

REFLECTIONS

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Annual Alumni Journal



American Service Academies Program

Anna Duval	2
Camaren Ly	5
Aidan Uvanni	9

Auschwitz Jewish Center Fellows Program

Alexander Compton	13
Natasha Doyon	20
Jonathan Lanz	22
Diana Sacilowski	26
Carli Snyder	29
Regan Treewater-Lipes	34

Menorah excavated at the site of the former
Great Synagogue in Oświęcim in 2004.
Auschwitz Jewish Center Collection

One Author Isn't Enough

Anna Duval, United States Naval Academy

I have always enjoyed studying history. The power in history lies in its truth, and in the knowledge that, as cheesy as it sounds, it can repeat itself. This is one of the reasons that I have always had a special interest in the Holocaust, and likewise why I applied for the American Service Academies Program (ASAP). The Holocaust tells a story that, in a fictional setting, may seem unbelievable. But the Holocaust did take place and it involved real people. Unlike *Harry Potter* or *The Chronicles of Narnia*, books about the Holocaust have a real setting, real characters, and real conflicts. Taking part in the ASAP was a once in a lifetime opportunity to “take a behind the scenes tour” of this ‘story’, and to get to learn about what happened at a much deeper level than I ever had before.

Although I did achieve this goal by the end of the program, my main takeaway was something far different: history is nothing like a story. It is not a linear sequence of events with protagonists and antagonists and an exposition and a climax. History doesn't have an omniscient narrator. Bias and prejudice exist to such an extent that a single, holistic view of history is unrealistic. Instead, history is a giant conglomeration of characters and climaxes and conflicts that exist together in a big, messy bundle. Studying the Holocaust from two countries and countless points of view opened my eyes to the fact that there are no universal truths in history, and that the past is a collection of many different memories and experiences. Unlike in fiction, ‘the truth’ exists in many different forms, each of which is influenced by its own prejudices.

My own biases about the Holocaust became very clear to me during our studies in Washington, D.C. At the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM), the “Americans and the Holocaust” special exhibit opened my eyes to a new way of thinking about the Holocaust. I am an American and, at this point in the program, had never studied the Holocaust outside the U.S. While I was familiar with a lot of the information presented in the USHMM's permanent exhibit, the theme of the special exhibit was the most foreign to me. I encountered a completely new narrative. I left feeling as if I were not in the USHMM anymore, but in a museum about a different subject matter. Looking back, I had started to think of all Holocaust memoirs as stories following a prescribed sequence of events: the loss of rights, the ghettos, the cattle cars, the concentration camps, the gas chambers; Elie Wiesel, Primo Levi, Anne Frank. They all lined up methodically into a perfect, linear progression of violence. In short, they all fit into the

‘story’ that I had come to view as the Holocaust. But “Americans and the Holocaust” opened my eyes to the fact that the Holocaust was taking place in the world moreso than the world was taking place in the Holocaust. I had always studied the Holocaust as if I were a Jew, imagining the horrors of leaving my family behind and being starved. In reality, my people weren't the ones being starved, they were among those who didn't stop the starvation. Just as readers of the Harry Potter saga often place themselves in the shoes of the famous protagonist himself, I had baselessly placed myself in the shoes of the ‘protagonists’ in all the Holocaust stories I had ever read. Upon leaving the exhibition, I tried to insert myself into a new story: the American one. I wondered whether I would have welcomed refugees into my already suffering country, or into my home. I debated whether I would have used precious resources to bomb concentration camps, or whether I would have wanted my country to participate in World War II at all. More than anything, this exhibit helped me recognize the fact that the Holocaust isn't just a story of victims and their oppressors. It's a story of millions and millions of people who were affected in some way by the horrors of war and genocide.

After leaving “Americans and the Holocaust,” I was more deliberate about placing myself into the shoes of all of the groups represented in the museums we visited. Naturally, the group that I found the hardest to empathize with was the perpetrators. In Washington D.C., I watched a lengthy video of the Nuremberg Trials from start to finish, consisting of nothing more than testimonies of Nazi after Nazi pronouncing themselves *nicht schuldig*, not guilty. They said these words with conviction, with no visible remorse or sadness. And while it was initially easy for me to chalk this attitude up as evidence of their monstrosity, I realized that most of these men probably truly and deeply believed that they were not guilty. They experienced a side of the Holocaust that is not usually highlighted in museums. They lived through war; they experienced loss; their lives were altered irrevocably. As historian Christopher Browning discussed in the book *Ordinary Men: Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland*, one of the reasons most commonly cited by Nazis for the crimes they committed was the fear of being physically harmed for not carrying out an order. Despite the fact that history doesn't support this fear, the fact that it was etched into the memories of perpetrators provides an insight into the Nazi experience of the time. So while it is easy to look back at the Nazis and their crimes and write them off as inhuman, it is more productive to study the contexts for their decisions and actions. While it is not right to excuse their actions, it is beneficial to study them as more than just the mistakes of a

barbaric subgroup.

Another significant factor in how the Holocaust is narrated is nationality. Getting the opportunity to study the Holocaust from the Polish perspective further emphasized to me the role that perspective plays in our understanding of the past. During World War II, the Poles suffered a lot. Even those who were not Jewish during this time period still lived in a war-torn country under occupation by a hostile government. They were treated like second-class human beings, they had to deal with curfews, violence, and rationing, and they were forced to give up many of the traditions that they held near and dear to their hearts. In America, most Holocaust literature portrays the Poles as bystanders in the Holocaust. While this is not completely untrue, the negative connotation attached to this designation is. Most published sources describe, more or less, the Jewish experience. They will describe the background and history of the Jews, explain what happened to them, and do their best to depict the way that they felt. The Poles, however, are portrayed merely as one-dimensional participants in the history of the Jews. This was most obvious to me on the day in which we studied the Warsaw Uprising. I had never heard of this uprising before. In hindsight, it is shocking and scary that I had never heard of this enormous event in Polish history despite all of the books I had read about wartime Poland. Because the books I had read focused on the Holocaust, the Poles were minor characters. I was unable to realize how unfair my lukewarm opinion of the Poles was because I had never heard their full story. Since it is impossible to get the full story of every individual person we study in history, we will never be able to reach a prejudice-free version of the past.

The difficulty that comes with the lack of a unilateral depiction of the past is especially prevalent in museums. At the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum in Oświęcim, our guide Paweł told us that it is a constant struggle to design the museum and its exhibits in a way that prevents the various victim groups from feeling as though their hardships are being discounted. Initially, this was odd for me to hear, as I generally considered museums to be more or less a showcase of 'stuff' from different time periods. Until then, I did not realize the extent to which museums shape a certain narrative. Just as with any book, oral testimony, or documentary, museums have a point of view. They are a collection of many memories, and thus it is unlikely that an individual victim can visit them and immediately recognize the experience they see portrayed as their own. Just as with those of us studying history, victims can get caught up in the viewpoint that what happened to them was simply *what happened*. In reality, their memories

are mere threads in the quilt of history. Bronia, an Auschwitz survivor, who spoke to our group in New York, expressed this bias as well, calculating her own struggles to be more or less than those of some of her contemporaries. There are so few constants in history, however, that comparing anything is almost counterproductive. Various biases are so ingrained in each of us that we are unable to recognize when we have them. This naturally makes us poor judges of history, especially when it concerns a period or an event in which we took part. If people were to recognize bias in history as easily as they can in politics and government, the world would be much easier to understand.

As the ASAP went on, I began to realize how arbitrary truth can be. However, I also came to appreciate how incredibly important it is to give credence to people's varying memories. For me, Bronia's testimony was the best example of this concept. Her story becomes more distant each day, and each time she tells it she probably leaves out certain details and includes others. The only thing we can confidently hold as a constant over time is her attitude towards what happened to her. Forgetting facts and figures is human nature, but so again is remembering trauma with startling accuracy. When Bronia described going into a coma for a month while in Auschwitz, it struck me as unlikely. Although we may not be able to corroborate all events recalled by survivors, the power in personal testimonies, in my opinion, is that the individuals believe them to be true. Bronia's memories from this awful time of her life reflect the way that she felt at the time. Does it matter if she was in a coma if she felt as though she was? Does it matter if she could have saved her siblings if she thought she could have? Would it have made a difference if she had actually only been in the camp for a week if she thought it had been years? Because we live in such a different time and place from almost anything we try to study in history, reading about an event will almost always give us a less than accurate depiction of reality, because we will unknowingly try to fit the events into our own worldviews. But hearing the filtered memories of a person from that time can make us feel closer to what it was really like to live as they did. Hearing Bronia's narrative and riding the wave of her emotions affected me more than a verifiably accurate chronology of events ever could.

Looking back at my entire ASAP experience, the most moving were the individual stories of survivors, bystanders, sympathizers, and perpetrators. Witnessing the Holocaust through each of their eyes was different, but also insightful. While none of their stories are likely to be completely correct or completely wrong, the combination of all of them provides a more

accurate depiction than anything else of what really took place during this time period. At the start of the two-week program, I generally imagined myself to be a more or less bias-free witness of history. I thought I could imagine what it would have been like to be each of the groups involved, and to judge none of them too harshly. However, I now believe that acknowledging the fact that every single telling of history has its own innate biases is much more beneficial than trying to filter them all out. I make decisions every day in which I naturally place my own priorities before others', or place more value on certain things that are important to me. Understanding that everything I do is shaped

by my known and unknown biases is more productive than trying to live without them. As a future officer in the U.S. military, I will be expected to make ethical decisions every day. As an employee of the United States of America, I will represent all of its citizens and all of their beliefs. While I can certainly do my best to represent all of them fairly, my decisions will never be capable of this on their own. Just as history needs many authors, progress needs many leaders.

The content and opinions expressed in this piece are solely those of the author and are not reflective in any way of the United States Navy.

American Identity and Military Doctrine in an International Context

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Research and American Service Academies Program experiences indicate that mass atrocities are often related to the classification and groupings of people. The American way of war tends to demonize the enemy more drastically than other nations, revealing America's general self-perception that its ideals are superior to other nations. Mass atrocities tend to derive from a sense of superiority based on groupings, whether ethnic, ideological, or religious. This paper will (1) define American ideals in the context of an unstable international setting, (2) explain the current methods of military indoctrination (personal experience) within the framework of nationalism, and (3) examine the service member's responsibility with regard to mass atrocities.

Introduction and Terminology

As a country founded on rights to life, liberty, and property, America is known as "the land of the free and the home of the brave." The principles that make our nation free are grounded in equality and choice. These characterizing ideals repeat themselves in both academics and general strategic branding. While there is controversy regarding whether equality exists in the context of racism, taxes, gerrymandering, and public education, guiding documents from the Founding Fathers depict America as a nation striving to reflect equality: freedom of speech, free exercise of religion, fair representation (Congress), the end of slavery, and, more recently, Title IX (Education Amendments of 1972).

Airmen, Soldiers, and Seamen risk their lives on a daily basis for the simple and lofty ideals of "freedom" and "equality." Most service members will say that they are willing to make the ultimate sacrifice, their lives, in order to protect their loved ones; specifically relating their combat experiences to a positive impact on a few stateside individuals. When objectively analyzing warfare, there are three levels from which one may understand conflict: strategic, operational, and tactical. The strategic level outlines overarching political and military goals; high ranking generals and political officials determine the strategic goals based on the specifics of the conflict and the current state of the nation (e.g., resources available, resources that could be gained from the conflict, how many service members to deploy, the risk involved, the cost of the conflict, public's willingness to wage war, etc.). The operational level specifies the organizational group

responsible for executing the strategic mission via specific plans. Examples of operational level groups include Combatant Commands, or Department of Defense groups responsible for area operations (e.g., planned phases of a conflict/exercises) or a certain function (e.g. Cyber). The tactical level is the smallest unit of perspective, embracing the grueling battles on the ground and the experiences of the individual. Of the three levels, the tactical level encompasses the service members' experiences executing a goal that has already been determined by others. These three lenses work together to completely define a conflict; it is important to note that each of these three levels is comprised of individuals making decisions.

Ideals of freedom and equality instill a sense of pride in Americans, but to what extent do those national freedoms need to be protected via large-scale international conflicts? This question illustrates the complex overlap between American ideals and national military strategy – and therefore, the tendency of developing strategic military strategy based on American ideals. Historian Russell F. Weigley explained that Americans possessed no national strategy in 1941, as "the United States was not involved in international politics continuously enough or with enough consistency of purpose to permit the development of a coherent national strategy for the consistent pursuit of political goals by diplomacy in combination with armed force" (Weigley 1). It was during the Cold War and the Korean War that the United States developed a distinct strategy based upon defending American ideals (e.g., fighting for or supporting democracy in other nations). This type of war makes victory difficult to define. German historian Hans Delbrück posited that there are two types of military strategy: annihilation (direct) and attrition (indirect). America's warfare history reflects an annihilation approach, primarily due to a desire to accomplish unlimited goals and the rising wealth of the nation (Weigley 3). While the U.S. prefers wars of annihilation, it is important to note that as a whole, the nation fluctuates in opinion on the amount of resources and lives that should be expended in pursuit of these objectives. This variance in public opinion is beyond the scope of this paper, but the paper acknowledges that U.S. preference of attaining unlimited political objectives is a simplification. In summary, as a world power, when America enters conflict, she desires absolute victory, if for no other purpose than as another demonstration of her global wealth and superiority.

In addition to the United States' preference to wage wars for unlimited political objectives, Americans have a tendency to demonize the enemy. To some ex-

tent, it could be argued that the enemy of any nation is demonized by nature of the label “enemy.” However, Americans notably emphasize such imagery to propagate notions of nationalism to justify expending valuable assets. Demonizing of the enemy is a tool to gain public support; for example, the United States historically villainized Hitler, Kim Il-Sung, Saddam Hussein, and Slobodan Milosevic, and discussed the authoritarian nature of each regime as justification to pursue unlimited political objectives (Mahnken 3). This negative characterization is warranted given the criminal nature of these leaders’ actions, but the tendency to demonize the enemy is an exaggerated and strategic tool in order to propagandize a conflict. In contrast to the more forwardly brutal leaders, the United States struggled to demonize “Uncle Ho” (Ho Chi Minh, brutal communist leader) during the Vietnam War, as he emulated an image of compassion (Mahnken 3). In the absence of an absolutely nefarious leader, the United States public struggled to comprehend the Vietnam War and, in general, did not support the war effort as much compared to other conflicts. To some extent, a conflict’s story development is just as important to building public justification as the objective facts, seeming manipulative but necessary.

These two strategic elements, unlimited political objectives in partnership with demonizing the enemy, have thus defined the American way of war. When coupled in the current international context, these combinations may be dangerous. It is all too easy to derive vilifying stories related to culture, religion, terror, or any number of national elements, and thereby easily manifest an American desire to wage conflict with unlimited political objectives.

Airman, Soldier, Seaman

“I am an American, fighting in the forces which guard my country and our way of life. I am prepared to give my life in their defense.”

– Code of Conduct for the Members of the Armed Forces of the United States of America, Article I

Young men and women who volunteer to join the United States’ Armed Forces are referred to as Airman, Soldiers, or Seamen depending on whether they choose to join the Air Force, Army, or Navy. These individuals execute the strategic military mission developed by higher-ranking officials.

I am an American Airman, C1C Camaren Ly, currently attending the United States Air Force Academy (USAFA). Upon first entering the Academy, all basic cadets must complete “Basic Cadet Training,” a physi-

cally and mentally grueling training program that transforms non-combatants into combatants. On the first day of training, “basics” understand that being a part of the Armed Forces comes with a commitment to sacrifice their lives, if asked. This is demonstrated in seemingly harmless practices; for example, a basic cadet may never travel alone, as someone who travels alone is killed. “BANG,” the cadre would say, “you left a wingman behind, you have killed him and you are dead. In combat, you never leave an Airman behind.” As “basics” approach the USAFA wall of fallen graduates, cadre explain, “Your name may be inscribed in this block, for this is what it means to be a part of the Long Blue Line.” There are briefs from injured veterans and successful pilots who discuss the importance of the profession of arms, their sacrifices, and their lost comrades. The perpetual discussion of sacrificing one’s life scared me as a basic cadet, and it scares me now.

During Basic Cadet Training, there is a never-ending recitation of quotes and knowledge. In a somewhat robotic function, basic cadets scream, “Without a word this uniform also whispers of freezing troops, injured bodies, and Americans left forever in foreign fields. It documents the courage of all military personnel, who by accepting this uniform, promise the one gift they truly have to give: their lives. I wear my uniform for the heritage of sacrifice it represents and more. I wear my uniform with pride, for it **represents the greatest nation of free people in the world**” (underline mine). There is nothing in history or academia that dictates which nation of free people is the greatest, and yet this particular quotation instills in the Basic Cadet a blind willingness to follow; why wouldn’t he or she wish to be part of the greatest nation of free people in the world? Similarly, I distinctly remember a briefer stating, “There are Americans... and there are those who want to be Americans!” followed by an eruption of applause. There is such danger in superiority, though! Distinguishing one group as a “superior” nation or a “superior” race or a “superior” culture harvests a breeding ground for toxic treatment of other humans, potentially leading to terrible injustices.

Basic cadets are perpetually at the rigid position of attention as they eat, walk, turn corners, and talk to their superiors. In fact, basic cadets may only ever speak with seven given responses: 1. Yes, sir; 2. No, sir; 3. No excuse, sir; 4. Sir, I do not know; 5. Sir, may I ask a question; 6. Sir, may I make a statement; and 7. Sir, I do not understand. This rigor of speech is intended to promote discipline. However, such rigidity eliminates critical thinking which is further reinforced by fear of harsh superiors when one deviates from these restrictions. Officers are taught to exemplify

character, humility, and moral judgment, but they are indoctrinated as disciplined followers. Rules with the justification of “discipline” continue throughout the academic year, perpetuating this lack of critical thought. Some contradiction exists, as the mission of the Academy is to develop officers of character, prepared to lead men and women of the armed forces.

From a tactical level, Airmen are trained to sacrifice their lives following the orders of their superiors and accomplishing their respective strategic goals. To some extent, they also are trained that such a sacrifice is on behalf of an American ideal such as equality or the American way of life, instead of the specificity of the conflict for which they may lose their life. In 1966, Army Specialist Daniel Fernandez, a Vietnam War Medal of Honor recipient, threw himself on a live grenade, saving the lives of the soldiers around him. Why did Daniel die? On a strategic level, Daniel was helping rid Vietnam of Communism and thus indirectly helping his family in America to continue living their way of life. In 2009, First Lieutenant Roslyn Schulte, the first female USAFA graduate to die as a result of enemy action, was killed by roadside bomb in Afghanistan. Why did Roslyn die? On a strategic level, Roslyn helped wage the global war on terrorism, indirectly saving her loved ones from a terrorist attack on the home front. Thousands of servicemen sacrifice their lives defending our nation and our people. I honor these dutiful and courageous military members, but wonder if the connection between these servicemen’s deaths and American safety may be a nationalistic oversimplification. One cannot flourish (as described by Aristotle or any other philosopher for that matter) without being alive. Perhaps it is selfish to describe the purpose of life as flourishing (be alive), while others believe life’s purpose is to help others (which sometimes disjointedly means death), but such is the conundrum of the Airmen, Soldiers, and Seamen.

Mass Atrocities

Further examination of the already complex nature of warfare reveals the humanity behind conflict. Individuals that subscribe to military doctrine and commit to sacrifice their life typically hope their efforts will be for some greater good – directly. This can be seen in humanitarian efforts and efforts to end mass atrocities. Americans grant each individual the right to life, but hundreds of thousands, if not millions of people – humans – just like us “Americans” do not have the right to life. Is it fair to pursue a flourishing life while others are not even granted an opportunity to live based solely on their identity? In this way, I know I have joined the United States Armed Forces,

but I am confused – the noble task I wish to fulfill is one that eliminates boundaries and classifications of humans, yet my profession is to defend the American way of life, American values, and American ideals. The perspective of the individual at a tactical level is muddled further. What is worth dying for?

Put the political objectives and public manipulation and all other complicated elements aside, immoral, brutal, unspeakable violence against a people is worth dying for. Standing in Auschwitz, the spot where millions of innocent people lost their lives, I shudder, and I am grateful I am free to live. I am grateful I am free to decide whether I will sacrifice my life or not. As a female and a scholar of women’s studies, I shudder at the World War II histories of sexual violence and physical humiliation. I cry for the victimized mothers, who had so many aspirations for their children, aspirations that would never transpire. Thinking of the children is the most painful, as children do not prescribe to any polarizing thought, they have no opinions that could be labeled as “wrong.” The massiveness of the Holocaust mortifies me. It sends chills up and down my spine and makes me wonder, “what kind of a world are we living in?”

In his book entitled *Blink*, journalist Malcolm Gladwell explains that we live in a world based on splicing, a behavioral science term used to explain the phenomenon where we classify people by their looks, in order to save time. It is the instinct that a car dealer uses to gauge who his customers will be. It is the instinct one uses in an alley on a dark night, to move quickly and avoid certain areas. It is also the instinct that causes fear in communities when people of color join the neighborhood. That same instinct alienates Muslims from certain area where citizens fear terrorism.

We also live in a world of considerable self-righteousness, as partially modeled by America’s tendencies to wage wars with unlimited political objectives. This is the idea that my political ideas are the best and only political ideas worth understanding. This kind of thinking breeds contempt for those less intellectually superior as you. Thich Nhat Hanh, a Vietnamese Zen master, global spiritual leader, and renowned pacifist wrote a book titled *Living Buddha, Living Christ*, explaining:

People kill and are killed because they cling too tightly to their own beliefs and ideologies. When we believe that ours is the only faith that contains the truth, violence and suffering will surely be the result. The second precept of the Order of Interbeing, founded within the Zen Buddhist tradition during the War in Vietnam, is about letting go of views: “Do not think the knowledge you presently possess is changeless,

absolute truth. Avoid being narrow-minded and bound to present views. Learn and practice nonattachment from views in order to be open to receive others' viewpoints" (Nhat Hanh 2).

He continues to explain that each tradition of religion has practices that are worth learning from, indiscriminately. As an individual at a tactical level, this concept is simple and I can subscribe to its goals, but what must one do beyond being a decent and understanding human being? One person's understanding and compassion is important, but one person's understanding and compassion cannot save millions of innocent lives without taking action outside of their daily kindness. Individuals, especially those who take part in military operations, are called to do more.

We can notice and counter microaggressions in our own communities, we can foster open-minded conversations to understand people different from ourselves, but how do we combat mass atrocities in distant nations whose politics are not clear? How do we eliminate the natural tendency to classify and label people based on distinguishing physical, cultural, racial, or behavioral characteristics? The answer, I think, may be in the question. The answer is: we. My role as a military member managing violence is equally as important as a grade school teacher managing education or a CEO managing corporate culture. Throughout my experience learning about mass atrocities and global perspectives, I felt a burden to save those innocent victims of mass atrocities. I felt an enormous burden to prevent future mass atrocities. But how was I going to take on a problem so enormous, at such a low level? I work on the tactics of battle, I work on the execution of higher level decisions. I have the ability to decide whether a decision is lawful or not, but again, that only impacts my small tactical area of operation.

Returning to the original questions: How do we combat mass atrocities in distant nations whose politics are not clear? How do we eliminate the natural tendency to classify and label people based on distinguishing physical, cultural, racial, or behavioral

characteristics? When we collectively as a military service, a community, a nation, a world – when we all are compassionate, understanding, and open-minded to diversity within our own spheres of influence, the world starts to look a little bit different. If it is true that two thirds of millennials do not know where Auschwitz is located, then we must assume this population has not thought about mass atrocities, about what it means to be an American, about the civil war in Syria, or about a multitude of other important global phenomena that impact our decisions as a nation. Politicians tend to avoid international conflict especially when it is prevention based, as it is difficult to appeal to constituents who do not understand the importance of prevention, much less the vastness of the conflict at large; prevention does not create any tangible results for politicians. As a nation, as the managers of violence, managers of education, managers of community climates, as neighbors, parents, students, and citizens of the world, we must decide prevention is a priority in order for politicians to decide prevention is a priority. I cannot take on the world alone. My call to action may be lofty, it may seem implausible, but all I ask is that we remain informed while maintaining a tolerant and understanding community, demanding intervention where possible. Should I need to risk my life on behalf of this kind of strategic intervention, I will.

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The content and opinions expressed in this piece are solely those of the author and are not reflective in any way of the United States Air Force.

Fear Has No Place in Policy

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From a very early age, I was interested in the Holocaust and I wondered how millions of people could be murdered simply because of their beliefs. Could something like this ever happen again? I gained a new perspective when I invited survivor Marion Blumenthal-Lazan to my middle school. The book *Four Perfect Pebbles* conveyed the message that despite the fear that defined people's lives during the Holocaust, there was still hope for change. Marion's story inspired me to live my life in a way that would promote fairness and equality for all. How this would take form, I did not know at the time. Five years later I joined the United States Coast Guard Academy (USCGA). My desire for studying the Holocaust and related issues continued, but my perspective has advanced and taken a different approach. The stories were no longer of militaristic men who rose to power and committed genocide. My new lens revealed a government that ruled by fear and transformed a population of ordinary men and women into mass murderers. Many of these men were similar to me in their aspirations to serve their country; however, the consequences of our service are different. It is incomprehensible how these individuals could carry out the orders Hitler had instructed on the very people they swore to protect. Reflecting today, I wonder if I could be placed into a similar position of challenging my command. The use of fear to exclude a group of individuals is an alarming signal that brings back memories of World War II. Policy should not impose fear upon a service member's career safety, physical safety, or emotional safety.

Over the years, Marion and I stayed in contact and I would keep her updated about my experiences at the Academy. Through interaction with the Honors Program at USCGA I was introduced to the American Service Academies Program (ASAP). During the program, participants were physically and emotionally exposed to the horrors of the Holocaust through survivor testimonies, touring museums, and visiting Auschwitz. The program provided a life changing experience that gave insight into the role the military played in the Final Solution and prompted us to recognize history to prevent it from repeating itself in today's military.

In preparation for the program, I read the book *Ordinary Men: Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland* by historian Christopher R. Browning. One of Browning's main arguments was the use of fear in the military among troops tasked with carrying out mass murder. Fear was used in

every aspect of the Holocaust, both in compliance of the military and in the compliance of the people taken captive. When officers were interrogated after the war, the majority listed fear of failure to obey orders as their excuse for participating in horrific acts of genocide. In their minds, failing to follow the orders would result in some form of punishment, the most severe consequence being death. However, as stated by Browning, no attorney "has been able to document a single case in which the refusal to obey an order to kill unarmed civilians resulted in the allegedly inevitable dire punishment" (Browning 170). The fear was perceived and not real. That perception of fear led those who may not have believed in the ideology to transition from protecting to persecuting their fellow citizens.

Instilling fear in the officers translated down the chain of command to the soldiers and policemen who were carrying out the actual killings and round-ups. If officers expressed their opposition to the new decrees, then their men would likely have been more willing to also express their desire to be reassigned to a job that did not involve direct executions. Those who remained in the killing squads became mentally hardened and rationalized their actions. Ceasing to be an alienated follower prevents the blind obedience of inhumane orders and policies. Being enlisted does not equate to lacking basic human judgments of what is right or wrong. There will be situations in which there will not be time to question an order of a superior officer, but in the case of genocide and mass murder, there is a different timeline that allows for intervention. There are warning signs that can be observed and often a systematic process has been put in place to allow for such actions to take place. These actions are clearly immoral, and every member of the military can and must refuse to obey the unlawful order.

Career aspirations play a critical role in an individual's decision to speak up. During the Holocaust, those who were loyal to extremist ideas and movements with a desire to remain in the military beyond the war were less likely to challenge an order due to their fear of a negative effect on their career (Browning 75). Those who were not primarily concerned with promotions or were economically independent from the military likely felt they had more mental freedom to refuse to obey. It is this particular aspect that led me to reflect on whether fear holds a similar role in the U.S. military today.

Today, fear continues to be present in the military. There is no fear of being sent to concentration camps, but rather there is fear of being discharged because of who you truly are. This fear has in the past and is

now being impressed on my fellow service members who are part of the LGBTQ+ community. Since its beginning, the Coast Guard has been a gender inclusive service with all enlisted jobs open to women. It took the Army, Navy, Air Force, and Marine Corps until 2016 to open all combat jobs to females. The Coast Guard is supposed to be an all-inclusive, welcoming family. Unfortunately, policies can be enacted that do not reflect the feelings held by most of the family. This occurred during the existence of the Don't Ask Don't Tell (DADT) policy that gave those in command the discretion to discharge a service member who was gay or lesbian. During this era, there was extreme homophobia. People feared the presence of a gay man because of the stereotype that they would be physically assaulted. Their intolerance for gay men was so strong that officials created demeaning regulations for punishing those who were involved with any action related to gay or lesbian activities. This policy made many Coastguardsmen (as well as members from every branch) to choose to separate, but it did not cease their desire to fulfill their call to serve our nation.

Shortly after returning from ASAP, I read an article highlighting the National Park Ranger for the Stonewall Monument, Jamie Adams. She was previously enlisted but chose to leave during the Don't Ask Don't Tell period. During her interview with the press, she expressed how she "suffered every day, so worried every day that someone would find out" (Ahmed). Her story about the fear she experienced as an enlisted lesbian woman is not unique. After much pain and division within the service, the Act was repealed by President Obama in 2011. Even with these pains, inclusion began to move in the right direction. Although homophobia still existed, policy prohibited the harassment or discrimination of gays and lesbians. Yet there was still a major group left out: transgender people.

Even though gays and lesbians could now openly serve and were much more accepted by their units, transgender people were left out of this newly found acceptance. Members of the trans community watched as their shipmates came out of the closet and were able to be their true selves. The fear felt by those who were transgender was not just of career security but also of physical safety. Taylor Miller was the first Coast Guard member to transition while on active duty. She spoke to the *Washington Post* about her experience during the ban. She stated that people in their early twenties should be concerned with normal worries like buying an apartment, but she was worried about paying for hormones and trying to "hide from everybody and not get beaten up and murdered in an alleyway" (Solovitch and O'Malley).

The trans community continued to be a marginalized group that would not be supported by policy until June 30, 2016 when the ban was lifted. Defense Secretary Carter declared that within the Department of Defense and the Coast Guard, transgender members may openly serve. With the elimination of the ban, equal health care and insurance that would cover the cost of a transition became available to transgender service members later that year, on October 1. This was a major milestone, but only applied to current service members, and kept transgender identity as disqualifying for those seeking to join the military. It was not until July 1, 2017 that transgender applicants were accepted.

It has become common and normal to serve alongside brothers and sisters of all different identities because imposed fear was not a strategy used to exclude one group. Recently I had the opportunity to interview Taylor Miller. She was surprised by the number of people accepting of her transition, but the acceptance did not always translate up the chain of command. Fortunately, despite the feelings held by ranking officials across services, the federal government was in support. The Obama administration included Pride Month on the government calendar for June, which prompted and gave a path for Coast Guard units to hold celebrations. This example of comfort level with being openly gay, lesbian, or transgender demonstrated great progress. For Miller, the time of greatest comfort came when she served with a lesbian commanding officer and executive officer. The tables turned from her being afraid to speak up for herself to people being afraid of punishment for discriminating against her.

Sadly, it took a long time for there to be equality, which was rapidly revoked shortly thereafter. Less than a month after the massive win for the LGBTQ+ community, the Commander in Chief tweeted that "victory cannot be burdened with the tremendous medical costs and disruption that transgender in the military would entail" (Boccher). Miller received this news while driving to a transgender integration panel, which was immediately postponed. The unofficial policy shift conveyed the message that transgender individuals were no longer welcomed (Solovitch and O'Malley). A sense of fear to follow orders was once again present for military members. Since there had yet to be an actual documented policy change, the Department of Defense (DOD) decided to pause discharging impacted troops by requiring memos to be routed to the Secretary of Defense, who refused to sign them. Therefore, members of the Army, Navy, Air Force, and Marines, were temporarily protected. The Coast Guard did not enact the same practice. Although no members could be formally separated

yet, they were already being even more marginalized. Ultimately, on April 12, 2019 a Transgender Ban was officially reinstated which would affect nearly 15,000 troops across all branches (Branstetter).

I see similarities in the pattern of contradictory policies towards LGBTQ+ in the military and struggles Jewish people faced in Europe over the past few centuries to fully integrate into non-Jewish society. We learned of this pattern in our visits to sites and museums related to Jewish history in Poland. There was a time when Jews were expelled from society, welcomed during the Enlightenment, granted equal rights through emancipation, and then were attempted to be wiped off this Earth by Hitler. Although the consequences of LGBTQ+ are not comparable to the genocide of the Jewish people, allowing this transgender ban to stay in effect will still have severe consequences. The government is sending a message to the entire nation that it is okay to ban transgender people. A more extreme form of this sentiment existed within the Third Reich. A special division of the Gestapo was established to track and arrest any suspected gay male. Those who were convicted and sent to concentration camps faced exceptionally cruel treatment by guards and fellow inmates due to the stigmatism the government had created against homosexuality (Persecution of Homosexuals). We must refuse to allow this type of attitude to form towards our fellow human beings. Persecution does not take place overnight, it is systematic. Fortunately, there are opportunities to impact change.

Change begins with those in command. The precedent must be set that the military is open to anyone who wishes to serve and protect this nation. Not everyone is at a level within the Coast Guard or government to be able to change policy, but everyone does have the power to create an inclusive workplace climate. When I asked Ms. Miller the best way to make a difference regardless of positional power, her response was to start by accepting oneself and to be cordial with everyone. Respect is a core value of the Coast Guard and the current climate of the armed forces does not embody this value. Fortunately, policy only decides regulations that must be enforced and does not dictate the climate or how you are to treat one another. A respectful and welcoming environment is the first step. Then members of the Coast Guard should have the courage to voice their disagreement and work with the government to repeal the ban without fear of reprisal.

Too often, senior officers will follow regulations without hesitation and will not question authority fearing that they would compromise their career

aspirations. This once again is a lesson that should have been learned by those in Police Battalions and the German Army. The United States government has a system of checks and balances for a reason. Hitler was able to rapidly rise to power and make sweeping changes within a very quick time period. One of those changes was amending the military oath to swear allegiance to the *Fuhrer*, the leader. Unlike the military under Hitler's reign, U.S. military personnel swear an oath to the Constitution, not a person. This should allow us to raise concerns to our superiors regardless of our career aspirations. Someone trying to serve 40 years in the Coast Guard has the same responsibility as someone looking to do one enlistment: To stand up for our fellow brothers and sisters in arms and to demand equality. The fear faced by transgender coastguardsmen for their career as well as physical and emotional safety is real and is relevant now.

Growing up, we are told history repeats itself. I believe this and we can prevent this from happening only by recognizing that notion. That is why I can say fear not. I and the 12 other cadets and midshipmen who participated in the ASAP have recognized this discrimination and are working to end it within our own respective branches. The initial action is to conduct self-reflection. We must understand our internal subconscious biases and how they show up in our everyday actions. Cultural awareness is another critical component to combating the marginalization currently occurring. At the Coast Guard Academy, this will take the form of a symposium for the entire Corps of Cadets. The discussion will begin with the Holocaust and then transition to how those lessons learned can be applied to the modern military with the goal of eliminating the systemic exclusion of our brothers and sisters. We must know and ensure our fellow academy shipmates understand they are not alone. There are many others who share the same feelings or identity. Fear not, you are part of a community. There are service members surrounding you who can put fear aside and prioritize caring about you on a personal level, with respect to you as a human regardless of the current policy or current command.

In middle school I could not have imagined my interest in the Holocaust would develop into a humanitarian service role and then having the opportunity to participate in the ASAP. The experiences I had in this program were life-changing and will influence the decisions I make for the rest of my military career and beyond. Words cannot express my appreciation and gratitude, but I can share what I have learned in the hope of changing the role fear plays in each of our lives.

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The Sound of Authenticity: History, Culture, and Dealing with Legacies of Racialized Violence in Poland and the United States¹

Alexander L. Compton

The Soła River is particularly high from last night's storm. The mist of the morning still lingers, and the embankment of stones on which I normally stand is almost completely submerged in water. Four days of visiting Auschwitz Concentration Camp is enough to make anyone feel overwhelmed. To combat the feeling of becoming another somber stone at the bottom of the river, a river where the ashes of thousands once flowed, I turn to music. Many people would probably cringe at the idea of listening to Hip-Hop in the city of Oświęcim, a space largely sanctified by its traumatic past, but for me the ensuing vibe is therapeutic. It's not necessarily about the lyrics alone, which always contradict and complement my interaction with any space. It's also about my experiences with a given song, and the experiences of those who I carry with me in musical memory.

I search through my playlists for a while, and eventually I come to a song that I first heard when I was a teenager, sitting in my stepfather's 2002 silver Monte Carlo as we drove through my hometown in Kentucky. We had been listening to various songs from the album *Life After Death*, but when the track "Sky's the Limit" began to play, I remember my stepfather suddenly started to talk about memories of his mother, how she would sometimes visit him in a dream, and the way music can transport you to another world. He always felt a connection between the overall message of the song and his mother's life advice, but the introductory clip featuring Voletta Wallace also reminded him of her presence as a parent. Having passed away years prior to that conversation, I never had the chance to meet his mother, but in that moment, I was able to internalize and preserve a small portion of her life and her memory, and specifically from my stepfather's perspective. Maybe a similar form of exchange would have been possible without music, but it still strikes me as a rather unique phenomenon that I am always brought back to that moment whenever I hear a particular set of musical chords, even when walking along the Sofa River more than a decade later.

I don't know if it is the seemingly unreal symbolic power of the place, the nostalgia of the music itself, or some combination of the two, but for some reason I find myself contemplating whether or not such experiences were real. Not real in the sense of whether they actually happened, but real in the sense of whether the personal significance I attach to them is valid. To what extent was that conversation with my stepfather culturally "authentic"? What does it mean when a white male teenager internalizes the life experiences of a Black American stepfather and his deceased mother while sharing what many consider to be an ethnically-specific art form? Are the many layers of experience encapsulated within this exchange - that of the musical artists, my stepfather, his mother, and myself - equally authentic, to whom, and based on what criteria? Such thoughts are of course not unique to one song or to this city. The same Notorious lyrics also sparked a similar moment of contemplation when I was living in Berlin a few years ago.

In fact, questions of cultural authenticity have been on my mind since the early years of my childhood, even if I didn't know what those words meant until I was much older. Having grown up in a bi-racial family with deeply influential relationships built on shared experiences with Hip-Hop and other forms of Black culture, my cultural status had never been clearly defined for me or for anyone else. Identity, consciousness, and appropriation were also concepts largely foreign to me prior to attending college, so for most of my youth I was continually trapped between a prideful love for Hip-Hop culture and the often painful, confusing reactions of others, who viewed my expression as lacking in authenticity, a sign of inherent delinquency, or both.

I eventually decided to make that aspect of my identity a completely private affair, one that could not be observed on the surface through clothing, language, or habit. Exploring history and Hip-Hop from an academic perspective during my undergraduate studies allowed me to successfully contextualize those experiences somewhat, but without any concrete conclusions. Living abroad in Germany as a student from the U.S. and being asked consistently about my background also served as a uniquely powerful catalyst for analyzing my past and my identity. Even then, I still couldn't define to

¹Throughout this paper, I use the term "racialized violence" to describe forms of violence, both physical (e.g. imprisonment and murder) and non-physical (e.g. denying someone the right to speak or to claim a certain status), which were based on constructed ideologies of "race." This is not meant to prescribe the notion of "race" as a valid or representative category of identification for any of the cultural, ethnic, religious, and/or national groups mentioned in this reflection, nor is it meant to imply a singularity of experience with racialized violence. Even when detached from racialization, I also use the term "violence" to broadly describe unjust and often multidirectional uses of power.

what extent my experiences with African American culture were any more or less authentic than those of the millions of other white kids who grew up in the same space and time, consuming and appropriating Hip-Hop.² Were my experiences, and me by extension, twenty-five percent authentic, fifty-percent authentic, fully authentic, or completely inauthentic? Above all, where was I to find the tools for measuring such personal experiences?

Although the precise definition of cultural authenticity is highly contested, I had learned by then that most discussions tend to reach at least one common conclusion regardless of their starting point. You can't have authentic culture without living people who have been socialized in a given cultural tradition; that is, living in the sense that those engaging in the process of cultural transmission are both alive and have internalized cultural experiences which were passed down via other living people who belong to the same culture. In the world of the authentic, cultural experiences must always be contemporary and historical simultaneously, both living and lived. When it comes to measuring authenticity, then, the perceived distance each person has from a certain set of collective experiences often serves as the main criteria of comparison. This conclusion seemed logical enough, but how cultural distance itself was to be measured across space and time, let alone compared, was still unclear.

Engaging with notions of cultural authenticity and attempting to apply them to my own life thus led to a state of ever-deepening confusion and internal doubt, but it also gave me the language and interpretational frameworks necessary to keep asking questions and to keep trying to answer those questions with greater nuance. Even if cultural authenticity proved to be endlessly elusive or something that can only be established on a situational basis, I was determined to pursue the topic until it stopped feeling productive. This was also the mindset I carried with me when I first decided to apply for a fellowship in New York and Poland dedicated to teaching Jewish history and the history of the Holocaust. After three weeks of traveling, researching, attending lectures, visiting historical sites, and participating in academic discussions, my understanding of authenticity has largely stayed the same, but it has also expanded in a way which I think may be worth describing briefly, if only as a momentary or provisional consideration.

Trying to find a starting point for discussing my interactions with authenticity in Poland has been somewhat impossible, given that questions of cultural and historical authenticity manifested themselves in almost every case study related to the remembrance, memorialization, and politicization of Jewish Polish history. One of the earliest and most fraught topics was the annual Krakow Jewish Festival, which attracts repeated accusations of creating "virtual," that is inauthentic Jewishness. These accusations are usually based on the presence of kitschy, stereotypical depictions of Jewishness and Jewish culture on the sidelines of the festival, and the fact that the majority of individuals who participate are either non-Jewish Poles or tourists from abroad. The consumption of a given culture by an extra-cultural population is always a cause for careful consideration, but if there is almost no representative population living within the same space and time, debates on what should be consumed and how become extremely fraught.³



The Final Concert of the Krakow Jewish Festival. Photo by Alexander L. Compton

Trying to analyze what exactly takes place every year in the second largest city in the country thus marked the first time when debates on authenticity came to the forefront of my group's experiences in Poland, not only in terms of who should have the right to represent Jewish culture, but also what forms of expression were to be considered authentic. On the one hand, the Kraków Jewish Festival represented the increasingly popular consumption and appropriation of Jewish culture, Judaica, and Jewish history among the non-Jewish majority of Poland in the last twenty or thirty years. On the other, it reflected broader efforts to "rescue" Jewish Polish history, to learn from

²For an informative overview of the theoretical and social debates surrounding the consumption of Hip-Hop, see: Russell A. Potter, *Spectacular Vernaculars: Hip-Hop and the Politics of Postmodernism* (New York: SUNY, 1995)

³Ruth Ellen Gruber, *Virtually Jewish: Reinventing Jewish Culture in Europe* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002); Ruth Ellen Gruber, "Scenes from a Krakow Café," *Moment*, www.momentmag.com/moment/-issues/currentyear/02/201002-Poland.html (May 1, 2010). For further personal testimonies, see: Erin Einhorn, *The Pages in Between: A Holocaust Legacy of Two Families, One Home* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2008); Jennifer Teege & Nikola Sellmair, *My Grandfather Would Have Shot Me: A Black Woman Discovers Her Family's Nazi Past*, translated by Carolin Sommer (New York: The Experiment, 2015), 23–58.

the past, and to achieve collective healing between Jewish and non-Jewish individuals from all over the world.⁴



A Wall of Recovered Jewish Gravestones at the Cemetery of the Remuh Synagogue in Kraków. Photo by Alexander L. Compton

The same contradiction continued to emerge in discussions about how trends of “dark tourism” applied to major sites of remembrance such as Auschwitz, the various Jewish spaces of Krakow, or the ruins of Plaszow Concentration Camp and the Oskar Schindler Factory.⁵ In each of these cases, a pervading consciousness of absence, or rather of distance from the Jewish life that once was, dominated all interactions with what were supposed to be spaces of cultural reconciliation and collective healing from various pasts of racialized violence. I couldn't help but wonder, for example, how many of my fellow tourists were Jewish, and what exactly would change if they were? Would their presence make the perceived or real authenticity of the experiences any greater or the spaces in which they took place more authentically Jewish as cultural-historic preservations?

If one day the majority of the visitors who travel to spaces like Krakow and Auschwitz are indeed Jewish, it still seemed impossible for them to ever fill the void left behind by the Holocaust and postwar antisemitism. Even if they were to choose to stay in Poland, no newly established community could fully claim the exact same historical and cultural authenticity as the large Jewish communities that probably would have continued to thrive had the Holocaust never taken place, at least not without defying the latter's humanity and individuality.



A Local Plaque Dedicated to the Bosak Family of Kazimierz (Krakow). Photo by Alexander L. Compton

The cultural specificity of the past is of course foundationally important; Jewish individuals were persecuted during the Holocaust, as well as throughout Polish, German, European, and global history, precisely because they were Jewish. Formerly Jewish spaces must certainly regain some authenticity, then, if individuals of the same background visit or even choose to live in those same spaces, and they certainly cannot be authentic without some form of Jewish life. And yet, the distance which separates those who are living from those who are confined to the past defies the ability to fully understand what happened or to fully replace that which once was. Furthermore, the distance which separates each individual from the past is often equally pluralistic if not equally great as the distance which separates those in the present.

Perceptions of what it meant to be Jewish in Poland between 1918 and 1939 were much different than contemporary perceptions of the same identity, for example, and perceptions of Jewishness have always differed considerably based on whether one is living in Israel, Brazil, Argentina, the United States, Canada, or even in different regions of Poland. So who if anyone has enough “authenticity” to claim the inheritance of Jewish Polish history and culture today? Is such authenticity open exclusively to the relatives of those Jewish families who survived the Holocaust and/or who fled Poland as refugees in the postwar

⁴Gruber, *Virtually Jewish*.

⁵For a highly informative and applicable discussion of “dark tourism,” see: Daniel P. Reynolds, *Postcards from Auschwitz: Holocaust Tourism and the Meaning of Remembrance* (New York: New York University Press, 2018).

era? What about the Polish individuals who were unaware of their Jewish heritage until fairly recently, non-Jewish Poles who decide to convert to Judaism, or the growing community of Jewish citizens who have no historic connection to Poland?

In the face of such plurality, attempting to compare various types and degrees of distance from the past and/or some standard of cultural experience is often a messy and dangerous process, because there is equal potential for both defending and doing violence against the experiences of those around you, both in the past and the present. This is particularly true in spaces characterized by collective legacies of racialized violence, where the violences of the past and the present are so heavily intertwined with cultural identity that strict borders of authenticity are often necessary to prevent further injury. Almost every form of modern imperialism and colonialism has depended on the ability to silence those groups marked as “other” and to violently coat over their voices with stereotypes, cultural appropriations, racialized mythologies, and an inherently colonizing language. Restricting from within who can authentically interact with, speak on, and represent collective cultural experiences is thus of utmost importance for decolonizing both historical and contemporary understandings of a given culture on the inside as well as the outside.

The contemporary Jewish community of Poland, for example, continues to face outbursts of popular antisemitism, new governmental attempts to rewrite history according to narratives that deny any Polish involvement in the Holocaust, as well as blatant acts of cultural appropriation. In the U.S., popular and institutionalized racism remain deeply engrained, mass incarceration and police brutality are largely ignored, and cultural appropriation continues to manifest itself in new forms.⁶ This also does not include the increasingly popular evocation of anti-LGBTQ and anti-migration propaganda on both sides of the Atlantic. In such contexts, defining who gets to authentically represent collective cultural experiences as well as the content associated with Jewishness or Blackness is a foundational necessity.

At the same time, however, most historical attempts to create and enforce hard barriers of cultural authenticity based on defining and using a collective standard of experience have also led to the internal oppression of the experiences of a large number of groups who also face intersectional disenfranchisement and/or possess identities made subsidiary to that standard. This includes women, members of the LGBTQ community, different religious sects, people from different classes and regions, people of different skin colors or tones (colorism), people with different nationalities, and so on.⁷ In other words, the politics of representation which emanate from the racialized trauma of the past and the present produce a contradictory dynamic, in which claims of authenticity often oscillate between defying hegemonic definitions from the outside and enforcing hegemonic definitions from the inside, either as a form of defense, to encourage united efforts of improvement, or, in some cases, for personal gain. This volatile nature of authenticity also seemed to characterize some of the major conflicts in the Jewish community during my time abroad.

As my group was planning to leave Krakow for Warsaw, for example, one of the only functioning historical synagogues in the city was forcefully shut down due to internal strife. The official Jewish Religious Community in Krakow (*Gmina*), which administers Jewish communal property in the city, had apparently chosen to shut out members of the local Chabad community who had been allowed to use the synagogue as a religious and educational institution for more than a decade. Regardless of the motivations or reasons for such actions, this conflict inherently evoked questions of authenticity, in that individuals of common ethnic, cultural, and/or religious identification were now fighting to determine who could lay claim to key sites of cultural-religious expression, exchange, and community building based on comparing their relationship with the past and their role within Polish and Jewish society.⁸ For one group to claim superior authenticity over the other based on their relative distance from the past or from some standard of collective experience would be to defy the humanity and individuality of everyone involved, both living and deceased. And yet, there seemed to be no alternative means for justifying one’s position.

⁶For a highly informative overview of mass-incarceration and police brutality/militarization in the U.S., see: Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* (New York: The New Press, 2012).

⁷For scholars who have discussed the often hegemonic definitions of Blackness, race, ethnicity, nationality, gender, sexuality, and identity which are imposed based on the stereotypical beliefs of the majority population, a type of overly-homogenized “standard” conceptualized within corresponding collectives, or both, see: Michelle M. Wright, *The Physics of Blackness: Beyond the Middle Passage Epistemology* (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 2015); Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, 4th Edition (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 2012); Touré, *Who’s Afraid of Post-Blackness?: What It Means to Be Black Now* (New York: Free Press, 2011); Michelle M. Wright, *Becoming Black: Creating Identity in the African Diaspora* (Durham: Duke Univ. Press, 2004).

⁸Cnaan Liphshiz, “A Clash between Jews in Krakow Highlights Growing Acceptance of Chabad in Europe,” *Times of Israel*, July 5, 2019, accessed August 29, 2019, www.timesofisrael.com/a-clash-between-jews-in-krakow-highlights-growing-acceptance-of-chabad-in-europe/.



The Isaac Synagogue in Krakow. *Photo by Alexander L. Compton*

Needless to say, my expectations for finding answers to questions of authenticity were rather low as I stood on the banks of the Sola River a few weeks later, playing the same Notorious track on repeat and questioning the realness of my own life experiences. I couldn't escape the feeling of being trapped between the often violent contradictions which arise when trying to define when the distance from a standard of historical-cultural experience warrants or defies authenticity. I was plagued by the question of how authenticity could be transformed into something that is capable of defense against external violences, such as appropriation or attempts to represent a given culture based on discriminatory ideologies, while simultaneously remaining open to dialogue as well as to the plurality created by differences in space, time, and the uniqueness of individual experiences.



The Sola River. *Photo by Alexander L. Compton*

Eventually, my musical contemplations sparked a rather mundane yet unexpected question: is it possible for authenticity to have a sound? The perceived authenticity of a given song of course has little to do with "sound" in most cases. The cultural status of the artist, the cultural status of the consumer, and the conditions under which the song was produced and disseminated are usually what matter most, but the specific dynamics of sound also provided a useful metaphor for reorienting my thinking about cultural-historical distance. Above all, I wondered how understandings of "the authentic" might be expanded if cultural and historical experiences could be compared with waves of sound emanating from the past and/or the voices of others?

To start, one might say that such sound waves don't simply flow from one location to another, but often circulate among endlessly plural points of creation and reception within a broader cultural sphere defined by a wide range of frequencies and major imbalances in amplitude. In this scenario, attempts to identify a common standard of authentic experience could be compared to selecting a specific frequency at which the "authentic" can be heard, which inherently makes non-conforming experiences less audible (less authentic) or completely inaudible (inauthentic). Furthermore, those who inhabit positions of systemic and temporal power are capable of projecting a desired frequency with the highest levels of amplitude, thus creating internal and external gradations of silence. Beyond providing an interesting way for me to think about contemporary debates related to identity in terms of sound, this idea also helped to conceptualize the highly restricted nature of traditional notions of authenticity.

If traditional notions of the authentic usually attempt to define a standard frequency against which other experiences are to be compared and "heard," they not only defy the plurality of experiences, but also how culture is produced and transmitted. Just as one frequency cannot serve as the basis of a single song, let alone an entire genre of music, using such standardizations of experience as the foundation for defining historical or cultural authenticity can only provide an extremely limited form of understanding. In terms of music, the entire notion of authenticity might be better understood as a process of harmony rather than comparative selection, in which "the authentic" remains open to a wide range of experiential frequencies, whose specific combination are what make up the (musical) content of culture itself.

This of course does not offer a unique conclusion, nor does it help to explain how the barriers of culture are to be defined or how to correct imbalances in power

(amplitude). Even if taken to the extreme, where each individual's experiential framework represents a separate frequency on a range of cultural experiences, deciding which frequency should be included within that specific range - who has the right to "speak" - remains necessarily controversial. Establishing who has the right to make such decisions remains even more so, precisely because those decisions never take place within a vacuum, but within specific cultural and historical contexts characterized by major systemic and temporal inequalities of power. Racialized violence and cultural identity are often intertwined in such a way that authenticity cannot be self-awarded. It must be agreed upon by others who share previously established authenticity.

However, if historical-culture experiences are comparable to sound waves, and the unique way in which each individual perceives and expresses their experiences is comparable to frequency, perhaps the relative distance between frequencies doesn't have to serve as the *only* measure of relational authenticity, even in its expanded, musical form. Perhaps there is room for an alternative definition of authenticity at the other end of the musical relationship, a notion of authenticity based on "listening," which is not geared toward establishing identity, but consciousness; where cultural-historical distance serves to encourage rather than to discourage dialogue. Here authenticity could be seen as dependent on the *recognition* of the *limitations* for understanding created by distance, rather than distance itself. That is, assuming that each individual is already willing to approach experiences from a position of respect, this authenticity of listening could be defined through recognizing those limitations created by cultural plurality and time, as well as various power imbalances, which shape interactions with all forms of experience, cultural, historical, or both.

By recognizing the limited ability certain experiences, living or lived, have for shaping a complete understanding of the person and collection of people from which those experiences originated, authenticity could be theoretically maintained despite the inherent and contextual challenges of their exchange, both in the present and across time. In this way, the humanity and individuality of the experiences (the testimony) are respected, which seems like the best measure of authentic listening given my current understanding of the meaning of culture and history. Furthermore, once the varying types and degrees of distance from certain experiences no longer serve

as the standard for defining authenticity, but rather the open recognition of the limitations created by those distances, the internal barriers which normally discourage the creation of new positive experiential exchanges might begin to break down, or at least to become more porous.

In making this form of authenticity dependent on recognizing both the universal and relative limitations which dictate one's ability to understand the experiences of others, the need to maintain strict exclusionary or oppressive barriers of authenticity is lessened, because such recognition removes much of the potential for doing violence when interacting with experiences across space, time, and culture. In fact, authenticity becomes inclusionary by its very definition, in that it is defined by the recognition of the universally shared distance from all experiences followed by a *successive* recognition of the *relative* distance from the experiences of specific individuals, from various culturally-specific collectives, and from the past, rather than a singular comparative emphasis on relative closeness to an overly-generalized standard of common experience. In turn, this growing experiential foundation might lead to the development of a critical consciousness geared towards interpersonal dialogue without using hegemonic standards, past or present, as the only form of mediation, without attempting to standardize one's own experiences or the experiences of others.

The admission of the inherent heterogeneity and subjectivity of all experiential exchanges, as well as of culture and history by extension, is not the end, then, but rather the beginning of how this authenticity could be maintained when interacting with the experiences of others, regardless of distance. It is the line which must be crossed to begin listening within a type of conceptual "third space" where all the inhabitants can possess an *initial level of universal or shared authenticity* based on the recognition of a shared, universal distance from any set of experiences, a factor which is often foundationally necessary for internalizing experiences of any kind.⁹

What necessarily follows, however, is a similar yet different form of recognition; not the recognition of the universal limitations created by the impossibility of inhabiting the *exact* same space, time, and subjectivity as another person or group of people, but the *specific* limitations which dictate *personal* experiences based on individual, group-specific, and broader societal contexts; those limitations which

⁹Recently, the concept of "third spaces" in which everything is both symbolic and real has been used by scholars of Jewish and Eastern European history to describe acts of memorialization: Malgorzata Bakalarz, "Finding its Place in the World: Multiethnic Poland Today" (Lecture), *Museum of Jewish Heritage*, June 25, 2019. For early uses, see: Edward Soja, *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places* (Malden: Blackwell, 1996).

make every act of experiential exchange unique. After all, these experiences are what inform an individual's consciousness within a particular space and time.

This not only means taking stock of the specific distances each person has from a set of experiences, but also maintaining a critical consciousness of positions of temporal and institutionalized power. Such recognition applies just as much to those individuals living in the present who wish to understand the experiences of those in the past as it does to the non-Jewish majority of Poland or the White majority of the U.S. who consume Jewish and Black culture en masse. In fact, even if all forms of experiential exchange which are characterized by large distances in space, time, and culture are not necessarily to be classified as inauthentic, the entire process of internalization described above is also inherently dependent on a *group-specific* and *contextual* recognition of the power dynamics which dictate all exchanges *within a given space and time*.

Attempting to understand those who are confined to the past and trying to understand those who are physically or culturally distant can be intertwined and related processes, but both are also intrinsically bound to historically entrenched imbalances of power, especially when they take place in spaces built on collective pasts and presents of racialized violence. In such contexts, the recognition of the limitations of individual interactions with experiences also inherently requires the recognition of group-specific and contextual limitations, past and present, in order for this alternative version of authenticity to be maintained as it applies to all forms of testimony, living and lived. Without such recognition, violence becomes conceptualized as something confined to the past and/or to groups of historical-cultural "others," such as (Neo)Nazis or the Ku Klux Klan.

At first, this recycling of distance might seem equally self-defeating or implausible as traditional conceptualizations of authenticity, because it might lead to the implication that the only way to "listen" authentically is to continually concentrate on the traumas of the past and the present. That is, it implies that one should make recognition of the distance from that which is and that which was *the* foundation for defin-

ing an authenticity of listening. To a certain extent, this is true. Recognizing the limits created by distance as well as the often violent power imbalances which created and maintain that distance is a foundational prerequisite for respecting human life and individuality when attempting to deal with collective legacies of racialized violence.

My total life experiences are undeniably different than many of those individuals who identify as members of Black or African American culture, for example, as well as those who identify as members of White American culture. In both cases, however, my level of authenticity is already assumed based on my appearance, and understandably so. I have never told my mother I want to rip off my skin as a result of bullying. I will not be followed around in a shopping mall based on my perceived propensity for theft, my hair will not be the target of insensitive curiosity, and I will probably never be pulled over because "my music is too loud." And if I do, my chances of getting shot, arrested, or incarcerated are incomparably lower than if my skin color were darker.

The alternative notion of authentic listening put forward here is thus certainly not an answer to debates on authenticity or a how-to-guide for intercultural dialogue, any more than it is a prescription against apathetic acts of appropriation or other forms of racialized violence which characterize the contemporary United States, Poland, or elsewhere. However, in recognizing the limits of understanding created by cultural-historical distance and power, there might be some newfound potential for the continuation of collective growth and exchange. That is, pursuing such modes of authentic listening might also lead to another equally important form of recognition; the recognition of a collective longing to become, a collective longing to reclaim that which cannot be reached and may never be reached, to connect with that which can, and to come as close as possible to achieving a more complete understanding of self and the world given the current circumstances which dictate exchange. In time, these various forms of overlapping recognition might also aid the process of dealing with collective legacies of racialized violence across the otherwise necessary barriers of authenticity they create.

Resisting Time – Memorials in Natural Landscapes

Natasha Doyon

Memorials are sacred sites that hold space for reflection and contemplation – they entreat you to pause within a soundscape of muzzled screams and thunderous silences. I will be reflecting on memorials that coexist with nature. Where do they begin and end, and what is the right amount of buffer between them and modern life? Memorials that exist in natural surroundings have permeable gates and questionable buffer zones. Akin to memory and the past, there is no hard line that separates memorials in natural landscapes from their surroundings. It is messy and biological. The challenge of preserving memory in rural settings is to resist both *natural* and human progress. I walked around wondering what would happen if they were overgrown and forgotten, to simply become digital artifacts in cyber archives. Due to the precarious nature of these spaces, they are all the more expectant to be protected.

Logging Roads and Birdsong – Zbylitowska Góra

We had circled the town of Zbylitowska Góra numerous times looking for the entrance to the Buczyna Forest; it is easy to miss. Our bus drove into a shaded area, a canopy of deep-rooted beech trees sheltered us from the afternoon sun. The earth was dark and well trodden. The pathway slightly sloped towards a verdant forest, fresh with insects buzzing and birds singing. Their songs delineated a sound barrier between the village and us. There is a clearing and I can see fragments of dispersed memorials in the shadow of a Goliath concrete obelisk that is pointing upwards towards the blue ether.

Cement. Metal. Territory. The obelisk is a Communist effort at memorializing while maximizing its own ideological presence. I was curious about the gigantic sword embedded in the monument pointing downwards, and troubled by the generalizable way they honored the victims. Despite its overbearing presence, I recognized that they did not destroy the killing field and mass graves by pouring cement over the entire site. In the background, the Jewish and Catholic memorials are sunken into the earth, surrounded by bushes and trees that are slowly growing over them. All enshrined by a catatonic silence. The horror of this memorial is amplified by the solitude and absence of any human trace.

What thrives is a disobedient forest, rich with lush greenery, logging roads and hiking trails. This memorial is fragile because the earth is in constant

movement. It is ephemeral, not unlike memory that transforms over time.

Rusted blue metal fences demarcate the mass graves of Jews, 6,000 women, men and children, including 800 Jewish children from the orphanage, and 2,000 Christian Poles. The Jewish memorials have stones placed on *matzevot* (tombstones) and those that have fallen to the ground, *yizkor* (memorial) candles, and loosely hung Israeli flags tied to the fences. The Christian memorials have crosses and clusters of fresh and dried flowers tied in red and blue ribbons.

Fresh flowers... Some people must still remain if they are placing fresh flowers.



Zbylitowska Góra. Painting by Natasha Doyon. Watercolor on archival paper, 8x11 in, 2019

I carefully looked at where I was stepping in this emotional subterranean landscape – for this entire site is a resting place. The saplings contrasted the darker green depressions pitted in the earth. Disoriented by the weightlessness of innocent victims I needed to reorient myself. I wandered off down a path into the forest and took out my phone to record the sounds of the forest. Suddenly I saw a young boy wandering up the path. We were both stunned to see someone.

He looked scared and began to run off. I reassured him that it was ok – he ran back down the path towards a clearing. No more than 15 feet from the memorial is a logging road with numerous neatly piled wood stacks placed in rows. The young boy stood next to his bike and waited for his friend. This is their backyard, and a pleasant way to spend the day adventuring in the Buczyna Forest.

Treblinka II

Treblinka II is a sparse memorial enclosed in a pine forest. Its vast emptiness left me gasping for air. A

sea of 17,000 *matzevot*, whose grey jagged tips flow into the forest. The earth is a spiritual archeological site empty of artifacts. An unbearable stillness of 900,000 lives lost comprising of their traditions, culture, stories, and familial lineages—evaporated.

An active sign of remembrance is the Ribbon of Remembrance. A white ribbon with the names and surnames of 4,000 people who were murdered in Treblinka II is woven throughout the trees in the forest. If all the names were written, the entire forest would be covered in white, because they only represent less than 0.5% of the victims at this site. I followed the ribbon, stepping on dry branches and soft mossy earth, swiping away the insects that come out in the rain.

Embodying a still rage that swelled in my throat, tempered by the loving hands that placed this long ribbon. In the Jewish tradition, it says that we die two deaths, the first is our body and the second is when we are forgotten.

Scattered light purple wildflowers and grass push through the cracks in-between the stones, mirroring the restlessness of memories. Time lapses here, with one foot in the past and one marking my path through the stones I instinctually search for an echo, to hold onto something tangible. I hold onto silence and walk away more perplexed. What are the future challenges of remembrance in these sites that are conditionally ephemeral and vulnerable to the seasons? Not to mention the current whitewashing and rewriting of history, these sacred sites demand protection.



Ribbon of Remembrance – Treblinka II. *Painting by Natasha Doyon.* Watercolor on archival paper, 11x8 in., 2019

One of our Fellows asked, “What is the educational value of these sites?” and that question still lingers with me. It depends what one defines as educational. I will borrow from John Dewey, who believed that knowledge is based in real life experience.¹ There are a multitude of ways to encounter a memorial, however, it is faulty to expect anything. It is a sorrowful warning.

As an artist one of the ways I processed these sacred sites was through painting, these watercolors were done on the bus or train throughout our Fellowship.

¹John Dewey, *Democracy and Education: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Education* (New York: Free Press, 1966).

The Question of American Concentration Camps

Jonathan Lanz

“Auschwitz did not begin with the gas chambers; it ended with them,” declared Paweł, our tour guide, at the site of the former Birkenau death camp.¹ I always found this type of language to be kitsch. Of course, the Holocaust was a process of ostracization and dehumanization that only concluded with mass murder, but I often notice that language such as “Never Again,” echoed in the rhetoric of our tour guide, does more to provide comfort than to inspire action. Genocide has reoccurred many times since 1945, from Bosnia to Cambodia, and there is no reason to believe that the abuse of human rights will subside in the near future. The lessons of places like Birkenau have fallen on deaf ears for the past seventy-five years. Yet as Paweł made these comments, when I was standing in front of the ruins of gas chambers two and three at Birkenau, my mind wandered far from those women, men, and children who were murdered by members of the SS.² I could not even think of antisemitism in our current world. My thoughts veered far from the purpose of my trip to Poland. All I could think about was the statement made two weeks prior to my visit by Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez of New York, who characterized the detention centers for migrants along the U.S.-Mexican border as “concentration camps.”

Understandably, this tweet immediately caused renewed debate over whether American politicians hijack the history of the Holocaust for political purposes. When I first heard news of Ocasio-Cortez’s comments, I balked at her misuse of the term “concentration camps.” How could someone appropriate the imprisonment and murder of millions of people for political means? Why are politicians so obsessed with invoking dead Jews in their arguments? As a historian of the Holocaust, I found the notion of concentration camps in the United States absurd and offensive. In Nazi Germany, Jews, Poles, Roma, and numerous other groups categorized as “unworthy of life” were imprisoned not for a crime, but for their perceived race. They were murdered, either outright, or through a process which became known as “extermination through labor” (*Vernichtung durch Arbeit*). The American government detains migrants in these

detention centers for *illegally* crossing a border and their imprisonment is only temporary as immigration courts work through the backlog of cases. Surely, Ocasio-Cortez was simply infusing more controversy into her statements in order to gain the upper hand in a political fight that currently divides the American people.

Yet there I was at the site of a former death camp, unable to focus on the lives of the 865,000 Jews who were murdered on arrival at Birkenau (Dwork and van Pelt 361). Why was this the case, I asked myself. At Birkenau, the tour might have ended at the site of the former gas chambers, but it certainly did not begin there. In fact, we began our early-morning tour at the edge of the camp, at the location of a train platform that served as the arrival point for transports of Jews destined for forced labor and the gas chambers.³ Here individuals arrived, dehydrated and starving, in a place which would serve as their graveyard. For the small percentage of those who were not killed on arrival, a process of further dehumanization awaited them. New prisoners had all of their remaining belongings stolen from them. The newly arrived had their hair shaved off and they were issued numbers to replace the last vestige of individuality: one’s name. Auschwitz-Birkenau was an epicenter of dehumanization.

As we continued our tour of Birkenau, I learned even more about the conditions at the camp. All inmates were organized into work details called *kommandos* and they were often forced to perform backbreaking labor. The SS even organized some prisoners into squads, known as *Sonderkommando*, who were tasked with burning the bodies of recently gassed Jews.⁴ When it came to nourishment, prisoners were given a coffee-like substance, a soup that was barely edible, and bread that was often composed of sawdust. This amounted to less than half of the daily calories needed to sustain a human being. After completing roll call, prisoners returned to their lice-infested barracks where they slept five to a wooden bunk. These overcrowded, overworked, and malnourished men, women, and children rapidly died, fulfilling the Nazi regime’s ultimate goal of killing Europe’s entire Jewish population.

Here, I thought, is a sharp divide between the conditions in the Nazi camp system and the “American concentration camps.” While the SS treated prisoners

¹The Auschwitz camp complex was composed of three main sections. Auschwitz I was a concentration camp, Auschwitz II (Birkenau) was a death camp, and Auschwitz III (Buna-Monowitz) was a labor camp.

²The “SS” is an acronym for the *Shutzstaffel* (protection squad), the Nazi regime’s primary paramilitary organization after 1934. A portion of SS officers, led by *Reichsführer-SS* Heinrich Himmler, operated the camp system.

³This ramp is more commonly known as the *Bahnrampe*. The so-called *Judenrampe*, the iconic railroad platform in the center of Birkenau, was only completed in 1944 to accommodate the deportation of Hungarian Jews to Auschwitz.

⁴For testimony from members of the *Sonderkommando*, see Shlomo Venezia, *Inside the Gas Chambers*, Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2009.

in Birkenau with the intention of eventually killing them, migrants imprisoned at American detention centers are victims of a lack of resources rather than a desire to murder. Once again, our tour guide Paweł's comments challenged that line of logic. "Auschwitz is built using *architecture of dehumanization*," he noted. In Paweł's words, architecture of dehumanization seeks to use the physical elements of a camp to encourage thoughts of fear and isolation within prisoners. Barbed wire and overcrowded conditions both served this purpose. As Paweł explained this concept to us, I immediately thought of American detention centers. Barbed wire and overcrowded conditions are common markers among these detention sites. A lack of hygiene, food, and medical care characterizes the experiences of migrants at these locations. It was clear to me that the architecture of dehumanization is present in both detention centers for migrants crossing the U.S.-Mexico border and Nazi concentration camps.

Even after recognizing the similarities in architecture between these two forms of detention centers, I still maintained my belief that Nazi concentration camps had little in common with American detention centers designed for migrants crossing the U.S.-Mexico border. This time, it was one of my peers in the program who provided the challenge to this stance. In the early days of the Nazi camp system, she noted, prisoners were treated far differently compared with prisoners in the later stages of the Holocaust, particularly starting in the spring of 1942. In the immediate months following the Nazi seizure of power, concentration camps such as Dachau, appeared to be a continuation of prewar concentration camps, rather than the beginning of a radical departure from pre-Nazi detention centers.⁵

At this point, our three-and-a-half-hour visit to Birkenau was almost over. As we reached the western-most portion of the camp, I approached the ruins of two of the former crematoria. This was the final, symbolic conclusion of the Nazi worldview, or as it is often portrayed in the popular consciousness. For much of the general public, gas chambers and crematoria ovens are the ultimate representation of the racial hatred expressed by the Nazi regime. Industrialized murder is seen as the apex of genocide, with almost every human rights abuse compared to the killing factory at Birkenau. In this moment, I felt ashamed. I could neither think of the dead nor memorialize them. During this time, my thoughts were obsessed with the children being held in American

detention centers. I remember being transfixed by the arguments presented, unknowingly, by Paweł. I was completely unable to turn my attention to my surroundings.

Before my time on the Auschwitz Jewish Center Fellowship, I was confident that I was absolutely correct in rejecting Ocasio-Cortez's comments. There was simply no doubt in my mind that these remarks twisted the historical legacy of the Holocaust and shamed the memory of those who were murdered. I believed in the sanctity of concentration camps, and I was fooled by the rhetoric that played on my emotional connections to the history that I have dedicated my life to studying. Yet at the physical manifestation of the Nazi desire to murder all of Europe's Jews, I came to a conclusion that shaped my perception of the Holocaust's legacy in the modern world: I was wrong. In every sense of the term, the detention centers along the U.S.-Mexico border constitute concentration camps.

In making this declaration, my intention is not to politicize death camps and gas chambers. This was, in fact, my initial criticism of Ocasio-Cortez's remarks. I understand that my realization could be perceived as a political attack. Nevertheless, as I reflect on this change of opinion, I have found it more and more important to publicly label these detention centers as American concentration camps. In a world of fake news, radicalizing discrimination, and politicized rhetoric, words matter. They matter because we teach our children to live according to the mantra of "Never Again," and we make a sharp, legal distinction between concentration camps and ordinary sites of imprisonment. The former is seen as a crime against humanity while the latter is accepted, ostensibly, as a necessary institution for society to function.

I also considered the crucial difference between Nazi death camps, concentration camps, and other forms of detention centers in modifying my opinion on this issue. In our historical analyses, we must draw a sharp distinction, as the Nazi state itself did, between concentration camps and death camps. While there were over 42,000 different detention centers throughout the Third Reich, there were only six extermination camps ("Nazi Camps").⁶ When we discuss comparisons to the Nazi camp system in our current world, we must include the fact that killing factories were the exception, not the rule. Therefore, we cannot deny Ocasio-Cortez's comparison on the basis of gas chambers. Even though Birkenau was

⁵Recent historiography has emphasized the steady transformation of the Nazi camp system from its original purpose, a site of concentration, to a novel method of killing. See Nikolaus Wachsmann, *KL: A History of the Nazi Concentration Camps* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2016).

⁶The six death camps were Auschwitz-Birkenau, Belzec, Chelmno, Sobibor, Treblinka, and Majdanek.

one of these extermination camps, I recognized in Paweł's comments that the elements of dehumanization mentioned can be seen throughout the Nazi camp system, and in our own world.

If we accept the premise that these detention centers constitute concentration camps, then what can the Holocaust teach us about how to respond to their existence? Well, like anything having to do with the abuse of human rights, my time in Poland had proven to me that the answer is far from simple. As I mentioned in the beginning of this essay, slogans of history repeating itself and appeals to pathos are often kitsch; they rarely produce their intended effect. Much of my final week in Poland, during which I lived in Oświęcim, a Polish town located two kilometers from Auschwitz, was spent reflecting on potential responses to my realization at Birkenau.

It was only during my final evening in Poland, well after we had completed the Fellowship syllabus, when I reached a conclusion to this question. During our final reflection in the basement of the Auschwitz Jewish Center's café, my peers and I provided feedback to the program's educators. When asked about my greatest takeaway from the program, I responded that I learned that there were productive, and perhaps somewhat more common during my time in Poland, unproductive forms of dialogue. My experiences with unproductive dialogue, conversations that only lead to doubling-down and surface-level exchange, is not unique to Poland. Throughout the United States, from family dinner tables to the halls of Congress, honest and open exchange is being decimated by notions of ideological superiority.

This question of dialogue is omnipresent in contemporary American society. Questions of what constitutes offensive speech and the point at which freedom of expression ends are some of the most fraught and intricate issues of our day. I don't claim to answer them here, nor do I attempt to argue for one position over another. However, I do not cede the right of Neo-Nazis to march on college campuses chanting, "Jews will not replace us," unchallenged (Rosenberg). To place the role of dialogue within American society, perhaps we can look to the history of the Holocaust for a lesson.

If the Nazi ideology of "racial purity" has taught us anything, it's that an unchallenged belief in ideological superiority undermines the very foundation of tolerance and understanding. My visit to Birkenau, indeed, my entire time engaging with the legacy of the Holocaust in Poland has taught me that empathy, not judgment, is the only way we can begin to address the existence of American concentration camps.

Intellectual humility, not notions of political purity, is the way. Honest and open dialogue, devoid of power dynamics, is the way. I understand how this argument might sound. The American government is interning children in concentration camps. These children are surrounded by barbed wire, denied access to proper medical care, and many are starved ("*Management Alert – DHS*"). They are ensconced within the architecture of dehumanization. I am calling for dialogue, and perhaps even worse, dialogue which doesn't necessarily result in immediate action.

To these critics, I would ask how else one can respond to the existence of concentration camps in the post-Auschwitz world. Protests and political action are essential to ending the inhumane practice of child imprisonment, but they fail to address the crucial fact that many Americans see no issue with these concentration camps or deny their existence in the first place. This pervasive problem requires a two-pronged response: an education in the history of the Holocaust and an environment in which individuals have the space to admit their error in opinion without judgment. These simple, yet crucial, aspects are largely absent from political dialogues in the present-day.

When I say that Holocaust education is absent from popular conversation, I mean that a comprehensive and accurate understanding of the facts is unknown. We are all familiar with places like Birkenau. Crematoria fascinate us and the ultimate fate of Jews has spawned numerous novels and works of fiction which attempt to link the experiences of those murdered to the present-day. Yet how many Americans read about the history of antisemitism, one that has existed for centuries, if not millennia? How many Americans read books about not just Birkenau, but the *path to Birkenau*? Knowledge of these preceding events would expand our definition of what constitutes a concentration camp.

My second call is for an open environment in which productive dialogue can occur. Prior to my own experiences in Poland, I was duped by rhetoric which calls for the unique and incomparable nature of the Holocaust. Yet it wasn't only Paweł's comments which convinced me to radically shift my opinion on the question of American concentration camps. I was travelling with a group of extraordinary and talented individuals. Even though many of us studied the history of the Holocaust, we didn't stake claim to intellectual superiority; that wasn't our goal. It was only in this context where I felt I could publicly shift my previously dogmatic position. This environment must be a prerequisite for discussing our own abuses of human rights.

On one of our day trips to a small town in southern Poland, I had a chance to sit down and talk with one of the educators who was running our program. He works in the town of Oświęcim and has devoted his life to teaching students the history of the Holocaust. As we discussed the role of Holocaust education in the modern world, he mentioned that the primary purpose of his work is to connect the lessons of the past to current events in the present. His comments very much echoed Paweł's at the site of the Birkenau gas chambers. This connection is why I now believe the detention centers along the U.S-Mexico border are concentration camps. If we intend to follow the creed of "Never Again," then we need to embrace honest, open dialogue. It is only through this path by which we can find the means to apply the lessons of the Holocaust to the reality of American concentration camps.

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“It’s Complicated”: Navigating Contemporary Perceptions of Poland

Diana Sacilowski

I joked throughout the Auschwitz Jewish Center Fellowship Program that I would start my reflection piece with the phrase “It’s complicated,” as it had become something of our motto during discussions. Whether we were working through issues regarding, for example, the history of Polish-Jewish relations, the changes in the narrativization and memorialization of the Holocaust in Poland, or the varying stereotypes and perceptions of Jews and Poles, “it’s complicated” was often voiced by at least one person – sometimes in jest, sometimes out of frustration, sometimes as a way to point out that there are very rarely simple answers to the topics we were dealing with. In fact, it came up early on in the program when we were still in New York, during a conversation regarding the merits of and purposes one might have for visiting Poland, specifically in relation to the trend of going to Poland to visit Auschwitz and then leaving without seeing anything else. Some of my colleagues had taken such trips to Auschwitz in the past, while others suggested that they themselves would never have even bothered trying to go to Poland if it wasn’t for programs such as this one. Why? What’s the point? As a Polish-American and a scholar of Polish Studies, I found myself disappointed, even defensive. Certainly, there is more to Poland and to understanding Polish-Jewish history and culture than Auschwitz? Certainly, it’s just as worth going to Poland as it is to Germany or France? I was reminded of Claude Lanzmann’s statement that “The West for me is human; the East scares the hell out of me” (Lanzmann 43). Does Poland still terrify people? Does the thought of Poland still conjure up images of some backwards place full of death, ignorance, and hatred? The conversation as a whole left me with a lot of thoughts and questions that I found myself coming back to throughout the duration of the program – because it is, indeed, complicated.

Of course, I know where some of these reservations regarding Poland derive from. Some of my colleagues may have been coming from a place of ignorance, perhaps believing Poland was part of some dark “East” where the language is hard, the food is strange, and the people are mean, worth visiting only to learn about the death camps that once dotted its landscape. But, aside from studying Polish culture, I am also a scholar of the Holocaust, and understand why many people legitimately still define Poland as a place of death and destruction and why Auschwitz continues to be such a powerful symbol of not only the Holocaust, but of Poland as a whole. A nation once teeming with Jewish life, Poland was the main site of

the near total annihilation of that Jewish life – it is a graveyard to that lost culture, to those lives lost. As we walked the streets of Kazimierz, Krakow’s Jewish district, one colleague wondered what these streets would have looked like before the Holocaust and noted the enduring sense of absence that permeates the space. Such absence comes to mind in many spaces in Poland and it is little wonder that people would think of this loss and the reasons for it when thinking of this country. Auschwitz stands as a key icon for the reasons for this absence, and so, in many ways, of Poland itself. Poland is, after all, fundamentally a post-Holocaust landscape – meaning not only that it exists after the event and that the Holocaust is part of its past, but also that it is a space qualified by, defined by, the Holocaust, where the Holocaust forever marks its present. Despite discourse of the “return” of Jewish life in Poland since the fall of Communism, a true return is never fully possible and what once was will never be exactly as it was once again. Auschwitz, and Poland as a whole, are sites of unimaginable death and loss, of trauma and pain, and of anger.

Indeed, many of the readings we had to do in preparation for the program brought up this issue of anger towards Poland and Poles. Reporter and editor Erin Einhorn, for example, describes the anger of her parents and grandparents throughout her memoir, *The Pages in Between: A Holocaust Legacy of Two Families, One Home*, noting how Poland is often perceived as nothing more than a site of slaughter, a site, moreover, where non-Jews failed to help, and often actively aided in the murder of, their Jewish neighbors. For many, it is seen as a place still teeming with antisemitic sentiments and hatred for Jews. Interestingly, while Einhorn makes an effort to keep these preconceptions from coloring her perception of Poland and Poles, her experiences don’t exactly fully expunge Poland of this reputation. She shows exactly how complicated it is, going back and forth between thinking that maybe history has been too hard, too unfair on Poland and seeing why there is something to its reputation.

And there is something to it. In another reading for the program, sociologist Nechama Tec describes the “vague and yet all-encompassing sort of anti-Semitism” that pervaded Polish society before and during the war, calling it “diffuse cultural anti-Semitism” (Tec 55–56). Such antisemitism, found in seemingly harmless jokes and stereotypes, is often largely passive and almost thoughtlessly used. But it is also crucially negative and deeply ingrained, and can easily transform into more explicit acts of antisemitism. It may seem simply ignorant to think that Jews use the blood of Christian children to make

matzo, but as historian Jan Gross shows in his book, *Fear: Anti-Semitism in Poland after Auschwitz*, it was precisely such a seemingly silly superstition that contributed to the full-scale violence of the Kielce Pogrom in July 1946. And such “diffuse anti-Semitism” continues to exist, continues to be entrenched in the Polish cultural psyche. The Polish word for Jew, *Żyd*, still carries connotations of difference, of otherness, and seems often to preclude Polishness, especially amongst those who stress the importance of Catholicism to Polish national identity. Moreover, the politics of memory and identity at play in Poland certainly do not help alleviate this entrenched cultural antisemitism. In particular, the national historical offensive implemented by the ruling Law and Justice Party (PiS) essentially brushes Poland’s historical antisemitism under the rug and smoothes over the complexities of its past. Instead, it emphasizes narratives of Polish martyrdom and heroism, criticizing, if not outright silencing, counter-narratives that complicate such an image, and, as such, obstructing platforms that can give voice to and work through such complexities, that create space for civic action, dialogue, and positive change.

However, it seems to me that to say that Poland is nothing more than a graveyard, to say that all Poles are inherently antisemitic, to believe that there are no reasons to go to Poland besides Auschwitz, is to similarly engage in an unproductive program that erases the complexities of Poland’s past and present. Indeed, such attitudes, although perhaps a simple way to counter the dominating political-historical narrative, stoke resentment and defensiveness and disregard those that have worked and are working to make Poland more than that. Much of what we saw in Poland during the AJC Fellowship Program brought to mind absence and death and hatred and forgetting – the lack of what was once there and how it was lost, how it wasn’t even memorialized at times or memorialized in distorted and politicized ways. But we also met with people dedicated to showing another side to things, who are purposefully engaged with countering that absence in productive ways, that foster conversation and community, and that point to the inherent complexities of the situation in Poland today. This includes people like Bogdan Białek, president of the Jan Karski Society in Kielce, dedicated to promoting and encouraging Polish-Jewish dialogue; Piotr JakoweĐko, a founder of the Cukerman Gate Foundation in BĐdzin, established to protect Jewish sites of prayer and culture in the area; the founders of Mi Polin, Helena Czernek and Aleksander Prugar, who find and preserve *mezuzah* (doorpost) traces throughout Poland; and Dorota Wiewióra, chairman of the Bielsko-Biała Jewish community, who works to foster and protect spaces for the Jewish community

in the region. This includes the tour guides we had in Krakow, Warsaw, and Auschwitz, the educators we learned from, and those involved in the work of places like the POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews and the Emmanuel Ringelblum Jewish Historical Institute – all people who are committed to studying Poland’s Jewish past and educating the present. This even includes the knowledgeable caretaker of the synagogue in ŁaĐcut who taught himself Hebrew and the man who moved to Poland to open a Jewish café in Tarnów. And, of course, this includes Maciek Zabierowski and Tomek Kuncewicz at the Auschwitz Jewish Center, which comprises of a museum, an education center, a synagogue, and even a café, all dedicated to creating a space for learning about and preserving the Jewish past of OĐwiĐcim. Some of these people are Jewish, others are not, but all are committed to bringing attention to the Jewish life that was once so vibrant in Poland and to creating pockets for current Polish-Jewish life to exist. These people may be largely going against the grain in Poland, may be exceptions to the rule, but their work matters and is making a difference. And to focus solely on Poland as nothing more than a place of death and ingrained antisemitism, using such broad brushstrokes, is to ignore their efforts.

But it is complicated, and a lot of work still needs to be done for Poland to lose its reputation for hatred and violence. I’m not espousing a “not all Poles!” mentality because I know how empty such things sound – such an approach utterly fails to excuse the loss of Jewish life that occurred on this land, the antisemitism and other forms of hatred, diffuse and more explicit, that can still be found everywhere. Just a couple of weeks after our program, the first pride parade in Białystok, a city in the northeast of Poland, not far from where my own family is from, was met with outrage and violence by groups backed by PiS and “defending” “family” values. A few days later, a conservative newspaper printed and distributed “LGBT-free zone” stickers in its issue. Many scholars and activists immediately saw connections between such actions and those leading up to the Holocaust, when Jews were also met with violence for the sake of supposed values and Nazis established areas that were “free of Jews.” It’s easy to read of such occurrences and understand why people think of Poland with fear, to wonder if Poland has learned anything from its past, if it is a place just intrinsically imbued with anger towards those it deems “other.”

So yes, it is complicated. I don’t think my experience in the program made it any easier to make sense of and reconcile the different perceptions of Poland that currently exist. But I don’t know that it is necessarily about making things easier. I do know that at least

one of my more hesitant but open-minded colleagues came through the program with changed attitudes, surprised to have found a place that wasn't simply defined by death and hatred, that can really be full of culture and life and kindness. They were inspired by the people we met and excited to come back someday, even as they directly saw why many consider Poland to be a place of death and antisemitism. And perhaps that is the best way to navigate the situation – to be open to the spectrum of approaches towards and perceptions of Poland, to not close one's self off to experiencing the complexities of Poland's present, to neither blindly criticize it nor blindly defend it. As another colleague in the program pointed out, the phrase "it's complicated" doesn't have to be an end to a conversation, a shrug, an easy way out, a suggestion that these issues can't be worked through, so let's forget it and move on. It can be a beginning, an invitation to dialogue and, maybe, some kind of understanding.

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With Their Voices in Mind: Testimonies and Silences at Polish Holocaust Sites, 2019

Carli Snyder

Each time 93-year-old Holocaust survivor Ruth Pagirsky gives her testimony to public audiences, she opens by describing her father's last words to her: "He held my head, looked deeply into my eyes and said: '*Du mein Kind, du wirst leben um das Alles zu erzehlen.*' You my child, you shall live. You shall live to tell it all." Ruth never saw her father again. For three years of the war, she worked as a slave laborer on a farm in Germany, disguised as a Catholic Pole, pretending to be mute, so as not to be exposed as a German Jew. She was liberated by the American army at the end of the war. Upon her arrival in New York City in June 1946, Ruth remembers being told to not speak about what happened to her and to try to forget about her experiences.

Years later, Ruth took it upon herself to make telling her story her life's mission—to honor her father's message—so others would know about the horrors she survived and what happened to all of her family members who were killed. She has since presented in front of thousands of people by volunteering as a speaker for the Museum of Jewish Heritage—A Living Memorial to the Holocaust.

On June 26, 2019, Ruth told her story to the Auschwitz Jewish Center Fellows during our training at the Museum. As she asked for our questions after her presentation, she noticed that some members of the group were visibly shaken by learning about her experiences. She felt compelled to comfort us—"it's okay, I'm sorry," she said. We were so struck that she was apologizing to us, when we could not imagine how difficult it must be for her to describe these traumatic memories time and again. Right before she left, she took my hand and said, "These stories have never left me, and now they will probably never leave you either." Those words repeatedly flashed across my mind throughout my time in the AJC Fellowship.

In the days before we departed for Poland, we listened to two other survivors in addition to Ruth: Bronia Brandman and Celia Kener. Ruth was right, each of these women's unique stories certainly have not left me since. I can still hear their voices when I think about their presentations. Since they were speaking to a group of young people planning to go into Holocaust education, these survivors emphasized that they hoped we would transmit their stories to our future students.

I previously met Celia at the Museum and we have since become friends. At one point, she put her hand under my chin, looked into my eyes and told me simply, "You are the future." I typed it down into my notes and wrote beside it: "What does that even mean? What is my role?" I quickly snapped back into the present moment when Celia's best friend of 52 years (who came to watch the presentation) asked me when I was going to get engaged. I was reminded that this survivor and her friend were typical women in their 80s, asking about young people's weddings and talking about their children, grandchildren, and great grandchildren. Bouncing from the past, to the future, and back to the present together was a most human connection.

Getting to know some survivors personally has certainly impacted the way I approach my academic work—I am constantly reminded of their lives after the Holocaust. My doctoral research relies on studying survivor testimonies, specifically ones recorded in United States during the 1980s and 1990s. In the past two years, I have watched and listened to a total of 35 audiovisual testimonies in full, and clips of many others. I have immersed myself in images of survivors in their 60s and 70s, listened to them speaking English, and become familiar with stories of survival. These testimonies are always painful to listen to, but I have gotten used to counting on their eventual immigration to the U.S. after the war and usually hearing about their children and grandchildren at the end of the testimony.

Before we left for the Poland, I certainly anticipated that it would be emotionally difficult to visit various sites where many of these survivors were during the war. But I also hoped that going with their voices in mind would enrich my abilities to re-listen to their testimonies upon my return and allow me to more thoroughly analyze their experiences as a scholar.

I could not have prepared, however, for the emotional impact of taking in the silences of the millions who were killed during the Holocaust, which are distinctly palpable in Poland. This Fellowship made me quickly realize that my focus on survivors in my research has actually prevented me from thoroughly grappling with the scale of the devastation and the victims. Throughout the three weeks in Poland, I revisited the survivors' testimonies I had already closely studied, while also being confronted by the vast losses in ways that were not possible before physically visiting these places.

The place-based style of learning completely shifted my conceptualization of the Holocaust by

considering what it meant on a local level. It was especially impactful to go to smaller Polish towns where thousands of Jews once lived and flourished before the war, and learn that today, no Jews live there at all. We visited five Jewish cemeteries and numerous synagogues, most of which are no longer in use. Our tour guides pointed out empty spaces in doorframes where *mezuzot* used to be. We also spoke with non-Jewish Polish individuals who have taken it upon themselves to study and guard the history of these places. In Poland, the memory of the war and the Holocaust still seems so fresh. I was struck by the ways forms of remembrance are much different there than in the United States. I remember thinking: this is a glimpse into what it means to live in a post-genocide society.

After a few days in Poland, I started to wonder: Who am I here as? A student? A researcher/scholar? A teacher? A museum intern? A witness? A story-collector? Just a person? Everything above? What is my role as someone who is not Jewish and what are my responsibilities? What does it mean to be an American in Poland studying the Holocaust? What will I bring back? It became difficult to maintain a purely “scholarly approach” while on the ground there. I quickly learned that my first and foremost responsibility on this trip was to open up my mind and listen. Listen to the voices, listen to the silences. Take it all in, write it all down, sort it out later. A month after returning to the U.S., I still found myself “sorting” what we saw and learned on this Fellowship. For now, in this reflection essay, I want to highlight two days in which thinking about the voices and silences of the survivors and victims impacted me particularly strongly. Both occurred during our visits to the sites of the killing centers, Treblinka and Auschwitz-Birkenau.

Treblinka

On the morning of July 5, our group piled into a bus on our way to the site of Treblinka. It is important to note that the previous day, we had taken an extensive tour of the former area of the Warsaw ghetto and concluded the day at the *Umschlagplatz*. This was the deportation point where Nazi authorities assembled the Jews of the Warsaw ghetto and sent them to their deaths at Treblinka. The majority of the deportations occurred in the summer of 1942, known as “the Great Deportation,” in which 300,000 Jews were sent to the killing center in freight cars. We walked away from the *Umschlagplatz* memorial area knowing that the next day that we ourselves would travel the 50 miles from Warsaw to Treblinka.

One of our guides from the AJC, Maciek, sent us an excerpt of a firsthand account to read before arriving

at the former killing center. It was a description of the eighteen days that a 25-year-old Polish Jew, Abraham Jacob Krzepicki, was forced to work there. His account is considered the most extensive firsthand testimony about Treblinka. On the ride to the site, I read the account.

Krzepicki was deported to Treblinka on August 25, 1942. While he was lining up for the gas chambers, German officials selected him to work instead. For a little over two weeks, he interacted with each incoming transport of Jews and was forced to collect and sort their clothes and shoes. He was able to later escape from Treblinka by hiding in a boxcar and returned to the Warsaw ghetto. There, Rachel Auerbach, a member of the Oyneg Shabes Archive (the secret archive in the Warsaw ghetto led by Emanuel Ringelblum) transcribed 90 pages worth of material that Krzepicki relayed to her, in Yiddish. The account includes his horrific descriptions of the *Umschlagplatz*, his own deportation, the subsequent deportations of other groups, witnessing beatings of victims, moving corpses, and the gas chambers. He told Auerbach that “in the event of my death, please inform others what happened to me.” Krzepicki was killed during the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising.



Treblinka Memorial. Photo by Carli Snyder

Once we arrived and got out of the van, five of us headed toward the memorial. The others went into the small museum space first. The path to the memorial is lined with a long, seemingly unending white banner with individual names of victims. None of the killing center’s buildings are still there today. In their place is a large memorial space, in the middle of the forest where the camp used to be. The memorial is comprised of thousands of rocks. The larger rocks have town names engraved on them—the hometowns of the victims. There is a central, gigantic monument, depicting the inside of the gas chambers. The effect was completely overwhelming.

It was an overcast and rainy morning. Other than bees buzzing and five sets of footsteps, it was silent. Soon, the five of us began to break off. As I was walking, I started to think about Chris Lerman, a survivor whose mother was killed at Treblinka. I previously watched Lerman's testimony, recorded by the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum, for one of my recent research papers. There was one moment in which she tearfully described learning of her mother's deportation to and death at Treblinka in 1942. She said that when her mother was killed, "there [was] no time, there [was] no space" to properly mourn her. Lerman noted, "Now, every time I go to Poland, I make my way to Treblinka with a little flower. That stone there is the only thing that I have to remember Mother." Lerman frequently returned to Poland in the later decades of her life for Holocaust remembrance projects, until she passed away in 2016.

I passed rock after rock with town names on them, looking for Lerman's town: Starachowice. There were so many: Skaryszew, Staszów, Wodzisław, on and on and on and on. I was thinking of Lerman's mother. But all these town names signaled to me that these were all someone's mother, father, child, brother, sister, cousin, aunt, uncle, husband, wife, best friend. As I got farther from the other Fellows in my group, the rain came down harder. Rock to rock, I was scanning. Finally, I turned my head to the right, toward the trees, looked down, and found Starachowice. I gasped. I heard Lerman's voice in my head, "a little flower." I hurried to the edge of the memorial where I saw some wild flowers growing and plucked a little bunch of them. I also grabbed a smooth stone off the ground. I placed the flowers on top of the Starachowice rock and secured them underneath the stone. I traced each letter of the town name with my finger.



Starachowice stone. Photo by Carli Snyder

The wind picked up and I walked through the rest of the memorial, rock after rock after rock before hurrying back through the forest to our van. While I waited for the other Fellows, I looked at the brochure from the memorial site and read a poem printed on it, written by a Holocaust survivor named Halina Birenbaum: *Go to Treblinka, keep your eyes wide open/sharpen your hearing/stop your breathing/and listen to the voices which emerge/from every grain of that earth—//Go to Treblinka/They are waiting there for you/They long for the voice of your life/to the sign of your existence,/to the pace of your feet/to human look of understanding and remembering/to caress of love over their ashes—//(...) Go to Treblinka for generations to generations/Do not leave Them alone.*

My experience at Treblinka was influenced by two different types of testimony. One that I had just read, from a young man who described Treblinka as it functioned as a killing center in 1942, from the perspective from someone who perished during the Holocaust. The second was a video testimony recorded in the 1990s, in which a survivor described the personal significance Treblinka held in her mind in the decades after the Holocaust. To Lerman, since this was where her mother was murdered, the memorial site itself in the decades after came to serve as a meaningful remembrance space. By going to this memorial with two individual stories in mind, I had a completely different experience there than I would have without them. It could have been easy to feel lost in the thousands of rocks (and in thinking about what they symbolize), but by having one particular family and town name that I was looking for, I was able to contemplate one individual loss among the hundreds of thousands of others.

Immediately after our visit to Treblinka, we traveled back to Warsaw to visit the Emanuel Ringelblum Jewish Historical Institute. Here we saw an exhibit of the Oyneg Shabes Archive materials. The exhibit was called "What We've Been Unable to Shout Out to the World," based on a quote by one of the archive's members, then 19-year-old David Graber. Before he was killed, Graber wrote: "What we couldn't scream out to the world we buried in the ground. I don't want thanks! That's not what I spent my life and my energy for. I would like to live to see the moment when it will be possible to unearth this great treasure and shout out the truth. Let the world know, let those who didn't have to go through this rejoice. But we stand little chance of surviving and that is why I am writing this testament. May this treasure fall into good hands, may it survive until better times, may it alarm the world to what happened in the 20th century. Now we can die in peace...Our mission has been accomplished...Let history bear witness to that." I always

share this quote with my students when teaching the Holocaust, so it felt surreal to see the physical document containing Graber's statement, along with many others.

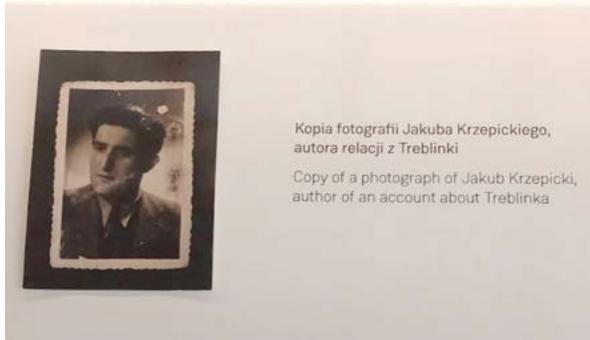


Photo and caption from Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw.
Photo by Carli Snyder

While looking in the glass cases, I noticed one of the original pages of Krzepicki's account along with a small photo of him. His story is now one that will also stay with me. That day alone caused me to consider the Holocaust on so many different levels—how the memory of the killing centers remained with survivors, how victims wanted their stories to eventually be shared with the world, and the tens of thousands of voices that were never able to be recorded or heard. I left Treblinka with a much greater sense of the silences.

Auschwitz

Three days after our visit to Treblinka, we began our two-part tour of Auschwitz. On July 8, we toured Auschwitz I and on July 9, Auschwitz II-Birkenau. This was a drastically different experience than I had in Treblinka, almost the opposite in many ways. Both days were bright and sunny, as opposed to cloudy and rainy. We were on an organized tour, so there was no walking around on my own in silence, and of course there were hundreds of other visitors. The original buildings are still there, unlike Treblinka, which are actively being conserved so visitors can continue to visit them in the future.

For the tour, we each put on individual headsets and listened to our tour guide's voice through them. Our guide, Paweł, did an impressive job of covering so much information during the tour—informing us about the inner workings of the camp, the different groups that went through or were murdered at the camp, and telling us stories of individuals. He handled everything sensitively but in a way that was not too emotional. Despite having an incredible guide, I had a difficult time with our tours in Auschwitz—I felt flooded by all of the voices.

In Treblinka, I had two specific people to think about, but by the time we reached Auschwitz, so many testimonies were on my mind that I could barely focus. I was thinking of Auschwitz survivors whose testimonies I have studied. I also thought of Bronia, a survivor we met in person at the Museum, whose photo is actually included in an installation right outside the entrance to Auschwitz I. At the same time, the famous literature by authors such as Elie Wiesel and Primo Levi and Tadeusz Borowski came to mind. I was also thinking of Eva Kor, an Auschwitz survivor who had just passed away, days before in Krakow. I felt somewhat distracted or unable to fully connect to any one of these stories though, which made me feel a bit frustrated with myself.

Of course, since Auschwitz served as both a killing center and concentration camp, there was much more survivor testimony to come out of it than from Treblinka. So it made sense that I had many more reference points there than in Treblinka. This is also part of the reason why Auschwitz has become such a symbol of the Holocaust as a whole and why millions of visitors go to Auschwitz each year.

My time visiting Auschwitz was not exactly what I expected, but neither was my experience at Treblinka. The visit to Treblinka was filled mostly with silence and self-reflection, and I went into the site without any idea of what it would look like ahead of time. I focused on a couple voices among the overwhelming silence. Visiting Auschwitz felt overwhelming in a very different way—seeing the "Arbeits Macht Frei" (Work Will Make You Free) sign and train tracks at Auschwitz II, being in the barracks, and walking those grounds. I went in knowing so many survivor stories that came from the site, and knowing that there were more "silences" or deaths at Auschwitz than at Treblinka. Most significantly to me, being surrounded by hundreds of other people visiting the site from around the world made me more deeply consider the implications of Holocaust remembrance in our world today.

There was a moment during our tour of Auschwitz II-Birkenau that has stuck with me. It occurred when Paweł spoke to us beside what used to be one of the gas chambers. He said that as a tour guide, obviously he could not see or hear how visitors process their time at Auschwitz after the fact. However, he does know that simply visiting Auschwitz alone is not enough to say that you have "remembered." He emphasized that actually, the work must begin after the visit. Paweł also explained that most visitors tend to want to identify with the victims. He urged us as educators to challenge our future students to have sympathy for victims, but also to understand themselves in the world as bystanders, and the

responsibility that this entails. This, he hopes, will push students to consider the moral obligation that comes with learning about this history and to be more alert in society.

Conclusion

Anyone involved in Holocaust education, in whichever capacity, knows that we are working in a critical moment. I have written some form of: “As the generation of survivors and other witnesses pass away...” in nearly every application I have submitted in the last three or four years. In 20 or so years from now, when I’m teaching history in my mid 40s, the Holocaust will have been 100 years ago. My students will never meet a survivor. Of course, there are numerous ways people are preparing for this time without survivors, but I always knew that I would be telling my students about my firsthand interactions with survivors for the rest of my career. After this Fellowship however, I have also considered how to attempt to communicate to them the reality of the millions of victims of the Holocaust, too. I will approach my work with a new level of attentiveness to both the voices and the silences. Being in Poland challenged all of my preconceived scholarly notions about the Holocaust and pushed me to reconsider the incredible complexities of this history and the politics surrounding its collective memory.

One final thing that has stayed with me happened in the days before we left for Poland. The three survivors I previously mentioned, Bronia, Ruth, and Celia, all concluded their presentations to us by expressing their intense fears and anxieties about the present moment we are living in and for the future. Bronia said she was scared that her grandchildren are growing up while antisemitic acts rise in United States and around the world. Each of them, in different ways, also noted their profound disappointment about injustice, racism, xenophobia, and violence in today’s world. They noted that “never again” has not been a reality. Ruth, for example, expressed outrage about family separations at the U.S. southern border, because “that’s exactly what happened” to her, she said.

Paweł also touched on contemporary issues when he spoke to us in Auschwitz-Birkenau. He said that unfortunately in thirty to forty years, there will be new memorials. And at that point in the future, graduate students and scholars will be writing about those atrocities, wars, and genocides, and they will be asking, “What did they do in 2019 when they saw all of that happening?” Which leaves me asking, what do I do with all of this listening? I understand my ongoing responsibility as someone who has collected these stories to share them with others. I also see it as a call-to-action to find ways to become more engaged with the urgent problems we face today and will continue to face in the years to come.

The Polish-Jewish Renaissance: Preserving Echoes from the Past to Give Voice to the Future

Dr. Regan Treewater-Lipes

“The best revenge against the murderers [...] would be a revitalization of Jewish life in Poland” (Weiss 8). In many ways, this “revitalization,” or Polish-Jewish Renaissance, is well under way. While for decades the world has regarded Poland as the mass grave of European Jewry, groups within the country are actively engaged in efforts to preserve and commemorate what once was. According to philosopher Emil Fackenheim: “The Nazi Holocaust is totally present, contemporary, and nonanachronistic. The passage of time has brought it closer rather than moving it farther away” (qtd. Dwork and van Pelt 386). Despite the uncomfortable truth of this statement, there is clear evidence to support the existence and vitality of a current Polish-Jewish revival. Projects being pursued across the country speak to the determination of both Jews and Poles to see that Jewish-Poland – a vibrant world existing mostly in the memories of survivors and in Jewish literature – will not be forgotten. Rabbi Moshe Weiss explains: “I go to Poland to do what I can for the sake of my fellow Jews – those inside that cursed land and those outside” (179).

Since 1988, one year before the fall of Communism in the country, Poland has hosted a yearly festival in the iconic city of Krakow to celebrate Jewish culture. According to Jewish heritage scholar Ruth Ellen Gruber: “By now, the reality of the annual Jewish Culture Festival and Jewish themed tourism in Kazimierz goes back more than twenty years. The physical development of the district as a site of Jewish-themed tourism got off the ground [...] on the heels of an interest in Jewish culture that had already been growing in Poland for more than a decade” (491). This “interest” has proven itself to be symptomatic of absence above all else. As Suzanne Weiss puts it: currently, “in Krakow you can find a good kosher meal, a number of klezmer bands, Jewish cabaret, art exhibits and folk dancing. The only thing you probably won’t find – unless you look very hard – are Jews” (qtd. in Saxonberg and Walligórska 433). The Jewish Culture Festival, organized yearly by the Jewish Culture Festival Society, attracts huge numbers of visitors to Krakow’s Kazimierz district to immerse in all things ‘Jewish’. However, critics of the event cite a lack of authenticity as particularly problematic, making the festivities Jew-‘ish’, rather than Jewish. “The houses and synagogues are still here, but the population of this Jewish *shtetl* [...] is now gone” (Saxonberg and Waligórska 433). Thus, the pageant-like event itself takes on a quality not unlike a North

American Renaissance fair – delightful and dynamic, but manufactured and orchestrated nonetheless.

Ruth Ellen Gruber, who conceives of space as being both tangible and not, regards Krakow’s “Jewish-themed tourism” as originating from an artificial construct. “The festival, organized by non-Jews for an overwhelmingly non-Jewish audience [...] by 2007 [...] had expanded to encompass as many as two hundred concerts, lectures, performances, workshops, tours, and other events. The Kazimierz district, meanwhile, had evolved from being a desolate Jewish graveyard to a popular tourist and nightlife venue” (491). Sociologist Steven Saxonberg and historian Magdalena Walligórska explain that “With the disappearance of Jews from Kazimierz, the city district quickly degenerated and the whole area fell into disrepute for being particularly dangerous” (433). However, as the Jewish Culture Festival has reignited the Kazimierz district economically, this has also provided fertile ground for echoes from the past to once again be heard as vibrant voices.

It could certainly be argued that Poland suffers from a postcolonial legacy as the nation still bears the scars of Nazi oppression and Communist occupation. In *Post-Colonial Transformation* (2001) Bill Ashcroft, a scholar of post-colonial theory, writes: “The issues surrounding the concept of place – how it is conceived, how it differs from ‘space’ and ‘location’, how it enters into and produces cultural consciousness, how it becomes the horizon of identity – are some of the most difficult and debated in post-colonial experience” (124). Symptoms of a search for “cultural consciousness” can be seen in reporter and editor Erin Einhorn’s book *The Pages In Between: A Holocaust Legacy of Two Families, One Home* (2008). The author recounts an encounter with an American-Jewish couple: “Like most Jews who visited Poland, he’d come for the past, to pay tribute to murder and memory” (104). While Einhorn’s description accounts for a sizeable demographic of Krakow’s tourism, many visitors from the global Jewish community flock to the historic city to reclaim a sense of their ‘Jewishness,’ not only to make a somber pilgrimage. In the words of Danny Fingerroth, a comic-book writer and editor: “It doesn’t take much of a stretch to see these post-Holocaust young (edging towards middle age) Jewish men – who, if their parents or grandparents hadn’t fled Europe would very likely have perished in the Holocaust wanting to, in some way journey across time and space to find out more about the world they (or their parents) had left behind, a world that had since vanished” (21). Although Fingerroth’s examination focuses on the reclaiming of Jewish identity through the mid-twentieth century creation of superhero comics, his exploration of the collective

yearning for a connection to a lost world is still very much applicable—especially in regard to the current Polish-Jewish Renaissance.

What began with non-Jews organizing a Jewish cultural event engaging other non-Jews, has since evolved to include a growing number of self-aware international Jews seeking a deeper understanding of a past tarnished by historical infamy and traumatic conflict. Eleonora Shafranskaia, a scholar of cultural memory and collective identity explains that “In the realm of the twentieth century there are cities that have given birth to their own text. Because of geopolitical reasons, cultural loci break apart, people leave them—but the cities continue to exist in a different manner, with a different city folk culture. But while the people themselves are still alive, those who bear witness to the folklore of the abandoned locus, the city text continues to exist: in memories” (135). In the most brutal sense, the pre-war world of Jewish Krakow can never exist again, and any revival becomes a symbolic, albeit meaningful, approximation. This notion is touched on by literary scholar Dorota Kołodziejczyk: “Opening up the sense of dwelling to an interaction with the environment not limited to its function of passive landscape results in the bringing of agency of the non-human component of locality into the foreground. This entails a simultaneous withdrawal from identity-accumulating narratives usually associated with the idea of place and its function as the basis of identity development” (263).

While the Jewish Culture Festival has been monumental in rebuilding an evolving facsimile of Krakow’s Jewish footprint, preservation and conservation efforts continue year-round. Privately owned commercial enterprises like the Jewish-founded and Jewish-operated Mi Polin have breathed new life into ongoing Polish-Jewish artistic endeavors. Their product catalog reads: “Mi Polin is the first Polish Judaica company since World War II. Mi Polin was created by Helena Czernek and Aleksander Prugar in 2014 to design and produce contemporary Judaica in Poland” (“Mi Polin” 3). Based in Warsaw, Helena Czernek and Aleksander Prugar, with minimal staff, are the artistic visionaries and entrepreneurs behind the company’s eclectic collection of jewelry and religious objects. “Mi Polin is a way of preserving and reinforcing our Polish-Jewish identity, which gives us strength and inspiration. We continue the more than 1000-year history of the Jewish community in Poland. To do so is a duty and responsibility, which we take upon ourselves” (“Mi Polin” 6). The millennial duo is an indication that Polish-Jewish life does not need to exist on the peripheries of mainstream culture. Instead of occupying a place of societal obscurity, the company has an active online presence and patrons

can track their continuing projects via frequent updates to social media. Recent posts chronicle Czernek and Prugar’s travels throughout Poland and neighboring countries in search of the imprints of *mezuzot*. “The Mezuzah From This Home is a series of mezuzahs—bronze casts of mezuzah traces that commemorate the Jewish lives of pre-war Poland. When you affix the mezuzah to your doorpost, you fill the emptiness and give it a second life. Touching the mezuzah activates a link between past and present. Untouched for many years, these mezuzahs can now fulfill their holy function. Again” (“Mi Polin” 12). Their work appeals to not only a Polish-Jewish clientele, but also to Jews of the diaspora. Somewhere between identity affirmation and cultural nostalgia, there is a sense of vitality at the core of the business, and the team’s efforts to connect their products directly to remnants of the past are nothing short of inspirational. Ultimately, with every mezuzah imprint there is a story, so that when the trace is cast in bronze it is not just the outline of an indentation that gains new permanence, but also the memory of where it originated. “When looking for mezuzah traces in a once predominantly Jewish region, we enter every building, and we check every doorpost, on each floor; district after district, street after street, house after house” (“Mi Polin” 41). As religious studies scholar Oren Baruch Stier points out, according to *halakha*, “It should be noted [...] that the very notion of a Jewish relic is something of an oxymoron” (508), as such religiously significant objects as mezuzah scrolls should be buried because of the holy purpose they served. However, Czernek and Prugar’s restorative work is highly unique in that it preserves not only the memory of the holy scrolls themselves and tangibly the mezuzot that once encased them, but the space these precious items once occupied. Although the mezuzot that once adorned these doorways are no longer, Mi Polin’s efforts serve to document tactile memory in a lasting and meaningful way. The stories attached to these pre-war mezuzot are being documented and now become a part of the lives and family narratives of a new generation of Jews.

According to historian Jan Gross: “people could not bear the Jewish presence after the war because it called forth their own feelings of shame and of contempt in which they were held by their victims” (256). Today, Poland’s grass-roots preservation is being pioneered, in no small measure, thanks to non-Jewish Poles seeking to understand their own history as a people, through honesty and truth. As sociologist Sławomir Kaprański observes, “Landscape as a cultural construction of a group serves generally the purpose of creating and/or maintaining the group’s identity. To put it more precisely, the construction of a landscape and the construction

of identity are inseparable parts of one process, as a result of which landscape becomes incorporated into the group's identity, being one of the symbolic representations of the latter" (35). In this way, just as Poland has become fused with the collective Jewish global consciousness, what took place on Polish soil will forever be a part of every Pole's cultural and national identity. "Landscape, however, is not only a culturally defined territory which becomes a part of a group's identity-building process. It also is a territory within history, the history that is to be remembered [...] Identity is inevitably connected with the memory of the past" (Kapralski 35). Today, many Polish-run groups remain committed to advocating for honesty, truth, and transparency in how history is taught and proliferated in their country. This activism is not only targeting schools and educational curricula, but in regard to the greater national narrative as well. In Lublin, a small not-for-profit group exists atop what was once known as the city's 'Jewish Gate' before the war. Director Tomasz Pietrasiewicz and Vice Director Witold Dębrowski lead a team of dedicated staff and volunteers at the Brama Grodzka NN Teatre. Originally established as a drama group in 1990, they now work to preserve the stories of 43,000 Jews that once called Lublin home before the war. In Kielce, the site of Poland's most recent pogrom on 4 July 1946, Bogdan Białek, founder of the Jan Karski Society, has devoted his life's work to ensuring that the tragic history of the town's Jews will never be lost.

"I go to see with my own eyes the extermination camps and the monuments, the synagogues, the museums, and the memorials that attest to the world of my childhood and youth, the world of Oswiecim, once so bright and joyful, that became the black, tortured hell of Auschwitz" (Weiss 179). For former inhabitants of the town of Oświęcim, reconciling idyllic childhood memories with what their town became under Nazi design, has been the topic of much discussion. "Those of us who come from that world carry it constantly within our hearts and our memories. However blackened that memory has become, however heartsick we feel when we recall what has taken place, I have discovered that men and women still long for news of their brothers and sisters, and they yearn, too, for word of the world they left behind" (Weiss 4). Now, traces of Jewish life in Oświęcim are being carefully preserved by the Auschwitz Jewish Center, a Polish-run group working to keep the Jewish stories of the area alive. Tomek Kuncewicz, Maciek Zabierowski, and Artur Szyndler are the guardians of what remains and oversee conservation work at the last remaining synagogue in Oświęcim and in the town's Jewish cemetery. "After Poland regained its independence in 1989, its dignity was restored. Today, the cemetery is a monument and place of education

about the multicultural heritage of Oświęcim and the Jewish residents who contributed to its development throughout four centuries" (Kuncewicz 3). Visitors can now see the restored synagogue, where the AJC's modest museum is housed, as well as the Jewish cemetery a short walk away. Such work as that being conducted by the Auschwitz Jewish Center, Brama Grodzka and Jan Karski Society illustrates a commitment within the country to pay tribute to the memory of Poland's pre-war Jews: their presence, their contributions, their history, and culture.

The Poland of today is experiencing a renaissance. Once a year, tens of thousands gather in Krakow to hear klezmer music resonate through historically Jewish streets. Thanks to efforts by Polish-Jewish communities, a new generation of Jews are embracing their cultural identities. For those that have devoted their careers to preservation, their work seems endless. Rabbi Weiss recalls meeting a Polish-Jewish mother during one of his visits to the country. He recounts how she refused to have her sons circumcised stating: "What happened once can happen again [...] I want my sons to survive" (Weiss 6). The collective inspired efforts of so many individuals and groups within Poland are showing encouraging signs of change. Despite so much hatred and xenophobia throughout the world, there is much to be optimistic about in this place that will always be scarred by insurmountable loss. There are constant setbacks, but through improved innovations in education, there is hope that those presently perpetuating hate will begin to dwindle in number – certainly the presence of groups like the Auschwitz Jewish Center, Jan Karski Society, Brama Grodzka, among many others, is testament to a positive movement within Poland.

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Camaren Ly is enrolled in the Air Force Academy's Scholars Program as a Humanities and Foreign Area Studies major with a minor in Japanese. Due to her East Asian interest, Camaren is currently on exchange at the Japanese National Defense Academy in Yokosuka, Japan, as an Academy ambassador of language and culture, building international relationships and further diversifying the perspective of the Air Force. Also, the Schulte Assembly, an affinity club whose purpose is discussing gender issues and developing mentorship, selected Camaren as their Cadet-in-Charge, representing gender relations at USAFA to the community and beyond; for example, she represented the group at the 2018 Officer Women Leadership Symposium in Washington, D.C. and often sits on international/national gender colloquia panels. In addition to social issues, Camaren is concerned with the innovative nature of the military. This is demonstrated by her leadership of USAFA's first Consulting Team, a group dedicated to maximizing military efficiency and processes. Her cadet career has consisted of a diverse array of leadership opportunities such as a Squadron PEER (Personal Ethics and Education Representative), Squadron Superintendent, and BCT (Basic Cadet Training) Squadron Commander. In her spare time, she teaches yoga and hosts a radio show at USAFA.

Aidan Uvanni is a Civil Engineering major and member of the Dean's List at the United States Coast Guard Academy. He is a member of the triathlon team and participates in various other clubs at the Academy. Aidan is still an active student of the American Martial Arts Institute where he is a second-degree black belt. Martial Arts is a way of life and has played a critical role in his development into a disciplined conscientious leader. In addition, he continues to mentor high school FIRST robotics teams. Outside of school, Aidan enjoys skiing and photography.

Alexander L. Compton is a doctoral student and Laney Fellow in the History Department at Emory University studying the role of race, identity, environment and collective memory in 20th century Central European history. He completed an Associate of Arts degree at Bluegrass Community and Technical College, as well as two Bachelor of Arts degrees at the University of Kentucky, one in history and the second in German studies. As an undergraduate student, he received a scholarship to study at the Ruprecht-Karls-Universität Heidelberg in Germany during the 2016–2017 academic year. While abroad, he further pursued his academic interests in the history of the Black and Jewish Diasporas, Central Europe, and Eastern Europe, expanded his language proficiencies to include Russian, and conducted extensive archival research for his undergraduate thesis, "War, Sovereignty, and the Longing of Nations: An Investigation into the Influence of the United States of America on German Unification (1861–1871)." Alexander presented and published his history thesis through the National Conference on Undergraduate Research in 2018, while also completing his undergraduate thesis in German studies, which focused on the reception of the politics of multiculturalism in contemporary German Hip-Hop. His current research focus is on how the racial assumptions of collective memory in Cold War Germany produced singular understandings of nationality in supposed "multicultural" societies. Alexander presented his most recent essay on "Black German History and the Politics of Memory" at the Southeast German Studies Workshop in February 2019. He is also currently working on a research paper that looks at the intersection of Jewishness and Blackness in Weimar political discourses. Moving forward, Alexander plans to use the coming years of course work, research, and fellowships, including his time at the Auschwitz Jewish Center, to lay a foundation for his dissertation that aims generally to investigate how 20th century dynamics of remembrance, race, environment, and decolonization have affected current understandings of community in Central Europe and beyond.

Natasha Doyon is a Ph.D. candidate in Art Education at Concordia University. Her research is at the intersection of arts education and social justice to counter radicalization in youth in Israel amidst the diverse population. Natasha is partnering with the Israel Museum's Youth Wing to research peace education initiatives that have built bridges with Israeli-Arabs in spite of exclusionary ideologies, and the problematics of addressing central and peripheral belief systems of victim/oppressor, minority/majority and core identity beliefs systems. She is using a critical arts-based pedagogy to situate youth as key participants in developing and actualizing change within their

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Jonathan Lanz is a first-year Ph.D. student in Modern European History at Indiana University, Bloomington. He was Auschwitz Jewish Center Fellow in the summer of 2019. Jonathan's research interests center around the intersection of Jewish History and European History in the twentieth century. While Jonathan's projects generally focus on the history of the Holocaust and the social history of the Third Reich, he has supplemental interests in the history of childhood and youth and Jewish/non-Jewish interactions during periods of anti-Jewish violence. His most recent project sought to provide a revised history of the so-called *Kristallnacht* pogrom from the perspective of children in Nazi Germany. He is currently researching the experiences of Jewish children in the Nazi camp system. At Indiana University, Jonathan is a 2019-2020 Glazer Family Graduate Fellow in Jewish Studies.

Diana Sacilowski is a Ph.D. candidate in the Department of Slavic Languages and Literatures at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. She holds a B.A. in Comparative Literature and European Cultural Studies from Brandeis University and an M.A. in Slavic Cultures, with a focus on Polish literature, from Columbia University. Her research interests include 20th & 21st century Polish and Russian literature and culture, postmodernism and critical theory, memory and trauma studies, and representations of World War II and the Holocaust in literature and film. Her dissertation project engages with portrayals of Jewish characters and Polish-Jewish history in Polish literature of the 1980s and 1990s.

Carli Snyder is a doctoral student in History at the City University of New York, Graduate Center. She teaches World History courses at Brooklyn College and serves as a Holocaust Education Intern at the Museum of Jewish Heritage in Lower Manhattan. Her current research focuses on the politics of Holocaust consciousness in the United States during the 1980s and 1990s. Snyder graduated from Pacific Lutheran

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Dr. Regan Treewater-Lipes teaches in the Department of English at MacEwan University in Edmonton, Alberta. She received her Doctorate in Comparative Literature from the University of Alberta, where she taught courses in first year Russian language. Dr. Treewater-Lipes defended her dissertation, "Cultural Identity Construction in Russian-Jewish Post-Immigration Literature" successfully in the winter of 2016. She completed her Master's in Slavic Languages and Literatures at the University of Waterloo, where she also taught courses in elementary Russian language and culture. She earned her Bachelor's degree in Russian language and literature at the University of Victoria. Dr. Treewater-Lipes studied in the Facultet russkovo iazika i kulture at Saint Petersburg State University in Russia. In 2008, she took part in Taglit's Young Professionals Program in Israel, and in 2015 she was selected by Brama Grodzka NN Theatre to participate in their summer seminar on Jewish memory preservation in Lublin, Poland. Her research in Poland was supported, in part, by the Wirth Institute for Austrian and Central European Studies. Dr. Treewater-Lipes is a published scholar who has presented her research internationally. She serves on the Board of Directors at Temple Beth Ora, and volunteers extensively with the National Council of Jewish Women of Canada. Dr. Treewater-Lipes is also a freelance journalist for the Edmonton Jewish News and the Alberta Native News. Additionally, she is a ministerial appointee to the Premier's Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities. In this capacity she provides advice and recommendations concerning the needs and rights of disabled citizens directly to the Minister of Social Services and Premier of Alberta. Currently, Dr. Treewater-Lipes is engaged in developing curricula for English literature courses to promote greater awareness and understanding of the Holocaust and its traumatic legacy through the intensive examination of fictional and non-fictional narratives. Her dedication to Holocaust education is a part of both her professional endeavors, and personal commitments.



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