

Making Better Social Worlds

John Parrish-Sprowl

Indiana University Purdue University
Indianapolis

**"KTO NIĘ PAMIĘTA HISTORII SKAZANY
JEST NA JEJ PONOWNE PRZEŻYCIE"**

GEORGE SANTAYANA

**"THE ONE WHO DOES NOT REMEMBER
HISTORY IS BOUND TO LIVE THROUGH IT
AGAIN"**

GEORGE SANTAYANA

KIERUNEK ZWIEDZANIA
DIRECTION OF VISITING





Student Journal Entries

Auschwitz-The experience: “We learned while we were there what the sign over the camp meant. It translates into “Hard Work Shall Set You Free.” This was put up almost to mock the Jews. This is the message that they were told when they were brought in, even though it was never going to be an option for them. As a class we talked about how those who don’t know their history are doomed to repeat it. Without breaking the pattern of communication, we continue to have resources at risk. If ethnocentric patterns dominate, they will never change. After going into one of the first exhibits, where we saw all the hair, which was just an image I will never forget, and all of the bags of luggage, and all the SHOES! When you see that mass number of things, you can still just BARELY conceptualize the number of people who were tortured here. When we walked out of that building we met up to talk again. We talked about how the Nazi’s didn’t just kill the Jews, but completely exploited them. It wasn’t enough to murder them. They used their hair for rugs, and their skin or lamps. They found a way to make money off of them, even in death. Among the other exhibits they showed all the prosthetic legs, dishes, brushes, children’s clothes, and children’s shoes. The stuff about the children had to be the hardest. It’s just so hard to imagine there being that kind of evil in the world that you would exploit and murder an innocent child, even babies. We talked about how the Jews were told that they were being relocated so they took their most valuable objects with them. This made it easier for the Nazi’s to steal their most prized possessions. We also talked about the role of semiotics. The way that the possessions aren’t simply iconic, but they are actual possessions by those who were murdered. If we develop the resources, we can escape from these patterns of ethnocentrism.

Student Journal Entries

- I copied a good portion of my journal entry from that day because I identified some of the key terminology, and information from class, within those notes. I made mention, in my journal, that this whole day really revolved around **ethnocentricity**. In the book, Pearce (1989) said, “The distinctive feature of **ethnocentric communication** is that these stories contain explicit distinctions between “us” with our stories and practices, and “them” with theirs.” In addition, he said, “There is a **mindfulness** of the existence of others who differ from us, and some way of accounting for the fact that “our” resources and practices are “right”” (p.119). I think this directly corresponds with the Nazi’s and how they brainwashed the German people.
- We talked in class about the **ethnocentric pattern** and **justification** is that “they might kill us first.” Although the killing is the same, the way it is interpreted is “completely” different. The Nazi’s justified their actions by saying that killing your own is a crime, but killing the enemy will be rewarded. Pearce (1998) continued in the text, “In **ethnocentric communication**, whatever “we” are is defined in part by its contrast with “them,” and “our” resources include specific ways of dealing with “them” such that those **resources** are not put **at risk**.” When taken to the extreme, you have the case of the Nazi’s. The Nazi’s felt that the Jews were a threat to their **resources** and the way they “dealt” with it was by trying to eliminate their civilization.

Student Journal Entries

There was a point that Professor John made in our last class meeting that we cannot dictate to others or impose on others what we believe “our” truth to be. We would be better communicators when we try to understand what others believe their “truth” to be. I am a better a communicator today because of those words spoken. I try to make myself aware of what it is I am thinking in conversation, it has a way of influencing what I say, by way of verbal communication. I enjoyed my trip a great deal and it has been a defining moment in my life.

Student Journal Entry

- Cultures that utilize ethnocentric communication have an awareness of other cultures and the possible risk to their resources. In order to minimize this risk, they may avoid the other cultures or choose to preemptively attack them. Ethnocentric cultures create what Kenneth Burke would call, identification, through division (Burke, 1972). This separation creates an ‘us versus them’ mentality, which serves to demonize the opposition (Borchers, 2005). Pearce (1989) uses the terms ‘natives’ and ‘non-natives’ in order to mark the differences between the two groups in his writings. “This distinction often, but not necessarily or always, translates into patterns of treating others as if they were inferior” (Pearce, 1989, p. 93). The choices and resulting consequences of the ethnocentric pattern of communication ultimately determine the culture. It isn’t always bad, but when taken to the extreme, it can be fatal. These actions are then justified by the ‘rightness’ of the dominant culture and the ‘wrongness’ of the other culture.
- An example of extreme ethnocentrism occurred in Nazi Germany during World War II. While in Poland, I visited Auschwitz, the largest Nazi concentration camp where over 1.1 million people were killed. As I entered the first building there was a quote by George Santayana that read, “those who forget history are bound to repeat it.” John elaborated on this point by explaining that you need to do more than know history in order to avoid repeating it. You need to put your resources at risk in order to alter the communication pattern. If ethnocentric communication patterns continue to dominate the global discourse, then things will not change because the same communication patterns will produce the same results regardless of the participants.

Student Journal Entry

I could not help but question today's society. Are we as Americans so enmeshed in our own stories to see what is actually occurring? The normal truth of Americans appears to be to focus on the actions only affected us: work, hobbies, and leisure. We are busy in the practices of our daily routine and do not realize the larger practices that are occurring. Do we question those larger practices that we support daily without questioning? Are the actions of our government always acceptable and should we always support the decisions? If the answer to these questions is yes, then I can see a great parallel to the leadership during the Holocaust. "We" are too busy seeing how well "we" are doing, the progress "we" are making, and are blinded to see that "we" include everyone and that "we" are only hurting ourselves by not being considerate of the supposed "they" that we have created. This ethnocentric behavior always ends up in death or destruction of the "they" that is created. Actions must be taken in order to change these patterns to create a communication perspective. If the conversation is not reconstructed, history proves to us that destruction will continue to occur.

Thank You
for Listening!