Comprehending the Holocaust

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Office Hours: upon request

OUTLINE OF THE COURSE:
The Holocaust – Shoah – is a lesson in what happened in our modern rational technological society and in what might happen again in spite of all trusted safety measures. What does it mean to comprehend the Holocaust – is it desirable or possible at all?
The Holocaust as a significant and unique event in history continues to have universal implications. This mass murder has specific features that make it different from all other genocides (we shall briefly discuss the nature of modern genocides, their underlying ideological patterns and their modern features). It is not only a historical event but rather turning-point of our history – a revelation of the “absolute power” and inhumanity (an analysis of which will be discussed). We will go through the rise and history of Christian anti-Judaism, its transformation into modern forms of anti-Semitism; the role of intellectuals, use of propaganda and terror during and before the Holocaust will be discussed and also what makes good people can kill so easily. Also, the phenomenon of “denying the Holocaust”, that is a modern form of antisemitism, will be discussed.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS:
Students will present their own summaries of the examined texts. They will also write an essay (some 2500 words) and present it to the others at the end of the semester. The whole course will thus be finished by a small colloquium. In addition, the course will comprise lectures, discussions and close readings of the relevant literature.

GRADING POLICY:
1. Attendance (UPCES only allows one unexcused absence), participation in class and summary of the relevant literature and its presentation (every student will present one summary) = 20 %
2. Summary of the relevant literature and its presentation (every student should present at least one summary) = 15 points
3. Midterm exam = 25 %
4. Final exam = 20 %
5. Final paper (2500 words) = 20 %
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. The Course Reader
2. Other materials provided by the lecturer

PROGRAM:

Week 1
Introductory UPCES lecture series.

Week 2
Introduction. Dear Watson: What do we know about the mass murder?


Optional:
Raul Hilberg: Sources and Their Uses (The Holocaust and the History), pp. 5–11.

Week 3
History of Anti-Judaism and Anti-Semitism: Why Germany?

What is anti-Judaism and what is wrong with the term anti-Semitism. Where to start digging. Centuries old myths and their secular meanings. Radical changes of the 19th century and the Jew hatred in modern Germany. Types of Jewish responses. Arendt on Eichmann: the turning point in the perception of the Holocaust and its anti-Semitic link.

Reading:
Optional:

Week 4
Ideology and propaganda of the Third Reich: How to Corrupt Decent People.

Reading:
Marion A. Kaplan: The Daily Lives of Jewish Children and Youth in the “Third Reich” (Between Dignity and Despair), pp. 94–118.
Optional:

Week 5
Which Solution is the Final One: Comprehending the Decision Making Process.


Readings:
Ian Kershaw: Hitler’s Role in the “Final Solution” (Hitler, the Germans, and the Final Solution), pp. 89–116.
Optional:

Week 6
Nazi Promised Lands and Its Enemies.


Readings:
Optional:
Saul Friedländer: September 1941–December 1941 (The Years of Extermination), pp. 261–293.
Week 7


Midterm Exam

Readings:

Optional:

Week 8
Theory of morality after the Holocaust: Social Production of Evil.


Readings:

Optional:

Week 9
Victim´s Reactions: Types of Resistance


Readings:

Optional:
Yehuda Bauer: The Neighbors (The Death of the Shtetl), pp. 92–120.
Week 10

**Representation of Shoah in Art, Especially in Film.**


**Readings:**
Omer Bartov: *Chambers of Horror* (Murder in Our Midst), pp. 157–175.
*Schindler’s List* (movie)

Week 11

**The Czech Holocaust: FORGOTTEN TRANSPORTS.**

A rare documentary on a group of Czech Jewish women who survived their deportation to Estonia.

Week 12

**The Uniqueness and Normality of the Holocaust. Tentative Conclusion.**

America and the Holocaust: before, during, and after. Holocaust link to the creation of the State of Israel. Aftermath: was there any meaning? Judaism and Christianity after the Holocaust. What makes modern genocides modern. What makes the Holocaust different from other mass violence. Holocaust deniers and other modern forms of anti-Semitism. Inhumanity as strictly human choice. Humanity as an everlasting project.

**Readings:**
Helen P. Fry: *The Holocaust* (Christian-Jewish Dialogue–A Reader), pp. 43–73.
Optional:
Omer Bartov: *Seeking the Roots of Modern Genocide* (Specter of Genocide), pp. 75–96.

Week 13

**Oral Presentations**
Final Exam and Final Paper.