

2026 Elie Wiesel Competition

3rd Place Senior Essay

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The Consequences of Scapegoating and Unchecked Hatred

Between the years of 1933 and 1945, approximately 6 million Jewish people throughout Europe were brutally murdered by the hand of a government that advertised and bolstered the widespread loathing of Jews. The hate and dehumanization rapidly changed Germany's stance on the Jewish population, which occupied around one percent of the German population, toward the start of the Holocaust. They were seen as emotionless and nonhuman even before the Holocaust, as the majority of non-Jewish Germans blamed them for economic downturns in Germany after World War I, which gave this sudden persecution a justification. The Holocaust and other similar events demonstrate the dangers of scapegoating by highlighting the trust that people can put into propaganda that stems from blame but also showcase the consequences of unchecked hatred when one sees the impacts on the Jewish population in Europe through and after the war.

To begin, scapegoating, defined as placing blame for problems on a certain individual or group, despite not creating them, has been a very prevalent force in many atrocities similar to the Holocaust. The intentional antisemitic ways of scapegoating before and during the Holocaust revolved around propaganda sold to the public through newspapers, cartoons, etc., which contributed to the mass blaming for things like economic downturns after the Great Depression and Germany's loss of World War I. For years, the Nazis had built up an antisemitic ideology in Germany with the help of the ongoing struggles in the country, so people became increasingly receptive to the radical ideas that accused the Jews of terrible things. Over time, the desensitization of the German public eventually led to much less pushback to the Holocaust in general. This demonstrates that placing unwarranted blame on a certain group using propaganda can lead to a widespread acceptance of cruelty and a dangerous trend of apathy and discomfort towards that certain group. This pattern doesn't solely belong to large-scale events like the Holocaust, as I have observed similar forms of scapegoating through my personal lens. I, a half-Latino, half-white American Honduran teenager, have experienced, observed, and explored the two vastly different sides of my ethnicity throughout my life. One thing I have learned living in these two nuanced communities, which also happen to be the largest ethnicities in the US today, is the ethnic and cultural divide between the two. With that divide, I come bearing a new viewpoint on news stories and recent events in this country. Recently, I have observed and become more aware of an ongoing issue, which is the scapegoating of Hispanics. We are unfairly blamed for declines in the economy, losses of jobs, and an increasing crime rate in this country. Hispanics in modern-day America receive unnecessary judgment because of this scapegoating created by racists who influence the American public, which has created a detrimental effect on my community in America. This modern-day example reflects the qualities of the Nazi persecution of the Jews, as the scapegoating of Hispanics will and has created a normalization of discrimination and a fuel for resentment.

Additionally, prejudice isn't solely used for discrimination verbally, but when people's hatred is left unchecked, it transitions to widespread violence. During 1938, a horrific event took place, which was called Kristallnacht, meaning the night of broken glass. During the morning before the massacre, Joseph Goebbels, a Nazi propagandist, gave a passionate antisemitic speech to soldiers regarding their orders for the night. That night, one thousand four hundred synagogues were burned, Jews were assaulted, murdered, imprisoned, and eventually taken to concentration camps, all at the behest of the Nazi party and its sweeping ideology of hate across Germany. Although Kristallnacht wasn't the only act of terror during the Holocaust, it displays how one speech or order from an influential leader to an already hateful population can make a whole population act violently against one minority group. This tolerated hate causes long-term violence and harm to society, resulting in events like diasporas. Similarly, through my experience, I have seen blatant hate and violence towards my culture and community. The United States Immigration and Customs Enforcement Agency (ICE) has become increasingly violent in its arrests and detentions of illegal immigrants. The agency has not solely acted and detained illegal immigrants today, but there are records of the agency acting upon legal immigrants or Hispanics in general and acting with immense force and pressure. For example, the U.S.-born citizen, Leonardo Garcia Venegas, was first detained at a construction site by men in camouflage, which was not the first instance, as he was arrested a second time two weeks later when a group of immigration officers profiled him as undocumented. ICE agents are feared among the Hispanic community, not because of their enforcement of the law, but because of the violence and unprofessional manner in which they try to enforce it. These many injustices have shown to the American public that hate surges through not just this agency but its supporters. If this violence and hate can go unchecked multiple times over, as it has in recent years, my community will indefinitely see more of these injustices made.

In conclusion, the Holocaust demonstrates that when scapegoating is prevalent towards one minority, people become increasingly less empathetic towards that group, leading to the toleration of mass prejudice. It also shows the countless consequences of unchecked hatred, like violence made against certain groups, being largely easy to do. These themes haven't remained in the 1930s, as we see the hate and blame today placed on many other minority groups. My experience only encompasses a minuscule portion of these injustices, but despite that, I believe that it is immensely important to speak the truth about the hateful world that we live in because speaking about personal experiences can only bring more awareness to the ongoing problem. Watching the news today has moved me to take responsibility for doing something worth hearing in the future about my generation and my community. Together, we can raise this awareness across the world because even if the change is small-scale, it builds.

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