

The Holocaust Needs a Beginning

A Curriculum Petition — New York State, April 2026

- From Rome's expulsion of 70 CE to the Holocaust • The theological roots of antisemitism
- The ghetto system • The Russian pogroms and the Dreyfus Affair • The Evian Conference
- Judaism as a living civilization • What this civilization built • The case for a full textbook chapter

Orit Yakuel • April 2026

A Note From the Author

The word “ghetto” is 500 years old. Our students don't know that.

Recently, I traveled to Italy with my family. In Rome, I walked through the Jewish Ghetto — the one Pope Paul IV established by papal decree in 1555, where Jews were forced to pay for the construction of their own prison walls and then petition the Church annually for the right to remain in the city. Then I went to Venice and stood in the *Geto Nuovo* (*Ghetto Nuovo*, in modern Italian) — the island that gave the word “ghetto” to every language in the world, where Jews were first locked in at sunset in 1516, beginning a system of enforced Jewish ghettos in Europe that did not end for another 354 years. I am a parent, and I have a background in art history and archaeology. I thought I knew this history. Standing inside it was different.

Back in New York, I looked through the Global History high school textbook. One page on Judaism. No specific homeland named — the Jewish people described as having “settled near the Mediterranean,” geographically unmoored in the same chapter that locates every other ancient civilization precisely in its origin. The chronology inverted — Babylonian influence cited as the context for Jewish origins, when the Babylonian exile happened centuries after the Israelite kingdoms of David and Solomon, centuries after the First Temple. Christianity and Islam across multiple chapters, taught as living civilizations that shaped the world. Judaism: one page, mislocated, truncated, and then gone until the Holocaust. There is no image. No Temple. No Jerusalem. No Western Wall. Every other religion in that chapter has imagery, maps, named holy sites. Judaism has three paragraphs and no picture.

The petition began in two ghettos in Italy. It was confirmed in the textbooks back in New York.

I came home asking a question I could not shake: why isn't any of this being taught? Our students learn about the Holocaust — but they are handed the last chapter of a very long story with none of the preceding ones. They encounter the word “ghetto” in their Holocaust unit with no idea it is 500 years old. They see the yellow star with no idea that Jews had first been required to wear identifying badges in 1215. They cannot recognize the warning signs when the same patterns reappear — and those patterns are reappearing now, at a 46-year high.

That question became the research. The research became this petition. I am a parent who has been paying attention to what our children are taught about Jewish history for some time. In November 2023, I appeared before our local school board to raise concerns about a supplemental social studies curriculum that I had reviewed independently and found to be historically inaccurate in its treatment of the Middle East. I contacted CAMERA, the media watchdog organization, who confirmed they were already investigating the same material. In March 2025, the Institute for the Study of Global Antisemitism and Policy published a national report confirming the bias I had identified, and Brown University shut the program down entirely.

That was the problem of commission — wrong things being put in. This petition is about the problem of omission — essential things being left out. And I am bringing it forward in the same spirit I always have: as a partner to the institutions and officials who share the goal of educating our children honestly.

This petition is submitted simultaneously to Governor Hochul, the New York State Education Department, the Board of Regents, the NYS Assembly and Senate Education Committees, our local state legislators, the United States Congress, and the local School District.

What This Document Contains

This petition makes a case to New York State and the federal government that existing high school Holocaust education needs a beginning — a structured historical prologue, covering the period from the Roman expulsion of 70 CE through the Holocaust itself, that explains how 1,500 years of documented persecution made the Holocaust possible. It also makes the case that Jewish history is a civilization — not only a persecution narrative — and that it deserves full, serious curricular treatment.

The document covers the following, in order:

Section	Contents
1. What Jewish Students are Living Through Now	The current crisis in data: antisemitic incidents at a 46-year high, Jewish students hiding their identity, the human cost of a generation educated without historical context
2. What NYS Has Built and What Is Missing	New York's existing Holocaust education framework; the specific pre-1933 gap; the cost of the gap and what fills it when the state leaves it empty; a direct comparison of pre-Nazi and Nazi mechanisms showing the Nazis inherited a 400-year-old template; why Judaism is treated differently in the curriculum than Christianity and Islam; the case for teaching this as a civilization
3. The Theological Roots of Antisemitism	How Christianity began as a Jewish movement and why the separation produced hostility; the Roman political factor; what Pope Paul IV's 1555 ghetto decree was actually designed to do; Jules Isaac — the Holocaust survivor who persuaded the Pope to change Church doctrine in 1965; the First Amendment clarification
4. Before the Ghetto — A Pattern Already Ancient	The full pre-ghetto persecution timeline from 70 CE through 1492; the Russian pogroms (1881–1921) and why they matter to American students; the Dreyfus Affair and how it produced modern Zionism
5. The Ghetto — 354 Years of Enforced Segregation	Venice 1516, the yellow badge, the Doctor Exception, the spread across Europe, Napoleon's liberation, the Congress of Vienna's reversal, the timeline showing the last European ghetto closed five years after American slavery ended
6. The Evian Conference — When the World Had a Chance	July 1938: thirty-two nations met to address the Jewish refugee crisis and almost universally refused. The most important civic lesson the Holocaust offers — and it is currently not taught.
7. Judaism — A Living Civilization	The Temple, Jerusalem, and the Western Wall — the physical and spiritual center of Jewish civilization, the Dome of the Rock, and why students cannot understand the Israeli-Palestinian conflict without this history; what Judaism actually is: core beliefs, Shabbat, the High Holidays, Passover and its resonance with every oppressed people, the Talmudic method of argument, the diversity of the Jewish people, and the extraordinary survival of this civilization across 3,500 years and every attempt to destroy it
8. What This Civilization Built	Everything Jewish civilization produced under persecution: the foundational gift to Western ethics and law; Maimonides and the Golden Age of Spain; the Talmudic academies; the rescuers — Wallenberg, Winton, Denmark, Albania; the Nobel Prize data. Contributions given to the world by a people the world was simultaneously trying to eradicate.
9. Curriculum Recommendations	Learning objectives, grade-level integration aligned to NYS Regents courses, standards alignment, direct responses to the 'no time' and 'why Jewish history' objections
10. The Larger Argument — Toward a Full History	Why two to three class periods is the floor, not the ceiling; the case for a middle school foundation under existing SS.6.4 standards; how both the middle school and high school standard textbooks produce the same structural gap; what a full textbook treatment of Jewish history and civilization would require; a companion document covering the post-1945 period is available upon request
11. Sources and Further Reading	Full institutional, academic, and legislative citations for every claim in this document

Executive Summary

New York State has been a national leader in Holocaust education. §801 of NYS Education Law requires instruction in the Holocaust as part of citizenship and human rights education. The 2024–25 State Budget invested \$500,000 to review and update Holocaust curricula statewide. The Holocaust & Human Rights Education Center of White Plains, selected by NYSED, has produced the ConsiderTheSourceNY.org platform. This is serious, substantive work.

This petition does not seek to replace or reduce any of it. It asks for one targeted addition: a structured contextual unit of approximately two to three high school class periods — 150 to 200 minutes — that gives students what they currently lack: the historical foundation that explains how the Holocaust became possible, why it was not an aberration, and why its patterns are reappearing in the world today.

The Core Request:

- Add a structured pre-Holocaust context unit to NYS high school curricula covering the theological roots of antisemitism, the pre-Holocaust persecution timeline (586 BCE–1945), the Russian pogroms and Dreyfus Affair, the American chapter, the Jewish ghetto system (1516–1870), the Evian Conference, and Judaism as a living civilization — to supplement materials that currently devote one page to Judaism, locate it vaguely “near the Mediterranean,” and invert its chronology, while treating Christianity and Islam as civilizations that shaped the world. This is the 1,500-year foundation without which the Holocaust cannot be fully understood
- Direct the USHMM study mandated by the HEAL Act (H.R.768 / S.332) to examine specifically whether Holocaust education includes pre-1933 historical context, not only whether the Holocaust itself is required to be taught

Why this is urgent:

- 9,354 antisemitic incidents in the US in 2024 — the highest in 46 years of ADL tracking; more than 25 per day
- 83% of Jewish college students experienced or witnessed antisemitism in 2024 (ADL / Hillel International, 135 universities)
- 41% of Jewish college students felt the need to hide their Jewish identity on campus
- 2025 was the deadliest year for Jews globally in over 30 years: 20 killed in 4 attacks across 3 continents (Tel Aviv University, April 2026)
- 1 in 5 Americans aged 18–39 believe the Holocaust is a myth or exaggeration (Claims Conference, 2020)
- Students who learn the Holocaust’s conclusion without its 1,500-year causes cannot recognize the same patterns when they reappear — and they are reappearing now

Section 1: What Jewish Students Are Living Through Right Now

A Composite Voice — drawn from and illustrating survey data from the ADL / Hillel International Campus Antisemitism Survey, 2024–2025

“I took off my Star of David necklace before going to class this semester. I’ve worn it since my bat mitzvah. I didn’t take it off because I’m ashamed of being Jewish. I took it off because I’m afraid.”

“Someone in my class said Israel deserves what it gets. The teacher said nothing. I didn’t know what to say either — because I’ve never been taught the history that would let me answer. I just sat there.”

“I changed my last name on delivery apps so drivers don’t know I’m Jewish. My grandmother survived the Holocaust. I don’t think she ever imagined I’d be doing this in America in 2025.”

These are not isolated incidents. They are the statistical norm.

Judaism is one of the oldest continuous civilizations on earth — 3,500 years old, practiced today by 15 million people on every continent, and the foundation on which the two largest religions in the world were built. It is also the subject of the world’s oldest and most persistent hatred. The students above are living inside that hatred right now. They have been given none of its history.

According to the ADL and Hillel International survey of 1,030 Jewish students at 135 universities, conducted in fall 2024:

- 83% of Jewish college students experienced or witnessed antisemitism since October 7, 2023
- 41% felt the need to sometimes hide their Jewish identity on campus
- 27% observed antisemitic activity by faculty members
- 66% were not confident in their university’s ability to prevent antisemitic incidents

Source: ADL / Hillel International / College Pulse Campus Antisemitism Survey, January 2025

These students did not arrive at university as blank slates. They arrived from twelve years of education in which the history that would equip them to understand, recognize, and respond to what they are experiencing was never taught. The pattern of antisemitism they are encountering has a 1,500-year documented history. They have been given none of it. They are being asked to navigate something their education never prepared them for — because their education never told them it existed.

The argument for non-Jewish students:

This history is not only relevant to Jewish students. The mechanisms documented in this petition — how states use law to isolate a minority, how institutions enable persecution, how rights can be granted and then revoked, how ordinary people participate in violence against neighbors — are lessons about power, democracy, and civic responsibility that every student needs. The question “*How did the Holocaust happen?*” is not a Jewish question. It is a human question. And it cannot be answered without the history this petition asks schools to teach.

Section 2: What New York State Has Built and What Is Missing

New York State has built a serious Holocaust education infrastructure: a legal mandate, a state budget allocation, a designated curriculum partner, and a public platform. This section describes what exists, identifies the specific historical gap that 1933-onward instruction cannot fill on its own, and shows how that gap maps directly onto the mechanisms the Nazis later inherited. The existing framework is the foundation. What follows is what should be built on top of it.

2.1 The Existing Framework

- §801 of NYS Education Law mandates instruction in genocide and the Holocaust as part of citizenship and human rights education
- The NYS K–12 Social Studies Framework requires Holocaust instruction at specific grade levels
- The HHREC of White Plains was selected by NYSED to revise all curricular resources, working with 29 educators across New York State
- ConsiderTheSourceNY.org, launched September 2025, provides free vetted materials organized by time period with lesson plans, pacing guides, and primary sources
- The 2024–25 State Budget allocated \$500,000 specifically for Holocaust curriculum review and update

Source: NYSED Holocaust Education Resources page; HHREC press release December 2024; NYS Assembly press release SFY 2024-25 Budget

2.2 The Specific Gap

Every existing unit focuses on the Nazi era: 1933–1945. This is appropriate and necessary. But when a student first encounters the word “ghetto” in that unit, they have no idea that Jews had been required to live in walled, locked quarters since 1516 — 354 years before the Nazis revived the practice. When they learn about the yellow star, they do not know Jews had first been legally required to wear identifying badges by Church mandate in 1215. When they study the Holocaust, they learn the conclusion of a 1,500-year story without ever being taught the story itself.

This gap does not begin in high school. The **widely adopted Grade 6 world history textbook** — McGraw Hill's *Discovering Our Past: The Eastern Hemisphere, New York edition* — covers Judaism in approximately eight pages under the heading “The Israelites.” That chapter addresses Abraham, Moses, the Exodus, and the Kingdom of Israel. It ends at the Babylonian exile. There is no Shabbat. No High Holidays. No Talmud. No living practice. No post-biblical Jewish history. Judaism appears as an ancient civilization that produced the Hebrew Bible — and then disappears from the curriculum entirely until the Holocaust. A student who has gone through both the standard middle school and high school curricula has encountered Judaism twice: once as an ancient people, and once as victims. Everything in between — 2,500 years of documented civilization — has never appeared in any classroom they have sat in. The high school textbook does not create the gap. It confirms it.

The Holocaust did not begin in 1933.

It became possible in 1933 because of what had been constructed over 1,500 years.

High school students deserve to understand both.

2.3 The Cost of the Gap

By the time students sit in a Holocaust unit, they have been through twelve years of education in which Judaism has appeared twice: eight pages in 6th grade ending at the Babylonian exile, and one page in 9th grade that inverts the chronology and then disappears. That is not a foundation. That is the curriculum confirming its own omission.

A curriculum gap is not neutral. When students have no historical framework for antisemitism — no understanding of where it comes from, how it has operated, or what it looks like across fifteen centuries — they do not remain in a state of informed neutrality. They fill that vacuum with whatever they encounter first. Today, what they encounter first is social media, peer groups, and in some cases curricular materials whose treatment of Jewish history and the Middle East has been documented as one-sided. Materials of this kind fill the vacuum that absent foundational instruction creates.

The state mandates Holocaust education but provides no historical foundation for it. It also mandates Judaism instruction in 6th grade under SS.6.4 while providing no guidance on what that instruction should achieve or how the standard textbook's treatment of it falls short. Teachers are left to identify the gap themselves — without institutional guidance on what is missing, why it matters, or how to address it. Some do. Many do not, because they have not been told there is a gap to fill. The result is not a generation of students who know nothing about Jewish history. It is a generation of students who know only what the Holocaust looks like from the outside — the camps, the numbers, the names — without any understanding of how it became possible, what it was built on, or why the same patterns are reappearing in their own schools and communities right now.

That is not a Holocaust education problem. It is a historical literacy problem. And it has a direct cost: students who cannot recognize antisemitism when they encounter it, who have no framework for evaluating what they are seeing, and who are therefore most vulnerable to the narratives that fill the space education has left empty.

2.4 The Direct Connection: Pre-Nazi Mechanisms and Nazi Policy

The Nazis did not invent the tools they used. They inherited them, scaled them, and added trains. A side-by-side comparison makes this inescapably clear:

Pre-Nazi Precedent	Nazi Revival
Fourth Lateran Council (1215): Church mandates Jews wear identifying badges across all Christian lands	1939 –1941: Nazi regime progressively mandates yellow Star of David badges, beginning in occupied Poland in 1939 and extending to Germany itself in 1941
Venice Ghetto (1516): Jews confined to walled, gated island; gates locked at sunset	Warsaw Ghetto (1940): Jews confined to walled, sealed district; gates locked and guarded
Forbidden professions: Jews barred from manufacturing, property ownership, guilds, public office	Nuremberg Laws (1935): Jews stripped of citizenship, barred from professions, property ownership
Special taxation: Jews required to pay extra taxes on top of normal rates	Systematic asset stripping: Jews forced to register and surrender property, assets, businesses
Yellow badge: compulsory identifying dress in public for centuries before 1933	Yellow star: exact same mechanism, exact same purpose, exact same humiliation
Expulsions: England (1290), France (1394), Spain (1492) — entire nations declared Jew-free	Wannsee Conference (1942): systematic plan to make all of Europe Jew-free

Sources: USHMM Holocaust Encyclopedia; Schwartz, Daniel. Ghetto: The History of a Word. Harvard University Press, 2019; Freedman, Harry. Shylock's Venice. Bloomsbury Continuum, 2024

2.5 The Curriculum Treats Judaism as a Parenthesis

The preceding comparison shows what the Nazis inherited. This section shows how that inheritance maps onto what students are — and are not — currently taught.

The gap is not only about persecution. It is about an entire civilization that is absent from the curriculum between its ancient origins and its destruction.

The NYS Grades 9–12 Social Studies Framework names Judaism alongside Christianity and Islam as belief systems students will study. That is technically true. But named is not the same as taught.

Religion	How It Appears in the NYS Curriculum
Christianity	Woven through virtually every period of Western history: the Crusades, the Reformation, the Counter-Reformation, European colonialism, the American founding, abolitionism, and modern political thought. Christianity is not a unit. It is the background of the curriculum.
Islam	Treated as a civilization-shaping force across dedicated units: the rise of Islam in the 7th century, the Islamic Golden Age, the Ottoman Empire, the Mughal Empire, and modern Middle Eastern geopolitics. Students learn that Islamic civilization preserved Greek philosophy, built the libraries of Baghdad and Cordoba, and shaped the political geography of half the world.
Judaism	Appears in two places across all of K-12: eight pages in 6th grade covering the ancient Israelites, ending at the Babylonian exile — and one page in 9th grade that inverts the chronology and then disappears until Auschwitz. The 2,500 years between those two appearances are invisible. Students learn that Judaism existed as an ancient religion and that Jews were murdered. They do not learn how Jews lived, what they built, what was done to them, or why — leaving students with a single implicit message across twelve years of education: Judaism is an ancient civilization that produced victims. They have no understanding of what it actually is, what it produced, or what the world lost when it was nearly erased.

Sources: NYS Grades 9–12 Social Studies Framework, standard 9.2 (nysed.gov)

The disparity is not hypothetical — and the treatment is not merely incomplete but in key respects inaccurate. This is not a complaint about any individual district. The textbook examined here is a Pearson text widely adopted in Pre-AP and AP Global History classrooms across the country, including in the high school Pre-AP Global History course at the local High School. It is cited because it is the book in the hands of the students this petition is about.

“World Civilizations: The Global Experience,” 7th Edition (Stearns, Adas, Schwartz, and Gilbert; Pearson, 2015) devotes one page to Judaism in a chapter on early civilizations covering 3,500–600 BCE, where it appears as the final entry. The text describes the Jewish people as having “settled near the Mediterranean” around 1,200 BCE under Babylonian influence — language that fails on three counts.

First, it locates Jewish civilization geographically as “near the Mediterranean” while the same chapter grounds every other ancient civilization precisely in a named homeland: Mesopotamian civilization in the Tigris and Euphrates, Egyptian civilization in the Nile Valley, Chinese civilization in the Yellow River basin. The Jewish people alone are given no specific place — rendered geographically unanchored in the same chapter that roots every other civilization in its origin.

Second, the framing conflates the Babylonian exile of 586 BCE with the origins of Jewish civilization, erasing over a thousand years of documented Israelite history — the patriarchal period, the Exodus, the United Kingdom under David and Solomon, the First Temple — that preceded it.

Third, and most directly: the framing contains a demonstrable factual error. The Babylonian exile did not produce Judaism — it was a catastrophe visited upon a civilization that already existed. The Babylonians

destroyed the First Temple, which had stood for nearly four hundred years, and exiled a people with established kings, a written legal tradition, and a documented homeland. Presenting this destruction as Judaism’s origin is not a simplification. It is an inversion. It is as if a textbook described Christianity as having emerged from Roman persecution — technically mentioning a historical relationship while reversing its causality entirely.

There is also no imagery: no Temple, no Jerusalem, no Western Wall, no map, no named holy site — while every other religion in the chapter receives visual representation of its sacred geography. Christianity and Islam receive substantially more coverage and appear across multiple chapters as living civilizations that shaped subsequent world history.

Source: World Civilizations: The Global Experience, 7th Edition. Peter N. Stearns, Michael B. Adas, Stuart B. Schwartz, and Marc Jason Gilbert. Pearson Education, 2015. ISBN 978-0205986309. A widely adopted high school world history textbook used in Pre-AP and AP Global History classrooms; confirmed in use in the high school Pre-AP Global History course, 2025–2026 academic year.

The consequence is not merely that Jewish history is underrepresented. The consequence is that students encounter the Holocaust without understanding the mechanism that produced it — which was built, in large part, by the two religious traditions they have just spent years studying. Teaching Christianity and Islam without teaching what those traditions did to Jews across fifteen centuries is teaching a conversation while omitting one of its principal speakers.

This is not a complaint about one textbook or one district. The textbook is widely adopted by schools across the country. What a student finds on that one page — a civilization rendered vague, mislocated, and truncated — appears in some form across the major textbooks examined by the academic literature cited at the end of this section. The problem is not a local oversight. **It is a structural feature of how American education has chosen to treat Jewish history. And it has consequences.** A student who has been taught that Judaism is an ancient religion that existed somewhere near the Mediterranean, was influenced by Babylon, and then reappears in the 20th century as the target of genocide, is a student who has been prepared to feel sympathy for victims but not to understand a civilization. That is not Holocaust education. It is Holocaust conclusion without Holocaust context — and it is what §801 currently produces.

If a **widely adopted high school world history textbook in use in New York State classrooms** contains a factual error about the origins of Jewish civilization — and if that same textbook is the foundation on which students receive the Holocaust instruction mandated by §801 — then the question is not only what is being left out of the curriculum. It is whether what is currently being taught is accurate.

This petition asks for more. It also asks: has anyone checked?

This pattern is documented and longstanding. A 2009 academic analysis of world history textbooks across publishers found that Judaism received less coverage than any other major religion, and what coverage existed was almost entirely dependent on its connection to Christianity or Islam. The Pearson textbook examined above suggests that, sixteen years later, the structural treatment has not changed.

Cunningham, Jennifer. "The Treatment of the Monotheistic Religions in World History High School Textbooks: A Comparison of Sample Editions 2001–2007." ProQuest, 2009 (ERIC ED532538). Finding: Judaism receives the least coverage of the three monotheistic religions in world history textbooks, and very little is presented concerning Jewish accomplishments unless connected to Christianity or Islam.

Judaism produced the foundational texts of both Christianity and Islam.

Every student who studies either of those religions in school is studying a tradition built in direct relationship — and often in direct opposition — to Judaism.

Teaching them without teaching Judaism’s history is teaching cause without consequence.

2.6 This Is a Civilization, Not Only a Persecution

The petition you are reading is primarily a case for adding the history of antisemitism to Holocaust education. But there is a larger argument underneath it: Jewish history is not only a persecution narrative. It is the story of one of the oldest, most continuously documented, and most consequential civilizations in human history. And it is almost entirely absent from American education.

Judaism gave the Western world its foundational ethical and legal framework. The Ten Commandments, the covenant between God and humanity, the principle that every human being is made in the image of God, the weekly Sabbath as a universal right to rest — these are Jewish contributions to civilization that every Western legal and moral tradition traces a direct line back to. Christianity and Islam both explicitly acknowledge their debt to Jewish scripture and law. You cannot understand either tradition honestly without understanding the Jewish tradition they grew from. And yet Judaism - the source - is treated as a footnote.

Jewish intellectual and cultural life across the diaspora produced remarkable things under remarkable conditions. The Babylonian Talmud — one of the most sophisticated legal and ethical documents ever produced — was written in Iraq between the 3rd and 6th centuries CE. The Golden Age of Jewish Spain produced Maimonides, whose synthesis of Jewish law and Aristotelian philosophy shaped both Islamic and Christian theology. In the Venice Ghetto — where Jews were locked in at sunset — by 1650 nearly one in three Hebrew books printed anywhere in Europe came from Jewish printing presses on that small island.

Every other major civilization with comparable reach and continuity receives full treatment in American high school textbooks.

Greece gets chapters. Rome gets chapters. The Islamic world gets chapters.

Jewish civilization — older than most of these, more continuously documented than any of them, the origin point of the two largest religions on earth — gets one page, a vague geography, and Auschwitz.

That is not a gap. It is a structural failure.

This petition asks for two to three class periods as the immediate step.

The complete answer is a chapter.

Section 3: The “Why” — Theological Roots of Antisemitism

For students to understand why European societies persecuted Jews for 1,500 years, they must understand the ideological framework that made it not just acceptable but theologically mandated. This is not an anti-Christian argument. It is history the Catholic Church itself formally acknowledged and explicitly repudiated in 1965 — teaching it is an act of honesty the Church has already endorsed.

Nor is it religious instruction in the constitutional sense: the Supreme Court has consistently distinguished between teaching religion, which the First Amendment prohibits in public schools, and teaching about religion, which is not only permitted but embedded in the NYS Social Studies Framework.

This section teaches about Christian theology’s historical consequences. It does not promote or practice any faith.

3.1 How a Jewish Movement Became a Force Against Jews

The most important fact for students to grasp is also the most disorienting: Christianity began entirely within Judaism. Jesus was Jewish. His disciples were Jewish. The earliest followers of Jesus were Jewish. For the first several decades, what would become Christianity was not a separate religion — it was one Jewish sect among several, competing within Jewish communities across the Roman Empire.

The Gospels were written between approximately 70 CE and 100 CE, at a moment when followers of Jesus were being expelled from synagogues and actively separating from the broader Jewish community. The hostile language about “the Jews” in the Gospel of John was written in this context — internal polemic, written by people who were themselves largely Jewish, about a specific group of authorities in a specific first-century dispute. The catastrophic problem came later, when those same texts were read by a predominantly Gentile Church in medieval Germany or France whose members had never met a Jewish person. What began as a family argument became an eternal condemnation of an entire people.

The Roman Political Factor

There was also a political incentive behind the deicide charge that is rarely taught. Early Christians were seeking acceptance within the Roman Empire. Rome had just crushed two catastrophic Jewish revolts — in 66–73 CE and again in 132–135 CE — with enormous brutality. Being associated with Jewish rebellion was dangerous. The deicide charge was not only theology. It was also political positioning.

Why Pope Paul IV Built the Ghetto

In 1555, Pope Paul IV issued the papal bull *Cum nimis absurdum*, establishing the Roman Ghetto. The bull’s opening words reveal its entire logic: “Since it is absurd and utterly inconvenient that the Jews, who through their own fault were condemned by God to eternal slavery...” That single sentence contains 1,400 years of accumulated theology: the deicide charge, supersessionism, and the doctrine of perpetual punishment. The ghetto’s stated purpose was conversion — make Jewish life so humiliating and economically desperate that Jews would convert to Christianity to escape it. The ghetto was not a place of confinement. It was a machine for conversion. It was built on 1,400 years of theology and designed to break people.

3.2 The Deicide Charge and Supersessionism

Beginning in the 2nd century CE, Christian theologians developed the charge that Jewish people as a whole — in every generation, forever — bore collective guilt for the crucifixion of Jesus. This is the deicide charge. Alongside it ran supersessionism — the doctrine that Christianity had replaced Judaism in God’s plan, rendering the Jewish people permanently obsolete. Together these created a complete ideological system in which Jewish persecution was not only permitted but could appear righteous.

Key Figure	What They Said and Did
John Chrysostom Archbishop of Constantinople from 398 CE (347–407 CE)	Called Jews “destined for slaughter” with “no repentance, no forgiveness.” His eight sermons <i>Against the Jews (Adversus Judaeos)</i> were among the most widely circulated antisemitic texts in medieval Europe.
Thomas Aquinas Most important medieval Catholic theologian 1225–1274	Argued Jews were destined for “perpetual slavery” and should be “compelled to wear a distinctive badge” — precisely what governments later mandated.
Fourth Lateran Council, 1215	Issued Church-wide mandate requiring Jews to wear identifying badges across all Christian lands — three centuries before Venice.
Pope Paul IV, 1555	Issued the papal bull <i>Cum nimis absurdum</i> (“Since it is absurd...”), establishing the Roman Ghetto. Jews paid for construction of their own prison walls, then petitioned the Church annually for the right to remain.

Sources: USHMM Holocaust Encyclopedia, Christian Persecution of Jews over the Centuries; Yad Vashem, Antisemitism: History and Definition; Nostra Aetate, *Vatican II, 1965*

3.3 Jules Isaac: The Man Who Traced the Line From Theology to Auschwitz

Jules Isaac was born in 1877 — a decorated French World War I veteran, a respected historian, a French patriot. He was not particularly religious. During World War II, his wife, daughter, and son-in-law were arrested by the Nazis and murdered at Auschwitz. Isaac survived in hiding. He spent the rest of his life documenting with scholarly precision exactly how Christian education across fifteen centuries had created the cultural conditions that made the Holocaust possible.

His books *Jesus and Israel* (1948) and *The Teaching of Contempt* (1962) argued that the Holocaust did not come from nowhere. It came from 1,500 years of Christian education that framed Jews as God’s enemies, as a cursed and wandering people, as the collective murderers of Christ. In 1960, Isaac secured a personal audience with Pope John XXIII. He presented his research. The Pope convened the Second Vatican Council and instructed the drafters to address the Jewish question. In 1965, *Nostra Aetate* was issued.

A Jewish Holocaust survivor, whose family had been murdered in Auschwitz, persuaded the Pope of Rome to change Church doctrine. That is the story that closes the loop: from Chrysostom in the 4th century, to Paul IV’s ghetto decree in 1555, to Auschwitz in 1944, to Rome in 1965. It is a story about ideology, institutional power, and what one person with evidence and moral clarity can accomplish. It belongs in every high school.

3.4 The Church’s Own Reckoning — 1965

In 1965, the Catholic Church issued *Nostra Aetate* — one of the most consequential theological documents of the 20th century. It explicitly rejected the deicide charge, condemned antisemitism “at any time and by anyone, without qualification,” and repudiated the idea that Jews are a people rejected or accursed by God.

For the Classroom:

It took the Catholic Church until 1965 — twenty years after the Holocaust and 1,800 years after the deicide charge was first made — to formally repudiate it.

What does it mean when an institution teaches something for nearly two millennia and then officially declares it wrong?

What does that tell us about ideology, institutional power, and the long timelines of the harm they enable?

Sources: *Nostra Aetate, Vatican II, October 1965*; Yad Vashem, *Jules Isaac and the Jewish-Christian Dialogue*; USHMM, *Jews and Christians: The Unfolding Interfaith Relationship*

Section 4: Before the Holocaust — A Pattern Already Ancient

This section maps the persecution that preceded the Holocaust — the legal, theological, and cultural infrastructure that made ghetto walls in Venice imaginable in the first place — and three later episodes, the Russian pogroms, the Dreyfus Affair, and the American chapter, that carried the same patterns into the modern era. Together, these are the chapters between the Babylonian destruction of the First Temple and the deportation of the Judean leadership in 586 BCE and Hitler's rise in 1933. They are what students currently miss.

4.1 The Pre-Holocaust Persecution Timeline

The Venice Ghetto of 1516 was not a beginning. It was a milestone in a persecution that had been accumulating for over a thousand years. The table below is not a list of isolated incidents. It is a pattern — each element building on the last, each making the next more imaginable. Students who understand this pattern will recognize it when they see it again.

Year	Event	What Students Should Understand
586 BCE	Babylonian destruction of the First Temple in Jerusalem (Solomon's Temple) — the holiest site in ancient Jewish religious life — and deportation of the Judean leadership, priesthood, and skilled population to Babylon (the Babylonian Captivity)	The first imperial destruction of Jewish religious and political life. The Romans were repeating, six centuries later, what Babylon had done. Jewish memory holds both catastrophes together — both are mourned on the same fast day, Tisha B'Av. But the Babylonian deportation also produced something unexpected: many Judeans remained in Mesopotamia after Cyrus permitted return in 539 BCE, founding a community that lasted there for the next 2,500 years and produced the Babylonian Talmud — one of the most consequential documents in Jewish civilization.
70 CE	Rome destroys the Second Temple and expels Jews from Israel — creating the diaspora	Jews in Europe did not choose to be there. They were expelled from their homeland by a foreign empire. This is the origin of every Jewish community in Europe.
315–700	Roman and Church laws progressively bar Jews from public office, property ownership, intermarriage with Christians	The legal architecture of exclusion is built incrementally — centuries before any ghetto wall.
1096	Crusade armies massacre Jewish communities across the Rhine Valley — Worms, Mainz, Cologne	State-sanctioned violence against Jews, framed as religious duty.
1144	First blood libel: Jews falsely accused of ritually murdering a Christian child in Norwich, England	This lie spread across Europe for 800 years and was used to justify massacres. Versions of it circulate online today.
1215	Fourth Lateran Council mandates identifying badges for Jews across all Christian lands	Three centuries before Venice. The yellow star did not begin with the Nazis. It began with the Church.
1290	England expels all Jews; they cannot legally return for 366 years	Entire nations declared themselves Jew-free. England was one. France expelled Jews in 1394.
1348–1351	Black Death: Jews accused of poisoning wells and massacred across Europe	When crisis hit, Jews were scapegoated. The pattern is identical across centuries.

1492	Spain expels all Jews: 100,000–200,000 people forced to leave in 90 days	The same year Columbus sailed. The Edict of Expulsion was not revoked until 1968.
1478–1834	Spanish Inquisition: torture and execution of Jews suspected of secretly practicing Judaism	The most sustained institutionalized persecution in European history before the 20th century.

Sources: USHMM Holocaust Encyclopedia; Claims Conference, 50-State Holocaust Awareness Survey 2020; Encyclopaedia Judaica, "Babylonian Captivity"; Britannica, "First Temple"

This pattern did not end with the Spanish Expulsion. It continued — and in some ways accelerated — in the century and a half between the last European ghetto and the Holocaust. Two episodes from that era belong in every classroom.

4.2 The Russian Pogroms — The Origin of American Jewry

Between 1881 and 1921, waves of organized, state-tolerated massacres of Jewish communities swept through the Russian Empire and Eastern Europe. These are called pogroms — from the Russian word for “devastation.” They were not spontaneous riots. They were systematic, often carried out by Cossack cavalry, and frequently ignored or encouraged by local authorities.

The Kishinev pogrom of 1903 lasted two days: 49 Jews were killed, 592 were injured, 700 homes were destroyed. The Ukrainian pogroms of 1919–1921 killed an estimated 50,000 to 200,000 Jews in hundreds of separate massacres — one of the largest waves of anti-Jewish violence in history, occurring less than twenty years before the Holocaust. It is almost entirely unknown to American students.

Source: USHMM Holocaust Encyclopedia, Kishinev Pogrom; Encyclopaedia Judaica, Kishinev

The pogroms were the most violent catalyst of the largest Jewish migration in modern history. Between 1881 and 1924 — when the U.S. Johnson-Reed Immigration Act effectively closed the door — roughly 2 million Jews fled the Russian Empire, Austria-Hungary, and Romania for the United States, driven from their homes by pogroms, anti-Jewish laws, economic exclusion, and forced conscription. They are the grandparents and great-grandparents of most American Jews alive today. The origin story of American Jewry is a refugee story — and it ended not when the persecution stopped but when American immigration restrictions took effect. It is not taught in American schools.

For the Classroom:

Ask students: why did your Jewish neighbors’ families come to America?

For most, the answer begins with the pogroms and the persecution that surrounded them.

This is not only Jewish history — it is American history.

The Jewish immigration wave of 1881–1924 shaped New York, shaped American labor law, shaped American culture.

None of it makes sense without the persecution that caused it.

Sources: USHMM Holocaust Encyclopedia, Pogroms; Yad Vashem, The Pogroms in Ukraine 1918–1921

4.3 The Dreyfus Affair — Its Consequences for Modern History

In 1894, Alfred Dreyfus — a French Jewish army officer, a thoroughly assimilated French patriot — was falsely convicted of treason in a case driven entirely by antisemitism.

Dreyfus was stripped of his rank in a public ceremony while a mob outside chanted “Death to the Jews.” In the press gallery was a Viennese Jewish journalist named Theodor Herzl.

Herzl had believed that assimilation was the answer — that if Jews became fully European, the hatred would fade. The Dreyfus Affair destroyed that belief in a single afternoon.

If France — the country of Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité, the first country in the world to emancipate its Jews — could do this, then no country would permanently protect its Jewish population.

The hatred was not about what Jews did. It was about what Jews were.

Herzl went home and wrote *Der Judenstaat — The Jewish State* — in 1896. In 1897 he convened the First Zionist Congress in Basel. He wrote in his diary: “In Basel I founded the Jewish State.” Fifty-one years later, it was.

The Dreyfus-to-Herzl chain is one of the most important causal sequences in modern history.
It belongs in every classroom that teaches about the 20th century.
It is currently taught in none of them.

Sources: USHMM Holocaust Encyclopedia, The Dreyfus Affair; Herzl, Theodor. Der Judenstaat. 1896; Burns, Michael. France and the Dreyfus Affair. Bedford/St. Martin's, 1998

4.4 The American Chapter

The persecution students are taught — when they are taught any of it — is European. They learn that Jews were murdered in Germany. They are not taught that the same patterns operated in America at the same time, against the same population, often with the same vocabulary. In 1915, Leo Frank — a Jewish factory manager in Atlanta — was lynched by a mob after being falsely convicted of murder in a trial saturated with antisemitic press coverage. His lynching was a catalyst for the modern Ku Klux Klan, which from its 1915 revival onward targeted Jews alongside Black Americans and Catholics.

Through the 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s, American universities — including Harvard, Yale, Columbia, and Princeton — imposed quotas capping Jewish admissions. Restrictive housing covenants barred Jews from neighborhoods, resorts, and clubs. Major employers refused to hire Jews. Father Charles Coughlin's antisemitic radio broadcasts reached tens of millions of American listeners weekly. In February 1939, the German American Bund held a Nazi rally at Madison Square Garden that drew 20,000 attendees, complete with American flags flanking a portrait of George Washington and swastika armbands worn by uniformed marshals.

American Jewish life adapted to this exclusion. Locked out of banking, manufacturing, mainstream retail, and most professional sectors, Jewish immigrants concentrated in industries that were open to them — the garment trade, peddling, and a fledgling new industry called moving pictures. The major Hollywood studios — Warner Bros, MGM, Paramount, Universal, 20th Century Fox — were founded by Jewish immigrants because every other path was closed. The same pattern that produced the Babylonian Talmud and the Hebrew printing presses of Venice produced Hollywood: a literate, intellectually disciplined community pouring its talent into the narrow channels persecution left open. The achievement is real. So is the persecution that shaped it. Students who learn the Holocaust as something distant — something Europeans did, in Europe, to European Jews — are not equipped to recognize the same patterns when they appear in their own country. American antisemitism is not a footnote to European antisemitism. It is its own continuous history, and the gap in current curricula is just as serious.

Sources: USHMM Holocaust Encyclopedia, Antisemitism in History: World War I and the Interwar Period; Anti-Defamation League, History of the Ku Klux Klan; Karabel, Jerome. The Chosen: The Hidden History of Admission and Exclusion at Harvard, Yale, and Princeton. Houghton Mifflin, 2005; Gabler, Neal. An Empire of Their Own: How the Jews Invented Hollywood. Crown, 1988

Section 5: The Ghetto — 354 Years of Enforced Segregation

The Jewish ghetto is 500 years old. The word, the system, the locked gate, the yellow badge, the forbidden professions — all of it predates the Nazis by four centuries. This section traces the ghetto from the moment Venice locked its first gate in 1516, through Rome and Frankfurt and Prague, through the brief Napoleonic liberation and the Congress of Vienna's reversal, to 1870 — five years after American slavery ended — when the last European ghetto was finally abolished. It is the institutional history students currently miss.

5.1 Venice 1516: Origin of a Word and a System

On March 29, 1516, the Venetian Senate ordered every Jew in the city to move to a small island in the Cannaregio district — the site of an old copper foundry called the “geto.” That word became “ghetto.”

It spread into every European language. It is still used today because the system it described lasted 354 years and was then revived by the Nazis.

What Was Enforced	Detail
Curfew and confinement	Gates locked at sunset; patrol boats circled surrounding canals. Jews were required to be inside by dark.
Financial burden	The Jewish community paid the wages of the guards imprisoning them. Windows facing the water were sealed to prevent escape.
The yellow badge	Yellow hat or badge required at all times outside the ghetto. Women wore yellow veils. Failure to comply meant fines, beatings, or arrest.
The Doctor Exception	Jewish physicians were exempted from the yellow hat — because Christian patients refused care from someone wearing one. The same society that locked Jews in at night depended on their medicine by day. This coexistence of persecution and utility is itself a lesson in how antisemitism operates.
Forbidden professions	Manufacturing, property ownership, guild membership, public office. Permitted: moneylending, pawnbroking, secondhand cloth, medicine.

Despite these conditions, the Venice Ghetto became a remarkable center of cultural production. By 1650, nearly 1 in 3 Hebrew books printed anywhere in Europe came from Venice. There were five synagogues, a theater, a music academy, literary salons, a hospital. The resilience of Jewish communities inside these constraints is as much a part of the history as the constraints themselves.

Source: Freedman, Harry. Shylock's Venice. Bloomsbury Continuum, 2024

5.2 The Spread: Rome, Frankfurt, Prague

- Rome (1555): Pope Paul IV forced Jews into a flood-prone zone near the Tiber. Jews paid for construction of their own prison walls, then petitioned the Church annually for the right to remain.
- Frankfurt's Judengasse: thousands confined to a single narrow lane. The Rothschild banking dynasty was born here because Jews were barred from every other economic sector.
- Prague's Old Jewish Cemetery: tombstones are stacked 12 layers deep because the ghetto could never be expanded. Even the dead had nowhere to go.

5.3 Napoleon, Liberation, and Betrayal

In 1797, Napoleon's army entered Ancona, Italy. He ordered yellow armbands removed immediately and made Jewish emancipation his policy everywhere he conquered. Ghetto gates across Europe came down. In 1807, he convened the Grand Sanhedrin — the first formal assembly of Jewish leaders since ancient Jerusalem — declaring Judaism an official religion of France. Jews across Europe named their children Napoleone.

Then Napoleon fell. The Congress of Vienna in 1815 restored the old order. In Austria, the Papal States, and most German states, every restriction was fully restored. Ghetto walls went back up. The Roman Ghetto — which Napoleon had freed — was re-locked. It remained the last operating ghetto in Europe until 1870. Freedom had lasted less than a generation.

The Lesson:

Napoleon freed the Jews.

The Congress of Vienna re-imprisoned them within months.

Rights granted by others can be revoked by others.

This is not an abstract lesson. It is one of the most important things any student can learn about the fragility of minority protections — and it is not taught anywhere in the NYS K–12 curriculum.

5.4 The Timeline Every Student Should Know

- 1516 ◦ Venice: world’s first legally enforced, walled Jewish ghetto
- 1555 ◦ Rome: Pope Paul IV orders the ghetto. Model spreads across Europe.
- 1791 ◦ Revolutionary France: first nation to grant Jews full citizenship
- 1797 ◦ Napoleon opens ghetto gates across Europe
- 1815 ◦ Congress of Vienna: restrictions fully restored. Walls back up.
- 1848 ◦ Rome’s walls torn down — then restored again within one year
- 1865 • United States abolishes slavery — 13th Amendment**
- 1870 • Rome’s ghetto permanently abolished. 354 years after Venice. Five years after American slavery ended.**
- 1871 ◦ Germany grants full Jewish emancipation. One year after the last ghetto.
- 1881 ◦ Russian pogroms begin. Over the next 43 years, 2 million Jews flee to the United States — until the 1924 U.S. Immigration Act closes the door.
- 1894 ◦ Dreyfus Affair. Herzl writes *Der Judenstaat* two years later.
- 1933 ◦ Hitler comes to power. The mechanisms are 400 years old. Only the scale changes.
- 1938 ◦ Evian Conference: 32 nations decline to accept Jewish refugees.
- 1939–45 ◦ Nazis establish 1,000+ ghettos — reviving an infrastructure built between 1516 and 1870

American slavery ended in **1865**.

The last Jewish ghetto in Europe closed in **1870**.

Five years apart.

Neither is ancient history.

Section 6: The Evian Conference — When the World Had a Chance

In July 1938 — five years into Hitler’s rule, four months before Kristallnacht — representatives of thirty-two nations gathered at the resort town of Évian-les-Bains, France, for a conference called by President Franklin D. Roosevelt.

The stated purpose was to address the Jewish refugee crisis: hundreds of thousands of Jews desperately trying to flee Nazi Germany and Austria with nowhere to go.

Almost every nation refused.

Australia: “We don’t have a racial problem and we don’t want to import one.”

Canada: “None is too many.”

The United States: existing immigration quotas would not be raised.

Britain: Palestine — then under British mandate — was not on the agenda.

Country after country offered sympathy and closed its doors.

Only the Dominican Republic agreed to accept a significant number of Jewish refugees.

The Nazi newspaper *Völkischer Beobachter* reported the conference results with satisfaction: the democracies that condemned Germany’s treatment of Jews refused to take them.

Josef Goebbels called it proof that “no one wants the Jews.”

The conference — intended as a rescue mission — became instead a green light.

For the Classroom:

The Holocaust was not only a German crime. It was enabled by the world’s indifference.

Thirty-two nations met, heard the evidence, and closed their doors.

Students who understand the Evian Conference understand something the standard Holocaust curriculum does not teach: that murder at this scale requires not only perpetrators but bystanders — and that the bystanders in 1938 included every democratic government on earth.

This is the most important civic lesson the Holocaust has to offer. And it cannot be taught without Evian.

Sources: USHMM Holocaust Encyclopedia, The Evian Conference; Maram, Linda. The Evian Conference: FDR and the Holocaust. Jewish Virtual Library

Section 7: Judaism — A Living Civilization

Consider what the current curriculum would look like if it applied to Christianity the same standard it applies to Judaism. Christianity appears throughout the NYS curriculum — as the force behind the Crusades, the Reformation and Counter-Reformation, European colonialism, and the shaping of Western civilization. It is woven through history as an active agent across every period from ancient Rome to the modern era. That is appropriate. Now consider Judaism. It is named once alongside Christianity in standard 9.2 — and then disappears from the curriculum entirely until the Holocaust. Not minimized. Not undertaught. Gone. The Reformation challenged the Catholic Church and reshaped the Western world — students learn this. The Jewish communities those same Reformation-era societies were simultaneously expelling, confining to ghettos, and forcing to wear identifying badges — students learn none of this. The same centuries. The same geography. One civilization treated as the agent of history. The other treated as its footnote.

When students study Christianity in American schools, they learn about the Crusades, the Reformation, European colonialism, and the role of the Church in shaping Western civilization across a thousand years of history. When they study Islam they learn the Five Pillars, the Islamic Golden Age, the Ottoman Empire, and Islam's role in preserving Greek philosophy and shaping the political geography of the Middle East. They learn these traditions as civilizations that acted in history — forces that shaped empires, sparked revolutions, and defined the world students live in today.

Judaism gets none of this. Students learn that Judaism is monotheistic, that it is old, and that it is the origin of Christianity. They do not learn what Shabbat is. They do not know what happens at a Passover Seder, or why that story of liberation from slavery has resonated with every oppressed people that has ever encountered it. They cannot explain the difference between Orthodox and Reform Judaism. They have no idea that Jewish law preserves both sides of every argument as holy, that there is no Jewish pope, that a person can be an atheist and fully Jewish, that interpretation of scripture is considered a religious obligation. Judaism is the only civilization taught in American schools as a set of historical endpoints rather than a living tradition — and that gap is both educationally impoverishing and, given what is happening in our schools right now, dangerous.

7.1 The Temple, Jerusalem, and the City at the Center of the World

Before understanding what Judaism believes and how Jews practice it, students need to understand one foundational fact: for most of Jewish history, Jewish worship centered on a single physical structure in a single city. The Temple in Jerusalem was not a synagogue. It was the dwelling place of God on earth — the place where the entire people assembled three times a year, where sacrifices were offered, where the high priest entered the innermost chamber once annually on Yom Kippur. It was the heart of Jewish civilization.

The First Temple was built by King Solomon around 957 BCE and destroyed by the Babylonians in 586 BCE — the event the standard textbook presents, incorrectly, as the origin of Jewish civilization. The Second Temple was built by returning exiles in 515 BCE, expanded magnificently by King Herod, and destroyed by Rome in 70 CE. That destruction — the one that created the diaspora and sent Jewish communities across Europe — is commemorated every year on Tisha B'Av, a day of fasting and mourning still observed today. When Jews pray, they face Jerusalem. When Jews end the Passover Seder, they say: “Next year in Jerusalem.” When a Jewish couple marries, a glass is broken to remember the destruction of the Temple even in moments of joy. The Temple is not ancient history. It is the wound around which Jewish civilization has organized itself for two thousand years.

The Western Wall — the last surviving retaining wall of the Temple complex — is the holiest accessible site in Judaism. It is one of the most photographed and most visited religious sites on earth. Above it sits the Temple Mount, where the First and Second Temples stood, and where the Dome of the Rock and Al-Aqsa Mosque were built in the 7th and 8th centuries CE. The Temple Mount is the most contested piece of real estate in the world — the physical center of a conflict that fills the news every year — and students have no framework to understand why, because no curriculum teaches them what it is or why it matters. They encounter the Israeli-Palestinian conflict with no knowledge that the ground being fought over is the same ground where the Temple stood, the same ground Rome destroyed, the same ground Jews have faced in prayer for two thousand years.

The Dome of the Rock, completed in 691–692 CE by Umayyad Caliph Abd al-Malik, adds another layer students are never given. Scholars at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Britannica, and Smarthistory all document that the Dome was built directly on the site of the destroyed Jewish Temple — the holiest location in Judaism — and that its interior walls carry a 240-meter inscription that directly asserts the superiority of Islam over Christianity and Judaism. The Metropolitan Museum describes the inscriptions as promoting “the virtues of the Islamic faith over Christianity.” Historians broadly agree that Abd al-Malik chose the Temple Mount specifically to assert Islamic ownership of the Abrahamic legacy and to place a monumental Islamic structure at the site most sacred to the traditions that preceded it. This is not contested: it is documented in the building’s own walls. Students are asked to understand the Israeli-Palestinian conflict — which centers on this exact ground — without being taught any of this. They cannot understand Jerusalem without understanding what is built there, why it was built there, and what came before it.

The Temple Mount is not a piece of real estate. It is the compressed weight of three thousand five hundred years of Jewish history, two thousand years of longing, and the living center of a conflict students are asked to form opinions about without any of the context that would allow them to understand it. This petition asks that they be given that context.

Sources: USHMM Holocaust Encyclopedia, The Temple; Jewish Virtual Library, Temple Mount; Encyclopaedia Judaica, Jerusalem; The Metropolitan Museum of Art, The Dome of the Rock (2012); Smarthistory, The Dome of the Rock; Britannica, Dome of the Rock

7.2 What Judaism Believes

Judaism is built on a small number of ideas so foundational to Western civilization that they have become invisible — which is to say, we have absorbed them so completely that we have forgotten where they came from.

The first is radical monotheism: one God who created the universe and who cares about human behavior. This was not obvious in the ancient world. It was revolutionary. The God of Judaism is not a god of one tribe or one place — God is the God of all humanity, and all humanity is accountable to the same moral standard.

The second is covenant: the idea that God and a people entered into a binding relationship. God did not simply create the Jewish people. God chose them — not for privilege but for responsibility. The covenant at Sinai is not a promise of reward. It is a calling: to be a kingdom of priests, a light unto the nations. To demonstrate through how you live that justice, compassion, and human dignity are not optional.

The third is Torah as living law. Torah — the five books of Moses — is not a historical document. It is a living text that every generation is obligated to interpret, argue with, and apply to its own circumstances. The Talmud, the great compendium of rabbinic argument compiled in Iraq between the 3rd and 6th centuries CE, does not resolve disputes — it records them. Two rabbis disagree: both opinions are preserved. The minority opinion is kept alongside the majority ruling because the minority opinion might be needed someday. The argument itself is considered holy.

Two concepts from Jewish thought deserve specific attention because they have shaped Western civilization in ways students rarely recognize:

- Teshuvah — repentance and return. The belief that no matter what a person has done, they can always change, always return, always begin again. This is not a minor theological point. It is the foundational claim that human beings have moral agency and are not defined by their worst moments. Every rehabilitation philosophy, every second-chance institution, every recovery movement in Western culture traces a line back to teshuvah.
- Tikkun olam — repair of the world. The belief that the world is broken and that human beings are obligated to fix it. Not to wait for God to intervene, but to act. This idea — that repairing injustice is a religious obligation, not an optional charity — underlies the disproportionate Jewish participation in every major social justice movement in American history: the labor movement, the civil rights movement, the immigration rights movement, the women’s movement. It is not a coincidence. It is theology in action.

7.3 The Calendar and the Practice

Judaism is lived through time. Its theology is embedded in a calendar that structures the year around memory, obligation, and joy. Understanding the Jewish calendar is understanding how Jewish identity has been maintained across 2,000 years of diaspora — without a homeland, without a state, often without safety, but always with this shared rhythm of time.

Shabbat — the Sabbath — begins at sundown every Friday and ends when three stars appear on Saturday night. For 25 hours, work stops. Phones are set aside. The family gathers. Candles are lit. Wine is blessed. Bread — challah, braided and golden — is broken and shared. This weekly practice of stopping, of insisting that rest is sacred and that human beings are not defined by their productivity, is one of Judaism’s gifts to the world. The concept of a weekly day of rest does not exist in any civilization that did not receive it from Jewish tradition.

The High Holidays — Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur — are the most sacred days of the Jewish year. Rosh Hashanah, the Jewish new year, begins ten days of reflection: What did I do this year that I regret? Whom did I harm? What do I need to repair? Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, is the culmination: a full 25-hour fast, a day spent in synagogue, a community standing together before God and before each other, asking forgiveness and committing to do better. Even largely secular Jews often observe Yom Kippur. It is the one day a year when the argument stops and the accounting begins.

Passover is the annual re-enactment of liberation from slavery in Egypt. Every spring, Jewish families gather for the Seder — a ritual meal structured around the telling of the Exodus story. The youngest child asks four questions: Why is this night different from all other nights? The family answers together, in every language Jews have ever spoken, in every country they have ever lived. The story is told not as ancient history but as present experience: “In every generation, each person is obligated to see themselves as if they personally left Egypt.” This is why the Passover story has resonated with every oppressed people that has encountered it — enslaved African Americans sang its songs, the Solidarity movement in Poland read its text, liberation theologians in Latin America built on its framework. It is a story about the obligation to be free and the obligation to free others.

The mezuzah on the doorpost. The kaddish — the prayer for the dead that never mentions death but only praises God, spoken by the living as an act of faith that meaning persists even in grief. The bar and bat mitzvah — the moment a young person becomes responsible for their own religious life. The mikveh. The sukkah built in the backyard for the harvest festival of Sukkot. These are the textures of a living civilization, and American students know none of them.

7.4 The Method of Argument

One of the most distinctive features of Jewish civilization — and one of the least understood — is its relationship to argument. In most religious traditions, disagreement is a problem to be resolved. In Judaism, it is a method to be practiced.

The Talmud — the central text of Jewish law and thought, compiled between the 3rd and 6th centuries CE — is not a rulebook. It is a record of arguments. Rabbi Shammai says this. Rabbi Hillel says that. Both are recorded. The ruling goes one way, but the minority opinion is preserved alongside it — because the minority opinion might be needed someday, because truth is not always simple, and because the quality of the argument matters as much as its outcome.

There is a concept in Jewish thought called the seventy faces of Torah — the idea that every verse of scripture has at least seventy valid interpretations. Interpretation is not a deviation from the text. It is the obligation the text places on the reader. Every generation must interpret anew. This is why Jewish tradition has produced so many lawyers, philosophers, scientists, and writers — not because Jews are inherently smarter, but because Jewish education trains a person from childhood to argue carefully, to hold multiple possibilities simultaneously, and to question what they have been told.

The Passover Seder begins with the youngest child asking four questions. Not reciting the answer. Asking. The entire structure of the ritual is a response to those questions. This is Jewish pedagogy: you start with the child’s question, not the adult’s answer. It is not a coincidence that so many of the foundational figures of modern psychology, philosophy, and social science — Freud, Wittgenstein, Marx, Durkheim, Lévi-Strauss — came from Jewish intellectual culture. They were trained to question, from birth.

7.5 The Diversity of the Jewish People

Judaism is simultaneously a religion, an ethnicity, a culture, and a civilization — and it resists every simple category. This internal complexity is one of its most important features, and one of the most important things students should understand.

You can be an Orthodox Jew who follows every aspect of Jewish law — keeping kosher, observing Shabbat strictly, praying three times a day in Hebrew. You can be a Reform Jew who attends synagogue on the High Holidays and otherwise practices minimally but feels deeply and completely Jewish. You can be a secular Jew with no religious practice whatsoever who identifies ethnically and culturally as Jewish. You can convert to Judaism and be fully, completely, unambiguously Jewish. You can be an atheist and Jewish. You can marry a non-Jew and raise Jewish children. The boundaries are porous, and the community is large.

The Jewish people are also far more diverse ethnically than most Americans realize. Ashkenazi Jews — from Eastern Europe, speaking Yiddish — are the most visible Jewish community in the United States, but they represent only one branch of a global family. Sephardic Jews descend from the Jews expelled from Spain in 1492 and settled across the Mediterranean — their liturgy is different, their food is different, their languages (Ladino, Judeo-Arabic) are different. Mizrahi Jews — from Iraq, Iran, Yemen, Morocco, Egypt, Syria — are roughly half of Israeli Jews today and the largest single ethnic group among them. Ethiopian Jews, known as Beta Israel, maintained Jewish practice in isolation for over two thousand years. The Bene Israel of India have been Jewish since ancient times. The Kaifeng Jewish community of China dates back at least a thousand years.

This diversity matters for understanding antisemitism. The oldest hatred in the world has been applied to people who look nothing alike, speak different languages, practice their Judaism differently, live in wildly different cultures, and hold every conceivable political view. Antisemitism is not a reaction to anything Jews actually are. It is a projection — a set of accusations that changes to fit whatever the accuser needs it to mean. It can call Jews too religious or too secular, too nationalist or too cosmopolitan, too separatist or too assimilated, all at the same time. Understanding the diversity of the Jewish people is essential to understanding why those accusations are incoherent — and why they have persisted anyway.

There is one more thing students should understand — perhaps the most extraordinary fact in this entire document. Every empire that attempted to destroy the Jewish people is gone. Babylon destroyed the First Temple. Rome destroyed the Second. The Spanish Inquisition expelled them in 1492. The Russian Tsar unleashed the pogroms. The Nazis murdered six million. And yet the Jewish people are still here — still reading the same Torah, still observing the same Shabbat and the same Passover Seder, still arguing over the same Talmudic questions, still ending the Seder with “Next year in Jerusalem.” Britannica describes Jewish civilization as displaying “remarkable adaptability and continuity” across nearly four thousand years — assimilating foreign elements while maintaining an unbroken religious and cultural tradition. The form evolved. The thread was never cut. Egypt is a museum. Greece is a museum. Rome is a museum. Judaism is a synagogue open this Friday night. Students who do not know this cannot understand what was at stake in the Holocaust — or why its patterns, when they reappear, are not merely a political crisis but an assault on one of the oldest continuous civilizations on earth.

Judaism is not a set of historical events. It is a living civilization — with a theology, a calendar, a method of argument, a cuisine, a literature, a music, a humor, and a way of being in the world that has persisted for 3,500 years across every continent on earth. American students can describe the Five Pillars of Islam and the Christian sacraments. They should be able to describe Shabbat, Yom Kippur, and the Passover Seder. The gap between what they know about other religions and what they know about Judaism is itself the argument for this petition.

Sources: Sacks, Jonathan. The Dignity of Difference. Continuum, 2002; Telushkin, Joseph. Jewish Literacy. William Morrow, 2008; Kushner, Harold. To Life: A Celebration of Jewish Being and Thinking. Little Brown, 1993; My Jewish Learning, myjewishlearning.com; Britannica, Judaism (encyclopaedia.britannica.com)

Section 8: What This Civilization Built

Judaism is not only a set of beliefs and practices. It is a civilization that has produced extraordinary things across 3,500 years — almost entirely under conditions of persecution, displacement, and constraint. That is the context that makes what follows remarkable: not that Jewish civilization contributed to the world, but that it did so while being systematically excluded, expelled, and murdered.

8.1 The Foundational Gift

Western civilization’s ethical and legal foundation is Jewish. The concept of a single God who demands moral behavior from human beings, the idea that every person is created in the divine image and therefore possesses inherent dignity, the principle of justice as a collective social obligation, the weekly Sabbath as a universal right to rest — these ideas entered Western culture through Jewish scripture and Jewish law. Every Western legal tradition, every declaration of human rights, every concept of individual dignity traces a direct line back to Jewish thought. Christianity and Islam both built on this foundation explicitly and acknowledge the debt. This is the gift a civilization gave to the world while that world was locking it in ghettos and expelling it across continents.

8.2 What the Diaspora Produced

Expelled from their homeland and confined to ghettos, forbidden from most professions and property ownership, Jews across the diaspora built civilizations within their confinement.

The Babylonian Talmud — compiled in Iraq between the 3rd and 6th centuries CE — is one of the most sophisticated legal and ethical documents ever produced: a 63-volume conversation across centuries about law, morality, medicine, agriculture, family, and metaphysics. It is still actively studied today. The Golden Age of Jewish Spain (approximately 900–1200 CE) produced Maimonides (1138–1204), whose *Guide for the Perplexed* synthesized Jewish law, Aristotelian philosophy, and Islamic learning in ways that shaped both Christian scholasticism and Islamic theology. The printing presses of the Venice Ghetto produced nearly one in three Hebrew books printed anywhere in Europe. The Rothschild banking dynasty emerged from the Frankfurt Ghetto, where Jews had been barred from every other economic sector. Persecution redirected talent. It could not extinguish it.

The reasons are documented and structural. Jewish communities developed near-universal male literacy centuries before surrounding cultures did, because reading Torah at thirteen was a religious requirement. The Talmudic method trained the mind from childhood to hold competing possibilities, to argue carefully, to question authority — the cognitive substrate of every profession that rewards complex reasoning. And when persecution closed most occupations, the few that remained received disproportionate talent: a population of doctors, scholars, traders, and lenders is what you get when manufacturing, agriculture, public office, and property ownership are all forbidden. Jewish achievement in confinement is not mysterious. It is the predictable result of a literate, intellectually disciplined civilization operating under structural conditions that concentrated its talent in narrow channels. The same pattern operated in 12th-century Spain, 16th-century Venice, and 20th-century America.

8.3 The Rescuers — A Counter-History Worth Teaching

Teaching the theological roots of antisemitism is not the same as condemning Christianity or Islam. One of the most important things a complete history can do is distinguish between the institutional forces that enabled persecution and the individual human beings — many of them devout Christians and Muslims — who chose at great personal risk to resist it.

Raoul Wallenberg issued tens of thousands of protective passports to Hungarian Jews in 1944 and personally stood between Jews and Nazi deportation squads — saving tens of thousands of lives — by some estimates as many as 100,000 — before being arrested by the Soviet Union. Nicholas Winton organized the evacuation of 669 Jewish children from Czechoslovakia in 1939 and told no one for fifty years. In Denmark, ordinary citizens in October 1943 ferried over 7,000 Jews to neutral Sweden in one week. In Albania,

families hid Jewish refugees under the ancient code of besa — a sworn obligation to protect guests at the cost of one’s own life. Albania was the only occupied country in Europe to end the war with a larger Jewish population than it had at the start.

These stories teach what the persecution narrative alone cannot: that evil is never inevitable, that individuals make choices, and that bystanders are never neutral.

Sources: USHMM Holocaust Encyclopedia, Raoul Wallenberg; Nicholas Winton; Rescue in Denmark; Besa: A Code of Honor (documentary, 2012)

8.4 The Modern Contribution

Jews constitute approximately 0.2% of the world’s population and have received 22% of all Nobel Prizes since the award’s inception — 220 of 965 individual recipients through 2025, across all six categories including literature, peace, and the sciences (Jewish Virtual Library, Nobel Prize data). Albert Einstein, Sigmund Freud, Franz Kafka, Marcel Proust, Gustav Mahler, Leonard Bernstein, Jonas Salk (the polio vaccine), Rosalind Franklin (the structure of DNA), Hannah Arendt, Isaiah Berlin — the intellectual and cultural map of the 20th century would look unrecognizable without Jewish thinkers and creators. This is the product of a civilization that treated literacy as a religious obligation, argument as a spiritual practice, and learning as survival.

Jewish students deserve to see their civilization reflected in their education
— not only as victims, but as builders and contributors.

Every student deserves to understand the full story of a civilization that shaped the world they live in.

Teaching Jewish history only as persecution is like teaching Greek history only as the Persian Wars. The persecution is part of the story. It is not all of it.

Sources: Nobel Prize organization data (nobelprize.org); Jewish Virtual Library, Jewish Nobel Prize Winners (jinfo.org) — 220 of 965 individual recipients through 2025, representing 22% of all laureates; Sacks, Jonathan. The Dignity of Difference. Continuum, 2002; Telushkin, Joseph. Jewish Literacy. William Morrow, 2008

Section 9: Curriculum Recommendations for New York High Schools

The following recommendations are designed to integrate with New York State's existing middle school and high school social studies frameworks without displacing existing content. The proposed addition requires approximately 150 to 200 minutes of instruction — two to three class periods. For context, this is less time than most NYS districts currently spend on the causes of World War I.

9.1 Addressing Common Objections Directly

The most common response to curriculum addition requests is that the curriculum is already full. This petition addresses that directly: the question is not whether there is time. The question is whether this history is worth the time. Given that antisemitic incidents are at a 46-year high, that Jewish students are hiding their identity on campus, and that 58% of New York millennials and Gen Z cannot name a single concentration camp or ghetto, the answer is clearly yes.

Moreover, the question is not only whether there is time — it is whether what currently exists is sufficient. A textbook that devotes one page to Judaism, describes its people as having settled vaguely “near the Mediterranean,” and conflates the Babylonian exile with Jewish origins is not a foundation. It is a gap dressed as coverage.

A related question sometimes arises: why Jewish history specifically, when other persecuted groups also deserve fuller treatment? This petition focuses on Jewish history for two reasons that are specific to it alone. First: it is the direct prerequisite for Holocaust education that is already legally mandated by §801 of NYS Education Law. This is not adding a new subject — it is providing the foundation for one that already exists. Second: the current antisemitism crisis is documented, acute, and directly traceable to the specific historical gap this petition addresses.

Finally: this is not a from-scratch undertaking. A rich ecosystem of peer-reviewed, institutionally authoritative, and freely available resources already exists — produced by organizations including the Institute for Curriculum Services (icsresources.org), the National Library of Israel for Educators (education.nli.org.il), ANU — the Museum of the Jewish People in Tel Aviv, and Unpacked for Educators (unpacked.education), among others. These institutions have done the scholarly work. What they have not done — because it is not their role — is organize that work into a coherent, NYS-standards-aligned module and direct teachers to it. That is the state's role.

The ConsiderTheSourceNY platform, built specifically for New York State teachers by the HHREC of White Plains, is the natural institutional home for exactly that module. What is currently missing is not content, not institutions, and not infrastructure. It is the directive — the acknowledgment from the state that the gap exists, that teachers have not been told what is missing or why, and that organizing a response is the state's responsibility.

9.2 Proposed Learning Objectives

Upon completing this contextual unit, high school students should be able to:

1. Explain the deicide charge and supersessionism, and describe their documented consequences for Jewish life in Christian Europe
2. Identify at least four major pre-Holocaust persecutions and explain how each contributed to the conditions the Nazis later exploited
3. Define the origin of the word “ghetto” and describe conditions of daily life in the pre-Nazi European ghetto
4. Explain the Doctor Exception and what it reveals about how persecution and utility can coexist
5. Construct a timeline from 70 CE to 1945 and place the Russian pogroms, Dreyfus Affair, and Evian Conference within it

6. Explain what the Congress of Vienna’s reversal of Napoleon’s emancipation decrees reveals about the fragility of minority rights
7. Describe the Evian Conference and explain why it matters for understanding the Holocaust as an internationally enabled crime
8. Identify the specific mechanisms the Nazis inherited from pre-Nazi European persecution
9. Name at least two individuals — Jewish or non-Jewish — who resisted persecution at personal risk, and explain what their choices reveal about human agency
10. Evaluate current antisemitic incidents in light of the historical patterns described above

9.3 Grade Level Integration

Grade	Subject	Approach	Time
6–8	Social Studies: Eastern Hemisphere / Comparative World Religions (Key Idea SS.6.4)	Introduce Judaism as a living civilization — its origins, foundational texts, core beliefs, Shabbat, Passover, the Temple and Jerusalem, and its place among the major world religions. This is not supplemental content: SS.6.4 already names Judaism alongside Christianity and Islam as a required area of study. The gap is not in the standard but in the depth and accuracy of how it is taught. Students who arrive in 9th grade with this foundation will engage the pre-Holocaust context unit as historical development rather than remedial introduction.	1–2 periods
9–10	Global History and Geography (Regents)	Insert as 2–3 period unit immediately before existing Holocaust instruction, framed as “The Infrastructure of Persecution: How the Holocaust Became Possible”	150–200 minutes
11–12	US History / AP World	Comparative civil rights module: ghetto emancipation alongside abolitionism; Congress of Vienna alongside constitutional rights; Russian pogroms and American Jewish immigration	2 periods
11–12	AP European History	Full unit: Reformation-era Church policy, ghetto architecture, Enlightenment emancipation, Congress of Vienna, Dreyfus Affair, connection to Nazi mechanisms	3–4 periods
All HS	English Language Arts	Paired with literary texts: The Merchant of Venice (Venice Ghetto context), Night (Wiesel), The Diary of a Young Girl	1–2 periods

Source: NYS K-8 Social Studies Framework, Key Idea 6.4 (nysed.gov)

9.4 NYS Standards Alignment

- 10.5: Causes and effects of World War II — this unit provides essential causal context for existing Holocaust instruction
- 10.2: Enlightenment ideas and political change — Napoleon’s emancipation decree and the Congress of Vienna reversal are direct applications
- 10.1: Political, economic, and social transformations of early modern Europe — the ghetto system (1516–1870) spans this entire period
- 9.4: Rise of transregional networks — Jewish diaspora communities across Europe and the Middle East
- Civic literacy: connecting historical patterns to present-day rights and responsibilities — directly applicable to current antisemitism data

Section 10: The Larger Argument — Toward a Full History

This petition asks for two to three class periods. That is the immediate, achievable ask — the minimum viable addition that would give students the context they currently lack. But it is the floor, not the ceiling.

10.1 The Middle School Foundation

There is also a prior step that would make the high school unit significantly more effective. The NYS Social Studies Framework already requires Judaism to be taught in Grade 6 under Key Idea SS.6.4 — Comparative World Religions.

The gap is not in the standard but in the depth and accuracy of instruction it produces. A foundational introduction to Judaism as a living civilization at the middle school level — its beliefs, its texts, its sacred geography, its place in world history — would mean that students arriving in 9th grade are building on knowledge rather than starting from nothing, and that the connections between ancient practice and modern antisemitism are available to them years before they encounter Holocaust instruction.

10.2 What a Full Treatment Would Require

What two to three periods cannot do is tell the full story of a civilization. It cannot give students Maimonides or the Golden Age of Spain. It cannot convey what the Talmudic academies were, what Jewish life in Baghdad or Córdoba or Venice actually looked like, what the Baal Shem Tov taught, what Yiddish literature was, why Einstein and Freud and Kafka all came from the same small world. For that, more is needed.

The world history textbook for the high school Pre-AP Global History class — a Pearson text widely adopted in Pre-AP and AP Global History classrooms across the country — gives Greece chapters, Rome chapters, the Islamic world chapters. It gives Judaism one page. That is a choice. And it can be unmade.

The failure does not begin in high school. As detailed in Section 2.2, the widely adopted Grade 6 world history textbook covers Judaism only as ancient Israelites, ending at the Babylonian exile, with no living practice and no post-biblical history. A student who has gone through both the standard middle school and high school curricula has encountered Judaism twice: once as an ancient people, and once as victims. Everything in between — 2,500 years of documented civilization — has never appeared in any classroom they have sat in.

Jewish civilization — older than most of these, more continuously documented than any of them, the origin point of the two largest religions in the world, foundational to Western ethics and law, the subject of the most sustained campaign of persecution in human history — deserves the same treatment. Not a trauma unit. Not a persecution narrative. A civilization: its founding, its contributions, its trials, its resilience, and its survival. A complete treatment would include the ancient period and the founding of Jewish law and ethics; the diaspora civilizations of Babylon, Spain, the Ottoman Empire, and Eastern Europe; the full persecution history; and the modern Jewish world including the ongoing reality of antisemitism.

That is a chapter. This petition asks for the beginning of that conversation.

American education has faced this structural problem before. For most of the 20th century, African American history appeared in K-12 curricula primarily as slavery and the civil rights movement — the origin of suffering and the struggle against it — with the 250 years between those two points treated as background rather than civilization. Carter G. Woodson, who founded Negro History Week in 1926, argued that a curriculum presenting a people only through their suffering produces students who cannot understand that people — and a society that cannot recognize its own debt to them. That argument took decades to be heard. It is now broadly accepted: no serious educator today would defend a curriculum that moves from slavery to the March on Washington and calls it complete.

The same structural failure applies to Jewish history. The curriculum moves from the ancient Israelites to Auschwitz. The 2,500 years between those two points — the civilization that produced the foundational texts of Western ethics, the two largest religions on earth, and a disproportionate share of the world's intellectual heritage — are absent. What Woodson said about Black history in 1926 is precisely true of Jewish history in 2026: a curriculum that presents a people only through their suffering produces students who cannot

understand that people, cannot recognize the patterns of persecution when they reappear, and have no framework for what was lost when six million were murdered.

The history documented in this petition ends in 1945. What happened after — the founding of Israel through a specific sequence of international legal decisions, and the simultaneous expulsion of nearly one million Jews from Arab countries where they had lived for thousands of years — is documented in a companion brief available upon request: "The Holocaust Needs a Continuation." That is the next chapter of the same story.

This petition asks for two to three class periods as the immediate step. The full argument is for a chapter. A civilization that produced the foundational texts of Western ethics, the two largest religions on earth, and a disproportionate share of the world's intellectual and cultural heritage — and that endured the most sustained campaign of persecution in human history while doing it — deserves to be taught as what it is: one of the great civilizations of the world.

Section 11: Sources and Further Reading

The sources listed below represent a curated selection of the institutional, academic, and legislative materials that inform this petition. The field of Jewish history education contains a far richer body of resources than any single document can represent.

Primary Institutional Sources

Anti-Defamation League. adl.org ADL Audit of Antisemitic Incidents 2024 (April 2025); ADL / Hillel International Campus Antisemitism Survey (January 2025); ADL / Jewish Federations Portrait of Antisemitic Experiences in the US (October 2025)

ANU — Museum of the Jewish People. anumuseum.org.il. The world's largest Jewish museum, Tel Aviv University campus. Permanent exhibition spanning 4,000 years of Jewish history and civilization. Online databases of photos, films, genealogy, and community records. English-language educational resources available globally.

Holocaust & Human Rights Education Center. hhrecny.org • ConsiderTheSourceNY.org Selected by NYSED to revise and update all Holocaust curricular resources. Working with 29 active and retired New York educators. Materials organized by time period.

Institute for Curriculum Services (ICS). icsresources.org Nationally recognized organization dedicated to improving the accuracy of K-12 instruction on Jews, Judaism, and Jewish history. Has achieved more than 11,000 corrections to textbooks and state standards reaching 9.1 million students annually. Produces free, standards-aligned curricula and professional development for teachers nationwide. Natural partner institution for the Pre-Holocaust Historical Context module this petition proposes.

National Library of Israel for Educators. education-en.nli.org.il. Israeli national institution. Free English-language lesson plans and primary source resources on Jewish history, culture, and civilization for K-12 educators worldwide. Includes specific resources on the Dreyfus Affair, Jewish diversity, and Jewish holidays.

New York State Education Department. nysed.gov/curriculum-instruction/holocaust-education Holocaust Education resources page; ConsiderTheSourceNY.org platform (launched September 2025); NYS Grades 9–12 Social Studies Framework, standard 9.2

Tel Aviv University / Irwin Cotler Institute. cotlerinstitute.com. *Annual Report on the State of Antisemitism in the World*, April 2026 edition (covering 2025 data).

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. encyclopedia.ushmm.org Holocaust Encyclopedia entries: The Evian Conference; The Dreyfus Affair; Christian Persecution of Jews over the Centuries; The Farhud; Rashid Ali al-Gaylani and the Pro-Nazi Coup in Iraq, 1941; Raoul Wallenberg; The Kishinev Pogrom; Pogroms; Where Holocaust Education is Required in the US. Free educator resources at ushmm.org/teach

Unpacked for Educators. unpacked.education. Free video series on Jewish and Israeli history with classroom lesson plans, used in integrated world history courses internationally.

Yad Vashem — The World Holocaust Remembrance Center. yadvashem.org Entries cited: Jules Isaac and the Jewish-Christian Dialogue; Antisemitism: History and Definition; The Pogroms in Ukraine 1918–1921. Extensive educator resources at yadvashem.org/education

Key Academic and Historical Sources

- Britannica.** "Dome of the Rock." [britannica.com/topic/Dome-of-the-Rock](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Dome-of-the-Rock). Cited for documentation of the building's construction on the site of the destroyed Jewish Temple and the content of its inscriptions.
- Britannica.** "First Temple." [britannica.com/topic/Solomons-Temple](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Solomons-Temple). Cited in Section 4.1 for documentation of Solomon's Temple, the Babylonian destruction in 586 BCE, and the Babylonian Captivity.
- Britannica.** "Judaism." [britannica.com/topic/Judaism](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Judaism). Cited for overview of Jewish belief, practice, and survival across history.
- Burns, Michael.** *France and the Dreyfus Affair: A Documentary History*. Bedford/St. Martin's, 1998.
- Claims Conference / USC Shoah Foundation.** *50-State Survey on Holocaust Knowledge among Millennials and Gen Z*. 2020.
- Cunningham, Jennifer.** "The Treatment of the Monotheistic Religions in World History High School Textbooks: A Comparison of Sample Editions 2001–2007." Doctoral dissertation, ProQuest, 2009 (ERIC ED532538). Finding: Judaism receives the least coverage of the three monotheistic religions in world history textbooks, and very little is presented concerning Jewish accomplishments unless connected to Christianity or Islam.
- Encyclopaedia Judaica.** Jerusalem: Keter Publishing House. Entries cited: Babylonian Captivity; Kishinev; Jerusalem; Jewish history and civilization. Available online via jewishvirtuallibrary.org.
- Freedman, Harry.** *Shylock's Venice: The Remarkable History of Venice's Jews and the Ghetto That Shaped the World*. Bloomsbury Continuum, 2024. Cited in Section 5 for documentation of ghetto conditions, cultural life, and the origin of the word "ghetto."
- Gabler, Neal.** *An Empire of Their Own: How the Jews Invented Hollywood*. Crown, 1988. Cited in Section 4.4 for documentation of how exclusion from mainstream American industries concentrated Jewish immigrants in the early film industry.
- Herzl, Theodor.** *Der Judenstaat (The Jewish State)*. 1896. Primary source: Herzl's founding argument for Jewish statehood, written in direct response to the Dreyfus Affair. Cited in Section 4.3.
- Jewish Virtual Library.** "Temple Mount." jewishvirtuallibrary.org. Cited in Section 7.1 for documentation of the Temple Mount's history and significance in Jewish tradition.
- Jewish Virtual Library.** "Jewish Nobel Prize Winners." jinfo.org. Cited in Section 8.4: 220 of 965 individual Nobel Prize recipients through 2025, representing 22% of all laureates.
- Karabel, Jerome.** *The Chosen: The Hidden History of Admission and Exclusion at Harvard, Yale, and Princeton*. Houghton Mifflin, 2005. Cited in Section 4.4 for documentation of antisemitic admission quotas at elite American universities.
- Kushner, Harold.** *To Life: A Celebration of Jewish Being and Thinking*. Little Brown, 1993. Cited in Section 7 for Jewish belief, practice, and civilization.
- Maimonides** (Rabbi Moses ben Maimon, 1138–1204). *Guide for the Perplexed (Moreh Nevukhim)*, ca. 1190. Primary source: Maimonides' synthesis of Jewish law, Aristotelian philosophy, and Islamic learning. Cited in Sections 8.2 and 2.6 as exemplar of Jewish intellectual contribution during the Golden Age of Spain.
- Maram, Linda.** "The Evian Conference: FDR and the Holocaust." Jewish Virtual Library. jewishvirtuallibrary.org. Cited in Section 6.
- McGraw Hill Education.** *Discovering Our Past: The Eastern Hemisphere, Grade 6, New York Edition*. McGraw Hill, 2018. ISBN 9780079037268. — A widely adopted Grade 6 world history textbook published in a New York Edition, cited in Sections 2.2 and 10.1 for its treatment of Judaism.

Coverage of Judaism appears under 'The Israelites,' approximately eight pages, ending at the Babylonian exile with no coverage of living Jewish practice, post-biblical history, or the Diaspora beyond its origin.

Metropolitan Museum of Art. "The Dome of the Rock." metmuseum.org, 2012. Cited in Section 7.1 for documentation of the Dome's inscriptions and their assertion of Islamic supersession over prior traditions.

My Jewish Learning. myjewishlearning.com. Cited in Section 7 for Jewish holidays, practice, and lifecycle events.

Sacks, Jonathan. *The Dignity of Difference: How to Avoid the Clash of Civilizations*. Continuum, 2002. Cited in Sections 7 and 8 for Jewish belief, civilization, and the ethics of difference.

Schwartz, Daniel B. *Ghetto: The History of a Word*. Harvard University Press, 2019. Cited in Section 2.4 for documentation of the ghetto as a pre-Nazi institution and its revival by the Nazis.

Stearns, Peter N., Michael B. Adas, Stuart B. Schwartz, and Marc Jason Gilbert. *World Civilizations: The Global Experience*, 7th Edition. Pearson Education, 2015. ISBN 978-0205986309. Cited in Sections 2.5 and 10.1 as the world history textbook used in a Pre-AP Global History course, 2025–2026 academic year, and as a widely adopted Pre-AP and AP Global History textbook nationally. Coverage of Judaism appears as a single page in the chapter on early civilizations (3,500–600 BCE) and is examined in detail in Section 2.5.

Smarthistory. "The Dome of the Rock." smarthistory.org. Cited in Section 7.1 for documentation of the building's construction, location, and inscriptions.

Legislative and Policy Sources

H.R.768 / S.332. Holocaust Education and Antisemitism Lessons (HEAL) Act, 119th Congress (2025–2026).

NYS Assembly press release: SFY 2024–25. Budget Holocaust Curriculum Investment, April 2024.

Executive Order 14188. Additional Measures to Combat Anti-Semitism, January 29, 2025.

Nostra Aetate. Declaration of the Second Vatican Council, October 28, 1965. Primary source: the Catholic Church's formal repudiation of the deicide charge and condemnation of antisemitism.

United Kingdom Parliament, Hansard. "Jewish Refugees from Arab Countries." House of Commons Debate, November 1, 2016. Primary source: parliamentary acknowledgment that property confiscated from Jewish communities expelled from Arab countries has never been compensated.

Closing Statement

What I Am Asking

Not a new subject. A beginning to the one already being taught.

I began this petition in Rome, in a ghetto built in 1555 — and in Venice, in the *Geto Nuovo*, the island that gave the word "ghetto" to every language in the world, where Jews were first locked in at sunset in 1516, beginning a system of enforced Jewish ghettos in Europe that did not end for another 354 years. I came home from that trip and could not stop asking the same question: why isn't any of this being taught?

The Holocaust does not begin in 1933. It becomes possible in 1933 because of what was constructed across the preceding centuries: from Rome's expulsion and renaming in 70 CE, to the deicide charge that made Jewish identity a moral offense, the badge that marked Jews for a thousand years before the Nazis revived it, the locked gate that confined them for 354 years, the congress that revoked their freedom within months, the thirty-two nations that met at Évian and closed their doors.

These are not footnotes to Holocaust history. They are its opening chapters. And they belong to a civilization — 3,500 years old, the source of the foundational ethical framework of Western society, the origin point of the two largest religions on earth — that is treated in American education as though it exists in only two moments: the ancient world and the gas chambers. Everything in between is missing. The Golden Age of Spain. The Talmudic academies of Baghdad. The printing presses of Venice. The Jewish doctors who treated the Christian patients who locked them in at night. The pogroms that drove 2 million Jews to America and became the origin story of American Jewry. The Dreyfus trial that changed the course of modern history. The thirty-two nations that declined. None of it. Can you believe what's being left out?

New York State's students are among the most diverse in the nation. They are sitting in classrooms right now next to Jewish classmates whose families were shaped by every chapter of this history — and they cannot name a single one of them. They are encountering antisemitism at a rate not seen in 46 years of tracking, and they have no framework to understand what they are seeing. They deserve better than the last chapter of a story no one has taught them.

I respectfully ask the New York State Education Department, the Board of Regents, Governor Hochul, the New York State Legislature, and the United States Congress to direct the expansion of existing high school Holocaust instruction to include the historical context without which the Holocaust cannot be fully understood — and to ensure that the existing requirement to teach Judaism under SS.6.4 at the middle school level is implemented with the same depth and accuracy applied to other major world religions.

I ask this not as an adversary but as a partner:
a parent, a community member, and someone who has been paying attention to this for a long time and is bringing it forward because it matters.

Orit Yakuel