

A Self Reflection

This has been my greatest adventure yet. I have seen and done so many things that I thought were out of my reach until I graduated from college. I had gained a broader view of the way people live and experienced the many cultural and physical differences that exist. Some of it was easy to cope with owing to the fact that I came from a different heritage than most Americans. However there were some aspects that were extremely difficult to deal with. One of the more difficult things to deal with was not being able to understand what was being said and written, that really puts a lot of stress on a person. Another thing was the different social values that some of the countries had. I found it hard to deal with the fact that some of the adolescents in France and Germany were able to have fun and enjoy themselves in the graveyard, the concentration camp, and the Memorial to the Murdered Jews.

Personally, I did a lot of things that I wouldn't have done back in the United States. The main one is that I went to bars and pubs. First off it would have been illegal for me to go. Secondly I never realized the point of going to bars and pubs until I went abroad. I realized how much fun it can be to go to a bar and have a couple of drinks with a bunch of friends. There were many memorable experiences that I had in the bars, however, some of them are not too clear memories. I also experienced getting drunk for the first time. Because it was with a bunch of good people who would not take advantage of me, I had probably had the greatest time of my life. I found it interesting that in the US, I had no real desire to drink, however when we reached Europe and it was legal for me to drink, I started to get the desire to drink. It is interesting to see that my beliefs about drinking changed when the law changed. In case you are wondering, all the other things that I did are legal to do in the US.

Academically, I found this class to be far more interesting than I expected. In spite of this being a writing centric course, I found myself enjoying this to the fullest. It was not difficult to write on my experiences in the class, nor was it difficult to complete the writing assignments. It was nice to learn about not only how the various nations remember the war but how the nations themselves are. You benefit a lot more from visiting the actual fields than you could gain from just reading about them. The writing of the site visit journal really forced me to think about and reflect on the memorials in a way that I usually wouldn't. The learning journal helped me keep track of my thoughts and progress in the class. I think that without either one, I wouldn't have learned as much as I did.

However, as with all things, there is room for improvement. First off, I think that there should have been more material regarding the German front. None of the books or material that we used paints a clear picture of what happened in the German side of the war. Perhaps there is no German equivalent to the Crusade in Europe, but the fact remains that studying the war from just the Allied perspective is not an ideal situation. A book I strongly recommend adding to the reading list, if it is legal to do so, is Hitler's book, *My Life*. This was the book that basically started the move to Nazism and allowed Hitler to rise to power. Secondly, I feel that we may be doing too much work abroad. In my opinion, the workload abroad should consist solely of the site visit journals and the learning journal, and perhaps reading *Crusade in Europe*, as that book is best read after one is familiar with the area. Lastly, I feel that it may have been a waste of time to try to follow the route the Allies took to victory. I do realize that it is historically significant, but to some people, the time on the bus is wasted time as not all people are capable of writing or reading when moving.

All in all, I feel that I gained a lot from this trip. I was able to understand myself better and have found that the more I try to look at myself, the more interesting the picture gets. I have a better understanding of what kind of person I am. I also have a better knowledge of the world. I have seen a lot of places that many people will not get to see in their lifetime. I will have visited six different countries by the time the trip is over, and I will have learned something about each one. The differences in culture have shown me what makes America such a special land. Seeing the ruins of the war was far more powerful than any photograph or movie could ever have been.