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Pondering Auschwitz

Of all their experiences in Poland, many students reported that a tour of Auschwitz stands alone as having the greatest impact.

Charles Carbone remembers the intensity of that day. "The camp is still very much intact, and therefore gave a clear picture of the death that was committed there. We went away with a real sense that human beings are capable of the worst atrocities."

In reaction to a film shown during their tour, Carbone said, "You could see the gradual progression to the full-blown Holocaust. Starting with the propaganda, non-violent protests of Jewish stores, throwing bricks through windows, throwing bricks at Jews — and then hauling millions away to their deaths. It made me question where along that chain do you begin to make personal sacrifices and say, 'This is enough for me to get involved.' I have wrestled with this question myself, wondering what types of sacrifices I would make in the face of human rights violations."

Julia Hall concurred. "We witnessed a living testament of inhumanity to fellow human beings. It attests to why people do human rights work in the first place."

She compared the American perspective to that of the Europeans. "For them, it is constantly staring them right in the face and they must get beyond the past in order to protect the future. Americans, operating in the present, dare not to let it happen again."

Suzanne Cruse pointed to the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia as an example of genocide today. She said, "International law is not progressing fast enough, because as I looked at the crematoriums, all I could think was how this is happening now."

This was Professor Marcus' third visit to Auschwitz. "It does not become less painful," she said. "Auschwitz is a monument to evil and you never recover from going there. You are changed profoundly by the experience."

"Each time I have gone, upon leaving the camp I walk on the train tracks that led to the crematorium and sing songs to the dead souls. I do this because I know that no Jew between 1941 and 1945 could do that." ■

African-American, Native American, Hispanic, Jewish and gay/lesbian communities spoke about the experience of their communities and the need for tolerance and human rights protections. In addition, the Polish students visited various ethnic and racial communities in Buffalo on a tour organized by



Professor Mark Goldman, an expert in Buffalo city history.

The seminar ended on April 10 with a reception and reading by author Eva Hoffman, sponsored by the Polish Arts Club. Afterward, the group convened at Marcus' home for a tearful farewell party. "Everyone was given an opportunity to say something about their experience," Hall said. "A lot of strong relationships were built during the exchange. It was a very moving and emotional closing ceremony."

Marcus hopes to expand the program to other countries. She said, "My dream is to end up with students from several different countries in the seminar, doing rigorous research and engaging in intense discussion. Perhaps we could have fewer students from Buffalo and Poland, and add five law students from South Africa to discuss an international human rights law subject, like the protection of refugees."

"In any case, I see the seminar as a statement of faith in the future and a serious investment in our students' education." ■