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Woodrow Wilson Undergraduate Research Fellowship Application

Raised as a Jew in New York City, I've always known the Holocaust to be one of, if not the, most deleterious acts in the history of mankind. It is a topic that has been and will continue to be exponentially studied, and yet one that we will forever fail to fully comprehend. And still, I've found myself undeniably fascinated with the topic, mostly because I myself cannot find a way to bring any rationality to the horrible crimes that occurred. I was raised around the notion that the words "genocide" and "Holocaust" were both synonymous and exclusively linked with one another: It was as if the crimes committed against the Jewish people and humanity were an anomaly in world history. However, it was only until I travelled to Tanzania two summers ago that I realized just how shortsighted that view was.

Although my travel program was centered in community service, my group took a daytime trip to the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda in Arusha, Tanzania. The center was established in 1994 to conduct trials for those deemed responsible for the genocide. While there, my group and I learned the historical facts of the genocide, spoke with government representatives about their previous and current work, and even met a survivor of the genocide. For me, the trip was both extremely upsetting and insightful: I began to realize that the atrocious crimes that occurred in Hitler's Germany were not mutually exclusive to the Third Reich itself. While it may be the most extreme example of genocide in modern history for us to study, it certainly is not the only case.

Further research on my part revealed a whole series of genocides that occurred throughout the twentieth century. Researchers have recently uncovered the slaughtering of almost two million Ottomans in Armenia in the early years of World War I. Aside from the Holocaust during World War II, Pot Pol's reign of terror in Cambodia, Saddam Hussein's destruction of the Kurds in Northern Iraq, and the Rwandan Hutus' systematic extermination of the Tutsi minority in 1994 are more recent examples of mass exterminations of peoples. After considering these cases, I began to see genocide as less of an anomaly, but as more of an unfortunate component of humankind that has possibly been occurring for centuries: If we classify genocide as the mass murder of a "race" of people, then should the Trail of Tears that occurred in the 1830's in Jackson's America be considered genocide? Is the Spanish conquistadors' murder of the native populations an example of genocide? What about the crusades that occurred in the beginning of the second millennium; is this yet another example?

I subsequently realized that these genocides or mass murders spanned countries, nationalities, religions, cultures, and centuries. Although the cases each vary in severity and scope, they share the common thread that the end result was the mass extermination of a group of people at the hands of their fellow man. While this upsetting epiphany furthered my inability to fathom the subject matter, a series of questions popped into my head that I now find worth investigating: What is genocide, and how do we classify it? How does genocide begin? Why do people commit genocide? What is the first genocide

to have ever occurred in the history of mankind? Are human beings in any way genetically predisposed to commit such atrocities? And perhaps the question that most motivates me to undertake this project: How can we prevent future genocides from occurring?

This project is innately interdisciplinary; it would look at genocide from historical, psychological, biological, anthropological, and ethical perspectives. The goal of my project is that by researching genocide from so many diverse viewpoints, I can draw some rational conclusions to behavior that is so completely irrational in nature.

Receiving a Woodrow Wilson Fellowship would give me the resources to thoroughly research my topic, and perhaps visit primary sources of information in their respective fields of study. While I know that at Johns Hopkins undergraduate research is a common practice, I would hopefully look to acquire the funds to extensively travel to a number of destinations in order to paint the most accurate picture. Travelling to places such as Rwanda, Bosnia, and Germany would allow me to interview people and therefore gain access to first-hand accounts of the crimes. Furthermore, seeing the locations where these crimes occurred is of extreme importance because it would allow to me to analyze the events with a geopolitical and social lens. The funds allotted to my project might also give me access to proper historical documents, such as government records.

Studying the mass slaughter of millions of people is certainly not an easy subject for anyone to examine. Genocide is typically seen as a taboo subject, a forbidden subject that can often times be easier to sweep under the rug than discuss and analyze. However, I believe it is unequivocally vital to us as an ever-evolving species, in order for us to retain and develop humanity and acceptance, to study these gross crimes and develop ways to prevent them from ever happening again.