

The Fallacious Monster

Over the past month, I was tasked with creating a presentation about a specific person, location, and event that occurred during the Holocaust. During the researching process, I came across an interview with Primo Levi, a Jewish-Italian writer, and scientist who survived 11 months in the Auschwitz concentration camp. During the interview, Levi was asked, “How can the Nazis’ fanatical hatred of the Jews be explained?” Levi went into an elaborate explanation and closed by stating: “Monsters exist, but they are too few in number to be truly dangerous; more dangerous are the common men, the functionaries ready to believe and act without asking questions.” This statement caught my attention instantly. When we reflect on the Holocaust, blame is immediately placed upon those who were active in the Nazi Party, like the SS guards and Hitler, but what about those who fit the physical attributes of the “Aryan race” and were not persecuted? I never considered that the individuals who sat by in silence while their Jewish, Gypsy, disabled, or homosexual neighbors were forced out of their homes and into Ghettos or onto trains carried a large amount of the responsibility for the progression of the Holocaust. I questioned whether this terrible event would’ve happened if enough people expressed their dissatisfaction.

As I persisted with my research, I continued to ponder Levi’s words. I began to consider all the “monsters” I had come across in my own life. Throughout my time in school, I have been bullied for being adopted and raised in an all-white household. Students would make fun of my family, my upbringing, and me for being African American. I have even been told that I am “barely black” or that I am “not black”, that I am “white” and therefore, cannot speak about issues African Americans currently face in the United States. When I thought back to all of these encounters, I realized that as many times as something like this has happened, my peers have never tried to stop the bullies. They would pretend it never happened and continue on with their work or conversation. I wonder now if the bullying would’ve continued if someone had spoken up for me. Even though these awful events in my life are nowhere near as horrible as what went on during the Holocaust, my peers and friends can serve as a comparison to the bystanders in Nazi-occupied territories. Why is it that we continue to sit back in silence after learning repeatedly in school that we should speak up when you see something that is clearly wrong? What we, as bystanders, fail to realize is that we are more dangerous than the few “monsters” because we are the majority. We overpower in numbers but continue to spread the system of blindly following. This project has served as an extremely motivational experience. It has inspired me to make sure I, along with family and peers, do not fall into this cyclical system of silence that leads to inevitable destruction.