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The Holocaust

What are the lessons of the Holocaust for individuals in modern society?

The Holocaust is a critical event in the history of Western culture, and its ramifications extend far beyond the Nazi regime under which it occurred, or the World War which simultaneously took place. It represents what could perhaps be the most devastating failure and breakdown of Western culture, resulting in the deaths of nearly six million Jews at the hands of the Nazi regime in Germany and the nationalist antisemitic sentiment it spawned. Without provocation or historical basis, millions of Jews were led to slaughter under the veiled pretenses of their responsibility for all the ills that befell the German population. Many people gave into this propaganda, without holding out for an alternative, even for the sake of morality.

While modern society would often like to eschew considering the Holocaust in order to avoid vague feelings of guilt or shame for its causes, it is inescapable that there is much to be learned from this event that affects us today. Why did such a devastation have to occur, and why was no one able to stop it sooner? These questions are still debated, but are crucially important to understanding and so restraining Western culture. Even more important is the consideration that, should such a devastating event as the Holocaust occur again, would we be prepared to stop it before it grew to unfathomable proportions? As difficult as it is to analyze the psyche of a war-torn and extremist, nationalist state from the 1940's, the situation is not much different when we consider persecutions going on today, all over the world.

The story of Konrad Latte is particularly telling of the lessons that we can learn from the Holocaust. The main theme of his story is that heroism under totalitarianism requires neither risking one's life nor any great heroic effort on one's part, but can be done simply with a little courage and cleverness. The people in his story refused to be volunteer members of the Gestapo and refused to give in to the mass hysteria of the Nazi regime, and chose to put humanity and the well-being of others first before their own safety. The key to undermining a totalitarian regime is to have the people reject the complete mindset that it forces upon them. As long as the people as a whole are not fully controlled, the regime is not complete, and humanity can still exist under even terrible conditions.

What is the significance of the Holocaust in European History?

The significance of the Holocaust in European History is great. It has and can be considered one of the greatest failings of Western culture, that after thousands of years such an event could occur without just cause or provocation. The Holocaust, the systematic murder of millions of Jews in Europe, occurred under a totalitarian regime and with little motivation other than the veiled propaganda that Jews were responsible for every ill that befell the Third Reich and its citizens. It occurred for years without much knowledge of its existence to outside countries, and even afterwards, has been rejected by many to this day of having actually occurred. If it were not for the conscious efforts of many unnamed German heroes, who potentially risked their lives in order to save Jews (though this was not always the case), then many more Jews would have suffered. And that it occurred under Hitler's regime, which could

have so easily been stopped by other nations before it came to a head, is nothing if not devastating to consider.

If we consider the Holocaust to be one of the most impacting events of the past century, we can see that the lessons we can learn from it are still applicable today, and are characteristic of Western society as a whole. The Holocaust can also be used as a brutal measuring stick by which our own sense of morality can be measured—what would we have done? What could we have done? And *why*? The questions the Holocaust forces us to answer not only help to make our society more moral and aware of itself, but also to bring some small hope that we will be capable of stopping an event like the Holocaust once again, if it were ever to occur. But the impact that the Holocaust had on the Jews of Europe—of whom nearly six million died—and the the question of how this could occur under the watch of the many peace-loving nations of the world, are some of the most important we must ask ourselves today.