

Newsweek

HOLOCAUST ‘ORPHAN’ DR. RUTH RESPONDS TO MILLENNIAL IGNORANCE ABOUT NAZI ATROCITIES

BY ANNA MENTA ON 4/12/18 AT 3:27 PM

Sex therapist Dr. Ruth Westheimer was disappointed—but not surprised—to hear that the millennial generation is less-than-informed about the Holocaust.

On Israel’s Holocaust Remembrance Day Thursday, Jewish Americans were confronted with sobering statistics based on a survey done by Schoen Consulting, commissioned by The Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany. Nearly one-third of Americans in general and 41 percent of millennial Americans think “substantially less” than 6 million Jews were murdered in the Holocaust, [the survey found](#). Further, two-thirds of millennials surveyed could not identify Auschwitz.

These numbers indicated societal memory of the Holocaust is fading—disturbing news for Jewish immigrants like Dr.

Ruth Westheimer. Westheimer—better known simply as Dr. Ruth—is a famed sex therapist, author and media personality. She's also an "orphan of the Holocaust," in her words.

"I don't consider myself a Holocaust survivor," Westheimer explained to *Newsweek*. "I consider myself an orphan of the Holocaust. I was fortunate: I was sent to Switzerland at the age of 10. I stayed in an orphanage until I became a sniper in the Haganah—the forerunner of the Israel Defense Forces." All of Westheimer's immediate family and friends perished, she believes, at Auschwitz. When she read the Schoen Consulting study, she took to Twitter to vent her frustrations.

"It's terrible that so many people today are ignorant of what happened at Auschwitz," Westheimer [wrote](#), "not just because my family members died there, but because those memories serve to protect all of us from another such tragedy."

Westheimer amended her statement slightly to *Newsweek*, saying, "I don't want to say so much of ignorance.... I think that very many people by nature shrink away, and say, 'How could that happen? How could our world have permitted that?'"

Westheimer stated that she was "not surprised" by the statistic, and hoped it would serve as a wake-up call for the need to educate the younger generation. "I think that some survivors of the Holocaust—some of the people who were in Auschwitz, where my family perished—now may be more willing to talk about it than in previous

years. They realize how time marches on, and how they are going to be like me, in their 90s!" Westheimer, 89, turns 90 in June.

Westheimer said she is hopeful about education measures already in place. She said, "Even I did not want to burden my children—and now my four grandchildren—with the horror stories." But at the same time, she said, millennials have "a tremendous responsibility" to get educated about Holocaust history.

"They cannot turn their backs now and say, 'It's of no concern to us, because we live in the United States, in a free country,' especially not now," she said. Westheimer was reluctant to clarify whether by "now" she meant under the current presidency: "I talk about sex, not politics!" she said.

Still, Westheimer is hopeful about the education measures already in place. "The Museum of Jewish Heritage in New York, where I'm on the board, organizes a Holocaust memorial every year, and this year there were 2,000 people," she said. Westheimer also pointed to the [museum's new interactive installation](#), where visitors can have a "virtual conversation" with holographic Holocaust survivors. "This is not only an educative process for Jews," Westheimer said. "It's very important to educate the public in general."