check out other organizations that offer resources to facilitate Holocaust education:
  - Echoes and Reflections  
<http://echoesandreflections.org/>

- Facing History and Ourselves  
<https://www.facinghistory.org/>
- Jewish Foundation for the Righteous  
<https://jfr.org/>