NEJS 132a
Against the Apocalypse:
Jewish Responses to the Holocaust

Professor: Dr. Laura Jockusch
Class Meetings: M, W, Th 11-11:50am
Office: Lown 310
Hours:

Semester: Fall 2017
Room:
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Phone:

Course Description

For decades, historians and the wider public ignored the vibrant activity of Jewish individuals and organizations during and immediately after World War II to confront, comprehend, and publicize the Nazi crimes, later known as the Holocaust. They even claimed that before the 1960s there had been a general absence of knowledge and inability to confront Nazi atrocities, thus falling into a hermetic silence that lasted for several decades. This narrative derived from the researchers’ focus on gentiles in Europe, who indeed silenced and repressed the Holocaust experience in the aftermath of the Second World War. Consumed by processes of rebuilding and stabilization, the non-Jewish public was unable and unwilling to face the Nazi genocide. Especially (but not only) the Germans and Austrians evaded acknowledging their involvement in the Nazi regime’s disfranchisement, persecution, expulsion, and ultimately murder of the Jews. But also in other parts of Europe—with a distinct pace in East and West—and in the United States, the critical public discourse about wartime behavior and an open confrontation with the plight of European Jews gradually began only one to two generations after the war. Usually, the trial of Adolf Eichmann in Jerusalem in 1961 is perceived as the trigger for this change of perception. In this periodization, a second turning point that further moved the Holocaust from periphery to the center of public discourse was the end of the Cold War. Only then did the Holocaust assume iconic status and became a negative foundational event of European integration and, as some scholars suggest, a central reference in American interventionist human rights discourses and policies.

While this periodization might be accurate from a perspective restricted to the non-Jewish public, it overlooks a very significant factor adding to our historical understanding of the complex formation of post-war memory and politics. Considering the Jewish perspective changes the chronology of Holocaust awareness and the entire post-history of the event itself. This leads to a re-evaluation of the first two decades after the war years. In contrast to the alleged hermetic silence and passivity, we find a host of crucial and distinctive activities that the Jewish world initiated immediately after 1945 to publicize the unprecedented dimensions of Nazi crimes. Jews in Europe, Palestine/Israel, and the Americas were by no means silent after the war, but tried on different levels to come to terms with the European Jewish cataclysm. On the part of the Jews, there was neither lack of knowledge and understanding nor was there unwillingness to confront the
traumatic events in discourse, writing, and commemoration; rather, they encountered an all-encompassing refusal on the part of the non-Jewish world to listen to and act on what Jews had to tell.

This undergraduate course provides an overview on the breadth of Jewish activities in the Diaspora and Israel to understand and commemorate the destruction of European Jews in the 1940s and 1950s and to create Holocaust consciousness. After surveying the history of the Holocaust and discussing the possibilities and constraints of Jewish responses to Nazi persecution and mass murder while the events were unfolding, the course’s main emphasis is on the years 1945-1961. Exploring the hardship of liberation and rebuilding and the promise and potential of the postwar moment, it highlights five realms of responses: history writing and documentation; the search for justice and the shaping of legal frameworks after genocide; cultural, political and religious responses to the Holocaust; and modes of commemoration. The concluding part of the course seeks to reevaluate the myth of a postwar Jewish silence.

Learning Goals

- Identify the major events, persons, problems, concepts and ideas in the history of Jewish responses to Nazi persecution and mass murder
- Read historical texts and primary sources critically and contextualize their significance to relevant problems
- Write short interpretive essays that speak critically about events and ideas.

Required Books


Recommended Books


**Learning Goals**

- Identify the major events, persons, problems, concepts and ideas in the history of Jewish responses to the Holocaust
- Read historical texts and primary sources critically and contextualize their significance to relevant problems
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**Course Requirements**

1. Serious and consistent class participation (this means attendance is essential because your participation is part of your grade)
2. Regular introductions of the homework readings
3. Two written assignments of 5-6 pages
4. A midterm exam
5. A final exam

**Grading**

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<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tr>
<td>Class participation</td>
<td>10 percent</td>
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<tr>
<td>Essays</td>
<td>30 percent</td>
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<td>Midterm</td>
<td>30 percent</td>
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<td>Final exam</td>
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Late work policy

Unless there are legitimate reasons (e.g., serious illness or personal circumstances), work will not be accepted more than one week past the due date. Work turned in late will be docked 5 percent per day.

Preparation Time

Success in this 4 credit hour course is based on the expectation that students will spend a minimum of 9 hours of study time per week in preparation for class (readings, papers, discussion sections, preparation for exams, etc.).

Academic Honesty

You must complete all assignments alone. In your writing, you must follow rules of attribution, meaning that you must cite all sources consulted in preparing your papers. As stated in the Student Handbook, “Every member of the University community is expected to maintain the highest standards of academic honesty. A student shall not receive credit for work that is not the product of the student’s own effort.” Examples of penalties for a student found responsible for an infringement of academic honesty are no credit for the work in question, failure in the course, and the traditional range of conduct sanctions from disciplinary warning through permanent dismissal from the University.

Students with Documented Disabilities

Students with disabilities certified by the Coordinator of Academic Accommodations for Students with Disabilities in the Office of Undergraduate Academic Affairs and First Year Services will be given reasonable accommodations to complete required assignments. Disabilities that are not documented and approved by the Office of Academic Affairs will not be given accommodations.

Weekly Topics and Reading Assignments

1. INTRODUCTION

August 30, 2017 Introduction: Why study Jewish Responses to the Holocaust?


Recommended Reading:
James E. Young “Names of the Holocaust: Meaning and Consequences,” in

**Historical Source**  

2. **UNDERSTANDING THE HISTORICAL EVENT: THE THIRD REICH’S DESTRUCTION OF EUROPEAN JEWS**

   **August 31, 2017**  
   The Nazi Persecution of German Jews 1933-1938  
   Doris Bergen  

   **September 4, 2017**  
   Labor Day -- No Class

   **September 6, 2017**  
   Exporting Terror and Persecution: Austria, Czechoslovakia, and Poland, 1938-1939  
   Doris Bergen  
   *The Holocaust*, 79-133.

   **September 7, 2017**  
   Systematizing and Globalizing Deportation and Mass Murder 1940-1943  
   Doris Bergen  
   *The Holocaust*, 135-165.

   **September 11, 2017**  
   Death Throes and Killing Frenzies, 1943-1945  
   Doris Bergen  
   *The Holocaust*, 167-233.

3. **SCOPE AND LIMITS OF WARTIME JEWISH RESPONSES TO NAZI PERSECUTION**

   **September 13, 2017**  
   Perceiving the Threat: Between Information and Knowledge  
   Evgeny Finkel  
   *Ordinary Jews: Choice and Survival during the Holocaust*,
Recommended Reading:


September 14, 2017  Patterns of Jewish Responses: Inside the Nazi Orbit

David Engel  The Holocaust, 62-80.

Historical Sources  “The First Jewish Intuition of a Nazi Murder Program,” in Engel, The Holocaust, 103.


September 18, 2017  Patterns of Jewish Responses: In the Free World


Recommended Reading:

Historical Source  The Riegner Telegram
Szmuel Zygielboim’s letter
4. **ON THE THRESHOLD TO THE POSTWAR ERA**

**September 20, 2017  The Ambiguities of Liberation**


**September 21, 2017  Rosh Hashanah – No Class**

**September 25, 2017  The Ambiguities of Liberation (Historical Sources)**


**September 27, 2017  Liberated but Not Free / Rehabilitation**

Dan Stone  *The Liberation of the Camps*, 105-138


**September 28, 2017  The Jewish Displaced Persons**


**October 2, 2017  Rebuilding the Postwar Jewish World**


**Recommended Reading:**  

**October 3, 2017  Review for Mid-Term Exam**
5. DOCUMENTING NAZI CRIMES: HISTORICAL JEWISH RESPONSES

October 9, 2017
Historical Commissions and Documentation Centers
Laura Jockusch

Historical Sources

“Call to the Public,” in Laura Jockusch (ed.), Early Jewish Texts on the Holocaust.

October 11, 2017
Historical Models for Documenting Catastrophe
Laura Jockusch

Historical Source

October 12, 2017
David Boder’s Testimony Project
Rachel Deblinger
Alan Rosen  “‘We Know very little in America’ David Boder and Un-Belated Testimony,” in After the Holocaust: Challenging the Myth of Silence, 102-114.


October 16, 2017  Children’s Testimony


6. SEEKING JUSTICE: JEWISH LEGAL RESPONSES TO THE HOLOCAUST

October 18, 2017  Revenge or Retribution?


October 19, 2017  Courtroom Justice

Laura Jockusch  “Justice at Nuremberg? Jewish Responses to Nazi War-Crime

**Historical Source**


**October 23, 2017**  
**Jewish Honor Courts**


**Historical Source**

Honor Court Case of Regina Szenberg, YIVO Archives.

**October 25, 2017**  
**Jewish Collaborator Trials in Israeli Courts**


**October 26, 2017**  
**Criminalizing and Outlawing Genocide**

Mark A. Lewis  

**Historical Source**


**October 30, 2017**  
**Restitution**

Elisabeth Gallas  

**Historical Source**


**November 1, 2017**  
**Reparation and Compensation**
Elazar Barkan  


**Historical Source**  
Chancellor Konrad Adenauer’s speech to the German Bundestag, September 27, 1951.

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### 7. CONTINUING A GOLDEN CHAIN: JEWISH CULTURAL RESPONSES

**November 2, 2017**  
**Holocaust Literature**

David G. Roskies and Naomi Diamant  


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**November 6, 2017**  
**Folklore and Music**

Shirli Gilbert  

“Buried Monuments: Yiddish Songs and Holocaust Memory,”  

**Historical Source**  
Examples from the sound archive of the Central Historical Commission in Munich, 1945-1949.

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**November 8, 2017**  
**Theatre**

Margarete Myers Feinstein  


**Recommended Reading:**

Ella Florsheim  

“‘Yiddish theater in the DP camps.’”  

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**November 9, 2017**  
**Film**

View Sections from _Undzere Kinder_ (Poland, 1948)

Lawrence L. Langer  

Recommended Reading:

November 13, 2017  Early Memoirs
Primo Levi  *Survival in Auschwitz: If this is a Man*, New York: Orion Press 2008 (sections)

8. CREATING SPACES OF MEMORY: JEWISH COMMEMORATIVE RESPONSES TO THE HOLOCAUST

November 15, 2017  Memorials
Margarete Myers Feinstein  *Holocaust Survivors*, 64-107.

Recommended Reading:
Ronald Zweig  *German Reparations and the Jewish World*, 155-176.

November 16, 2017  Yisker Books


9. BETWEEN NATIONAL SOVEREIGNTY AND MINORITY STATUS: JEWISH POLITICS IN THE SHADOW OF THE HOLOCAUST

November 20, 2017  Zionism and Statehood

Recommended Reading:

November 22-23, 2017  Thanksgiving—No Class

November 27, 2017  Bundism and Human Rights


Recommended Reading:

10.  RECKONING WITH GOD: JEWISH RELIGIOUS RESPONSES TO THE HOLOCAUST

November 30, 2017

Margarete Feinstein, Holocaust Survivors in Postwar Germany, 202-220.

Recommended Reading:

11.  REASSESSING JEWISH RESPONSES AND THEIR SIGNIFICANCE

December 4, 2017  The 1961 Eichmann Trial and After

December 6, 2017  Construing the “Myth of Silence”


December 7, 2017  Summary and Preparation for Final Exam