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A Line in the Sand: Defining and Educating about Genocide as Preventive Measures

The bystander effect is defined as “the tendency for any given bystander to be less likely to give aid if other bystanders are present” (Myers G-2). This phenomenon goes largely unnoticed in most cases, but at times the world cannot help but notice and be ashamed when confronted with its own lack of empathy. The Holocaust had its origins seeded deep in history; anti-Semitism was and still remains an unoriginal subject. But it was the lack of commitment and refusal of realization shown by the world powers at the time that allowed the hatred and methodical destruction against the Jewish people to reach a flash point in Germany and eventually bring Europe and finally the world to conflagration. This willing ignorance and arbitrarily bound, fearful stance has permitted the continuing genocide the world sees today, and as long as nations succumb to ignoring responsibility, no progress will be made to see an end to genocide.

With a seed of hate planted in the mind of a charismatic leader, the devastation of thousands was given berth to flourish. A Europe left wounded and catching its breath by World War One turned a blind eye to the frenzied Hitler’s schemes. Avoiding war was pivotal towards progress, and the concept was made all the more easier to swallow by complacent forecasts of resolution rather than the bitter truth that Hitler’s appetite could not be satiated by simply ruling Germany alone. But Europe did not house the only informed powers; many other nations knew of the growing threat as well. Non-intervention prevailed, and subsequently, nations were shackled to arbitrary protocol and only roused themselves, some later than others, after the horrific pogroms had begun. In no way can the bravery and determination of the soldier’s of nations be diminished, but the initial cowardice and failure to act cannot be discounted as the prime enabler of the Holocaust.

So what has the world learned? The world has learned a new word, genocide, but the application of that word does not bring the immediate action promised and fails to invoke the oath of “never again” (Straus 1). Terrible crimes are being committed in Darfur primarily against African Muslims, and these attacks seem fueled by the tension between the Arab and African cultures--what is more, the aggression of the Arab sect is backed by the government, which often attacks villages in coordination with the Arab militia, or the janjaweed (Straus 1). The loss of thousands upon thousands of lives has yet to initiate a response from international powers, highlighting the difficulty in rousing world interest in humanitarianism and the embarrassment which comes from the foreshadowing of repeating past mistakes (Straus 1). Darfur harkens back to the failures with Rwanda, when much of the same stigmas against labeling and defining a massacre as “genocide” prevented the protection of lives (Straus 1). The U.N. has and has had its hands tied by differing viewpoints in the definitions and taboo linked to identifying genocide and continues to find it difficult to enact tentative steps against state-sponsored murder (Straus 1). Interests in business with Sudan has prevented action and partially allowed the heinous killing to continue (Straus 1). With such a focus on comparative trivialities such as economy, it hardly takes long to realize how genocide continues to remain a scourge of humanity.

The steps required to fulfill the promise of “never again” are relatively miniscule, if completed in concert with humanitarian efforts from all countries. No nation should idly watch as another destroys its own people, and the very idea of doing such a thing should be universally reviled. This ideal is more easily said than done, which brings many to contemplate the semantics of intervening, raising the age old question of which takes precedence: personal security or the security of others. Herein lies the first step in preventing genocide, which is the use of wide-spread information. Education is key to preventing genocide. Media in the U.S. has generally ignored the events in Darfur, leaving it in obscurity to a majority of citizens. This type of close-minded mentality must be demolished, and global awareness must be constructed in its stead. The people of every nation must be taught and made aware, and in so learning, rise and petition their government to take action, while simultaneously accepting the responsibilities they will

hold for said action. Conflicts within the definition of genocide and interpretations of the Genocide Convention must be hammered out and the taboo put upon intervention must be broken. Simply allowing government- promoted killing leads towards inducing more of the same acts of brutality. The Security Council must take a firm and united stance, admonishing murderous leaders and bringing justice to countries where justice painfully absent. Without a coordinated effort, genocide will continue to flourish in the shadows of national scrutiny.

Genocide must be fought against on all fronts and constantly guarded against in order to be properly prevented. No exceptions can be made, lest an example of permissibility becomes standard. A world in which race, religion, and custom form grounds for extermination cannot be allowed to exist, but rallied against by widespread education. The reins of the future must be taken up collectively, and the world must be steered away from a cold, introverted mind set. The fire of holocaust must never be allowed to burn the people of the world again.

Works Cited

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