



Moral Courage

A Debt
to Honor
Teacher's Guide

"...Highlighting acts of moral courage
by individuals or groups who have
helped to change the events within
their community or country."

The Foundation for Moral Courage,
in partnership with South Carolina ETV,

presents

Moral Courage

*A seven-part series
“highlighting acts of moral courage
by individuals or groups
who have helped to change
the events within their community or country”*

A Debt to Honor

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Suggested Grade Levels
5th–12th

Subject Areas
Social Studies, U.S. History, World History,
Language Arts, Character Education

Moral Courage

Moral Courage identifies ordinary people who became extraordinary through their acts of great personal courage, and underscores the importance of a shared commitment to universal human values. These seven television documentaries focus on the unique lifesaving stories of rescue extended to Jewish fugitives during the Holocaust period.

The series consists of the following programs.

TREASON OR HONOR

(1998) *Narrated in English by Uta Hagen and in German by Anna Rosmus.*

This program introduces six German nationals, recognized by Yad Vashem, who found it possible in the center of Nazi tyranny to hide and protect German Jewish fugitives. Why they accepted the risk of defying German law is as important to understand as how they rescued these people. [28 minutes]

IT WAS NOTHING...IT WAS EVERYTHING Reflections on the Rescue of Jewish Fugitives in Greece During the Holocaust

(1997) *Narrated by Irene Papas.*

Highlighting the almost total destruction of Greece's Jewish community, this program offers dramatic archival footage and Ladino music to complement interviews with rescuers and a few who were rescued in Thessaloniki, Athens, Crete, and in other important locations. [29 minutes]

ZEGOTA: THE COUNCIL FOR AID TO JEWS IN OCCUPIED POLAND, 1942–1945

(1997) *Narrated by Eli Wallach.*

This is a story of the desperate plight of the Jews of Poland and the conditions of terror under which Zegota rescuers tried to help. Zegota participants, Jewish survivors, and Polish and Jewish historians recall and reflect on the unparalleled crime of genocide committed by Nazi occupation forces, and on the extraordinary courage of people who risked—and some of whom sacrificed—their lives trying to save some Jewish fugitives. [28 minutes]

A DEBT TO HONOR

(1995) *Narrated by Alan Alda.*

In spite of the fact that Italy was allied with Nazi Germany until its surrender to the Allies in September 1943, 80 percent of Italy's Jews survived the Holocaust. Many found safety and friendship with the clergy and others with ordinary citizens, both groups becoming heroic through their far-reaching rescue efforts. [29 minutes]

RESCUE IN SCANDINAVIA

(1994) *Narrated by Liv Ullmann.*

Thousands of Danes and Norwegians found it possible to guide Jewish fugitives across their borders to safety in Sweden. Raoul Wallenberg's and Count Folke Bernadotte's stories of rescue are told in this film, along with the unique story of protection extended by the government of Finland to its Jewish community while that country was allied with Nazi Germany in their common war against the Soviet Union. [55 minutes]

ZEGOTA: A TIME TO REMEMBER

(1992) *Narrated by Sy Rotter.*

The highest percentage of almost 20,000 "righteous gentiles" honored by Yad Vashem, the Holocaust Remembrance Museum in Israel, for their having rescued Jews during the Second World War are Polish. Their efforts are highlighted in this program, which includes an epilogue by Jan Karski. [52 minutes]

THE OTHER SIDE OF FAITH

(1991) *Narrated by Sy Rotter.*

In the town of Przemysl, Poland, it was possible, even under the strictest Nazi occupation regulations, for a 16-year-old Polish girl and her younger sister to successfully hide and nurture 13 Jewish fugitives—men, women, and children—for over two years. This is their inspiring story. [27 minutes]

How to Use *This Guide*

Guide Components

- **Pre-Teaching Material**
 - People
 - Places
 - Vocabulary
- **Timeline: Important Events of World War II**
- **Historical Background**
- **Maps**
- **Video Synopsis**
- **Classroom Activities**
 - Participatory Lessons
 - Classroom Discussion
 - Handouts
- **Selected Resources**
 - Bibliography
 - Videos
 - Web Sites

Moral Courage is delivered in seven programs. The guide for each program contains the components pre-teaching material, historical background, video synopsis, and classroom activities. Some programs contain specific bibliographies, videos, and Web entries. The instructor may use these components in a variety of ways.

- To provide a map through the program, as the pre-teaching material is organized in the order in which it is viewed or mentioned.
- To guide student viewing of the program. A written outline for students to follow can keep them focused and enhance student understanding.
- To assure that students are paying attention to the programs by having them listen for and define/identify the content of these sections, as basic factual questions do not do enough to challenge students' higher-order thinking skills.
- To set up the scenes and provide historical background for the lesson before viewing.

Note that the classroom activities and the classroom discussions for each program contain activities that may be used with many of the other videos.

The selected resources—bibliography, videos, and Web sites—can be used by both the instructor and the students. These are *selected* and are not meant to be all-inclusive.

Parts of this guide are taken wholly or partially from discussion guides prepared by the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) for The Foundation for Moral Courage. Those parts are in italics.

A Debt to Honor

“A Debt to Honor” presents historical evidence of how individuals reacted to their perception of injustice. Through interviews and archival footage, the program poses issues that viewers can consider both in the context of the Holocaust period and in the broader context of the society in which we live. In this sense, it is a program that allows viewers to relate historical issues to those of their own lives.

Pre-Teaching Material

People (in the order viewed and/or mentioned)

Marshall Bidoleo: Appointed head of Allied-controlled Italian government when Mussolini was deposed.

Sister Lelia Orlandi: Member of a convent (Religious Teachers Filippini) that hid Jews even under the threat of death.

Sister Luisa Girelli: Member of a religious order (Nostra Signora de Sion) that assisted Jewish families.

Don Aldo Brunacci: Italian priest who assisted with hiding Jews in the “hospital city” of Assisi.

Monsignor Flasheto Nickoleni: Bishop of Assisi; gave up his bed for Jewish refugees.

Davidina Cerioli: Assisted in hiding the Mulho family.

Dino Mulho: Member of a Jewish manufacturing family hidden by employees.

Don Arrigo Beccari: Recounts the story of hidden Jewish children protected from the Nazis.

Mr. Lazeray: Government employee who filled in false names on identification papers for hidden children.

Giancarlo Zoli: Led Jews to safe houses.

Ida Lenti: Babysitter who cared for orphaned Jewish children.

Louisella Ottolenghi Mortara: Tells of a Jewish family escaping from the Germans and finding shelter with a Catholic family.

Gigina Tampieri: Member of an Italian family that hid a Jewish family.

Michale Bassi: Walks viewers through a memorial park of Lebanon Cedars.

Rabbi Elio Toaff: Speaker at a ceremony honoring Italian rescuers.

Tulia Zevi: President of the Italian Jewish community hosting the ceremony.

Places (in the order viewed and/or mentioned)

Ostia Antica
Tiber River
Rome
Assisi
Magenta
Milan
Nonantola
Modena
Como
Carpi
Switzerland
Auschwitz
Bergen-Belsen
Florence
Aritzo
Avegno
Bologna
Cotignola

Vocabulary (in the order used)

Fascism
Anti-Semitic laws
Asylum
Refugees
Salò Republic
Bunker
Deciduous trees

Timeline: Important Events of World War II

- 1921 July 29:** Adolf Hitler becomes the leader of the National Socialist "Nazi" Party.
- 1930 September 14:** The Germans elect the Nazis; it is the second-largest political party in Germany.
- 1933 January 30:** Adolf Hitler becomes the chancellor of Germany.
March 12: The first concentration camp opens at Oranienburg, outside Berlin.
March 23: The Enabling Act gives Hitler dictatorial power.
April 1: Hitler orders the Nazi boycott of Jewish-owned shops.
May 10: The Nazis burn books.
June: The Nazis open the Dachau concentration camp.
July 14: The Nazi party is declared the only party in Germany.
August 19: Adolf Hitler becomes the führer of Germany.
September 15: The Nuremberg Laws take away Jewish legal rights.
- 1936 February 10:** The German Gestapo is above the law.
March 7: German troops occupy the Rhineland.
- 1938 March 12/13:** Germany announces "Anschluss" (union) with Austria.
October 15: German troops occupy the Sudetenland; the Czech government resigns.
November 9/10: Kristallnacht (The Night of Broken Glass)
- 1939 March 15/16:** Germany takes Czechoslovakia.
September 1: Germany attacks Poland from the west; the Soviet Union attacks Poland from the east.
September 27: Poland surrenders to Germany.
October: Germany begins euthanizing the sick and disabled in Germany.
- 1940 April 9:** Germany invades Denmark and Norway.
May 15: Holland surrenders to Germany.
May 28: Belgium surrenders to Germany.
June 10: Norway surrenders to Germany.
June 14: The Germans enter Paris.
July 10: The Battle of Britain begins.
October 7: German troops enter Romania.
- 1941 April 17:** Yugoslavia surrenders to Germany.
April 27: Greece surrenders to Germany.
June: German SS Einsatzgruppen begin mass murder of Polish Jews.
July 31: Göring instructs Heydrich to prepare for the Final Solution—the murder of all European Jews.
September 1: Germany orders Jews in Germany to wear yellow stars.
September 3: The first experimental use of gas chambers at Auschwitz occurs.
September 19: The German army takes Kiev.
- September 29:** The German army murders 33,771 Jews at Babi Yar, near Kiev.
- December 11:** Germany declares war on the United States.
- 1942 January 20:** The Wannsee Conference to coordinate the "Final Solution of the Jewish Question" convenes.
June: Mass murder of Jews by German forces, by gassing, begins at Auschwitz.
July 22: Deportations from the Warsaw Ghetto to German killing centers begin; the Treblinka death camp opens.
- 1943 February 18:** The Nazis arrest White Rose resistance leaders in Munich.
April: Jewish resistance in the Warsaw Ghetto begins.
May 16: Jewish resistance in the Warsaw Ghetto is crushed by German troops.
June 11: Himmler orders the liquidation of all Jewish ghettos in Poland.
- 1944 June 6:** D-Day landings.
July: The Polish army-led uprising against the German army begins.
July 24: Soviet troops liberate the first concentration camp at Majdanek.
August 4: Anne Frank and her family are arrested by the Gestapo in Amsterdam, Holland.
August 25: Liberation of Paris.
October 2: The Warsaw Uprising ends as the decimated Polish Home Army surrenders to the Germans.
October 30: The gas chambers at Auschwitz are used by the Germans for the last time.
December 17: German Waffen SS murder 81 U.S. POWs at Malmedy.
- 1945 January 26:** Soviet troops liberate Auschwitz.
April 12: The Allies liberate Buchenwald and Bergen-Belsen concentration camps.
April 29: The U.S. 7th Army liberates Dachau.
April 30: Adolf Hitler commits suicide.
May 7: Germany signs an unconditional surrender to the Allies.
May 8: V-E (Victory in Europe) Day.
August 6: Hiroshima, Japan, is the target of the first atomic bomb.
August 9: Nagasaki, Japan, is the target of the second atomic bomb.
August 15: The Japanese government surrenders; V-J (Victory over Japan) Day.
September 2: The Japanese sign the surrender agreement.
October 24: The United Nations is officially born.

Historical Background

There have been Jewish settlements in Italy since Roman times. Jewish historian Josephus records that, in 4 B.C.E., there were nearly 8,000 Jews living along the banks of the Tiber River, in a community named Ostia Antica, just a few miles south of present-day Rome. Historical references verify other Jewish settlements in Italy during the past 2,000 years and reflect both good times and bad for their inhabitants.

In the period following the Spanish Inquisition, during the late 15th century, the hostility of the Catholic Church in Italy led to the expulsion of Jews living in the southern part of the country. Although expulsion was not forced upon Jews living in Rome and Venice at that time, the first ghettos that appeared in these cities in the 1500s clearly evidenced the tenuous state of the security of Jews in the country.

Until the late 1800s, Italy was not a unitary nation but a collection of smaller states. During the earlier years of that century, the first clear indication of acceptance extended to Jews by the Royal House of Savoy, based in the Piedmont area of northern Italy, resulted in the rapid introduction of Jewish participation in many aspects of its society. The influence of the Napoleonic era brought a sense of social enlightenment and pressures for greater equality in Italian society overall, which set in motion a series of regional conflicts with the feudal system and the underlying conservative influence of the Catholic Church. It was largely through the leadership of the Royal House of Savoy that the 10 years of revolution against feudalism, beginning in 1860—a period referred to as the Risorgimento—finally brought unification to Italy.

The flowering of Jewish participation in all aspects of Italian social, political, economic, and cultural life that followed unification was nourished by the philosemitic orientation of the Royal House of Savoy. Acceptance of Jews into their community gradually extended across the Piedmont and resulted in the demise of all the ghettos, the last of which, in Rome, was abolished in 1870.

Finally able to fully participate in Italian society, the older traditions of Jewish cultural and religious life, which had been its own unifying force, began to fall away. By the time of Mussolini's march on Rome, in 1922, assimilation had influenced the lives of most Italian Jewish citizens. For example, 250 Jews, all members of the Italian fascist party, marched proudly with Mussolini when he took power as dictator of the country. Sixteen years later, in 1938, at the time of Mussolini's first anti-Jewish measures, more than 5,000 Jews, or approximately 15 percent of the total Jewish adult population, were members of the fascist party. It was clear, however, that, for most Italians, the presence of 47,000 Jews in their country, who represented no more than one-tenth of 1 percent of the total Italian population of close to 50 million, was of little significance. In fact, most of the Jews of Italy were essen-

tially assimilated. They spoke Italian and looked and acted in public as their non-Jewish neighbors. Indeed, there was no “Jewish problem” nor evidence of overt anti-Semitism within the population at large. Italy’s Jews were Italians.

Hitler’s rise to power in Germany, and Mussolini’s efforts to establish a military alliance with him, formalized in 1940, profoundly affected the fate of Italy’s Jewish community. The Italian racial laws of 1940 (succeeding and intensifying those of 1938) resulted in the identification by the Italian police of 44,500 Italian Jewish citizens and in their official stigmatization. Rich and poor, adults and children, those who assimilated, and those still clinging to their Jewish traditions, all found their lives jeopardized by Italian law.

Italy entered World War II in 1940 allied with Hitler and his Nazi German policies. After nearly three years of war, in which its military forces proved unequal to those of its enemies, Italy surrendered to the Allies on September 6, 1943. While few Italian Jews were killed by Italian fascists prior to this surrender, many were interned in concentration camps in Italy and others fled the country, seeking refuge wherever they could find it.

However, most Italian Jews waited, unable to work and unable to live normal lives, trying to avoid exposure and capture as best they could. This changed for the worse after Italy’s surrender, when German forces quickly occupied that part of northern Italy that had not as yet been liberated by the Allies. The Holocaust descended upon Italian Jews on October 16, 1943. The first German military raid on Rome’s Jewish ghetto area resulted in the capture of over 1,200 men, women, and children, who were imprisoned and subsequently transported to their deaths.

The full five years of war resulted in the deaths of 7,682 Italian Jews, most perishing in Nazi concentration camps located in Poland and Germany. Although it is acknowledged that very few of these victims would have been captured by the Nazis without some form of Italian collaboration, it is also true that most of the remaining Italian Jews not captured by the Germans were aided by other Italians and successfully evaded the Nazis and their Italian fascist partners.



ITALY

1943

Video Synopsis

The heroism of Italian citizens combating the terror of the Holocaust in Italy forms a unique, bright chapter in an otherwise unforgiving litany of abandonment, barbarism, and betrayal. It is a story that must be known for the morality it evidences.

“A Debt to Honor” is the story of rescue, not betrayal. Rescue is presented through interviews with Italian clergy, housewives, and others who acted as individuals, responding to a crisis in the broader society and, in doing so, evidence what we today refer to as moral courage. These were, by all accounts, ordinary people who undertook extraordinary action to save the lives of persecuted people because, as they frequently stated, “It was the right thing to do.” Through their stories, this film celebrates their courage and honors their memory.

Using archival footage, “A Debt to Honor” also chronicles the historical highlights of Mussolini’s entry into Rome to begin his 21-year dictatorship, and continues through his fall from power in 1943, after the Allied invasion of Italy. There are also scenes from the short-lived Salo Republic, based in northern Italy, in which Mussolini served for less than one year as the puppet dictator under Hitler’s direction, until his capture by Italian partisans and his summary execution.

Classroom Activities

Participatory Lessons

- Before viewing, use the map handout to locate the sites mentioned in the video, review the vocabulary words, and give students the names mentioned in the program. Use the timeline and historical background to set the stage for the video. This preparation will broaden students’ viewing experience.
- Is the title of this video “A Debt” (to be paid to the honor shown) “to Honor”? Or is it “A Debt” (that is owed because of the honor shown) “to Honor”? Substantiate your answer with evidence from the video. This can be done in a class discussion, or by dividing the class according to each student’s belief and allowing the groups to work on their evidence for presentation, perhaps to a neutral judge or group. Or, students could be assigned to create an electronic presentation, such as a PowerPoint presentation or a Web site.
- Have students research and stage a debate on the role of Pius XII and the Holocaust.
- From Florence, Italy, Giancarlo Zoli said, “Our experience shows that when there is a great need, people rise to the occasion.” Do you feel this is true today? Can you cite examples when this has been true in recent history? In your own life? Follow current events and find examples to prove or disprove the statement in today’s world.

- Let students create a Wall of Heroes. Include people from the past and/or present who have shown the qualities of a hero. The class will need to define the qualities of a hero. Let students defend their choices to the class, and have the class vote on whether each person should be placed on the wall. Students may write articles for the school newspaper or student video news programs telling others about their heroes.
- Have students research the properties of deciduous trees and evergreens. Why might the city of Cotignola choose deciduous trees while Yad Vashem used evergreens for honoring rescuers? Which would you use if you were planting trees at a memorial? Why?

Classroom Discussion

- *The mid-1930 pre-war Jewish community in Italy reflected a broad range of social, economic, and political involvement in Italian society overall. There were rich and poor, leaders and followers, those assimilated and those still evidencing a ghetto orientation. How might each of the different groups have reacted to the enactment of the racial laws in 1938 and 1940?*
- *In other European countries, the Catholic Church was generally hostile to Jews, which made popular resistance to anti-Jewish edicts and actions less likely to occur. Was there in Italy, the site of the Vatican State, less anti-Semitism among the people? Was the influence of the church different in Italy?*
- *Italian rescuers of Jewish fugitives from the Nazis may have had different motivations among themselves. What might have been some of the reasons they assisted persecuted Jews? Was it because the victims were Jewish? Could there have been other reasons?*
- *Broader issues for discussion include: Are there universal human values? If there are, who defines them? And, if definable, can they be taught and, if so, by whom? Can it happen again?*
- *“A Debt to Honor” proposes one answer to some of these questions—in the words of the rescuers, “It was the right thing to do.” If students accept the basic rationale, the teacher or discussion leader might then ask how the rescuers knew they were doing the right thing when most people did nothing, and some were contributing to the persecution of the Jews in their own communities. Why did the rescuers behave differently?*
- *Are there some human values or beliefs that should be beyond question? Are there, for example, values written into the Constitution and the Bill of Rights that apply to some American citizens but not to others? Where did the values and beliefs that we find in these documents originate?*

- *Students may be encouraged to speak about injustices that they face in relation to their studies, work, home, or street life. Explore the origins of stereotyping, anti-Semitism, racial intolerance, and violence as the behaviors some people use to resolve their differences. Examples of other ways of confronting social and ethnic differences could then be identified and discussed by the students.*
- *Of what consequence is the exposure to religion, to its learning, and to its practice on moral courage? Without distinguishing values among the different religions and their individual practices, help students identify those values that appear to be accepted and promulgated by all religions. Can these be subsumed in the basic Ten Commandments, which underlie Judeo-Christian beliefs? Are there other sources for these values? Be careful not to let the discussion tilt toward substantiating the students' or the teacher's own values.*

Selected Resources

Bibliography (specific to the Italian Experience)

- Carpi, Daniel. *Between Mussolini and Hitler*. Brandeis University Press, 1994.
- Herzer, Ivo, ed. *The Italian Refuge: Rescue of Jews During the Holocaust*. The Catholic University of America Press.
- Michaelis, Meir. *Mussolini and the Jews*. Clarendon Press, 1978.
- Morley, John. *Vatican Diplomacy and the Jews During the Holocaust*. Ktave Publishing House, 1980.
- Steinberg, Jonathan. *All or Nothing: The Axis and the Holocaust, 1941–1943*. Routledge.
- Stille, Alexander. *Benevolence and Betrayal: Five Italian Jewish Families Under Fascism*. Summit Books.
- Zuccotti, Susan. *The Italians and the Holocaust: Persecution, Rescue and Survival*. Basic Books, 1987.

Videos

The Assisi Underground

Conspiracy of Hearts

The Gold of Rome

The Righteous Enemy

Web Sites (pertaining to Italy)

Article from the *Jewish Bulletin*: <http://jewishsf.com/bk960419/sfconf.htm>

Pius XII: Consensus and Controversy: <http://www.piusxiisoc.org/marg1.htm>

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