Description of the Course

The twentieth century has witnessed an unprecedented upsurge of state sponsored and ideologically driven violence against civil populations. What sets genocide aside from all other internationally punishable crimes is the intent physically to destroy a defined population group. The ‘Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide’ adopted by the UN General Assembly on December 9, 1948, defined genocide as follows:

...genocide means any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such:
   a. killing members of the group
   b. causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group;
   c. deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part
   d. imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group
   e. forcibly transferring children of the group to another group

The convention was drafted very much with the experience of Nazi genocidal policies in mind and has been criticized as both too broad – how does one define to ‘destroy...in part’ – and too narrow, since it does not include mass murder for political objectives or action against a class or social group, like the kulaks in the Soviet Union. To us, there seem to be two different paths to mass murder and genocide in the twentieth century. One is derived from the desire of states for ethnic and political uniformity – here ethnic cleansing or counter insurgency tends in extreme cases to become genocide. The other is the use of terror as a political weapon in the totalitarian states – whether Nazi or communist – which on occasion develops into mass murder. These regimes shared certain characteristics which led them to have a propensity for genocidal actions. These have been well described by Eric D. Weitz:

1. An ideological utopianism promoted the belief that the current regime could indeed create the perfect society that would be the end point of history. 2. The
utopia necessitated population purges... Aside from carefully cultivated gender distinctions, utopia would be a leveled, homogenized society...

3. The creation of utopia required massive popular mobilization. 4. A breakdown of pre-existing norms of behavior and reworking of the rules of social interaction included the promotion of political violence as the method of progress towards utopia.

The course will start by examining the theory of genocide and then look at examples of genocide before the twentieth century. This will be followed by an examination of the Armenian genocide and mass killing in the Soviet Union. The Holocaust has become the paradigmatic genocide and we will devote two weeks to an analysis of the Nazi regime and the mass killings it perpetrated during the Second World War. We will then examine at mass killing in China, South Asia, Yugoslavia, and Africa. The course will conclude with a discussion of the attempts to prevent, prosecute, and memorialize genocide.

Learning Goals

This course has three main objectives. Firstly, you will learn how to identify genocide, its causes and preconditions, its dynamics, and its consequences. Secondly, you will learn about individual historical and contemporary case studies of genocide, mass murder and ethnic cleansing. Thirdly, you will become acquainted with different scholarly approaches toward genocide and mass murder. The study of genocide poses the essential questions for human history: How can human beings commit crimes of such magnitude? What provokes the destructive impulse? When should obligation before a group give way to responsibility for an individual? By the end of this course you should be able to provide answers to these questions.

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. Three written assignments of 4-5 pages
4. A midterm exam
5. A final exam

Grading

Class participation 10 percent
Essays 30 percent
Midterm 30 percent
Final exam 30 percent

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.

**Required Reading**

Samantha Power ‘*A Problem from Hell.* America and the Age of Genocide,’ Perennial, 2003. (Available as ebook through Brandeis Library)


Weekly Topics and Reading Assignments

Week 1

INTRODUCTION

January 16, 2019


January 17, 2019

What is Genocide?


Week 2

THE DEFINITION OF GENOCIDE

January 21, 2019

Martin Luther King Day—No Class

January 22, 2019

[Brandeis Monday!] Pre-Modern Precedents


January 23, 2019

A Crime without a Name?

Samantha Power, ‘*A Problem From Hell*: America and the Age of Genocide* (New York, 2002), 17-60.


January 24, 2019

Reading Historical Sources

Raphael Lemkin, “Genocide”

Week 3

EARLY TWENTIETH-CENTURY GENOCIDES
January 28, 2019  **Genocide before the First World War: The Herero Case**


Recommended:

January 30, 2019  **Genocide during the First World War: The Armenian Case**


January 31, 2019  **Reading Historical Sources**


**Week 4  MASS KILLING IN THE SOVIET UNION**

February 4, 2019  **The Great Terror**


February 6, 2019  **Man-Made Famine**

Yaroslav Bilinsky, ‘Was the Ukrainian Famine of 1932-1933 Genocide?’ in: *Journal of Genocide Research* Volume 1, Number 2 (June 1999), 147-156.


February 7, 2019  **Reading Historical Sources**


**Week 5 GENOCIDE DURING THE SECOND WORLD WAR: THE HOLOCAUST AND OTHER MASS KILLINGS**

February 11, 2019  **Nazi Racial Utopias**


February 13, 2019  **Nazi Murder of the Disabled and the “Gypsies”**


February 14, 2019  **The Nazi “Final Solution to the Jewish Question”**


February 18-22, 2019  **No Class—Spring break**

February 25, 2019  **Holocaust Uniqueness Debates**


February 27, 2019  Reading Historical Sources
February 28, 2019  Review for Midterm Exam
March 4, 2019  Midterm Exam

**Week 7  JAPAN AND CHINA IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY**

March 6, 2019  Japanese Atrocities in the Sino-Japanese War


March 7, 2019  China’s Secret Famine


**Week 8  ETHNIC CLEANSING AND GENOCIDE IN SOUTH ASIA**

March 11, 2019  East Timor

March 13, 2019  **Cambodia**


March 14, 2019  **Reading Historical Sources**

**Week 9  THE WARS OF THE YUGOSLAV SUCCESSION**

March 18, 2019  **Bosnia**


March 20, 2019  **Srebrenica and Kosovo**

Selma Leydesdorf, “Narrative sof the Survivors of Srebrenica: How do they reconnect to the world?,” *Women and Genocide*, 58-76.


March 21, 2019  **Reading Historical Sources**

**Week 10 ETHNIC CLEANSING AND GENOCIDE IN AFRICA**

March 25, 2019  **Burundi and Rwanda**


March 27, 2019  **Workshop on Gender and Mass Violence**, Tauber Institute, Brandeis University
March 28, 2019  

Reading Historical Sources

Week 11  
CONTROVERSIES ABOUT THE CHARACTERIZATION OF 
GENOCIDE

April 1, 2019  
Genocide Denial?


April 3, 2019  
The Nakba – A Genocide?


April 4, 2019  
Crimes against Humanity in Bangladesh – A Genocide?


Week 12  
THE PROSECUTION OF GENOCIDE

April 8, 2019  
Difficult Beginnings


April 10, 2019  The Nuremberg Trial Legacy


April 11, 2019  Do Trials Work?


Week 13  MEMORIALIZATION AND PREVENTION

April 15, 2019  Memorialization


April 17, 2019  Military Intervention?


April 18, 2019  Taking Action


April 19-26, 2019  No Class—Passover Recess

Week 14  SUMMING UP

April 29, 2019  Ongoing Cases: Between Mass Violence and Genocide

“They try to kill us all” Atrocity Crimes against Rohingya Muslims in Rekhine State, Myanmar, (November 2017)
https://www.ushmm.org/m/pdfs/201711-atrocity-crimes-rohingya-muslims.pdf

May 1, 2019  Review for Final Exam

Final Exam