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Kristallnacht

Two thousand and thirteen marks the seventy-fifth year anniversary of Kristallnacht, or Night of Broken Glass. Occurring on November 8-9, 1938, Kristallnacht symbolized the first real outbreak of violence against the Jews in Germany. Kristallnacht was not a spur-of-the moment impulse, but a result of a buildup of hatred, a sense of German superiority, and an ongoing fear of Jewish cultural influence. The Jews were portrayed as dangerous individuals and as a threat to the freedoms and security of the “master [German] race.” Due to Adolf Hitler's strong animosity towards the Jewish race, their image was fabricated to be *the enemy*, which led to the victimizing of their people and the vandalizing of their businesses and synagogues on Kristallnacht. This destruction created an intensified snowball effect of discrimination, persecution, and execution of the Jewish people; a devastation that will never be forgotten.

What began as simple hostility towards Jews escalated in 1933 with the rise of Adolf Hitler. With his new power, Hitler brought a greater sense of anti-Semitism that he penetrated into the minds of the German people. Prior to Hitler's rise, unorganized oppression and harsh government laws were controlling the practices of Jews. Hitler wanted some sort of order to the discrimination, so he and his Cabinet created the Nuremberg Laws on September 15, 1935; thereby firmly classifying the Jewish people not as part of a religious practice, but as members of an inferior *race* (Events).

Stripped of freedoms and citizenship under this new German law, Jews became completely subjugated by the German government and were underlined as nothing more than subjects to the German Reich. Though, submission was not enough for Hitler; he denied Jews the privilege to hold public office, to vote, or to hold public property (Events). Taxes were imposed

upon the Jewish people for being "aliens" (Events) along with marriages between Germans and Jews proclaimed illegitimate. In addition, the word "non-Aryan" became more widely used to define the Jewish race. "Non-Aryan" blood line consisted of at least one Jewish ancestor. This identity created for the Jewish people did not leave room for a loop hole, allowing the German government to further control the lives of the Jewish community.

At Nuremberg, Hitler explained the reasons for this solution:

“From numerous places vigorous complaints have been received of the provocative action of individuals belonging to this [Jewish] people, and the remarkable frequency of these reports and the similarity of their contents point to a certain system of operation...the only way to deal with the problem which remains open is that of legislative action. The German Government is in this controlled by the thought that through a single secular solution it may be possible still to create a level ground [*eine Ebene*] on which the German people may find a tolerable relation towards the Jewish people" (Jewish Virtual Library).

Hitler's speech at Nuremberg plagued the Jewish people with an image of their race as vile, unaccepted creatures. The "vigorous complaints" (Jewish Virtual Library) were obviously used to manipulate the German government into further oppressing the Jewish community. This anguish created a continuing resentment that would put Hitler's domain on a crash course to Kristallnacht.

The flame of increasing Jewish torment was sparked with the Nuremberg Laws, but the fire was set ablaze by the assassination of the Third Germany Secretary, Ernst vom Rath, in

Paris. Rath's death was spurred by Hitler's order to expel all Polish Jews (Explained). Given one night to abandon their homes, Polish Jews fled immediately. One Polish Jew, Herschel Grynszpan, was studying in Paris when he heard of his family's predicament in Germany. Out of revenge, he shot and killed Ernst vom Rath. This assassination opened the window of opportunity that Hitler and his collaborators had been waiting for; the justification for Kristallnacht (Events).

Shards of glass lined the streets as Jewish families wept at the monstrous sight of Kristallnacht. A long, harsh chain of events soon followed the slaughter of their [Jewish] people and destruction of their synagogues and businesses. It was declared that it was the Jews' fault that Kristallnacht occurred; they were framed as menaces and murderers. With this decree hanging over Jewish heads, Nazis swept them up and shipped them off to concentration camps; a death sentence that, for most, bared no escape.

Following the days of Kristallnacht, Germany became a dangerous place for Jewish life and culture. Anti-Semitism grew rapidly after the onset of World War II and millions of Jews faced execution, torture, gas, starvation, and wreck-less violence in ghettos and concentration camps.

Holocaust survivor Kitty Hart-Maxon described the scene upon her arrival at Auschwitz, the largest of these camps:

"Arrival in Auschwitz is a defining moment in your life.

The doors open, you are thrown out, greeted by barking dogs, screaming figures with whips, a stench of burning flesh and a glow of fire" (Harding).

These stories create a gruesome image that was a direct consequence of Kristallnacht, causing us to find meaning in the destruction and learn from our faults. Hatred is something that will be around indefinitely; humans will never live in a utopian society nor will humans ever find permanent peace, but hate is something that can be controlled. The moment to stand up against discrimination and hatred is not at the end when the situation is falling into chaos, but during the buildup of inevitable destruction. Kristallnacht was *the moment* when people should have stood up and spoke out, but no one did (Remember).

"We remember the past to protect the future" (Remember). Weighing on the shoulders of humanity, the memory of Kristallnacht forces us to realize how immoral and sinister this act of violence was. Images of the shattered glass, littering the street, symbolize the flaws of humankind. Acceptance of the event as a whole will compel society to defend against merciless legislation during its development and to fight for justice to secure the "international standard of Never Again" (Holocaust).

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