

“The Holocaust: Fact Or Fiction?” (www.hercomputers.com/Holocaustweb)

The San Diego University website (webquest.sdsu.edu/webquest.html) links to 134 recommended middle school social studies webquests. One is called *The Holocaust: Fact Or Fiction?* (www.hercomputers.com/Holocaustweb). According to this site, “there are people who believe that ‘The Holocaust’ never happened” and it asks students whether they are “convinced that it did from everything we have studied so far?” Students are challenged, based on the readings, pictures, movies and discussion they engaged in during the webquest to consider “The Holocaust’ was “made up by people and governments in order to support Israel, the Jewish homeland.” Their assignment is decide to “if ‘The Holocaust’ is fact or fiction and report your findings to your ethics, social studies, and English classes.” As part of the project, students are directed to examine what are identified as “Holocaust Denial Sites.” They include www.nizkor.org/faqs/leuchter, www.ihr.org/leaflets/denial.html, and www.Holocaust-history.org/denial-hoax.

I contacted the creator of the webquest who wrote back that “the idea behind this quest, besides tolerance and respect, is to teach students that there are other views to an issue.” She insisted that “in all my years teaching, no student has come away thinking that the Holocaust did not happen. If you click on the denial links, and the students have learned how to evaluate a web site, they can see through the hollow and erroneous thinking of Holocaust deniers.”

I invite readers to examine *The Holocaust: Fact Or Fiction?* webquest. While it has much excellent material and students are directed to create a series of interesting projects, I have serious questions about the way it is conceptualized, especially legitimizing claims that the Holocaust did not happen or has been exaggerated. It is also a pedagogical error to frame a supposedly open research question in such a way that no student ever arrives at one of the possible answers. Why introduce students to unsubstantiated and unsubstantiatable claims? Once teachers offer Holocaust denial as a legitimate topic for discussion they are opening the door for debate about creationism, the presentation of racist arguments and claims that intergalactic aliens are secretly manipulating events on Earth.

The issue is not whether the Holocaust happened, but why it happened and its historical and philosophical significance. Nothing can ever be “proven” beyond any doubt, especially to people who are committed to conspiracy theories and simply dismisses as phony any evidence that runs counter to their beliefs. – Alan Singer