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Maintaining Their Memory: A Remembrance of the Holocaust

Internationally, January 27th is dedicated as a day of Holocaust remembrance to keep alive the memory of millions of lives taken heinously in this genocide. But is a singular day enough to encapsulate the grief and tragedy that plagued those directly affected and their families? In short answer– no. Maintaining the legacy of all those who suffered and died is a continuous and global effort that is observed on a public and personal scale.

When American troops moved with Allied forces to liberate concentration camps at the end of World War II, Supreme Commander Eisenhower enforced detailed documentation on the state of the camps and their many horrors. Amidst a time of vicious war and great propaganda, this documentation was crucial to maintain the validity of the story without convoluting it with false information meant to harness fear. The crimes committed within the barb-wired and cemented walls deserve to remain in the light with excruciating detail, for downplaying and moving such stories out of sight would be to erase their meaning in all. These events were real, and the story of its victims deserves to be told and remembered for centuries to come.

The Holocaust proves to be a deeply unsettling topic, one that channels pure grief into anyone's chest. I recall my experience in the Holocaust Memorial Museum in D.C on a school

field trip. As our pack of 8th graders shuffled through the museum, it was not uncommon to encounter another student brought to tears or others to utter silence. I remember specifically a room filled with the shoes of Holocaust victims, hundreds upon hundreds of pairs. Seeing numbers attributed to something so horrific creates a statistic, one that strips the individuality of each victim. Yet each shoe was different, different styles and sizes, some even belonging to children. Standing there in that room, one is brought to think of how each shoe belonged to an individual— one with a life, a family, goals, aspirations, all wiped away with a simple number. It is crucial to bring up this fact to preserve the memory on an individual level. Though many victims were unidentified, unnamed, and unfound, we cannot allow them to be erased from history as Hitler intended to do in his deranged pursuit of an Aryan race.

On a personal level, it is important to delve deep into history and if applicable, pass on the stories of our ancestors. My family comes from Poland, myself being the first born in America. When I was younger, I was able to visit my great-grandmother regularly and was often reminded of the sacrifices of my great-grandfather who was the commander of a rural rebellion amidst World War II. He was killed by Nazis, leaving his pregnant wife with only memories, and we honor his memory by visiting a scantily marked tomb. My great grandmother lived on to tell his story, just as those who were lucky enough to survive the concentration camps lived on to tell the stories of the less fortunate. In this way, I believe the most fundamental part of safeguarding the memory of those who were lost is by keeping alive the most personal and intimate accounts, the ones that capture the pain and sacrifice in its entirety. Though these lives have been lost, their memory lives on through institutions, memorials, and the ones who pass on their stories— the ones who care the most.