

Introduction

Brian: Warning - This video contains disturbing and sensitive pieces of documented evidence of people who have faced sexual abuse and harassment. If you or someone you know who is experiencing domestic violence, please contact the National Sexual Abuse Hotline | 800.656.HOPE (4673) Viewer discretion is advised.

Hello, everyone, we are all students at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor. We are all part of the Global scholars program, which is an international themed living community committed to global social justice. This past year, we have worked with Alpha Education, a nonprofit NGO/organization dedicated to fostering awareness of often overlooked aspects of World War II. In this video, we will be discussing WWII Asia atrocities and the impact of human behaviors on others. In the end, we hope that this video can help shed light on the importance of telling the whole story, in addition to helping understand difficult historical and present-day issues.

What is World War II?

Shon: World War II has been considered one of the most devastating wars to happen in history. The war began when Adolf Hitler and the Nazi Party seized power in an economically and politically unstable country, Germany. Signing strategic treaties with Italy and Japan allowed him to further his goal of world domination. War finally broke out when Hitler invaded Poland in September 1939 which led to Great Britain and France to declare war on Germany. Then, WWII gained a foothold in Southeast Asia after Japan joined Nazi Germany in WWII. This conflict not only destroyed countries' land and property, but also took the lives of about 75 million people. While death is viewed by society as a terrible fate, being subjected to forced

prostitution is considered even worse by many. Unfortunately, that's exactly what happened to women from Korea, China, and other occupied countries to were forced into prostitution and were called, 'Comfort Women'.

Gurpreet: Between 1932 and 1945, uniformed men would attack innocent women and drag them into their vehicles. They were taken to "comfort stations" - brothels that serviced Japanese soldiers - in Japan - occupied China and were forced into sexual slavery by the imperial Japanese army during this time. These military brothels did not only occur in the Japanese military, they expanded especially after Japan attempted to take over the Republic of China through the Rape of Nanking, where Japanese troops raped between 20,000 and 80,000 women. These horrific rapes brought attention to many, including historians who urged the military to release information about these comfort stations to reduce sexually transmitted diseases and prevent further atrocities. When records were released, it was discovered that very few women survived and an estimated 90 percent of "comfort women" did not survive the war. Those who did bravely serve as activists and share their experiences about their horrific fate.

The Life and Development of Comfort Women in Detail:

While the stories of comfort women are often associated with the violence that was afflicted upon them, the stories of many of these women didn't start off as gruesome. Many of these women were lured into moving to different countries due to the promises of either being able to find work or to be able to work towards the freedom of their imprisoned family members. However, little did they know, they would end up being trapped themselves.

The contradiction between the title “Comfort Women” and the reality of these situations can be seen through the information that has been uncovered about life in these brothels. Though the title refers to the survivors as “women,” they were often young girls who were under the age of 18. In these environments, they were often put under the influence of different drugs as a way to increase their compliance with the many men who forced themselves on them every night. To add insult to injury, these routine rapes are where the word “comfort women” was derived from. This name accurately downplayed the extreme forms of torture and abuse that these women were facing.

Personal Anecdotes: Malana

Comfort Women: One testimony from Song Shindo, a victim of the Japanese told a commission on human rights:

“Many ‘comfort women’ got pregnant. The pregnant women were not allowed a rest period, and some were expelled from the brothel. I got pregnant. I was forced to keep [doing it], and my first pregnancy resulted in a stillbirth at seven months. I gave birth alone in my room. It was a difficult labor, and when the baby’s body came out, it was dark purple and already dead. I had other pregnancies in addition to the two births, but because I was expelled for each pregnancy, I induced early termination with a folk remedy (at eight weeks, refrain from moving and eating for three days and then drink a mixture made from the root of a certain kind of plant).”

This next testimony comes from Maria Rosa L. Henson, who was the first Philippine woman who spoke out about her own distress and was one of the three women who became the first recipients of the Asian Women’s Fund project in 1996.

Henson recalls: I was forced to stay at the hospital which they have made as a garrison. I met six women in the garrison after two or three days in the place. The Japanese soldiers were forcing

me to have sex with several of their colleagues. Sometimes 12 soldiers would force me to have sex with them and then they would allow me to rest for a while, then about 12 soldiers would have sex with me again.

There was no rest, they had sex with me every minute. That's why we were very tired. They would allow you to rest only when all of them have already finished. Maybe, because we were seven women in the garrison, there were a fewer number of soldiers for each one of us.

But then, due to my tender age, it was a painful experience for me. I stayed for three months in that place after which I was brought to a rice mill also here in Angeles. It was nighttime when we were fetched to be transferred. When I arrived in the rice mill, the same experience happened to us. Sometimes in the morning and sometimes in the evening... not only 20 times. At times, we would be brought to some quarters or houses of the Japanese. I remembered the Pamintuan Historical House. We were brought there several times. You cannot say no as they will definitely kill you. During the mornings, you have a guard. You are free to roam around the garrison, but you cannot get out. I could not even talk to my fellow women, two of whom I believed were Chinese. The others I thought were also from Pampanga. But then, we were not allowed to talk to each other.

Amanda: Just because the war ended in 1945, that does not mean that these brothels stopped running, and the women did not get to go home. In the year 2007, the United States-based news outlet *Associated Press* discovered that the American Army kept the slaves captive until General Douglas McArthur shut the facilities down in 1946.

There's still not a lot that is known about the scope of what happened. After the war, Japan destroyed the records of the brothels, so we will never know how many people died in the war,

but historians speculate that 90 percent of the women died by the end of the war. Japan continued to deny the invention and use of these comfort stations for decades.

However, the secret started to be revealed in the 1980s, when some heroic women started to speak out about their ordeals. In 1990, South Korea publicly spoke out about a Japanese official who denied the brothels yet again. In 1993, Japan finally confessed to what happened. However, it was not until 2015, seven DECADES after the war ended, that Japan agreed to pay reparations to the surviving victims. For perspective, the average expected lifespan for a person in Canada is 82 years.

Emily: In 2014, Pope Francis met with several comfort women before holding a mass in South Korea, the theme of which was Korean forgiveness. During his meeting with the women, he was given a butterfly pin, which the survivors use to symbolize their ordeal. That day, he prayed “for an ever greater recognition that all Koreans are brothers and sisters, members of one family, one people”.

Questions Slide

After watching this presentation, please reflect on the content by asking yourself these questions.

Citations

Casualties of World War II | History of Western Civilization II.

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Szczepanski, Kallie. "World War II in Asia: July 1937 to August 1945." *ThoughtCo*, ThoughtCo, 18 July 2019, www.thoughtco.com/world-war-ii-in-asia-195787. Updated July 18, 2019. Accessed 04/11/2020.

We want to thank everyone who has engaged with or contributed to this video. We really appreciate it. We hope that this presentation will raise awareness and shed light on the difficult topic of the sex slavery that went horribly unchecked during the war. This video is a small snippet of the atrocities and its impact that occurred during WWII. Therefore, we recommend going to the Alpha Education website for more information at alphaeducation.org.