

Sweet Peach Revolution

Episode Two: Mass Murder, Empathy, and a Bump in the Night

Rough Transcript, Sources.

Published July, 2019.

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[Begin with poem: "First they came"]

(Quote) First they came for the Communists

And I did not speak out

Because I was not a Communist

Then they came for the Socialists

And I did not speak out

Because I was not a Socialist

Then they came for the trade unionists

And I did not speak out

Because I was not a trade unionist

Then they came for the Jews

And I did not speak out

Because I was not a Jew

Then they came for me

And there was no one left

To speak out for me (End quote)

(PASTOR MARTIN NIEMOLLER) ¹

It is hard for me to capture the emotion I feel when considering this topic in words. I am not at all a poetic person, but like a poet, my heart breaks and my fist clenches. This topic is one that drives me to tears and it makes me feel pretty damning of the world, and quite frankly violent, to be honest, depending on the particular discussion. But if you give this a sympathetic listening, I believe you will find we have a similar perspective, if you just hear me out.

¹ "First they came" <https://www.hmd.org.uk/resource/first-they-came-by-pastor-martin-niemoller/>

I am Sweet Peach, and this is the Sweet Peach Revolution. We're going to talk a bit about human psychology and about particularly terrible things today. We're also going to be talking about some historical events, which I hope means (to you) that there are very good reasons why we should be discussing it, namely the relevance to our modern lives.

[Regarding the poem] The poem I opened this podcast with was, Entitled "First They Came" and was written by PASTOR MARTIN NIEMOLLER, who was a German Pastor during the early and mid 1900s. During WWII, he was present in Germany, and witness to the events preceding and ending in the Holocaust. "First they came" describes the systematic disenfranchisement and imprisoning of various groups that the Nazis took issue with, ultimately resulting in the mass murder and genocide of

- Almost 2000 Jehova's witnesses,
- At least 70,000 "criminal offenders" including homosexuals and political dissenters.
- Around 200,000 Roma people.
- 250,000 (Quarter of a million) disabled people.
- 312,000 Serb Civilians
- Around 1.8 Million Polish Civilians.
- 6 Million Jewish people and
- Around 10 Million Soviet Civilians and POWs.
- (Numbers courtesy of the US. Holocaust Memorial Museum) ²

That is a powerful number of wrongfully executed people. Our relatively recent history includes the mass murder of something like 20 million people. That is insane to think about. I couldn't even imagine a crowd of 100,000 people. The concept of a million people is...almost beyond conception. But we're talking about twenty times that amount. It's hard to imagine. But it's also hard for me to wrap my head around most terrible things of this caliber. Like how could it actually happen? People get so pissed about slight tax changes. I couldn't imagine how people could just...let twenty million murders occur. This poem, "First they came" shares some insight into the minds of those onlookers who did nothing.

One of the issues that has troubled intellectuals for the last 80 years, is how the Nazis were so effectively able to take over Germany and to get away with mass executions and other horrible crimes, all the while still having a country full of compliant citizens. It's perplexing: The German people acted in a way that enabled this to happen, but many of them held no real ill will toward their neighbors and fellows. It's surprising and quite terrifying to think that even long family friends were compelled to either do

²<https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/documenting-numbers-of-victims-of-the-holocaust-and-nazi-persecution>

nothing or to participate by aiding or informing secret police or SS units. And what is really terrifying, is that these people who enabled the hallocaust to happen, such as our pastor poet, were just normal, law-abiding, and well meaning people that were just...not helping. (not helping the victims) Because a whole lot of people really didn't do anything to stop this, it really makes you wonder what action you would have taken in that situation, having no knowledge of how it was going to turn out.

So let's explore that.

Imagine yourself in your bed, asleep at night. As you are lying there in the dark, you are awoken to a sound: To something crashing in the night. Heart pumping, you realize someone or something has gained entry into your home. You might rush to the bedroom door; lock it quickly and hurry back to your bed. You hear footsteps and rummaging around in the next room. You think it must be a thief taking your television or other valuables, or maybe a drunk who has haphazardly mistaken your home for his own. Most conservatively, the best course of action is to stay in your locked room. To hide in the closet, or be ready to defend yourself, but ultimately to stay out of harm's way. To call the police. Your items are clearly not worth putting yourself in danger. Most people would probably be willing to lose their playstation if it meant they wouldn't be placed in immediate life-threatening danger. This I have no problem with: I believe thoroughly that material possessions are secondary to the lives of humans. But is it ever worth putting yourself in danger? Is it necessary? What if it's more serious: What if instead of a burglar, or a thief, it's somebody coming to hurt someone you love? A murderer, a rapist, or a kidnapper.

What if this invader has come to hurt your brother or sister, or your significant other? Or what if they've come for your child in the next room over; to do terrible things to them, to use them or to hurt them. This situation is different: the temperament of the average human suddenly changes: it is not merely worth it to endanger yourself, but it is necessary; we must protect our children, our loved ones. If you hear your loved one yelling for help, you would come running. We humans have a natural and powerful empathetic survival response when those we care about and when they are in danger: we are compelled to help... even at the expense of ourselves. But what if, it is not your family member screaming for help, but a neighbor two doors down in your apartment building? Or a poor woman on the street, who is in danger, crying for help? Would you come running? This is a harder question.

So, when talking about a hypothetical, as I just described before, the question is, would you help? Would you step out, put yourself in harm's way and try to do something? Maybe if it were clearly a crime occuring, you might be more inclined to

intervene. But what if it's ambiguous? What if it was the police dragging someone out of their home? What if it was the army taking someone off a train? What if it was a mob of your family and friends breaking into a storefront? Would you help the victim or your comrades? Would you try to stop it? Would you do anything at all? These situations are more...tricky. Most of us would struggle to decide our level of intervention.

There are a number of reasons why you might not help, or at least, why some people don't. The first reason that I want to discuss is a concept known as **the bystander effect**: this is a relatively unknown, but key aspect of human psychology, which has been proven to occur more frequently than we may think. The idea of the bystander effect is pretty simple: If a person, "Person A" sees someone else "Person B" in need, and there are other people around, "Person A" assumes the other people will also recognise the needs of "Person B." However, because the original observer thinks that other people are realizing what is occurring, they believe one of the others will do something about it. Somebody else will offer help or somebody else will call the police.

This is not, initially, and unreasonable assumption. Especially if you are the kind of person who is optimistic about human nature: somebody will surely come in, do the right thing, help out, whatever, and now, I do not have to. Assuming someone will help seems natural and reasonable, especially for those well-meaning folk among us, but this assumption is often times an incorrect one. In 1964, for example, there was a young woman named Kitty Genovese who was shouting for help outside an apartment building in which there was a number of occupants, upwards of 30 to 40, it is claimed, that saw what occurred. When she was stabbed to death in sight of these multiple witnesses, nobody stepped in to intervene, and nobody called the police. Which is weird, right? But it's really not that weird, because most of these people were just doing what was safe and justified to them. This is the Bystander Effect at work here; this mass inaction, according to the Psychology Today article "What is the Bystander Effect?" is attributed to a "*perceived diffusion of responsibility ([the idea that] onlookers are less likely to intervene if there are other witnesses who seem likely to do so) and social influence ([which is when] individuals monitor the behavior of those around them to determine how to act).*"³ Innocent bystanders or witnesses to terrible acts take a look around, and either because they think somebody will help, or because they realize nobody is helping, can decide on inaction. It's strange that even helpful people can be swayed into not helping, just based off of something simple like group activity or the number of people around, but it happens. The fact is, that most people, including well-meaning individuals, are at risk for not getting involved, even when it seems clear they should be.

³ <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/basics/bystander-effect>

And this isn't all that is at play: There are more reasons why somebody might not get involved. Some people do not even consider that help will come. Some ignore it. Not that these people intend harm on whatever victim there is, but they act out of complete self-interest or self-preservation and decide to stay out of it. This is another understandable course of action, if not just reasonable. No need to put your life on the line for somebody else, right? It's completely natural to feel this way, but it has a clear pragmatic problem: it means the person who needs help will not be getting it from you.

Additionally, in some cases, people do nothing simply out of spite. They choose not to intervene because they know that something bad will happen, which is what they were hoping for. You know, like murderous inlaws or a particularly shitty x. They do not want to help a victim, because they do not like the victim. Being the optimistic person I am, I really hope that people like this are only a small part of the population. I think most of us don't wish a terrible fate on others. But it has happened.

Yet another situation in which this lack of help could occur is in the case that the onlooker is indifferent, with no stake in the matter. No moral or social reason for intervention, no investment in the fight, no inconvenience by staying out of it, no part in the fight itself. Point being that it's a fight between other people, no need to be involved. The opinion of this apathetic onlooker is that the struggle itself does not concern them and ultimately doesn't matter.

And finally, some people simply do not choose to be involved or not involved. It could be due to basic ignorance of the situation, or a miscommunication, or a misunderstanding, that the onlooker is unaware that the victim needs help. The stabber might be defending themselves against the woman, or maybe the woman is just pretending to yell for help while mugging the guy, to throw her victim or witnesses off. Or it could be an accident, which happens. Someone might just mistake someone else in need of help for somebody having a laugh. We see children crying in the shopping mall all the time, and I doubt that our first thoughts go to "that kid needs help."

Where does this leave us? Well... there is just a slurry of reasons why somebody won't come to the aid of another person extreme time of need. And that's a problem, right? People get hurt because of this inaction. It's sad, but some desperate people just don't get help from anyone when they need it. And this becomes quite a problem in some cases. It is beyond catastrophic in the cases when the people who do not offer help are one of the only, or perhaps the only, people who can help.

Let's take a look back at history again. We've already talked a bit about genocide in Nazi Germany, but this particular problem is one that persists even in our modern age. There is a depressing amount of examples that have occurred since the Holocaust, but we don't have the time to discuss all of them, so we're just going to look at one particular case that is an example of this inaction becoming a huge issue.

In 1995, the Bosnian War was well underway in Bosnia and Herzegovina (Hertz-uh-go-venia) between the states and internal dissenters receiving support from Serbia and Croatia. This war was a violent and nasty thing fueled by a lot of gross shit including massive amounts of extremely potent propaganda. One of the clear losers in the conflict was a large community of Bosniaks and Croats, which included a massive number of non-combatant including muslims and other protected groups. Ultimately these groups suffered unlawful confinement, general ransacking, sexual abuse and rape, as well as something like 30,000 mass expulsions and even torture and execution, amongst other inhumane fates. ⁴ The kicker about this is, that the world was in a position to help. The United Nations forces were physically in this country and region for the exact purpose of peacekeeping. But as we have discussed, being present doesn't mean that you are helping. In one case in particular, this is excruciatingly evident.

This example is the Srebrenica (sreb-ren-eet-tsa) massacre, which took place in what is now eastern Bosnia, in July 1995. This was an area controlled by the UN and designated as a UN safe zone for these groups and other refugees. According to the BBC and other sources, the Bosnian Serb army advanced into this zone, despite the UN's declaration, taking some UN hostages, and demanding the disarming of the Bosnian Muslim fighters in exchange for their safety. The Bosniak muslims ultimately agreed to a peaceful surrender, but the Bosnian Serb army had other plans. After disarming the muslims, they started separating individuals for "questioning" and within about a week had systematically murdered over 8000 people. ⁵ And these thousands of victims were supposed to be under the protection of the UN, and the UN was still completely present, but inactive in this massacre.

In fact, at one base particular, controlled by Dutch UN forces, there was approximately 300 men who sought refuge from the impending Bosnian-Serb army. These men were ultimately expelled from the base, by the very UN forces who were tasked with protecting them. Immediately upon leaving the base, these men were seized by a mob influenced by and largely consisting of Bosnian Serbs. They were immediately tortured and executed.

The consequences of inaction are serious. It enables atrocities. Even in the case of a military force, when backed with international support, that is armed and tasked with a mission to keep peace and protect people, just being in a position to help isn't enough.

⁴ <http://www.icty.org/x/cases/mladic/ind/en/kar-ii950724e.pdf>

⁵ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yymf5p3LbCAE> (BBC Video) and <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/jun/28/dutch-soldiers-let-300-muslims-die-in-bosnian-war-court-rules>

Even on a small scale, this type of thing matters. If you go to a school where fighting is punishable by expulsion, and you see a group of bullies beating up a younger student, do you get involved? Would you go fight for that kid? Do you come to the aid of someone in need, if, for your whole time you have been in school, you have been told not to? There are serious consequences for you if you get involved. The all-too-common answer to this question, is one of my greatest fears for our world. I have long since been of the opinion that this apathetic, indifferent, anti-interventional attitude or sense of diffused responsibility, is an extremely powerful and very dangerous force. I worry that our society is manufacturing people without that certain gumption to help others when they need it. It is a lack of bravery. It is a lack of strong opinion or firm beliefs about humanity, and it is the lack of action that takes place because of these missing traits, that I worry about. This lack of bravery lets a woman get stabbed to death while dozens of normal people idly watch it happen. It facilitates the murder of six million people in the 1940's. It allows 8000 people to be extrajudicially executed by a mob, just twenty years ago. And it allows the spread of hateful speech and threats to members of our collective community, right now, in the modern world.

Some people may say "Be a man. Have a sense of constitution. Grow some balls and do something." And I agree. Somewhat. It's not about being a "man" necessarily, it's about being a human.

I should be clear: This is not about the masculine or the feminine attitudes or characteristics, but it is about combating the unyielding and festering disease of apathy incubating and perpetuating itself in each and every one of us, regardless of background or identity. Bravery is what we need as people. A personal constitution that includes action for those in need is something that should be looked upon as a desirable human trait. This is how we should think of it: Empathetic Bravery is a quality that is necessary for the survival of humans and the preservation of their rights. Any lesser conception would be effectively diluting its essence from our society as a whole. Which is what is currently happening: it's precisely one of the mechanisms that perpetuated the very sickness that ails us. We are conditioned to hold our tongues. To not protest. To keep to ourselves and our own problems.

This is the case with those who are taught that dissent is unsavory. This is the case with the incessant dictation that our society pushes on someone dictated and expected to be 'feminine'. This is the case with the ridicule and criticism of those politicians who actually take a position. Our history is to favor moderate diplomacy over morality, at home, in politics, abroad, and even in genocide. But I believe we can do better.

It takes a certain quality to be that girl who stands up and refutes her instructor: and this is that trait that I am looking for. It is exactly the type of gumption that I think the world needs. But it is also the quality that our society has been slowly stripping away from the hands of not just the revolutionary, but the common person. So what is this quality? What is it that makes us brave? Why would we ever stand up against popular opinion, or an armed mob? Why would we ever do anything for anyone, especially if it endangers us? Why should we, ever, give a shit?

Because we do. Humans, as we generally see, have evolved differently than most other creatures and organisms on this earth. For better or worse, we are different, and one of the things that sets us apart, that allows us to advance, and to be preserved as a species, is our ability to empathize. Once I thought that our ability to empathize was our collective guarantee to survival as humans, but I see now, as I learn about the history of and the current state of the world, as my heart weeps, I see this as a mislead thought. It is no guarantee. Every day, in so many ways, we, as human beings, are being silently and viciously lashed at: we are being dehumanized: not only our rights are jeopardized when we are victims, but when we are aggressors, or when we stand by and do nothing, those very qualities that make us any different from beasts are being ripped from our minds and souls. We are allowing, even encouraging, the systematic extermination of care. And action.

I have said before that the greatest threat to humanity is apathy. I stand by this comment: but I hope now that I have shown where that apathy, or more precisely inaction, comes from and that it can be overcome by those who are strong: who are empowered, who are liberated and righteous: those who are brave.

I want to be brave and I want you to be brave too. I want you to be someone who is willing to do what is right, despite the consequences, and despite that tempting self-interest and fear.

We have evolved in a way that allows us to preserve ourselves, and to preserve our species. Because we understand our own self-preservation, we can see, and feel, when someone needs our help to preserve themselves. And that discomfort we feel when somebody is being harmed is important. It wants us to act. To overcome our exclusive self-interest, and to overcome fear, to help our common man and humanity as a whole.

It takes only effort to overcome your fear: to explode from the box that our society has smashed you into, to connect to your brothers and sisters and to your own humanity. Our duty as humans should not just be to our own survival, but to the survival

of all of us, because one day, our own individual survival may depend on somebody else.

I know that if the day comes that I stand by and allow something inhuman to occur, I have failed the evolutionary test, lost my humanity. I would then exist only as a scared animal, with nothing to set me apart from the beasts. But I hope this day will never come. I remind myself that my fear of being inhuman is far more important than my own survival. That is because empathy is my survival. It is all of ours. I am committed to this greater idea. Are you?

This is an ever important question, because of the

Diffusion of Responsibility in the modern world:

- Online, in comment sections, on twitter,
- At rallies for whatever purpose.
- In the news, or on podcasts, or youtube channels.
- There's an overwhelming sense of negativity on these platforms, and it is because people are afraid to speak up for what is right. It is can be dangerous to stand up to someone violent and hateful, but it isn't the same the other way around. Peaceful and loving people don't really threaten violent and hateful people. So nobody really speaks out. For fear of repercussions or the unrealized ability to connect to human empathy and what it wants from us.

Even just that comment on a racist video that says: "hey, that's mean" can do a whole load of good. (That's the call to action here) No need to get into huge arguments, or to post theses in comment sections, you don't have to disprove every shithead out there, but you just have to match the minimum effort that hateful people put in. It's not necessary just yet to be ready to die for someone else, only to curve the dialogue by making a comment. Just here and there, just a little bit of "that's not a very well formed-opinion, or be kind, friend, or don't be an idiot" is really all it takes to make the world a better place. It is because this is where those ideas can turn into terrible things. Your comment can really matter. You're letting onlookers know that there is opposition to that hateful position. You're letting moderates know they are not alone. You've letting victims know that you aren't supporting aggression and you aren't enabling it. You're helping, and it's all because you are brave enough to just....do it.

If you can find it in your soul to be one of these people, you are a fucking hero.

The video game "Legend of Zelda" has some really good advice for us. The triforce, the most powerful force in the world, to be wielded by a hero, is three pieces: Wisdom, Courage and power.

You have to be able to recognise what the right thing to do is. That's wisdom. You have to be able to actually act and make a difference. You have to have the ability to actually help. Call the police, give first aid, give advice, make a comment, and whatever. That's power. And finally, the last piece of the puzzle: you have to have the courage to actually do it.

In your life, wherever you are, and you hear a bump in the night, Be brave. Be ready to do the right thing, no matter the cost. That's what we need.

Endshow: Normal endshow notes here:

Follow me on twitter @revolutionpeach (one word) and check out my website sweetpeachrevolution.com.

If you support the dialogue, let us know, help us out, even a buck a month on patreon would be excellent.

We appreciate you being here and contributing however you can. Please remember to be brave and to stand up for what is kind. Next episode will be a sort-of follow up on this one, and we'll talk about free speech, hate speech, and speaking out. Until then, comrades, I love you dearly.