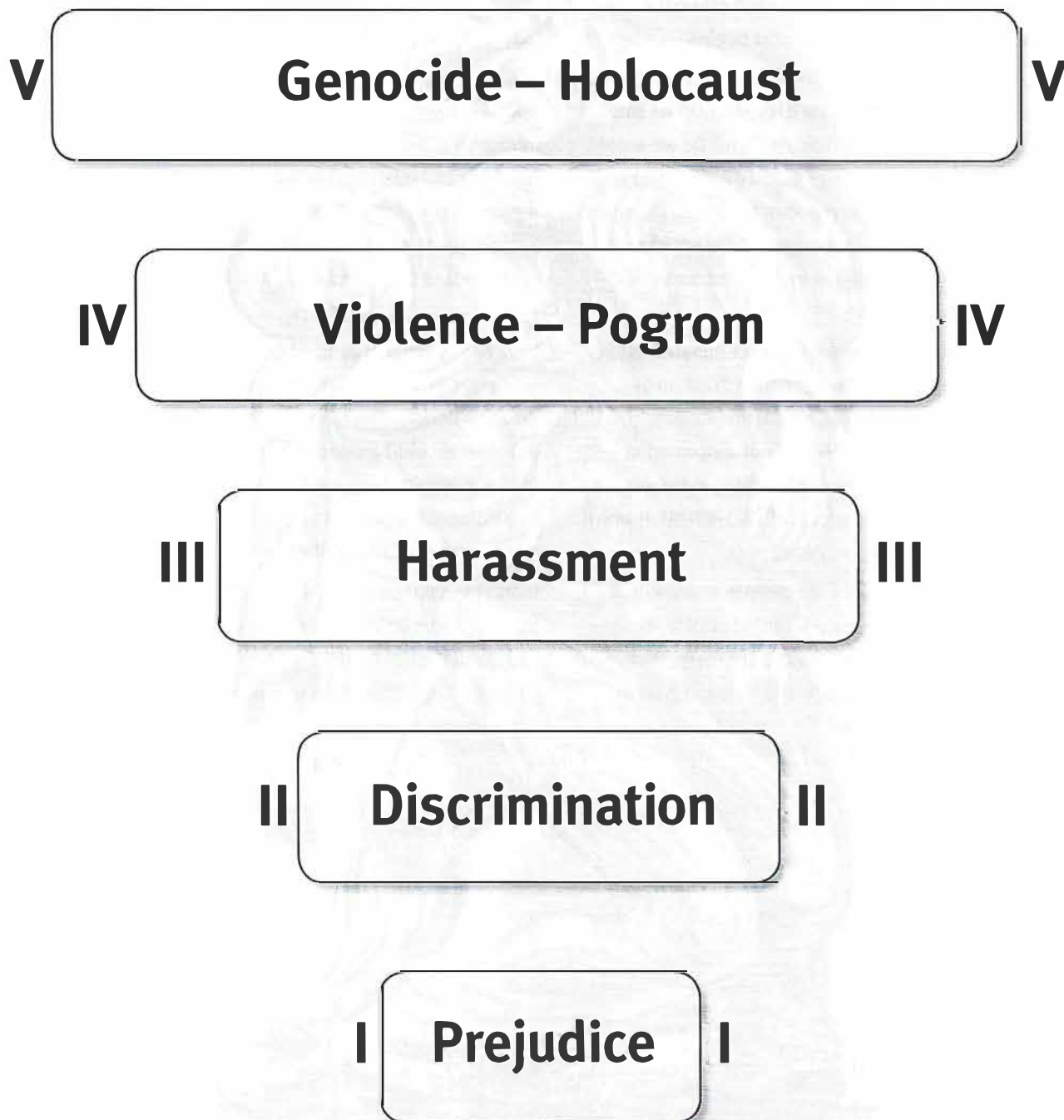


Ladder of Hate and Intolerance



"LEST WE REMEMBER, HISTORY WILL REPEAT ITSELF."

Simple acts of hate and intolerance are easily traced back to the individual on the bottom rung of the ladder. As we move up, hate and intolerance intensify and expand, affecting more and more people ultimately leading to the top rung of the ladder—genocide. Each rung is not always clearly distinguishable from the one next. They blend into each other; it's not always easy to tell where one ends and the next begins.

The bottom rung—prejudice: We are all prejudiced, but most of us are not even aware of it. How do we relate to others? Do we put them down, tell jokes about them and ridicule them? Do we accept stereotypes and engage in scapegoating? Bigotry is alive and well among us. We can become part of the problem or we can change our ways of relating to others and become part of the solution. If we choose not to address our prejudices, we will find ourselves moving quickly up to the second rung.

The second rung—discrimination: People are discriminated against in the areas of housing, employment, education, recreation or health care because of color, race, belief, sexual orientation, nationality, ability, age, gender, etc. Some are not welcomed at social events, professional organizations or religious gatherings. Profiling individuals for any reason is a form of discrimination which makes the climb to the next rung an easy one.

The third rung—harassment: Some of the people who are being discriminated against are now singled out for “special treatment” or harassment. Rumors and lies are spread about them, their businesses are boycotted and they are forced to leave govern-

ment jobs and teaching positions. Laws are passed that deny them basic civil rights. They are threatened with bodily harm and the confiscation of their properties among other actions. Bullying is a common form of harassment, and from there it's just a small step to violence.

The fourth rung—violence: People are now feeling empowered to abuse and assault others. Crosses are burned, people are lynched or murdered, women are raped, businesses, residences and houses of worship are looted or set on fire, and grave stones and monuments are vandalized. Also kidnapping, torture, suicide bombing and other acts of terrorism are common occurrences. A pogrom is a planned and well-coordinated act of violence against a minority anywhere. It comes from the Russian word pogromit, which means *to wreak havoc*, and it can lead to genocide.

The top rung—genocide: The leader or leadership of a country, tribe or any other organized group of people directs his followers to engage in a deliberate and systematic extermination of an entire group of people. The followers and collaborators willingly participate in this cold-blooded crime against humanity. In recent history, the term ethnic cleansing has come into use for some genocides. The Holocaust is by far the most well-known, best organized and most horrible example of genocide anywhere.

Individuals not unlike us were at the very beginning of the process that led to the unimaginable crime of the Holocaust. We must learn to defend the rights and dignity of everyone. In reflecting on the Holocaust, it is important to repeat this message.