

Memories of the Holocaust: Memoirs and Film



UHON 222-007 | M | 10:00-12:30 | SHC 12 | 32158
Fulfills A&S Group IV: Social and Behavioral Sciences

Dr. Sheri Karmioli

I often hear questions, such as, "Why didn't Jews fight back?" "Why didn't they escape?" These are questions that I find difficult to answer, since the very questions suggest complicity with the Nazi-directed destruction that Europe's Jewish populations were experiencing. For many people, a failure to fight back or to escape suggests a willingness to be destroyed. In truth, these are the questions that continue to inspire me to teach this class. The texts that we will read this semester—the diaries, letters, and memoirs—that have survived the Shoah remain the best evidence of the Holocaust's existence. Our experiences with these texts will give voice to Europe's Jewish population and refute the claims of Holocaust deniers. In these texts we will learn about the choices that Jews made and the choices that were made for them. In their descriptions of daily existence, we have the opportunity to learn about the kind of strength and resilience that enabled a culture and religion to survive, even as millions of people perished. We will examine a selection of letters, diaries, journals, and individual memoirs written during and immediately after the Holocaust. We will also watch several short film documentaries that depict the experiences of Jews during this period. And we will be given the chance to visit with and question several survivors about their experiences. Through interviews, readings, films, and discussion, we will explore the lives of a select group of Jews. The texts we will read are eyewitness accounts; some of them will be painful to examine, but they remain our best hope to never forget, to never allow this to happen again. In recent years there has been a movement to discount the reality of the Holocaust. When this denial is considered in light of the genocides in Rwanda, Bosnia, Darfur, Sudan it becomes more imperative that we continue to read and discuss the literature of the Holocaust.

Student Comments

"I feel I am leaving this class with a better understanding of how people behave."

"This course really showed us so much more of the Holocaust than is generally taught. It is a very emotional and powerful class that teaches us about what humans are capable of doing to one another."

"I learned a greater appreciation for life. I feel I can talk about the Holocaust and help prevent it from happening again."

"I would consider this one of the most valuable courses I have ever taken."

"This class made me change my major to history."

"Everyone should take this class. It changed my life."

Readings

Diane Ackerson, *The Zookeeper's Wife*

Deborah Dwork, *The Holocaust*

Simon Wiesenthal, *The Sunflower*

A reader with selections from diaries, letters, and memoirs

A selection of Holocaust documentaries



Requirements

Memoir book report, presentations, a research project, and active participation in seminar discussions.

About the Instructor

Sheri Karmioli has a Ph.D. in 16th and 17th century British literature. Most of the classes that she teaches focus on social inequity, prejudice, and the marginalization of people, who are classified as expendable members of society. Sheri has been honored with awards for her teaching and has received two fellowships, including one for study at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.