

## **Black Students Protest Schindler's List**

**By Lyla Miklos**

**The Sentinel**

**Spring 1994**

Just after sweeping the Oscars in March, Steven Spielberg announced that he wanted to make his film available to schools as a learning tool. He brought his film and himself to a California school to view and discuss the Holocaust. During the scene in which several female Jews are herded naked into what they believe is a gas chamber, certain members of the student audience started laughing and were asked to leave.

After the film several black students spoke out against the film saying they didn't identify with the plight of the Jews and what happened to the Jews had nothing to do with them. These students also went on to say that the Holocaust and persecution of Black people is much worse and is ignored by many.

To say I was upset by these comments is an understatement. These comments were appalling! What kind of comment is "our Holocaust is worse than your Holocaust"? Comparing horrors and putting them on some kind of rating scale is not a means to understanding.

What happened during the Nazi's reign in Europe isn't something that just happened to "them" and isn't something that just "they" did. The extermination of Jews by the Nazi's is an example of the human capacity for hate. It isn't just something that happened over there or way back when. It happens here, now and every day.

Maybe not on the same scale of extremes, nonetheless it does occur. Looking at the North American attitude towards the Japanese and other Asian peoples we can see some dangerous parallels with the attitudes that Nazi Germany had towards the Jews.

How many times have you said or have you heard others say things like:

- Japanese people think they are smarter than everyone else
- Japanese people are taking all our jobs and money
- . . . and so on.

Pretty frightening I'd say.

Instead of looking at where we can improve and looking at what makes certain groups of people successful in certain areas, we tend to lay blame and hold grudges. Blaming a race, sex, culture or any other group for your life or problems is not a solution, but a scapegoat. We need to look at our own self-worth and power. We need to believe that we can rise above the problems society places in front of us. We should try to look past labels that are put on us by elements that are not our choice or decision.

Our background is not something that we may have necessarily wanted or chose, and it on its own doesn't totally identify us. Looking at specific personality traits instead of broad definitions will help us to appreciate people individually. We will look at everyone as people and as human beings rather than male, female, black, white, skinny, fat, Catholic, Jewish . . . etc.

Within all of us is the ability and capacity for extreme cruelty and violence. That is what the Holocaust taught us. Uncontrolled hate is powerful, but it is a negative and destructive power. We should never let it happen again, yet we are. We as a North American culture walk around with this arrogant presumption that we are better than any other group of people in the world. We seem to believe that we have a higher moral standard than the rest of the world. Bull!

Don't think that you are incapable of prejudice and hate. We all are. We need to evolve to a higher plane of understanding and human relations. The only way we can do that is by admitting and acknowledging the atrocities of the past, see it in ourselves, control it and go beyond it.

"Schindler's List" isn't just about Nazis and Jews, but about all of us.