

**CLARK UNIVERSITY**  
HIST / HGS 237 / 337  
**The Holocaust Perpetrators**  
Spring 2021

Professor Thomas Kühne

Time: Wednesday, 9-11:50 am

Place: Kent Seminar Room, Strassler Center, 1<sup>st</sup> fl.

Office Hours: upon appointment, Zoom or Strassler Center, 2<sup>nd</sup> fl.

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**Description**

This course explores how, and why, Germans and other Europeans committed the Holocaust. It examines the whole range of different groups and types of perpetrators, accomplices, and collaborators. We will be looking at desktop perpetrators such as Adolf Eichmann; at medical doctors who used Jews and other victims of Nazi terror for their inhuman experiments; at the concentration and death camp guards; and at the death squads (Einsatzgruppen) as the hard core of the SS elite. Furthermore, we will investigate the actions, ideologies, and emotions of “ordinary” Germans who served in police battalions and in the drafted army; of women who served as camp guards and in the occupational regime; and of non-German collaborators. The course investigates the interrelation of motivations and biographies, of emotional attitudes and ideological orientations, and of social and institutional arrangements to answer why “normal” humans became mass murderers.

Images of Adolf Eichmann: rabbit farmer in Argentina, 1954; “Anthropomorphic Depiction” by (Holocaust survivor) Adolf Frankl, 1957.







## Requirements

This course will be taught in the spirit of a tutorial: once you decided to take the class, you are expected to stick to it, come to the sessions and be well prepared.

To facilitate informed discussion, you are required to write a short paper of one to two pages, single spaced for each session, related the assigned books and essays. It is due electronically (email attachment, word file, not pdf, to [tkuehne@clarku.edu](mailto:tkuehne@clarku.edu)) before class starts. This paper summarizes the readings (all of them) chapter by chapter or article by article; think of this summary as a short version of *Cliffs Notes*. The paper ends by articulating one or two 'big' questions you wish to discuss in class. The questions *must* refer closely to the readings and show that you have familiarized yourself with them.

Each session starts with a brief oral review (5 or so minutes) of the previous session presented by one student. This review may be based on minutes you take (by hand, not by computer) in class. It summarizes the major issues and *results* of our discussion, its findings and controversies in a well-organized form (not necessarily following the chronology of the discussion). You are supposed to sign up one of these reviews.

Finally, a research paper of 2,500 to 3,500 words (undergraduates) or 5,000 to 7,000 words (graduates & capstone undergraduates) including title page, TOC, and bibliography, double-spaced, is due no later than one week after our last class, as word document (not pdf) submitted as email attachment to the instructor. The topic of this final project may relate to one or more topics of our class discussions; you may also choose a different topic, for instance the representation of Holocaust perpetrators in certain fictional accounts (e.g., the respective novels of Edgar Hilsenrath, Bernhard Schlink, or Jonathan Littell), fictional or documentary movies (e.g., *Holocaust* 'miniseries,' Lanzmann's *Shoah*, Spielberg's *Schindler's List*) or one of the major trials against Holocaust perpetrators, for instance the Eichmann trial in Jerusalem, the Frankfurt Auschwitz trial, or the trials against Ivan Demjanuk. The topic of your paper must relate to the seminar (Holocaust perpetrators) and be approved by the instructor; it is recommended to discuss the topic and your ideas about your paper and its sources with the instructor no later than four weeks before the end of the semester.

If you are not familiar with how to write and submit such a paper, you may wish to consult J. R. Benjamin, *A Student's Guide to History* (10<sup>th</sup> ed., Boston, 2007) or Ch. Lipson, *How to Write a BA Thesis* (Chicago, 2005). They offer valuable assistance, not least regarding the formal shape of your paper.

Undergraduate research papers are based on at least two scholarly books and four scholarly articles *in addition* to those mentioned in this syllabus. Graduate and capstone undergraduate papers include at least four additional scholarly books and six scholarly articles. Instead of a book you can choose three articles, and vice versa. Make sure that your paper deals intensely with these sources. Originality, thoughtfulness, and organization of your thoughts are appreciated, as is the proper citation of your references and sources.

Plagiarism is a capital crime in academia; be aware of Clark's policy on academic integrity, <http://www.clarku.edu/offices/aac/integrity.cfm>: "Plagiarism refers to the presentation of someone else's work as one's own, without proper citation of references and sources, whether or not the work has been previously published. Submitting work obtained from a professional term paper writer or company is plagiarism. Claims of ignorance about the rules of attribution, or of unintentional error are not a defense against a finding of plagiarism."

### **Grading and practical arrangements**

The maximum of 100 points can be achieved by

- a maximum of 48 points for twelve weekly papers (4 point each), to be submitted *before* class starts. Late papers cannot receive more than 2 points, whatever the excuse for late submission may be.
- a maximum of 10 points for the oral session review.
- a maximum of 10 points for continuous participation in class discussion.
- a maximum of 32 points for the final paper (16 points for the content, 6 points for the range of consulted literature, 4 for the language/writing style, 4 for the organization, 2 for quotation and citation style).

You are supposed to attend class on a regularly basis. One absence will not inflict your grade. (You still have to submit the weekly paper.) Further absences without sufficient documentation (e.g., a doctor's note) will result in a deduction of five points each.

100-93 points=A, 92-90 = A-, 89-87 = B+, 86-83 = B, 82-80 = B-, 79-77 = C+ etc.

All readings are to be completed on the day assigned, before you come to class. Please bring both the readings and the notes you take from the readings to class to follow and participate in class discussions. At beginning of each class, each student will be asked to briefly address, based on the related short paper, what they have learned from the readings and what they wish to discuss in class.

Apart from inquiring in the perpetrators of the Holocaust this course serves to introduce students more generally in techniques of historical scholarship and in practices of academic communication. Great importance is attached to skills of analyzing both primary and secondary sources critically. The required readings are carefully chosen. However, none of them should be mistaken as comprising a final truth but rather be considered as one of many options to look at a certain topic. Thus, try to understand the basic assumptions, the main arguments, and the limitations of the texts you read. Critique is the oil of knowledge. In class, you are invited to speak up and to articulate your thoughts and ideas, whether or not they comply with those of your classmates or the professor.

Checking emails on a regular basis and staying connected with friends and the rest of the world is very important. Do not do it in class, though. Laptops, cell phones, iPods,



iPads, Gameboys, DVD players and other electronic devices are inclined to distract you or others from class discussions. They are to be switched off during class.

Clark University is committed to providing **students with documented disabilities** equal access to all university programs and facilities. If you have or think you have a disability and require academic accommodations, you must register with Student Accessibility Services (SAS), which is located in room 430 on the fourth floor of the Goddard Library, phone number (508) 798-4368, email [accessibilityservices@clarku.edu](mailto:accessibilityservices@clarku.edu). If you are registered with SAS and qualify for accommodations that you would like to utilize in this course, please request those accommodations through SAS in a timely manner.

The diversity that students bring to the class will be valued as a resource, benefit and strength in and outside of class. My goal is to create an environment that supports a diversity of thoughts, perspectives, and honors your diverse identities. If you have a name and/or set of pronouns that differ from those that appear in your official Clark records, please let me know. Please notify me if something is said in class, either by myself or other classmates, that creates unease or that discourages your ability to thrive in our course in any way. And if you feel that experiences outside class are impacting your performance, please do not hesitate to let me know.

Faculty Members are “Responsible Employees”: This notice is to inform you that the Faculty member(s) and Teaching Assistant(s) associated with this course are considered “Responsible Employees” by Clark University. As such, they are required to report all alleged sexual offenses to the University’s Title IX Coordinator. The only exceptions to this reporting responsibility are the community members who have been designated and/or trained as “Confidential” Sources. This includes the professional staff in Clark’s Center for Counseling and Personal Growth and the medical providers at the Health Center, as well as other individuals listed at <http://bit.ly/2eUOGGx>.

This course will require “ENGAGED ACADEMIC TIME” of 180 hours:

39 hours = In-class activities (13 x 3 hours)

96 hours = assigned readings (12 x 8 hours)

12 hours = weekly papers (12 x 1 hour)

33 hours = final paper.

### **Required Texts**

1. Gitta Sereny, *Into That Darkness: An Examination of Conscience* (New York, 1983)
2. Christopher Browning, *Ordinary Men. Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland* (New York, 1992)
3. Michael Wildt, *An Uncompromising Generation. The Nazi Leadership of the Reich Security Main Office* (Madison, 2010)

4. Jan T. Gross, *Neighbors. The Destruction of the Jewish Community in Jedwabne, Poland* (Princeton, 2001)
5. Wolfgang Sofsky, *The Order of Terror. The Concentration Camp* (Princeton, 1997)
6. David Cesarani, *Becoming Eichmann: Rethinking the Life, Crimes, and Trial of a "Desk Murderer"* (London, 2006)

Purchase of these books is recommended. They are available at Clark's online bookstore and elsewhere, also at used online bookstores. Most of them exist in various editions. Any of them will do it; you do not have to use the newest edition. All other required texts are available online or will be provided as pdfs.

## **COURSE OUTLINE**

**1<sup>st</sup> Session, Feb 24**

### **Introduction**

The syllabus and the organization of the class will be presented. We will be approaching the topic of the seminar by looking at images of Holocaust perpetrators as they appear in mass media and popular culture, and we will discuss short excerpts from the personal diary of a typical Holocaust perpetrator, SS officer Felix Landau, who participated in the shooting of Jews in Nazi occupied Poland. Parts of the diary are translated in Ernst Klee, Willy Dressen, and Volker Riess, eds., *"The Good Old Days." The Holocaust as Seen by Its Perpetrators and Bystanders* (New York: William S. Konecky Associates, 1991), pp. 87-106 (on Moodle).

**2<sup>nd</sup> Session, March 3**

### **Commandants**

Required reading: Gitta Sereny, *Into That Darkness: From Mercy Killing to Mass Murder* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1974).

"My conscience is clear. I was simply doing my duty..." explained the former commandant of the Treblinka and Sobibor extermination camps Franz Stangl, after being tried and imprisoned for the murder of 900,000 people in 1970. In this book, the British investigative journalist Gitta Sereny tries to make sense of the moral and emotional constitution of a 'model' perpetrator.

At the end of this class, we will be watching footage of the Eichmann trial in Jerusalem 1961, in preparation of the following week.

3<sup>rd</sup> Session, March 10

### **Bureaucrats**

Required Reading: David Cesarani, *Becoming Eichmann. Rethinking the Life, Crimes, and Trial of a "Desk Murderer"* (Cambridge, Mass.: DaCapo, 2006). (Focus on chapters I to VI.)

Unlike Stangl and most of the perpetrators analyzed in this class, Adolf Eichmann was a desk perpetrator, in charge with planning and administering the Holocaust. When he stood on trial in Jerusalem in 1961, famous observers such as Hannah Arendt believed that he, although a career SS man, had not been driven by hatred of Jews but simply by the wish to be a dutiful official. Cesarani's book offers a more complex view on the life and motives of Eichmann and allows us to discuss the basics of the Holocaust as process.

In preparation of the following session, we will be watching selections from the documentary movies such as the BBC documentary, *The Nazis: A Warning from History* (1997).

4<sup>th</sup> Session, March 17

### **Intellectuals**

Required reading: Michael Wildt, *An Uncompromising Generation. The Nazi Leadership of the Reich Security Main Office* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2010), pp. 1-357.

We will be looking at a core group of Holocaust perpetrators, those SS leaders that operated the Nazi genocide. Well educated, often boasting doctoral degrees, they not only embraced Nazi antisemitism and planned the Holocaust but eagerly volunteered as commanders of the SS death squads and took pride in spearheading the mass shooting of Jews in the East.

At the end of this session, we will be watching footage from the Milgram experiment and the Stanford Prison Experiment, in preparation of the following week.

5<sup>th</sup> Session, March 24

### **Shooters**

Required reading: Christopher Browning, *Ordinary Men. Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland* (New York: HarperCollins, 1992), in conjunction with Thomas Kühne, *Belonging and Genocide. Hitler's Community, 1918-1945* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), chapter III (online through Goddard).

Browning's book tells the story of a German police unit, some 500 men, that murdered in Nazi occupied Poland in 1942 and 1943 tens of thousands of Jews. When they started doing so, their commander gave them a remarkable choice: those who weren't up to kill



Jews could opt out. But only very few took advantage of this offer. Most of them joined in mass murder. Why?

In preparation of the following week, parts of this class time will be used to watch sections of the documentary movie *Nazi Medicine* (1997).

6<sup>th</sup> Session, March 31

### **Doctors**

Required reading: Selections from David Marwell, *Mengele. Unmasking the "Angel of Death"* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2020), and from Robert Jay Lifton, *Nazi Doctors. Medical Killing and the Psychology of Genocide* (New York: Basic Books, 1986), all on Moodle.

Although tied to the Hippocratic oath, many doctors in the Third Reich tortured or even killed human beings. Focusing the most infamous Nazi doctor, Josef Mengele, we will examine how physicians in the Third Reich reconciled, or didn't reconcile, their commitment to "help the sick" and to "abstain from all intentional wrongdoing and harm" with medical experiments that cause physical and mental harm and death. We will discuss whether they could do so by "doubling," by splitting their selves into two halves, and consider other explanations for why doctors became torturers and killers.

Sections of BBC documentary *Auschwitz. Inside the Nazi State* (2005) to be watched in class in preparation of following session.

7<sup>th</sup> Session, April 7

### **Guards**

Required reading: Wolfgang Sofsky, *The Order of Terror. The Concentration Camp* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997).

Instead of demonizing camp guards as sadists, we have to acknowledge the social dynamic of a subculture that was ruled by pure violence, suggests the German sociologist in this provocative book: "the more dead bodies" the guards "could chalk up, the greater was their fame; the more adroit and imaginative their brutality, the higher their rankings in the group pecking order." Ruled by "absolute power," the camp society erased agency and did not need inhuman ideologies to spread violence and brutality, says Sofsky. Do you agree? We will discuss Sofsky's book in conjunction with additional sources such as the photo album of an Auschwitz guard, <https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/collections-highlight-auschwitz-through-the-lens-of-the-ss>.

At the end of this class, in preparation of the following session, we will be watching sections of a documentary, *The Wehrmacht* (2007), on the leadership of Hitler's regular army, the Wehrmacht, and its attitude toward the Holocaust and other mass crimes.

8<sup>th</sup> Session, April 14

### **Soldiers**

Required reading: excerpts from Willy Peter Reese, *A Stranger to Myself. The Inhumanity of War: Russia, 1941-1944* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2005) (Moodle); Thomas Kühne, *Belonging and Genocide. Hitler's Community, 1918-1945* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), chapters II and IV (online through Goddard); Mark Mazower, "Military Violence and National Socialist Values: The 'Wehrmacht' in Greece 1941-1944", *Past and Present* 134 (1992), 129-158 (JSTOR).

In this class, we will be exploring how ordinary soldiers (most of them drafted and not members of the NSDAP) became complicit in the Holocaust and other Nazi crimes – how they helped the SS and the police to murder civilians, how they killed or let die millions of Soviet POWs, and how they destroyed the livelihoods of Soviet and East European citizens when they were about to lose the war.

At the end of this class, a short lecture of the instructor will introduce in the topic of the following session, the empowerment of ("Aryan") women in the Third Reich.

9<sup>th</sup> Session, April 28 (no class on April 21!)

### **Women**

Required reading (all on Moodle): selections from Melita Maschmann, *Account Rendered. A Dossier on my Former Self* (London: Abelard-Schuman, 1964); Wendy Lower, *Hitler's Furies: German Women in the Nazi Killing Fields* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2014), chapter V; Elizabeth Harvey, "'We Forgot all Jews and Poles'. German Women and the 'Ethnic Struggle' in Nazi-Occupied Poland," *Contemporary European History* 10 (2001), 447-461; Susanne Heschel, "Does Atrocity Have a Gender? Feminist Interpretations of Women in the SS", in: J. M. Diefendorf (ed.), *Lessons and Legacies VI. New Currents in Holocaust Research* (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 2004), 300-321.

In this class, we will analyze the manifold ways, and the reasons why, German women participated in the Nazi genocidal project -- by typing up deportation orders, by granting their murderer husbands a private haven, by guarding, humiliating, torturing, and killing civilians in the ghettos or in the camps, or even by joining the shooting actions in the East.

At the end of this class, the instructor will give a short lecture (in preparation of the following session) on pre-Nazi anti-Jewish pogroms and non-German collaboration in the Holocaust in Eastern Europe.

10<sup>th</sup> Session, May 5

### **Collaborators**

Required reading: Jan T. Gross, *Neighbors. The Destruction of the Jewish Community in Jedwabne, Poland* (Princeton, 2001), in conjunction with the respective Wikipedia article, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jedwabne\\_pogrom](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jedwabne_pogrom), and Anna Bikont, *The Crime and the Silence. Confronting the Massacre of Jews in Wartime Jedwabne* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2015), 115-134 (Moodle).

Topic of the class is the European dimension of the Holocaust and the complicity of non-Germans. Why did the Nazis get so much support for their genocidal projects all over Europe, especially in the occupied territories in the East? Did these 'local' collaborators act against Jews on their own or only because the Nazis made them so? The book of Jan Gross is a classic but controversial exploration of this topic.

In the last hour of this class, we will be watching a documentary movie on the Łódź ghetto and the head of its (Nazi installed) Jewish Council, or Judenrat (Łódź Ghetto, 1988)

11<sup>th</sup> Session, May 12

### **Victims**

Required reading (all on Moodle): Emanuel Ringelblum, *Notes from the Warsaw Ghetto* (1942), as in Simone Gigliotti and Berel Lang, eds., *The Holocaust. A Reader* (Malden: Blackwell, 2005), 313-332; Primo Levi, *The Drowned and the Saved* (New York 1989), Ch. II; Gideon Greif, "Between Sanity and Insanity. Spheres of Everyday Life in the Auschwitz-Birkenau Sonderkommando," in *Gray Zones. Ambiguity and Compromise in the Holocaust and its Aftermath*, ed. Jonathan Petropoulos & John K. Roth (New York: Berghahn, 2005), 37-60; Evgeny Finkel, *Ordinary Jews. Choice and Survival during the Holocaust* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017), Ch. 5.

In this class, we will be approaching the most sensitive issue of the seminar – the ways the Nazi perpetrators, especially in the death camps and in the ghettos, made some victims of the Holocaust complicit in mass murder. The discussion will address the question whether it is even legitimate to talk of complicity in these cases, and we will try to understand the "choiceless choices" (Lawrence Langer) these victims faced when the Nazis tried to turn them into perpetrators.

12<sup>th</sup> Session, May 19

### **Defendants**

Required reading: Michael Wildt, *An Uncompromising Generation. The Nazi Leadership of the Reich Security Main Office* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2010), pp. 361-424; Katharina von Kellenbach, "Vanishing Acts: Perpetrators in Postwar Germany,"

*Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 17: 2 (Fall 2003), pp. 305-329 (Goddard online); “John Demjanjuk: Prosecution of a Nazi Collaborator,” *USHMM Holocaust Encyclopedia* (online), <https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/john-demjanjuk-prosecution-of-a-nazi-collaborator>

At the end of the war, a few Holocaust perpetrators committed suicide. Many more went into hiding, assumed fake identities, escaped to countries that gave them asylum, or returned to an allegedly normal life – until they were caught and put-on trial. In this class, we will shed light on the lives and images of Holocaust perpetrators in post-Nazi societies.

**13<sup>th</sup>** Session, May 26

### **Conclusion**

Summary of the seminar, discussion of final papers. No response paper, but provide a short, one-page outline (and photocopies for the class) of your final paper and be prepared to present it orally.