

Freshman Seminar
Section 34603R
Memory and History: Video Testimonies of the Holocaust
Leavey Library 119 A, Tuesdays 12:00-1:50

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Office Hours: Tuesday 3:00-4:00 PM and by appointment

The Holocaust – the Shoah in Hebrew – is the paradigmatic genocide. This seminar seeks to compare how historians have described the Holocaust with how survivors and other eyewitnesses remember it.

We will spend the first several weeks of the course reading what historians have written about the Holocaust with what survivors say about their experience in video testimony. In the second part of the course, students will do research in the USC Shoah Foundation Institute's collection of 52,000 video testimonies. The last part of the course will be devoted to presentations based on that research and produced by teams of students.

Students will be evaluated on the basis of participation in class discussions, one 5-7 page essay, and the creativity of their presentations. I do not grant extensions for overdue work.

Ordinarily, the class will meet in the USC Shoah Foundation Institute's conference room, Leavey Library 122. We will also meet in Leavey Library, Learning Room A as indicated in the assignments.

Students are encouraged to learn more about the USC Shoah Foundation Institute and visual history by consulting the Institute's website at www.usc.edu/vhi, which both describes the work of the Institute and provides links to other useful sites.

There are four required books for the course listed below. Copies of these books are available for purchase in the University Bookstore. Assignments are keyed to each meeting of the class.

Books:

Deborah Dwork and Robert Jan van Pelt, The Holocaust: A History
Yehuda Bauer, Rethinking the Holocaust
Inga Clendinnen, Reading the Holocaust
Christopher R. Browning, Collected Memories: Holocaust History and Postwar Testimony

***Memory and History: Video Testimonies of the Holocaust
Syllabus***

Assignments:

August 22

Introduction: The Holocaust in History
"The Shoah Foundation Story" Video

August 29

Dwork and van Pelt, The Holocaust: A History, 202-315
In Class: "One Human Spirit" – Testimony Video

September 5

Bauer, Rethinking the Holocaust, vii-67, 119-142, 261-273
In Class: Testimony of Nechama Schneerson – Selections from Testimony Video

September 12

Clendinnen, Reading the Holocaust, 1-77; 163-184
In Class: "Survivors of the Shoah" – Student Testimony Project (Rice University)

September 19

Browning, Collected Memories: Holocaust History and Postwar Testimony,
entire book.
In Class: Testimony from the Archive: Henry Rosmarin, Renee Firestone, Peter
Hirsch, Regina Zielinski

September 26

Essay due
Introduction to Research in the USC Shoah Foundation Visual History Archive
Class will meet today in Leavey Library, Learning Room A

October 3

NO CLASS --- Project Preparation.

October 10

NO CLASS --- Project Preparation

October 17

NO CLASS – Project Preparation

October 24

Presentation of Projects

October 31

Presentation of Projects

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Essay Assignment (due in class September 26):

Each of the four works you will be reading approaches the problem of understanding the Shoah from a slightly different perspective; each of them also relies upon different kinds of evidence. In a clearly organized and coherently written essay, compare and contrast the approach of the four books with specific reference to the question of how different sorts of evidence can be brought to bear on an understanding of the Holocaust.

You may especially wish to consider what views they offer, either implicitly or explicitly, about the value of survivor testimony as a form of historical evidence. Having viewed several hours of testimony yourself, you should also provide your own analysis of the difference between video testimony and other forms of evidence.

Feel free to organize your essay as you see fit. The only requirement is that you have something to say about each of the books and that you focus on the issue of evidence. The specific questions you attempt to answer are not so important as your attempting to compare and contrast the differing interpretations offered by the authors of the four books and the evidence they use to support those interpretations.

Your paper should be 5-7 pages long. It should be written in grammatically correct prose, and it should be free of proofreading errors. If you quote from one of the books on the syllabus, simply bracket it with quotation marks and put the author's name and a page number in parentheses at the end of the sentence; for example (Bauer, p. 67). Formal footnotes are not required, but all quotations must be properly attributed to the author(s).

Project Assignment

Students will be divided into six groups of three at the beginning of the course. Each group will be responsible for selecting 15-18 minutes of testimony, a "reel", for presentation to the rest of the class. Each reel will be an attempt to answer a basic question about the Holocaust relying solely upon the testimony of people in the Shoah Foundation archive. The six reels will be presented and discussed at the last two classes on October 24 and October 31. In addition, the reels will be presented to a public audience at the beginning of the second semester as part of the University's Arts and Humanities Initiative. Details of the initiative can be found on the University's website at <http://www.usc.edu/dept/pubrel/visionsandvoices>.

We will discuss this assignment in more detail as the semester goes along and as students become more familiar with the USC Shoah Foundation Archive and its technology.

Memory and History: Video Testimonies of the Holocaust
Syllabus

Questionnaire

1. Where are you from? Where did you go to high school?
2. Have you ever read a book or books about the Holocaust or about genocide?
What was its title(s)?
3. Why did you select this Freshman Seminar?
4. If there were three questions you could ask a survivor or other eyewitness to the Holocaust about his or her experience, what would they be?