

The choking smell of smoke fills the air. Fires rage, homes burn, people flee for their lives. This attack claims 26,000 Jewish prisoners, all sent to concentration camps to be worked to death. 91 Jews are killed. Their enemy is not foreign. It is the very government they live under. One hundred and one synagogues, places of worship, are razed to the ground, and 7,500 Jewish businesses are destroyed.¹ On the nights of November 9 and 10, 1938, groups of Nazi followers target Jewish communities and carry out the ideology of Anti-Semitism.² To many, *Kristallnacht*, or "The Night of Broken Glass," represents the start of one of the most famous genocides in history: the Holocaust. This stain on history is taught in schools across the globe as a warning to future generations. The lessons we can each take away from this horrible event are invaluable as we try to further understand cultural and social relationships in today's modern world, and how studying the past shapes our future.

The Holocaust was the manifestation of an extremist ideology and showed the world the dangers of fanaticism. Most people view the end of the Holocaust as the end of the modern period and the rise of secularism. Existentialists, such as Jean-Paul Sartre, embraced the notion of the end of essence and meaning in human life. Widespread rejection of religion and ideologies became prevalent, and questions about humankind inevitably arose.³ This genocide of six million innocent people had been allowed to go on for approximately twelve years.⁴ Was human nature finally proven ultimately evil? Was the institution of government responsible? What of the many technological advances made? Was science an enemy? The Holocaust left scars upon the global psyche that are still felt today. The reflection brought about after the event may have led to a

¹ Ben Austin, "Kristattnacht," *Ben Austin's Sociology Corner*, 20 Feb 1996, 28 Mar 2010, <<http://frank.mtsu.edu/~baustin/knacht.html>>.

² Stephanie Fitzgerald, *Kristallnacht, the Night of Broken Glass: Igniting the Nazi War Against Jews* (Illustrated, Minneapolis, MN: Compass Point Books, 2008) 8.

³ Echevarria, "World War II," IB 20th Century World History, Rampart High School, 2 February 2010.

⁴ "The Holocaust," *United States Holocaust Memorial Museum*, 16 Mar 2010, 28 Mar 2010, <<http://www.ushmm.org/wlc/article.php?lang=en&ModuleId=10005143>>.

more secular, cynical world, but it is imperative that the lessons the Holocaust teaches us be passed on to posterity.

It is often said that those who do not study history are doomed to repeat it. While cliché, this statement sums up one of the important reasons why the Holocaust must continue to be studied. Throughout history, race and racism have always played a part in international relations. World leaders and even entire populations have perceived cultural differences as threats countless times in our past. As with Nazi Germany, racism was used as an easy vehicle with which to control the masses and place blame on someone other than the government for the country's problems. As a result, six million innocents died, all in the name of a better, Aryan world. Today, German children are taught to feel shame for their history and shoulder the blame of their ancestors.⁵ In order to ensure history does not repeat itself, this feeling of shame must be passed on to future generations. Although the blame is not theirs, children all around the globe must be taught at an early age that this event was a horrible anomaly in human behavior, not a commonplace and acceptable act.

In addition to the preventative measures mentioned, the Holocaust must be remembered for the sake of all those who suffered through it. Many of those who perished in concentration camps or attacks remain nameless, lost to history. Every single one of those people deserve to be remembered and mourned, and even if we cannot know their names, their faces, what they accomplished in life, and what they had yet to do, we can at least recognize their sacrifice. If this event were to be covered up and erased from the history books, these people would have died in vain, and the lessons we can take from them would go unlearned. Instead of ignoring the existence of those six million, we should embrace them, find out about their lives, examine the

Echevarria, "World War II," IB 20th Century World History, Rampart High School, 2 February 2010.

reasons why they were targeted, and resolve never to allow this kind of atrocity again. It is vital that the Holocaust is not forgotten, for without it, humanity would surely be doomed to make the same mistake. It must be impressed upon future generations that these extremes only achieve more blood, more turmoil, more suffering. Ideas must not be allowed to have so tight a grasp on our minds as to block out reason and awareness of others.

Today, racial wars are still waged and unfortunately, genocides are still carried out. Rwanda, Darfur, Armenia, and Burma are just a few examples of the hatred and ideological warfare present since the horrors of the Holocaust.⁶ In order to prevent the continuation of racism and prejudice, today's youth must embrace a more global perspective, in the classroom as well as socially. Today, more and more schools are promoting tolerance and acceptance of new ideas and differing cultures. Students organize clubs and events that celebrate differences between individuals. It would seem then, if the resources are already available and our collective attitude is shifting, it is left up to the individuals to make a change. In today's world, more emphasis is being placed upon international affairs, global perspectives, and acceptance. In order for this change in attitude to continue, young people must learn to listen to the message their environment is promoting. Oftentimes, today's youth focuses on those ideologies that are rebellious and promote chaos. However, if they used that same energy towards ideas such as inter-cultural tolerance and recognized that we should celebrate our differences, racism and prejudice would have less of a hold on our society.

In addition to today's youth, the older generation must also hold responsibility for teaching their children to be tolerant instead of violent. If they do not have a good leader to follow, the future generations cannot be expected to improve the quality of racial acceptance.

⁶ Elizabeth Kirkley Best, "Genocide," *Shoah Education Project Web*, 28 Mar 2010, <<http://www.shoaheducation.com/genocide.html>>.

They must be taught open-mindedness as well as respect, something that many of today's youth lack, unfortunately. It comes down to having a good foundation of values that have been presented by a parent or leader. Once those values are in place, the individual can then begin to help others change their point of view and fight against the destructive forces of racism and violence.

While the Holocaust was a tragic occurrence, the lessons it teaches ensure that future generations are aware of the dangers of ideologies that promote violence and hatred based on culture alone. Those who died in the genocide, as well as those who survived, should not be forgotten. The Holocaust must be remembered for their sake and should act as a deterrent for future racial violence. Today's youth is responsible for remembering these lessons, and hopefully this goal of acceptance seems more attainable than in 1945.

Works Cited

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