

# The simon wiesenthal museum of tolerance



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The Simon Wiesenthal Museum of Tolerance is a museum that explores the history of tolerance and intolerance throughout the world.

The general example of intolerance is the Holocaust, with many modern celebrations, such as Black History Month, defining what it means to be tolerant regardless of physical characteristics, gender, and religious beliefs.

The exhibits at the Museum displayed the various attempts and achievements that people have made in becoming tolerant of everyone, embracing their differences instead of marking them as flaws and mistakes.

Visiting the Museum was a wondrous, yet saddening, experience for me.

While the message of the museum is that of a positive one, one must still take in all of the negativity that came before. One of the first things that I learned upon entering the museum was that you have to take the good with the bad; the two concepts tend to exist simultaneously, so people should become accepting of both of them, as well as appreciative for the effect that one concept has on the other.

The numerous exhibits displayed varying messages for tolerance and equality for everyone. One of the memorable exhibits was the "Ain't You Gotta Right?" video that took up sixteen screens on the one wall, displaying interviews and footage from various rallies fighting for civil rights. The footage and interviews documented the battle for civil rights, a battle that is still being fought today by people who realize the importance of unity. It was through this exhibit that I was really able to get a grasp on the concepts of prejudice, discrimination, and stereotyping - these were all of the things that were holding citizens back during the attempts of equality. People were only looking skin deep, completely unaware that what they were looking for goes

much deeper than that. Another exhibit that I had checked out was the “ In Our Time” video that was being played.

This one was made more powerful to me because of the previous film and exhibit that I had visited. The “ In Our Time” video showed the different hate groups and acts of discrimination that were going on within our world today. Though I was already aware of it, I was still startled by how strong and alive discrimination was in our world; it was saddening to think that we have come such a long way, yet we are still so far from the absolute goal of equality.

One of the more moving, interactive exhibits was the one called The Point of View Diner, an exhibit set up to look like an old-fashioned '50s diner that played out numerous scenarios on television jukeboxes.

After the footage would be shown, we would be able to give our opinions on the things that we witnessed and heard. It made me curious to think of how the other viewers rated what they saw based on their opinions. Did we think alike, realizing that what we were seeing and hearing was wrong? Did we have different views of what was right and what was wrong? I was disturbed by what I was witnessing, and was hoping that others felt the same way. The most moving, and the most deeply disturbing, were the walls covered in pictures and stories of people who had been involved in the Holocaust. At the beginning of that tour, we were allowed to pick a card that told us personal information about an individual that had been in the Holocaust.

Throughout the tour, we would learn about them and their journey, of all they hardships they went through prior to being taken prisoner, up until – well, that varied with each person. At the end of the tour, we would be able

to find out if our person had managed to get out of the Holocaust alive or if they ended up dying before they were freed. It was devastating for me to see many of these people. While it hurt to know that anybody would be put into a situation like this, it especially bothered me to see how young many of these people were. Some were just babies - the majority of those did not make it past the gas chambers - and many were toddlers, three or four years of age.

Each of those children had a fifty/fifty chance of being able to avoid the gas chambers, though it could not be said if this was necessarily a good thing - they would have endured hell no matter what happened to them in the concentration camps. As I made my way through the museum, many of the concepts that I learned in class would ebb into my thoughts. Suddenly, seeing those concepts - simple words at first - take life changed how I understood those concepts. Now the terms and definitions I had studied had pictures and stories to go with them.

One of the concepts that I saw a lot of throughout the museum was that of cultural assimilation - the act of blending the minority with the majority of any given society. In many cases in regards to hate crime, prejudice, and discrimination, people would just try to make that minority fit in with the rest of society. This would cause a breach in the ideas of individualism and cultural differences. Ethnocentrism played a major role in the Holocaust, in regards to the positions that Adolf Hitler and his Nazis held themselves. Out of some twisted thought, Hitler believed himself to be better than the majority of those that he shared the world with, all based on how they looked and what religious affiliation they belonged to.

He found characteristics in himself that he did not see in others, and felt that this was a bad, threatening thing, so he decided to do something drastic about it and, one by one, “weed out” those in the world that he felt did not belong. It was in this sense that many viewed Hitler as a hypocrite, as some of his own characteristics went against those that he claimed to despise.

Globalization is one of the things that, I believe, is needed to get closer to a more united world. Globalization is the act of making something international, and that would include each other – we need to become more accepting of the fact that this world does not consist of only one type of person, though it does only consist of one race: the human race. Society needs to embrace these differences in their own little worlds, so that the world as a larger unit can experience it too. Though it was unnerving to see the kind of lives that many of the different cultures were forced to live because of their differences, it was amazing to see just how many different cultures there are in this world.

What amazed me more, standing in that museum, was realizing that at any one time and one place, there were many cultures within the same vicinity, learning and getting along. Perhaps it was a brief glimpse of what life could be like if people began acting together instead of against one another.

Another lesson that I learned from my visit is about self-awareness, about how I view myself in regards to my personality. Oftentimes, what is said the loudest hardly consists of words but of actions towards others.

After getting a glimpse of how others were treated because of their differences, I now know how I must act and react if I do not want to give off any negative impressions, especially when I do not mean them. From my

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experience at the Museum of Tolerance, I learned that if you can change one heart, you can end up changing the world. However, it is a big world, so equality is going to take its time, but there is still hope that one day we will be able to see the world stand as one, with every person being treated like the human being that they are, regardless of race, gender, sexual orientation, culture, or religious beliefs. This is a diverse world, it is made up of many different parts, and these differences are what makes it beautiful and a wondrous place to be. And within each of these diverse groups, there are individuals that make it even better; people need to learn to base their feelings on individuals and not on cultures - one does not decide the position of the others. A world without hate would be wonderful, but people are entitled to their individual quarrels.