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Apathy: The Support System of Genocide

Genocide is an evil that is spawned by the hatred of a few, but sustained by the apathy of the many. World-renowned Nazi hunter Simon Wiesenthal proclaimed that the prevention of future genocide can never be achieved by merely prosecuting those who are directly responsible for crimes against humanity. Rather, the burning presence of genocide can only be extinguished with the help of those who have seemingly no involvement. Genocide's continued existence is made possible by the general public. Those who live free from persecution often adopt the mentality that showing gratitude for their good fortune is an adequate response to the suffering of others. It is this very mentality that prevented more Jews from being saved during the Holocaust. It is this very mentality that prevents a moral and modernized world from intervening in the ruthless massacres taking place in Darfur. The masses have the power to advocate on behalf of those who cannot defend themselves. Those who do not know or care about these tragedies not only miss their chance to aid those in need, they undermine the ability of the masses as a whole to help others.

While leaders such as Adolf Hitler and Pol Pot instigated bigotry and murder, they should not be the focus of any educational program. To prevent genocide, the spotlight should be shifted away from the psychotic few causing the harm, and to the apathetic many who can prevent it. To educate people as to how they can become part of an active and conscientious society, school systems should incorporate mandatory units on genocide into their curriculum. Once an entire generation is educated, it will increase the chances of present and future governments becoming more human-rights oriented. Students should learn about atrocities committed during the Holocaust and in Darfur, Cambodia, Rwanda, and former Yugoslavia. The curriculum should involve general speakers, first-person accounts, and powerful literature. Also, the lessons should

emphasize the power that individuals can exert, such as righteous gentiles during the Holocaust, or heroes during the Rwanda genocide. Collectively, these elements will demonstrate that the horrors that have and which are still taking place are preventable. Schools will be responsible for preparing its students to fight for the rights of humanity. Efforts should be made to teach journalism advocacy, lobbying the government, running foreign aid projects, and exercising one's rights as a citizen. If administered with care, these initiatives can create a more charitable generation that will empathize with the needs of those who are poor and unfortunate. In addition, these activities will equip future leaders with the skills they need to lead a society that defends the oppressed, while nurturing compassion and a sense of obligation to the human race as a whole.

Teaching people the inherent goodness of acceptance and coexistence is crucial in eradicating bigotry and prejudice. After instilling these values, however, it is important to ensure that these values are turned into action. Many young, educated, and accomplished individuals in the world today are afflicted by a sense of cynicism and apathy. Whether this is caused by frustration with the government or disillusionment brought on by events occurring in the 21st century, it is crucial to help our generation understand that failing to act is a conscious choice. To foster the bonds of our common humanity and encourage involvement in the global community, it is important to expose people to alternate cultures. The government should consider constructing a mandatory one year social service commitment for all high school or college graduates. During this year, young men and women would do volunteer work in communities that exposes them to different cultures or races. This exposure will help individuals understand and appreciate their role in the global community. It may also foster a more empathetic society that considers understanding the needs of different peoples not just socially acceptable, but a way of life.

The key to preventing genocide lies not just in the politicians and policy molders, but in the common man. If our generation can actively empathize with the less fortunate, we can take a major step towards eliminating genocide once and for all. Implementing a hands-on genocide unit into the school curriculum will undoubtedly inspire many people to sympathize with the downtrodden, while realizing their own potential as human

beings. Exposing people to the world around them will help them recognize their affiliations with all of mankind, rather than only their own culture. Having citizens give back to the unfortunate through a mandatory community service programs will instill a greater sense of personal responsibility into young adults. Bigotry, prejudice, and intolerance will never end on their own. If people are raised in a society that does not take a stand against these evils, they will not overcome the xenophobia that has, historically, bred hatred throughout the ages. It is through education, experience, and action that our generation will learn to stop fighting humanity's diversity and instead begin acknowledging and accepting it with a sense of awe and true understanding.

Bibliography

Wiesenthal, Simon. The Murderers Among Us. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1967.