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My name is Steven Field, and I'm a member of the Board of The Jewish Foundation for the Righteous. I'd like to thank you for your time and for participating in this program.

The Holocaust was a devastating and a profoundly horrible event, in a century which had no shortage of horrible events, and studying its history is critically important. But to see it only as history, only as something that happened and was limited to several years and then ended, is not only naïve but foolhardy, not only incautious but dangerous. History is not a string of isolated events but a narrative whose themes and motifs are interrelated and recur, albeit in various forms, over the years, and to understand the Holocaust it is necessary to contextualize it, to situate it within the social, political, economic, and cultural environment of its time and the times that preceded it. Because those social, political, economic, and cultural trends don't necessarily disappear, and the capacity of the human race for marginalizing groups it considers "Other" is apparently limitless.

Thus this series of lessons is not just about the timeline, and the numbers, and the mechanics of the attempt to murder the Jews of Europe. It is about the conditions which provided a fertile environment for that murder to occur: the long history of European antisemitism, the social philosophy which divided people into races and then ranked those races, the way economic devastation produces social upheaval, and the manner in which a scientifically and culturally advanced Western European nation with a well-functioning democratic political system could be co-opted into participating in mass murder on an industrial scale. The history of the Third Reich is a cautionary tale and a nightmare.

In the same way that we seek to understand tragic historical events in context, we believe that only by understanding how things happened can we hope to prevent them from happening again. The Holocaust is in the past, but its preconditions, the fertile soil from which it sprang – antisemitism and racism, nationalism, authoritarianism, and intolerance of those who are different – those things have not disappeared, and in many cases are currently on the rise. Antisemitic incidents have increased across the nation and around the world, and the torchlight march by white supremacists and antisemites which took place in Charlottesville, Virginia in 2017 looked a lot like Nuremberg in 1935. One can only hope that showing where these trends can lead – where they have led in the past – will heighten awareness of the danger for the present and the future. The ability to defuse that danger lies with all of us. Past need not be prologue— but as it has often been said, "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it." This series of lessons is the JFR's attempt to help students remember that past.

Again, on behalf of The Jewish Foundation for the Righteous, thank you for your participation.