

Fifth Grade:

Amy (Dayoung) Lee, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. School, Cambridge, MA

What the Grave Responsibility of Justice Means to Me

Injustice can come in many different forms, such as discrimination, forced labor, torture or deprivation. In World War II, injustice was everywhere. Jewish people, disabled, or “asocial” people were put in concentration camps by the Nazis. Therefore, Judge Jackson gave a speech stating: “...*We must never forget that the record on which we judge these defendants today is the record on which history will judge us tomorrow...*” I think that Judge Jackson meant that we might be in a powerful position to judge injustice right now, but in the future, we will still be judged by our actions.

Hence, we should recognize that we all have the “grave responsibility” of justice. It means to me that I should be kind to people because an action that I did can affect others and I would be responsible for it. As citizens to this world, we all are responsible for our actions. Therefore, hurting or just affecting someone in general with our actions would make us responsible. Oskar Schindler is an example of someone who did a good deed when he could have just ignored what was going on. Schindler was a factory owner during World War II. He hired as many Jewish people as he could and, in that way saved them. If people took the “grave responsibility” of justice seriously like Oskar Schindler, justice would become pervasive.

On the contrary, if there weren’t people like Oskar Schindler, it wouldn’t be possible for justice to prevail. For example, in the book *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, Uncle Tom was beaten by a slave owner, called Simon Legree. He beat up Uncle Tom merely because the presence of him was intimidating. This is not right and against the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), which was established by the United Nations. The UDHR clearly states that people should not be beaten up or locked up without trial, or legal process.

Nowadays, however, injustice is still seen throughout the world. For example, in North Korea, people can be put into terrible concentration camps if they oppose the dictator. That makes it difficult to state their mind and speak freely. The concentration camp is even difficult to survive. One person who escaped the camp testified “The officials were crueler than beasts.” The existence of such a camp violates human rights from the UDHR and is vivid evidence that injustice is still very real in this world.

Injustice is a problem that is still happening in all corners of the earth. It was a big problem in the past, and although our world has improved materially, and takes injustice more seriously, it still persists. I believe that if people all took the “grave responsibility” of justice seriously, the earth we live in would be a much better place, where there wouldn’t be as much conflict related to injustice, and all people would be welcome.

Sixth Grade:

Carter Schultz, St. Paul Lutheran School, Boca Raton, FL

The Legacy of the Nuremberg Trials

Prejudice and hatred have been the cause of many horrible crimes throughout history, and unfortunately, we still see too many examples of unacceptable actions today. That is why the message behind Supreme Court Justice Robert Jackson's statement at the opening of the Nuremberg trials--saying history would judge the prosecutors and tribunal by how they judged the Nazi war criminals—still applies today. Modern societies cannot allow horrible conduct to become normalized, and must be opposed to behavior seen as incompatible with human decency.

At Nuremberg, seeking justice was vital because it allowed the world to see the war crimes the Nazi regime committed. Despite the gravity of the Nazis' crimes, much of the world had not understood previously their horrible scope, as they were far removed from the actual events. The Nuremberg Trials showed the world the horror of what the Nazi government had done, and they also showed there were consequences for war crimes and crimes against humanity. This was the main point of the Nuremberg Trials: to send a message that the world would not condone war crimes and attempts to eliminate entire races of people. While the Nuremberg trials never could have fully redressed the atrocities committed by the Nazis, there was an invaluable symbolism behind them, as they showed that the world would not tolerate or forget the Nazis' horrible crimes. The trials showed that there are consequences, even if some would rightly think that adequate justice for the scope of the crimes committed was not possible. To the greatest extent possible, the Nuremberg Trials brought justice, and they reestablished what was not acceptable to society. That was the meaning behind Justice Jackson's statement—showing all who would consider committing such crimes again that the world would not tolerate it.

Seeking justice in the face of atrocities continues to be important. Today the International Criminal Court plays a similar role as that of the prosecutors in the Nuremberg Trials. The International Criminal Court (ICC) hears cases concerning war crimes, and the ICC has the jurisdiction to convict a person of genocide, war crimes, crimes against humanity, and crimes of aggression. The ICC has convicted two people, Sudanese President Omar-al-Bashir and Congolese Vice President Jean-Pierre-Bemba. Omar-al-Bashir was convicted for corruption, and Jean-Pierre-Bemba was convicted for crimes against humanity and war crimes. In the past thirty years, the world has seen two major genocides. First the Rwandan genocide, and second, the Bosnian genocide. It is essential that there always be a forum for justice for these crimes.

What I think the "grave responsibility of justice" means is that if a crime goes unnoticed or unpunished, it makes a person think that they can get away with it, which leads to the crime being normalized. Horrible crimes against humanity cannot be normalized or tolerated in the past or in the future, and this is what I think Justice Jackson meant in his statement.

Seventh Grade:

Iago Macknik-Conde, The Anderson School, New York, NY

The Legacy of Nuremberg

In the Spring of 2017, I joined my mother on a business trip to Poland. A few days after our arrival in Warsaw, we took a train to Krakow, and then a bus to Auschwitz. We approached the gates to the

concentration camp, where we encountered the infamous motto embedded in the wrought iron framework: “Arbeit Macht Frei,” or “work will set you free”. Our guide walked us from exhibit to exhibit, showing us overwhelming proof of the terrible crimes committed in the very places where we stood. There were entire rooms filled with children’s shoes, and mountains of hair that was cropped from the prisoners. I stopped at the threshold of the gas chambers, my eyes fixed on the dusty shower heads a few steps ahead. I felt the visceral impulse to run away from the cold, dimly lit compartment, into the sunlit path outside. What happened in this room was too terrible to even think about.

Yet, when Supreme Court Justice Robert H. Jackson and his fellow prosecutors were given the duty of determining the Nazis’ responsibility at the Nuremberg Trials, they did not have the luxury of looking away from the horror. They had to dig deep to discover exactly what happened during the Holocaust and who should be held accountable for the many atrocities that were perpetrated on innocent people. This was part of what Jackson referred to as to his “grave responsibility.” He understood that the Nuremberg trials must be conducted as fairly as possible, because they would set the standard for judges and prosecutors that might need to address future “crimes against the peace of the world.” Because Jackson was an American Supreme Court Justice, one might be tempted to think that something like the Holocaust could never occur in the US. Unfortunately, there is recent evidence to the contrary, such as the 2014 and 2018 shootings that targeted Jewish communities in Overland Park, Kansas, and Pittsburg, Pennsylvania.

Racially motivated hate crimes and violence in our country also affect Muslim, Black, and Latinx communities, as seen in the recent shooting in El Paso. Possibly worst of all, thousands of immigrants are imprisoned at the US border, where children are separated from their families and detainees live in the most precarious conditions, without access to adequate hygiene or healthcare.

This is why seeking and upholding justice, even when it feels unbearable to do so, is so important, and why people worldwide must participate in this relentless effort. Entire nations must be held subject to international law to prevent and punish crimes against humanity, and it is everyone’s duty to both uphold these rules and to defend them. Making amends for the Nazis’ war crimes is an impossible task, because the millions of lives lost cannot be restored, or the pain of the survivors diminished. Even so, striving for justice is necessary if we ever hope to achieve a future in which “crimes against the peace of the world” exist in history books only.

Eighth Grade:

Alexandra Li, Grover Cleveland Middle School, Caldwell, NJ

On Justice for Nazis, and Many More

Millions perished at their hands. Cities were destroyed, families forced apart, and many hearts were devastated by the Nazis in World War II. When Supreme Court Justice Robert Jackson faced the Nazi officers on trial, he was accompanied by the anguished hearts of millions more whose lives were destroyed by these very men, and whose hearts longed for them to experience their own turmoil. Justice Jackson knew this, and that it was his responsibility as a judge to deliver justice for the millions devastated by their very hands. The sheer number of people all over the globe who were relying on him to serve justice to the Nazis made the case a “grave responsibility”.

For many, it seems that after committing such heinous acts, serving “justice” would not be necessary; after all, when did these Nazi officers on trial ever deliver justice to the millions dead by their hands? However, justice, even for the worst of criminals, is necessary because victims must rise above succumbing to vengeance. Give everyone a chance, no matter how slim; be gracious enough to give the enemy even the slightest chance to justify, apologize or defend their actions. If we simply give up on justice, no matter how horrific the perpetrator, we are showing that we are just as horrific. The perpetrator never gave the victim a chance to speak up. We must never then act in the same way as the perpetrators.

If anyone takes a look into the news of today, a bombardment of stories about the newest illegal act committed by a celebrity, leader, or public figure will appear. Presidents, actors, comedians, pastors, even billionaires have all been found guilty of various crimes. But can these people be found guilty? Yes! We need justice to reach each and every person, no matter how big, powerful, and rich they may be, because the entire point of justice is to bring fair reparations to the victim, and how would it be fair if only common-folk perpetrators were subject to punishment? After all, in the end, people are people, and the only thing that separates classes are man-made dividers.

As with delivering justice to the Nazi officers at Nuremberg, delivering complete justice would likely be impossible. The people who survived the Holocaust could never let the Nazis experience what they experienced. Even a death sentence would not mean the Nazi officers would experience the pain of the millions of deaths they caused, nor the heartbreak that came after. Perhaps there was no way to truly give the Nazis the punishment they deserved. But what is possible is to give the fairest judgment and punishment possible.

Middle School Honorable Mentions:

Aydin Daniel, Basis Scottsdale, Scottsdale, AZ
Daven Huete, Riverdale Middle School, Jefferson, LA
Ethan Quintana De Andres, Santa Fe Prep, Santa Fe, NM
Carter Weiss, Elite Academic Academy, Temecula, CA
Jackie Cutrona, John Glenn Middle School, Bedford, MA