

The holocaust was a horrific event that effected the entire world forever in the atrocities that had happened before, during, and after this crisis. Even today the holocaust is still talked about with the upmost respect and understanding on how tragic it all was for many people, especially the victims. When one thinks about the victims of the holocaust the Jewish people first come to mind, which is not surprising as they were the most persecuted against group by the Nazi's and most of the world based on the longevity of Antisemitism throughout history. Beyond the obvious travesty that happened to the Jewish people during the holocaust, there were many other victims of the holocaust, often referred to as the forgotten victims, that stories deserve to also be told and known as they also faced persecution and unjust laws against them for being minorities. As of today, there is around 11 million people known to have died in the holocaust, 6 million of those victims were Jewish, and the other 5 million are rarely discussed beyond passing mention. The main victim groups that was not Jewish include the Roma and Sinti, disabled people, homosexuals, Jehovah's Witnesses, and political opponents. In fact, even though majority of students can identify at least one other non-Jewish victim group the knowledge and being able to give accurate, if any, details on other groups is rare and most students stay quiet when asked questions about these groups (Center for Holocaust Education). In this essay I hope to bring awareness to the forgotten victims of the holocaust in hopes to make them more memorable and for people, including me, to learn their stories and what they have gone through during this horrific time in human history. There were so many people hurt, and groups that have suffered at the hands of corruption, abuse, and ignorance. As time goes on, hopefully those voices and stories will be heard more often and known just as much as the stories of the Jewish victims.

It is well known that the Jewish community, in most places outside of the camps and in every camp, had to wear the Star of David to quickly show to everyone that they were in fact Jewish. This method of using a symbol to represent what group a person belonged to was widespread in the camps for every group. The symbols were colored triangles that gave the prison guards and other prisoners an

easy way to figure out why someone was in the camps. The Roma and Sinti had to wear a black or brown triangle, homosexuals had to wear a pink triangle, Jehovah's Witnesses had to wear purple triangles, political prisoners had to wear a red inverted triangle, and if a Jewish prisoner identified with another group, then one of the triangle colors would be replaced the color associated with that group, otherwise the Star of David was all yellow (United States Holocaust Museum). This was not the only way that prisoners were identified, as they had to still be identified as individuals for records and another form of dehumanization that the Nazi's did to their victims, so each prisoner was given a serial number that was sewn on to their clothes along with their other identification forms. If the prisoner was not German, then the serial number would start with the German name for whatever country they were from then going into the series of numbers. Tattooing a prisoner's serial number on them only happened in Auschwitz, and not every prisoner from Auschwitz got tattooed (Illinois Holocaust Museum). The identifications kept many things orderly for the Nazi's and allowed them to make decisions on how to direct their cruelty.

Another common practice among the groups of victims of the holocaust was forced sterilization with the thought process being eugenics. Eugenics is the practice of selective breeding and getting rid of certain traits and genetic diseases of humans typically via forced sterilization. While in theory it sounds like a great way to get rid of disease and suffering in future offspring, eugenics caused multiple deaths and does not actually work in practice. Eugenics was performed basically everywhere as a form of racism and getting rid of the undesired traits, but because of how closely it is associated with Nazi Germany, people do not know about it as much happening in other countries (Kelves). Eugenics played in integral part in the holocaust for most people involved who were "undesired" or useless that ended up being killed or at the very least being forced to never be able to have children.

The first group that will be discussed is the Roma and the Sinti, two different yet very similar groups that are often discussed together because of the subtle differences in them. Out of all the

forgotten victims, the Roma has the closest story to the Jews, as they also had centuries of persecution and ostracization before the holocaust and misconceptions on where they were from. The Romani people are commonly also referred to as “gypsies”, however that term is not being used as often anymore as it is now known as a slur toward the Romani people. The reason that this term was used to call the Roma is because they were thought to have come from Egypt due to their dark hair and tanned skin, but now the main speculation is that they came from India (Alt and Folts 2). Because of their unknown origin for so many years, the Roma and the Sinti were persecuted and exiled from their homes many times, eventually just deciding on becoming nomads (Alt and Folts 3). The Romani people probably decided to become nomads due to the constant exile and being told they did not belong anywhere and forcing them to sell their goods on the street. During the holocaust Croatia also made race laws in order to get rid of the Roma from the newly founded state, making even fewer safe places for them to exist (Shapiro 34). Even though the trials and hardships of the Roma and the Sinti could be its own paper, there are other forgotten victims of the holocaust that need to be discussed.

The next group victims are ones that are typically remembered the most out of the forgotten victims which are the disabled people. Having a disability was seen by Hitler and the rest of the Nazi's as a liability and made an individual a useless member to society in their eyes. Because the Nazi regime saw disabled people as useless, they informed the public that they were taking up precious resources, such as housing and food, from abled bodied people, so the public was encouraged to stop giving the disabled food, starving them (Evans 33). Beyond the starvation there was also a children's killing program that got rid of disabled children which was horrific. The disabled children were forced to be experimented on, the targets being ones who had disabilities that effected the body and the mind. Their blood was taken and replaced with air while the children were alive, and after they died, their organs were harvested (Evans 38). The thought of what the disabled people were put through that caused long

and painful deaths with the thought that they were just burdens taking up resources is horrible but the reality of what happened.

Homosexuals, mainly males, were also targeted by the Nazi's at this time with new laws and being forced into the camps. The start of laws against homosexuals happened with the closure of gay bars around Germany, which could obviously be seen as just the normal homophobia at the time; however, this was not just normal homophobia because Berlin, Germany was the lead in research of gender and sexuality in the 1930s, despite all that was happening to them at the time (Sidebotham). Germany was quite progressive for its time, which is why it made no sense for the Nazi's to shut down the gay bars unless it was a part of Nazi persecution. The reason homosexual men were sent to concentration camps more often than lesbians was because the men were seen as more of a threat to the goals of Nazi Germany, which was to have more children, and if a group of people were not going to further their goals they need to go (Sidebotham). Women were much easier to force into becoming what the Nazi's wanted out of women, which was a baby-maker housewife, but men were much more difficult to force and were seen as a threat to the Nazi regime. And because the Nazi's believed in strict gender roles, they held the belief that lesbians and gay men could not be able to fulfill the roles of what they thought of as the proper household and German values.

The next of the forgotten victims are the Jehovah's Witnesses, who were persecuted against for their unshaking faith to Jehovah, the name they call God. The nature of a Jehovah's Witness is to not get involved with politics, not to fight in the military, and not to worship anyone other than Jehovah. These core values made Nazi's mad as Jehovah's Witnesses refused to join the Nazi regime and to worship Hitler like he was God, this made it so that the Nazi's made being a Jehovah' Witness illegal. Jehovah's Witnesses were given the opportunity to survive by leaving their religion, but most refused (Holocaust Memorial Day Trust). Despite it being illegal, Jehovah's Witnesses kept practicing their religion, which also inevitably got them sent to camps or killed or both. Beyond not worshipping Hitler, denouncing

their religion, or fighting in the wars, Jehovah's Witnesses were also seen as threat to the Nazi's because of their wide numbers around the world, specifically in America. Even when the Jehovah's Witnesses tried explaining their religion and their politically neutral stance the Nazi's refused to listen. This angered the Nazi's into sending the Gestapo, Nazi Germany's secret police, to arrest and detain all Jehovah's Witnesses (Jewish Virtual Library). Jehovah's Witnesses did in fact try to explain themselves, but the Nazi's were impossible to reason with; and despite having the opportunity to keep their own lives and safety secure, Jehovah's Witnesses held true to their religion and that was what ultimately got them killed.

Finally, Hitler's political opponents became ostracized and sent to the camps, in fact, they were the first groups to be sent to the concentration camps. The main reason that Hitler was able to get away with locking away political opponents was because of the Reichstag Fire that took place in 1933, shortly after Hitler took his place as chancellor. Soon after the fire a communist boy, Marinus van der Lubbe, got captured and allegedly confessed. It is still uncertain if this was a real confession, or a forced one that the Nazi's made this communist boy say. Because of the fire, Hitler took this opportunity to make new laws concerning communism, and eventually all political opposition, by making it illegal to not be part of the Nazi party, this event quickly boosting Hitler's power. For instance, "Still under Nazi control, the Reichstag passed a new law on March 21, 1933, that made it a crime to speak out against the new government or criticize its leaders" (Facing History and Ourselves). This new law gave Hitler much of his power over people and Germany and allowed for him to have his political opponents sent to a concentration camp, Dachau under the pretense of ensure the safety of his country. Dachau was the first of many Nazi concentration camps that was a labor camp. People still died there due to the horrific conditions of the camps, but that was not why Dachau was founded or utilized. Because these political opponents were the ones able to keep Hitler from absolute power, and that was a problem for the Nazi's, so they had to get rid of them.

In conclusion, the holocaust had so many victims, and many of those victims' stories go untold or overshadowed. Despite the amount of groups I have discussed in this paper, there are still more that have had their own abuse and hardships during the holocaust. The world suffered due to the holocaust, and humanity will continue to feel its effects forever as it has changed and added many war laws and values as people exist.

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