

Professor Alvin H. Rosenfeld
TR 2:30-3:45 p.m.
Ballantine Hall 314
Fall Semester 2012

H234/JSTU 203--UNDERSTANDING ANTISEMITISM

The term “antisemitism” was coined only in the late 19th century, but the phenomenon it describes—intense hostility to Jews and/or Judaism—dates back millennia. Sometimes called “the longest hatred,” antisemitism begins in the ancient world and, with varying degrees of virulence, has continued over the centuries in the lands of both Christendom and Islam. At its most destructive, in the Nazi Holocaust of European Jewry, it turned genocidal, but well before that catastrophe, and also since, it has been the cause of humiliation, denigration, persecution, and murder, sometimes on a mass scale. Dormant for a time following the end of World War II, antisemitic passions have reawakened in recent years and pose serious challenges today in certain parts of the world.

The aim of this course is to help students understand this complex and often lethal form of hatred. Students will be introduced to the history of anti-Jewish hostilities and become familiar with some of their most prominent manifestations, especially in the modern period. They will learn that antisemitism is rooted in a range of sources--theological, legal, social, political, economic, and mythical--and that it both resembles and differs from other kinds of social bias and antagonism. Through close readings of antisemitic texts, they will become acquainted with the full repertoire of antisemitic tropes: Jews as agents of cosmic evil and murderers of God, children of the Devil and followers of the Antichrist, money manipulators and usurpers of other peoples’ possessions, political connivers and conspirators, sexual predators and social corrupters, and more. How these negative stereotypes get encoded and transmitted and why they continue to have appeal will be a continuing concern during our study.

Required readings for the course will include an historical survey of antisemitism, Walter Laqueur’s *The Changing Face of Antisemitism*, Marvin Perry and Frederick M. Schweitzer’s anthology of antisemitic texts, *Antisemitic Myths*, a novel that describes the nature and consequences of antisemitic violence: Bernard Malamud’s *The Fixer*, and one historical case study, Jan Gross’s *Neighbors*. Additional materials will be provided in class or accessed on the Web. A few films will also be shown.

Written work for the course will include three papers: one of 3-4 pages, one of 6-8 pages, and a term paper of 10-12 pages. Students will also present two brief oral reports in class. These assignments are described in detail on the course syllabus. There may also be an in-class examination. The final examination is optional.

Given the nature of the subject matter, this will be a demanding course. Students will be expected to do the assigned readings on time, attend all class meetings, and participate actively in class discussions of the literature. If you must miss a class session, be sure to let me know in advance. Repeated unexcused absences (more than 3) will lower your grade for the course.

You are encouraged to see me during office hours, TR 3:45-4:30 p.m. (Ballantine Hall 453 or Goodbody Hall 306), to discuss any aspect of your work in this course. If these times are inconvenient for you, please call or email me for a special appointment. I welcome meeting with you, so if you think I can be helpful, please feel free to get in touch.