

# What is the Jewish Community doing for the Centenary? Jewish Perspectives on World War I: Education and Remembrance

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## Introduction

Although World War I is history's most literate and literary war, it does not have a compelling place in Jewish history. Robert Wohl invites us to hark back to the Generation of 1914:

Close your eyes and a host of images leaps to mind: of students packing off to war with flowers in their rifles and patriotic songs on their lips, too young, too innocent to suspect what bloody rites of passages awaited them; ... of a generation missing, sacrificed, decimated, destroyed 'for an old bitch gone in the teeth, for a botched civilization'.<sup>1</sup>

However, this is not as rewarding an exercise for a Jewish audience regarding the Jewish experience of the war. The profile and visuals of the Jewish Generation of 1914 have a less defined and privileged place in Jewish memory.

Rather than correcting this disparity, the Centenary of World War I may have achieved the opposite effect; it has highlighted the absence of World War I in Jewish discourse and education. As Professor David Rechter, author of *The Jews of Vienna and the First World War* (2008), challenged his audience, “World War I has been very much in public and academic debate, but I will wager that you

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1. Wohl, *The Generation of 1914*, p. 1.

have probably heard very little specifically about the Jews and their experience in the war. (I will do my best to remedy this at least in part and I will tell you some of that story)".<sup>2</sup>

This article reports on one inquiry into what is being taught and what is being learned about World War I. It looks at the inclusion of the Jewish World War I experience in history curricula. It assesses the level, content and appreciation of students' learning of World War I; and their attitude towards historical facts, events, personalities, themes and consequences from an ethnic, national and global point of view, prior to the Centenary. It focuses on Jewish secondary school students and investigates their awareness of a Jewish narrative of the war. It questions Jewish students' involvement in extra-curricular state-sponsored and/or community-level commemorations of the Centenary, and reflects upon their receptivity to the cultural memory messages of World War I.

## **Government Centenary Plans**

In anticipation of the Centenary, national and regional governments worldwide assumed responsibility for World War I education and planned special programs for high school students, focusing on imparting a better understanding of the war's global significance. The premise of this paper acknowledges a contradiction. On the one hand, Jewish education has a definite advantage because it provides a means for achieving global commemoration. On the other hand, Jewish education suffers a distinct disadvantage because no government is allocating money towards educating and commemorating the global Jewish experience of World War I.<sup>3</sup>

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2. Rechter, Trauma on the Eastern Front (Lecture)

3. At best, government grants are given to local projects such as, in 2012, to "Hackney Remembers" – the lives and stories of the soldiers (with particular emphasis on British Jewish soldiers) and their families during World War I in Hackney and, in 2014, to Heritage Fund, Schoolchildren.

In 2012, British Prime Minister David Cameron announced a £50m budget for First World War commemorations “in every corner of our country”, from 2014 to 2018. Regardless of the controversy that inevitably surrounded these commemorations, they amounted to “possibly one of the biggest exercises of public education this century,” in which “millions of people have learned more about our country’s history”.<sup>4</sup>

The British Government established a £5.3 million fund for The First World War Centenary Battlefield Tours Program, which enabled two students and one teacher from every state-funded secondary school in England to explore key sites of the Western Front. Consequently, under the government’s new Legacy 110 project, these 9,000 students were expected to share their experience with 110 other people. The government envisioned that if every touring student reached that target, 880,000 people would acquire a deeper understanding of the War.

In the United States, President Obama also passed a World War I Centennial Commission Act in January 2013, establishing a commission for commemorative plans for the Centennial, which was gearing up for action in April 2017. Under this act, the Commissioners were to serve without pay, and no appropriated Federal Funds were to be used for any of the Commission’s activities or expenses. The Commission was, however, responsible for encouraging private organizations as well as state and local governments to organize and participate in activities commemorating the Centennial of World War I. The Commission’s website is a treasure trove of learning materials and classroom curricula related to World War I. The website offers “a wide array of resources for the scholar, student, or anyone interested in finding out more about this critical period in American and world history”.<sup>5</sup>

Any comparison between the UK Centenary and the US Centennial reflects a transatlantic difference not only between two very different public memories

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4. British Future, New study.

5. The U.S. World War I Centennial Commission, Introduction.

but also between two very separate pedagogical realities (one centralized and aggressive, the other decentralized and laissez-faire.) In the UK, it is London for the most part that determines what schools teach. The federal government of the US, however, does not dictate education standards in the US; the states, not Washington DC, determine curricula. Despite these structural differences, the two countries, in common with other participating countries such as Australia, France and Belgium, established education goals for their Centenary programs.

## **The Role of Surveys in Assessing National Education**

In preparation for the Centenary, several national and international World War I surveys were conducted to gauge levels of education, knowledge, understanding and identity. One particularly relevant example, due to its specific interest in ethnic contributions, came from British Future, an independent, non-partisan think tank that advances a dialogue on identity, migration and integration. British Future regarded the Centenary as an excellent opportunity for schools to teach and remember a shared history that includes people of different faiths and ethnic backgrounds. Their poll, “Do mention the war: will 1914 matter in 2014?” explored public knowledge about the war and public opinion about the relevance of the Centenary. Their findings revealed that 60% of 16 to 24 year-olds were unable to recall the year in which World War I ended and that less than half of the public knew about the participation of the Commonwealth. A majority struggled to differentiate between the two world wars. Some people thought Britain declared war in August 1914 because Germany invaded Poland (that was in 1939, not 1914); only 13% knew that Belgium was the right answer.<sup>6</sup>

Another poll was carried out in April 2014 by Ipsos Reid, one of the world's largest independent market research companies, on behalf of the Vimy Foundation, in order to determine what Canadians know about their country's participation in the Great War. To their dismay, the poll revealed that 1 in 5

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6. British Future, Do mention the war.

Canadians could not identify the Battle of Vimy Ridge even though that battle is considered a defining moment in Canada's development as an independent nation.<sup>7</sup>

Perhaps the most ambitious survey was the Centennial of the Great War Survey Project. Conducted on the eve of the centennial by the World Heritage Tourism Research Network, an inter-university research collaboration mainly based in Canada, this survey sought to investigate how people around the globe viewed the significance of commemorating World War I and the value of its heritage sites. Sourced from FluidSurvey, an online survey and feedback collection tool, the survey succeeded in collecting 2,490 responses worldwide. One of the most surprising statistics was that 42% of the Canadian respondents stated that they had never attended any World War One related remembrance event or ceremony in Canada.

At a First World War symposium held in Halifax in May 2014 to present the findings of the World Heritage Survey, the question of how to build upon this survey was discussed. It was agreed that the survey needed to address regional differences, reflect upon the home front experience, include ethnic minorities, and specifically consider pre- and post-factum educational influences such as the impact of a visit to a war site and the effect of a book or a film. These recommendations were incorporated into a survey to examine how Jewish students viewed World War I, its commemoration, and the value of its heritage from a Jewish perspective.

## **The Jewish Centenary Survey**

The Jewish Centenary Survey (hereafter: JCS) differed from its precursors. It was an independent project carried out by an individual (the author of this article) and not by an institution or team. It was not posted online, but carried out in classrooms. It focused exclusively on Jewish high school students and

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7. Ipsos, One in Five.

aimed to evaluate their knowledge and understanding of the War in general and the Jewish war experience in particular. The JCS did not consist of a multiple-choice questionnaire (with assisted answers), but required blanks to be filled in, and where appropriate space was provided for thoughts and comments.

The JCS was distributed in the classrooms of six schools between May 2013 and May 2014. A total of 146 surveys were collected. It was very much a work in progress, practically an *ad hoc* experiment. In the first school, for example, classes took the survey without any accompanying presentation or discussion. In Hasmonean, the opposite occurred; the survey was embedded in a presentation as “Hasmonean students prepare for the Jewish Centenary of World War I”.<sup>8</sup> In the only non-Jewish school visited, in the setting of a “Jewish lunch and learn” assembly, the survey was only discussed orally and casually; it was not officially filled out. The goal of the presentations was to provide the students with Jewish images of the war; to offer a different kind of survey of the Jewish aspects of the war experience; and to impart knowledge as well as appraise it.

The following table shows school participation in the JCS:

SCHOOL	LOCATION	AFFILIATION (YEAR FOUNDED)	PARTICIPATING CLASSES
JEWISH FREE SCHOOL	HARROW, ENGLAND	COMPREHENSIVE CO-ED, ORTHODOX (1732)	YEAR 13 (AGES 17-18)
IMMANUEL COLLEGE	HERTFORDSHIRE, ENGLAND	INDEPENDENT, CO-ED, MODERN ORTHODOX (1990)	YEAR 9 (AGES 13-14)

8. See Hasmonean students.

SCHOOL	LOCATION	AFFILIATION (YEAR FOUNDED)	PARTICIPATING CLASSES
HABERDASHERS' ASKE'S BOYS' SCHOOL	HERTFORDSHIRE, ENGLAND	PRIVATE, NOT JEWISH, SECULAR (1690)	"JEWISH BOYS' LUNCH AND LEARN" (AGES 13-18)
HASMONEAN BOYS' SCHOOL	HENDON, LONDON	ORTHODOX STATE GRAMMAR SCHOOL (1929)	YEAR 9 (AGES: 13-14)
HASMONEAN GIRLS' SCHOOL	HENDON, LONDON	ORTHODOX STATE GRAMMAR SCHOOL (1936)	YEAR 9 (AGES 13-14)
THE HESCHEL SCHOOL	MANHATTAN, NEW YORK	PRIVATE AND PLURALISTIC (2004)	10 <sup>th</sup> GRADE CLASS, "THE LONG 19 <sup>th</sup> CENTURY" (AGES 15-16)
THE FRISCH SCHOOL	HACKENSACK, NEW JERSEY	PRIVATE, CO-ED MODERN ORTHODOX (1972)	HONORS AND REGULAR 10 <sup>th</sup> -12 <sup>th</sup> GRADE (AGES 15-18 )

It is significant to note that Jewish day schools in America are a post-World War II phenomenon. Only in England can the history of a Jewish school be intrinsically linked to the history of World War I. All research into the methodology of engaging young people in history and research, and in particular World War I learning, emphasizes the need to draw upon local connections.<sup>9</sup> Jewish Free School (hereafter: JFS) students served in World War I and I showed their students some statistics. Also, JFS students belong to four different houses, three of them named for men who were involved in World War I: JFS alumnus and Jewish writer Israel Zangwill, the author of *The War for*

9. See, for example, Lucy Noakes as quoted in Pennell, *Bringing the Marginal*.

*the World* (1916); the mathematician (and later second president of Hebrew University) Selig Brodetzky, another JFS boy, who was an advisor to the British company developing periscopes for submarines during World War I; and Chaim Weitzmann, a chemist and later president of Israel, who headed the laboratories of the British Admiralty and worked towards the Balfour declaration. The potential definitely exists for JFS to utilize this learning advantage. Similarly, at the end of my visit to Haberdashers', a student took me to see his school's World War One and Two memorial plaque and book, a page of which is turned each school day.

Part one of the survey posed general questions: when did the war begin, what was its immediate cause, how long did it last, who were the Allies and who were the Central Powers, when did America enter, when did the war end, name a soldier, a battle, a general, a Prime Minister or the President, a poet, a book, a movie, a memorial, a commemorative custom, and where you learned about the war (class, book, television, movie, museum, travel).

Part two addressed personal and Jewish knowledge: where did students' relatives live at the time, did any of their relatives fight, on what side or sides did Jewish soldiers fight, name a Jewish writer of the war, what changed in Jewish history, was World War I important to Jewish history, and how has it been commemorated by Jews.

Students in all the schools struggled with the questions of who were the Allies and who were the Central Powers. The term Central may have confused them. Many placed Great Britain and Germany on the same side, put Italy on the side of the Central Powers, forgot about Russia or referred to it as the Soviet Union, and overlooked the Ottoman Empire. Belgium was rarely mentioned.

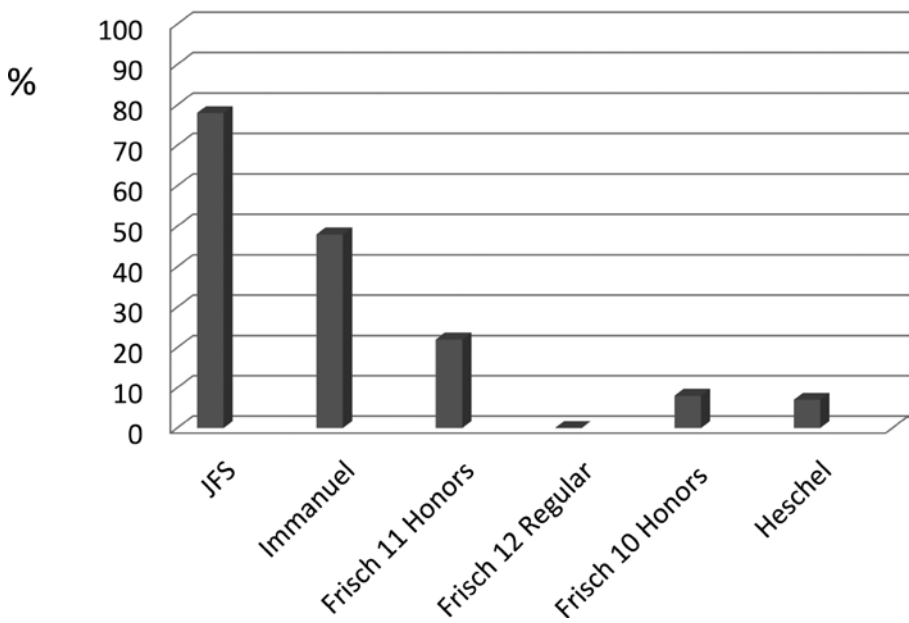
Many London students identified the Somme as a battle (77% from JFS, 83% from Immanuel) but the Somme was not a familiar reference for Americans, possibly because, despite the fact that the first day of the Somme was the bloodiest day in British military history, the battle was over before America's



involvement in the war began. The few American students who were able to name a battle, mentioned Marne, Verdun, and the Dardanelles.

The works of national curriculum recommended author Michael Morpurgo were frequently mentioned by British students. Just under half of them identified his novels or movies: *War Horse* or *Private Peaceful*. Some 17% 11<sup>th</sup> grade Frisch Honors students mentioned Hemingway’s World War I novel *A Farewell to Arms*. The poem 'In Flanders Fields' by the Canadian John McCrae was not mentioned at all.

### Identification of a WWI Novel



American students had more success identifying their president during World War I than clarifying the date of America’s entrance into the war: 76% of the Frisch 11 Honors students knew Wilson was the president; 37% knew 1917 was the year the United States entered the war. The results among Heschel students were 100% and 64% respectively.

No one mentioned a local memorial although they exist in practically every neighborhood. There is a World War I memorial in the heart of Golders Green, a major orthodox Jewish neighborhood in London. Another London Jewish neighborhood, Hendon, where Hasmonian is located, was the site of the Jewish Military Museum until it merged with the Jewish Museum in Camden in 2014. The Royal Air Force Museum is another landmark in Hendon; both museums constitute sites of remembrance. Near the Frisch school in Hackensack, New Jersey, are many war memorials, including the Circle of Honor with a monument to the Veterans of World War I and John McCrae's poem.

The Heschel school in New York is located opposite the De Witt Clinton Park, with its World War I doughboy of the Clinton War Memorial, also with the words of John McCrae's poem inscribed on its pedestal.

More than half of all the JFS and Immanuel students mentioned poppies as a commemorative rite, but American students are unfamiliar with the connotation. Americans mark both Veterans Day and Memorial Day, but the emphasis is not on remembrance.

Museums factored far less for students from New York and New Jersey than for those in London. British students have the Imperial War Museum based in Central London (as well as in Manchester), but the American national World War I museum and monument are located in Kansas City, Missouri.

Jewish schools in England began to participate in the Battlefields Tour Program in October 2015. One participant, aged 16, may have been chosen to represent Hasmonian because both his grandfathers fought in the war on opposing sides. A History A-Level student from JFS commented while on the trip "The First World War can sometimes get sidelined at school. But I think it is important to counter the myth that Jews didn't fight".<sup>10</sup> Frisch and Heschel students did not make similar trips.

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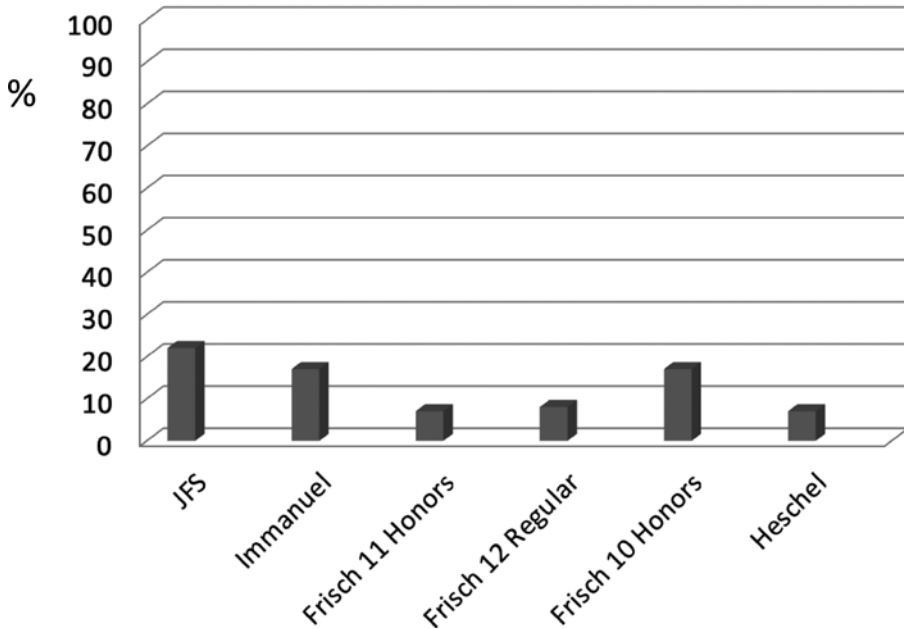
10. Oliver, *Stars of David*.



A student lays a Star of David remembrance token at a Jewish soldier's gravestone

The survey revealed that the students had very little Jewish knowledge of the subject. Jewish students know nothing about the Eastern Front of World War I (the 'Jewish Front'). While they were able to identify a novel or poet of World War I in the first half of the survey, they were unable to do so in the second half. Few English Jewish school children could identify Isaac Rosenberg as their World War I poet laureate, despite the fact that he is part of the national curriculum, and both Jewish Free School and Immanuel participated in the Centenary commemoration at Jewish Book Week in February 2014, which included poems by Rosenberg. A few American students mentioned Bialik and Agnon.

### Name a Jewish Writer of WWI

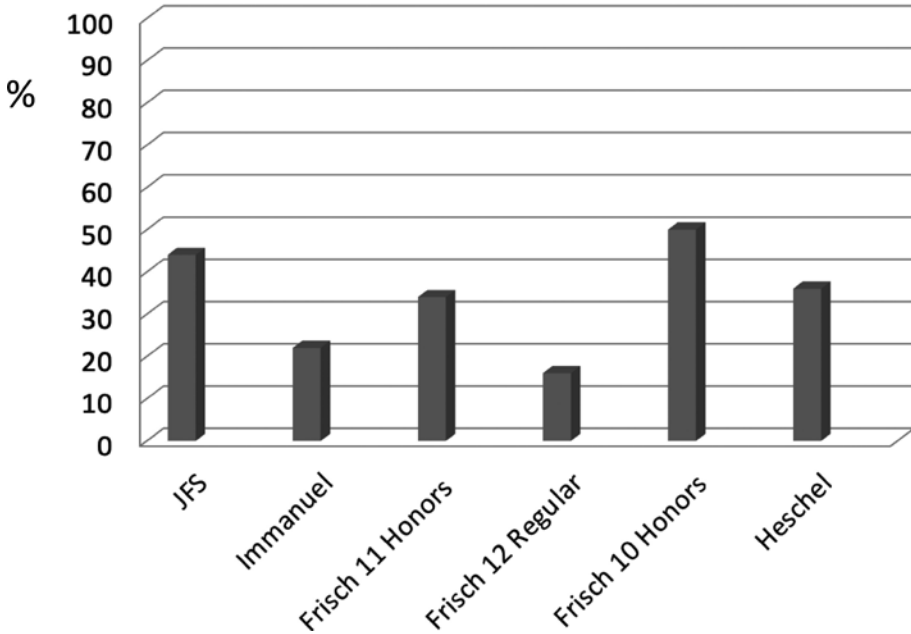


None of the students cited General Monash, Australia's Jewish general, arguably the greatest general of the War, although former Australian Prime Minister Tony Abbott (2013–2015) said that he wanted Monash to be a household name in Australia.<sup>11</sup> None of the students mentioned the entry of General Allenby into Jerusalem with the Jewish Legion, or famous Jewish soldiers who volunteered, trained or fought in the war, including Alfred Dreyfus, David Ben Gurion, Vladimir Jabotinsky, and Joseph Trumplerdor.

National differences appeared to even out towards the end of the survey. American Jewish students had a relatively strong sense of the importance of World War I in Jewish history, its role in the rise of anti-Semitism, its role in the Balfour Declaration, the fall of Ottoman rule, its effect on demographics, Jewish nationalism and the Holocaust.

11. See Abbott wants Monash.

**Students who considered WWI a turning point in Jewish history**



The final question: “Do Jews commemorate World War I? If so, how?” drew a blank in all the schools. One student confused World War I with Holocaust Remembrance Day, another with Israeli Memorial Day. The lighting of a candle, wearing poppies and observing one minute’s silence were the most common responses. Only a couple of JFS students recalled the AJEX (Association of Jewish Ex-Servicemen and Women) parade held every November.<sup>12</sup>

12. Even as late as November 2017, disappointment was expressed in *The Jewish Chronicle* that the Parade is not well attended by Jewish youth with the “obvious exception of the Jewish Lads and Girls Brigade”: “Youth movements – where were you? ... November 18, 2017. Put it in the diary now”. Lipman, We need to safeguard.  
 In 2018, 250 of the JFS school community joined the AJEX parade; 105 students marched with the names of 105 JFS alumni who were casualties of World War I. JFS, We Remember.

## Jewish Centenary Programs

What has the Jewish community planned for the Centenary of World War I and why have these programs not reached out to Jewish students? By the time of the Efrata College conference in February 2015, many Jewish Centenary events had been planned, starting in March 2013. By the Centenary of the Armistice on November 11, 2018, hundred of events had been added, including musical and literary recitals,<sup>13</sup> walking tours,<sup>14</sup> blogs,<sup>15</sup> internet sites,<sup>16</sup> new

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13. For example, “An evening of Music and Poetry for the Isaac Rosenberg statue appeal” at the Liberal Synagogue, in St. John’s Wood, London on April 26, 2015; “The Half-Used Life: Isaac Rosenberg – An evening of words and music”, to commemorate the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Battle of the Somme, at the West London Synagogue, March 7, 2016.
  14. Clive Bettington, chairman of the Jewish East End Celebration Society (JEECS), leads walking tours such as: “The Jewish East End and the Great War” on January 18, 2015 when he discussed the poetry of Rosenberg and Bomberg, the paintings of Bomberg and Gertler, zeppelins, the Jewish Legion and more.
  15. Two parallel blogs come from librarians from the Jewish Division of the NY Public Library and the National Library of Israel: Syroyezhkin, “Jüdischer Frontsoldaten, Posted December 2, 2015, <https://www.nypl.org/blog/2015/02/12/jews-and-wwi> and Lipson, The Jewish Soldiers, posted December 18, 2017.
  16. The most important site for school students is “We were there too”, launched at the Bevis Marks Somme Memorial Service on June 30, 2016. This started as a project to record the contribution of London Jewry to the World War I effort as an interactive website, but now includes the Jewish contribution from the provinces. It features aspects of the conflict from a Jewish perspective. The website recorded 30,000 visitors in just its first year. Another site is World War I – Memorials to fallen Jewish Soldiers, where to “mark the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of World War I, we remember the Jewish soldiers who fell on the field of battle - and, in particular, we take a look at the memorials raised in their honor... As our own World War I remembrance, we have created this gallery of images. Our World War I gallery is expanding - so please feel free to send us your own images to add”. See Jewish Heritage Europe.

books published and launched,<sup>17</sup> articles in newspapers and magazines,<sup>18</sup> and lectures, as well as commemorative services,<sup>19</sup> exhibitions<sup>20</sup> and conferences.

In March 2014, the Jewish Museum of London presented “For King and Country?” an exhibition that explored the Jewish experience of the First World War. A month later, “Doomsday. Jewish Life and Death in World War I” opened in Vienna, seeking answers to the question: “There were 350,000 Austro-Hungarian Jewish soldiers and 80,000 Jewish refugees in Vienna. Who were they?” “The Orient in Bohemia? Jewish refugees during the First World War” in Prague, sought to restore the vanished voices and experiences of Jewish

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17. For example, Tim Fischer, former deputy Prime Minister of Australia launched his book, *Maestro John Monash: Australia's Greatest Citizen General* (Monash University, 2014), discussed his subject at the Sydney Jewish Writers Festival on August 30, 2015. A second edition in paperback of *World War I and the Jews: Conflict and Transformation in Europe, the Middle East, and America*, edited by Marsha Rozenblit and Jonathan Karp (New York and Oxford, 2017) based on a 2014 conference, was launched at the Center for Jewish History in New York on November 11, 2018.
  18. The magazine *Segula: The Jewish Journey Through History*, devoted a special edition for the World War I Centenary to “The War That Changed the Jewish World”, Tishrei 5775, October 2014, Issue 23. See also, “Passchendaele and the Jews who fell”, by Jack Mendel, *The Jewish News*, August 2, 2017.
  19. These include honoring of Lieutenant Frank de Pass, the first Jewish soldier and the first Indian army officer to receive the Victoria Cross, with a commemorative stone in Whitehall, London, November 25, 2014; the ANZAC commemorative service at The Great Synagogue, Sydney, May 3, 2015; Remembering wartime nurse Edith Munro, on Woman’s Day, held at the United Synagogue’s Plashet cemetery in East London, 1, March 8, 2016, United Synagogue, A perfect day; the consecration of a paving stone in honor of VC hero Jack White in Manchester on May 7, 2017.
  20. There have been several exhibitions of Jewish artists from World War I: ‘Chagall: Between War and Peace’, Musée du Luxembourg, Paris 2013; Chagall: ‘Love, War, and Exile’ was at the Jewish Museum, New York 2013-2014; Mark Gertler and David Bomberg in ‘A Crisis of Brilliance, 1908-1922’, Dulwich Picture Gallery, London 2013; Abel Pann, ‘Works from the War 1915-1917’, Museum of Jewish Art and History, Paris, 2014; World War I Jewish artists Isaac Rosenberg, David Bomberg, Mark Gertler and Jacob Kramer featured in ‘Out of Chaos’, the centenary exhibition of the Ben Uri Gallery, London 2014; and in recognition of the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Bomberg’s death, a travelling exhibition ‘Bomberg’ at Pallant House Gallery, Chichester, the Laing Gallery in Newcastle, and the Ben Uri Gallery, London 2017–2018.

refugees from the Eastern European Front. To explore the ways in which the war transformed Jewish life around the globe, the Center for Jewish History in New York, in addition to organizing a conference, a film series, and an evening of literary readings entitled “Jews and the Great War: A Reflection at the Centennial”, curated two exhibitions – “German Jews at the Eastern Front in World War I: Modernism meets Tradition” and “The Kaiser's Call to Arms: Jewish Expression in the Great War” (November 2014–February 2015). Melbourne’s Jewish Museum of Australia held an exhibition entitled “True Jews and Patriots: Australian Jews and World War One”. According to the exhibit’s catalogue, “few Australian Jews today are aware of the significance of the War in the context of Australian Jewish History. One of the key objectives in the Jewish Museum is to collect and exhibit objects, artwork and archival material that tell the story of the Australian Jewish experience”.<sup>21</sup>

The conference at Efrata College is one of a series on how the war *transformed* the Jewish experience and the Jewish world. The first such conference concentrated on “European-Jewish Literature and World War I”, at Graz University, Austria, June, 2013 but since then the focus has become more historical, as demonstrated by “The Jewish Experience of the First World War”, in London, June 2014; and “World War One and the Jews”, in New York, November 2014.

The Centenary has been dominated by the most prominent historical developments, notably the anniversaries of America’s entrance into the war, the Russian Revolution, and the Balfour Declaration. Balfour 100 was launched as the official tribute of the British Jewish community to the Balfour Declaration in November of 2016, with a website “intended to be the definitive digital resource about the centenary,” a designated “Balfour Shabbat” with synagogues hosting their own celebrations, and, its highlight event, the Balfour Centenary Lecture delivered and live-streamed by Simon Schama on November 1<sup>st</sup> 2017, the eve of the Declaration’s centenary, at The Royal Society, London. In America,

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21. Forward by the Director of the Jewish Museum of Melbourne, Rebecca Forgasz, *True Jews and Patriots*, p. 7.



“1917: How One Year Changed the World” explored how Americans Jews experienced America’s entry into the war, the Bolshevik Revolution and the Balfour Declaration. This exhibition travelled from the National Museum of American Jewish History in Philadelphia (March 17-July 16, 2017), to the American Jewish Historical Society in New York (September 8-December 29, 2017). It was then rebranded as “For Liberty: American Jewish Experience in World War I” at the National World War I Museum and Memorial, Kansas City, MO (29<sup>th</sup> June–11<sup>th</sup> November, 2018).

There is, however, a disconnect between Jewish academics and Jewish educators. Jewish conferences do not reach a wide enough audience, especially teachers in Jewish schools, and young people, as a rule, do not attend. Academics, educators and students need to become better acquainted within the Jewish world. The Wellington College Conference “Schools and The Great War Centenary: How to Prepare” was a rare successful and proactive attempt to bridge the divide between academics and educators. Convened in London March 2014 to address the question of how best to commemorate the Centenary of the First World War in British secondary schools, the event drew a vast number of attendees: 1,020 teacher delegates came from 600 schools to hear presentations (including history teachers from the Hasmonean School).<sup>22</sup> The Arts and Humanities Research Council’s funded Teaching and Learning War Research Network has subsequently built upon this effort.<sup>23</sup> This is an international, interdisciplinary collaboration between educators, museum specialists, historians, and battlefield tour guides that connects academic and public histories. At their first event, a one-day interdisciplinary workshop hosted at King's College London, 'Their Past, Their Memory?' on September 15, 2017 I presented my survey's methodological premises, challenges, descriptive and analytical results. The importance of involving historians and academics

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22. On this conference, see Davidson, How secondary schools can teach pupils, March 28, 2014.

23. Pennell, Bringing the Marginal.

in the education of young people was affirmed in a report compiled by the Network on lessons learned from the Centenary.<sup>24</sup>

With regard to the Jewish centenary, a different scenario emerges: the central role played by synagogues, rabbis, and prayers in the commemoration efforts. The Centenary of the outbreak of war on August 4, 2014 coincided with Tisha B'Av, as it did in 1914. The Bevis Marks Synagogue in London participated in 'Lights Out Across England' with a special Tisha B'Av service. Although the synagogue was packed, there were at most half a dozen children present. The United Synagogue produced a Centenary publication of "100 Years Ago... Remembering World War I", dedicated to the memory of those who fell in the war, but who received it, and who actually read it?<sup>25</sup> The Somme Centenary Jewish memorial event was also observed on June 30<sup>th</sup> 2016 at the Bevis Marks Synagogue. The United Synagogue marked the anniversary of the Battle of the Somme in their *Daf Hashavua*, with an essay by Rabbi Major Reuben Livingstone, Senior Jewish Chaplain to Her Majesty's Armed Forces. Livingstone's message contained notes of Jewish patriotism, Jewish religious and political values, within and across borders:

The 2016 centenary of this seminal battle means a great deal to this country and to the Jewish community. It was a turning point in the War which defined modern Britain and its democratic values. Equally important to remember is that among the vast casualties on both sides were many Jews...<sup>26</sup>

The significance of these commemorations is that they are not school-centric. One reason why no student in the JCS was able to recognize the connection between Tisha B'Av and the outbreak of World War I is that, unlike most Jewish holidays, Tisha B'Av always falls outside of the school calendar year.

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24. Pennell, *Bringing the Marginal into the Mainstream*.

25. This United Synagogue publication is also available as a PDF online: [http://www.theus.org.uk/sites/default/files/WW1%20Booklet%20web\\_FOR%20WEBSITE%20WITHOUT%20THE%20MAP.pdf](http://www.theus.org.uk/sites/default/files/WW1%20Booklet%20web_FOR%20WEBSITE%20WITHOUT%20THE%20MAP.pdf)

26. Livingstone, *Commemorating the Battle*, p. 3.

When reflecting upon the Balfour Declaration anniversary for the purposes of his own multi-national survey on Jewish identity across the European Union, *Jewish Chronicle* journalist and executive director of the Institute for Jewish Policy Research Jonathan Boyd wrote about how “Jews love anniversaries. One hundred years since the Balfour Declaration. Fifty years since the Six-Day War. Three hundred years since the readmission of Jews into Britain. We’ve done them all recently.” Jewish identity is usually measured by religious observance, communal affiliation, charitable gifts, political affiliation, family life and attachment to Israel, but it could also be measured by connections to Jewish history: “...yes, connections to Jewish history. And the evidence indicates that our history really matters to us. Or, more accurately, some of our history does.” The Holocaust is particularly pertinent — Jewish Policy Research’s 2013 National Jewish Community Survey offered a representative sample of British Jews with 20 different aspects of Jewishness that might be important to them, and found that “remembering the Holocaust” came second, narrowly outscored by “strong moral and ethical behavior”. By way of comparison, “believing in God” and “keeping kosher” came 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup>. “Studying Jewish religious texts” came last. That doesn’t mean those are unimportant; it just means they don’t resonate for many.” Boyd argued that the hegemony of Holocaust studies can limit understanding of our past. There is much more Jewish history to learn and it needs to be located more centrally in the educational curriculum of Jewish schools. A similar plea was expressed in the *Jewish Chronicle* by education consultant and former teacher of Jewish history Alastair Falk. He called for a Jewish History Month in cooperation with “the great Jewish museums we have, the world-class historians we have produced and focusing on the vibrant tapestry of Jewish histories in these shores”. This echoes the proposal adopted after World War I to construct a memorial to the Jews who fought in the war by establishing the Jewish Memorial Council, which trained a new generation of Jewish leaders.<sup>27</sup>

The ultimate repercussion of commemorating the Jewish experience of World War I in the synagogue is that participation becomes a “mitzvah” to be observed,

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27. Falk, We need to have a Jewish History, p. 13.

rather than an academic subject to be studied in school. This practice developed towards the end of the Centenary, helped perhaps by the fact that the AJEX parade in 2017 coincided with Mitzvah Day. By the 84<sup>th</sup> Annual Ceremony and Parade to mark the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Armistice, remembrance had been promoted as a mitzvah, similar to the Torah commandment to remember Amalek.<sup>28</sup>

## Summary

I have long advocated making available a textbook (possibly online) for use in American and British Jewish High Schools. Jewish history textbooks would definitely benefit from a study guide on World War I Jewish history for teachers and students. It should include maps, statistics, biographies, a representation of military contribution, the issues of participation, the experience of Jews fighting Jews, material on the wartime Jewish refugee crisis in Eastern Europe, an account of relief efforts, photographs of soldiers, medics, scientists, examples of graves and memorials to Jewish soldiers across Europe, an examination of postwar Jewish life and demographics, Jewish veteran organizations, web links to relevant cyber sites, a bibliography, books and movie recommendations, the works of Jewish artists in the war and primary source documents. Such a work, providing facts, original documents, images, icons and narratives, would be an invaluable aid for Jewish identity.

It is not enough for Jewish high school students to read Remarque, Hemingway and Michael Morpurgo. In their studies of World War I they need to reclaim their own texts and writers. These should include substantial passages and excerpts from the war writings of Ansky, Sholem Aleichem, Sholem Asch, Stefan and Arnold Zweig, Karl Kraus, Joseph Roth, Avigdor Hameiri, Shai Agnon, Leivick, Uri Zvi Greenberg, Israel Rabon, Israel Joshua Singer, and Isaac Bashevis Singer.

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28. Livingstone, *Marking 100 years*, p. 5.

When I attended the Efrata College conference and the walking tour on World War I in Jerusalem, it was most refreshing to see Dr. Ben Ya'akov's students, who were taking her Efrata College class on World War I history. At Szarvas, an international Jewish Camp for high school students, a Heschel student who had participated in the Jewish Centenary Survey, reported that she had asked a fellow Szarvas camper from Israel about the role of World War I in her school curriculum. The Heschel student was impressed to hear that a tenth grader in Israel learns about the Jewish aspects of the First World War and does not feel that World War I was overshadowed in her history education by the Holocaust.

Two interesting developments have occurred recently that point to both the difficulties and possibilities that are recurrent themes in this paper. The Museum of Jewish Heritage has announced New York's Holocaust Curriculum, a resource for middle and high school students and educators, supported by the New York City Department of Education and in line with Common Core standards and New York City Scope and Sequences for Social Studies. In Lesson One of this curriculum, "Introduction to Jewish Life During the Holocaust," World War I receives its *singular* mention: "The Nazis blamed the Jews for Germany's economic problems and their loss in World War I, as well as many other problems in society."<sup>29</sup> The connections between World War I and the Holocaust definitely merit far more attention. In contrast, the education department of the National Museum of American Jewish History has been developing its own curriculum, "*Open Book: Discovering American Jewish History through Objects*". These lessons challenge students to exercise critical thinking and inquiry-based learning skills while exploring the American Jewish experience. In the spirit of traditional Talmudic study, *Open Book* invites students to study Jewish history and connect what they learn to their own ideas, experiences, and passions. The lesson plan on *What does patriotism mean to you? American Jews and World War I (1917–1918)* explores in an essentially Jewish way "the

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29. "Announcing Holocaust Curriculum, NYC", by mass email on February 13, 2019, Explore New York's Holocaust Curriculum: lesson plans and resources for students in New York City and beyond", <https://education.mjhnyc.org>, initiated February 13, 2019, accessed June 11, 2019.

meaning of patriotism and how the dramatic events of World War I brought about fundamental changes in American society and politics that reverberated throughout the world and still affect our lives today”.<sup>30</sup>

**OPEN BOOK**

# What Does Patriotism Mean to You?

American Jews and World War I (1917-1918)

Disseminating American Jewish History Through Objects

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**01 THE LAW AND THE LAND**  
 If the government has the power to exclude Jews in its locale, then its laws are laws for the principles that the law of the land is law.  
 אם השלטון חסר כוח לביטול חוקים בעיירה דומה לך, דוקימטא לך דינא דמלכותא דינא.  
 Public Property 1918

**WHAT I LOVE 08**  
 I love hot dogs, like any other American. I love football like any other American. But I don't love segregation. I don't love race. I don't love oppression. I don't love gender slander. And I just want to see people have equality for they deserve.  
 Michael Berman, NY, Introduction August 11, 2007

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**02 LET'S ALL BE AMERICANS NOW**  
 But you'll agree/That, now is the time, / To fall in line./ You swore that you would so be true to your vow, / Let's all be Americans now.  
 Lyrics by the American Youth League and made to ring from Fisher's words, with lyrics by Robert 1917


**REMEMBER...**  
 We, who came from Europe, came here looking America as the promised land, I came believing that liberty was a fact. And when we today recent war and recent immigration, it is not that we are foreigners and don't care, it is precisely because we love America and we are opposed to war.  
 "Remembered in the Holocaust," speech by Elmer Goldman delivered at the 1948 American Jewish Archives, New York City May 16, 1997

**04 THIS IS THE WAR**  
 Remember this is not a war—it is the war. It is the contest of the ages, which we and our allies together can make the last human holocaust, if we be mighty in war and even mightier in the generosity and magnanimities of peace. Your sons have taken up arms not to slay, but to bring the hope of unbroken life to countless generations unborn.  
 "We are an Open Book?" speech given by Public Property, NY, November 1918

**07 ESPIONAGE ACT**  
 Whosoever, shall willfully make or convey false reports or false statements with intent to interfere with the operations or success of the military or naval Service of the United States or to promote the interests of its enemies, shall be guilty of espionage, or attempt to secure information, disclosure, making, refusal of duty, in the military or naval forces... or shall willfully obstruct the recruiting or enlistment service... shall be punished by a fine of not more than \$10,000 or imprisonment for not more than twenty years, or both.  
 Espionage Act of 1917 passed by Congress June 16, 1917

**DON'T THROW AWAY YOUR SHOT**  
 Raise a glass to freedom / Something they can never take away / No matter what they tell you.  
 The Story of Uncle Sam's Hat, National American Historical Museum, Washington, DC

**TWO AMERICAS 05**  
 Very few Americans, and this includes very few Jews, wish to believe that the American Negro situation is as desperate and dangerous as it is. Very few Americans, and very few Jews, have the courage to recognize that the America of which they dream and long to meet the America in which the Negro lives. It is a country which the Negro has never seen. And this is not merely a matter of bad faith on the part of Americans.  
 Julius Rosenberg, "Negroes Are Not So-called 'Immigrants,'" The New York Times, April 9, 1947



Poster, United Behind the Service Star  
 National Museum of American Jewish History, 2000.1942  
 Photo by Michael Ochs, Gift of Jewish Communities

NATIONAL MUSEUM OF AMERICAN JEWISH HISTORY  
 A Smithsonian Institution Affiliate  
 nmajh.org/openbook

This is very promising step in the right direction and although it cannot yet be evaluated, it points the way to the benefits of collaboration between historians, museum professionals and educators.

30. National Museum of American Jewish History, OpenBook.

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