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The Holocaust: How Acts of Civil Disobedience Saved Thousands of Lives

“It is forbidden to kill; therefore all murderers are punished unless they kill in large numbers and to the sound of trumpets.” As stated by Voltaire, war is justified only by the victors who write the history as the defeated did not live to tell the truth. Ultimately war is a perplexing issue caused by strife between people of different cultures, beliefs, and goals. When analyzing wars, the main purpose is to understand the actions of both sides, draw a conclusion, and apply the conclusion when making challenging decisions for the future. In the cases of history’s senseless genocides, all the conclusions drawn only reaffirm the presence of bigotry and racism in humanity’s cultures. Millions of people have been killed due to many cultures’ inability to accept the existence of others with different interest and beliefs, or the existence of different races in the world. One of the most stunning examples of genocide in recent history is the Holocaust, in which about 5.7 million people who practiced the religion of Judaism were slaughtered in death camps like sheep. Though this meaningless massacre was caused by the blind obedience of the German people to the ruling Nazi party, there were thousands of citizens who tried to go against the ruling government and help the innocent from persecution.

There are many examples of outstanding citizens who sought to end the plight of the Jews, homosexuals, disabled, and gypsies. A prime example of a ‘blind German sheep’ who changed his ways and helped prevent the bloodshed of 1,200 Jews was Oskar Schindler. As a German industrialist who entered Poland with the sole purpose of making money, he intervened in the harsh Nazi tactics by employing Jewish people in his factories and paying off the police for their silence. Later, when commenting on his wartime actions, Schindler said, “If you saw a dog going to be crushed under a car, wouldn’t you help him?”

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Another citizen who aided the escape and survival of many Jews was Raoul Wallenberg. Wallenberg was a Swedish diplomat in Nazi occupied Hungary who saved the lives of Hungarian Jews by issuing Swedish 'protective passes' for them. These passes were printed in yellow and blue with the coat of arms of the Three Crowns of Sweden in the middle. The Swedish government had allowed 4,500 passes to be issued; however, Wallenberg issued more than three times as many as he was allowed, saving the lives of many more people.

Another example of how the actions of responsible citizens helped save thousands of innocent people is the case with Bulgarian Jews. Bulgaria was the only Eastern European country where people protested against the deportation of their neighbors to concentration camps, so Bulgaria kept most of its Jewish population from the gas chambers and the crematoria. At the beginning of World War II, the Jewish population of Bulgaria was 48,000. At the end it was 50,000, making Bulgaria the only country under Nazi rule to end the war with more Jews than at the beginning. Many outstanding citizens acted against the injustice of the Nazi nation, and an entire country stood up for the rights of its citizens.

In history, there are millions of men and women who blindly followed foolish beliefs and disregarded the suffering of others. When millions of men, women, and children were massacred for only the stigma attached to their religion, millions of Germans turned a blind eye, but a few sought to help. People like Oskar Schindler and Raoul Wallenberg have been commemorated for their civil disobedience and humane actions in the Holocaust memorial in Israel. The country of Bulgaria, who was allied with Germany, stood up against the deportation of its citizens to death camps. The acts of civil disobedience and humanity by responsible citizens helped prevent the slaughter of thousands of lives. As Alexander the Great stated, "I am not afraid of an army of

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lions led by a sheep; I am afraid of an army of sheep led by a lion.” Following the orders of a deranged leader blindly is not necessarily the right choice of action. The people who did not abide by the herd mentality of the common populace but were able to see the injustice in their society and acted responsibly will always be remembered for their heroic deeds of humanity. Everyone should try not to be a ‘sheep’ but act as responsible citizens and speak out when injustice occurs to insure that terrible events like the Holocaust do not repeat.