CIEE in Prague, Czech Republic

Course Title: History of the Jews in Bohemia and Central Europe
Course Code: RELI 3002 PRAG
Programs offering course: CES, CNMJ
Language of instruction: English
U.S. Semester Credits: 3
Contact Hours: 45
Term: Spring 2019

Course Description

This course examines the Jewish experience in the Czech Lands and the other countries of Central Europe. It touches upon the history of Jews in Russia, in addition to Central Europe, since Russia shares some commonalities with the history of Jews in Poland and the Czech Lands. The course will be of interest to History and/or Jewish or Religious studies students, as well as those who want to learn about the history of the Jewish people in the heart of Europe. It is of interest to US students in particular, as one of the largest Jewish communities worldwide lives in the United States and most North American Jews are of Central or Eastern European decent. The History of Jews in Central Europe is not only a story of prejudice and contempt, but also a story of hope and suffering which culminates in the worst tragedy of the Jewish people in history, the Holocaust. However, the issue of the Holocaust is not principal in this course. This course aims at providing students insights into this most flourishing center of Jewish life of Prague and Central Europe. Students will gain a great deal from excursions to Prague's Jewish Quarter with its famous Jewish cemetery, and to the new Jewish cemetery where Franz Kafka is buried. Further, students will participate in a class excursion The course will deal partly with some Jewish philosophical ideas and practices, but is not a course in the Jewish Religion.

Learning Objectives

Upon successful completion of this course, students should be able to:

- Understand Jewish experience in Prague and other Central European centers
- Identify the main obstacles in the life of Central European Jewry
- Contextualize the existence of Jewish population within plurality of cultures in the region
- Discuss the acquainted knowledge about Jewish existence before Auschwitz

Course Prerequisites
A student should have a curiosity and desire to explore Jewish History in Prague and Central Europe using the on-site opportunity to explore real sites and locations and "walk" where this history took place.

**Methods of Instruction**

Experiential excursions, presentations, group discussions, research

**Assessment and Final Grade**

1. Discussion leader of a reading or a selected topic 20%
2. Tests 20%
3. Final paper and presentation 20%
4. Reading Checks, Field trip reaction papers 20%
5. Class participation 20%

**Course Requirements**

**Discussion leader of a reading or a selected topic**

Mandatory presentation on a given topic or an assigned reading. Assessed areas: clarity, delivery, organization. This task includes ppt presentation with one slate info about the author of the reading (if relevant), five slates with content presentation with difficult points explained and last slate with questions and polemic points for moderating the debate. Grading takes into account the accuracy in delivering main issues to the class and success in stimulating discussion. Remember you are presenting the content of the reading (if relevant), your comments and interpretations are voiced in the discussion part.

**Final paper and presentation**

2000 words, spacing 1,5 lines. The projects are evaluated according to the quality of research and ability to add your own commentary. The work MUST have resonance with topics and readings covered in class. The topic must be consulted with the lecturer and approved by the lecturer in advance.

**Reading Checks, Field trip reaction papers**

Consistent preparation for the class. First page - check: Author, title (event/exhibition,…), year (if relevant). Bullet points learned, in the jargon of the author, quotes, names, data. One initiated question for great class discussion. Second page – reaction: your evaluation, polemics, criticism, etc. Only accepted BEFORE class. Submit in email and print. Deadline for electronic submitting of the checks: two days before class at 8 pm.

**Weekly Schedule**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week 1</th>
<th>Jews in the Ancient world and in the Middle Ages, Ashkenazim</th>
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<td>Week 2</td>
<td>Crusades, medieval antisemitism, status of Jews in the Middle Ages</td>
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**Discussion:** Blood Libel and other accusations

*Sources:* Thomas of Monmouth’s account of the *Life and Miracles of St. William of Norwich* (a ritual murder accusation from 1173);
A ritual murder accusation from Blois, 1171;
Accusations of well-poisoning levelled against Jews during the Black Death (c. 1346-52)

*Discussion Readings:*
Breuer 1988, 139-151.

**Week 3**  
**Jewish mysticism and Hassidism, Jews in the 17th and 18th centuries**

*Reading:*
Possible field trip to the Old-New Synagogue

Kolin: one of the main centers of Jewish life in Bohemia since the 14th century. The 15th century Jewish cemetery is the second most important one in the country after the Old Jewish Cemetery in Prague.

*Presentations:*
1) Medieval antisemitism and representations of Jews
2) Architecture of a synagogue
3) Maharal and his followers


**Week 4**  
**Emancipation of Jews, French revolution, Joseph II., reformed Judaism**

*Presentation:*
Moses Mendelsohn

*Discussion Reading:*
Laquer 2003.


Mendes-Flohr, Reinhartz 1995
The French National Assembly: Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen, 1789
The French National Assembly: Debate on Eligibility of Jews for Citizenship, 1789
Moses Mendelsohn, The Right to be Different, 1783
Joseph II: Edict of Tolerance, 1782

**Week 5**  
**The Pale of Settlement**  
**Jews in the Austro-Hungarian Empire in the 19th century**

Mendes-Flohr, Reinhartz 1995.
Alexander I: Statutes Concerning the Organization of Jews, 1804
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<th>Week 6</th>
<th><strong>Field trip to the Jewish Museum</strong></th>
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<td><strong>Readings:</strong></td>
<td>Pařík 1991, 5-12.</td>
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<th>Week 7 <strong>Midterm</strong></th>
<th><strong>Test</strong></th>
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<td><strong>Film:</strong></td>
<td>Yaakov Lifshin, The Way of Man – on Martin Buber</td>
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<th>Week 8</th>
<th><strong>19th century antisemitism, sionism, modern racial theories, blood libel</strong></th>
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<td><strong>Presentations:</strong></td>
<td>de Gobineau 1915, 23-36.</td>
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<td></td>
<td><a href="https://archive.org/details/inequalityofhuma00gobi">https://archive.org/details/inequalityofhuma00gobi</a></td>
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| **Readings:**              | Biddis 1970: 103-180, 244-64.  |
|                            | Mendes-Flohr, Reinhartz 1995.  |
|                            | Moses Hess: Returning Home, 1862 |
|                            | The Bilu: Manifesto, 1882       |
|                            | Theodor Herzl: A Solution of the Jewish Question, 1896 |
|                            | The First Zionist Congress: The Basle Program, 1897 |
|                            | N. Tchaykovsky: The Massacre of Jews at Kishnev, 1903 |
|                            | The Beilis Trial, 1913          |

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<th>Week 9</th>
<th><strong>Interwar situation in the Central Europe</strong></th>
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<td><strong>Readings:</strong></td>
<td>Mendelsohn 1983, 131-169.</td>
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<th>Week 10</th>
<th><strong>Holocaust</strong></th>
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<td><strong>Mendes-Flohr, Reinhartz, 1995</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Hitler 1923.</strong></td>
<td>The Nuremberg Laws, 1935, Law for the Protection of German Blood and Honor, The Reich Citizenship Law</td>
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<td><strong>Security Service Report on the Kristallnacht, 1938</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Decree for the Elimination of the Jews from German Economic Life, 1938</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Numerus Nullus in Schools, 1938</strong></td>
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| Week 11 | Guest lecture: Holocaust survivor Michaela Vidláková  
Film screening on Sir Nicholas Winton, Matěj Mináč, The Power of Good |
| Week 12 | **Jews under communism**  
*Discussion Readings:*  
Judt 2006, 803-831. |
| Final Exam Week | Final Exam, Final presentations of research papers |

### Course Materials

#### Required readings


Pařík, Arno „From the History of the Jewish Communities in Bohemia and Moravia“, *Jewish Sights of Bohemia and Moravia*, Prague 1991.  

**Electronic resources**

Accusations of well-poisoning levelled against Jews during the Black Death (c. 1346-52)

A ritual murder accusation from Blois, 1171 -

Thomas of Monmouth’s account of the *Life and Miracles of St. William of Norwich* (a ritual murder accusation from 1173) -
[http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/source/1173williamnorwich.asp](http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/source/1173williamnorwich.asp)