

PAUL SEIDEMAN COMPETITION 2017

Topic: Explain the significance of the Holocaust for the high school student today.

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The holocaust is significant to high schoolers because it provides us with one of the most hideous events for examining basic moral issues. It highlights all the problems we have in our society. It demonstrates, just how dangerous it is to be silent and indifferent to those that suffer or are being oppressed, it shows us how easy it is to become influenced by a person or figure in power, and the immense impact that will ripple into the future. The Holocaust was not an accident in history; nor was the genocide in any way inevitable. It occurred because individuals, organizations, and governments made choices that not only legalized discrimination, but also allowed and encouraged prejudice, hatred, and ultimately mass murder to occur. This is through the heavy use of Hitler's propoganda and how he was able to use that as a tool to rule over a whole country and expand that sphere of influence to impact on other nations. It was also the idea that he built upon, that one race could be ultimately superior to another.

But as Elie Wiesel, a holocaust survivor said, "No human race is superior, no religious faith is inferior. All collective judgements are wrong. Only racists make them." So it proves, just how important it is for us high schoolers to understand that we are living in a society and have always lived in a society, that if we do not protect and sustain democratic institutions or moral values, we can be so easily swept away with the crowd. We can become brainwashed by a political figure of power, just like the Nazi followers, and we can lose our way of thinking

for ourselves. It teaches us how dangerous and deadly a thing like propaganda is, and how that can further fuel hatred and racism. By studying the past to understand the present, we learn that human beings possess the power to control their behaviour, so we know the importance of making choices and come to realize, that one person can make a difference.

Abolishing the civil rights of one group can lead to the abolition of those rights for all, so each person must take a stand against evil or eventually risk forfeiting all individual freedom. It can significantly help us open our eyes, not only to educate ourselves about the problems in our developing world, but to also help us to develop, an acceptance and embracing of diversity, and to also build empathy, sympathy and help us reflect on the events of history, and know what happened and what history did, was wrong. The Holocaust was a watershed event, one of the dimmest moments not only in the 20th century, but also in the entire course of human history. And as the leaders of the future generation, we high school students need to learn and understand the roots and the ramifications of prejudice, racism, and stereotyping in our society. Because we cannot allow to be silent when we see another person suffering. It will never be acceptable, or excusable, how the people of Germany, people all over the world, allowed for so long, the Nazis to rule.

How through their lack of protests, and standing up for what was justifiably right, they allowed, right in front of them, the Holocaust to happen. It was a horrible tragedy, a systematically constructed genocide in which six million European/North African Jews were brutally killed by Adolf Hitler's Nazi Germany and their allies. The victims included 1.5 million children, and constituted about two-thirds of the nine million Jews who had resided in Continental Europe. Yet this is significant to high schoolers because it will get us thinking, about the use

and abuse of power, as well as the roles and responsibilities of individuals, organizations, and nations when confronted with civil rights suppression.

There is the horrible suppression of the Jews, as individuals like Eugene Black had to be stripped of his basic human rights, how he was so brutally treated more of cattle than a human, how he “saw an SS man hit his mother across the face and push her on to the lorry. I wasn't allowed into the house; I was forced onto the lorry with the rest of his family and other Jewish people from the ghetto. The lorry was driven to a nearby brickyard, where the Jewish population was being forcibly gathered together. I and my family were ordered into railway cattle trucks and from there transported to Auschwitz Birkenau. I was separated from my mother and sisters, then also from my father. After being completely shaved and then showered, I was given my number, 55546, and a striped uniform. “Only animals would be assessed by numbers, not humans, not rightful people of the society. To be put into concentration camps, forced to do endless hours of harsh labour, with nothing but the bare minimum of food, Eugene described it as “a hellhole. People were dying all over the place”.

This is only one person's experience in the other 6 million stories. The significance of the holocaust was so brutal, 6 million families were affected, more even. Their heritage, their traditions, their religion, their ancestry, their past, all cruelly cut off. For some high school students, that is their families. That is a gap in their histories. And there are still so many impacts, for some, they will never have gotten to know their grandparents, their relatives, for some they are still looking. Jewish parents are still looking for their hidden children, their families so harshly separated. For some high school students will lose their family backgrounds and their customs, their identities torn.

People like Saul Dreier, a Holocaust survivor who thought he lost his entire family during the World War II murder of millions by the Nazi regime. After almost 70 years of thinking he was alone, he was able to locate his cousin thanks to the American Red Cross and its international family tracing services. He said how he was “held at Schindler’s camp and for many years believed I was the only survivor in our family,” “It was very hard.” The holocaust has directly affected so many people, it is still affecting them. It is such a significant impact even decades into the future, the damage never forgotten. So as we students gain insight into the many historical, social, political, and economic factors that all contributed to result in the Holocaust, we gain awareness of the complexity of the subject and come to understand that it is the responsibility of us, individuals in any society to learn to identify danger signals and to know when to stand up against it.

The impact overall of the Holocaust to a modern high school student of any race, is to reflect and understand the many mistakes we made as humanitarians to allow such an atrocious act to occur, because if we held a minute of silence for every person who ever died in the Holocaust, we would be silent for more than eleven and a half years. We must remember all the things that lead to the Holocaust, to remember not to succumb to the ruling of another person, whether or not they be powerful, to think individually for ourselves, and that will impact us in the most positive ways.

We will only then, be true people of our society humanitarians, who fight for the rights of every person of every race ethnicity. People who can indulge and accept difference and diversity, the true value of pluralism. To ensure that we will never let history repeat itself again. We must be upstanders in society not bystanders.