

## The Holocaust as a Mirror and Magnifying Glass of the Recent Planetary Crisis

**Professor:** Michal Plzák

**Contact:** [michal.plzak@cerge-ei.cz](mailto:michal.plzak@cerge-ei.cz)

*The year 2021 marks the 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the formulation and beginning of the systematic execution of the mass murder we call the Holocaust, or Shoah. Some of the survivors compared their experiences from concentration camps to being in a “dark room” that develops reality otherwise hidden and obscured but still present in “normal” modern life. As I prepare this syllabus, nearly the entire world is being fragmented and locked in national ghetto-like units. This course is to address those disturbing findings that had been revealed in the Holocaust and reflect on them in a way that might enlighten us vis-à-vis the current crisis.*

### REQUIREMENTS:

Each student presents their own summaries of one examined text from the reader. Students will write short tests every class that will reflect on the lecture, presentation and discussion from previous class. They will also write an essay and present it to the others at the end of the semester. The objective of the whole course is to enable broad and free discussion that discovers parallels between past and present. To get rid of false stereotypes and myths is very much desirable.

### GRADING POLICY:

1. Attendance and participation in class (students should not miss more than one class excused by a doctor) = 30 points
2. Summary of the relevant literature and its presentation (every student should present at least once) = 20 points
3. Final essay (2500 words) = 30 points
4. Four short tests = 5 points each = 20 points

A = 100–90 pt.; B = 89–80 pt.; C = 79–70pt.; D = 69–51; F = 50 pt. and less

Any student, who, because of disability, may require some special arrangements, in order to meet course requirements, should contact the lecturer as soon as possible to make necessary accommodations.

### REQUIRED READINGS:

1. Course Reader
2. Other materials provided by the lecturer

### FIELD TRIP TO TEREZÍN AND OTHER PLACES IN PRAGUE

**Grading Policy:**

Letter Grade	Percentage	Description
A	93-100	Outstanding work
A-	90-92	
B+	87-89	Good work
B	83-86	
B-	80-82	
C+	77-79	Acceptable Work
C	73-76	
C-	70-72	
D+	67-69	Work that is significantly below average
D	63-66	
D-	60-62	
F	0-59	Work that does not meet the minimum standards for passing the course

**UPCES Non-Discrimination/Harassment Policy**

The UPCES program in Prague promotes a diverse learning environment where the dignity, worth, and differences of each individual are valued and respected. Discrimination and harassment, whether based on a person's race, gender, sexual orientation, color, religion, national origin, age, disability, or other legally protected characteristic, are repugnant and completely inconsistent with our objectives. Retaliation against individuals for raising good faith claims of harassment and/or discrimination is prohibited.

**UPCES Diversity Policy**

UPCES fully embraces diversity and strives to create a safe and welcoming environment for students from all backgrounds. Prague is a wonderfully diverse community and UPCES is no different. All students should feel at home while studying abroad and UPCES will do its utmost to make sure that becomes a reality. Although unique challenges may arise, we believe that students from all walks of life will encounter wonderful opportunities for enrichment as they explore a new culture while studying abroad.

## **Week 1**

Why the Jews and not bicycle riders or red haired people? The birth of the Other: historical survey. The Final Solution: the decision making process. Scapegoating minorities in the times of social, economic and medical upheaval. From first, innocent measures to unseen, drastic consequences.

### *Readings:*

- 1/ Dan Stone: Ideologies of Race: The Construction and Suppression of Otherness in Nazi Germany (*A Companion to the Holocaust*).
- 2/ Raul Hilberg: Definition by Decree (*The Destruction of the European Jews*).

### *Optional:*

Götz Aly: Anti-Semitism as a Political Force (*Why the Germans? Why the Jews?*).

## **Week 2**

The role of doctors in modern systems. Legitimacy of the unconditional trust in medical science: perversion of the medical profession and voluntary implementation of murderous Nazi policy by doctors and nurses. The International Red Cross's activities and its implications.

### *Readings:*

- 1/ Benno Müller-Hill: Human Genetics and the Mass Murder of Jews, Gypsies, and Others (*The Holocaust and the History*).
- 2/ Gerald Steinacher: Intervention and Opportunism (*Humanitarians At War: The Red Cross In the Shadow of the Holocaust*).

### *Optional:*

Michael Burleigh: Psychiatry, German society and the Nazi "euthanasia" programme (*The Holocaust: Origins, Implementation, Aftermath*).

## **Week 3**

Invention of a ghetto: open experiment with the radical lockdown – its initial purpose and reactions of the victims. What is to be done to retain humanity under unhuman conditions – more so today enclosed by advanced technologies.

### *Readings:*

- 1/ Guy Miron: Ghettos and Ghettoization – History and Historiography (*A Companion to the Holocaust*).
- 2/ Dan Michman: Jewish Leadership in Extremis (*The Historiography of the Holocaust*).

### *Optional:*

Michel Foucault: The Great Confinement (*History of Madness*).

## **Week 4**

Theory of morality after the Holocaust: social production of evil. Myth of the fall and myth of the civilizing process: innocent man corrupted by society, or moral society taming beasts? Social conformity and obedience to the norms. Politics of fear.

### *Readings:*

- 1/ Hannah Arendt: An Expert on the Jewish Question (*Eichmann in Jerusalem*).
- 2/ Robert Gellately: The Gestapo and Social Co-operation—The Example of Political Denunciation (*The Gestapo and German Society: Enforcing Racial Policy 1933–1945*).

### *Optional:*

Omer Bartov: Chambers of Horror (*Murder in Our Midst*).

## **Week 5**

Social or psychological distancing as a crucial prerequisite for every extraordinary violence. Reflections on freedom, responsibility and bureaucracy. Sources of moral norms. Decent people turned into mass killers – such an easy trick.

### *Readings:*

- 1/ Zygmunt Bauman: The Ethics of Obedience (*Modernity and the Holocaust*).
- 2/ Steven K. Baum: Bystanders (*The Psychology of Genocide*).

### *Optional:*

Christopher R. Browning: German Killers—Behavior and Motivation in the Light of New Evidence (*Nazi Policy, Jewish Workers. German Killers*).

## **Week 6**

Aftermath: was there any meaning? Responses to the current epidemics: moral story of the crisis. A God to save us? Inhumanity as a strictly human choice. Humanity as an everlasting project.

### *Readings:*

- 1/ Primo Levi: The Grey Zone (*The Drowned and the Saved*).
- 2/ Divine Surprise: Bernard-Henri Lévy (*The Virus in the Age of Madness*).

### *Optional:*

Helen P. Fry: The Holocaust (*Christian-Jewish Dialogue—A Reader*).