

REMEMBERING THE CHILDREN (Slide #8)
“Fighting for Freedom: Simone Segouin’s Brave Resistance to Nazi Persecution”

Grace Hipple
12th Grader at Davenport Central High School
1st Place in The Ida Kramer “Children and the Holocaust” Essay Contest

In 1739, Scottish philosopher David Hume posed one of the most influential fallacies in Western thought; the is-ought problem. Hume offered that just because a situation is a certain way, does not mean it ought to be that way (Hanks). Hume’s statement stood in direct contrast with the Natural Ethics philosophers of his time. Natural Ethics stated that humans simply know an innate difference between right and wrong, either through evolutionary purposes or from God (Feiser). Hume’s statement skyrocketed him to instant infamy, seen as dangerous and blasphemous (Fieser). Like David Hume, French student Simone Segouin recognized the difference between passiveness and action. Simone recognized that even in a world controlled by men, she could stand out amongst her peers and refuse to accept the genocide and persecution of millions of people during the Holocaust (Simone Segouin).

Simone was born in the town of Thivars, France. Her father was a decorated veteran of the Great War, and she was raised with a strong sense of French pride (Murray). The only girl in a family with three brothers, Simone grew up learning to hold her own in a world of men. As word of the atrocities of the Nazis spread Simone felt compelled to fight back. In 1943 when she was just seventeen, she joined the Francs-Tireurs et Partisans, an armed resistance organization as a loyal French nationalist (Chen). The men only allowed her to aid in stakeouts and relay messages. In Simone’s time, a young woman in the militia was unprecedented (Zuccotti).

By 1944, many French people had heard of the Nazi’s horrific mass genocide and imprisonment of Jews (Zuccotti). Simone grew tired of playing messenger to the men while they fought for France. She wanted to take place in combat missions, something unheard of for women in her time (Simone Segouin). She insisted on receiving the same weapons training that the men got, and soon developed a natural tactical brilliance. Following training she was allowed to take part in dangerous combat missions helping to blow up bridges, derail trains, and even capture German soldiers (Murray).

Simone’s fight for freedom from Nazi oppression was impressive, but she remained unknown even to the supporters of the resistance until late 1944. Charles De Gaulle, leader of the Free French Movement and future French President visited Simone’s hometown of Chartres (Zuccotti). The accompanying press corp quickly took notice of Simone. She proudly told reporters she was there to provide security to De Gaulle, not be gawked at (Belden). The teenage girl with the MP40 was heavily photographed and interviewed, most notably by Life magazine (Malassis). The article, titled “The Girl Partisan of Chartres,” reached millions of readers (Belden). Within months, it skyrocketed Simone to fame as a symbol of the French Revolution.

The Francs-Tireurs et Partisans succeeded in liberating Chartres shortly after De Gaulle’s visit (Zuccotti). Simone still insisted she would not be satisfied until France was free of Germans and the Nazis fell (Murray). For Simone, the battle became about more than freeing France.

Although Nazis heavily guarded news sources, she had heard rumors about the Nazi regime through the rebel grapevine (Murray). The collection of horrors she received about mass persecution motivated her even more than love for her country. Simone expressed disgust that ordinary people could be treated so brutally (Simone Segouin). She joined with France's 2nd Armoured Division heading toward Paris, which was still under heavy Nazi control. After weeks of intense fighting, the German garrison finally surrendered Paris to Allied Forces in August (Zuccotti).

After the invasion, Simone was promoted to lieutenant and joined the FFI, a formal military organization which American General Patton credits with giving the allies the upper hand in the war (Simone Segouin). Although Simone was awarded the prestigious Croix de Guerre, she remained disturbed years after her military service. The idea of war throughout Europe and the United States at the time had been sensationalized. Simone even admitted she had been swept up in the romance of freeing France (Murray). In a later interview, Simone despondently expressed her regret, saying even in war nobody should have to kill another human (Murray). Despite this, she never lost sight of her true goal, peace. Although Simone takes pride in the work she did for the people of France and those persecuted by the Nazis, she takes no pride in the violence she needed to commit in her efforts (Murray).

The Holocaust will be remembered as one of the most horrifying and disgusting displays of humanity. Yom Hashoah reminds us that we must never forget what occurred, lest we be doomed to repeat it. Yet, an element of the Holocaust that is often forgotten in our history books are the people who fought to stop it. Children, like Simone, who refused to accept what was happening are heroes forgotten in history. In Simone's case, it's not difficult to see why. While she attracted the attention of international news, the stories focused on her beauty, rather than her bravery. She was called "the Pin-up girl of the French Resistance" (Belden). They forewent detailing her actions and motivations in fighting the Nazis and ending the Holocaust, instead describing the length of her shorts and how her militia apparel complimented her figure (Belden). Living in a man's world at a man's time in history, Simone's work was mocked rather than admired.

In the 73 years since Simone worked to free Europe from oppression, the world has changed astronomically. Unfortunately, being a young woman still comes with a lot of the same challenges that young men simply don't face. Simone has shown me that the standard of objectification in our world should not stop me from doing brave and bold things. She did not fight for herself, but rather for Europe and the millions of Jews and other oppressed groups who could not fight for themselves. She risked her life to stop the suffering of millions of people. To me the images of Simone, machine gun in hand, make her a symbol of the power young women have (Chen). Simone has inspired me in my goal to pursue a career in Civil Rights Law; I feel lucky to have the opportunity to fight against oppression with intelligence rather than an MP-40.

Like David Hume, Simone Segouin refused to accept that the mass genocide and imprisonment faced by Jews and other groups of Europe had to be reality. She knew that just because teenage girls did not take part in militias did not mean she could not. She was committed to relative pacifism, refusing to sink to the Nazis' level to stop them. Another admirable virtue Simone possessed was humility. After the fall of the Third Reich, she became a pediatric nurse and cared

for children until her retirement (Simone Segouin). When asked about her revolutionary past, Simone says she was a resistance fighter, and that's all (Murray).

I believe that all men, women, and even children have the ability to end the horrible things that happen every day. After researching Simone's life, I am confident I will never allow myself to sit back and watch injustices happen, simply because that's what I am expected to do or worse, because I don't think it's my problem. Simone is evidence that one person can create change. She's inspired me to be a change maker too.