# Remembrance Day is Really for Everyone Else

Andrea Fiano (January 26, 2014)

The Point of participating in one of the many upcoming events scheduled in New York City. Remembrance Day is not for the victims; they can’t forget. And they certainly don’t need a special anniversary to do so. As the son of an Auschwitz survivor arrested in Florence, I don’t need a special date either.

What is the point of spending January 27th at the Italian Consulate on Park Avenue, reading the names of over 8,000 Jewish Italians deported to Nazi concentration camps? Or participating in one of the many upcoming events scheduled to take place in Manhattan?

The point of this “Remembrance Day”—signed into law in 2000 by the Italian Parliament, in 2005 by the United Nations, and later by dozens of other countries—is to reflect on the past, on the Nazi extermination of the Jewish population, on Nazism and Fascism in general, and on how far along we have come and how far we have to go. As the law states:

The Republic of Italy recognizes the day of January 27th, anniversary of the demolition of the gates of Auschwitz, as a “Day of Remembrance” for the Shoah (extermination of the Jewish people), the racial laws, the Italian persecution of Jewish citizens, the Italians who suffered deportation, imprisonment, death, and those who opposed the final solution and risked their own lives to save lives and protect those who were persecuted.

We may be remembering the victims and the few who came to their aid, but we should also remember the collaborators and spies too, like those Italians who had their neighbors arrested for a reward. For many years, in Italy and throughout Europe, we’ve kept quiet about them, as if we could turn the page without pause, as if we could erase our complicity. “Auschwitz,” writes Mirco Dondi, “occurred because thousands of people who knew about it refused to consider themselves accountable. Think about all those accomplices who didn’t kill yet who allowed a system of annihilation to work. Understanding this facet gives us the tools to build our future.”

The day is also an occasion to think about who we are today, about how the freedom we take for granted was won at a terrible human cost. And about how, if we don’t reflect on recent history, if we’re not vigilant about the value of democracy and freedom, history will repeat itself. There have been genocides since, in various guises and various countries.
There are still many questions with no clear answers, even for historians, yet that’s no reason not to ask them. Who were the Nazi collaborators in Italy and elsewhere? Who passed the Italian race laws in 1938, which turned Jews into second-class citizens long before the deportations of 1943? What do we remember about all that today?

Remembrance Day is not for the victims; they can’t forget. And they certainly don’t need a special anniversary to do so. As the son of an Auschwitz survivor arrested in Florence, I don’t need a special date either. Remembrance Day is really for everyone else, for those who weren’t born yet, for the children of the few civilian heroes who strove to save human lives, for the millions of “spectators” who didn’t want to or couldn’t do anything to stop what was happening, for the children of the persecutors.

When the Red Army liberated Auschwitz on January 17, 1945, the spectacle was so ghostly and apocalyptic it’s no wonder they didn’t ask many questions. Yakov Vinichenko, one of the soldiers who threw open the gates, recalls: “Not even those of us who saw it wanted to believe it. For years I tried to erase it from my memory, until I realized that would make me an accomplice, a culprit. So now I remember it, even if I still can’t understand it.”

* Andrea Fiano is the son of Nedo Fiano, an Auschwitz survivor

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**Links**
[1] http://www.iitaly.org/files/memoriabimbi1390774651jpg