

# Opinion

SOMEONE HAS TO SAY IT

## Forget the Holocaust? It could happen if we're not careful



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It's hard to imagine that anyone could ever forget the Holocaust. How do you simply forget about the millions of innocent Jews and others killed by the Nazi death machine?

These weren't victims of war. They weren't soldiers.

No, they were "undesirables" deemed to be unworthy of life by Adolph Hitler and his murderous Third Reich, and were slated for extermination in concentration camps scattered all over Europe. They were torn from their homes, separated from their families, their money and belongings confiscated.

And not just exterminated. Used for slave labor. Or as the guinea pigs in horrific "medical" experiments. Entire families were annihilated.

And how to we know? Because if nothing else, the Nazis were good record-keepers. The amount of evidence that they themselves left behind was more than enough to damn them, to convict them in any court in the world. It was almost like they were proud of what they'd done, like they wanted to create a documentary monument to their madness.

We've all gotten a fresh reminder about the horrors of the Holocaust thanks to Advance multimedia specialist Shira Stoll, who has created a sad, beautiful, haunting and ultimately triumphant documentary profiling a number of Holocaust survivors from Staten Island, titled "Where Life Leads You: Stories of Staten Island's Holocaust Survivors."

To hear these men and women tell their harrowing stories, to see the faded concentration camp tattoos on their arms, is searing. But then to hear them talk about how they've endured in the decades later, how they raised families, how they thwarted Hitler's twisted plan, is one of the most life-affirming things you'll ever see.

But here's what you'll also see: The age of these folks. They are in their 80s and 90s. And when all the living witnesses and survivors of the Holocaust are gone, that's when we'll be in trouble of forgetting.

We'll still have International Holocaust Remembrance Day, but without the living testimony, the constant reminders from those who lived it, will people still remember? A recent study from the Conference on Jewish Material Claims on Germany showed that more than a fifth of Amer-

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ican millennials had either not heard of the Holocaust or weren't sure if they'd heard of it.

When I was a kid back in the 1970s, we always remembered Pearl Harbor Day. How could we forget Dec. 7, 1941, the day that would live in infamy? It was only 30-some years earlier. So many of the men and women of the Greatest Generation were still around. World War II wasn't in some distant, misty past.

Now we know how much that's changed, how many of those World War II veterans we've lost in the intervening decades. We know that Pearl Harbor Day isn't observed the same way anymore. It's no longer living history to many people. It's something from a history book. It's easy to forget.

New Yorkers in particular will of course never forget 9/11. But even here we've already heard debate over how the anniversary should be observed in the future. Should the list of the names of the dead still be read out?

And while no American alive then will ever forget those terrorist attacks on our country, there are so many now who weren't born then, or were too young to really remember. Will the day continue to resonate for them as well? Outside of New York, the memory has already faded.

Forget history and you're condemned to repeat it. That's the danger.

The Holocaust survivors have long had a mantra: Never forget. And so far, we haven't. And we never should. This history needs to be told over and over again. The survivors won't be with us forever. There are only about 100,000 left. It's going to be our job to tell these stories. "Where Life Leads You" is going to help with that. It goes hand-in-hand with all the efforts we've already seen from the Wagner College Holocaust Center.

But it's up to all of us to keep these stories alive. To never, ever forget.