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**For Immediate Release**

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## **2020 Lyndon Baines Johnson Moral Courage Award Virtual Event Raises \$775,000 for Holocaust Education**

**HOUSTON, TX (May 13, 2020)**...When extraordinary times require extraordinary response, Holocaust Museum Houston (HMH) steps up. Due to COVID-19 restrictions, the Museum pivoted and held its 25<sup>th</sup> Annual Lyndon Baines Johnson Moral Courage Award Dinner as a virtual event that streamed to more than 500 households on Thursday, May 7, 2020, raising \$775,000 for Holocaust education programs.

With the 75th anniversary of V-E Day on May 8, 2020, the virtual event commemorated this historical date with the theme of liberation and by honoring Brigadier General Felix L. Sparks, posthumously. HMH presents the Lyndon Baines Johnson Moral Courage Award to individuals who have taken a stand against injustice, hatred and prejudice, and used their skills and influence to make a better world for all people. The award was accepted by the family of Felix Sparks via a Zoom recording. ([click here for photo and credit: Courtesy of The Sparks Family](#))

The streamed event included a virtual conversation with WWII Historian and *New York Times* Bestselling Author Alex Kershaw and Holocaust Survivor Pinchas Gutter. Kershaw has written several books on WWII, including *The Liberator*, which traces the remarkable battlefield journey of our honoree, General Sparks, through the Allied liberation of Europe—from the first landing in Italy to the final death throes of the Third Reich.

Honorary Chairs for this historic event included The Honorable Lina Hidalgo, Harris County Judge, Luci Baines Johnson and The Honorable Sylvester Turner, Mayor, City of Houston. Dinner chairs were Heidi and David Gerger, Sultana and Moez Mangalji and Andrea and Bill White. Erica and Benjy Levit served as host committee chairs.

Holocaust Museum Houston created the Lyndon Baines Johnson Moral Courage Award in 1994 in cooperation with the Johnson family. In 1938, as a young congressman, Johnson stretched the limits of his authority and risked his personal dreams to provide American sanctuary for threatened European Jews. It is because of these acts of moral courage that the Museum proudly named the award in his honor. The award recognizes either a single righteous act or a lifetime of morally courageous behavior.

Brigadier General Sparks, an American military commander of the 3rd Battalion, 157th Infantry Regiment, 45th Infantry Division of the United States Army, was one of the first Allied forces to enter Dachau concentration camp and liberate its 32,000 prisoners on April 29, 1945. He took part in the Allied's Battle of Anzio, invasions of Sicily and Provence, Battle of the Bulge and Battle of Aschaffenburg. His unit saw 511 days of combat time in WWII. A Lt. Colonel when he led forces into Dachau, and just 27 years old, we honor his service to our country, and his humanity and leadership during a war filled with hatred, horrific violence and prejudice.

Previous recipients have included George W. Bush, 43<sup>rd</sup> President of the United States; Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.; Holocaust survivor and author Elie Wiesel; activist and actress Mia Farrow; U.S. Sen. John McCain; the late Daniel Pearl, the Wall Street Journal reporter who was murdered by terrorists in Pakistan; former U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell; former U.S. Sen. Lloyd Bentsen, Jr.; former U.S. Sen. Robert Dole; filmmaker Steven Spielberg; and former U.S. President Dwight D. Eisenhower, among others.

A pre-show presentation streamed starting at 6:45 p.m. followed by a virtual program beginning at 7 p.m. and lasting for approximately one hour and twenty-three minutes. Produced by Vision, the show is accessible to the public at [hmh.org/moralcourage](http://hmh.org/moralcourage).

*PaperCity* served as media sponsor for the event and United Airlines as the official airline of Holocaust Museum Houston. The pre-show was sponsored by Heidi and David Gerger and Debra and Steven Cohen.

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