

The Importance of Identity

A name, memories, a life, a future. What is the component that links these four seemingly unrelated words together? The answer lies in the gift of identity. Between 1933 and 1945, the Nazi regime orchestrated the “systematic, state-sponsored persecution and murder of six million European Jews.” When one searches, *What was the Holocaust?* That is the answer they will inevitably receive. However, how is it feasible to confine the atrocities of the Holocaust to any singular definition? This finite depiction fails to convey the full extent of the Nazi’s oppression against Jews, which engulfed much more than solely physical harm. Jews of the Holocaust were stripped of their bodies, but also the very essence of their humanity.

Following the Nazi invasion of Poland, German authorities established the Łódź Ghetto in 1940, which imprisoned 163,777 individuals. Two years later, mass deportations to the Chełmno extermination camp commenced. Amid this madness, a young boy lived with his twelve-year-old sister and father. In the spring and summer of 1944, he decided to chronicle his experiences in a diary. This boy writes about his consistent struggles to maintain hope at a time when the energy required to plan a better future is instead focused on the pursuit of a simple meal. In his writing, he pleaded with God about His neutrality and absence from the world, debated the fate of humanity, and dreamt of fame and a brighter future. Above all, he yearned for the opportunity to tell the world of his suffering. Tragically, this boy’s aspirations died in 1945 as the ghetto was liquidated, and he was presumably deported to Auschwitz Birkenau where he was murdered.

Little information is given about the diarist as his name, age, and background are unbeknownst to the reader. This human being, once full of vitality, ambitions, and hope, is now reduced to the label: “anonymous boy,” and as readers yearn to forge a relationship with him, the

harsh reality of the Holocaust continuously reminds them that this is not possible. The sole things keeping his fate from its complete historical omission are the words that he wrote in his diary and his choice to tell his story.

Unfortunately, this anonymous boy was not the only one whose identity was stolen from him. How many others were consumed by a history made voracious by Nazi horrors? How many were denied the luxury of a chance to tell their stories?

In an era where institutions proudly parade their commitment to inclusion and equality, we are still fighting for a voice against suppression and cruelty. On June 15, 2021, Texas House Bill 3979 was enacted, thereby imposing restrictions on educators discussing “divisive concepts.” This legislation prohibits public schools from incorporating controversial topics such as sex, racism, and critical race theory into their curriculum. Should educators bring up these “sensitive” subjects, they are required to maintain complete impartiality.

In October 2021, a school in Southlake, Texas conducted a training session for teachers regarding permissible books for classroom libraries. During this session, Gina Peddy, the School District Executive Director of Curriculum and Instruction, referenced this House Bill and used the Holocaust as an example. Incredulously, she instructed her staff to ensure that if they have a book on the Holocaust, there should be an accompanying one presenting an opposing perspective.

On October 7th, 2023, Hamas terrorists launched an unprovoked assault on Israel, resulting in approximately 1,200 deaths and taking roughly 240 people hostage. Since the attack, there has been a significant surge in antisemitism worldwide. Israel and the Jewish community face relentless slander in the media for simply existing. Uneducated individuals propagate this defamation by posting and disseminating uninformed propaganda regarding the attack.

Particularly alarming is the escalating antisemitic incidents on college campuses, leaving numerous Jewish students feeling vulnerable and unsafe. Presidents of Harvard, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and the University of Pennsylvania declined to acknowledge that advocating for the genocide of Jews violated the colleges' code of conduct.

These egregious acts of suppression and censorship not only undermine the memory of Holocaust victims but also constitute an assault on the very foundations of our history. By treating the largest genocide of modern history as a taboo subject, off-limits to the contextual understanding of students, we fuel the continuous spread of ignorance and antisemitism. Therefore, in the face of these challenges, it becomes imperative to remember the profound sacrifices made by Jews of the Holocaust, who relinquished their lives and identities so that we could obtain the freedoms they were denied. It is both our duty and a matter of paramount importance to honor their sacrifice and uphold their aspirations for a better world. The anonymous boy, alongside countless others, did not risk his life writing diary entries for future generations, only to have his existence forgotten and memory abandoned.

As our collective history and the future of education are threatened, it is crucial to pay homage to every individual identity lost in the Holocaust. By immersing ourselves in the tragedies of the Holocaust we uncover invaluable lessons through every name, memory, life, and future lost. Through the remembrance of our history and preservation of hope, we ensure that every lost dream finds new life through us. As upstanders, we possess the profound opportunity to carry forward the legacy of every individual mercilessly murdered in the Holocaust. It is through this legacy, coupled with hope, resilience, and a steadfast remembrance of the Holocaust, that we can commemorate the horrors of the past to forge a greater future.