***Matthew H. Brittingham***

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**JS 190/REL 120:**

**Freshman Seminar: Memoirs of the Holocaust**



Memoirs are documents of a history lived, but also (re)constructions of that experience through memory. By taking Holocaust memoirs as the focus of our inquiry, we will examine how a text about the Holocaust might be both a historical document and a personal narrative. We will consider the relationship between experience, historical fact, and memory, as well as the distinctions between “truth” and “reality.

**Key questions:**

* Who wrote the memoirs we will read and under what circumstances were they written?
* Are memoirs historical, literary…or both?
* How does an author write about everyday experiences while commenting on larger themes and issues related to catastrophic atrocities?
* What does the mode of writing—as memoir, not a traditional historical work—teaching us that we might not be able to learn some other way?

**Books:**

**Can be purchased at the university bookstore, but the listed books will also be on reserve at the library.**

* *The Journal of Helene Berr*, translated by David Bellos.
* Ruth Kluger, *Still Alive: A Holocaust Girlhood Remembered.*
* Sarah Kofman, *Rue Ordener, Rue Labat*. Trans. Ann Smock.
* Primo Levi, *Survival in Auschwitz*. Trans. Stuart Woolf.
* Deborah E. Lipstadt. *Denial,* 2016 *[History on Trial: My Day in Court with a Holocaust Denier, 2005]*.
* Art Spiegelman, *The Complete Maus: A Survivor’s Tale: My Father Bleeds History/Here My Troubles Began.*
* Anne Frank, *The Diary of Anne Frank.*

**Film Screenings**:

There will be several film screenings for our class. They will be held Monday nights from 5-7.

**Course requirements and grading**:

* **Active participation** means you have read the text closely and carefully, are prepared to discuss it, and will participate in class discussion. Participation is a must. Regular attendance at all class sessions is required. *The success of this class is directly dependent on everyone’s participation***. 25%**
* **Class Presentation: 15%**
  + **Questions for class discussion**: In collaboration with another classmate, each student will prepare questions, thoughts, or comments**.**
  + **Presentation reflective paper** (based on class presentation): 650-750 words
* **Three papers** of 1250-1500 words each; **60% (20%each):** [see below]
  + ***Late papers will be penalized.***

**Honor Code:**

The university honor code is in effect throughout the semester. By taking this course, you affirm that it is a violation of the code to cheat on exams, to plagiarize, to deviate from the teacher’s instructions about collaboration on work that is submitted for grades, to give false information to a faculty member, and to undertake any other form of academic misconduct. You agree that the teacher is entitled to move you to another seat during examinations, without explanation. You also affirm that if you witness others violating the code you have a duty to report them to the honor council. **Note: cutting and pasting from the Internet constitutes plagiarism.**

**Prereqs:**

There are **NO** official prerequisites for this course. Students from all backgrounds are invited to take this course. In relation to the discussion of Jews and Judaism, some of the concepts and traditions might be challenging from time to time, as new cultures and new material is often challenging. All difficult concepts and terms will be defined and discussed in full. Likewise, if you come to class having done the day’s readings/viewings, and you are ready to participate in class, you will already have the most important tools you need to succeed in the course, without any previous study or knowledge of Jews or Judaism. [If you are having any issues or if you have any questions please let me know ASAP and we can find a time to discuss and review the material.]

**On being prepared for class:**

You will be most successful in this class if you are prepared for this class. That means, do ALL the readings, think deeply about the material, come with thoughts or questions, and be ready to listen and take notes. Doing the required readings will not only help you participate in class and perform well, but it will also make the class much more engaging, lively, and fun. Actually doing the readings will also help you think deeper about what we are learning in class, as the class will not be a summary of the readings. Also remember, participation is part of your grade (seriously, and there is no curve)! If you do the readings and think about the material, you will come with *substantive* questions and comment,questions and comments that will get you the most participation points. One way to participate is to observe the classroom rule: no computers, no cell phone...unless you have a specially dispensation from the office of student affairs.

Within the first two weeks of class, you must tell me of any need for special allowances related to note taking, assignments, or tests (ex. extra time or formatting). Only *authorized documentation* from the office of student affairs will be accepted for special allowances.

**Blackboard:**

Check Blackboard for your section/registration regularly. Notices and updates will be posted on Blackboard. Additional readings and documents will appear on Blackboard.

**Schedule:**

Aug. 29:

Opening Session: syllabus review and conversation about the course/topic

Sept. 5:

Sarah Kofman, all.

Sept. 11:

**Monday evening screening: *Into the Arms of Strangers***

Sept. 12:

RuthKluger, 1-132

Sept. 19:

Ruth Kluger, 133-end

Sept. 26:

Primo Levi, 1-100

Oct. 3:

Primo Levi, 100-END

Oct. 10:

Fall Break: **\*Screen at home: *Diary of Anne Frank* (George Stevens, 1959)**; take copious notes because we will be discussing this film at a later date.

Read: Barnouw, *The Phenomenon of Anne Frank*, Chapters 3-4, Blackboard

Oct. 16:

**Monday evening screening: *Au Revoir les Enfants***

Oct. 17*:*

HeleneBerr, 1-154

***First paper due***

Oct. 23:

**Monday evening screening: *La Rafle***

Oct. 24:

Helene Berr*,* 155-end; Barnouw, *The Phenomenon of Anne Frank*, Chapter 1.

Oct. 30:

**Monday evening screening: *Anne Frank Remembered***

#### Oct. 31:

#### (We will devote this class to an analysis of these two Anne Frank films, the one we watch on Monday night and the one you watched at home).

For Anne Frank session please:

* Read: *Diary of Anne Frank*

On Blackboard:

* Alvin H. Rosenfeld, “Anne Frank and the Future of Holocaust Memory,” United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 2004, (available as a pdf online: [*https://www.ushmm.org/m/pdfs/Publication\_OP\_2005-04-01.pdf*](https://www.ushmm.org/m/pdfs/Publication_OP_2005-04-01.pdf)
* Cynthia Ozick, “Who Owns Anne Frank?” *New Yorker,* October 6, 1997 Issue <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/1997/10/06>
* Barnouw, *The Phenomenon of Anne Frank*, Chapters 1-2.

Nov. 07:

*Denial*/*History on Trial*, 1-149; explore [www.hdot.org](http://www.hdot.org)

***Paper #2 due***

Nov. 13:

**Monday evening screening: *Denial***

Nov. 14:

*Denial*/*History on Trial* 149-end; Barnouw, *The Phenomenon of Anne Frank*, Chapters 5, Blackboard

Nov. 21:

THANKSGIVING

Nov. 28:

Postmemory 1: Art Spiegelman *Maus I*

Dec. 5:

Postmemory 2: Art Spiegelman *Maus II*

***Paper #3 due***

**Assignments:**

***I. Leading class discussion:***

Starting with the second week of class, in groups of two, or as individuals, students must briefly present critical questions, thoughts, or comments on the assigned readings.  These “presentations” should not last more than 5-10 minutes, but the conversations they initiate should focus class discussion around particular areas of interest for a good portion of the class. This is not a PowerPoint presentation or anything like that. Your goal is to engage the class with a meaningful response to the week’s readings and direct class attention toward critical themes and issues in the readings.

* Ways to do this: present the class with a set of questions; select a key passage (or set of passages) for the class to read together and discuss; design an exercise that will enable the class to probe a particular aspect of the text more fully.
* We encourage you to be creative in your approach to this assignment. We are available to consult with you or help you think through options.
* Note: *These should not be formal papers or presentations, but starting points for discussion.*

***II. Presentation Response Paper:*** Once the session is over, each presenter will write up a short response paper (650 words), reflecting on the experience of close textual reading, questions prep., and how your fellow peers responded to the presentation. This is not a research paper. It is a reflection on the experience and how it changed or did *not* change your understanding of the text. Short paper is due by the end of the week [Friday] of your presentation.

***III. Papers #1-3:***

All 1250 words. This series of assignments asks you to assess how each text/movie in its own way approach discussing and thinking about the Holocaust—in history and memory. I also want you to consider the human dimension of Holocaust history by engaging with texts written by those who experienced it. For the most part these are critical analysis papers relying on the course texts and should require little outside research.

***A. Paper #1:*** Compare/contrast two of the memoirs we have read. Engage with each text on the style of writing and themes. Analyze how each author approaches telling her/his story.

\*Do cannot use the memoir you presented in class.

Your paper should address some of the following issues/topics:

* What is the basis of your comparison (themes, narrative form, characters, selection of events, etc.)?
* How are the two memoirs similar and/or different? How and where do their themes and ways of telling the story converge/diverge?
* What are the central issues in each text?
* What do they focus on and what do they leave aside? What do they include and/or leave out?
* How is history narrated, i.e. how are pieces of history recounted in the form of stories and how do the authors fashion themselves and others into personae of their respective narratives?

***B. Paper #2:*** We have watched a number of films this semester that reflected themes we saw in a memoir. Pick a theme and analyze how it was treated in the memoir and how it was treated in film. Use the guidelines for paper #2.

***C. Paper #3:*** Compare 2-3 passages in the memoirs that interest you and circulate around a similar theme or topic. How do the passages fit within the larger context of their memoirs? How do they fit within the larger context of Holocaust memory? When put together, what do they illuminate about each other? Why do you think these passages affected you in that way? Dig down into them and find how they interested you.

**Guidelines for papers:**

* All papers must have your name and course number at top of page. Include page numbers and length as indicated on syllabus.
* All references must be attributed in accordance with standard academic practice; we recommend a “Works Cited” format with in-text page references.
* All papers must be submitted electronically.