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“You never know what you’ll find or who you’ll meet”: I cannot think of a better way to explain my Burch fellowship experience this past summer; my journey was certainly one of discovery, every step of the way. I spent six weeks conducting historical research in France, starting out with one idea that inspired a different idea within the first few days of my travels. I had set out to uncover “othered” experiences in regard to sites of national remembrance.

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# JEWISH AND ALGERIAN INTERNMENT IN COLLECTIVE AND OFFICIAL FRENCH MEMORY

I focused my research on places of Jewish internment during World War II, finding along the way that many of these places were also sites of Algerian internment during and after the Algerian War. Getting to this stage of specificity took a while, but the journey there further supported my research question: Why were some things remembered and others less so or not at all?

The idea of “remembrance” is central to my summer in France. I recall seeing the word souvenir—the French word for “remember”—scrawled on the walls of the Jewish internment site of the Camp des Milles in Aix-en-Provence. I snapped a picture and kept coming back to this idea, not only when reflecting on my research but throughout my everyday experiences. Possibly the highlight of my trip and something I will certainly never forget happened completely by chance. I met

one of the leading historians of French World War II history, Henry Rousso, who just happened to be on the same bus with me one day on the way to a newly erected internment [memorial?] site just outside Paris. I will always remember a certain Harvard fellow’s words to me on this chance meeting: “You hit the jackpot, honey!” Meeting with Henry Rousso on the bus and discussing my research with him later in my travels directly influenced my project. His key works on the “Vichy Syndrome” are now the historiographical cornerstones of my thesis.

Further inspiration came from actively becoming a flâneur—a term typically given to those who stroll around the streets of Paris—proving that the best clichés about the city sometimes prove true. How else would I have discovered the overwhelming number of plaques

placed throughout the city in remembrance of Jewish deportees and the underwhelming number that remember other traumas like the massacre of Algerians in the city in October 1961? I simultaneously could not forget either event: one because I could not avoid its visible presence, and the other because of its marked absence.

As I previously stated, “remembering” stretched beyond my research to my everyday experiences. I will certainly never forget the time I tried escargot and launched the snail across the restaurant in a sorry first attempt to eat it! Also particularly memorable was my constant cultural discomfort with the French approach to time; my stereotypical American “protestant work ethic” lay in stark contrast with this two-hour-lunch-

break society. I had to adjust my schedule accordingly, making note of exactly what time every place I intended to see opened, closed, and took breaks

for lunch. Most places did not open until 10 AM. Some were open only a few days a week, and on the days they were open, their hours might be from 2 PM to 5 PM. My inner control freak had a fit. I learned to appreciate this change and took the time to do what French citizens would do in my situation, which is to enjoy myself! Victor Hugo once said “To breathe in Paris is to conserve the soul.” So I took some time to do as the Parisians do: breathe in the city, and conserve my soul (though I can’t say I always enjoyed the cigarette smoke that came along with it!).

I hope I will never lose the confidence I developed in my French-speaking abilities. Before my visit to Paris, I found it difficult to speak French outside the classroom. I now find it easy to say exactly what I want to say in any situation. Once I realized, only hours into my trip, that



if I wanted to get anything done efficiently I had to put my French to the test, I lost all anxiety and found my abilities both better than I had previously thought and completely indispensable. Had I not done this, I would probably still be stuck at the Gare du nord, trying to figure out how to communicate my complicated but necessary plan for a five-ticket train trip between multiple cities. Instead, it took five minutes. Without my knowledge of French, I would also have been unable to enjoy what locals had to tell me about the sites I visited, about their political opinions, or about places they recommended I visit for fun.

My Burch “journey” has been the single most formative experience of my college career. I met amazing, accomplished individuals I would never meet in any other circumstances. I developed a research “calling” that now defines my academic life across all disciplines. Most importantly, I learned and grew as a confident citizen of the world.

