

Reading 2

Separating Neighbor from Neighbor

“For one could get rid of one’s badge a hundred times, yet one still remained oneself.”

A scene from Schindler’s List: On March 3, 1941, the Nazis order the Jews of Krakow into a walled and closely guarded section of the city known as a ghetto. Soon after, hundreds of Jewish families pile their possessions onto pushcarts and form a huge procession toward the ghetto. As they walk, a Polish man grabs horse dung from the street and hurls it at the Jews. As they brush the dung from their clothes, they hear a small child shout, “Good-bye, Jews! Good-bye, Jews!”

The actions of the bystanders suggest that in Poland many had turned against their neighbors long before the German invasion. Gusta Draenger, a young Jewish woman with “Aryan looks” and “Aryan papers,” believes that separation made it almost impossible for Jews to escape.

How easy it was to say: “Run away from the deportations!” But how was one to escape from the barbed wire guarded by policemen? It was enough for a policeman to notice one’s Jewish armband and he gunned down the bearer. One could, of course, get rid of one’s armband, but if passers-by notice the blue-white symbolic badge disappear, they handed one over to the police. Even if one crept into the darkest gateway and there accomplished this fundamental change of decor, there would always be somebody who had noticed that one had entered the gateway as a Jew and reappeared . . . as what? Yes, indeed, as what? For one could get rid of one’s badge a hundred times, yet one still remained oneself. . . . One betrayed one’s Jewishness by every anxious movement one made; by every uncertain step one took; by one’s hunched back that seemed to carry the burden of slavery; by one’s eyes that were those of a hunted animal; by one’s general appearance on which the ghetto had left its stamp. One was nothing else but a Jew not simply because of the colour of one’s eyes, hair, complexion, shape of nose, race. One remained a Jew because one lacked self-assurance; because of the intonations in one’s speech; because of the way one expressed oneself; because of the way one behaved and because of the Lord only knows what else. One was and remained a Jew because everybody was determined to see a Jew in one; because everybody around wanted to hound Jews and could not bear the thought that even a single Jew might escape annihilation. Wherever one went, people stared arrogantly, suspiciously and provocatively into one’s eyes until one became confused, blushed, lowered one’s eyes—and turned out to be a Jew.

Therefore, before a Jew reached the nearest railway station, he already had behind him several battles in which the weapons were eyes, several encounters when without a word being said he had stood up to the enemy in every passer-by, and frequently also several encounters with blackmailers, so that in his pocket there hardly remained enough money to buy a ticket for the nearest townlet. And when he finally reached the railway station, he found himself the object of scrutiny by people in uniforms. There were several police forces whose only task was to track down Jews. . . . A Jew needed all the sang froid in the world to walk proudly, head held high, through the station, meeting the persistent stares of the plain-clothes policemen with a cold glare, and finally fight-

ing his way into a carriage with a nonchalance as though he did it every day.

But it was inside the carriage that the rule of the mob truly began. From the stares of those people, devoid of all subtlety, there was no escape. Their gimlet eyes bored through one; they smelt out a Jew for the pleasure of handing him over to the police or, in the best cases, in order to torment, blackmail and threaten him until his spirit broke completely and he prayed for death as one prays for salvation. Not infrequently, as the price of the most intense nervous strain, the Jew managed to conceal his identity. But he could not avoid listening to conversations that chilled the blood in his veins. What did they talk about? They talked about Jews. They said that the Jews got what they deserved. That it was high time that their fate should be settled once and for all. That they had been justly punished; that they had tried to escape, but had been caught in the nick of time. That they had attempted to get away with their gold, but had been prevented from doing so just in time. The Jew had to listen to old wives' tales, to base slanders, to infamous lies, and above all, to expressions of rejoicing, to low bestial joy at the fact that hundreds of thousands of children, women and old people were being murdered. Like hyenas in search of carrion, they were willing to pounce on Jewish belongings, to plunder and rob the houses whose owners were no longer there. And in the corner of the carriage there sits a human being who has not yet got over the loss of his nearest and dearest and not a single muscle must move in his face, for should he display the slightest emotion of indignation or anguish, then he must be a Jew.

Connections

~~What do the man and the child in the scene from the film symbolize? Sonia Weitz, a survivor of the Krakow ghetto and Plaszow, says of her own experiences, "As Jews, we were twice victimized, first by the Nazis and then by many of our Polish neighbors. We became victims of the victims." How does the scene reflect that feeling?~~

① { What is "the rule of the mob"? Do people behave differently in large crowds than they do in small groups? Than they do when they are alone? Would the people Gusta Draenger encountered on the train have behaved differently if they met at school or work?

② { How did Gusta Draenger's fears affect what she saw and heard on her train ride? To what extent did her own stereotypes of Poles and Jews shape her perceptions?

Reading 3

Betraying the Youth

A scene from Schindler's List: The cameras shift from one part of Krakow to another as individuals and groups prepare for the final liquidation of the ghetto. Through it all, Amon Goeth can be heard addressing his men:

Today is history. Today will be remembered. Years from now, the young will ask with wonder about this day. Today is history, and you are part of it. Six hundred years ago . . . , Kazimierz the Great so-called told the Jews they could come to Krakow. . . . They took hold. They prospered. In business, science, education, the arts. They came here with nothing. Nothing. And they flourished. For six centuries, there has been a Jewish Krakow. Think about that. By this evening, those six centuries are a rumor. They never happened. Today is history.

Goeth's speech reflects years of Nazi propaganda. He joined a Nazi youth group in Austria at the age of seventeen and became a member of the SS at 22. He was convinced that he belonged to a "superior race" and the Jews were his "racial enemy." Most of his men held similar views. The Nazis focused much of their propaganda on young people. Soon after Hitler took power, a new course was added to the curriculum. Its objectives were to:

1. Give pupils an insight into the relationship, causes and effects of all basic facts having to do with the science of heredity and race.
2. Impress the pupils with the importance of the science of heredity and race for the future of the nation and the purposes of the government.
3. Awaken in the pupils a sense of responsibility toward the nation, as represented by both its ancestry and its posterity; imbue the pupils with pride in the fact that the German people are the most important exponent of the Nordic race, and to influence them in favor of complete (Nordification) of the German people.

This is to be accomplished early enough so that no child shall leave school without a conviction of the necessity of pure blood.

As homework for the new "race science" classes, students were to collect pictures of great scholars, statesmen, artists, and others who "distinguish themselves by their special accomplishments." Students were then to determine the "preponderant race" of these individuals "according to physical characteristics." Racial instruction was not limited to a single course. Every course taught that Jews, blacks, and "Gypsies" were inferior to "Aryans." Even arithmetic text books contained "story problems" like this one: "The Jews are aliens in Germany—In 1933 there were 66,060,000 inhabitants of the German Reich, of whom 499,682 were Jews. What is the percentage of aliens?"

The emphasis on "race" accentuated the isolation of Jewish students. One recalls, "People started to pick on me, 'a dirty Jew,' and all this kind of thing. And we started to fight. In the break time there was always one of us fighting." "Race science" classes had a different effect on "Aryan" students. A former member of Hitler Youth recalls them as fostering pride. "The flag, the people—they were everything. You are nothing, your people everything. Yes, that's how children were brought up, that's how you can manipulate a child." Erika Mann, a German writer who opposed the Nazis, held similar views. In a book called *School for Barbarians*, she wrote:

You leave the house in the morning, “Heil Hitler” on your lips. . . . All the way down the street, the flags are waving, every window colored with red banners, and the black swastika in the middle of each. You don’t stop to ask why; it’s bound to be some national event. . . .

You meet the uniforms on the way to school: the black [uniformed] SS men, the men of the Volunteer Labor Service, and the Reichswehr soldiers. And if some of the streets are closed, you know that an official is driving through town. . . . And here, where a building is going up, the workmen are gone—probably because of the “national event.” But the sign is on the scaffolding. “We have our Fuhrer to thank that we are working here today. Heil Hitler!” The familiar sign, seen everywhere with men at work, on roads, barracks, sport fields. . . .

There are more placards as you continue past hotels, restaurants, indoor swimming pools, to school. They read . . . “Not for Jews.” And what do you feel? . . . You don’t feel anything, you’ve seen these placards for almost five years. This is a habit, it is all perfectly natural, of course Jews aren’t allowed here. Five years in the life of a child of nine—that’s his life, after four years of infancy, his whole personal, conscious existence. Through the Nazi street walks the Nazi child. There is nothing to disturb him, nothing to attract his attention or criticism.

Alfons Heck, a former member of Hitler Youth, is not as certain that it was just propaganda that made it easy to manipulate children:

Traditionally, the German people were subservient to authority and respected their rulers as exalted father figures who could be relied on to look after them. . . . Hitler used that yearning for a leader brilliantly. From our very first day in [a Nazi youth group], we accepted it as a natural law—especially since it was merely an extension of what we had learned in school—that a leader’s orders must be obeyed unconditionally, even if they appeared harsh, punitive or unsound. . . .

I still recall with wonder that [our leader] once marched all 160 of us in his [troop] into an ice-cold river in November because our singing had displeased him. We cursed him bitterly under our breath, but not one of us refused. That would have been the unthinkable crime of disobeying a “direct order.”

*“The flag, the people—
they were everything.
You are nothing, your
people everything. Yes,
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late a child.”*

Connections

① { Write a working definition of the word *indoctrinate*. How does it differ from the word *educate*? How did Hitler try to indoctrinate young Germans?

② —What should the goals of education be?

③ { How important is it to you to “look right”? To fit in? How do you feel when you don’t belong? How does it affect your self-esteem? When in a child’s development is he or she most vulnerable to issues related to “in” and “out” group behavior? Are adolescents more or less vulnerable than young children?

Reading 4

Obedience and Choice

A scene from Schindler's List: During the evacuation of the Krakow ghetto, soldiers hide in the stairwell of a tenement. As they wait to see if any Jew remains hidden in the building, they hear a sound. The commander promptly gives an order and the men rush to the second floor with their machine guns blazing. In the midst of the action, an SS officer plays the piano in a deserted apartment. A soldier and an officer appear in the doorway and listen briefly. The officer asks in German, "What is it? Is it Bach?" The soldier tells him, "No. Mozart."

What kind of person stops for music in the midst of a massacre? Murders babies? Slaughters old people? Were the soldiers so blinded by propaganda that they did not know right from wrong? To find answers to such questions, historian Christopher Browning studied interrogations made in the 1960s and early 1970s of 210 men in Reserve Police Battalion 101. The battalion was originally formed from the German equivalent of city policemen and county sheriffs. After 1939, it and other Order Police battalions served as occupation forces in conquered territory. Battalion 101 was assigned to the district of Lublin in Poland. Although Amon Goeth was not a member of the battalion, he was assigned to Lublin before coming to Plaszow.

Like the National Guard in the United States, German battalions were organized regionally. Most of the men in Battalion 101 came from Hamburg, Germany. They were older than the men who cleared Krakow. The average age was thirty-nine. Most were not well-educated. The majority had left school by the age of fifteen. Still few were Nazis and none was openly antisemitic. Major Wilhelm Trapp, a 53-year-old career police officer who rose through the ranks, headed the battalion. Although he became a Nazi in 1932, he did not belong to the SS. His two captains did.

The unit's first killing mission took place on July 13, 1942. Browning used interrogations to piece together the events of that day.

Just as daylight was breaking, the men arrived at the village [of Jozefow] and assembled in a half-circle around Major Trapp, who proceeded to give a short speech. With choking voice and tears in his eyes, he visibly fought to control himself as he informed his men that they had received orders to perform a very unpleasant task. These orders were not to his liking, but they came from above. It might perhaps make their task easier, he told the men, if they remembered that in Germany bombs were falling on the women and children. Two witnesses claimed that Trapp also mentioned that the Jews of this village had supported the partisans. Another witness recalled Trapp's mentioning that the Jews had instigated the boycott against Germany. Trapp then explained to the men that the Jews in Jozefow would have to be rounded up, whereupon the young males were to be selected out for labor and the others shot.

Trapp then made an extraordinary offer to his battalion: if any of the older men among them did not feel up to the task that lay before him, he could step out. Trapp paused, and after some moments, one man stepped forward. The captain of 3rd company, enraged that one of his men had broken ranks, began to berate the man. The major told the captain to hold his tongue. Then ten or twelve other men stepped forward as well. They turned in their rifles and were told to await a further assignment. . . .

“A few who admitted that they had been given the choice and yet failed to opt out were quite blunt. One said that he had not wanted to be considered a coward by his comrades. Another—more aware of what truly required courage—said quite simply: ‘I was cowardly.’”

Trapp then summoned the company commanders and gave them their respective assignments. Two platoons of 3rd company were to surround the village; the men were explicitly ordered to shoot anyone trying to escape. The remaining men were to round up the Jews and take them to the market place. Those too sick or frail to walk to the market place, as well as infants and anyone offering resistance or attempting to hide, were to be shot on the spot. Thereafter, a few men of 1st company were to accompany the work Jews selected at the market place, while the rest were to proceed to the forest to form the firing squads. The Jews were to be loaded onto battalion trucks by 2nd company and shuttled from the market place to the forest.

Once Trapp gave his men their assignments, he spent the day in town. No one recalled seeing him at the shooting site. Those who did describe him as bitterly complaining about the orders and “weeping like a child.” Despite his discomfort, Trapp insisted that “orders were orders” and must be carried out.

Browning says of the massacre, “While the men of Reserve Battalion 101 were apparently willing to shoot those Jews too weak or sick to move, they still shied for the most part from shooting infants, despite their orders. No officer intervened, though subsequently one officer warned his men that in the future they would have to be more energetic.” As the killing continued, some asked to be reassigned. A few officers complied, while others pressed their men to continue. By midday, the men were given vodka to “refresh” them. By afternoon, a number of men had broken down, but the majority continued to the end.

After the massacre, the battalion was transferred and platoons were divided up, each stationed in a different town. But they all took part in at least one more shooting action and most of the men found it easier to participate this time. Therefore Browning regards the first massacre as an important dividing line. It changed everyone who took part.

Even twenty-five years later they could not hide the horror of endlessly shooting Jews at point-blank range. In contrast, however, they spoke of surrounding ghettos and watching [Polish “volunteers”] brutally drive the Jews onto the death trains with considerable detachment and a near-total absence of any sense of participation or responsibility. Such actions they routinely dismissed with a standard refrain: “I was only in the police cordon there.” The shock treatment of Jozefow had created an effective and desensitized unit of ghetto-clearers and, when the occasion required, outright murderers. After Jozefow nothing else seemed so terrible.

Browning says of the choices open to the men he studied.

Most simply denied that they had any choice. Faced with the testimony of others, they did not contest that Trapp had made the offer but repeatedly claimed that they had not heard that part of his speech or could not remember it. A few who admitted that they had been given the choice and yet failed to opt out were quite blunt. One said that he had not wanted to be considered a coward by his comrades. Another—more aware of what truly required courage—said quite simply: “I was cowardly.” A few others also made the attempt to confront the question of choice but failed to find the words. It was a different time and place, as if they had been on another political planet, and the political vocabulary and values of the 1960s were helpless to explain the situation in which they found themselves in 1942. As one man admitted, it was

not until years later that he began to consider that what he had done had not been right. He had not given it a thought at the time.

The men who did not take part were more specific about their motives. Some attributed their refusal to age or lack of ambition. Browning notes:

What remains virtually unexamined by the interrogators and unmentioned by the policemen was the role of anti-Semitism. Did they not speak of it because anti-Semitism had not been a motivating factor? Or were they unwilling and unable to confront this issue even after twenty-five years, because it had been all too important, all too pervasive? One is tempted to wonder if the silence speaks louder than words, but in the end—the silence is still silence, and the question remains unanswered.

Connections

~~In reflecting on Milgram's experiment (pages 17-18), Philip Zimbardo states: "The question to ask of Milgram's research is not why the majority of normal, average subjects behave in evil (felonious) ways, but what did the disobeying minority do after they refused to continue?" How does that question apply to Browning's research? How does your answer explain why the soldiers were never punished for refusing to participate?~~

~~Zygmunt Bauman notes, "It is difficult to harm a person we touch. It is somewhat easier to inflict pain upon a person we only see at a distance." Does Browning's research support that conclusion? What new insights does it offer?~~

①

What choices were open to the soldiers? What part did peer pressure play in the evacuation of the ghetto? In the massacre at Jozefow? What part did opportunism play? What other factors may have influenced participation?

~~What does Browning mean when he writes of the soldiers, "It was a different time and place, as if they had been on another political planet, and the political vocabulary and values of the 1960s were helpless to explain the situation in which they found themselves in 1942"?~~

②

The officers described in the reading were concerned for their psychological well-being and that of their men. Yet they had no concern for their victims. What does this suggest about their sense of morality—of right and wrong?

~~What does Browning mean when he writes, "After Jozefow, nothing else seemed so terrible"? Would Amon Goeth agree? Would Trapp? Compare Trapp's speech with Goeth's. How do you account for differences?~~

~~Browning writes of two men who took part in the murders, "One said that he had not wanted to be considered a coward by his comrades. Another—more aware of what truly required courage—said quite simply: "I was cowardly." Write a working definition of the word *coward*.~~

Reading 6

Slavery and Labor

A scene from Schindler's List: After learning that Plaszow will soon be closed and the Jews shipped to Auschwitz, Schindler goes to see Amon Goeth. Schindler tells Goeth that he wants to move his factory to Czechoslovakia and take his workers with him. Goeth looks down from his window to a large group of Jewish prisoners being led to the main gate. "You want these people?" he asks. Schindler replies, "These people, my people. I want my people." The scene ends with Schindler saying, "All you have to do is tell me what it's worth to you. What's a person worth to you?" Goeth replies, "No, no, no, no. What's one worth to you?" The two men stare at each other and grin meaningfully.

Theologian Richard Rubenstein maintains that the Holocaust is linked, although not exclusively, to a cultural tradition of slavery "which stretches back to the Middle Passage from the coast of Africa, and beyond, to the enforced servitude in Ancient Greece and Rome." And he argues that "if we ignore this linkage, we ignore the existence of the sleeping virus in the bloodstream of civilization, at the risk of our future." That "sleeping virus" is racial hatred—in Steven Spielberg's words "a state of mind that attacks not what makes us people but what makes us different from each other." It was that hatred that made it possible for the Germans to enslave the Jews.

Orlando Patterson, an African-American sociologist who has studied slavery at various times in history, defines *slavery* as a relationship based on the total power of one individual or group over another. Although he sees similarities between it and other relationships based on power, he regards slavery as unique in three important ways: slaves are always powerless; they are almost always outsiders; and they are always disrespected.

Long before the Jews of Krakow were deported to Plaszow, they had lost power over their lives. Sonia Weitz, a survivor of the Krakow ghetto, tells of the night in October of 1942 when the Nazis came for her mother. Although Sonia, her father, and sister tried desperately to save the woman, there was nothing they could do. Nor was there anyone they could turn to for help. Their Jewish neighbors were as powerless as they were. That kind of helplessness is a characteristic of slavery.

Slaves are also isolated. They are almost always outside the larger community's "universe of obligations." Patterson found that their treatment accentuated their isolation. They not only lived apart. They were usually dressed in special clothing or given a distinctive haircut. Many were also tattooed. In the United States, historian Winthrop D. Jordan writes, the powerlessness and social isolation of African slaves led to a "generalized conception of 'us'—white, English, free—and 'them'—black, heathen, slave." In Nazi Europe, that conception was of "us"—Aryan, German, free—and "them"—Jewish, foreign, slave.



Amon Goeth and Oskar Schindler bargain for Jewish life in *Schindler's List*.

“The fierce love of the slave mother for her child is attested to in every slaveholding society; everywhere the slave’s zest for life and fellowship confounded the slaveholder class; and in all slaveholding societies the existential dignity of the slave belied the slaveholder’s denial of its existence.”

According to Patterson, slavery is also distinctive in that slaves are always humiliated. Only through acts of resistance can they maintain their identity. Thus he stresses the importance of even small acts of resistance:

The slave resisted in countless ways, only one of which, rebellion, was not subtle. Against all odds he strove for some measure of regularity and predictability in his social life. . . . Because he was considered degraded, he was all the more infused with the yearning for dignity. Because of his formal isolation . . . he was acutely sensitive to the realities of community. The fierce love of the slave mother for her child is attested to in every slaveholding society; everywhere the slave’s zest for life and fellowship confounded the slaveholder class; and in all slaveholding societies the existential dignity of the slave belied the slaveholder’s denial of its existence.

Sonia Weitz can still recall her own acts of resistance at Plaszow.

Although men and women lived in separate parts of the camp, the two groups did manage to have contact with each other. For example, on one occasion I was sent to the ghetto with a cleanup detail. While there I found a jacket, a precious warm jacket. I smuggled it back to Plaszow to my father. It was comforting to think that the jacket would keep him warm that winter.

On another day, I sneaked into my father’s barracks on the other side of the barbed wire fence. While I was there, I met a boy who was about my age—14 or 15. The boy was playing a harmonica, an offense punishable by death. My father and I listened to the music, and my father said to me, “You and I never had a chance to dance together” . . . and so we danced. It is such a precious image, a bizarre and beautiful gift.

Orlando Patterson has also noted that in every society he studied, slaves were “not allowed freely to integrate the experience of their ancestors into their lives.” The Jews, like other slaves, understood the importance of keeping their heritage alive. Many went to extraordinary lengths to do so. Sonia Weitz’s father and other parents secretly supported a Jewish school in the ghetto, a criminal act in German-occupied Poland. Countless families carried prayer books and other religious objects wherever they were sent. Thus, early in the film, when the Nussbaums prepare for their move to the ghetto, Mrs. Nussbaum packs the candlesticks she lit at sunset every Friday to mark the beginning of the Sabbath. Before leaving the apartment Oskar Schindler would eventually occupy, Mr. Nussbaum removes a *mezuzah* from the doorpost. It is a small tube that contains a quotation from the Bible calling upon Jews to make their homes worthy of God’s presence.

Connections

①

Why does Rubenstein regard racial hatred as a “sleeping virus”? What does the virus threaten? How is it linked to slavery? To the Holocaust? What signs of such a link can you find in the film? In current events?

②

Frederick Douglass once wrote, “A man without force is without the essential dignity of humanity.” What is the relationship between disrespect and powerlessness? Between a person’s labor and his or her social value? How does your answer explain why many Jews felt they had to resist no matter what the consequences?

Jews in every part of Europe fought back. In *Schindler’s List*, Keneally writes of the

3 } Zionists, the Jewish nationalists who led the resistance movement in Krakow:

The young Zionists ... had acquired uniforms of the Waffen SS and, with them, the entitlement to visit the SS-reserved Cyganeria Restaurant in *sw Duchą Plac*, across the square from the Slowacki Theatre. In the Cyganeria they left a bomb which blew the tables through the roof, tore seven SS men to fragments, and injured some forty more. ... They bombed the SS-only Bagatella Cinema in Karmelicka Street. [Zionists] would in a few months sink patrol boats on the Vistula, fire-bomb sundry military garages throughout the city, arrange [passes] for people who were not supposed to have them, smuggle passport photographs out to centers where they could be used in the forging of Aryan papers, derail the elegant Army-only train that ran between Krakow and Bochnia, and get their underground newspaper into circulation. They would also arrange for two of [ghetto police officers] who had drawn up lists for the imprisonment of thousands, to walk into a Ghetto ambush.

Still, the style of resistance for the ghetto dwellers remained that of Artur Rosenzweig [a leader of the Jewish council] who, when asked in June to make a list of thousands for deportation, had placed his own name, his wife's, his daughter's at the top.

Elie Wiesel, a Holocaust survivor, says of such acts, "The question is not why all the Jews did not fight, but how so many of them did. Tormented, beaten, starved, where did they find the strength—spiritual and physical—to resist?" How would you answer Wiesel's question?

~~Historian Debórah Dwork finds uprisings and acts of sabotage "spectacular, awe-inspiring, and monumentally courageous." But she believes that other forms of courage were equally spectacular. What were they?~~

~~The policy, for example, ... in Warsaw and Gens in Vilna to educate, feed, and protect children out of proportion to their ghettos' resources was another way in which Jews opposed the press of Nazism and held fast to their principles and responsibilities. The activities of Jewish networks throughout Nazi-occupied Europe to save the children is also too frequently forgotten. And, most poignant, the decisions taken by the children's parents on behalf of their daughters and sons is an overwhelmingly painful form of courage and resistance. It cannot be stressed too fervently that it was the parents who took the first step and the most terrifying step in the protection of their children, as it was they who had to determine whether it was best to send them into hiding, to try to smuggle them out of the country, or to keep them at their side.~~

~~What evidence of such resistance can be seen in the film? In Keneally's book? How does Dwork define *courage*? *Resistance*? How do you define them?~~

~~Why have slaves throughout history gone to extraordinary lengths to keep their heritage alive? How does your answer help explain the Yiddish folk song a children's choir sings throughout the evacuation of the ghetto? In the song, young children are repeatedly told that they must learn their "ABCs" to preserve their heritage. What other scenes in the film convey a similar message? Research the way African Americans used music, storytelling, and other art forms to keep their culture alive through over 300 years of slavery.~~

Reading 7

Was Oskar Schindler a Hero?

A scene in *Schindler's List*: After learning that the war is over, Schindler addresses his workers from a catwalk overlooking the factory floor as the guards look on.

The unconditional surrender of Germany has just been announced. At midnight tonight the war is over. Tomorrow, you'll begin the process of looking for survivors of your families. In most cases . . . you won't find them. After six long years of murder. . . victims are being mourned throughout the world. We've survived. Many of you have come up to me and thanked me. Thank yourselves. Thank your fearless Stern and others among you who, worried about you, have faced death at every moment. I'm a member of the Nazi party. I'm a munitions manufacturer. I'm a profiteer of slave labor. I am . . . a criminal. At midnight, you'll be free and I'll be hunted. I shall remain with you until five minutes after midnight, after which time—and I hope you'll forgive me—I have to flee.

Was Schindler's assessment of his role accurate? Or did he tell only part of the story? In 1964, he said of himself, "The persecution of Jews in occupied Poland meant that we could see horror emerging gradually in many ways. In 1939 they were forced to wear Jewish stars, and people were herded and shut up into ghettos. Then in the years '41 and '42 there was plenty of public evidence of pure sadism. With people behaving like pigs, I felt the Jews were being destroyed. I had to help them. There was no choice."

Did Schindler have a choice? Was he a hero? A moral person? For Rena Finder, who was on "Schindler's list," the answer is simple. He was indeed a hero, a "savior," a man larger than life. She still recalls his acts of kindness at a time when "nobody had a kind word or look for us. Here was a German who would say 'good morning,' who would talk to you." In her view, Schindler was never a real Nazi because he had no hate in his heart.

Steven Spielberg believes that in the beginning Schindler was in the "Oskar Schindler business." In his view, the industrialist changed as a result of "getting to know his workers as people, not just as metal polishers or lathe operators, but he got to know them by name, and he got to know who they were. He looked upon them as people who were doing kindnesses to him, making him a lot of money and giving him a lifestyle that he wanted to enjoy. I think he returned the favor just simply by identifying his Jewish workers as people, not as numbers." After studying many rescuers, Ervin Staub came to a similar conclusion: "Goodness, like evil, often begins in small steps. Heroes evolve; they aren't born."

Actor Gregory Alan-Williams distinguishes between heroism and acts of courage. His own act of courage took place on April 29, 1992, the day a jury acquitted the Los Angeles police officers accused of beating Rodney King, an African American. After viewing a video of the beating that a bystander made, many African Americans were outraged by the verdict. Within hours, they took to the streets of Los Angeles. When Alan-Williams, also an African American, saw an angry crowd attack a Japanese American motorist with broken bottles and metal rods, he rushed to save the man. Alan-Williams was hailed as a hero but he is not sure that he was heroic.

The true heroes are those who do the best they can on behalf of themselves and others. Folks who go to work every day, despite the drudgery, then come home and love a bunch of crazy kids who don't really appreciate them. Every day, around the world, heroes feed the hungry, house the homeless, clothe the naked, and teach the so-called hopeless and ignorant. Heroes take the time to share themselves and the wisdom they have gathered on their walk toward destiny. Heroes cry and cry out when there is injustice, regardless of their ties to the unjust.

Jennifer Jones, a student at Bellevue Junior High in Memphis, Tennessee, wrote of such a hero:

At night as I lie in my bed smelling the sweet smell of the freshly-cut grass of summertime float through the open window caressing my face and tickling my nose, I sometimes remember a lot of the things that my "hero" has done for me. My "hero" is my dad. My dad has always been there for me to talk to and to understand. To many people my dad is just another "nigga" who talks too much, but to me, he is my world. The feelings that I have for my dad can't be explained by any word in the English language.

My dad was born in Memphis, Tennessee, to a poor Black mother and a poor Black father. Their names were Olden William Jones, Senior, and Louise Jones. My father often talks about how different things were back when he was young. He was born in 1942 and is now 52 years old. He talks about the many struggles he and his three brothers and one sister faced. He was the second oldest of five children, now he is the oldest of four. My uncle Olden was the oldest child. He was the first Black Eagle Scout in the state of Tennessee. He was stabbed to death by some white teenagers at the age of seventeen.

When my father was older, he became a singer. He sang with a group called the Ovations. They cut one record. They opened for groups like the Temptations and the Commodores. At many of the places they performed, they couldn't go through the front door because they were Black. When he was in his 40's my dad worked as a garbage man. I remember a time when my little brothers and I were little and we had no place to live. During that time we slept in the very same station wagon that often drives me to school some mornings. Even though times were tough, we always had enough to eat and a sacrificing father who worked hard to feed us. Now we have a nice home and we know our father loves us, always has, and always will. He can truly be called a hero by me.

"Every day, around the world, heroes feed the hungry, house the homeless, clothe the naked, and teach the so-called hopeless and ignorant. Heroes take the time to share themselves and the wisdom they have gathered on their walk toward destiny. Heroes cry and cry out when there is injustice, regardless of their ties to the unjust."

Connections

① { Do your own experiences and those of friends and classmates support the idea that goodness and evil both begin with small steps?

② { How does Alan-Williams define the word *hero*? According to his definition, is Jennifer Jones' dad a hero? Was Schindler a hero? Write your own definition.

Reading 8

Can One Person Make a Difference?

“From past experience we have learned that whenever people speak up on behalf of their more unfortunate fellow human beings, their protest does have an effect . . . But even if our efforts left the tormentors indifferent, they would still be fruitful, for they bring comfort and consolation to their victims.”

The final scene in *Schindler’s List*: At the Catholic cemetery in Jerusalem, one Schindler Jew after another places a pebble on Oskar Schindler’s gravestone. Each is accompanied by the actor who played him or her in the film. A few words appear on the screen to identify each individual. The line of people waiting to pay their respects seems endless, as these words appear on the screen: “There are fewer than four thousand Jews left alive in Poland today. There are more than six thousand descendants of the Schindler Jews.”

Rena Finder, a Schindler Jew and a survivor of the Holocaust, firmly believes that she has a responsibility to call attention to injustices wherever they may occur. Elie Wiesel, a Holocaust survivor and a recipient of the Nobel Prize for Peace, has a similar view. In 1993, he traveled to war-torn countries around the world to call attention to violations of basic human rights. Shortly after returning from one such trip, he was asked why students should care about events in distant places.

From past experience we have learned that whenever people speak up on behalf of their more unfortunate fellow human beings, their protest does have an effect . . . But even if our efforts left the tormentors indifferent, they would still be fruitful, for they bring comfort and consolation to their victims.

In other words: It may very well be that you are powerless to change the course of history on a decision-making level but it is incumbent upon you to improve the psychological condition of those who suffer. . . .

Find a way, any way, to give voice to your outrage at the young racists in Germany, to your abhorrence of bigotry on our own streets, to your solidarity with the prisoners in former Yugoslavia and to your determination to combat hunger in Somalia. Do not tell me you are voiceless. . . . There are adolescents in Somalia who will die if help does not arrive soon. They are younger than you.

Connections

① How do Rena Finder and Elie Wiesel define their “universe of obligations”? How important is that definition to the way they see themselves? To their community? To society as a whole? What questions would you like to ask of them? What can you learn from their experiences?

② A Polish woman recalls two occasions when she turned away rather than help someone from the ghetto. Wondering if the outcome would have been different if she and others had followed their conscience, she concludes, “Possibly, even if more of us had turned out to be more Christian, it would have made no difference in the statistics of the extermination, but maybe it would not have been such a lonely death.” Every major religion teaches that we are indeed “our brothers’ keepers” and yet much of history describes the way neighbors have turned against neighbors. What can history teach us about the value of our neighbors? About the way people everywhere are linked?