

Professor Schweitzer's paper, published in December 2017, considers the relevance of the Holocaust for contemporary responses to injustice, and to prevent genocide. It provides powerful examples of activists as an inspiration for younger people to engage meaningfully in building a just and peaceful world. The paper explores the importance of Holocaust education in the ongoing challenge to prevent genocide and protect human rights.

The Aftermath of the Holocaust: The Rise of Consciousness in Global Resistance against Injustice

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On 10 December 1948, the General Assembly of the United Nations proclaimed the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Article 1 states: "All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood"¹, declaring that each human being has inherent rights to freedom, to equality and dignity. No person needs to justify his or her presence as an inhabitant of planet earth. The article also draws attention to the reciprocal relationship between the natural law of all people and the human mind. All humans are endowed with the cognitive faculties of reason and conscience. Recognising a responsibility to one another, we are called upon to act in a spirit of brotherhood. Knowing that the given birth right creates a possibility of caring toward one another, the expression "in spirit of," highlights both the inner world of the mind bound up with the external conditions and circumstances. Consequently, caring for another in a sense of brotherhood creates an equal alliance between oneself and the other.²

Raphael Lemkin's commitment to prosecuting perpetrators of organised massacres and systematic mass killings can be considered as an example of a conscious decision to act in the spirit of brotherhood. Lemkin is known for his groundbreaking work on making genocide an internationally recognised crime.³ Born on 24 June 1901 into a Jewish family, Lemkin became an eminent Polish scholar and lawyer who was able to escape the Nazis. In 1941, he left Sweden for the United States where he taught at Duke University. Unfortunately, most of his family perished in Nazi camps. His activism was based on the inequality of law. For a true understanding of inequality, he provided a structural analysis of a criminal trial against a young man, Soghomon Tehlirian, who killed his oppressor after surviving the Armenian massacres. In the context of implementing a punishable law against mass murderers, this question sheds light not only on his conscious involvement towards others but also on his activism to end unpunishable global crimes. Is it "a crime for Tehlirian to kill a man, but it is not a crime for his oppressor to kill more than a million men?"⁴ The Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide was adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations on 9 December 1948 and entered into force on 12 January 1951.⁵ In Article 2, genocide is defined as committing any of the following acts "with the intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnic, racial or religious group, as such:

- A) Killing members of the group;
- B) Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group;
- C) Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part;
- D) Imposing measures intended to prevent birth within the groups;
- E) Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group".

Lemkin's diligent endeavor to bring justice to the perpetrators of mass killings and acts of dehumanization recognized the killing of 6 million Jews during the Nazi dictatorship as genocide.

The Nazi movement began in 1919 when Adolf Hitler joined the German Workers' Party (DAP) and began to formulate his anti-Semitic outlook. Hitler's ideology was outlined in his autobiographical book *Mein Kampf*. In 1925, he became the leader of the Nationalist Socialist Workers' Party (NSDAP). The dictatorship and administrative implementation of the systematic plan for the destruction of the European Jewry began in 1933 after President Paul von Hindenburg named Hitler as chancellor of Germany. Hitler's position allowed him to propagate and institutionalise his ideas of racism and antisemitism.⁶ The seed of his dehumanising rhetoric combined with his driving desire to create a pure superior Aryan race by annihilating the Jewish people and their culture flourished, seeping into the conscience of most Germans. The Nazi government proclaimed racial purity as the core of its anti-Semitic agenda. Political propaganda aimed to destroy an inferior race by viewing them as subhuman. Any political, economic or cultural differences were erased to establish the Third Reich that would become a world power. Blind obedience and dedication to the Führer underpinned his political aspiration to power. Popular rhetoric called upon all German citizens to support the Nazi hierarchy and all aspects of its organisation. On 30 January 1939, Hitler told the German Parliament that the outbreak of war would mean the end of European Jewry.

As a result of Hitler's war against the European Jewry, 1939–45, the aftermath of the Holocaust can be considered as a timeless continuation of a never-ending process uncovering the horrendous crime of Nazi Germany.

In the years since the Nazi downfall, historical research, countless sources of documents, testimonies, memoirs, artifacts, films and other specificities of the Holocaust have been available to educate past, present and future generations. The outreach programs around the world bring the systematic persecution of the Jewish people and other victims to our consciousness. Post-Holocaust education aims to bring together people from all countries and all ages to realize the consequences of racist and anti-Semitic policies.

Regarding the prevention of genocides, early warnings have become an essential factor⁷, yet they continued. Organized mass killings such as the genocides of Cambodia (1975–79), Bosnia-Herzegovina (1992–95) and Rwanda (1994) were done with the purpose to eliminate entire groups of people and to establish ideological dominance. The ruthlessness of the recent Darfur genocide began in February 2003 due to an ethnic group conflict and continues.⁸

Visiting the Holocaust Museum in Washington where one can also see exhibits of global genocides makes us ask the same question again and again: how can one grasp such unimaginable atrocities that were systematically planned and willingly executed by human beings endowed with reason and conscience? We have seen that Hitler's propaganda claimed that Jews were subhuman creatures and know that those theories were discredited. Yet, we have seen other examples, so we must question the complexity of the human mind regarding good and evil actions. What will it take for people to act in spirit of brotherhood? The 2017 national and international Holocaust Remembrance Days reminded the world that the victims mark 72 years since the liberation of Auschwitz. Thinking about the liberation as the beginning of the "aftermath", I recall the experience of listening to the voice of an American soldier on a video playing while moving up in an elevator to reach the fourth floor of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Permanent Exhibit in Washington D.C. The voice of the witness describes the discovery of a devastating landscape of brutal mass murder from one of the camps.

Natural catastrophes, organized violent events and other changes happening around the world involve all living beings. No one can escape another wherever we go or wherever we are. What comes into play here is the response of an individual or a collective community. In human civilization, justice and injustice are inextricably linked to the relationship of all humankind. Human rights have been violated throughout centuries but the possibility of responding to injustice/dehumanization have advanced due to human evolution such as education, technical advances or one's consciousness. The sovereign position of humans among other living humans unfolds within various power relations that aim to dominate individuals or groups of people. Responding to inhuman treatments and discriminations seems to coincide with the conscious decision to speak up or to protect another human being.

For example, the conscious awareness of unjust conditions within their countries motivated Nelson Mandela, Malala Yousafzai and Ai Weiwei to call for justice. In so doing, they became voices expressing a noble cause on behalf of others.

"I hate race discrimination most intensely and in all its manifestations. I have fought it all during my life; I fight it now, and will do so until the end of my days" stated Nelson Mandela (1918–2013), the first black president of South Africa from 1994 to 99 at his first court statement in 1962.⁹ A member of the African National Congress, Mandela was charged by the South African apartheid government for his non-violent anti-apartheid activism resisting the regime's racial injustice. Imprisoned in 1964, Mandela spent 27 years in prison for political offenses. After his release on 11 February 1990, he worked together with President Frederik Willem de Klerk to repeal most of the legislation that provided the basis for apartheid.¹⁰ Although Mandela's activism was non-violent, he embraced violence, an armed struggle, to end the apartheid racism.¹¹ With his actions against racial discrimination, he became a symbol of courage, hope and reconciliation.¹²

Malala Yousafzai was born 12 July 1997 in Mingora, Pakistan. Early in life, she became an activist advocating children's right to education.¹³ In speaking out against the injustices of female discrimination by the Taliban, she asked "How dare the Taliban take away my basic right to education?" For this stand, she was terrorised and shot by a Taliban gunman on 9 October 2012.¹⁴ After her recovery, she continued to campaign for educational equality. In 2014, she was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize, becoming the youngest person ever to receive the prize. Standing in front of the microphone, she took the voice of the ones who suffer with lack of education: "I am Amina, I am those 66 million girls who are deprived of education". Malala was designated the youngest United Nations Messenger of Peace by United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres in April 2017.

Ai Weiwei's statement in his new documentary, "Human Flow", points to the 65 million people displaced worldwide: "Being a refugee . . . is the most pervasive kind of cruelty that can be exercised against a human being." As "The Atlantic" reports, Weiwei's documentary looks at more than 23 countries and "40 of the largest refugee camps" to highlight the displaced people and the conditions that now define their lives.¹⁶ In addressing the current devastating situation of displacement, he sees the refugee crisis from a historical point of view. For him, the contemporary phenomenon of fleeing refugees is defined by the current political world situation, claiming refugee movements are endemic to the human situation.¹⁷ Being displaced himself, Weiwei suffered torture and imprisonment for being an activist for human rights in his country and for using his artistic skills to criticise the Chinese government for its human rights violations. His work represents opinions that can be linked to a global resistance against injustice.¹⁸

In studying the lives of these three persons, who were disregarded, detained, terrorised and violated for resisting injustice against political structures, we see fellow beings whose individual actions care for humanity. Their work deals with social issues that arise everywhere and are ultimately a problem of the entire world.

Inequalities and injustices are today's headlines. We witness the dehumanisation of people in multiple ways. Global conflicts such as climate change, poverty, xenophobia, racism, discrimination against the LGBT community, hate-crimes, refugee crises, child labor, human trafficking, chemical weapons, health crises, ethnic marginalization intersect with each other and impact the world at large. The tireless voluntary work of humanitarian groups of international governments and organisations are working together to provide sustainable living. For example, institutionalised organisations such as the United Nations, Non-Governmental Organizations, Amnesty International, the U.N. Convention on the Rights of the Child, Human Rights Watch or the unarmed and neutral work of the White Helmets network together save or preserve human lives.

As an educator and Human Rights advocate, I am interested in the global youth movement. In my current First-Year-Seminar titled "Remnants of Genocide", at Shenandoah University, we discuss contemporary human rights violations, inequalities and injustices around the world. In studying past genocides, these young people are standing up to express their voices by drawing attention to peaceful activism. The strength of these young people fosters self-reflection, advocates peace and promotes initiatives to increase community aid but more importantly they strive to change their own worldview and to have the courage to bring their convictions to reality. Here are four typical responses from first-year students.

"Social injustice, involving racial discrimination, can be defined as the unfair treatment in which the rights of an individual of a certain race are taken away. In our society, this problem is always being fought for, whether it is a Black Lives Matter campaign or a twitter hashtag of #fightracism. As a student, some things I can do are to confront myself and learn about what racism is and how it lives within myself and within the community. The biggest solution is to say something and let your voice be heard if you see something that involves this problem".

"I believe that perception is the key to successfully approaching the world's conflicts and issues. We all as individuals gain our own meanings and understanding of life from different experiences we encounter within each of our own lives. It is our duty, not to claim that individually our experiences define what is right or wrong in life, but rather to offer our own perceptions to one another, in hopes of spreading wisdom and care".

"The rise of social consciousness can be directly tied to the growing use of social media around the world. As more victims of bigotry are able to find a niche online where they can voice the injustices they experience, more people become aware of the injustice and it then becomes harder for governments and citizens to ignore. I believe that in order to truly help communities facing injustice, those not facing the injustice use their privilege to boost marginalised voices".

"Youth of today can rise above injustice in all forms by the simple act of wanting goodwill for another. To truly aspire good for another, one must want to make choices and do actions that don't inhibit the other. Practice trust with all those around, and caution when that trust is given reason to be rescinded. Practice love instead of indifference, and respect instead of selfishness. Understand how your actions, feelings, and internalizations effect not only yourself but all those around as well".

What others experience today, we might experience tomorrow. If we want to progress as a human race, it seems that the condition of our consciousness must change. Constructed ideas of the human intellect against otherness or difference have been passed on by generations. They reappear and unfold in times when our individual or collective future seems to be in danger depending upon the desired position of power. Swastikas smeared on walls, Nazi flags carried at rallies, defacing Jewish grave stones or the brutal violence against the LGBT community among other acts of discrimination testify that the condition of humanity is rooted within external or internal preconceived ideas. How can we cure the wounds of the

past that act out in the present and deny a peaceful humanitarian future? The rise of consciousness against global injustice, I suggest, begins with the longing for transformation.

“The Aftermath of the Holocaust: The Rise of Consciousness in Global Resistance Against Injustice” arises from the understanding to *act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood*. If we humans can identify ourselves in solidarity with another by acting towards the other at heart, Humanity itself could be seen emerging from One World One Humanity.¹⁹

¹ [Universal Declaration of Human Rights](#)

² Emmanuel Levinas, “Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority”, trans. Alphonso Lingis, (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1969). The idea of other has been essential in the work of the French philosopher.

³ Raphael Lemkin, *Axis Rule in Occupied Europe: Laws of Occupation, Analysis of Government, Proposals for Redress*. (Washington: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1944).

⁴ Jane Springer, *Genocide*. (Toronto: Groundwood Books, 2013), pages 20–21.

⁵ Jane Springer, *Genocide*. (Toronto: Groundwood Books, 2013), pages 15–26.

⁶ Leni Yahl, *The Holocaust: The Fate of European Jewry*, trans. Ina Friedman and Haya Galai (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), pages 44-63.

⁷ For more information on recognising and preventing genocide, see [The Simon-Skjoldt Center for the Prevention of Genocide](#) at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum and the [United Nations Office on the Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect](#)

⁸ Jane Springer, *Genocide*. (Toronto: Groundwood Books, 2013).

⁹ For additional information: [Nelson Mandela's First Court Statement - 1962](#)

¹⁰ Kenneth S. Broun, *Saving Nelson Mandela: the Rivonia Trial and the Fate of Africa*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), xiii.

¹¹ [“Mandela and the Question of Violence”](#) by Ta-Nehisi Coates in *The Atlantic*. Published on 11 December 2013.

¹² Nelson Mandela, *Long Walk to Freedom: the Autobiography of Nelson Mandela*. (Boston: Little Brown, 1994).

¹³ Malala Yousafzai, *I am Malala: The Girl Who Stood Up for Education and Was Shot by the Taliban*. (New York: Little Brown, & Company, 2013).

¹⁴ [Malala gave first anti-Taliban speech aged 11](#) by Satyaki Das on inshorts. Published on 12 July 2016.

¹⁵ [Nobel Lecture by Malala Yousafzai](#), Oslo, 10 December 2014.

¹⁶ [“Humanity Is Subjective’ A conversation with Ai Weiwei about perpetual migration, the tragedy of exile, and the power of plain cinematic language”](#) by Emily Buder. *The Atlantic*. Published on 14 October 2017.

¹⁷ [“More Than A Political Status’: Ai Weiwei Captures Scale Of Global Refugee Crisis”](#) on NPR. Published on 14 October 2017.

¹⁸ Ai Weiwei and Lee Amrozy, *Ai Weiwei's Blog. Writings, Interviews and Digital Rants, 2006-2009*. (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2011), xvi–xxviii.

¹⁹ Jonathan Glover, *Humanity A Moral History of the 20th Century*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012).

Discussion Questions:

1. Raphael Lemkin is known for his groundbreaking work on making genocide an internationally recognized crime, how was this achieved? And what is the definition of genocide?
2. What is the importance of Holocaust education today?
3. The conscious awareness of unjust conditions within their countries motivated Nelson Mandela, Malala Yousafzai and Ai Weiwei to call for justice. How did they do it and what lessons can we learn from their actions?
4. Ai Weiwei's statement in his documentary *Human Flow* points to the 65 million people displaced worldwide. How can the refugee crisis of today relate to the Holocaust?
5. What role can youth play in helping to promote human rights around the world?

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The discussion papers series provides a forum for individual scholars on the Holocaust and the averting of genocide to raise issues for debate and further study. These writers, representing a variety of cultures and backgrounds, have been asked to draft papers based on their own perspective and particular experiences.

The views expressed by the individual scholars do not necessarily reflect those of the United Nations.