

Department of Religion and Culture  
Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University

JUD/HIST/RLCL 3494  
The Holocaust:  
History, Memory, Shadows

Fall 2016  
Prof. Samuel J. Kessler  
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Tuesday/Thursday  
9:30-10:45AM  
HUTCH 310

Office Hours:  
211 Major Williams Hall  
T/H 2-4PM

Final Exam:  
10:05AM, Thursday, December 15

The “Holocaust” (Hebrew: *Shoah*; Yiddish: *Horban*) as word and idea has a potent force in contemporary society. International leaders who oversee acts of human atrocity are often called “fascist,” “Nazi,” or “like Hitler.” Anti-Semitism, an integral but complex antecedent to the events of the Holocaust, continues to be a focus of international condemnation and opprobrium, though likewise of recurring frequency. This course is designed to be both historical and contemporary, meant to give students a thorough knowledge of the Second World War and the destruction of the Jewish communities of Europe so that they can better understand Holocaust references and their political power in our present time. In the final part of the course, we will examine the many ways the Holocaust appears in contemporary discourse, and discuss whether it can be successfully decoupled from broader issues of anti-Semitic or anti-Zionist rhetoric.

But first, the course will focus on primary questions. What was the Holocaust itself? Why did it happen mainly in Eastern and Central Europe? What were its antecedents? Is Germany the only culpable belligerent? In the wider context of the Second World War, what does culpability even mean? Do numbers matter? Why is mass death in a camp or factory different from mass death on the field of battle?

The semester is organized around the examination of primary and secondary sources: memoirs, photographs, films, and scholarly histories. It is divided into five units: (1) Historical Jewish Communities in Europe, (2) Europe on the Eve of War, (3) Outbreak of the Second World War, (4) The Murder of European Jewry, and (5) Shadows and Memories. These units are meant to suggest pathways of thought and avenues of approach, along which we can develop our study of the Holocaust, its precedents, and its consequences. The murder of Jews, state-sponsored or otherwise, did not begin with Germany in 1933, nor did it end there. Jews remain today targets in Europe and elsewhere simply for their existence as Jews. In the shadow of the Holocaust, however, each threat, let alone each death, immediately recalls images from the killing factories of Eastern Europe and the

loading docks of Drancy, placing a moral urgency on thinkers and politicians to bring to fruition the oft-repeated dedication “never again.”

All readings for this course will be available as PDF documents on Canvas unless listed below as Required Texts. (All required texts are available at the Virginia Tech University Bookstore, Amazon.com, or through the publisher’s website.) Readings should be completed before the Tuesday lecture for the week that they are listed. You are required to bring a printed copy of the week’s reading to each class period (although you may bring the texts on a tablet computer but not a laptop computer.) You are responsible for checking your VT email regularly for communications about the course. The VT Writing Center provides helpful overviews and links for improving your writing. They also have appointment services available to help edit papers or discuss the writing process with a tutor.

This class has no prerequisites. The professor reserves the right to make changes to the syllabus, which includes assignment due dates. These changes will be announced as early as possible.

### Guidelines and Policies

#### *Accessibility Resource Policy*

Those who qualify under the VT policies and guidelines for reasonable accommodation should alert the professor privately at the start of the semester. Information concerning programs through University ADA Services can be found [here](#).

#### *Assignment Policies*

All assignments are to be submitted online before 9:30PM on the day they are due. You will be penalized 10% for each day a paper is late. Papers submitted over one week after the deadline will not be accepted. If you are ill or have a family emergency you must upload papers before 9:30PM on the due date.

All assignments must be written in 12-point font, Times New Roman or Garamond, with 1-inch margins. They are to be submit in either .doc or .pdf formats only.

You may not contact the professor about papers or exams beginning 24-hours prior to their due date.

#### *University Honor Code*

The Undergraduate Honor Code pledge that each member of the university community agrees to abide by states:

*“As a Hokie, I will conduct myself with honor and integrity at all times.”*

Students enrolled in this course are responsible for abiding by the Honor Code. A student who has doubts about how the Honor Code applies to any assignment is responsible for obtaining specific guidance from the course instructor before submitting the assignment for evaluation. Ignorance of the rules does not exclude any member of the University community from the requirements and expectations of the Honor Code.

For additional information about the Honor Code, please visit:  
<https://www.honorsystem.vt.edu/>

*Honor Code Pledge for Assignments:*

The Virginia Tech honor pledge for assignments is as follows:

*"I have neither given nor received unauthorized assistance on this assignment."*

The pledge is to be written out on all graded assignments at the university and signed by the student. The honor pledge represents both an expression of the student's support of the honor code and an unambiguous acknowledgment that the student has, on the assignment in question, abided by the obligation that the Honor Code entails. In the absence of a written honor pledge, the Honor Code still applies to an assignment.

1. All assignments submitted shall be considered "graded work," and all aspects of your coursework are covered by the Honor Code. All projects and homework assignments are to be completed individually unless otherwise specified.

2. Commission of any of the following acts shall constitute academic misconduct. This listing is not, however, exclusive of other acts that may reasonably be said to constitute academic misconduct. Clarification is provided for each definition with some examples of prohibited behaviors in the Undergraduate Honor Code Manual located at: <https://www.honorsystem.vt.edu/>

A. CHEATING

Cheating includes the intentional use of unauthorized materials, information, notes, study aids or other devices or materials in any academic exercise, or attempts thereof.

B. PLAGIARISM

Plagiarism includes the copying of the language, structure, programming, computer code, ideas, and/or thoughts of another and passing off the same as one's own original work, or attempts thereof.

C. FALSIFICATION

Falsification includes the statement of any untruth, either verbally or in writing, with respect to any element of one's academic work, or attempts thereof.

D. FABRICATION

Fabrication includes making up data and results, and recording or reporting them, or submitting fabricated documents, or attempts thereof.

E. MULTIPLE SUBMISSION

Multiple submission involves the submission for credit—without authorization of the instructor receiving the work—of substantial portions of any work (including oral reports) previously submitted for credit at any academic institution, or attempts thereof.

F. COMPLICITY

Complicity includes intentionally helping another to engage in an act of academic misconduct, or attempts thereof.

G. VIOLATION OF UNIVERSITY, COLLEGE, DEPARTMENTAL, PROGRAM, COURSE, OR FACULTY RULES

The violation of any University, College, Departmental, Program, Course, or Faculty Rules relating to academic matters that may lead to an unfair

academic advantage by the student violating the rule(s).

### Required Texts

- Imre Kertész, *Fatelessness*, trans. Tim Wilkinson (Vintage, 2014) [\$15.95]
- Jan T. Gross, *Neighbors: The Destruction of the Jewish Community in Jedwabne, Poland* (Penguin, 2002) [\$17.00]
- Christopher Browning, *Ordinary Men: Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland* (Harper Perennial, 1998) [\$15.99]
- Primo Levi, *Survival in Auschwitz* (Touchstone, 1996) [\$16.00]
- Elie Wiesel, *Night* (Hill and Wang, 2006) [\$9.95]
- Andre Singer, “Night Will Fall”  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ROAjbKnBITA> [\$2.99]  
<http://documentaryheaven.com/night-will-fall/> [Free]

### Course Assignments and Expectations

#### *Class Attendance and Participation*

Attendance will be taken during each class period. If you arrive late and attendance has already been taken, you are responsible for alerting the professor to your presence. Arrivals more than ten minutes after class begins, or continuous tardiness, will be counted as absence. More than two unexcused absences will impact your final grade by 2% per absence. If you have more than six unexcused absences you cannot receive a course grade higher than a C. Please notify the professor as soon as possible for absences related to illness or family emergencies. For more information, the VT Class Attendance Policy can be found [here](#).

Class participation points are based on the following criteria: arriving in class on time; being awake and attentive during lecture; being responsive and active during discussions and small group activities; respectfully listening when others are speaking; and being engaged in the course without checking your mobile devices or non-class related webpages. Failure to meet these criteria will result in the loss of participation points throughout the semester.

#### *Reading Reviews* (2 pages, double-spaced)

During the semester you must write three reading reviews of texts from the course. These reviews must demonstrate your comprehension of the text, and should include a one-paragraph summary, an explanation of the text’s core thesis or purpose, and a discussion of the historical/social significance of the text. You must write at least one review before the midterm and a second before Thanksgiving.

#### *First Paper: Analysis of Anti-Semitic Propaganda* (4 pages, double-spaced)

For this first paper I will provide examples of anti-Semitic propaganda that circulated in Europe before the onset of the Second World War. You will need to choose one of these examples and analyze its content, form, overt and subtle messages, and suggest an audience for whom it was intended.

**(Due Thursday, September 29, in class)**

#### *Midterm*

For the midterm exam you will be asked a set of historical questions, divided into two parts. Part One will ask you to define a set of terms that featured prominently in the first half of the semester. These might be historical figures, geographical locations, political ideologies, or military operations. You will be provided with a list of terms prior to the exam. Part Two will be an essay question. You will be provided with three quotations from the course readings and, through them, asked to narrate a history of Jewish life and anti-Semitism in pre-War European society.

**(Tuesday, October 11)**

*Second Paper: The Holocaust on Film* (5 pages, double-spaced)

The second paper is a formal analysis of a feature film that depicts some aspect of the Holocaust. You will need to provide a brief synopsis of the story, but should focus most of your writing on how the director, actors, and cinematography strive to recreate for the audience the experience of the Holocaust. What aspects of that event does the film accentuate? What does it downplay? How is the viewer drawn to certain characters or events, and what does the film say about the relationship between perpetrator and victim? Chose two or three of these questions to write about in depth. A list of Holocaust films can be found at: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_Holocaust\\_films](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_Holocaust_films)

**(Due Thursday, November 10, in class)**

*Final Exam*

The final exam will ask you to write two essays that address topics from class readings and class discussions. The final will be cumulative. The first essay will be historical in nature, and you will need to demonstrate an ability to explain various aspects of the Third Reich, the Second World War, and the destruction of the historic Jewish communities of Europe. The second essay will address contemporary issues in Holocaust commemoration, denial, and anti-Semitism. For each question you will be responsible for analyzing, and synthesizing at least four course readings.

**The final exam will be at 10:05AM, Thursday, December 15**

#### Grading

Class Attendance and Participation	5
Reading Reviews	15
First Paper	20
Midterm	20
Second Paper	20
Final Exam	<u>20</u>
	100

### Schedule

#### Week 1: August 23-25

Introduction: Why the Holocaust? Why the Jews?

*Watch* (for Thursday)

Andre Singer, "Night Will Fall" (Length 1:14:50)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ROAjbKwBITA>

<http://documentaryheaven.com/night-will-fall/>

*Suggested Reading*

- Konrad Jarausch, *Out of Ashes: A New History of Europe in the Twentieth Century*, pp. 341-368 (Canvas)

#### *Historical Jewish Communities in Europe*

#### Week 2: August 30-September 1

European Jewry Before 1933 (Part 1): Eastern Europe

*Readings*

- Abraham Joshua Heschel, *The Earth is the Lord's: The Inner World of the Jew in Eastern Europe*, pp. 7-22, 45-50, 56-60 (Canvas)
- Elie Wiesel, *Night*

[*Suggested to Watch*]

- Marian Marzynski, "Shtetl" (Length 2:54:41)  
<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shtetl/>

#### Week 3: September 6-8

European Jewry Before 1933 (Part 2): Western Europe

*Reading*

- Amos Elon, *The Pity of It All*, pp. 221-258 (Canvas)

#### *Europe on the Eve of War*

#### Week 4: September 13-15

Anti-Semitism in Europe and the Third Reich

*Readings*

- David Nirenberg, *Anti-Judaism: The Western Tradition*, pp. 423-459 (Canvas)
- Saul Friedländer, *Nazi Germany and the Jews: The Years of Persecution*. pp. 9-40 (Canvas)

#### Week 5: September 20-22

Victims and Victimhood in Interwar Europe

*Readings*

- Guenter Lewy, *The Nazi Persecution of the Gypsies*, pp. 1-14, 218-228 (Canvas)
- Timothy Snyder, *Bloodlands: Europe Between Hitler and Stalin*, pp. 1-20 (Canvas)

#### *Outbreak of the Second World War*

#### Week 6: September 27-29

The Occupation of France, the Destruction of Poland, and Operations Barbarossa and Rheinhard

*Readings*

- Max Hastings, *Inferno: The World at War, 1939-1945*, pp. 3-25, 137-161 (Canvas)

- Julian Jackson, *France: The Dark Years, 1940-1944* (Canvas)

**(First Paper Due: September 29, in class)**

Week 7: October 4-6

**\*Note: No class on October 4: *Rosh Hashanah***

Women Soldiers; Women's Bodies

*Readings*

- Jill Stephenson, *Women in Nazi Germany*, pp. 1-20 (Canvas)
- Beverley Chalmers, *Birth, Sex, and Abuse: Women's Voices Under Nazi Rule* (Canvas)

*The Murder of European Jewry*

Week 8: October 11-13

An Unexpected Deportation

*Reading*

- Imre Kertész, *Fatelessness*

*Suggested Reading*

- "Child of Auschwitz: Imre Kertész" in Ruth Franklin, *A Thousand Darknenses: Lies and Truth in Holocaust Fiction* (Canvas)

**(Midterm Exam: Tuesday, October 11)**

Week 9: October 18-20

The Extent of the Destruction

*Readings*

- Jan T. Gross, *Neighbors: The Destruction of the Jewish Community in Jedwabne, Poland*, pp. xv-114

*Suggested Reading*

- Timothy Snyder, "Holocaust: The Ignored Reality" (Canvas)

Week 10: October 25-27

Auschwitz

*Reading*

Primo Levi, *Survival in Auschwitz*

**\*Guest lecture: Thursday, October 27 by Maya Benton (+1.5% extra credit)**

Week 11: November 1-3

Those Who Did the Killing

*Reading*

- Christopher Browning, *Ordinary Men: Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland*, pp. xv-77, 159-189

**\*Guest lecture: Monday, October 31 by Aimee Pozorski and Maren Scheurer (+1.5% extra credit)**

*Shadows and Memories*

Week 12: November 8-10

**\*Note: Election Day, November 8: VOTE!**

## Holocaust Memorialization

*Readings*

- Oren Baruch Stier, *Holocaust Icons: Symbolizing the Shoah in History and Memory* (Canvas)
- Jennifer Hanson-Glucklich, *Holocaust Memory Reframed: Museums and the Challenges of Representation* (Canvas)

**(Second Paper Due: November 10, in class)**Week 13: November 15-17

## Holocaust Denial &amp; Holocaust Jeering

*Readings*

- Deborah Lipstadt, *Denying the Holocaust: The Growing Assault on Truth and Memory*, pp. 1-30 (Canvas)
- Matthias Küntzel, “Iranian Holocaust Denial and the Internet” (Canvas)
- Dana Schwartz, “An Open Letter to Jared Kushner, From One of Your Jewish Employees” (Canvas)

**\*Thanksgiving Break: November 21-25**Week 14: November 29-December 1

## Anti-Semitism, Anti-Zionism, and the Holocaust

*Readings*

- John-Paul Pagano, “Anti-Racism Erases Anti-Semitism” (Canvas)
- Ari Shavit, “Grass and the Mute Left” (Canvas)
- Robert S. Wistrich, *A Lethal Obsession: Anti-Semitism from Antiquity to the Global Jihad* (Canvas)

Week 15: December 6

## Who Are We Today?

*Readings*

- Tony Judt, “From the House of the Dead: On Modern European Memory” (Canvas)

**Final Exam: 10:05AM, Thursday, December 15**

“Like a corpse trampled underfoot, you will not join them in burial, for you have destroyed your land and killed your people. Let the offspring of the wicked never be mentioned again. Prepare a place to slaughter his children for the sins of their ancestors; they are not to rise to inherit the land and cover the earth with their cities.” (Isaiah 14: 20-21)

“As the Master said: While Rabbi Akiva was dying, Rabbi [Yehuda HaNasi] was born; while Rabbi was dying, Rav Yehuda was born; while Rav Yehuda was dying, Rava was born; while Rava was dying, Rav Ashi was born. [This] teaches you that a righteous person does not leave the world before an equally righteous person is created, as it is stated: ‘The sun also rises and the sun also sets’ [Ecclesiastes 1:5].” (Babylonian Talmud *Kiddushin* 72b)