

C&I 515 Holocaust History, Memory, and Education: Understanding History and Constructing Consciousness

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Overview

Whether viewed as an unprecedented, unique event or a tragic example in a sequence of twentieth century genocides; whether focusing solely on the narrative of the Jews or expanding the narrative to include and conflate all victims of war; whether presented as an uncomplicated story of unspeakable evil or a period in time in which deep moral dilemmas and impossible choices played out on a world war arena; whether called the *Shoah*, *churban*, genocide, Jewish genocide, the victimization under Nazi-occupation, or the “The Final Solution;” the Holocaust is a significant and complex event in human history.

As the above indicates, people conceptualize and make sense of the history of the Holocaust in different ways. As provocative as the historical events are, their invocations in modern times are equally so. The persistence and controversies surrounding its memories and representations have become increasingly prevalent over the past sixty-five years. One need only turn on the television to see pundits comparing liberal healthcare policies to National Socialist “death panels,” to learn how Jewish victimization under Nazi-rule informs political decisions in the 21st century, or hear the phrase “Never again” to promote a call to action to end often-ignored genocides in Africa.

So, why study the Holocaust? It is a richly documented period, for which a breadth of primary sources affords us the opportunity to gain detailed historical understanding. Whether the event or events themselves are unique, or its memories and representations have been uniquely catapulted into the world’s consciousness over the past decades, the construction of Holocaust history and its representations have been provocative and pervasive. The questions that can be framed around its history and representations have the power to provoke strong emotional responses and stimulate critical thinking around questions that often have no clear answers. It forces us to examine the persistence, manipulations, mutations, and exploitations of history on collective memory and collective memory on history.

Ultimately, through these confluences and contradictions of the study of the Holocaust and its representations, I want you to leave this course with a stronger sense of its complexities and a list of ongoing questions.

Course Expectations

Effective, intensive learning is challenging, but rewarding work. My expectations are as follows:

- Attend class every week.
- Engage in the course material.
- Complete assignments with thoughtfulness and accuracy.
- Ask questions, challenge yourself, and challenge each other.

If any of these expectations ever pose a challenge for you, please contact me. This class will be demanding of your time and your mind, but I promise you, in the end, you will walk away appreciating the fruits of our labors (and be in need of a nap).

It is also important to note that the nature of this material often provokes personal and emotional responses. Moreover, the types of questions we will be working with often require risk-taking and vulnerability. I trust we will all foster a classroom environment that allows us to challenge ideas and not people.

Course Goals

It is my hope that by developing a historical knowledge and discussing a breadth of provocative, complex questions regarding the Holocaust, you will leave the course with a basic understanding of the history of the Holocaust and the implications, consequences, and presences of its memories and representations.

By the end of the course, you will have developed an understanding of:

- a concise history of twentieth century life in Europe prior to World War II
- the origins and iterations of anti-Semitism
- historical narratives of the Holocaust including, but not limited to, the start of the war, life under occupation, the process of ghettoization, the development of and implementation of so-called "Final Solution," the immediate rebuilding post-war
- representations of the Holocaust as manifested in and through popular literature, film, museums, politics, governments, institutions of memory, sites of memory, popular media, and education

Through developing and demonstrating this content knowledge, you will be able to:

- articulate answers to and pose complex questions regarding ethical issues
- engage in critical conversation and inquiry through writing, partner/group/class work, and oral presentations
- develop three forms of academic writing and engage in the process of reflecting and editing that accompanies them
- construct and develop a meaningful project around a topic that interests you

While these are my objectives for the course, they are by no means exhaustive. I hope they will serve as a starting point to our learning together this semester and foster a curiosity for lifelong learning.

Required Texts

The required texts are listed below. They will all be on reserve at Merit Library (Teacher Education Building, 225 N. Mills Street, 3rd floor). Additional articles are listed in the course outline and will be available at Learn@UW.

1. Dorris Bergen. *War and Genocide*. 2009
2. Marion Kaplan. *Between Dignity and Despair: Jewish Life in Nazi Germany*. 1999.
3. Primo Levi. *Survival in Auschwitz*. 1996.
4. Christopher Browning. *Ordinary Men: Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland*. 1993.
5. Art Spiegelman. *Maus I*. 1986.
6. Art Spiegelman. *Maus II*. 1992.

7a. Elie Wiesel. *Night* (Oprah's Book club). 2006.

OR

7b. Anne Frank. *The Diary of a Young Girl* (Everyman's Library, reprint edition). 2010

Assessments

Your progress will be evaluated through the following assignments:

1. Participation

I want us to embrace the time we have together, as opportunities to learn with and from people who are excited to engage in important and complex questions about the same topic as you are a rare and special experience. Participation comes in all shapes and sizes - whether you thrive in individual work, small group settings, large class discussions, or whether you engage more comfortably verbally or in writing - you will have opportunities to shine in ways you feel comfortable and grow in the areas that give you apprehension. Your presence, thoughtful preparation, and critical inquiry in this class will enable us to move deeper into the content of this course and allow us to address the important, complex questions that emerge as a result of learning about this history. Don't rob yourself or others of these opportunities to learn by not investing yourself 100% in this course.

2. Weekly Reflection (1-2 pages per week)

For some, the nature of this history evokes provocative emotional responses. Since we will not always have the opportunity to address that in class, the reflection will give you the space process the material in a more intimate, less-structured way. Also, with this being a larger class, your journal will provide me and you with an opportunity to individually dialogue with each other in a consistent manner.

You will be expected to write 1-2 pages every week reflecting on the themes addressed in class. Your entries should not be a summary of what you have learned, but rather, a place to engage in critical inquiry and/or self-reflection. You may pose questions, work through confusions, reflect on potential emotional reactions to the material, etc. You will submit this to the dropbox on our Learn@UW site each **Saturday by midnight**.

3. Written Assignments (4-5 pages)

More specific details about the assignments will be given to you at least two weeks prior to when it is due. You will be required to hand in two drafts of each of your essays, based on the following prompts:

a. Thesis-Driven Essay: Based on your reading of any of the course books in the "history" portion of the class, you will develop a 4-5 page thesis-driven essay.

b. Exploration Essay: Based on an issue/theme/idea that we have touched upon in class, you will explore the issue/theme/idea in further detail in order to deepen your knowledge of the subject.

c. Expanded Reflection: Building upon one of your journal pieces, you will expand on one self-selected entry. Pulling together thoughts and ideas from that week and others, you will craft a more formalized, developed piece of writing. Unlike the journal, this will be read and critiqued by others.

4. Group Presentations

We are all a collective of "experts-in-training" in this course and I look forward to learning with and from everyone in the class. Once during the semester, you will co-teach 20 minutes of

the class with one or two of your peers. You will have the option to address any aspect of the topic of class that week. What and how you present will be dependent on your own creativity and research. Your group will provide me with a detailed outline of your presentation on the **Friday prior to the class you are teaching** so that I may provide feedback on your lesson. If your lesson is not approved, you will not be able to teach in class.

The sign-up for the teaching dates will take place during the first week of class.

5. *Final Presentation*

You will work with a group to explore one theme, person, concept, event, representation, etc. that intrigues you from the course or something that was left out of the course. Your written assignments may be used to help you think through this presentation.

Take the initiative to explore an aspect of this history that you find both challenging and thought-provoking and present it in a way that highlights your creativity. Some examples include, but are not limited to:

- website/blog
- yearbook
- a commemorative activity
- poetry/music/art
- an exhibition layout
- a curriculum
- a film

You will be working with a group, though assessed individually, on your work. It is my hope that this form of learning and teaching will foster an intellectual depth and creativity of your work that comes with collaboration. Pull from their strengths and help build up their weaknesses - and enjoy being “intellectual nerds” together.

**The amount of writing and speaking is to, in part, fulfill the requirements for a Comm-B course. **

A note about grading: For me, grades, if one must have them, reflect a process of growth. As such, I am looking for accuracy, thoughtfulness, clear articulation and development of ideas, and evidence of growth and improvement across drafts. You will have opportunities to revise and hand in multiple drafts of all of your work. That being said, you are expected to put your best effort forward at every turn.

Please let me know if, because of a disability or special situation, you need accommodations in the curriculum, instruction, or assessment in this course to enable your full participation. Information shared will be held confidential to the highest degree possible.

Rubrics with more specific guidelines will be provided the second week of class. Weighted breakdown of assignments are:

- 20% Participation
- 10% Journal
- 15% Thesis-Driven Essay
- 15% Exploration Essay
- 15% Expanded Reflection
- 10 % Group Presentation
- 15% Final Assignment and Presentation

A note on plagiarism: Simply stated: do not do it. In a class that is explicitly focused on developing your critical thinking skills, it is not worth it. Cite all of your sources appropriately in your writing and oral presentations using the American Psychological Association referencing (APA). The Writing Center has a useful handbook to guide you: <http://www.wisc.edu/writing/Handbook/>. Anyone enrolled in the course who is found to have plagiarized material will receive an “F” as a final grade. Please do not put yourself or me in the position to do this.

Our Class, Week-By-Week

Each class will focus on series of questions. They will be addressed in the weekly readings (to be completed by the date under which they are listed) and throughout the class session.

Note that the syllabus is subject to change, but if so, you will be given fair and ample notice.

January 23

1. A day of beginnings...

Questions:

- Where do we begin?
- What does where we begin tell us about how we are framing the history of the Holocaust?

Readings:

(none)

January 30

2. Pre-Conditions

Questions:

- What foundational knowledge will help us make sense of World War II and the Holocaust?
- What has been the trajectory of Jewish history in Europe?
- What were the threads of daily life in interwar Europe?

Reading:

Bergen, Doris. *War and Genocide*. p. 1-101.

February 6

3. Daily Life and the Outbreak of War

Question:

- How did the events transpiring in Germany in the 1930s set the stage for the start of World War II?

Reading:

Kaplan, Marion. *Between Dignity and Despair: Jewish Life in Nazi Germany*

February 13

4. Systematizing Death

Questions:

- In what ways were different peoples experiencing Nazi occupation?
- How did geographical location, ethnicity, religion, and identity (both lived and perceived) shape that experience?
- What was the systematic process of death imposed on by the Nazis?
- In what ways did people live under such horrific tragedies? How did they make sense of their lives? How did they maintain their humanity under the constant threat of death?

Reading:

Levi, Primo. *Survival in Auschwitz*

First Draft: Thesis-Driven Essay

February 20

5. Understanding Perpetration

Question:

- How can history (both social and top-down), psychology, and sociology help us make sense of the actions of the perpetrators?

Readings:

1. Browning, Christopher. *Ordinary Men*
2. Goldhagen, Daniel. *Hitler's Willing Executioners* (excerpts)
3. Gross, Jan. "Neighbors" (article from *The New Yorker*)

February 27

6. Response: Rescue and Resistance

Questions:

- How did different individuals and groups respond to Nazi perpetration?
- How did those responses vary across geographic location, socioeconomic status, ethnicity, political affiliation, religion, and age?

Reading:

1. United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. "Resistance During the Holocaust"
2. Gilbert, Martin. *The Righteous: The Unsung Heroes of the Holocaust* (excerpts)

Final Draft: Thesis-Driven Essay

March 5

7. Holocaust Memory in America: A Critical Examination

Questions:

- What does the trajectory of Holocaust memory look like?
- Who shaped this memory? In what ways?
- What is the value in understanding these memories?
- How can a critical examination of two popular pieces of Holocaust literature challenge what it means to represent this period in history?

Readings:

Wiesel, Elie. *Night*
OR
Frank, Anne. *The Diary of a Young Girl*

March 12

8. Holocaust in Hollywood

Questions:

- What does it mean to create an artistic representation of the Holocaust through film?
- What does it mean to trivialize the Holocaust? Deny the Holocaust? "Accurately portray" the Holocaust? What the boundaries of these concepts?

Reading:

Insdorf, Annette. "Nazis and the Movies" (article from <http://www.thedailybeast.com/newsweek/2008/11/27/nazis-and-the-movies.html>)

Viewing:

Select a film that relates to the content and themes of this course.

First Draft: Exploration Essay

March 19

9. Second and Third Generation

Questions:

- How has the history and memory of the Holocaust impacted the lives of those born of the generation that survived it?
- What is unique about the experiences of the second generation? The third?

Readings:

1. Spiegelman, Art. *Maus I & II*
2. Rosenthal, Gabriele. "National Socialism and Anti-Semitism in Intergenerational Dialogue" (chapter in *The Holocaust in Three Generations*). p. 305-314.

March 26

10. Museums, Monuments, and Memorials

Questions:

- How is the institutional memory of the Holocaust maintained and presented through museums, monuments, and memorials?
- What are local reactions to different sites of memories? International reactions? What do those reactions say about a people(s)?

Reading:

Young, James. *The Texture of Memory*. p. 113-209.

Final Draft:

Exploration Essay

NOTE: This class might be replaced by a visit to a Holocaust museum.

April 9

11. Education

Questions:

- How is the Holocaust taught in elementary and secondary schools?
- How does Holocaust education vary in across countries?
- What is the purpose of teaching the Holocaust?
- In what ways is your learning about in this class added to and/or challenged what and how you previously learned about the Holocaust?

Readings:

1. Schweber, Simone. "Simulating Survival" (article from *Curriculum Inquiry*)
2. Milerski, Boguslaw. "Holocaust Education in Public Schools: Between Remembrance and Civic Education" (article from *Prospects: Quarterly Review of Comparative Education*)
3. Meseth, Wolfgang & Proske, Matthias. "Mind the Gap: Holocaust Education in Germany, Between Intentions and Classroom Interactions" (article from *Prospects: Quarterly Review of Comparative Education*)

April 16

12. Holocaust Memory through Politics, Law & Medicine

Questions:

- How has the history and memory of the Holocaust impacted the formation and governance of particular countries?
- How has the history and memory of the Holocaust impacted international law?

- In what ways have political, legal, and medical ethics be shaped by the Holocaust?

Readings:

(work-in-progress)

First Draft: Expanded Reflection

April 23

13. Bearing Witness and *Never Again*-ing - The Holocaust As a Call to...?

Questions:

- In what ways, if at all, is learning about the Holocaust a call to act and prevent?
- What responsibility, if any, so people who learning about the Holocaust have a responsibility to do something with that knowledge?
- What are historically accurate and sensitive parallels and comparisons to the Holocaust?

Readings:

YOU will be responsible for finding your own readings this week! We will divide the class into three groups. Each group will be responsible for answering one question. Each *member* of the group will research the answer to the group question by finding, reading, and taking notes on a scholarly article or book chapter. Please bring a copy of the reading and your notes to class.

April 30

14. Conclusions I: Pervasive Discourses

Questions:

- For what purposes in the Holocaust evoked in current events in Europe, America, the world?
- How are modern-day Germany and modern Germans viewed in light of the Holocaust?
- How are Jews and Jewish communities viewed in light of the Holocaust?
- When, who, and for purpose can the Holocaust be evoked? And not?

Reading:

Andriani, Cristina and Manning, Jody. "Negotiating with the Dead': On the Past of Auschwitz and the Present of Oswiecim" (article from *Psychology and Society*).

Final Draft: Expanded Reflection

May 7

15. Conclusions II: Final Presentations

Question:

- What do you take away from learning about the Holocaust?

Reading:

(none)

Final Project:

Presentation due

May 14

Final Projects due to room 514b by 12:00pm.