

Genocide Today

Genocide was a term coined by Raphael Lemkin, a Polish- Jewish lawyer in 1944. It was created to describe the horrors of the Holocaust. Unfortunately, today, the term is so often used that people do not think twice about the meaning of it. Not only does genocide mean the killing of a race, it also means the killing of a child who may as well be your own.

“When the Nazis came for the communists, I remained silent; I was not a communist... When they came for the Jews, I remained silent; I wasn't a Jew. When they came for me, there was no one left to speak out.” - Martin Niemöller

In America, the four freedoms- freedom of speech, freedom of worship, freedom from want, and freedom from fear - are taken for granted. Living in a first world country, most Americans believe the genocides occurring in the the Middle East are not their problems. However, if we remain silent because we are not directly affected, who will speak up for us when we are in trouble?

Recently, a few groups of AP World History students at Granada Hills Charter High School, including myself, were given the opportunity to view the horrors of the Rwandan Genocide through the movie *Hotel Rwanda*. It carries the story of a man named Paul Rusesabagina, a Hutu man who worked to save his Tutsi family and neighbors from death.

Many students complained that the movie was too gory or disturbing. While the movie was both gory and disturbing, it was also a way to peer into the world of injustice, abandonment, suffering, and death. It allowed students to feel the pains of the Rwandan Genocide at a much more personal level than reading about it in a jargon-filled textbook. Reflecting on the movie,

personally, I felt that it seems almost disrespectful to those who lost their lives to lightly brush these deaths off our shoulders.

These events are not events of the past. Even today, in Syria, what started as an uprising against President Bashar al-Assad has become a violent conflict between forces, local and international. In this struggle, as a strategy of war, the Syrian government and other foreign influences continue to perpetrate great atrocities against civilians. Meanwhile, in America, some people could not care less. However, it is our responsibility, as citizens of a leading first world country, to care.