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Holocaust Denial: Draft

"Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it." -George Santayana

In George Orwell's novel, *1984*, the people are constantly under government surveillance, which is Big Brother and the Party. The world is in a state of constant war and the people even have telescreens in their homes that watch their every move. Big Brother and the Party use their power over the people to influence their daily lives and make sure whatever the people do or know is in their favor. Orwell introduces the character Winstcn, who is an average man that works for the Ministry of Truth, editing or changing old newspaper articles to revise the past and make sure they fit the claims of the Party.

The revision of history in this case made the people believe that the Party was the greatest thing to ever happened to them, although their lives were highly oppressed. People depend on their understanding of their history to make judgments about their present. If the Party controlled the past, they controlled what people think about now and the future. The case with Winston is he knew the Party was changing the past because he had some recollection of his childhood, so he often questioned them. However, the Party would never allow anyone to risk their power, so they set Winston up captured him and did what they deemed necessary in order to keep the control over the people.

Because the public did not have the information or memories like Winston did, society remained the same after the Party 'took care' of Winston. However, in real life, if people believe
what they are told without supporting evidence, then one can be led to believe almost anything. There are many things that people may never know about for sure; if these gaps can be filled with anything the government wants, then we can be made to believe almost anything ... and act on that belief. Not only in the novel but in today’s society, the past is just a tool to control the present. People tend to rewrite it to serve any purpose they wish.

In Nazi Germany, January 30, 1933, the beginnings of a mass genocide of the Jewish population occurred, which became known as the Holocaust. The Holocaust lasted over 10 years under the power of Adolf Hitler, the Nazi Party, and Nazi sympathizers. Although the Holocaust was one of the most well documented eras in history; today some still believe and argue that the Holocaust was a hoax. The people who believe this are Holocaust deniers. According to The Skeptic’s Dictionary, Holocaust denial, “refers to attacking the accuracy of any aspect of the symbology or history of the Holocaust.” Deniers are trying to rewrite one of the most horrific times of the world’s history because they do not believe the Jewish population should have so much sympathy for events that did not happen. However, if people believe the claims of parts of the Holocaust being fake, it may lead a way for the same thing, maybe not to the same extent, to happen again as George Santayana’s quote stated.

Holocaust denial is an attempt to negate the established facts of the Nazi genocide of European Jewry (Holocaust Denial and Distortion). Holocaust denial and distortion are forms of antisemitism. The disbelief is typically driven by the hate for Jews and built on how claims of the Holocaust were created or exaggerated by them as a plot to advance Jewish interests. These views maintain established anti-Semitic stereotypes, and hateful burdens that played a role in arranging the foundation for the Holocaust. Holocaust denial and reinterpretation all weaken the understanding of history.
During the period of the Holocaust, most of the killings when they were ordered, were verbal. There was little documentation because the Germans destroyed it before the end of World War II (United States Memorial Holocaust Museum). According to the Holocaust Memorial Museum,

In order to hide the killing operation as much as possible from the uninitiated, Hitler ordered that the killings not be spoken of directly in German documentation or in public statements. Instead, the Germans used codenames and neutral-sounding terms for the killing process. In Nazi parlance, for example, “action” (Aktion) referred to a violent operation against Jewish (or other) civilians by German security forces; “resettlement to the East” (Umsiedlung nach dem Osten) referred to the forced deportation of Jewish civilians to killing centers in German-occupied Poland; and “special treatment” (Sonderbehandlung) meant killing.

This allowed Hitler and his fellow officers to be secretive about their operations to persecute the Jewish population. They did not want the general public to know about these plans in the beginning. However, as time went on, people in Germany began to realize exactly what the Nazi Party was up to. Also, some survivors of the killings would come forward and explain what they had seen and been through. But Hitler had grown such a fan base that he was greatly supported in the termination of Jews by any means possible.

Another way the Nazis tried to cover up their operations was to hide the bodies of victims remains from their Allies. Heinrich Himmler assigned SS Officer Paul Blobel to command Operation (Aktion) 1005 (Combating the Holocaust). This plan was to destroy the forensic evidence at mass murder sites. Prisoners in concentration camps were forced to reopen mass graves at both the killing centers in German-occupied Poland and at the open air killing sites in the former Soviet territory and to cremate the bodies, thus removing evidence of mass murder. These two examples of how the Nazis would destroy evidence is some of the basis for the arguments of deniers. They believe that because there are ‘holes’ in some facts that they cannot be true because there is no hard evidence to back up facts of the Holocaust.
There are countless instances of deniers rewriting the history of the Holocaust. For example, many believe that gas chambers never really existed, and Auschwitz was either nonexistent as well, or not as cruel as it was made to be. In an article, “Denying the Holocaust”, by Deborah Lipstadt, she touches upon these examples and the arguments deniers have as to why they are false accusations. She is presenting the thoughts that some of these people may have and how they came to the conclusion that the Holocaust was a hoax and it was all planned out by another government and not the German Nazi’s or even Hitler himself. Lipstadt states that, “Deniers dismiss all assertions that the Holocaust took place as conscious fabrications, or as psychotic delusions,” and the deniers even go as far as to say that Hitler loved the Jews and went out of his way to help them when he could. This is absurd due to the substantial evidence that has been gathered about the mass murder.

The author then brings up the point that countless executors confessed to what they had done during war once it was over. An example of a confession from Otto Ohlendorf, who was a commander of the Einsatzgruppen units, testified that between June 1941 and 1942 his unit murdered about 90,000 people. Even with these solid confessions from several other people as well, who were there at the time of the war, the deniers say that these confessions were forced because they were tortured into doing so to avoid the death penalty. However, this cannot be the case because there were still cases in which people confessed what they had done even after they had been sentenced to death, which was the situation of a man named Rudolf Höss.

One of the biggest thing the deniers try to talk their way through is claiming that Auschwitz was never an extermination camp. This is of course ridiculous because there is an overwhelming amount of evidence, such as, eye-witnesses, victims, perpetrators, and documents that have been found proving all the terrible things that took place in this concentration camp.
They ignore or try to explain away evidence that leaves no doubt as to Auschwitz’s immoral purposes. However, there is an innumerable amount of drawings of the camp and time logs that prove otherwise. These hard artifacts prove the real purpose of Auschwitz and most claims the deniers make have little validity.

Lipstadt also states how deniers believe that the gas chambers used to kill thousands of Jews did nothing of the sort. The gas chambers were rather delousing chambers or morgues. Deniers also say that these gas chambers were air-raid shelters to ‘protect’ the camp inmates from airstrikes of the war. However, the chambers were much too small to hold anywhere close to the amount of people that were living in the camps. There are many witnesses that support the true use of the gas chambers that the deniers fail to recognize because it does not support their own theories. For example, a man named Hans Stark was a member of the Auschwitz Gestapo, and at his trial he described the process used to kill the Jews in the chambers. Starks testimony includes,

As early as autumn 1941 gassings were carried in a room...[which] held 200 to 250 people, had a higher than average ceiling, no windows, only a specially insulated door with bolts like those of an airtight door [Luftzuter]. The room had a flat roof, which allowed daylight in through the openings. It was though the openings that Zyylon B in granular form would be poured.

Which only furthers that the deniers will not accept the truths of what actually happened because they do not want others to feel sympathy towards the Jews.

Holocaust deniers are so invested in their ideals, that in 1980 they even offered a $50,000 award to anyone who could prove that Jews were gassed in Auschwitz (Holocaust Encyclopedia). A survivor named Mel Mermelstein submitted an affidavit of his internment at Auschwitz and later sued against the Institute of Historical Review (IHR) because the institute refused to pay him. In October 1981, Superior Court judge Thomas T. Johnson uses "judicial
notice," which allows courts to recognize as fact matters that are common knowledge, to issue a ruling that the Holocaust was fact and that Jews were gassed at Auschwitz.

In addition, deniers have frequently attacked the *Diary of Anne Frank*, which is the experiences a young Jewish girl goes through with her family in hiding as well (Lipstadt). Deniers argue that because there are different versions of the book that it must be a fraud. However, the Netherlands Sate Institute for War Documentation, proved with extensive forensic tests that the journal was indeed authentic. By deniers making the claim that the Diary of Anne Frank is a fraud, it is only continuing their journey in trying to rewrite history as we know it. Going after this diary does have an impact because it is often the first piece of literature that students are exposed to involving the Holocaust. If the students were to ever hear the cases the deniers make as to why this book may be a hoax, the children may begin to question it themselves. This may cause the following of deniers to grow at a young age, and change how young people grow up viewing the Holocaust and the Jewish population.

For years, there has always been people that do not accept some of the facts of the Holocaust. They tend to manipulate the facts to what they believe is right and get others to follow and think their claims are true history. Still, the severity of Holocaust denial has grown even with the outstanding evidence proving it is legitimate. For example, in some countries one may be prosecuted if they are caught promoting any type of idea that the Holocaust was a hoax because of all the hateful remarks, slurs, and sometimes violence. In Israel for instance, on July 8, 1986 the Israeli parliament passed a law that criminalizes anyone who promotes denial of the Holocaust (Holocaust Encyclopedia). Another example is in 1990 when the French government ratifies the Gayssot Law, which declares that questioning the scale or
existence of crimes against humanity is a criminal offense. This act marked the first European order openly outlawing denial of the Holocaust.

On the other hand, Holocaust Denial was and is affecting lives in the United States as well. One cause is in 1990, Illinois became the first state to make teaching of the Holocaust mandatory in public schools. Unfortunately, deniers were not pleased with this decision at all because it went against their views of the history of the Holocaust.

According to the Holocaust Encyclopedia,

...parents Ingeborg and Safet Sarich publicly protest by pulling their 13-year-old daughter out of school. The Sariches also mail 6,000 letters to public officials, scholars, journalists, and Holocaust survivors attacking the historical record as "rumors and exaggerations.

This is yet another example of how young children may be influenced into a different type of history that is taught through their parent’s eyes and beliefs. Again, this is how the following continues to grow because parents will teach their kids how they view the Holocaust and so the child will grow up thinking that is how history is rather than believing in the real version.

A more recent example of Holocaust Denial is the 2008 Irving V. Lipstadt case.

According to Jewish Virtual Library, the case was

a legal case initiated by Holocaust denier David Irving against defendants Deborah Lipstadt and Penguin Books, tried in a London court from January to March 2001, and resulting in the defeat of Irving. At stake was not the truth of the Holocaust but the quality and nature of Irving’s historiography.

The two were different in many ways. Deborah Lipstadt was a history professor who had written many books that debunk the claims against Holocaust denial. While David Irving on the other hand was a Holocaust denier and had written several books on the Third Reich (Irving V. Lipstadt). In this case, the problem was not that Irving was a Holocaust denier, it was that he did not have sufficient evidence to back up his claims, thus Penguin Books thought it was not publishable because of its inaccuracy. Irving then sued Lipstadt and her publishers for
defamation. However, Irving’s was clearly prejudice against Jews and exaggerated many of the claims he made in his book and in court that the judge ruled in favor of Penguin Books. The Jewish Virtual Library states, “The judge also decided that he was an antisemite, a racist, and a falsifier of the historical record.”

Although Irving did lose the case, he later tried for an appeal to somewhat clear his name, if that was possible. The appeal was heard and denied and Irving was forced to pay a cost order, but he did not pay this money and so the court bankrupted him. Even after all Irving went through in the trial, he was asked if he will stop denying the Holocaust after the judgement and his simple reply was “Good Lord, no.” Like much other deniers, just because others do not agree with their views of the Holocaust does not mean they will give up endorsing their versions of history and will continue to try to get others to see it.

Holocaust denial, is an attempt to rewrite history and play down the events of a horrific past. In Pierre Vidal-Naquet’s book, *Assassins of Memory*, which is a serious of denial essays ranging from 1980-1987, one of the essays he uses that talks about denial, he touches on the subjects of German sympathy. The essay states, “Germans are simultaneously the victims of the Jews and, by the way of capitalism, their beneficiaries (137).” Deniers try to change the past in order to discredit the Jewish population and promote their own values and beliefs of what really happened during the Holocaust. The objective to unwrite history as we know it can have devastating results if more people begin to believe such an idea. The past may be relived, although unlikely, and the world’s understanding of history would be changed for the worse.

*This essay needs more of this: putting the topic in a broader context.*
Works Cited


<http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/worldwars/genocide/deniers_01.shtml>.