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There is destruction everywhere. Many people are hurt physically, emotionally or even dead, and people are starving. People living their days in fear of what could happen to them at anytime. World War II in France had this affect on many people. The book *All the Light We Cannot See* by Anthony Doerr talks about the life of civilian and a soldier in this time. It talks about their struggles, and what they were doing and thinking in World War II. The characters may not be real, but their experiences in Saint-Malo and the Hitler Youth program reflect actual conditions in Europe in World War II.

Throughout the book it talks about the story of two main characters and what they have been through in World War II. One of the main characters is Marie-Laure, a French blind girl, who is moving from her home in Paris to Saint-Malo to "escape" from the Germans. Her dad is entrusted with a certain gem that the Germans are after, but they have no idea if it is the real one or one of the decoys. Since they had no idea they decided to move away and go to Saint-Malo to live with her uncle, which was considered one of the safest cities since it is surround by water and has walls surrounding it. Eventually the people she lived with died or disappeared and she hides out in a hidden room. Werner is a German, orphan boy who lives in a children's hospital. He wants to become a mathematician, but his "parents" says that he can't because he is destined to be a coal miner like the others. To defy his "parents" he decides to join Hitler Youth. He joins, becomes a soldier by his teacher changing his age to 18, and learns how to locate the enemies by

radio. Later he has to go to Saint-Malo to help find the jewel. Once he is there he goes into Marie-Laure's house and his partner, who is German soldier, tries to kill him so he get praised for finding the jewel, but Werner quickly realizes it and kills him. Knowing that Marie-Laure is hiding, he calls for her to come out and she does. Quickly falling in love with her, he does his best to save her because he hears that they are going to bomb this city. Giving her a white pillow case, he says to follow this wall, and the Americans will save her. She does this and he waits for her to completely leave. Once she does, he then leaves, but he gets captured. Werner becomes really sick and hallucinates. He walks outside then and people yell at him to stop, but he doesn't and steps on a land mine (Doerr). As shown throughout the book many people no matter if they were a soldier or civilian had many struggles in World War II.

Saint-Malo was seen as a safe place for many people in France, like Marie-Laure, but that changed quickly. It was considered safe since it is a old, walled city that is also surrounded by water. The streets were considerably empty since people were worried to walk on the streets since they heard awful rumors about what they could do. People didn't want to have any trouble with the Germans because of this. Marie-Laure wasn't allowed out often because of this, so her family kept her inside at all times. Eventually her uncle let her go to the bakery to get a loaf of bread, but that was it. While Marie-Laure was in Saint Malo many people started to go hungry and had to make their food stretch farther by doing things like making the bread more dense and slowly eating canned foods (Doerr). Even though Saint-Malo slowly started to become barren, people thought that this city would make it hard to Germans to attack it, but that thought changed quickly. Saint-Malo got bombed and was "almost totally destroyed by fire" (Beck). Many of the citizens believed that the Germans purposely did this. The worst part about this is that many

people died because of this since many civilians couldn't escape because the gates were closed by the Germans, and they didn't want to leave because they didn't want to get looted by Germans and citizens. The city became "three fourth destroyed during World War II" because of the bombings, fire, and attacks that happened in there ("Saint-Malo"). Once the war was over they decided to rebuild the city, which was rebuilt in between the 14th and 17th century. At first Saint-Malo was the place to be at that time, but this city had gone through a tough time and rebuilt itself from the damage.

The Hitler Youth program was a horrible system for German boys to do. This program was made for German boys mainly. When the boys reached 13 years old they were allowed to join Hitler Youth. This program had classes that taught them about discrimination against other races, saying that they were not civilized or they can't create a culture. In class they were all taught to love Hitler, and they all had to swear allegiance to Hitler to become extremely faithful to him. The Hitler Youth "aimed to produce race-conscious, obedient, self-sacrificing Germans who would be willing to die for Führer and Fatherland" ("Indoctrinating Youth"). When they are not in the classroom they focused a lot on physical exercise and strength. In the book Werner had to do a lot of running. The leader of that would pick a student and have him to pick who he thinks is the weakest. Once he picks the person then the he has a three second head start to run to a certain destination. After the three seconds are up the rest of the boys chase after him like it's a hunt. If they get to him before he reaches the spot they beat him. If he makes it then he is safe (Doerr). All of this training is for preparing them for becoming a soldier. Once they turn 18 they were "required to enlist immediately in the armed forces" ("Indoctrinating Youth"). Once they are enlisted they must "served in the state labour service and the armed forces until at least the

age of 21" ("Hitler Youth"). This program was meant to brainwash many German boys to just serve and die willingly for a messed up cause.

Anthony Doerr creating the book *All the Light We Cannot See* is a way for the readers to see and understand life in France from a civilian and soldier point of view during World War II. From a civilian's view it showed what life was like during this rough time in Saint Malo, and from a soldier what they had to go through and fight through. Both of these people had hardships they had to break through. By reading this book it showed what happened to German boys who were following the path to becoming a Nazi. It also showed what struggles that French civilians had to go through to try to survive. Throughout the book, Doerr has shown the some of the horrors that happened in World War II .

## Works Cited

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