

Holocaust Memorial Essay

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The holocaust was one of the most horrific times in human history. So many innocent Jewish people were being treated like inferior human beings. Families were torn apart. Jewish businesses were closed. Jewish food supplies were rationed. Jews were sent to concentration camps. Jews had to wear an armband to show who they were.

What happened during the holocaust cannot be captured adequately by any poem, sculpture, statue, monument, or memorial. But we could still build a memorial to remember the persecution and suffering of the Jewish people and the millions that lost their lives in that horrible time during World War Two. And by building a memorial it will get people thinking about what happened during that time and then hopefully it would never happen again.

According to the Miriam Webster's Dictionary, a memorial is something that keeps remembrance alive. According to the United States Holocaust Museum, between 1 and 5 thousand Jews were being tortured and killed every day, by being worked to death, being gassed at one of the concentration camps, or by being shot at by one of the *Einsatzgruppen* (mobile killing units). Between 1941 and 1944, millions of Jews were being transported to a killing center, often known as death camps, or concentration camps, where they would be killed in specially designed gassing chambers

My thought of a holocaust memorial would be two large stone hands coming out of the ground together, as if praying, to show how the Jewish people, even threatened with death, did not abandon their faith. Even it cost a lot of them their lives, the Jews stayed strong. I would have

barbed wire winding up around the hands, to show the pain and suffering inflicted on the Jews just because of their beliefs. They still celebrated their holidays in secret, and they tried to live their lives as normally as possible. According to *Courageousjews.com*, throughout history, the Jewish people have been hurt, tortured, and killed, but they stayed strong and, ultimately, they survived throughout all the horrors they had experienced.

Around the stone hands, I would have statues of mothers crying for their children which they would never see again, to show the sadness the Jews felt. Countless times, a child was ripped out of their mothers arms so they could use them for some other purpose, such as manual labor. I once read a book about holocaust survivors and their stories. One of the stories told about a lady at one of the concentration camps. The lady in front of her was holding the hand of a small boy. Four Nazi soldiers walked up and tore the boy away from his mother and started to carry him away, leaving the mother there, crying and screaming for her son back. A few days later, when the little boy asked one of the Nazi soldiers where his mom went, the soldier pointed to a chimney with smoke coming out and said "she went up there". It was terrible what happened to the Jewish children, but even more terrible to know they had their full lives ahead of them.

I would also have a slab of marble in front with these words:

This memorial is dedicated to all the Jews who were persecuted during the holocaust, and to show that their faith could not be broken by any human evil. Never again will something as horrible as the holocaust happen. Never again will the Jews be tortured like that. Their faith is more powerful than any evil.

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Creating a Holocaust Memorial

The Holocaust is an extremely significant, but very sad part of history. If I had the honor and once-in-a-lifetime chance to dedicate a memorial and completely design it myself, I would make a Holocaust Memorial Museum. You may wonder why a museum, where would it be located, what will it look like, what will it have inside, and why I chose those things.

I chose to create a museum because there is not enough room on a monument or sculpture to memorialize everything that I feel is necessary. Even words can not truly describe this horrific period in our past. With a museum, you can put more in it and be more interactive. A museum also seemed to be the best choice because along with memorializing the Holocaust I would also be able to educate people on the events of the Holocaust which would help people to understand why we must make it a priority to stop racism and prejudice when we see it happening.

The location of the museum would be in Tallahassee, Florida. This may seem like an obvious choice since it is the town where I am from, but I feel that north Florida does not have any way to remember and learn from the Holocaust. With Tallahassee being the capital of our state we should take on a leadership role in remembering the Holocaust and educating others on the dangers that come with allowing racism and prejudice to exist. With two major four-year colleges and one major community college, Tallahassee would be a perfect location to also be able to get the large community of college students involved in Holocaust education.

My goal in creating a Holocaust museum in Tallahassee would be to build something interesting and interactive while showing respect and sensitivity to the particular topic. Imagine a huge dome consuming your eyes. The entire outside of the dome is covered in reflective glass. It looks as if there is one dome inside of another dome. In between the two domes there is a pathway swirling completely around the museum to the top where you can see through the glass to observe the people and sites below, but not into the exhibits. Your eyes eventually fall upon the entrance. Against the glass it looks like a cave. Coming out of the cave is a portion of a train that quickly disappears into a huge boulder. The boulder is engraved with names of victims of the Holocaust. Of course the train is not moving because it is made entirely out of stone. Opposite where the train is heading into the boulder are the entrance doors. The entrance doors are glass and have a Star of David representing Jews. You enter through the automatic doors and then through a wide, long hallway where you reach the inside of the dome into the lobby. To the left is a small food court, café, and library where you can purchase many educational materials on the Holocaust. To the right is the main desk where museum employees can give you answers to your questions and where you purchase tickets. As your eyes glide across the lobby you see railroad tracks. On the tracks sit a train that will be your mode of transportation to three different locations in the museum. Because the rail cars were the main method of transporting Jews to concentration and death camps I wanted to be sure that the public was educated and aware of the role that the railroad played in the Holocaust being carried out.

The first stop of the train would take you into a section of the museum called "The Holocaust." Mounted on the walls are pictures of those who were victims of the Holocaust. Approximately eleven million people were murdered during the Holocaust. Six million were Jews and others were Gypsies, homosexuals, Jehovah's Witness, Poles, Communists, and the mentally and physically disabled. In this part of the museum you will also find artifacts from the Holocaust with captions underneath that tell their story. Engravings on the walls and displays will tell the overall history of the Holocaust.

The next stop on the train is called "The Ghettos". In this section will be a life-like recreation of a street inside of a ghetto which will be behind a replica of the wall that surrounded the Warsaw Ghetto. You will be able to walk into the enclosed area behind the wall and then into the buildings on the street of the ghetto. As you walk into the buildings you will see displays that will help you to develop an understanding what life was like inside the ghetto walls.

The third section of the museum is called "The Camps". As the train drops you off in this section you will learn about the history of the different types of camps where millions of men, women, and children perished or endured terrible suffering until liberation. You will develop a knowledge and understanding of the function of concentration camps, transit camps, forced-labor camps, and extermination camps. By analyzing scale models of individual camps you will gain an understanding of how each of the Nazi camps were different and unique in their own way. You will have the opportunity to view replicas of striped prison uniforms, bunks used in the barracks for sleeping, barbed wire fencing that surrounded the camps, and a recreated guard tower that would have surrounded the wire fencing in the camps.

After leaving the camp section of the museum the train will take you back into the lobby where the museum tour will end. I have chosen this as the end of the tour because for most victims of the Holocaust, the camps were the end of life for them. You will be able to reflect upon your experience by walking through a hall of remembrance as you exit the museum. Names of those who were murdered during the Holocaust will appear along with pictures of those who survived. This is an important part of the museum because I want all who come to the museum to recognize those who perished during the Holocaust, but also to remember the survivors by telling their story and letting others know about the terrible events of the Holocaust so that we can make sure that it never happens again.

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“First they killed my brother Moshe....

Then they killed my father....

Then they killed my brother Bunio...

Then they killed my brother Zachary....

Then they killed my last brother, Herzl.

Only my mother and I were left. I vowed that I would never let them kill her, that I would protect my mother from the Nazis and their collaborators for as long as I lived. Love and hate

were what motivated my young mind and heart. Love for my dear, gentle mother- and hate for the cruel murderers.... (Appleman-Jurman 1)"

Horrifying stories like that of Alicia Appleman-Jurman's above portrays the day-in and day-out life for thousands of children during the Nazi invasion of Europe. Separated from their parents, siblings and any semblance of the life they used to know, children from the ages of infancy to 18 were captured by Adolf Hitler's soldiers and sent to concentration camps throughout Europe. Shockingly, it wasn't just Jewish children that suffered this horrible fate... the Germans added tens of thousands of Romani (Gypsy) children, Polish children, children that resided in the occupied Soviet Union, and even some of their own German children that had physical or mental disabilities.

Adolescents that were forced into the concentration camps (Jewish and non-Jewish children from the ages of 13-18) had a better chance of surviving because they could be put to work as forced laborers, and therefore could possibly escape death in the gas chambers. There were four documented possible fates for the children that entered concentration camps daily. The first was that the child was killed immediately upon arrival at the camp in what was known as the 'killing centers' or gas chambers (located at Auschwitz-Birkenau, Chelmno, Treblinka, Bergen-Belsen, and at many other concentration camps). If pregnant women arrived at the camps, the woman was allowed to carry her baby all the way to term, but as soon as the child was born it was killed to prevent 'over-population'. A child over the age of 12, that wasn't a member of the forced labor groups, could possibly become a subject of the medical experiments that were performed on prisoners by twisted German scientists led by Joseph Mengele. The last alternative that an adolescent living through the Holocaust might endure was to be a member of German 'reprisal operations' (or 'anti-partisan operations')... however, most of those children didn't survive. Due to the fact that most kids were too young to be deployed into forced labor,

they often joined the elderly, disabled or severely ill in being the first people to be sent into the fields to be shot at the mass grave sites. If they happened to not be located near a killing site, they suffered the torment of traveling to a known killing center through death marches or seemingly endless, cramped train rides. Thankfully, there were some children who did successfully endure the Holocaust; they are the voices that have passed on the terrifying but truthful stories to the world. The survivors made it through by hiding in ghettos, participating in underground resistance activities, escaping to camps run by Jewish partisans, or by being rescued through the liberation of camps near the end of the war. Most of the children at the end of the Holocaust were orphaned and ended up in displaced persons camps, looking for lost family members, or a different family that would take them in as their own.

Though Holocaust survivors tell their stories daily, most of the voices will never be heard due to the unimaginable suffering, torturing, and killing handed out by the Nazis. Ironically, the millions of Holocaust children need to be remembered not by what's publicized now, but by the fact that they had no voice then. The children that were given the mercy of survival must make it their responsibility to lift their fallen friends; through books, interviews, songs, poems, speeches, lectures... anything that will pass on their stories to the generations that didn't experience this tragedy. Only through knowing about this sickening experience can society be assured that something that cruel will never happen again.

The building of a memorial for these children (the ones lost in the war and the ones that survived, still haunted by memories) will allow other people to witness the past; to take an in-depth and personal look at the lives of the tortured children. The memorial would need to balance the portrayal of childhood torture while capturing the youth and innocence of a child's heart. A portrayal of balance...a portrayal of children...a portrayal of balanced children...what could do this better than, say... a see-saw in a playground? Children world-wide enjoy the

freedom and fun that comes from playground equipment; envision scattered within the sun and fun of children playing, the placement of small plaques with personal stories of Holocaust children. Each little plaque (or podium), intermixed with playground equipment, would represent a Holocaust victim. If possible, a picture could be added with the dates of their birth and death, along with any known members of their families that endured the Holocaust as well. If the child didn't die during Europe's occupation, an addition could be made to their plaque that says how they survived, where they are living now, and if they have a family or a profession as of now. A playground setting would attract the monument's theme: children, while the historical factor of the monuments would draw adults as well. What better way to spread information to the next generation than by retelling a captured child's story to the face of a freely enraptured child?

Keeping in that theme, there would be no better way to honor the spirit of the lost and tormented children than to let it smile and sing through the youthful activities of a modern day child. I would entitle this monument 'Playground Portraits: Viewing the Holocaust through the eyes of a child'. A catchy name and modern equipment would draw people world-wide to this site... the powerful biographies of the children who suffered during the Nazi occupation would remind them daily about the cruel power of prejudice. People would feel that it's too late to help the children of the past but that we owe it to the children of today and those in the future, to live childhood to the fullest. While the hopes of being able to play on monkey bars, see-saws, slides, swing sets and jungle gyms would attract the eyes of young kids, adults would pass time by reading about children their own kids' age. Nothing dismisses the threat of repetition quite like fear; a parent's fear of had this been a different time and possibly a completely different situation, it could have been their own child that was forced to endure the awful tragedies laid out on little monuments before them. Mixed with this fear would be the strong emotions of relief

that they still have their child safely with them, and a slight hatred towards a group of people that could possibly do such inhumane things to a young child. Along with these thoughts, there would also be the valiant promise running through every adult's head that they would never let something as tragic as this ever take place again.

Even though over 1.5 million children died during the Holocaust, from all walks of life, I believe that a playground monument would help to capture the youth, love, and innocence of every child's heart. All children, of any age or nationality, want to feel safe and loved in the eyes of those they trust and hold dear. During the German soldiers' invasion, most of the victims were separated from other members of their families. Children who had just reached puberty were wrenched from their families and placed into forced labor camps. Infants and small toddlers who desperately needed their mothers and fathers for food and safety were often times killed for no reason other than they were 'unwanted'. Most children of the Holocaust did not get to enjoy the luxury of seeing the familiar faces of a friend or family member alongside them during their darkest days. So it is my hope that a monument in their memory would help to symbolize the love they never received from Nazi soldiers.

The emotion of fear would hopefully never surface in this happy playground. A memorial such as the one described would be an appropriate representation of the lives of Holocaust children, but it would also allow freedom and space to play that those suffering youth never had. Only true and factual lives would be represented on the small biography plaques; ensuring a pure and honest reaction and interest towards the lives of forgotten children. Here in America we tend to abide by the policy of "No child left behind"... however, through the contributions, maintenance, and viewing of the 'Playground Portraits', we can ensure that "No child is forgotten."

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