

A light in the dark

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In his book, *Night*, Elie Wiesel, provides a firsthand account of the horrors of the Jewish Holocaust of World War II. He details the exhausting work, brutal routine, and daily despair of life in the camps, as well as the disbelief and fear leading up to his relocation and the hopelessness that followed his liberation. Wiesel does not shy away from even the most painful aspects of the camp; unflinchingly, Wiesel relates the resentment he felt towards his ailing father, the terrible relief of his death, the dark aroma of fear and death that lulled him to sleep, on nights when he lay crushed beneath dozens of emaciated bodies, unsure if he would live to see the dawn. At the conclusion of the tale of misery that is *Night*, one can only wonder, “What took so long?”.

The first concentration camp was established in 1933. War did not break out in Europe until 1939—six years. The United States did not join it until it was attacked at Pearl Harbor in 1941—eight years. The last camp was not liberated until 1945—twelve years. One has to wonder how it is possible for the suffering of so many to go unnoticed and unchallenged for so long. Millions suffering, crying out in anguish, dying by the thousands, and no one lifted a finger to help.

Perhaps the answer lies in the quote, “Ignorance is bliss.” The world chose not to see, because to see and do nothing would be a crime greater than that of the camps’ overseers, and to do something would mean war, pain, and death. It was much easier to ignore the cries of the long-persecuted Jews, and continue living normal lives. Wiesel, in his 1986 Nobel Peace Prize acceptance speech, provided the solution to such feigned ignorance “When human lives are endangered, when human dignity is in jeopardy, national

borders and sensitivities become irrelevant. Whenever men or women are persecuted because of their race, religion, or political views, that place must—at that moment— become the center of the universe.” When a country’s worth of helpless people are being persecuted, we have to sit up and pay attention.

No matter how difficult it is, the world— particularly America, savior of the “ tired, huddled masses”— must fight for them. The Armenians, Sarajevo, the Native Americans—all of them have faced war as their daily reality. The Ottoman Empire massacred the Armenians, Sarajevo was bombed and sniped daily, America slaughtered and pillaged the Native Americans; the Holocaust was no the first, nor the last case of needless human suffering, ignored. *Night* is not the only book to narrate a journey through violent persecution. It is simply the only one we were forced to acknowledge. The solution to the worlds’ disinterest, its ignorance, is precisely what Wiesel has provided us with: knowledge.

Books like *Night* and *Sarajevo: A War Journal* personalize the stories of persecution, and make them real. When the numbers of the dead suddenly become the faces of the dead, they are far harder to ignore. 21st century America has so much at its fingertips: newspaper and magazine articles; books, online or otherwise; social media, Twitter, instagram, Facebook, snapchat; TV; email; instant messaging. Communication has never been easier; telling the world a story has never been easier.

So many mediums can be used to spread the news, to inspire and educate others. Wiesel is right- “ whenever men or women are persecuted...that place must-at that moment-become the center of the universe.

” The Holocaust must never happen again. The Armenians must never happen again. The Native Americans must never happen again. Sarajevo must never happen again. It is so easy to say, and so hard to do. The only way we can truly keep that promise, is to expose those who cause and those who perpetrate the suffering.

To shine a light, even in the darkest of places. Shine a beacon on the most tumultuous areas of the world, force people to see the pain and suffering, show the world what is really happening, and then- stop it. Peace can only come when the strong pledge to protect the weak, and follow through. The suffering of those like Wiesel cannot be in vain. I believe in the strength of the United States, in the American Dream that we perpetuate, in strength, honor, freedom. It is my generation’s duty to fill in the cracks our parents and grandparents ignored, and restore the United States’s reputation as the protector of the weak and injured.

It is time to stand up. It is time to end the ignorance. It is time to fight.