

Justice or Injustice?

by Alexandra Morris



There are at least two sides to every story. The same event can be read by multiple people in multiple ways. In today's society, there is a justice system in place to identify the "correct" side of every story. Most commonly, the judgment of what is just can be seen through trials and court cases. In my piece entitled "Justice in the Courtroom," three symbols are shown that relate to justice. The gavel is made out of a collage of courtroom drawings, while the hands show justice defining itself by cuffing someone's hands, and in the background, the scales of justice are seen weighing the importance of the court case. The complex system of justice we have in place today was not always around.

Sitting in class one day, you notice you forgot to pack a pencil and note taking has begun. Looking over your shoulder, you see I have three pencils, and without asking, you steal one of them. Although I may not sue you for this small act of injustice, I might decide to steal your pink eraser as payback. This childish way of thinking—most commonly associated with the phrase "an eye for an eye"—was a concept generated by King Hammurabi around 1772 BC to punish people's wrongdoings.



Hammurabi's Code, written on a human-sized fingerlike stone, is the first sign of recorded law in history. Once completed, Hammurabi's Code would offer a template for justice for generations to come. This important stepping-stone (no pun intended) is commemorated in a piece that I created last year entitled "An Eye For An Eye." In the piece, Mesopotamian script can be seen written across an image of an eye. This script contains some of the rules that the people followed in this time. Within the eye there are two figures appearing at the top of the stone on which Hammurabi's Code is written. After King Hammurabi established a basic understanding of what justice meant for his people, the idea of written law spread.

Imagine becoming a hero for your country, risking your life for what you believe is right. You know your home country will throw celebrations for you because of your valiant efforts overseas. Your whole life has led up this act of justice for your country and you feel so strongly that you are right that you are willing to give your life for the people you love. You are on a plane that is flying over New York City towards two of the most recognizable towers in the city, and now is your chance to give your life for what you believe is just.



Perspective shift: chaos, explosions, death, and murder surround the people of New York City on September 11th, 2001. Smoke fills people's lungs; they cannot see. The worst attack on the United States is underway, and no one is sure what has just happened.

I remember sitting on the couch with my mother a few days after 9/11. We were watching a guitar singer dedicate his performance to the people who perished in the attack. The names of the deceased were scrolling from bottom to the top of a screen positioned behind the singer. My mom started to cry, but I couldn't understand why. "Why are you crying Mom? You don't know any of these people," I questioned. My innocent understanding of the event was revealed in the nature of my question; it would take a few more years for my maturity to kick in in order to comprehend the importance of this event.

In today's world, justice and injustice engulf every aspect of human life, but the idea of justice is challenged when stepping into another perspective. In my two pieces that commemorate 9/11, I try to show the two perspectives of this event. To Americans, the tragedy is the furthest from just. An al-Qaeda member, on the other hand, may think that he is performing the highest act of justice to serve his country. In one piece, the Twin Towers are shown burning by fire-like hands positioned in a fist with the pointer finger raised. This hand gesture represents the sign that many al-Qaeda leaders hold up in pictures. Also written in Arabic in the background of the portrait are the words that Osama Bin Laden spoke about 9/11 moments before it happened. 9/11 is a perfect example of how the perspective one takes on an event can alter their view of the situation.



The United States is the only country to drop not just one but two nuclear bombs on another country. This fact is astounding. The bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki has always interested me when it comes to questioning justice in the world. The bombing that caused the deaths of thousands of people—primarily innocent civilians—was America’s strategy to force Japan to surrender to the Allies during World War II. This unjust decision made by the American government is shown in my piece “Attack on Hiroshima”. This two-part piece depicts a realistic (left) and cubist (right) version of Uncle Sam during the bomb dropping on Hiroshima.

The work on the left can be interpreted as the “before” events that lead up to the bomb. Uncle Sam is the main focus, and the stripes of the American flag surround him. In the white stripes are words from a letter written by Albert Einstein to Franklin Delano Roosevelt about the creation of the bomb during the Manhattan Project. This letter was discrete since the creation of the bombs was, at first, a secret. Many key words from the letter such as “nuclear” and “reactor” are bigger than others to emphasize the letter’s message. In the right piece, the US is ready to strike Hiroshima. The background is the map of the exact location where the bomb was dropped. Because this is a cubist version of the piece on the left, the same elements are shown such as the pointer finger, the stars from the hat, and stripes of the American flag. The hand turns into a target on the spot where FDR would drop the bomb.

The underlying message of this piece is that Uncle Sam is used by the United States as propaganda, encouraging Americans to believe that FDR made the right decision. Uncle Sam is the symbol of American power and military pride and is shown in a serious demeanor here. It is as if he is looking down on the American people, forcing them to believe in FDR’s decision. Uncle Sam represents not only the American government but the justice system as well. He has the say of what is just and unjust in America and is telling Americans that the bomb dropping is just.



One of the most powerful examples of injustice is the Holocaust, where one man believed so wholeheartedly that what he was doing was right for his country that he was able to convince thousands to participate in the most atrocious genocide seen to date. Near the beginning of the Holocaust, there was a night when Nazi police demolished all Jewish-owned businesses, now referred to as Kristallnacht. In fewer than twenty-four hours many families' hopes and dreams, hard work and dedication, family history, and future were torn away from them. This horrible and terrifying event foreshadowed what was to come for Jews, Gypsies, and "cripples" in Europe.

My piece entitled "A Crystal Night" shows Anne Frank, a well-known figure of the Holocaust, as the main focal point. Her portrait has been smashed into several pieces, just like the shop fronts on Kristallnacht. Surrounding Anne's head are two excerpts from her diary in which she comments on the Nazi Police. Behind Anne's portrait is a blue background with symbols from the Nazi regime such as their flag and their salute.

The Holocaust has a personal connection to me because I am Jewish. The Jewish community is tight knit and I love this, but if the Holocaust had not occurred, we would have 32 million Jews alive today instead of the current 13 million. This huge disparity is the result of the actions of Adolf Hitler and his Nazi followers. They destroyed not only the non-Aryans of the 1930s and 40s, but future generations to come. Hitler was a dominating leader who tried to control the whole world, and in some ways, he succeeded. For this, he should be given the title of one of the most unjust people in history. He, like many other terrorists, used his leadership skills to control people's minds in order to make them believe in his version of what was right.

Perspective always alters the way we look at events that occur in our lifetime. Which point of view will help us know what is truly just? It is obviously not the brainwashed Nazis of Hitler's regime. It is not the terrorists that have fallen under leadership of Osama Bin Laden. It is also not the people who decided to kill thousands of innocents by agreeing to drop the bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Although it is important to regard other perspectives, there are still sides that are defined as just or unjust according to the rules set up by the American justice system.

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