

The Cautionary Tales: dehumanization, mistreatment and slaughter

History holds up a mirror to nations who through barbarous actions sought to eliminate an entire racial, national, ethnic or religious group. Although many nations deny what they see in the mirror, students of history see what happens when nations demonize and dehumanize groups. Depending upon the circumstances in each case, the actions of the perpetrators are described as:

- 1.Genocides
- 2.Holocausts
- 3.Ethnic Cleansing
- 4.Crimes Against Humanity
- 5.Mass Murder or
- 6.War Crimes

However the atrocities are finally labeled, what is significant is that they are cautionary tales as to what happens when the first steps are taken to devalue a group of people. It is easier to take away rights and mistreat people when you first hate and devalue them. And once a nation starts down the slippery slope of demonization and dehumanization, the path towards slaughter is much shorter.

Below is a partial list that includes genocides, holocausts, ethnic cleansing, crimes against humanity, mass murder and war crimes. Throughout history there have been many more.

- 1.Armenia in the Ottoman Turk Empire 1915-1920
- 2.Ukraine in the Soviet Republic 1932-33
- 3.Europe from the 1930's to 1945
- 4.The Indonesian invasion of East Timor 1975
- 5.Cambodia and the Khmer Rouge in the 1970's
- 6.Bosnia in the former Yugoslavia 1992-95
- 7.Rwanda 1994
- 8.Dafur in the Sudan, today

In all cases mass killings of people of a specific racial, national, ethnic or religious group took place. The individuals in these groups were dehumanized, mistreated and killed or left to die for the sole reason that they were identifiable as part of the group that another group wished to eliminate.

In preparation for Reading and Remembrance 2006:

Holocaust and Anti-Racism Education:

- 1.Research one of the 8 shameful attacks upon a group of people.
- 2.The United Nations and individual nations have methods of naming these atrocities. (United Nations Convention on the prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide) To the best of your ability, decide which naming (1-6) best suits your selected topic. Be prepared to provide evidence as to why it is a genocide instead of something else. Hints: Sometimes it matters whether or not the actions happened during a declared war or whether the murderous actions were intentional.
- 3.Why was your selected group targeted for elimination?
- 4.What were the first warning signs for the targeted group that their lives were in danger? Could they protect themselves? Why or why not?
- 5.Did anyone come forward to defend the group you are researching? Why or why not?
- 6.In World War I, World War II, Korea and now in Afghanistan, Canada sent soldiers. Why?

Writing for Reading

Select ONE of the activities below.

1. **Verbal Collage:** Find 5-8 first person accounts of people involved in your atrocity. You're looking for short quotations that capture the feeling of what went on during your atrocity. Title your collage, i.e. Never Again a Ukraine Hunger! Or We shall not remain buried in Cambodia! Be prepared to read your verbal collage on Nov 10 at 2:10 p.m.
2. **Histories:** Find 5-8 oral histories of veterans on web sites such as the Memory Project (www.thememoryproject.com) or Veterans Affairs Canada (www.vac-acc.gc.ca) and follow the links to Canada Remembers and Heroes Remember) Take short clips out of the oral histories to highlight what the soldiers felt they were fighting for. Title your oral history presentation and be prepared to read it out loud.

3. Write a poem, song or short prose reflection about the steps that lead from dehumanization to mistreatment.

Prompts to get you started:

- First no one looked me in the eye
- Don't call me that!
- You should try to know me
- Down but not out

Be prepared to share your creative writing on Nov 10 at 2:10 p.m.