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Reverential Remembrance

Without history, a nation, a people, and a legacy cease to exist. When students are asked why history matters, I have learned that often times we say “so it doesn’t repeat itself”. Teachers brush this answer aside, but it is in fact true. By preserving even the cruelest legacies and histories of a people, the fight to prevent its recurrence ensues. The Holocaust is the most devastating genocide in all of history, and even more awful because it occurred due to a policy of appeasement. The faults of a nation and those who govern it are vital to remember so that such errors can be prevented, which is why history must present all the facts.

The estimated number of Jews killed throughout the Holocaust, according to most sources, is about six million. However, when studying statistics that give separate numbers of various camps, killing operations, and other exterminations, several of the numbers say “at least 500,000” or “at least 1.3 million”. No single document from World War II gives a number of the victims of this terrorism, and the words “at least” are nauseating as it leaves room for ambiguity. Millions of undocumented lives, each person a possibility to effect change in the world, destroyed by the evil of acquiesced hatred. The Holocaust is often studied in numbers, and while there is ample depth to the subject, even just registering the number six million leaves an impression in one’s memory as a dreadful doing never to be repeated.

Though I have never visited the Holocaust Memorial Museum, I have heard it to be a chilling and saddening memorialization. This is because these six million deaths finally turn into names, into lives, and into lost possibilities. It is difficult to understand evil until it is confronted, and I imagine this exhibit defines the result of evil itself. It is said that “whoever saves a single life, it is as if he or she has saved an entire universe.” In applying this to the Holocaust, millions of universes were shattered in the span of about twelve years. The death toll of the Holocaust is often what it is remembered by, but even if a fraction of this number was massacred, the duty of remembrance would still exist. The Holocaust should be remembered equally as much for both its copious losses and the malice that fueled it. We as the continuers of history have the duty to expose such evils, and prevent those in power from inciting it.

Without institutions and outlets for remembrance, we become desensitized to our past, and historical fallacies transpire. The Holocaust has fortunately inspired profuse activism for remembrance, but many similar events have been unable to accomplish this. If we seek remembrance for our own action and accomplishments, then it is our duty to pay tribute to those before us. Even the most nefarious instances in history must be commemorated, for they remind us why such evil should never echo.

Works Cited

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