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For the Past, For the Future: Remembering the Holocaust

"For the dead and the living, we must bear witness."

Elie Wiesel

500,000 people dead, 2.5 million displaced, and one horrific genocide. This is the story of Sudan, and perhaps what's even more frightening—it is still occurring to this very moment. Today, countless thousands are terrorized simply because of the utterly senseless fighting in Sudan. These innocent civilians are denied of their basic rights, savagely attacked and raped, and mercilessly stripped of the very right to live. Sound familiar? It is a modern Holocaust, happening right in front of the eyes of the world. The atrocities are a reflection of the ignorance in humanity – and the fundamental need to pass down the lessons of the Holocaust to a new generation.

The crisis in Sudan has been an appalling reflection of what our civilization is capable of. Various local and political factions have caused chaos in this African country while the Khartoum government simply stands and watches. But perhaps what's even more alarming is the fact that there are countless other situations happening across the world – religious persecution in the Middle East and Asia, instances of ethnic cleansing in Africa, and so much more – that are rarely noticed but just as horrifying. People are suffering... hurting...and dying, simply because we as a human race cannot recognize the importance of one human life. By learning about the Holocaust, then and only then can we truly understand and ultimately give voice to the voiceless across the world.

The current situation in Sudan is strikingly similar to the Holocaust – both involve a mass extermination of a particular sector of the population, and both were largely ignored at the beginning because of the lack of public awareness. But we ought not let history repeat itself, and consequently, the magnitude of the Holocaust and its immeasurable lessons should consistently be highlighted. What exactly are the lessons? The message that tolerance instead of belligerence is the best solution to any conflict – that we as humanity must collectively promote the peaceful coexistence of every individual within all societies. By ignoring others' existence and right to humanity because of preconceived notions or prejudices, we are effectively disrupting the road to a more harmonious world and inevitably leading to genocides and wars. We must not let another Holocaust happen and stand so blindly while it occurs. We must, with all our power, exterminate the evils that threaten to extinguish the very humanity in us. Spurred on by radicalism, many Germans blindly followed Hitler's words, disregarding the humane side of each of them. Similarly, many Sudanese stand idly by, unaware of the suffering facing their fellow countrymen. The lessons of the Holocaust are profound, but more importantly, we need to apply it to our daily lives because every second matters in deterring the next Janjaweed invasion to another innocent village.

It is so vital for us to remember the Holocaust and its importance because in my generation, the generation infatuated with celebrities, video games, and the iPhone, it is increasingly hard to remember that history—that a collection of events from a distant and seemingly inconsequential past—actually affect our lives. Even though many teens are mind-numbingly unaware of global events, it has become imperative to make ourselves think globally and critically, especially in our increasingly interdependent society. As the

old adage goes, history repeats itself, and only by critically examining our past can we truly call ourselves informed citizens and prevent another Holocaust. Yes, the temptations of a consumerist society may be hard to resist, but being educated about our world offers us a better window to act upon tragedies like the Darfur genocide. There is a need to pass down the lessons of the Holocaust for the next generation because we are the future – we have the power to continue living the legacy that the Holocaust provides. As Congressman Tim Holden once remarked, the Holocaust must stay relevant because it "forces us to examine the responsibilities of citizenship and confront the powerful ramifications of indifference and inaction" (Roth 14).

We students, however, can, must, and will combat prejudice through our daily actions, starting right this moment. I have personally become involved in the fight against the violence that plagues global conflicts. I am involved in organizations that seek to prevent the outbreak of such violence, such as Amnesty International and other activist groups. Through these organizations, I seek to disperse knowledge about the past to inspire action in the present, leading innovative projects and starting programs that harness the power of technology. For instance, as president of the local Amnesty chapter, I try to raise the awareness of international events such as the Darfur conflict through various efforts such as a media campaign. I have discovered that if we are only persistent in our efforts, people do open their ears—and hearts. I successfully got the word out to many who were previously unaware and also brought enough enthusiasm that some have decided to join the activism movement! Through this experience, I have learned that students can indeed shape history in combating prejudice. There is not one simple way to achieve this, yet the perfect formula for success consists of students combining their

creativity and passion together to accomplish something. My recommendation to aspiring youths who feel strongly about a cause? Start a project, do something groundbreaking that will engage the minds of others and bring about change. Create an awareness campaign; start a letter-writing drive; do a media campaign; collect funds while educating others – the possibilities are truly infinite.

But ultimately, it is the collective efforts of everyone that shakes mountains. Students must recognize the importance of education in past events by studying them in and out of the classroom. Aristotle once observed that "the fate of empires depends on the education of youth." After all, education is the key to everything, and only by properly educating ourselves can we effectively see things in a new light and bring about change. I firmly believe that we should place special emphasis on ethics and civic studies in school—indeed, even require them—to enable students to better comprehend the magnitude of events like the Holocaust and its legacy. Too often schools are unable to look beyond the simple core subjects like math or science. It is their duty to broaden every youngster's mind by fostering a sense of citizenship and responsibility; sadly, though, many focus more on producing achievement scores rather than enlightening us through curriculum to produce conscientious citizens.

The Holocaust, as Stephen Ambrose aptly notes, "was the most evil crime ever committed" (Dwork 9). Then, millions were senselessly massacred under the power of one man – of one evil and hateful man. But we must not – we cannot – let history repeat itself. We must remember the Holocaust for its lessons, for posterity, and for the bettering of mankind. Why? Because I'm a firm believer that despite everything, goodness will ultimately triumph, but only if we let it. We must play our role in attaining global

harmony and peace by promoting activism and crying out against the injustices of the world. It may be a small act of kindness or even a major project, but it makes the world of difference.

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