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### **Educational Visit to Auschwitz and Birkenau**

Visiting Krakow and seeing the artefacts that have been a prominent source of my university studies was a jarring experience. From examining the theoretical groundwork to witnessing this as a reality, this shift in context made me reflect on how these historical events are treated amongst 4th and future generations, and its position in public memory. The sites central to the discussion are the Kazimierz district and the Auschwitz Birkenau concentration camp. To visit these locations of potent social trauma, and a pilgrimage for many, this resonated particularly following the completion of my university studies. Here, the focus was predominantly on the cinematographic representation of the Holocaust and, most notably, my dissertation. This was the investigation of the *Lebensborn e.V.*, a lesser known aspect of positive eugenics in Nazi ideology, and its portrayal in public consciousness in historiographical debate and popular culture.

Upon visiting Auschwitz, I chose to join a German speaking tour group in order to ask fellow group members of varying Nazi victim, perpetrator and bystander generations about their motives to visit the camp and what this means to them as modern German citizens. I spoke to one man who was making his third visit; his first was 26 years ago. We discussed the representation of the Nazi atrocities in the camp and the challenges faced with Auschwitz's growing tourism. We touched on the nature of glossed information provided by the museum tour guide and the omission of details, inherent in reaching a wide audience. We also discussed the staging of the exhibits such as the piles of victims' possessions, and the sterile dehumanised nature of the museum in contrast to a more 'authentic' first visit in 1993. In sum, I found the depersonalising effect to diminish any poignancy, yet in parts, I found it overtly hyperbolic, as though the tour itself were curated to engineer the visitors' reactions which I found contrived and rather commercialised, another challenge when faced with educating a large audience. On the converse, one may ask, how does one create and curate an exhibition of an atrocity?

During the tour I read a quote, "those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it" (George Santayana). This sums up my thoughts about Auschwitz, the concentration camps and the Holocaust as a concept relative to the modern day social and political climate. I find there is a growing trivialisation of an event whose eyewitnesses are gradually fading into the ether; it goes without question that the concept of Holocaust denial is becoming a growing issue. The geographical location I found an equal contributor to this phenomenon, for it is simply beyond human comprehension that a location of such natural beauty can witness such a heinous act of mankind.

Ultimately, this incites the rhetorical question posed by Spengler's *Decline of the West*: is it simply human nature that we are condemned to repeat the atrocities of our elders and for the cyclicity of history to be perpetuated? I found this the most thought provoking from the Krakow visit. Kindly enabled by the Fanny Bogdanow Bursary, this made me reflective of our modern society which has seen an unprecedented level of peace between nations. For how long will this remain so, and has humanity learned from his errors?