

**Fred S. Zeidman's Remarks**  
**Days of Remembrance Commemoration**  
**U.S. Capitol Rotunda**  
**April 23, 2009**

MEMBERS OF CONGRESS, ADMINISTRATION OFFICIALS, AMBASSADORS, LIBERATORS OF THE CAMPS, RIGHTEOUS AMONG THE NATIONS, FRIENDS OF THE MUSEUM AND MOST ESPECIALLY, SURVIVORS OF THE HOLOCAUST.

WE ARE HONORED BY YOUR PRESENCE AND GRATEFUL FOR YOUR COMMITMENT TO THE CAUSE OF REMEMBRANCE.

AND MR. PRESIDENT, IT IS OUR PROFOUND PRIVILEGE TO HAVE YOU AMONG US. AS SOMEONE WHO HAS DEMONSTRATED A LIFETIME COMMITMENT TO SOCIAL JUSTICE, YOUR PRESENCE IS ESPECIALLY MEANINGFUL, AND WE WELCOME YOU TODAY.

WE OFTEN SAY THAT REMEMBRANCE IS NOT ABOUT THE PAST. IT IS ALSO ABOUT OUR WORLD TODAY. AND IN THESE DAYS OF REMEMBRANCE, WE RECALL THAT THE RESPONSIBILITY FOR BRINGING THE LESSONS OF MEMORY TO BEAR IN OUR WORLD RESIDES WITH EACH OF US.

WHAT EACH OF US DOES, THIS YEAR'S THEME DECLARES, MAKES A DIFFERENCE.

IT DOES. AT LEAST, IT CAN. BUT REMEMBRANCE ONLY TEACHES THE LESSONS TO WHICH OUR HEARTS ARE OPEN. BECAUSE REMEMBRANCE CAN BE EMPOWERING – OR INTIMIDATING. THE CHOICE IS OURS.

WE CAN SEE THE SHEER SCALE OF SLAUGHTER – HOW THE VAST RESOURCES OF A MODERN NATION WERE DEPLOYED IN THE SERVICE OF MECHANIZED MURDER – AND SURRENDER TO OUR OWN FEELINGS OF FUTILITY.

OR WE CAN CHOOSE TO SEE THE SIX MILLION NOT AS AN ANONYMOUS MASS, BUT AS INDIVIDUAL FACES, AND SAY: I MIGHT NOT BE ABLE TO SAVE THEM ALL. BUT IT IS WITHIN MY POWER TO SAVE ONE. OR TWO. PERHAPS DOZENS. EVEN HUNDREDS.

AND WHAT IS WITHIN OUR POWER IS ALSO OUR RESPONSIBILITY. WHAT WE DO MATTERS.

THEREIN LIES A STORY – A STORY OF HEROISM OF THE TRUEST SORT.

IT BEGAN ON AN INFAMOUS SHIP CALLED THE ST. LOUIS, WHOSE JEWISH PASSENGERS FLED NAZI GERMANY 70 YEARS AGO IN MAY 1939, SEEKING SAFETY IN THE UNITED STATES BY WAY OF CUBA. MOST OF YOU KNOW THE SHAMEFUL RESULT: FIRST CUBA, THEN OUR COUNTRY, TURNED THEM AWAY.

THE STORY MIGHT HAVE ENDED THERE. BECAUSE PEOPLE CONCLUDED THEY COULD NOT MAKE A DIFFERENCE. THAT THE FORCES INVOLVED WERE TOO POWERFUL, THE NUMBER OF INDIVIDUALS TOO VAST, THE DANGERS TOO DISTANT.

BUT TWO INDIVIDUALS, LAWRENCE BERENSON AND MORRIS TROPER, WHO WORKED FOR THE AMERICAN JEWISH JOINT DISTRIBUTION COMMITTEE, FELT OTHERWISE. THEY KNEW THAT RETURNING THESE PASSENGERS TO HITLER'S GERMANY WOULD DOOM THEM. SO THEY AGGRESSIVELY NEGOTIATED WITH CUBA, THEN THE U.S., AND WHEN ALL THAT PROVED FUTILE, ARRANGED FOR THE PASSENGERS TO BE ACCEPTED IN WHAT WERE THEN FOUR SAFE EUROPEAN COUNTRIES.

THE FOLLOWING YEAR, THE CONTINENT WAS CONSUMED BY WAR, BUT THE JDC CLUNG TO THE BELIEF THAT THEY COULD STILL MAKE A DIFFERENCE FOR THE PASSENGERS ON THE ST. LOUIS.

THEY TRACKED THEM ONE BY ONE AS THEY SPREAD ACROSS EUROPE. THEY ALLOCATED WHAT WERE THEN ENORMOUS FUNDS. THEY PLACED SOME CHILDREN IN SAFE HOMES. THEY HELPED SOME PARENTS ESCAPE. OF COURSE, THEY DID NOT SAVE THEM ALL. BUT THEY SAVED SOME. BY THE SCALE OF THE HOLOCAUST, ONE MIGHT SAY THEY SAVED "FEW." BUT THE ETHIC THESE INDIVIDUALS LIVED BY IS THE SAME ETHIC WE CELEBRATE TODAY. WHAT YOU DO MATTERS.

IN THAT LESSON THERE IS AN INSPIRATION – AND A WARNING.

THE INSPIRATION IS THE KNOWLEDGE, THE CERTAINTY, THAT WHAT WE DO MAKES A DIFFERENCE.

THE WARNING IS THIS: THE HOLOCAUST WAS NOT MERELY A MASSIVE EVENT ON A MASSIVE SCALE. SIX MILLION JEWS, EACH ONE AN INDIVIDUAL HUMAN BEING, WERE MURDERED BY OTHER INDIVIDUAL HUMAN BEINGS. SOME INDIVIDUAL HUMAN BEINGS TRIED TO HELP THEM. MOST DID NOT.

AND WHEN WE – INDIVIDUAL HUMAN BEINGS – LOOK AWAY, AND SURRENDER TO FUTILITY, WE ARE LIKE THE BYSTANDERS OF THIS DARK PERIOD, AND BECOME COMPLICIT IN THE CRIME. INACTION IS AS CONSEQUENTIAL AS ACTION.

THEREFORE, TODAY, WE RECALL INDIVIDUALS LIKE LAWRENCE BERENSON AND MORRIS TROPER WHOSE ACTIONS MATTERED. AND WE HONOR OTHERS WHO RESCUED AS WELL. AND WE PAY TRIBUTE TO THOSE WHO HELPED DEFEAT NAZI TYRANNY AS WE WELCOME THE FLAGS OF THE LIBERATING DIVISIONS OF THE UNITED STATES ARMY.