

“Antisemitism: The Dynamics and History of the “Longest Hatred”

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Each two-hour class will include a narrated PowerPoint with opportunities for questions and dialogue. The structure will be fast-paced and focused on the highlights of this long, complex history.

Tentative Schedule of Topics:

Week 1:

We will introduce the taxonomy of the two plus millennia-old phenomenon of *antisemitism*. We begin with a survey of pre-Christian sources of Jew-hatred beginning in the Greco-Roman era. With the rise of Christianity, and the development of Christian ideological constructs (the teachings of contempt), we then trace that history through the Crusades, the development of Medieval images and conceptions of Jews, the growth of European persecutions, pogroms and deportations, including the Inquisition and ghettos up to the coming of the enlightenment era.

Week 2:

With the coming of the enlightenment, *Judenhass* (Jew-hatred) takes a distinctive turn toward its more modern and secular forms. We will discuss issues of continuity and discontinuity with earlier appearances of antisemitism, focusing on how modern historical developments in the west encourage the transformation of traditional forms into fatal new ones. We want to explore issues of the Jew as ultimate outsider, the rise of notions of Jewish conspiracy with the coming of Jewish emancipation. With the rise of nationalism throughout Europe, Jews become the ultimate outsiders, opening them to a myriad of conspiracies. Coming into the revolutionary era of the 20th century we discuss the rise of Marxist revolutionary events, the explosion of Eugenics and racist hatred on the European stage, the disaster of WWI, the following destabilization of the Weimar Republic and the foundations of the Nazi movement that would lead to Hitler’s “*Final Solution of the Jewish problem.*”

Week 3:

Many courses on the Holocaust begin with the period after World War I and the rise of the ill-fated Weimar Republic as the birth setting for the rise of Nazism and the Third Reich. We will indeed pick up the story here taking note of those areas of deep continuities that were carried from previous historic eras as the Nazi era and the “Final Solution” take shape. We will walk through this horrible period between 1933-1945 noting the important role of all the “players” on the world stage including the under told story of the United States.

Week 4:

In this session we will take what may seem at first to be a digression in the development of the “*Longest hatred*” by tracing two important post-war branches off the main trunk of the deadly tree. First, we will focus on the world of the middle east and the deep roots of Jew-hatred within Muslim culture and how Europe fed that region the poison it had developed. The results will allow us to offer some fascinating explanations for the intractable conflicts that rage throughout the region to this day. However, to understand the growth of this distinctive anti-Jewish ideology it is also necessary to understand the important role of the Soviet ideological contributions to Jew-hatred in the post-Shoah era. Soviet propaganda was a key exponent of an anti-western, anti-colonial and deeply antisemitic ideology that has become powerful in the post-war era and continues to nourish ever-growing antisemitic conspiracies to the present. What begins to appear during this period is a distinctive “left-wing” brand of Jew-hatred.

Week 5:

This session will explore the latest “transmogrification” of Jew-hatred as antisemitism has become anti-Zionism and the State of Israel has become the “Jew of the world.” We will need to make careful distinctions between valid and important criticisms of any government and existential attacks upon a people to the right of self-determination. We will want to take a passing look at a succinct history of the State of Israel within the larger context of western Jewish history already covered and attempt to develop careful and fair-minded insights into the contemporary context.

Week 6:

This final week will continue our conversations from the previous week and investigate the contemporary situation for Jews throughout Europe, the middle east as well as in the United States. Amid the resurgence of aggressive and violent outbreaks of antisemitic hatred throughout all these regions, we will want to analyze continuities and discontinuities in both left and right wing ideologically based Jew-hatred with earlier historic expressions. Finally, we will want to ask some important questions about where this “*longest hatred*” might yet emerge on the stage of contemporary history.

A note from the instructor:

I am excited to present this course to mature, adult learners. I will make every attempt to remain roughly within the parameters of the above outline. I am very conscious that much of this material is sensitive and deeply value laden. There are likely to be any number of emotionally charged moments. I will do my utmost to be both balanced, objective, and sensitive to facilitate and guide those difficult conversations. I will rely on a PowerPoint presentation to anchor my comments. I have concentrated a semester-long course into six, two-hour, sessions. There is clearly much too much material to cover in this short class. Consequently, I will try to attend to the most important questions from the class, but I will restrict questions and comments to a time at the end of each hour. Students are welcome to submit written questions which I will attempt to respond to outside of class or via e-mail. Your comments, questions and responses to the material and the flow of the class are important to me. I will leave us an opportunity for you to offer your evaluations and comments as I learn as much from teaching as any student of this material.

A Biographical sketch for The Rev. Bruce R. Bramlett

Rev. Bruce Bramlett did his professional master’s degree at both Union Theological Seminary and the Episcopal Divinity School in Cambridge, MA. He did his graduate studies in post-Holocaust Christian theology, Holocaust studies and the Jewish-Christian encounter at the Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley, completing all requirements except his dissertation toward his PhD. He completed the international educator’s program at Yad Vashem and is has been a Fellow at the Shalom Hartman Institute in Jerusalem. Beyond his pastoral work, he has taught ethics, European history, and religious studies and World Religions at such institutions as the University of the Pacific, St. Mary’s College, the University of San Francisco, The Church Divinity School of the Pacific, and Dominican University. He has been an adjunct lecturer on the faculties of the Jewish Studies programs at Sonoma State and San Jose State Universities. He has taught in the Lehrhaus Judaica’s adult education programs in synagogues, churches, and schools for over 25 years. He continues to teach courses in holocaust/genocide, Jewish history, the history of antisemitism, and the Jewish-Christian relationship, especially the early growth of rabbinic Judaism and classical Christianity. He has provided educational programming in inter-Group and Interfaith relations for area public and private schools. He lives in El Cerrito, California.