

**UNDERSTANDING THE HOLOCAUST**  
**HIST/JST/RELS 117**  
**FALL 2020**

**Instructor:** Dr. Michał J. Wilczewski

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**Class Time:** TR 9:30am-10:45am synchronously via Blackboard Collaborate Ultra

**Drop-In Hours:** T 11:00am-12:00pm via Blackboard Collaborate Ultra or by appt.

**Teaching Assistant:** Elizabeth Maher

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**Drop-In Hours:** MF 2:00pm-3:00pm via Blackboard Collaborate Ultra or by appt.

**COURSE DESCRIPTION:**

The Holocaust remains one of the most shocking events of the twentieth century. In a matter of mere years, it brought about the systematic annihilation of six million Jews and millions of other targeted groups. How was this able to happen? And why was more not done to stop it? This course attempts to answer these questions and provides an in-depth analysis of the cultural and social forces that allowed the Holocaust to take place. The course begins first with understanding the development of Jewish emancipation and the subsequent rise of antisemitism in Europe in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. From there, we will trace the rise of the Nazi state and the gradual escalation of anti-Jewish policies as well as policies that discriminated against other vulnerable groups, including the disabled, homosexuals, and other religious and ethnic minorities. We will analyze the various stages of the Holocaust including ghettoization, the dispatch of the Einsatzgruppen, and the creation of death camps. At every moment, we will be looking at issues of everyday life – how it was possible for seemingly ordinary citizens to become among the perpetrators of mass death, how neighbors became victims, perpetrators, and bystanders, and how the Holocaust affected local communities. The course will end with a unit on Holocaust memory and the Holocaust in contemporary culture.

We tend to think of the Holocaust as an event that took place only in concentration and death camps scattered around East-Central Europe. More recently, however, historians have asked us to de-center the camps from our understanding of the Holocaust and instead come to understand the local history of the Holocaust. This course seeks to uncover the everyday lived experience of the Holocaust both in and outside of the camps and to understand how ordinary people and communities faced the horror that accompanied it.

**Required Readings:**

- Doris L. Bergen, *War and Genocide: A Concise History of the Holocaust*, 3rd Edition (ISBN: 978-1442242289)

- Gad Beck, *An Underground Life: Memoirs of a Gay Jew in Nazi Berlin* (ISBN: 978-0299165048)
- Jan T. Gross, *Neighbors: The Destruction of the Jewish Community in Jedwabne, Poland* (ISBN: 978-0142002407)
- Primo Levi, *Survival in Auschwitz*, (ISBN: 978-0684826806)

**Additional readings will be posted on Blackboard and are marked in the course schedule below. Books are available for purchase in the UIC Bookstore, though they are all easily available from other vendors. Please complete readings prior to class and come prepared to discuss them. In addition to large class discussions, we will occasionally divide into small groups to analyze some readings more closely.**

**COURSE REQUIREMENTS AND METHODS OF EVALUATION:** Students will be evaluated on the quality of their performance on the following required assignments:

- *An Underground Life* Paper (4-5 pages) (25%) – **due September 22, 2020**
- *Neighbors* Paper (4-5 pages) (25%) – **due October 20, 2020**
- *Survival in Auschwitz* Paper (4-5 pages) (25%) – **due November 17, 2020**
- Holocaust Memorial Analysis (2-3 pages) (15%) – **due December 3, 2020**
- Active Participation (10%)

**GRADES:** Students' final grades will be rendered according to the following:

A = 90% – 100%

B = 80% – 89.9%

C = 70% – 79.9%

D = 60% – 69.9%

F = 0% – 59.9%

**ADDITIONAL NOTES:**

1. **Trigger Warning:** This course deals with difficult and potentially challenging historical material. Some of the topics we cover may trigger strong emotional and physiological responses. If you are concerned about the course material, please read the syllabus ahead of time to identify potentially triggering issues and contact me so that we can discuss further.
2. **Plagiarism:** Please make sure you understand the definition of plagiarism. Plagiarism will not be tolerated in this class. If you take words from any source, you must use quotation marks and acknowledge the sources with proper citations. Even when you use your own words, but have borrowed an idea from another source, you must reference it. Presenting someone else's work as your own can result in the disqualification of your work and a failing grade for this class. It can also result in suspension from the University. This is a very serious offense and should be treated that way. If you are ever unsure of whether you are at risk of plagiarizing, please ask. Students are required to produce original work for each assignment for this course. Reusing parts of papers written for this

or other courses is considered self-plagiarism and will also result in the disqualification of that assignment.

3. **Blackboard and SafeAssign:** Classes will be held via Blackboard Collaborate Ultra and will require that students access Blackboard (uic.blackboard.com) to read additional readings. Please make sure that you have access to Blackboard from the beginning of the semester. If for some reason you do not, please write to the instructor immediately. All papers must be submitted electronically through Blackboard before the beginning of the class on the due date. All papers will be filtered through SafeAssign to deter plagiarism.
4. **Late Papers:** Late papers drop one letter grade per day after the deadline. An A becomes a B, then a C, and so on. If you cannot complete the assignment on time and need an extension, please contact the instructor or TA ahead of the due date.
5. **Cell Phones:** Please sign in to class on time with cell phones set to silent and stored away. Please refrain from texting or reading text messages during class.
6. **Common Courtesy:** Students are expected to respect, though certainly not always agree with, others' ideas, interpretations, and comments. Healthy and respectful debate is expected and encouraged. Students are also expected to respect the diversity of their classmates. Everyone is encouraged to help create and sustain a healthy, safe, and productive learning environment. Students who regularly come in late, leave to take phone calls, chat with their neighbors during lecture, and are otherwise disrespectful will have their participation grade severely diminished.
7. **Pronouns and Names:** My pronouns are he/him/his. I will gladly honor your request to address you by the name and pronouns you prefer. Please advise me early in the semester so that I may make appropriate changes to my records.
8. **Attendance and Participation:** Regular attendance and thoughtful participation are crucial if students want to perform well in this class. While attendance will not be taken formally, students are expected to attend class regularly and participate actively in reading discussions. **Students must attend days when discussions will be held.** Students are responsible for any work and announcements that they may miss during their absence. Recordings of course lectures, but not discussions, will be made available on Blackboard.
9. **E-mailing the Instructor and TA:** Please make sure that your e-mails to both the instructor and TA are written carefully and completely with a greeting, message, and signature that identifies yourself. You should use this as an opportunity to building your professional communication skills.
10. **Student Drop-In Hours:** Both the instructor and TA are available to meet with students during drop-in hours via Blackboard Collaborate. If you cannot attend the drop-in hours scheduled, students can also ask to make an appointment to meet. These are an excellent time to discuss paper drafts, your performance in the class, or to clarify any additional questions you may have. If you wish to discuss a draft of your paper during drop-in hours, please e-mail it to the instructor or TA at least 18 hours in advance.

**11. Students with Disabilities:** The University of Illinois at Chicago is committed to maintaining a barrier-free environment so that students with disabilities can fully access programs, courses, services, and activities at UIC. Students with disabilities who require accommodations for access to and/or participation in this course are welcome, but must be registered with the Disability Resource Center (DRC). You may contact DRC at 312-413-2183 (v) or 773-649-4535 (VP/Relay) and consult the following: <http://drc.uic.edu/guide-to-accommodations>.

**12. Extra Credit:** There may be instances during the semester that students will be offered extra credit opportunities. Any student who satisfactorily completes an extra credit opportunity will earn ONE point to their final grade. Submitting multiple extra credits will still only credit the student with one point at the end of the semester.

#### **SCHEDULE OF TOPICS AND ASSIGNMENTS:**

**\*This course outline is tentative and subject to change during the semester. Students are responsible for all changes announced in class.\***

#### **Week 1 (Aug 25 and 27): Course Introduction and the History of Antisemitism in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries**

**Reading:** Bergen, 1-24; Antoni Słonimski, "Elegy for the Little Jewish Towns," (Blackboard)

#### **Week 2 (Sept 1 and 3): Understanding the Victims**

**Reading:** Bergen, 25-44; "Laws for the Prevention of Hereditarily Diseased Offspring, July 14, 1933"; Heinrich Himmler, "On the Question of Homosexuality, February 18, 1937,"; Heinrich Himmler, "Fight against the Gypsy Nuisance, December 8, 1938,"; Marta Appel, "A German Jewish Woman Describes Her Experience in the Early Nazi Years,"; "Joseph Goebbels, "Why Do We Oppose the Jews?, July 30, 1928" (Blackboard)

#### **Week 3 (Sept 8 and 10): The Rise of the Nazis**

**Reading:** Bergen, 45-100; Gad Beck, *An Underground Life*; Adolf Hitler, "On His Hopes for Germany in 1914" from *Mein Kampf*, 1925; Adolf Hitler, "Anti-Semitic Speech April 12, 1922"; Adolf Hitler, "On the Use of Mass Meetings" from *Mein Kampf*, 1925; Joseph Goebbels, "The Task of the Ministry for Propaganda, March 15, 1933"; Martha Appel, "Jewish Life after the Nazi Seizure of Power in 1933" (Blackboard)

- **September 10, 2020--DISCUSSION OF AN UNDERGROUND LIFE**

#### **Week 4 (Sept 15 and 17): The Invasion of Eastern Europe**

**Reading:** Bergen, 101-128; Omer Bartov, "Eastern Europe as the Site of Genocide"; Melita Maschmann, "A German Colonizer of Poland in 1939 or 1940"; Field Marshall Walter von Reichenau "Conduct of Troops in Eastern Territories, October 10, 1941" (Blackboard)

**Week 5 (Sept 22 and 24): The Creation of Ghettos and their Social and Cultural Life**

**Reading:** Bergen, 129-166; Chaim Kaplan, "In the Warsaw Ghetto, 1939-1942"; Szmuel Zygielbojm, "The Warsaw *Judenrat* Offers to Regulate Jewish Forced Labor,"; Efraim Barash, "The Leader of the Białystok *Judenrat* Preaches 'Salvation through Work,'" ; Mordechai Haim Rumkowski, "The Head of the Łódź Ghetto Announces the Deportation of Children," ; "A Warsaw Ghetto Resident Comments on Czerniaków's Suicide," Henryka Łazertówna, "The Little Smuggler" (Blackboard)

- **DUE SEPTEMBER 22, 2020 – AN UNDERGROUND LIFE PAPER**

**Week 6 (Sept 29 and Oct 1): Jewish Responses and Forms of Resistance in the Holocaust**

**Reading:** Natalia Aleksion, "Gender and the Daily Lives of Jews in Hiding in Eastern Galicia," and Michael Marrus, "Jewish Resistance to the Holocaust," (Blackboard)

**Week 7 (Oct 6 and 8): The Dispatch of the Einsatzgruppen and Local Stories**

**Reading:** Bergen, 167-206; Jan Gross, *Neighbors*; Omer Bartov, "The Voice of your Brother's Blood: Reconstructing Genocide on the Local Level; Hermann Friedrich Graebe, "Description of a Mass Execution of Jews in Ukraine in 1942" (Blackboard)

- **October 8, 2020 – DISCUSSION OF *NEIGHBORS* and Bartov article**

**Week 8 (Oct 13 and 15): Non-Jewish Responses: Bystandership and Rescue**

**Reading:** Jan Błoński, "The Poor Poles Look at the Ghetto, Czesław Miłosz, "Campo dei Fiori", "A Poor Pole Looks at the Ghetto", "Dedication"; "A Plea to Combat Blackmail of Jews in Hiding" (Blackboard)

**Week 9 (Oct 20 and 22): The Wannsee Conference and the Final Solution**

**Reading:** Bergen, 207-236; "Göring Instructs Heydrich to Prepare a 'Total Solution' of the Jewish Question," (Blackboard)

- **DUE OCTOBER 20, 2020 – *NEIGHBORS* PAPER**

**Week 10 (Oct 27 and 29): The Creation of Concentration and Death Camps**

**Reading:** Bergen, 237-310; Hanna Levy-Hass, "The Bergen-Belsen Concentration Camp, 1944-1945,"; Tadeusz Borowski, Excerpts from *This Way to the Gas, Ladies and Gentlemen* (Blackboard)

**Week 11 (Nov 3 and 5): Life and Death in the Camps**

**Reading:** Primo Levi, *Survival in Auschwitz*

- **November 5, 2020 – DISCUSSION OF *Survival in Auschwitz***

**Week 12 (Nov 10 and 12): Liberation, Return, and Emigration**

**Reading:** Gene Currivan, "Report on a Visit to a Nazi Concentration Camp Liberated by the U.S. Army, April 18, 1945," (Blackboard)

**Week 13 (Nov 17 and 19): The Nuremberg Trials**

**Reading:** Laura Jockusch, "Justice at Nuremberg?: Jewish Responses to Nazi War Crimes Trials in Allied-Occupied Germany,"; Nuremberg Trial Judgements of Hermann Göring and Rudolf Hess (Blackboard)

- **DUE NOVEMBER 17, 2020 – SURVIVAL IN AUSCHWITZ PAPER**

**Week 14 (Nov 24 and 26): The Rise of Communism and Holocaust Memory**

**Reading:** Jonathan Huener, "On the Postwar History of Auschwitz and its Symbolism," and Budenstag President Wolfgang Thierse, "Opening of the Holocaust Memorial, May 10, 2005) (Blackboard)

- **NO CLASS November 26, 2020 in observance of Thanksgiving**

**Week 15 (Dec 1 and 3): The Holocaust Today**

**Reading:** None

- **DUE DECEMBER 3, 2020 – HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL ANALYSIS**