

CET Syllabus of Term



Program: CET Prague
Course Title: Jewish Life in Contemporary Europe
Course Code: JS362
Total Hours: 45
Recommended Credits: 3
Suggested Cross Listings: History
Language of Instruction: English
Prerequisites/Requirements: none
Professor: Jan Fingerland, PhD.
Class Schedule: Wed 9:00-12:00

Description of the course

The main aim of this course is to encourage debate and reflection on the relevance of the Jewish experience in and for contemporary Europe. For millennia, European Jewish culture has represented “the other” for Europe, necessary for Europe’s self-definition. At the same time, however, in the narrower sense of Judaism, and in the broader dimension of Jewish culture, Jews were at the birth and development of the modern European cultural sphere as we know it today. This phenomenon of the dual position of the Jewish minority in relation to the majority, which is not entirely unusual for Jewish Diaspora communities, manifested itself most distinctly on the European continent.

This unique Jewish experience of ambiguous position of insider/outsider may provide valuable views on contemporary European reality and identity crises. During the course, main common denominators of contemporary Jewish life, such as an intense confrontation with the heritage of the Holocaust and unrelenting anti-Semitism on the one hand and on the other hand, high recognition and appreciation of traditional Jewish learning and culture by the majority of European society, will be discussed. This discussion will bring about the following questions: how does the European Jewish minority differ from other Jewish Diasporas outside of Europe in the sense of belonging? Is there an emerging European Jewish identity on the backdrop of particular national identities or do European Jews nowadays rather perceive themselves as global citizens? Are members of minority groups in general, Jews in particular, the most persuaded supranational Europeans? To what extent are relations between the Jewish minority and the non-Jewish majority nowadays “normalized”? To what extent are Jews and non-Jews inclined to share a culture and politics of memory regarding World War II and the Shoah? The course will explore these questions by focusing on selected countries of Europe.

This course is designed for Jewish Studies, Religion, History, and Sociology students as well as those interested in questions of nationalism, racial prejudice, and inter-faith relations in a European context.

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Objectives:

In this course students

- Gain an understanding of the complex and multifaceted Jewish experience in contemporary Europe
- Understand the interactions between Jewish and non-Jewish communities
- Learn the ways in which these various communities create a multilayered sense of “European identity”

Course Requirements

- Attendance and active participation in class is required
- Students are expected to read all the required texts (up to 30 pages per week) and be prepared to present its content and initiate group discussion.
- Students are also expected prepare two presentations during the semester on two different topics based on provided texts.
- Students write a final paper that contextualizes contemporary Jewish life in Europe

Methods of Evaluation

- Enthusiastic class participation 30%
- Oral presentation on the readings 20%
- Oral presentation on special subject 20% (10% + 10%)
- Final paper 30%

Attendance Policy:

Grading scale

A:	93-100%	C+:	77-79%
A-:	90-92%	C:	73-76%
B+:	87-89%	C-:	70-72%
B:	83-86%	D+:	67-69%
B-:	80-82%	D:	60-66%
		F:	59% and below

Primary Texts

(available at the CET library)

Sachar, Howard M.: The Course of Modern Jewish History

Call Number: JH0019

Publisher: Vintage Books 1990

Subject: Jewish History - JS (JH)

Notes: Modern Jewish History

Wasserstein, Bernard: Vanishing Diaspora - The Jews in Europe Since 1945

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Call Number: JH0022

ISBN: 0-674-93196-3

Publisher: Harvard University Press 996

Subject: Jewish History - JS (JH)

Other important texts used:

Rozenblit, Marsha L.: *Reconstructing a National Identity: The Jews of Habsburg Austria*. Oxford UP 2001.

Bodemann, Y. M. (ed.), *The New German Jewry and the European Context, The Return of the European Jewish Diaspora*, Palgrave MacMillan 2008.

Biale, David: *Power & Powerlessness in Jewish History*, Schocken 1986.

Course Schedule

WEEK 1

January 31

Introduction to the topic. European Jews in statistical view.

TOPICS: The purpose of the course. Who are we and where are we. Students' preferences. Topics of the presentations. Who are the Jews of Europe – history, statistics, topics. European East and West.

WEEK 2

February 7

Jews in pre-WWII Europe as „the Others“.

Europa, Europa, German/French/Polish movie by Agnieszka Holland, 1990.

Reading:

Sachar, *The Course of Modern Jewish History*:

from Chapter 21 Europe *Judenrein*:

subchapters *The Formulation of the Final Solution*; *Antipartisan Warfare in Russia*; *The Last Days of Polish Jewry*; *Where Jews Fought Back*; *Conclusion*;

from Chapter 17: The Jews of Eastern Europe Between the wars these subchapters: *Poland: Successor-state Nationalism*; *The Rise of Polish Fascism*.

No texts from the Reader.

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TOPICS: Polish Jews, the largest Jewish Community in pre-WWII Europe; Changing of Polish borders; Poles Between Nazis and Soviets; the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact; Assimilation; circumcision and Jewish Identity; Polish Jews under Nazis and under Stalin; Germans as perpetrators and as bystanders; Jewish responses; Jews in the Zero hour.

WEEK 3

February 14

Eastern Europe 1: Poland

Reading:

Sachar, The Course of Modern Jewish History: subchapter "Exodus and Atrophy in the Satellites" from Chapter 23 Eastern Europe in the Postwar:

+ Texts in the Reader

TOPICS

From largest Jewish community to largest Jewish graveyard; Jews, Communists, gentiles; year 1968 in Poland; After 1989, resurrection of Jewish life or Judaism without Jews?; the phenomenon of the POLIN center; are Polish Jews more secure than the Western ones?; Whose Auschwitz?; Polish-Jewish rivalry in victimhood – not so common history of Poles and Polish Jews (Case of Jan T. Gross and Jan Grabowski).

ART:

Maus cartoon by Art Spiegelman (1991)

Architecture of the POLIN

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tLeFIEg4z7U>

PRESENTATIONS:

From Bernard Wasserstein's Vanishing Diaspora

Chapter 2, Stalin's Last Victims;

WEEK 4

February 21

Eastern Europe 2: Russia, Czech Republic

Reading:

Sachar, The Course of Modern Jewish History, subchapters "The Soviet Union: Failed Utopia" and "Conclusion" (both from Chapter 23 Eastern Europe in the Postwar)

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+ texts from the Reader

ART:

Vladimir Vyssotsky's song on the anti-Semites.

Nu, pogodi! (Just You Wait!) (Soviet cartoon 1969-1980)

TOPICS

Russia: Bittersweet relationship; Seen from within – an enormous role of Jews in Soviet culture and science; Communism, emancipation and antisemitism; 1990's - mass emigration to Israel and the US; 21st Century - new anti-Semitism or the old one?; Putin and his Jews; Russian Jews abroad; the Jewish Oligarchs.

The Czech Exception: a country without anti-Semitism?; case of Prostějov Cemetery.

WEEK 5

February 28

IDA Polish/Danish/French/British movie (2013)

Jews as victims and/or perpetrators? The Holocaust as trauma for the others.

Reading:

TOPICS

Victims and perpetrators – who is who?; Poles, Jews and Communists. Facing one's own past. Jewish dilemmas; Christianity as a factor in Jewish-Polish relations.

PRESENTATIONS:

From Bernard Wasserstein's *Vanishing Diaspora*:

chapter 1. Displaced persons

chapter 9. East European Shadows.

Optionally:

chapter 6. Jews and the Christian Problem

WEEK6

March 7

Western Europe 1: Germany

Reading:

Sachar, *The Course of Modern Jewish History*,

subchapter "Return to the eye of the Hurricane" (from the chapter 24 A Precarious Revival in Democratic

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Europe).

+ Texts from the Reader

PRESENTATIONS:

From Bernard Wasserstein's Vanishing Diaspora.

Chapter 7 Three Germanies and the Jews.

Chapter 5 Facing the Past

TOPICS

The two German states before 1989; Jews living in country of perpetrators; Russian and Israeli Jews in Germany; can a Jewish girl win German beauty contest? Valeria Bystritskaia and Tamar Morali; rise of far right in Germany; anti-Semitism among the Muslim immigrants; left-wing anti-Zionism; Henryk Broder's case; Is survival of Israel raison Raison d'être of democratic Germany?;

ART:

The Design of German Holocaust memorials.

Wolf Biermann, German "Bob Dylan"?

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0e6q6tLRzGM>

WEEK 7

March 14

Western Europe 2: France + the UK

TOPICS

France: From Jews of France to Jewish Frenchmen; two Jewries in France, Sephardi and Ashkenazi. Three anti-Semitismisms, rightists, Islamist and leftist; Anti-Zionist propaganda and anti-Semitic violence; Emigration to Israel: Zionism, saving of lives or betrayal of native land? The phenomenon of Jewish "public intellectuals" in France.

The UK: The question of Israel in the public debate. The Corbyn case. Left wing Jews against the others. Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, the exemplary European Jew.

ART AND EXAMPLES

Serge Gainsbourg, 'Le Sable et le Soldat' and Juif et dieu
Riff Cohen A Paris (song 2012).

Booker prize winner Howard Jacobson
A European Rabbi, (baron) Jonathan Sacks

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PRESENTATIONS

From Bernard Wasserstein's Vanishing Diaspora, Chapter 10 West European Dilemmas.

Reading: Texts in the Reader

March 21 Traveling Seminar March 15-23 (no classes)

WEEK 8

March 28

A Complicated Triangle: Jews, Europe and Israel.

Walk on Water. Israeli-Swedish movie, 2004.

Reading:

Wasserstein, Vanishing Diaspora: Chapter 4 The Influence of Israel

TOPICS: Israeli or Jewish Identity?; Specter of the European Past in Israel and in Germany; From "European" meekness to "Israeli" belligerence?; From powerless Jews to Powerful Israelis? Image of Germany in Israel, image of Israel in Germany.

April 4 Spring Break April 2 - April 6 (no classes)

WEEK 9

April 11

Field trip – the New Jewish cemetery. Changing identity of Jews in Central Europe. Example of "funeral culture".

Reading:

Marsha L. Rozenblit: Reconstructing a National Identity: The Jews of Habsburg Austria Chapter 1: The Jews of Austria-Hungary on the Eve of World War I (p. 14-38)

WEEK 10

April 18

Guest lecture by Irena Kalhousová:

Communist Dictatorship in Central European countries and its Relations towards the Jewish Minority and

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Israel. The pro-Israeli hub in the EU? Czech, Hungarian, and Polish relations towards Israel since 1989.

Reading: TBA

WEEK 11

April 25

American Jews as "Europeans".

A Serious Man, American movie (2009)

Reading:

Sachar, The Course of Modern Jewish History.

From chapter 15 "The Great Migration" subchapters: Emigration from the Pale Begins; The Meaning of the Great Migration; Conclusion.

From Chapter 16 "Russian Jewry's Liberal Tradition" subchapters: Anti-Semitism in America; Jewish Life at Mid-Century; Conclusion.

WEEK 12

May 2

American (and Israeli Jews) looking at their European brothers.

European Jewry's alternative paths: what if the Holocaust had been averted? What if the Holocaust had been completed?

Reading:

Sachar ch. 26 The Growth of the American-Jewish Community

PRESENTATIONS

"Power & Powerlessness in Jewish History" by David Biale (Schocken 1986)

Chapter VI. Israel and the Meaning of Modern Sovereignty

VII. American Jews and Contemporary Diaspora Power.

(Texts will be provided by the lecturer to the students in advance)

Possibly also

Bernard Wasserstein's "Vanishing Diaspora".

Chapter 11 "Jews in the New European Disorder"

Chapter 8 The Soviet Jewish Revolt.

WEEK 13

May 9

Conclusion of the semester. Final summary of the topic.