

Jan Grabowski

Course Description: The Extermination of Polish Jews, 1939-1945

In 1939, there were 3.3 million Jews in Poland, or about 10% of the total population of the Polish Republic. Polish Jews formed the largest Jewish community in Europe. In 1945, six years later, no more than 50,000 Jews remained alive in Poland. Almost 98.5% of Polish Jewry (excluding the 300,000 who fled the Germans and survived in the Soviet Union) have perished in the Holocaust. A nation rich in history, with its own traditions and language ceased to exist.

On September 1st, 1939, the German forces invaded Poland and – before the end of the month – completed the conquest of the country. The course will focus on the initial German policies directed against the Jews and, at the same time, it shall follow the reactions of the Jewish community in the face of new existential threats. The lectures will shed light on the creation of the ghettos, on the strategy of the Jewish leadership and on the plight of the Jewish masses. The course will explore the growing German terror and the implementation of the “Final Solution of the Jewish Question”- as Germans referred to the policies of mass extermination. The students will become familiar with the planning and the execution of the so-called “*Aktion Reinhard*”, as well as with the survival strategies pursued later by the Jews who avoided the 1942-43 deportations to the extermination camps. While learning about German perpetrators and Jewish victims, the students will also explore the attitudes of the Polish society and the Polish Catholic Church to the persecuted Jews. Although the course is geographically centered on Poland, it will place the discussed events in a broader, European, context.

SCHEDULES & DATES

Lecture 1. Polish Jews during the interwar period, 1918-1939. Polish-Jewish Relations during the 1930s. The *Machtübernahme* in Germany and the growth of anti-Semitism in pre-war Europe.

Readings: William W. Hagen, *Before the "Final Solution": Toward a Comparative Analysis of Political Anti-Semitism in Interwar Germany and Poland*, in: *The Journal of Modern History*, Vol. 68, No. 2 (Jun., 1996), pp. 351-381

Dariusz Libionka, “*Alien, Hostile, Dangerous*”: *The Image of the Jews and the “Jewish Question” in the Polish Catholic Press in the 1930s*.

Lecture 2. *Blitzkrieg* in Poland; Polish Jews under the German Occupation in the *Generalgouvernement*. Initial anti-Jewish measures and the creation of the ghettos.

Readings: Emmanuel Ringelblum, *Notes from the Warsaw Ghetto, Dec. 10, 1940 – April 14, 1941*. (please, read p. 97-147). New York, Schocken, 1974.

The Warsaw Diary of Adam Czerniakow

Lecture 3 : Inciting Hate: Anti-Jewish Propaganda: Films, Posters, Books and the Press.

Jan Grabowski, “*German Anti-Jewish Propaganda in the Generalgouvernement, 1939–1945: Inciting Hate through Posters, Films, and Exhibitions*”, *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 23, no. 3 (Winter 2009): 381–412

Lecture 4 , Jewish life and death in the ghettos: *Judenräte*; Jewish Police, Jewish Self-Help, German administrators and local enablers. Living conditions: rations, smuggling, work details - ghettos as “working units”.

Readings: Christopher Browning, *The Path to Genocide, chapter 2: “Nazi Ghettoization Policy, 1939-1941”*, p. 28-56.

B. Engelking, J. Leociak, *The Warsaw Ghetto. A Guide to the Perished City*, Yale University Press, 2008, p. Chapter: *The establishment of the Judenrat and its first period in office*; p. 139-167.

Excerpts from the diary of Abraham Lewin. A Cup of Tears : a diary of the Warsaw Ghetto, Oxford, 1988.

Lecture 5. The fate of the Polish Jews in the East: Holocaust by bullets: the invasion of the Soviet Union, *Einsatzgruppen*, Ponary. The “communal” genocides: Jedwabne, Radziłów, Wąsosz and the rest. Preparing ground for the “Final Solution” - German Special Courts [*Sondergerichte*] and the Jews.

Jan T. Gross – selected parts from “Neighbors”.

Lecture 6. The Wannsee conference. Planning and construction of the extermination camps. Holocaust in Poland as a self-financing policy of the German state. “Aktion Reinhardt” begins: The “Aktionen” - the liquidation of the ghettos in Generalgouvernement.

Reading: *Abraham Lewin – The Diary of the Great Deportation (chosen fragments)*

Calel Perechodnik, Am I A Murderer? Testament of a Jewish ghetto policeman, Boulder, Co, 1996, Chapter: “The Aktion” [in Otwock ghetto]

Lecture 7. A Case Study: The Liquidation of the Węgrow Ghetto, September 22-23, 1942.

Reading: *Shraga Feivel Bielawski: The Last Jew from Wegrow. The Memoirs of a Survivor of the Step-by-Step Genocide in Poland, Praeger, 1991, chapters to be indicated.*

Lecture 8. Judenjagd- hunting down the Jewish survivors. The “Blue” police, village guards, firefighters and the German police.

Jan Grabowski: “Rural Society and the Jews in Hiding: Elders, Night Watches, Firefighters, Hostages and Manhunts”, Yad Vashem Studies, 40 (1), 2012, p. 49-74

Lecture 9 Resistance: uprisings in the ghettos and in the camps.

Reading: *Israel Gutman, The Jews of Warsaw, 1939-1943. Ghetto, Underground, Revolt, Indiana University Press, Chapter 14: “Days of Battle”.*

Parts of Stroop’s Report, Parts of Katzmann’s Report

Lecture 10. World reacts to the Holocaust: Jan Karski’s testimony. World powers and the churches.

Readings TBA

Lecture 11 Surviving on the “Aryan side” among the gentiles: Poland, Holland and France compared. The “Shmaltzovniki” - blackmailers of the Jews.

Reading: *Michał Glowński: „The Black Seasons”. Northwestern University Press, Evanston, 2005, Chapters: “The Black Hour” and “A Quarter Hour Passes in a Pastry Shop”, p. 59-96.*

Lecture 12 The rescue dilemma: The Righteous. Individual and organized [institutional] help. Operation “Harvest Feast” [Erntefest] - November 1943 and the liquidation of the last ghettos. The last days of Emanuel Ringelblum.

Readings: TBA

Lecture 13 . Unhappy returns: Jewish survivors after the war, 1944-1948. Commemoration of the Holocaust in Poland Today.

Reading: *Jan T. Gross, Fear. Anti-Semitism in Poland after Auschwitz. An Essay in Historical Interpretation., Random House, NY, 2006, chapter III: “The Kielce Pogrom”.*

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Course Requirements:

- Weekly reading assignments: Each lecture will compliment one or more short articles or book chapters. Please complete each lesson’s reading before viewing the video lecture. Student assessment will be based on written work commensurate with the level you choose to take the class.
- Response papers: Students will have to submit twice a short response paper of approximately 1000 words, addressing an issue based on selected pieces of the course assigned reading.
- Final “short” paper, for those who opt for it: Length – approximately 3000 words. Students should submit proposal of 1-2 pages for final papers by the end of December 2017. A proposal should include research question, a brief explanation about the

literature on the topic, methodological considerations, table of contents and bibliography. Final papers should follow standard academic practice.

Submission deadline for final short papers: One month after the end of the semester, on February 28th, 2018.

- Seminar paper, for those who opt for it: Length – approximately 8-9,000 words. Students should submit proposal of approximately 3 pages along the same lines as required for the short final paper, by the end of December 2017. Submission deadline for seminar papers: By the end of the spring semester, on June 20, 2018.