

INTL4625
The Holocaust and Contemporary German Politics
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Fall 2009
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The general thesis of this course is that World War II and the Holocaust continue to play a very important role in Germany today as well as the rest of Europe. At the end of the war, the European continent and Germany itself were reshaped both geographically and politically. The Jews, a thriving minority within Germany, Poland, the Soviet Union and other nations were virtually eliminated from European life, with most survivors going to Israel, the United States, or Canada. The war and the Holocaust divided Europe and changed its political face until the collapse of Communism and the reunification of Germany in 1990.

It is of interest not only to explore the Holocaust itself, but also to determine the extent to which the event still influences politics in Germany and other nations in the European Community. The settlement between the Jews and the Swiss banks, the compensation of slave laborers by the German government and industries, and the construction of the Berlin Holocaust Memorial are good illustrations of the contemporary relevance of the Holocaust. In Germany, attacks against foreigners and Jews have abated since the early years of reunification but anti-foreign sentiment and antisemitism have not disappeared. Political scientists are still attempting to explain much of the violence against Jews and foreigners which occurred during the 1990s. To what extent does the new German state have the potential to maintain democratic values and be stable in the face of domestic economic and political problems? What is the pattern of public opinion in Germany with regard to minorities and the Jews today? Is the current pattern of sometimes negative attitudes toward foreign workers a product of the past or is it a new phenomenon manifested by primarily by Right-wing youth? Did the war in the former Yugoslavia with its "ethnic cleansing" affect Germany and its willingness to accept refugees? How does the German concept of citizenship compare with other nations?

It is also important to note that racism, antisemitism, bigotry, and genocide are not confined to Germany. One only has to examine the trials at the Hague regarding crimes committed in the Yugoslavian civil war, the rise of the Freedom Party in Austria, and the slaughters in the Congo, Rwanda, and Sudan to realize that these issues extend to other contexts. It is interesting that the Office of Special Investigations (OSI) in the US Justice Department that formerly targeted Holocaust perpetrators in the US, is now focused on those who have committed crimes against Muslims (primarily in Bosnia). Of course, the central reason to study the Holocaust is to examine its causes in order to try to understand it, as best as we can, and to prevent it from happening elsewhere.

In order to explore these questions, we first have to examine the development of German politics and history during this century, with a major emphasis on the war and the Holocaust. We begin with a brief introduction to the modern German state, its emergence from totalitarianism in World War II, its division, and reunification. We then shift to a general

discussion of the concepts of stereotypes, prejudice, discrimination, and genocide. I also describe the history of the Jews as a people and a religion and how different types of antisemitism developed. In particular, I want to describe the conflicts between Jews and their practices/beliefs and the host cultures. It is universally agreed that the Holocaust did not occur overnight or abruptly but was the consequence of centuries of cultural conflict and bigotry. After exploring antisemitism in general, we devote some time to the emergence of German antisemitism. This is followed by lectures on the defeat of Germany in World War I, the signing of the Versailles Treaty, and the collapse of the Weimar Republic. We then turn to the rise of the Nazi party and the emergence of Adolf Hitler. I attempt to explain Hitler both as to how his political and antisemitic beliefs developed as well as aspects of his personal life.

We then move to Hitler's consolidation of power, the emergence of the totalitarian state, the Nuremberg Laws, and the persecution of the Jews in Germany during the 1930s. We discuss the war extensively, the decisions which led to the implementation of the Holocaust and explore in some depth the two primary instruments of killing: the Einsatzgruppen (the mobile killing units in Poland and the Soviet Union) and the camps (both "work" and death camps). Through the Browning book and other contemporary works we will attempt to understand the psychology of the killers. We ultimately discuss responsibility for this tragedy and describe rescue, gentiles who worked to save Jews, and the responsibility of the Western democracies, and religious institutions. I describe the fate of the survivors immediately after the war and how they adjusted and fared when they returned to a normal life. I plan to have survivors and children of survivors speak to the class. During the final weeks of the course, we swing back to contemporary Germany, its remarkable development since the war, and assess the prospects for the future of democracy in that nation.

Class Format

The primary format of the class consists of my lectures. During some classes, I will present a discussion question(s) during the lecture which details a certain concept or issue that I want you to think about. Toward the end of the class, to the greatest extent possible, I will reserve between 5 and 10 minutes for us to interact about the subject. I am hoping that this will get you to engage actively in the topics and to think critically about them. Some topics gear more naturally toward discussion, such as some of the books we read (e.g. *The Sunflower*) and on those days, we probably will not have a formal discussion question but will talk about the book more generally. Nor will we have discussion questions when viewing movies or having guest speakers.

Examinations and Papers

In addition to the readings (which are vital to keep up with), we will have a midterm examination and a final. The midterm will count 25 percent of the grade and the final will be 50 percent. Also, each student will write a short essay (five pages to seven pages, approximately) on some aspect of the Holocaust. It also will count 25 percent. The essay could deal with topics such as responsibility, the concept of collective guilt, analogies between the Holocaust and other incidents of genocide today (such as Bosnia, Cambodia, or Rwanda). These papers will be due on the day of the final examination. (Thursday, December 10). We can discuss this exercise as

the course proceeds and I have papers from previous classes available.

Attendance

I assume that since you have registered for the class that you are interested in this subject and consider it to be a serious intellectual enterprise. I will warn in advance that in order to do well in the class, you have to attend on a regular basis. The most important items which are tested are my lectures. The readings are very important but the lectures are designed to “dig out” the most important parts of the books, which can be very involved.

I do not have an attendance policy as such but I take attendance periodically. In border cases, when I am trying to evaluate a final grade, I often base my decision on attendance, which to me is an indicator of interest in the subject.

Academic Honesty

In accordance with the University Honor Code and Academic Honesty Policy, I am including the following statement: “All academic work must meet the standards included in ‘A Culture of Honesty.’ Students are responsible for informing themselves about those standards prior to performing any academic work.” The link to more detailed information about academic honesty can be found at: <http://www.uga.edu/ovpi/honesty/acadhon.htm>.

Readings

There are a number of ways to teach a course on the Holocaust and I have selected the following readings after a great deal of thought and experimentation. These have worked for me and students have enjoyed them.

Simon Green, Dan Hough, Alister Miskimmon, and Graham Timmins, *The Politics of the New Germany*

Marian A. Kaplan, *Between Dignity and Despair: Jewish Life in Nazi Germany*

Raul Hilberg, *The Destruction of the European Jews* (Student Edition).

Christopher R. Browning, *Ordinary Men*.

Primo Levi, *The Drowned and the Saved*.

Simon Wiesenthal, *The Sunflower*.

Jerome S. Legge, Jr., *Jews, Turks and Other Strangers: The Roots of Prejudice in Modern Germany*

Introduction to the Course (Monday, August 17)

The Development of the Modern German State (Wednesday, August 19)

Reading: Green, Hough, Miskimmon, and Timmins, *The Politics of the New Germany*, Introduction, Chapter 1

Stereotypes, Prejudice, Discrimination, and Genocide (Friday, August 21).

Reading: Legge, *Jews, Turks and Other Strangers: The Roots of Prejudice in Modern Germany*, Introduction

The Jews and their Religious Practices (Monday, August 24; Wednesday, August 26).

Reading: Kaplan, *Between Dignity and Despair*, (Complete by midterm).

The Nature of Antisemitism (Friday, August 28; Monday, August 31).

Readings: Hilberg, *The Destruction of the European Jews*, Chapter 1.

At some point you should start Browning, *Ordinary Men* which also has to be completed by the midterm.

The Collapse of Weimar, the Rise of Hitler and the Nazi Party, and the German Totalitarian State (Wednesday, September 2; Friday, September 4).

The Nuremberg Laws and the Jewish Persecution of the Jews (Wednesday, September 9).

Readings: Hilberg, Chapter 2, pp. 41-64.

The On-set of War and the Nature of the Violence: The German Invasion of Poland

(Friday, September 11; Monday, September 14; Wednesday, September 16).

During these three days, we will view the movie *Europa, Europa*. On the 21st, we will take some time to discuss the movie and the events of this time period.

Ghettoization and Deportation (Friday, September 18)

Reading: Hilberg, pp. 64-96.

The Invasion of the Soviet Union: The Beginning of the Final Solution (Monday, September 21; Wednesday, September 23)

Hilberg, Chapter 4.

Browning, *Ordinary Men* (entire book)

Midterm Examination (Friday, September 25).

Life and Death in the Concentration and Death Camps (Wednesday, September 30; Friday, October 2; Monday, October 5).

Hilberg, Chapters 5-7.

I will offer a few comments on the results of the German Federal Election which takes place on Sunday, September 27.

On one of these days, we will have a discussion with a Holocaust survivor in class and we also will discuss Levi's *The Drowned and the Saved*.

Rescue: Some Obvious Cases: Denmark, Hungary, Shanghai, Italy (Wednesday, October 7)

Hilberg, pp. 309-331.

Rescue: The More Complicated Circumstances (Friday, October 9). We will discuss the British reluctance to let Jews into Palestine, the prevalence of antisemitism in the US, isolationism in the US Congress, and the behavior of the US Jewish community.

Responsibility, Reconciliation, and the Concept of Forgiveness Discussion of Simon Wiesenthal, *The Sunflower* (Monday, October 12).

Film: Memories of Auschwitz with Eli Wiesel and Opra Winfrey (Wednesday, October 14).

Post-War Germany: Occupation (Friday, October 16, Monday, October 19).

Nazism and the Development of Post-war Political Institutions (Wednesday, October 21).

Movie: The Nasty Girl (Friday, October 23; Monday, October 26).

Nazi War Criminals in the United States—a case study—Karl Linnas and Genocide in Estonia (Wednesday, October 28).

Fall Break (October 29-October 30).

The Adenauer Years (Monday, November 2; Wednesday November 4).
Readings: Green, Hough, Miskimmon, and Timmons, Chapter 2.

The Grand Coalition and Ostpolitik (Friday, November 6; Monday, November 9).

The Schmidt and Kohl Years (Wednesday, November 11; Friday, November 13).
Readings: Green, Hough, Miskimmon, and Timmons, Chapter 3.

The Collapse of German Communism and Reunification (Monday, November 16, Wednesday, November 18).
Legge, Chapter 2.

Cracks in Democracy: the Rise of Extremist Parties in Germany and Austria (Friday, November 20).
Readings: Green, Hough, Miskimmon, and Timmons, Chapters 4-11 (start reading over Thanksgiving break and finish by the final).

Thanksgiving Break, (November 23-27).

Legge, Chapters 3-7 (read by the final).

German Minority Group Politics: Turks, Jews, Asylum-Seekers, and Aussiedler (Monday, November 30).

The Politics of the 1998 National Election and the Reform of the Citizenship Law

(Wednesday, December 2)

Discussion with Children of Holocaust Survivors (Friday, December 4).

German Politics in this Century: Prospects for the Future of German Democracy (Monday, December 7).

Readings: Legge, Postscript: The 2002 National Election.

Review for Final (Tuesday, December 8).

Final Examination (Thursday, December 10, noon-3pm). Papers are due at this time. I prefer to receive them in class instead of via e-mail but whatever is convenient is ok.