

**History 3416G**  
**The Holocaust**  
**Winter 2025**

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This is a **draft** outline. Please see the course site on OWL Brightspace for a final version.

**Course Description**

This course examines the largely successful effort of Nazi Germany to murder the Jews of Europe, as well as other large-scale programs of murder it conducted against the cultural and political leaders of Poland and Poles who resisted Nazi domination in any way; Soviet prisoners of war; Roma and Sinti; and mentally handicapped individuals, especially but not only in Germany. We examine the larger causes of these crimes, the beliefs, political goals, and circumstances that made such crimes seem both possible and – to Nazi leaders and a not insignificant number of their followers – desirable. We examine how these crimes were carried out, by whom, and at whose direction. We examine the assistance provided by certain of Germany's allies and neutral states, and sometimes the people of conquered countries. We also examine resistance to Hitler's orders, within Germany, among Jews, and in the countries Germany occupied, and the responses of the states fighting Germany.

**Prerequisite(s):**

1.0 History course at the 2200 level or above.

**Antirequisite(s):**

The former History 3427E.

**Course Syllabus**

As the course description indicates, this course will examine very disturbing subjects. The texts we read and the documentary excerpts that we view may cause great distress. To take this class you must be prepared for such emotions. In popular culture there is often an attempt to find a happy ending, a silver lining, even in the most terrible historical episodes. This class focuses on the evidence and its interpretation. There are very few silver linings.

Because the literature on the Holocaust is vast, composing the syllabus for this course involved making choices about the subjects to be covered. One of the choices concerns the countries on which we will principally focus. We examine closely the development of policy in Germany, including the roles of Hitler, the SS, and the German

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army. A significant amount of attention is devoted to Poland and to the conquered territories of the Soviet Union. Less attention is paid to other countries whose governments or populations were pressured to join, or joined voluntarily, in policies of persecution and murder. The course focuses on those regions where most killing took place. In examining the responses to these events of Germany's enemies, we focus especially on Canada, in part because a fine book was written on this subject and because this course is offered at a Canadian university. A more complete treatment of the subject would examine in more detail the responses of the other countries that fought Germany, and also of the Protestant, Catholic, and Orthodox churches. We devote only a modest amount of time to examining the prosecution, or failure to prosecute, those responsible for the crimes we examine, and to the ways in which the Holocaust has come to be remembered and discussed in the popular media, in educational institutions, and in other public forums. A class lasting one semester cannot cover all aspects of this subject.

Although the events examined in this class took place over two generations ago, historians continue to deepen our understanding of the subject. The generational change in Germany in the 1970s and 1980s resulted in probing works of history that were extremely difficult to research or publish earlier. In this class we read several examples, including Christian Streit's article on the German army's treatment of Soviet POWs, based on an earlier book published in German, as well as Juergen Forster's examination of the German army's planning for the invasion of the Soviet Union. The collapse of the Soviet Union and its empire between 1989 and 1991 also led to numerous new studies, both because of new access to sources and because historians from the countries of the former Eastern bloc were permitted to ask previously forbidden questions. For a range of reasons the leaders of the Soviet Union sought to prevent investigation into the specifically antisemitic character of Nazi policies, and also many aspects of the conduct of the inhabitants of those parts of the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe conquered by Germany. These barriers to exploring archives and memories of this period are no longer as rigid. Jan Grabowski's study of the experience of Jews in one rural district of Poland between 1942 and 1944 is a product of this change, as is Omer Bartov's study of the Holocaust in the town of Buczacz (now Buchach), now in western Ukraine. Among the aspects of the history of the period that has attracted significant attention in the past several decades is the experience of women. We read excerpts from one exemplary study with this focus, Marion Kaplan's *Between Dignity and Despair*. Finally, it sometimes requires time and a great deal of reflection for the most thoughtful histories of such a period to be written. Saul Friedlaender's *Nazi Germany and the Jews: The Years of Extermination*, is such a work; numerous excerpts from it are assigned.

Since the 1980s the attention paid to the Holocaust in Europe and North America has been challenged by individuals and groups who see this focus as a species of Eurocentrism, or a means to legitimize the state of Israel, or to distract from the crimes Europeans, especially the British and French, committed in their colonial empires, or simply a privileging of a particular set of crimes that cannot be objectively justified. We will consider some of these claims at the end of the course.

Finally, a word about nomenclature. The term Holocaust is derived from the Greek *holokauston*, meaning a burnt offering to the gods. Part of this original meaning clearly is completely out of place, false. Those murdered were in no sense a sacrifice to the gods. The term has been applied to the mass killing of Jews and members of other groups by Nazi Germany presumably because the image of burning bodies, dead and sometimes also alive, both reflects the historical reality and also conveys some of the horror that these historical events should – usage of the term suggests – make us feel. The word Shoah, the Hebrew term meaning calamity, is to my knowledge used to refer exclusively to the killing of European Jews. It, like the term genocide, is more abstract. The term Holocaust has increasingly been understood, as used here, to refer to the entire complex of Nazi programs of mass killing. Studying these crimes together helps us understand the reasons for each.

### **Learning outcomes**

Students who pass this class will be able to:

- Explain the reasons for the intensification of antisemitic feeling in Germany and other European countries from the middle of the nineteenth century, and in particular after the Russian Revolution and the First World War;

- Explain how and in what stages the Nazi regime persecuted and then murdered Jews, and the reasons for its other programs of murder;

- Explain the responses to these murders of the peoples of different countries in occupied Europe, and also foreign observers and governments;

- Explain Jewish responses to the existential threat posed by Nazi rule;

- Construct analytic, logical, and clear historical arguments in essays on a range of assigned subjects;

- Actively engage in analytic discussions of the assigned materials.

### **Methods of Evaluation**

Contributions to class discussions. Students are expected to participate periodically in class discussions. In calling on students, the instructor will give priority to students who have not commented previously in a class, or in recent classes. Students will be able to earn full credit in this part of the class if they respond to a question posed by the instructor on an average of once every two weeks, or at least six times in the course of the semester, and the answers they give reflect a careful reading of the assigned sources. Quality, not quantity or length, is the key.

10%

Part of the course grade will be based on in-class written responses to questions on the assigned readings or, in some classes, regarding excerpts from documentaries shown in class. All classes will have at least one such written assignment. If there are two response papers in a single class, the average of the two marks will determine the response paper grade for that class. In calculating the grade for this part of the course, the lowest mark for the term for one class will not be counted. The in-class written assignments may be made up after the class takes place only on the basis of a request for

an accommodation from the student's Academic Counseling Office. Students who know they must miss a class in advance may see the instructor to write the response paper before the class without seeking a request for an accommodation from their Academic Counseling Office. The questions posed in response papers assigned before or after the class may differ from the questions posed in the class.

30%

Three essays, each approximately six to eight pages (1700-2500 words) in length. Essays are due on the dates found in the final syllabus, available on the course OWL Brightspace website. All due dates are the day before discussion of the text will take place in class. Essays must be submitted to the Assignments section of the course OWL website by 10:00pm on the due date. No research is required for the essays beyond the assigned text and related materials that are part of the course assignments. **Students who miss the deadline for the submission of an essay will be assigned a different question based on a different source, unless the essay is submitted before the start of the class on the following day. Essays submitted after the 10:00 pm deadline but before the start of class will be marked down by one point. The grade on the alternative essay question and sources will be marked down by ten points on a hundred point scale to reflect the failure to meet the original deadline for submission. Note that the alternative essays may be based on texts not part of the assigned reading for the course. If a request for an accommodation is received from an Academic Counseling Office, this may lead to a waiving of the ten point penalty, but it will not change the requirement to write a different essay on a different subject if the deadline described above is missed. Please note that all response papers and essays must be submitted by midnight on Friday, April 4th, the last day of class. Any work submitted after the last day of classes must be approved by the student's Academic Counseling Office.**

20% for each essay

**There will be no mid-term or final examination in this class.**

### **Essay Questions and Due Dates:**

**Week Five:** This essay assignment is based on Primo Levi, *Survival in Auschwitz. The Nazi Assault on Humanity*, trans. by Stuart Woolf (Collier Books, 1993).

On page 87 of Levi's book he writes that he does not accept what he calls "the most facile and obvious deduction" suggested by the conduct of prisoners and those in positions of authority at Auschwitz, that "man is fundamentally brutal, egoistic and stupid in his conduct once every civilized institution is taken away . . . ." He suggests that there are other "fundamental values" that can be learned from an examination of behavior in the camp. What are the fundamental values that Levi writes that he learned from his experience as a prisoner in Auschwitz? Please base your analysis on examples from the

assigned text; there is no reason to do any further reading. Please use standard footnote form when citing from Levi's book.

**Week Eight:** Jan Grabowski, *Hunt for the Jews. Betrayal and Murder in German-Occupied Poland* (Indiana University Press, 2013).

Based on Jan Grabowski's book, how can one explain the conduct of non-Jewish Poles towards Jews seeking to escape murder at the hands of the German occupiers in Dabrowa Tarnowska County between the start of 1942 and January of 1945? You may also, if you wish, refer to other assigned documents and class materials that shed light on the relationship between Christian Poles and Polish Jews, even though none of this material relates directly to Dabrowa Tarnowska County. Note that while you must discuss Grabowski's claims, you need not agree with his conclusions. Again, please use standard footnote form when citing from sources.

**Week Ten:** Irving Abella and Harold Troper, *None is Too Many. Canada and the Jews of Europe 1933-1945* (University of Toronto Press, 2012), 1-189. In responding to the question please also consider the assigned selection from Bernard Wasserstein, *Britain and the Jews of Europe 1939-1945* (Oxford University Press, 1988), 134-82.

Based on the assigned texts noted above, how can one explain the policies of Canada and Britain regarding the immigration of Jewish refugees from Germany and then Europe between 1933 and 1945? In the case of Canada, the question refers to immigration to Canada, with respect to Britain, it refers to immigration to both Britain and Palestine, which Britain at the time governed.

**Alternative essay topic for Week Ten:** Students who have access to Bernard Wasserstein, *Britain and the Jews of Europe 1939-1945*, any edition, may instead write on the following question, based on the entirety of that book: "Based on Bernard Wasserstein's account, how can one explain the policies adopted by the British government in response to the desperate efforts of Jews to flee Germany and, from 1938, the various countries conquered by Germany?"

### **Course Materials**

Irving Abella and Harold Troper, *None is Too Many. Canada and the Jews of Europe 1933-1945* (University of Toronto Press, 2012).

Jan Grabowski, *Hunt for the Jews. Betrayal and Murder in German-Occupied Poland* (Indiana University Press, 2013).

Peter Kenez, *The Coming of the Holocaust. From Antisemitism to Genocide* (Cambridge, 2013).

Primo Levi, *Survival in Auschwitz. The Nazi Assault on Humanity*, trans. by Stuart Woolf (Collier Books, 1993).

I have also given students the chance to write an essay based on Bernard Wasserstein's *Britain and the Jews of Europe 1939-1945*. The book has been published in several editions by different presses, in 1979, 1988, and 1999. Any of these versions are fine. Unfortunately, because it is out of print, I was unable to order it for the class. I have placed four copies on reserve at Weldon Library. Students interested in writing an essay based on it will either have to borrow one of the copies found in the Western library system, or find it in a different library, or order a used copy on-line.

In addition to the assigned books, which will be available in the Western bookstore, the course will assign selections from numerous other secondary and, to a more limited extent, primary, sources, found in the Resources section of the course website. These documents will also be available for purchase in a coursebook from the Western bookstore.

## **Course Schedule and Readings**

### **Week One            Introduction. European history and European Jews in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries; European antisemitism**

Peter Kenez, *The Coming of the Holocaust. From Antisemitism to Genocide* (Cambridge University Press, 2013), 1-87.

Peter Pulzer, "The Return of Old Hatreds," in *German-Jewish History in Modern Times*, Vol. 3, *Integration in Dispute 1871-1918*, Michael Meyer, Michael Brenner, eds. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 196-209, 231-234, 237-251.

Peter Pulzer, "The First World War," in *German-Jewish History in Modern Times*, Vol. 3, *Integration in Dispute 1871-1918*, Michael Meyer, Michael Brenner, eds. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 360-384.

Michael Marrus, "The Theory and Practice of Anti-Semitism," *Commentary* 76:6 (August, 1982), 38-42.

Todd Endelman, "Comparative perspectives on Modern Anti-Semitism in the West," in *History and Hate: the Dimensions of Anti-Semitism*, ed. by David Berger, (Philadelphia, 1986), 95-114.

### **Week Two            Nazi Plans for German Jews; The pre-war years of Nazi rule**

Kenez, *The Coming of the Holocaust*, 88-123.

Nazi Party Platform, 1920





Primo Levi, *Survival in Auschwitz. The Nazi Assault on Humanity*, trans. by Stuart Woolf (Collier Books, 1993).

**Essay question for the Primo Levi essay:**

**Please respond to the following question: On page 87 of Levi's book he writes that he does not accept what he calls "the most facile and obvious deduction" suggested by the conduct of prisoners and those in positions of authority at Auschwitz, that "man is fundamentally brutal, egoistic and stupid in his conduct once every civilized institution is taken away . . . ." He suggests that there are other "fundamental values" that can be learned from an examination of behavior in this labor and extermination camp. What are the fundamental values that Levi writes that he learned from his experience as a prisoner in Auschwitz? Please base your analysis on examples from the assigned text; there is no reason to do any further reading. Please use standard footnote form when citing from Levi's book.**

**The essay is due on the day before the class, at 10:00 pm. Please submit the essay to the assignment section of the course OWL Brightspace website.**

Michael Burleigh and Wolfgang Wipperman, *The Racial State: Germany 1933-1945* (Cambridge University Press, 1992), 113-27.

**Week Six                      Jewish responses**

Leni Yahil, *The Holocaust. The Fate of European Jewry, 1932-1945* (Oxford University Press, 1990), 457-67, 479-93.

Yehuda Bauer, *Rethinking the Holocaust* (Yale University Press, 2001), 119-51.

Samuel Kassow, *Who Will Write Our History? Emanuel Ringelbaum, the Warsaw Ghetto, and the Oyneg Shabes Archive* (Indiana University Press, 2007), 209-24, 285-99.

Nechama Tec, *Dry Tears. The Story of a Lost Childhood* (Oxford University Press, 1984), 60-65, 141-44, 194-203.

**Week Seven                      No class - winter term reading week**

**Week Eight                      Assistance from German allies in the project of mass murder. Responses of bystanders. Essay due on Jan Grabowski's *Hunt for the Jews***

Kenez, *The Coming of the Holocaust*, 176-95, 205-234, 235-236

Jan Grabowski, *Hunt for the Jews*.

Prof. Grzegorz Berendt's response to Jan Grabowski's book

Zygmunt Klukowski, *Diary from the Years of Occupation, 1939-44*, trans. by George Klukowski (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993), 184-201. Dr. Klukowski was a physician in a town that is now in the southeast of Poland.

Martin Gilbert, *The Righteous. The Unsung Heroes of the Holocaust* (New York: Henry Holt, 2003), 101-27.

**Based on Jan Grabowski's account in *Hunt for the Jews*, which will be discussed in class, how can one explain the conduct of non-Jewish Poles towards Jews seeking to escape murder at the hands of the German occupiers in Dabrowa Tarnowska County between the start of 1942 and January 1945?**

You may also, if you wish, refer to other assigned documents and class materials that shed light on the relationship between Christian Poles and Polish Jews, even though none of this material relates directly to Dabrowa Tarnowska County.

**The essay is due on the day before the class, at 10:00 pm. Please submit the essay to the assignment section of the course OWL Brightspace website.**

## **Week Nine            What Germans knew of the Holocaust. Responses of the Catholic Church**

Walter Laqueur, *The Terrible Secret. Suppression of the Truth about Hitler's 'Final Solution'* (Little, Brown: 1980), 17-35, 229-35.

David Bankier, *The Germans and the Final Solution. Public Opinion under Nazism* (Blackwell, 1992), 101-15.

Sönke Neitzel, *Tapping Hitler's Generals. Transcripts of Secret Conversations, 1942-1945* (Frontline Books, 2007), 7-11, 167-71, 228-31.

Friedlaender, *The Years of Extermination*, 510-17, 559-73.

Guenter Lewy, *The Catholic Church and Nazi Germany* (Da Capo Press, 2000; original 1964), 284-93.

**Week Ten**                    **Attempts to rescue Jews, or to resist the Nazi regime on moral grounds. Responses to the Nazi persecution and the Holocaust of Britain, Canada, and the Soviet Union. Essay due on Abella and Troper's *None is Too Many***

Leni Yahil, *The Holocaust*, 573-621.

Martin Gilbert, *The Righteous. The Unsung Heroes of the Holocaust* (New York: Henry Holt, 2003), 181-97, 387-95.

John Michalczyk, *Confront: Resistance in Nazi Germany* (Peter Lang, 2004), 196-205. Please note that this account of the White Rose resistance group was written by Georg (Juergen) Wittenstein, who participated in some of the activities of the group but was spared execution in 1943.

Fliers of the White Rose group, from *Nazism 1919-1945. A Documentary Reader*, ed. by J. Noakes and G. Pridham, vol. 4, *The German Home Front in World War II* (Exeter: 1984), 456-9.

Bernard Wasserstein, *Britain and the Jews of Europe 1939-1945* (Clarendon Press, 1979), 134-82 (Chapter Four: "The 'Final Solution'").

Irving Abella and Harold Troper, *None is Too Many. Canada and the Jews of Europe 1933-1945* (University of Toronto Press, 2012), 1-189

**Please submit an essay based on the following question to the Assignments section of the class OWL website based on the assigned reading from Irving Abella and Harold Troper, *None is Too Many. Canada and the Jews of Europe 1933-1945* (University of Toronto Press, 2012), 1-189; and Bernard Wasserstein, *Britain and the Jews of Europe 1939-1945* (Oxford University Press, 1988), 134-82.**

Based on the assigned texts noted above, how can one explain the policies of Canada and Britain regarding the immigration of Jewish refugees from Germany and then Europe between 1933 and 1945? In the case of Canada, the question refers to immigration to Canada, with respect to Britain, it refers to immigration to both Britain and Palestine, which Britain at the time governed.

**Alternative essay topic for Week Ten:** Students who obtain a copy of Bernard Wasserstein, *Britain and the Jews of Europe 1939-1945*, any edition, may instead write on the following question, based on the entirety of that book: "Based on Bernard Wasserstein's account, how can one explain the policies adopted by the British government in response to the desperate efforts of Jews to flee Germany and, from

1938, the various countries conquered by Germany?

**Week Eleven: Postwar trials. Compensating Victims. Holocaust denial**

Hilary Earl, *The SS-Einsatzgruppen Trial, 1945-1958. Atrocity, Law, and History* (Cambridge University Press, 2009), 46-58, 71-79, 90-95, 296-301.

Omer Bartov, "Guilt and Accountability in the Postwar Courtroom. The Holocaust in Czortkow and Buczacz, East Galicia, as seen in West German Legal Discourse," *Historical Reflections* 39:2 (2013): 96-123.

Marilyn Henry, "Fifty Years of Holocaust Compensation," *The American Jewish Yearbook* 102 (2002): 3-21, 26-35, 39-45, 52-71.

Please see the Resources section of the coursewebsite, document number 49, or [https://www-jstor-org.proxy1.lib.uwo.ca/stable/pdf/23604537.pdf?ab\\_segments=0%2Fbasic\\_SYC-5187\\_SYC-5188%2F5187&refreqid=fastly-default%3Aa506a7b8dac1230cb5c1bea89cc83518](https://www-jstor-org.proxy1.lib.uwo.ca/stable/pdf/23604537.pdf?ab_segments=0%2Fbasic_SYC-5187_SYC-5188%2F5187&refreqid=fastly-default%3Aa506a7b8dac1230cb5c1bea89cc83518)

Judgment of the court in *David Irving v Penguin Books and Deborah Lipstadt*, April 11, 2000, accessed on October 6, 2020 at <https://www.hdot.org/trial-materials/judgment-and-appeal/>). Please note that only a part of this judgment is assigned; the selections are found on the course website.

**Week Twelve The historiography of the Holocaust**

John Paul Himka, *Ukrainian Nationalists and the Holocaust. OUN and UPA's Participation in the Destruction of Ukrainian Jewry, 1941-1944* (ibidem Verlag: 2021), 21-67.

Other texts to be determined.

**Additional Statements**

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**Communication policies:** I am happy to speak with students during my weekly office hours. If this is not convenient, I am happy to arrange alternative times to meet. I am in my office most days of the week. Please write me at [enathans@uwo.ca](mailto:enathans@uwo.ca) to schedule a time to talk. I am also happy to talk by phone or via Zoom.

**Classroom behavior:** Please turn off cell phones and refrain from using any recording devices during the class. Please remove earbuds during the class.

**Use of generative artificial intelligence (AI):** Students may use artificial intelligence tools in studying for the class and in preparing essays. However, if you take language from an AI source, the words taken must be placed in quotation marks, and ideas footnoted, just as is the case with any other secondary source. I expect all essays for this class to be drawn from the assigned editions of texts. Essays with footnotes to sources other than the assigned sources will receive failing grades. Each essay must be primarily the student's own work, as is the case now with respect to the use of more conventional secondary sources. It may in fact be advisable to avoid AI as a source primarily because it may impede independent reflection. Note that AI often makes very general claims, and is likely not to reflect the particular conversations on which this course focuses.

Please review the Department of History's shared policies and statements for all undergraduate courses at: [https://history.uwo.ca/undergraduate/program\\_module\\_information/policies.html](https://history.uwo.ca/undergraduate/program_module_information/policies.html) for important information regarding accessibility options, make-up exams, medical accommodations, health and wellness, academic integrity, plagiarism, and more.