

Third Place Senior Essay
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Superheroes Speaking Up

In an ideal world, people always want to think of themselves as superheroes. In our minds, we can lift cars, outrun bullets, and even sacrifice ourselves for a better cause. We think we are all powerful, courageous and selfless. But in reality, are we? How many would put themselves in harm's way for the sake of a stranger, especially a stranger that the entirety of society tells you is a criminal? How many are willing to die for their morality?

Years of evolution have made mankind what it is today. Why is it that humans as a species have survived as long as they have? Natural instincts. Innate behaviors. These characteristics make it so that humans will instinctively protect themselves. Whenever presented with hypothetical ethical dilemmas, we will always put ourselves on a pedestal and imagine ourselves as heroes, saving the hiding Jewish family. We say that we would provide food, provide clothes, and provide safety for them. But how many have actually faced this situation? We have all heard of the few that were courageous enough to do so. These citizens have immense strength and resolve. They should be admired by all. They did what few could do: they went against their human nature. Of course there are other examples of such selflessness in modern times. Liviu Librescu, for example, held the doors to an auditorium closed during a shooting at Virginia Tech so that almost all of his students could escape. However, is it reasonable to expect every person to betray

their human nature? Is it probable that every single citizen will choose the morally high road in the face of potential consequences?

I think not. A far better choice of action is to prevent anyone from having to make such a choice. I am reminded of the poem, “first they came for...” taken from a speech by Martin Niemöller. It highlights the cowardice and passiveness of the German people as they realized that their society was becoming more and more dangerous. They were completely self-absorbed and would not speak out against the government unless the rules directly affected themselves. At the time, they had no such event to look to in history. The Holocaust was a terrifying and cataclysmic event that nobody would have thought that humans could possibly commit. However, we as a species now have a history of such persecution and genocide. It is a history that we must never forget. In consequence, we have an obligation to those who lost their lives in the Holocaust to learn from our mistakes and never allow history to repeat.

We must speak up against oppression. Before the situation escalates, we must put ourselves in the shoes of others and advocate for our neighbors. If racist, sexist, and oppressive rhetoric is addressed immediately, it will have no chance to grow. I believe that the most important action is to do all that can be done to prevent situations where people’s ethics and safety are at odds. Although it is still frightening to speak up at an earlier stage, the consequences of waiting for someone else to speak out are much worse. You must take your destiny in your own hands, and even though it seems you are putting yourself in danger, you are

ultimately saving yourself from further danger, as well as making a morally sound decision. The best choice of action is being proactive.