

Rise up

Elie Wiesel, a Holocaust survivor, mournfully recollects, “Never shall I forget the little faces of the children, whose bodies turned into wreaths of smoke beneath a silent blue sky” (Wiesel.) It may seem comforting to categorize genocide as the carried-out work of evil men, but the fact of the matter is, such acts entail great populations turning a blind eye. Amidst the great tragedies that define humanity’s depths of cruelty, the Holocaust stands distinctly; The Third Reich’s barrage went beyond the unfortunate genocide, it was the desecration of a culture, the stomping of a heritage, the eclipse of a people’s light, yet perhaps the worst of all, it was committed in the context of millions who stood idly by. The survivors often recount, within their personal narratives, just how horrifying it was to be victimized, all-the-while painstakingly aware of the audience of silent millions. Within the darkness of *Night*, Wiesel woefully retells the horrors of his sudden realization and profound inner conflicting question, “*if God exists, why is he silent?*” Simultaneously, Vladék Spiegelman ponders how the ignorance to the movements of the Third Reich, his included, was a direct precursor the horrors that occurred. The expressed commonality arising from the ashes of genocidal tragedy, specifically, the Holocaust, is that the major contributor in the face of evil is a silent audience. And so it follows, it must be our foremost prerogative, as people, to uplift voices at the first sign of an infringement upon human rights. We must begin on the micro-scale, establishing the structural support through an informed population, intent on the insurance of a better tomorrow. This can be done through instilling humanitarian beliefs in our children through education, and fulfilling this process by preserving the memories of survivors, as a reminder to do right by them.

Such will not be quick, it will take generations to sustain long-lasting lessons as a safeguard against genocide. The fact of the matter is, we can no longer stagnate the fight for human rights through policies and government procedures. The only infallible defense against genocide and attacks on human rights, is a knowledgeable population intent on the security of human rights.

The dismal black waters of the depths in which humanity can sink were terrifyingly captured in the pages of *Night*; In which, Elie retells his own story, from the childish wonder instilled within him by religious education, to his grim awakening to his own self, now forever-afflicted by the genocide. The opening pages reflect Elie's, and the German people's, reaction to the fast-paced movements of the Third Reich, with an unsettling fear, yet all the same, silent relinquishment. Elie remorsefully remembers the gradual appearance of the Third Reich, "our first impressions of the Germans were rather reassuring... First edict: Jews were prohibited from leaving their residences for three days, under penalty of death..." These movements spread like an epidemic, creeping around the edges of Wiesel's life, embedding itself within the proud Judaism he bore, darkening and belittling it to but a golden star forced upon his clothing. He recalls once more, his own father's comforting tone, "The yellow star? So what? It's not lethal..." Only until it became too late were the horrors truly grasped, within the moral hollows of Birkenau and Auschwitz. As a recovering humanity, still damaged by the abhorrent blows of the Holocaust, we must examine its foundational harbinger. Wiesel maintains that it was simply the encountered *silence*, the overwhelming silence in sight of the Third Reich's evils that provided and facilitated its spread. Elie grapples with the concepts of silence, even as it relates to his all-powerful and benevolent, yet silent God. If God is following suit with the fearful millions

unwilling to dissent, then what does that make God? Wiesel answers, that the true dialogue lies between Man and the God within him, that prayers are answered by our profound inner selves. And so he accepts, that without the immediate physical being set to intervene upon moral undoings, the responsibility falls upon ourselves. *We* must take action against oppression, *we* must rise up against injustice, it is *our* duty to protect the goodness in this world. Elie leaves in his memory a powerful obligation; we've seen how anti-humanitarian movements are able to proliferate so long as it is followed by a fear-inspiring army, how the feeling of powerlessness under a larger threat can crumble communities, leaving the remains vulnerable to tyranny and oppression. A humanitarian-based education system would instill the necessary values in the populace that, in aggregate, forms a powerful defense against acts of genocide. Alongside this, the only way we can truly understand how to prevent such terrible ideologies from spreading, is to preserve and memorialize survivor narratives. These narrative are cautionary tales, and must be looked upon in each instance as dubiously anti-humanitarian beliefs grow and thrive in different parts of the world. Only with our unified awareness and a vigorous intent to end genocide, can we truly move forward, toward a better tomorrow.

Vladek Spiegelman, having endured the same travesty, reflects on the unsettling calm leading up to the thunderous storm that rained down, scorching a path marked with agony and anguish, forever-scarring the wistful snow blanket that was our faith in the goodness of humanity. Yet, this blanket *can* be sewn once more, we *can* heal, given that we examine the fundamental harbinger of the Holocaust and work toward reparations. Vladek begins his experience as young Polish worker, simply seeking the rose of a loving family; he regretfully

recounts the slow events leading up to the occurred horrors, the discriminant policies that the people felt far too powerless to stand against. One such moment was when he finds that his father-in-law's factory had been taken. He recalls being told, "Don't you know? ALL Jewish businesses have been taken over by 'Aryan managers'" (Spiegelman.) At the same time, any thoughts of revolt were silenced by the forceful movements of the Third Reich's anti-Semites. Spiegelman recollects, "It was many, many such stories – synagogues burned, Jews beaten with no reason, whole towns pushing out all Jews – each story worse than the other" (Spiegelman.) And so this feeling of powerlessness stemmed and permeated the fog of arid silence that clouded around the Third Reich's movements. The only way to obviate such, the only way to ensure that the people's voice is never such stifled out of fear, is to encourage and provide a global structural support for the betterment and protection of human rights. In light of the greatest abyss humanity has ever befallen, we can no longer distinguish conflicts by political borders, each battle for human rights is a piercing in the rising balloon that is humanity protection against genocide, and so we must make a collective effort to close that wound at the first sight. As Vladek noted, citizens took part in the Third Reich's movements, illuminating the great part that the people maintain in the security of human rights. Mindful of this, an informed populace, aware of humanitarian values and the narratives of past genocide survivors, therefore gives us the best safeguard against such movements.

With the memory of the Holocaust in mind, we cannot afford to take action lightly. With a humanitarian education system and the preserved memories of genocide survivors, the pathway to the security of human rights is here. As a full collective effort, we must unite beneath a global

force, one set on the protection of human rights and the security of the people's voice. It can only be with a concerted and invigorating spirit that we fight for human rights. The unending war for human rights is not won through government policies and laws, no we have seen these laws fall. Governments break down, policies are overridden, but the people? If we can all commit to a better tomorrow and pledge ourselves to the security of international human rights, then the seeds for a safer tomorrow are planted. As we look upon ourselves, sitting beneath the spring of innocence and benevolence, we cannot taint the memory of the horrid winter we once endured, a winter still stirring in foreign countries. With this, Wiesel preaches, "Take sides... silence encourages the tormentor, never the tormented" (Elie.)

Works Cited

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- ii. Spiegelman, Art. *Maus: a Survivor's Tale*. Pantheon, 2011.
- iii. Wiesel, Elie, and Marion Wiesel. *Night*. Hill and Wang, a Division of Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2017.