

2026 Elie Wiesel Competition
Special Commendation Senior Essay
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Indifference: Society's Acceptance of Unchecked Hatred and Scapegoating

In the years prior to the Holocaust, facing the distraught German economy and the loss of the will of the German people following the First World War, Adolf Hitler reunited the country. The core of this reunification was antisemitic, bubbling hatred against the Jewish population. In media like *"The Eternal Jew,"* the Jewish were portrayed as scheming individuals causing the loss of Germany in World War I and destroying the entirety of Western civilization. Under the slogan of "Make Germany Great Again," the road to Final Solution of extermination began.

Throughout history, the Jewish were portrayed as a categorized and othered group, the scapegoats of society. Jews weren't deserving of hopes or dreams, or many thought.

Discovering *"The Diary of Anne Frank"* as a grouchy 12-year-old, I saw myself in the narrative of a girl only a year older than me. We lived decades apart, and our circumstances were worlds apart. Yet we were teen girls with similar dreams and aspirations. Her fate, however, lay in the aftermath of the Holocaust. On April 11th, 1944, Frank wrote: *"Let me be myself and then I am satisfied."* By then, the Franks, along with the Van Pels family, had lived two years in quiet routine and constant fear, accompanied by the small joys of the Secret Annex.

What does the phrase *"be myself"* mean? In the conditions Frank faced, it meant breaking free of the suffocating restrictions placed on her and her community, breaking free of the stifling environment that ironically, was her only safe shelter. Upon freedom, Frank wanted to bring joy to the world through words, to live even after death. At the time I read her work, I didn't dream as big. When Frank yearned for the sweetness of teenage romance with her "one true love," Peter Schiff, and hoped for a glamorous sparkling life in London or Paris without the occupations of Nazi soldiers, however, I caught a glimpse of myself reflected. But to those blinded by hatred, without the ability to see the value in empathy, Frank was just one of the six million Jews considered to be the vermin of society, deserving of death.

The flourishing of the Nazi Regime is evidence of the hatred of society that will always be directed at a particular marginalized group, with no conception of human connection that extends beyond race, ethnicity, and belief.

The beginning of the Hitler's fascist Germany was not the Final Solution. It started with antisemitism, antisemitism that is embraced by society. Since the first major persecution of the Neo-Babylonian Empire in 597 BCE, society seems to have found its perfect scapegoat in the Jewish – Black Death persecutions, the 1066 Granada massacre, the Massacre of 1391, etc., etc. Like tiny grains of sand, invisible to the eye, unchecked hatred towards this particular group was integrated into everyday life.

In the early 20th century, this hatred was common and open, from biological Pseudo-scientific racism to Ethno-nationalism that listed Jews as *"aliens."* Hitler's own hatred for the Jewish population didn't occur at birth, instead it was acquired during his occupation at antisemitic cities like Vienna. Likewise, the beginnings of the Holocaust also didn't begin with mass extermination camps, but from everyday life. Early restrictions that defined the Nazi regime include the 1933 Civil Service Law (forced retirement of Jewish residents), the 1934 Cultural and Media Purge (excluding Jewish representation in media), later escalating to the 1935 Nuremberg Race Laws (transforming the definition of *"Jew"* and stripping the rights of the Jewish). Such restrictions paved the way for the Holocaust, as did the majority of the German civilian population and the rest of the world that chose to accept such hatred in the form of othering and scapegoating, as a normality that is not to be interfered with.

As said in the words of Elie Wiesel: *"Indifference is always the friend of the enemy."* The true harm of unchecked hatred, and scapegoating is ultimately normalized indifference, at the loss of the colorful identities that make up one group, at violence that shatters diversity. Eighty-one years after the Holocaust, indifference continues to persist, with the excuse of neutrality. By ignoring the pleas of those thousands of miles away, deprived from the basic necessities of life, one is siding with those inducing food shortages and bomb-filled, sleepless nights. By ignoring the mistreatment of locals, neighbors, deemed as *"illegal,"* one is placing their trust on the slogan of *"Make ***** Great Again,"* bolstering violence coined as *"enforcement."*

The consequences of the Holocaust, of scapegoating and unchecked hatred, is so evidently peeking through the curtains of the modern-day world yet is still ignored. And so, the suffering continues. A thriving young girl's future is carved onto a hastily made tombstone caused by malnutrition. One family, then two, then hundreds are separated across states, then continents.

The consequence of normalized hatred is indifference, and the true harm in indifference falls on the aspect of its *"othering"*: blindness to the misfortunes of another group, failure to find empathy and human connection that extends beyond appearance, ethnicity, and belief. This indifference is what allows one to accept the scapegoating of another, to embody the hate that is *"easier."* And so, the cycle continues.

Works Cited

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