November 6, 2017 - Ms. Serro’s Holocaust and Genocide Studies classes had the opportunity to visit the United States Holocaust Memorial, along with the Lincoln and Martin Luther King Jr. Memorials in Washington DC. The students were able to share their journey with ten other students from Joseph Kushner Hebrew Academy in Livingston, along with Rabbi Kirch and Michael Rubell. Fortunately, the students were introduced to Holocaust survivor Peter, who told his story and how he was able to escape the horrors of the Holocaust.

The trip began with going through the many exhibits within the museum. We were given an identification card that had the story of a male or female who went through the holocaust. We were then led into an elevator that was built in a way that made the passengers feel vulnerable because of the rusty, broken down walls that surrounded and squeezed the passengers together. We then entered a hallway that contained multiple exhibits as well as four little cinema rooms where video clips were shown describe a certain event. As we continued to walk, we came about a hallway that had glass walls with the holocaust victim’s names written on. These glass walls extended to two floors, which really impacted us because we realized that these were thousands of people, not just numbers, who had their lives ruined and tortured by the Nazi regime. Later in the museum, there was another hallway that contained the shoes of most of the victims and another exhibition where a cattle car that had originally held the Jews who were being sent to the concentration camps. The museum continued with a big circular room where we paid our respects to the victims who had to endure the Nazi regime. Finally, there was one last area to the museum called “Daniel’s Story” and it was about the journey a little boy went through as well as the discrimination he faced. Afterwards, we were taken to the Lincoln Memorial where we were able to collaborate with other students and share our thoughts, followed by the same routine at the MLK Memorial. It was discussed as to why the visits to these memorials were made, and the most valuable lesson learned was that one individual can make a difference, despite what obstacles they face, one should not be a bystander but be the voice for those who need one.

This experience could not have happened without the assistance of The Jewish Federation of Greater Metrowest from Whippany. The people involved were: Ilyse Shainbrown, Abbey Roth and Adi. The students were able to engage with students from different backgrounds, experience things they have not done so before, and learn in greater depth not only about the Holocaust but also about themselves. It was a pleasure to have been able to participate in this journey, and we look forward to the follow up in May 2018.
Science Park Holocaust & Genocide Studies Holocaust Museum Trip Gallery
The things I saw beggar description.... The visual evidence and the verbal testimony of starvation, cruelty and bestiality were... overpowering.... I made the visit deliberately in order to be in a position to give first-hand evidence of these things if ever, in the future, there develops a tendency to charge these allegations merely to "propaganda."

General Dwight D. Eisenhower, April 13, 1945
Soon after German troops arrived on June 24, 1941, the Nazis established a ghetto in the Lithuanian city of Kovno (in Yiddish and Russian, Kovno). Before the war, 40,000 Jews lived in this community, whose renowned seminaries had produced generations of Jewish religious and intellectual leaders. Within a month of the German occupation, pogroms and massacres caused the death of 10,000 Kovno Jews.

The ghetto was sealed in August 1941, confining nearly 30,000 inhabitants. Mass killings continued. On October 28, 10,000 Kovno Jews were taken to an execution site outside the city and killed.

The Kovno Jews learned about the “Final Solution” in 1942, from an underground courier. From then on, the Jewish Council took a defiant stance toward German rule. The council commissioned artists to portray life in the ghetto.

A photographer, Hirsch Kadushin, secretly recorded ghetto scenes with a homemade camera.

In the autumn of 1943, the Germans converted the Kovno ghetto into a concentration camp, and the following spring, mass killings resumed. In mid-1944, the ghetto was liquidated, and its remaining residents were sent to concentration camps in Germany. Only 2,000 Kovno Jews survived the Holocaust.

DEFIANCE

Unlike the Jewish Councils in Lodz and Warsaw, the Kovno ghetto leadership was elected by the Jews themselves. It aided all factions within the ghetto, including an underground resistance movement. The Jewish ghetto police in Kovno gave military training to young men and women, and the council helped them escape to the forests, where they joined the Nazi partisans. Jews defied the Germans in other ghettos as well.

The pre-existing of educational, religious, cultural, and political activity within the ghettos itself constituted defiance. Inside the Warsaw ghetto, underground groups collected information and published clandestine newspapers. In several ghettos, private homes served as houses of prayer. In places where signs of Jewish life were visible, Jews continued to mark the Sabbath, and in Theresienstadt, Rabbi Levi Eshel gave weekly lectures on the Torah.
FIRST THEY CAME FOR THE SOCIALISTS, AND I DID NOT SPEAK OUT—
BECAUSE I WAS NOT A SOCIALIST.
THEN THEY CAME FOR THE TRADE UNIONISTS, AND I DID NOT SPEAK OUT—
BECAUSE I WAS NOT A TRADE UNIONIST.
THEN THEY CAME FOR THE JEWS, AND I DID NOT SPEAK OUT—
BECAUSE I WAS NOT A JEW.
THEN THEY CAME FOR ME—AND THERE WAS NO ONE LEFT TO SPEAK FOR ME.

MARTIN NIEMÖLLER (1892–1984), LUTHERAN MINISTER AND EARLY NAZI SUPPORTER
WHO WAS LATER IMPRISONED FOR OPPOSING HITLER'S REGIME