

**HIST 242 European Genocides**  
Spring 2019  
Westfield State University

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The phenomenon of mass killing has been a plague on our history since the inception of civilization.

Human beings obsessed with identity, divide ourselves into categories according to arbitrary and variable socially constructs: language, ethnicity, geographic origin, culture, religion, and most recently, race. These arbitrary lines of delineation, mercurial as they are, are nonetheless given enormous amounts of weight in



determining how we value a human life. During times of plenty and ease, these imagined differences tend to be unimportant. They can take on a casual character that plays little role in influencing social behavior. They are still often noted, but are fairly unremarkable. However, during times of stress, we tend to become acutely

important to determining who is allowed to live and who will be subject to starvation, exposure, or even violent death. As societies become larger and more complex, as the forces that act upon these societies become more powerful and less comprehensible, small tremors in systems can make the delineations between the “in-group” and the “out-group” extreme to the point where a society agrees to allow for the full-scale extermination of an “out-group.” This is what we call genocide, and it will be the subject of the course.

Studying the full scale of genocide in a course of this kind is nearly impossible. The size and scope of the phenomenon extends back to our earliest history and cuts across time, geography, culture, and social circumstance. Therefore, this course is designed to track genocidal activity within a single cultural zone in order to see how it changes over time in response to shifts in socio-economic realities and historical events. Europe was selected as the location of this course as it is the site where the first industrial scale genocide (the Holocaust) took place. This fact allows us to investigate how the history of genocide as a political tool within this political space led to the development of this industrial process of mass destruction.

#### **Required Texts**

Chalk, Frank Robert, and Kurt Jonassohn. *The History and Sociology of Genocide: Analyses and Case studies*. Yale University Press, 1990. [ISBN-13: 978-0300044461 ISBN-10: 0300044461] (Available used on Amazon for less than 10 dollars)

#### **Knowledge-based objectives:**

- Students will have a sound introduction to the history of genocide in Europe with particular emphasis on the economic, social, and political forces that enabled them to occur.
- Students will understand how socio-economic forces interacts with culture in shaping how these mass killings are perpetrated.

### **Skills-based objectives:**

Students will be able to engage effectively with:

- Readings for the purposes of research and analysis.
- Interdisciplinary approaches to each topic discussed, thereby broadening the intellectual scope and critical possibilities of your investigations.
- Critical questions and honest disagreement that challenges conventional intellectual and research methods, which carve fresh spaces for different and useful entry points into the field.
- Multiple perspectives in order to recognize the influence of culture in relation to mass killings.

### **Assessment**

The key to success in this course is completing the reading. It is the basis of all of the assessments and will mean the difference between finding the course a meaningful education experience, or not. Below are the assessments for the course.

- **Weekly Assessments** (60 points):
  - **Discussion Questions** (45 Points; 3 points each): Each week, students will be required to **Answer a Discussion Question** each week, and post them on the PLATO. These answers are short informal writing that will use evidence from as many of the week's readings as possible. You will cite this information using footnotes. Two pages minimum.
  - **Discussion Question Reply** (15 points; 1 point each): You must read the other discussion question responses and reply to two of them answering the following question: What did you learn from the post you read?
- **Unit Assessments** (40 points; 10 points each):
  - **Response Papers:** At the end of every Unit Students will use specific info from the readings and lectures of the unit to write a 5 page response to one of the **Essential Questions**. There are 4 Response Papers (one for each unit). The Essential Questions for the unit build off the discussion questions for each class, so reading and spending time on the discussion questions will help your analysis in answering the Essential Question for the Unit. You will use all the readings from the Unit for your evidence.