

1st Place, (tied) Junior Essay
Lily Bodnar
Hickory Day School, Sheran Thompson

Tolerance Does Not Equal Peace

If hope and peace are not gifts from God, then why do we wait for permission to pursue them? We face challenges at every turn of life, and now, although we are past the horrors of the 1940s, the hatred and resentment that began it all are still very present in our everyday world. The Holocaust was a terrible time, filled with death, destruction and hurt. However, there was one thing that could have stopped it all: an olive branch. Peace is a gift, but not the way we think. We have to be the catalysts that start new eras of peace and hope. If we don't step up and extend our hand to our neighbors, something like the Holocaust could happen again. We are in a turbulent time politically and everyone is lacking hope, but the thing about hope and peace is that they aren't gifts we receive from some higher power, but they are the gifts that we give to each other and that we owe to each other.

Tolerance is one of the most misunderstood topics of our time. The main problem we face with tolerance is that in some cases, people use their results to justify their means. In order not to become an accomplice of immoral behavior, our tolerance must be tempered, and we as a people cannot be accepting of keeping peace at any price. If we let our own compass be out of reach, then we have become no better than the people we are trying to stand against.

Some people view tolerance as welcoming new cultures into their living communities without pushback, while others see it as dealing with constant aggression, deceit, and enduring consistent monitoring in fear of persecution. This is a problem that has become even more prevalent in our culture today. The concept of "tolerance" has become a vessel and an excuse for hatred to instill in our minds. We have seen what hatred has blossomed

into in the past, and it eventually led to the deaths of six million people. It was our “tolerance” to the miles that were taken instead of the inches that set the stage for Adolf Hitler to damage the Jewish culture. We have to step in sooner, so that the inch is never taken in the first place. Starting with the segregation of Jews to the ghettos and not allowing them to attend school turned into shamelessly shoving them into cattle cars as if they were nothing more than wood chips fueling the fire that was Hitler’s power. The Jew’s world was burning before our eyes, and their cries for help were drowned out by the Nazi-led propaganda and persecution.

The truth is that there is no straightforward way to achieve peace. Everyone comes from different backgrounds, having different wants, needs, and values, which makes it virtually impossible to sit down to talk as enemies and leave as brothers. Everyone is scared of what conflict could bring: more death, destruction and hurt feelings. But if we aren’t honest with each other about what we want, peace will never truly be an option. We all have to compromise, listen to each other, and not talk over each other to see who can scream the loudest. Peace is feasible, however, if we continue to plant seeds of connection, forgiveness, and hope. Simply going to another political party’s rally, or sitting with the new kid at lunch can be the way you plant seeds in your community. We all just have to be willing to break the ground.

No road to peace is going to be easy, but fear of bloodshed and war cannot stop us from trying. We can’t change what happened in the past, but we have to take it as a terrible lesson learned and continue to move on with our best foot forward. We need to learn to be accepting and tolerant of cultures other than our own without sacrificing our own morals and becoming complacent. We must learn that peace is not agreeing, but being able to agree to disagree. If we take the time to learn about our neighbors and our fellow people, we will soon learn that peace can be achieved if we give it to each other. We can’t wait for a permission slip from someone else. It starts with us.