

The floorboards of the boxcar, now over seventy years old, creak loudly under my feet despite my careful steps. Paired with the memorial's somber atmosphere, the noise seems to trigger others, as painful to hear as they are necessary to understand.

Hammers pounding nails into wood. The desperate wail of a child forcibly separated from his mother. A dull thud, elicited by a metal baton. Multitudes of bare feet padding softly on the worn dirt trails, marching because stopping means death—or worse. The wild clawing for one more gasp of air as the suffocatingly small room seems to shrink even further. The silence.

The silence is the worst of all.

I leave the boxcar hurriedly, looking away from the peeling paint and focusing my attention on one of the informative signs scattered throughout the museum. *An estimated eleven million people were killed during the Holocaust, over half of them of Jewish descent.*

“You know, eleven million is a gross overestimation.” I whirl around to face a woman whose authoritative tone gives me pause. “*Genocide* isn't even the correct term for it,” she continues, directing her words at a crowd of tourists. “Sure, a few million died, but it was their own fault for sabotaging the German economy. They bit the hand that fed them, you might say.”

The woman and her entourage are gone before I have time to completely digest her words. The rest of my visit, I wander the museum in a daze of disbelief and regret. I wish I had said something, anything, to that woman before she disappeared. I was taken completely off guard; I thought everyone understood the atrocities of the Holocaust, and I had at least hoped that most sincerely lamented them.

Unable to forget the disturbing museum encounter, I consult the all-knowing internet the moment I return home. Apparently there's an official term for people like that woman: Holocaust deniers. One source states that deniers “attempt to negate the established facts of the Nazi genocide of European Jewry” (United States Holocaust Memorial Museum), something that I can't even begin to wrap my head around. The woman at the museum wasn't exactly denying that the Holocaust happened, though. I continue reading and stumble across information about newer Holocaust distortion trends, like “assertions that ... the figure of six

million Jewish deaths is an exaggeration ...” (Ibid). That sounds more like the woman’s statements, and that’s how she avoided getting scrutinized for her accusations; distorting facts is more subtle than denying them entirely.

As I continue reading, I deduce that the woman, like most Holocaust deniers, was using distortion to justify her racist, anti-Semitic ideologies. But although I find a plethora of information as to *why* people deny the Holocaust, I’m really seeking instructions on how to stop them. Growing increasingly frustrated, I find that hate speech is generally protected in the United States under First Amendment. So criminalizing Holocaust deniers is out.

After visiting a few more websites, I begin to understand what I— and everyone else— must do to combat Holocaust denial: confront it, and continue teaching those ignorant about the Holocaust what truly happened. Then, we must extend those lessons to include how the Holocaust should impact our future. Discrimination still exists, and Nazi Germany showed the world the consequences of allowing discrimination to escalate on a massive scale.

Understanding the Holocaust will prevent future genocides from affecting any group to the extent of the Holocaust sufferers. Only when the world embraces the lessons learned due to the Holocaust can we assure that its victims did not die in vain.