

Senior Essay
First Place
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A Crime Against Humanity

We live in a world numb to hatred. As I write this, I need only think back two weeks to remember the last time a violent act of bigotry reared its head in the national news. Over those two days in mid-January, I had no idea of the events occurring in Colleyville, Texas, until an acquaintance reached out to a group of teen leaders in BBYO, my Jewish youth group, offering her support to anyone who needed it. I immediately sought to find out what had occurred, and when I learned of the then just resolved hostage situation, I was surprised, not at the occurrence of this terrible act of bigotry, but at how little reaction to it I felt. In a world where hate crimes oppress more and more victims every year, the best emotion I could muster was relief that the hostages escaped; however, the fact that members of my own minority religion were being terrorized left me seemingly unaffected. Clearly we have become desensitized to hatred, let it become normalized, watched it grow year on year, and at times many of us, myself included, let this happen in perfect silence. And so it grows, and so we watch it grow, and so it grows more. It grows to the point where I feel a disturbing lack of fear. Of course we should not succumb to fear and do the bigots' work for them, but if we cannot acknowledge the danger, then we cannot address it, and there is certainly a very real danger right now, growing more real the more we sit in silence. Silence acts as the ideal soil for the seedlings of hate planted centuries or even millennia ago, and the resulting shadow of hate now looms deeper and darker than ever.

The normalization of hatred means that not every such act can make national news, and these smaller actions can be just as impactful for individuals. Acts of bigotry now surround us so

much that we often do not recognize them. These smaller acts of hatred are rooted in indifference, not caring for the consequences of our actions. This indifference encourages hatred to grow. When we are ignorant of, or worse, when we actively ignore these microaggressions, we fall at the first hurdle of solving the problem: acknowledging the existence of the problem. Therefore, the solution to this epidemic of indifference towards hate is a relatively simple one: talking, educating, speaking up; simply put, breaking the silence. I have seen the positive impact this can have. Recently, having witnessed several uses of a common slur aimed at neurodivergent people by some acquaintances, I chose to speak out against this. I owed it to not just my neurodivergent friends and to others who are similarly marginalized, but also to myself as a member of another minority group, to stand up to these acts of hatred. I presented those who did not realize the bigotry implicit in that slur with a perspective which showed them the damage that it can do. The reaction I received was wholly positive. Small steps such as these force progress in an area where no progress is too small. Speaking out against and eliminating such smaller injustices prevents them from growing and feeding into larger acts of hatred. Thus we must begin to push out bigotry and its enabler, indifference, from our world. As a society, we cannot afford to shirk this effort and remain silent.

In today's world, where hatred is commonplace, even expected, we must eliminate this problem at its roots by speaking out against injustice. Last year we watched a bitter reminder of what the future otherwise holds, as extremists and members of hate groups attacked the United States Capitol. We must actively fight injustice, for sitting back condemns us to a world dominated by hatred. As Elie Wiesel said, "Neutrality helps the oppressor, never the victim. Silence encourages the tormentor, never the tormented." Indifference is a disease as virulent as any other, and it kills as well. The only cure is shattering the silence and speaking out against

intolerance. To silently and indifferently enable the hatred which marches in Charlottesville, riots in Washington, and kills in Pittsburgh, doing so much harm to humans, is to commit a crime against our humanity.