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### The Torch Has Been Passed

Stereotypes are a deadly poison, infecting the minds of youths and spreading seeds of destruction that lead to mass genocide. No event exemplifies this principle as well as the Holocaust, where the vicious cycle of prejudice, racism, and stereotyping turned Europe into a massive grave. While the world watched, the Nazis systematically murdered millions of people for the simple fact that they existed. The unspeakable crimes and unutterable violence of that time make the Holocaust, as Stephen Ambrose puts it, the single "most evil crime ever committed," one that must never be forgotten, one that we must strive to prevent from ever happening again.

As the last generation that will ever be able to look upon the faces of Holocaust survivors, to hear their stories from their own lips, and to see the black numbers, like a brand, on their skin, it is our duty to carry their memories into the future. If we allow those memories to die with them, we betray them again, letting their names and their stories sink back into the dark anonymity that the Nazis strove so hard to cast over their victims. If we allow ourselves to forget the victims' experiences, we are letting the Nazis win in the end.

The groundwork for Holocaust remembrance has already been laid by those that were there. One of the Jewish phrases most widely used to discuss the Holocaust is zachor. remember. In an effort to remember and to preserve the memory of the Holocaust victims, good work has already been done: in the Oneg Shabbat circle which buried milk cans documenting life in the Warsaw Ghetto, hoping that in the future, someone would find them who would care; in the creation of numerous museums and memorials dedicated to the Holocaust and its victims; and in

the writings of survivors and witnesses, such as Elie Wiesel, who are making certain that their story is told. In the hallway of the Holocaust Museum is a quotation from the Book of Isaiah, "You are my witnesses." The torch has been passed. It is now the duty of this generation to bear witness to the memories and the sufferings of the Holocaust victims. By keeping these memories alive, we attach faces to the events, and it is these faces and the stories behind them that humanize the Holocaust for those of us who never experienced it. That humanization is vital, for if we forget the enormous suffering of the Holocaust, we lose any meaning that we attach to the event, permitting it to occur again and again. When the loss of human life and dignity ceases to mean anything to us, it is then that genocides are allowed to happen again.

If the Holocaust has taught us anything, it is that indifference has powerful ramifications. The Holocaust could never have taken place were it not for the widespread inaction that was the world's response to the Nazi's actions; millions of Jews, Gypsies, Slavs, homosexuals, political dissidents, and other minorities were tortured and killed with incredible inhumanity because of the simple fact that most people stood by and did nothing to stop the Nazis. By 1943, four million Jews had already disappeared; yet, the Allies and Pope Pius XII were largely mute as the Nazi atrocities continued in Germany. The police, bureaucrats, and civilians in occupied countries watched in passive indifference as their neighbors were loaded into cattle cars and taken away. America, having just emerged from its isolationist cocoon, stuck its head in the sand and tried to ignore the reports of persecution coming from Europe. But how could they ignore one of the greatest horror stories in history?

There were some heroes, however, such as the famous Anton Schmid and Oscar Schindler, and their actions and sacrifices must never be forgotten either, for it is these people that we must emulate in the face of future discrimination. We must look to and learn from the Danish

fishermen, who smuggled nearly all of Denmark's Jewish population into Sweden in September 1943. We must follow in the footsteps of the four hundred rabbis who marched on Washington, D.C., in an effort to encourage the American government to rescue Jewish refugees. And we must never forget or cease to honor the countless people who opened up their homes in order to hide Jews and other minorities, sacrificing their own safety. It is to these people that we should look to when we find ourselves faced with their choice: the choice of whether to watch silently as other humans are stripped of their dignity or to take a stand against injustice.

As the torch is passed to a generation that will not know the living survivors of the Holocaust, it is now our responsibility and moral obligation to help other human beings in need. The Holocaust has shown us the consequences of inaction and indifference; never again can we simply stand aside and watch as injustice unfolds around us. We must learn from this tragedy, and we must stay vigilant against such inhumanity in the future. Never again can we fail to take a stand; never again can we fail to protest. As Elie Wiesel said, "Neutrality helps the oppressor, never the victim. Silence encourages the tormentor, never the tormented." Everyone can make a difference by not being indifferent. The Holocaust has shown us that humankind has the potential for great evil as well as for great goodness. We have that choice before us. Confronted with discrimination in our world today, we can choose apathy and inaction, knowing the consequences of that choice in the Holocaust, or we can choose to stand up against hatred. It is the choice we make that will determine whether or not the Holocaust will ever happen again.

But how can I, just a high school student, prevent such a thing from ever happening again? How can I combat the prejudice and discrimination in our world today? It is so easy to scoff at the idea that one person can change the world, but if Hitler, through sheer force of personality, could convince people to allow acts of such terrible inhumanity to occur, then is it

not also possible for just one person to prevent injustice by being an advocate for human rights, by promoting an end to tyranny, and by actively trying to end discrimination in our world? All we need is people that will stand up and say something, anything, in protest to prejudice, stereotypes, and discriminative violence, someone who will join a march for peace or organize a protest against injustice. As Carol Matas once wrote, "What are our choices? We can despair and curse, and change nothing. We can choose evil.. .and create a world based on hate. Or we can try to make things better." As this generation goes into the world, preparing to become the leaders of tomorrow, what will our choice be? Hopefully, it will be our decision to stand with the weak, the persecuted, and the despairing. Perhaps we will create a new world, one that reflects Yehuda Bauer's words, in which we are not victims, we are not perpetrators, but above all, we are not bystanders.

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