

## Reading 18A

### IMPLICATIONS OF THE HOLOCAUST

The authors of this unit on the Holocaust think that each of the following implications of the Holocaust must be considered as lessons to be learned for the present and the future. It is their belief that these implications, taken from careful examination of the experiences of the victims and the actions of the perpetrators, have profound consequences for our lives today.

“Ask not for whom the bell tolls – it tolls for thee.”

*John Donne*

#### CONSEQUENCES OF:

##### TOLERANCE OF PERSECUTION:

Because of opportunities to advance careers or social status, or to gain profits, average citizens might neglect ethics and allow discrimination and persecution to go on.

##### DEHUMANIZATION:

Dehumanization of any person or group, turning people into objects, seems necessary for a tragic event like the Holocaust to occur. During the Holocaust, Jews were no longer perceived as humans, but as a problem or “question” that needed an efficient solution.

##### QUESTION OF CONSCIENCE:

As a guide for proper behavior, conscience might become an inconvenience and be replaced by ideology, profit, silence, science or social status. SS leaders recognized that the established moral codes could not exist if their goal, to destroy all Jews, was to be reached.

##### ABANDONEMENT OF PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY:

It is the responsibility of human beings to *think*—especially about the consequences of their actions. Those who do not think beyond their immediate tasks or consider the consequences of their actions still share the responsibility for what happens around them.

All those involved in the killing process—railroad employees, chemists, doctors, civil servants, lawyers, clergymen, physicists, engineers, craftsman, architects, businessmen, plumbers, university professors, accountants—stopped thinking beyond their immediate tasks. The chemists producing Zyklon B never thought beyond the

production in their laboratories. The doctors performing experiments never thought beyond the “scientific” and racial rationalizations. Railroad officials never thought beyond getting cattle cars full of people to their destinations quickly and efficiently.

All of these people shared the guilt of the killers.

#### ABUSE OF TECHNOLOGY:

Science and technology, logic and efficiency are potential tools for evil when used by an unethical government. The great advances in science and technology, and in methods of organization and efficiently easily served the forces of destruction of human life. Technological progress was not moral progress.

#### INDIFFERENCE:

Personal responsibility extends beyond one’s immediate surroundings to the suffering of others. The Allies shared in the responsibility for the murder of the Jews because of their indifference, apathy and/or refusal to help rescue the victims.

#### PERSONAL COURAGE:

Perhaps the most important implication or lesson comes from the examples of the rescuers. In spite of pressures, non-Jews all over Europe refused to collaborate in the “Final Solution.” These individuals chose to act according to a standard of behavior, a code of ethics, that put human life ahead of other considerations. As one scholar wrote, referring to the rescue of the Jews in Denmark, the history of the Holocaust shows us that “it could happen in most places but it did not happen everywhere.”

#### LIFE WORTHY OF LIFE:

The idea of “useless people” or of “surplus populations” is one that threatens everyone. On that basis, millions of innocent victims were murdered. On that basis, where human dignity or the sanctity of life are rejected, mass murder is a continuing danger.

“Our only hope will lie in the frail web of understanding  
of one person for the pain of another.”

*John Dos Passos (1940)*