

Syllabus Template for German 3256: Coming to Terms with the Holocaust and War in Germany: *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*

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(2) NA

(3) TBD

**(4) German 3256: Coming to Terms with the Holocaust and War in Germany: *Vergangenheitsbewältigung***

**(5) Fulfills GE Culture and Ideas, Historical Study**

**Expected Learning Outcomes:**

- 1. Students will be dealing with a major philosophical, literary, and cinematic works from postwar Germany dealing with the Holocaust and Second World War. They will learn to differentiate among responses to the horrors of the past and recognize that different postwar generations had different views on the meaning and ramifications of the Third Reich.**
- 2. Students will evaluate how ideas are formed in an intellectual and historical context, and learn to view critically the various responses to very difficult issues of historical action. They will engage with close reading of texts and film, and learn to articulate views in class discussions and in written exercises.**

**(6) Course Description: For at least the five decades postwar German intellectual and cultural life was haunted by the shadows of the Nazi Past. In particular the horrors of the war and the enormity of the cruel and murderous actions in the Holocaust have caused German intellectuals, writers, filmmakers, statesmen, and poets to reflect upon the nature of German actions and their consequences. This course is dedicated to examining how postwar Germans came to terms with war and the Holocaust. The ubiquity of the response in Germany has been such that the Germans use a single term for this phenomenon: *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, which means literally “mastering the past,” but which is understood to deal specifically with confronting the crimes of the Third Reich. We will look at various responses in several different genres, from philosophy and public debates to poems and films. We**

will discern that there are several periods to “*Vergangenheitsbewältigung*,” and that the nature of Germans dealing with their past (and the past of their fathers/mothers and grandfathers/grandmothers) has changed over time. Students will be confronted with difficult historical, intellectual, aesthetic, and ethical issues in this variety of German response.

**(7) Required Course Materials:** There will be various types of course materials. (1) I will make up a course reader, collecting various essays and excerpts that will be covered at various stages of the course. I will put this reader on Carmen and make it available through a local copy shop. (2) There will be several books ordered for the course, all available through the University Bookstore. I will also place copies of these books on reserve in the library. (3) Several films will be included in the course, and I will use the Secured Video Library for them.

**(8) Assignments:** Average number of pages of reading per week will be fewer than 50 pages. In weeks when the chief assignment is viewing a film, there will be little or no reading required.

**1. A midterm examination after the eighth week of classes. With instructor’s permission students may substitute a short paper (4-6 pages) for the midterm examination.**

**2. A final examination. With instructor’s permission, students will be permitted to substitute a final paper (10-15 pages) for the final examination.**

**(9) Grading based on the following percentages: papers (40%); final examination (60%).**

(10) Grading Scale:

|          |          |            |
|----------|----------|------------|
| 100-93 A | 79-77 C+ |            |
| 92-90 A- | 76-73 C  |            |
| 89-87 B+ | 72-70 C- |            |
| 86-83 B  | 69-67 D+ |            |
| 82-80 B- | 66-63 D  | below 63 E |

(11) Final examination during the regularly scheduled finals period.

(12) Class attendance policy: Students are expected to attend class, and will be penalized for failure to attend more than three sessions per term.

### (13) Weekly Outline

| <b>Week</b>       | <b>Topics</b>   | <b>Reading or Viewing Assignment</b>   |
|-------------------|---|--|
| <b>Week One</b>   | <b>Introduction to “Mastering the Past”; the War, the Holocaust, and the Aftermath in Germany; official responses in anthems; poetry after Auschwitz</b>  | <b>Germany’s national anthems; Celan’s “Fugue of Death”</b>  |
| <b>Week Two</b>   | <b>Philosophical Reflections from Three Different Sources: the internal emigration and the new Germany; the collaborator and the philosophical distancing; the exiled and their view of the Holocaust</b> | <b>Karl Jaspers: <i>The Question of German Guilt</i>; Martin Heidegger: “The Self-Assertion of the German University” and “The Rectorate 1933/34: Facts and Thoughts; Theodor Adorno/Max Horkheimer, “Elements of Anti-Semitism”</b> |
| <b>Week Three</b> | <b>The View from the Frontline Soldier: Germans and Nazis; Soldiers and Civilians</b>   | <b>Heinrich Böll: <i>The Train Was On Time</i></b>   |
| <b>Week Four</b>  | <b>First Filmic Response: Chasing daemons and catching criminals</b>  | <b>Wolfgang Staude: <i>The Murderers Are Among Us</i></b>  |
| <b>Week Five</b>  | <b>Writing and Guilt: responsibility and the difficulty of facing the past</b>  | <b>Günter Grass: <i>Cat and Mouse</i></b>  |
| <b>Week Six</b>   | <b>Complicity of the Pope: good and evil with regard to the Holocaust</b>   | <b>Rolf Hochhuth: <i>The Representative</i></b>  |
| <b>Week Seven</b> | <b>Documenting the Past: individuals and systemic responsibilities</b>  | <b>Peter Weiss: <i>The Investigation</i></b>   |
| <b>Week Eight</b> | <b>Psychoanalysis as Tool for Understanding the Third Reich: who were the Nazis?, why can’t we master our past; male culture and the horrors of war</b>   | <b>Selections from Wilhelm Reich, <i>Mass Psychology of Facism</i>; Alexander Mitscherlich, <i>The Inability to Mourn</i>, and Klaus Theweleit, <i>Male Fantasies</i></b>  |
| <b>Week Nine</b>  | <b>Splitting the Self: Accounting for one’s own actions through otherness; Mothers and Daughters and the other victims of National Socialism</b>  | <b>Christa Wolf: <i>Patterns of Childhood</i> (first half of book); Helga Sanders-Brahms: <i>Germany, Pale Mother</i></b>  |
| <b>Week Ten</b>   | <b>Women and the Third Reich: Coming to terms with yourself as coming to terms with the past</b>  | <b>Christa Wolf: <i>Patterns of Childhood</i> (second half of book)</b>  |

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|---------------|---|---|
| Week Eleven   | Explanations of Nazism: the Hitler in us; kitsch and National Socialism   | Hans-Jürgen Syberberg: <i>Our Hitler</i> (first two hours); Saul Friedländer, <i>Reflections on Nazism</i>          |
| Week Twelve   | Destruction of a Nation Consensus: revision of admission of guilt; Hitler and Stalin; Habermas and the ethical imperative     | Selections from <i>Forever in the Shadow of Hitler</i> (Historians' Debate)   |
| Week Thirteen | The Long View of National Socialism: German tradition and the hypothesis of German exceptionalism; Germany suffers in silence | From Daniel Goldhagen: <i>Hitler's Willing Executioners</i> ; W. G. Sebald, "On the Natural History of Destruction" |
| Week Fourteen | Blaming the Innocent: Perpetrators as Victims in the Third Reich  | Bernhard Schlink, <i>The Reader</i>   |

(14) "It is the responsibility of the Committee on Academic Misconduct to investigate or establish procedures for the investigation of all reported cases of student academic misconduct. The term "academic misconduct" includes all forms of student academic misconduct wherever committed; illustrated by, but not limited to, cases of plagiarism and dishonest practices in connection with examinations. Instructors shall report all instances of alleged academic misconduct to the committee (Faculty Rule 3335-5-487). For additional information, see the [Code of Student Conduct](#)

(15) "Students with disabilities that have been certified by the [Office for Disability Services](#) will be appropriately accommodated and should inform the instructor as soon as possible of their needs. The Office for Disability Services is located in 150 Pomerene Hall, 1760 Neil Avenue; telephone 292-3307, TDD 292-0901."