Patterns of the Holocaust

The Holocaust, the genocide of European Jews, is often perceived as an event of the past, a grave mistake that would never be repeated in the modern day, but minorities around the world, like the Uyghur population in Xianjang, China, continue to be targeted in similar ways in the twenty-first century. Under the nazi regime, Jewish people were victims of relentless persecution that snowballed into the largest and most devastating genocide the world has ever seen. Similar patterns are repeating themselves in China, where the Muslim Uyghur population is put into "reeducation" camps and faces persecution for practicing Islam. Despite how many years have passed since the Holocaust took place, many similarities can be seen between how Jews were treated in Nazi Germany, and how Uyghurs are treated in China today, including dehumanization in camps, intolerance to unfamiliar religion and culture, and vicious propaganda and fake news.

The Jewish people were targeted due to the widely popular Nazi ideology, which was founded on the basis that people should be ranked by biological, racial, political, and social status (The United States Holocaust). According to Nazi extremists, Jews were a danger to the racial purity of Aryan society, a term that the Nazis used to define a white, European, and supreme race (The United States). They used this thought process to justify the mass murder of the Jews (The United States Holocaust). During Kristallnacht which translates to The Night of Broken Glass, over 7,500 Jewish businesses and synagogues were burned down and destroyed, highlighting the hatred and anti-semitism building up in Germany (The United States Holocaust). Notably, Kristallnacht was also the first instance of Jews being arrested on a large scale without reason, with over 30,000 Jewish men being put into custody (The United States Holocaust).

The Uyghurs in Xinjiang, China are currently experiencing similar persecution as European Jews did, primarily on the basis of their religion. The Uyghurs have a distinct culture that the Chinese Communist Party is threatened by, and they claim the Uyghurs are an extremist and separatist group (Maizland). Similar to how the Nazis imprisoned Jews for merely being Jewish, Urghur individuals are often arbitrarily detained in reeducation camps and labeled extremists for traveling to foreign countries, visiting a mosque, texting verses from the Quran, or otherwise engaging with Islam (Maizland). The Chinese government claims the purpose of the camps is to simply teach Uyghurs Mandarin and Chinese law, however, prisoners are also forced to renounce their religion and swear to obey the communist and atheist Chinese ideals (Maizland). There have been reports of intense surveillance, torture, sleep deprivation, sexual abuse, and sterilization within the camps (Maizland). The secrecy and lies told by the

Chinese government leave the full reality of the camps unknown and is reminiscent of the covertness of the Nazi regime and the length they went to to cover up the genocide they were conducting.

The descent into the mass genocide of the European Jews did not happen overnight. Intolerance and hatred towards the Jews had been building since the 1920s and had only grown stronger with Hitler coming to power in 1933 (Meltzer 78). In 1939, German authorities established the first ghetto in Poland, segregating Jewish communities from the rest of the population, and forcing them to live in disgusting conditions, wear the Star of David as identification, and conduct forced labor (Meltzer 78). The true murderous intentions of Hitler and the German government were not made known to the public, and the ghettos served as a coverup for their final plan, which was genocide (Meltzer 78). The ghettos largely served as a transition period, and after anywhere from a couple of days, to a few years, Jews were deported to concentration camps (The United States Holocaust). Although the term "concentration camp" is often used as a broad term to refer to all Nazi camps, there was actually multiple types of camps, including: concentration camps which were for enemy civilians, forced-labor camps where prisoners were exploited to make up for labor shortages, transit camps, which were similar to ghettos in that they were temporary holding areas, and Killing Centers, designed solely to kill Jews with as much efficiency as possible.

Propaganda was a major tactic used by the Nazi regime to both initially target the Jewish population, and cover up the atrocities that were committed in the concentration camps (the United States Holocaust). The Nazis aimed to promote political unity in Germany, and used Jews as the scapegoats to accomplish this task. They used films, posters, and newspapers to portray Jewish people as "subhuman" creatures destroying Aryan society (the United States Holocaust). Propaganda was also used to hide the truth of the genocide from German citizens and opposing nations (the United States Holocaust). During the beginning of the "Final Solution", the genocide of Jews in Europe, victims were encouraged to send letters home to continue the lie that they were living in humane conditions, despite being days away from being put to their death (The United Staters Holocaust) .

Reminiscent of these Nazi efforts, the Chinese government also orchestrated a massive propaganda campaign in attempts to shift the foreign public perception of the mistreatment of the Uyghurs in Xianyang (Kao et al.). In an extremely obvious example of propaganda and fake news, over 3,000 videos of seemingly normal Uyghur citizens denouncing the claims about the reeducation camps and asserting that they were "very free and happy" surfaced on social media (Kao et al.). One man even claimed that the camp had "removed his religious extremist thoughts"(Kao et al.). In 2019, The governor of Xinjiang formally stated that the "reeducation" programs had been

stopped, but in reality, the reeducation centers were stronger than ever, with old camps being expanded, and new ones being built (Maizland). Quite like how Nazi officials denied concentration camps, China propagates the narrative that the United States is spreading “vicious lies”, and even attempted to stop the United Nations from publishing the article exposing the “reeducation” center for what they were (Maizland).

Although the Holocaust and Uyghur treatment in China are not exact parallels, It is disheartening to see the similarities and patterns that remain consistent between them. The root of targeting and persecution comes from hatred and a fear of groups that hold different beliefs. Nazi ideology was framed upon the notion that othered groups like the Jews were inferior and should be exterminated. Although the Chinese government does not take it to that extreme, they still imprison Uyghurs and force them to abandon their culture if they are not willing to conform to the communist Chinese way of life. The speed at which Germany deteriorated into an environment that justified Genocide is alarming and serves as a reminder to be aware of how quickly a situation can escalate into horrendous crimes against humanity. It’s imperative that society remembers the Holocaust and speaks out for the rights of targeted groups, like the Uyghurs, in order to prevent history from repeating itself.

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