

The Holocaust and the American Experience (MAHG 5004)

Fall 2014

Tuesday, 6 – 9:00 PM (HRC Classroom)

Dr. Carol Rittner RSM

Office: J 107

Tel #: (609) 652-4553

Email: Carol.Rittner@Stockton.Edu

Hours: Tues, 10 AM – 5:00 PM
and by Appointment

The Holocaust and the American Experience is a MAHG graduate seminar during which we shall examine the ways Americans have treated those who are different, beginning with the indigenous peoples – native American Indians – who were already living in what would become the United States of America. We shall also discuss the case of Africans brought involuntarily to “the New World” and enslaved. We shall look at another immigrant group as well – the Japanese during World War II, and we shall give some attention to the Vietnam War of the 1960s and 70s. If we had more time, we could explore other events and groups who have impacted America, before, during, and after the Nazi era and the Holocaust (1933-1945).

We shall try to examine our capacity – as Americans, as human beings – to succumb to massacres, war crimes, even genocidal evils. We shall also consider our potential, rooted in the American historical legacy, to remain faithful to the values of tolerance, diversity and unity.

In this seminar, we shall engage in a comparative approach to genocide as we explore the Holocaust and other colonial, racist and imperialist-motivated genocides and atrocities, in short, **The Holocaust and the American Experience**.

Here are some questions for you to think about as you read, write, and research this semester – I am sure there are many more that you will raise in our seminar:

1. How is it possible for a people to be destroyed?
2. What is the role and responsibility of the individual in society?
3. What makes some people resist and others obey authority?
4. What would I have done in similar circumstances [as during the historical events we are studying]?
5. Where does one draw the line between obeying the law and obeying one’s conscience?
6. What can people’s involvement in historical events [like those we are studying] tell us about human nature?
7. Is the study of the Holocaust relevant today? If it is, why is it? If it’s not, why isn’t it?

Essential Learning Outcomes (ELOs)

The faculty of The Richard Stockton College of New Jersey (RSC) have identified ten (10) Essential Learning Outcomes (ELOs) students should achieve by the time they graduate from RSC. Of course, no one course can address all of them, but here are three (3) for us to focus on as we move through the semester:

- ***Critical Thinking*** which is a habit of mind characterized by purposeful, self-regulatory practices, resulting in effective, fair, and balanced interpretation, analysis, evaluation, or inference, and which demonstrates understanding of relevant evidence, concepts, methods, criteria, or contexts. In other words, you are learning to make a habit of asking “why,” “who said that,” “Where did you find it,” “when was it published,” and “ what does that mean” whenever you hear or learn anything.
- ***Ethical Reasoning*** which is the recognition of an ethical dimension in a situation, that leads to critical examination of the potential consequences of your (in)actions based on consideration of alternate viewpoints and multiple principles and their implications, with the result that you are able to demonstrate ethical reasoning when faced with moral dilemmas in a variety of real-world contexts.
- ***Communication Skills***, specifically that you will understand college-level texts, demonstrate oral, written, and Multimedia skills, and you will use standard edited English (spelling, syntax, punctuation, and grammar).

Please see the attached Information Sheets detailing the three (3) levels of competence for each of the above ELOs. These are criteria against which I shall grade your written papers, your oral presentations/responses, and your seminar projects.

Required Books (and one [1] DVD

Alex Alvarez, *Native America and the Question of Genocide* (New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 2014).

Doris Bergen, *War & Genocide: A Concise History of the Holocaust, Second Edition* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2009).

Dee Brown, *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee: An Indian History of the American West* (New York: Picador/Henry Holt and Co, 1970).

Mary Matsuda Gruenwald, *Looking Like the Enemy: My Story of Imprisonment in Japanese-American Internment Camps* (Troutdale, OR: New Sage Press, 2005).

Carroll P. Kakel, III, *The American West and the Nazi East: A Comparative and Interpretive Perspective* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan 2013).

Steve McQueen (Director), *12 Years a Slave* (DVD, 2013).

Nick Turse, *Kill Anything That Moves: The Real American War in Vietnam* (New York: Picador – Reprint Edition, 2013).

Seminar Requirements

- **Attendance and Participation** in each Seminar Session;
- Weekly, 1-2 page, single-spaced, typed **Conversation Starters**;
- One (1) 4-5 page, double-spaced, typed **Book Review**; and
- **Final Project** (see below for instructions)

Evaluation

Final Grades will be calculated as follows:

- | | |
|--------------------------------|------|
| • Attendance and participation | 20% |
| • Conversation Starters | 20% |
| • Book Review | 20% |
| • Final Project | 40% |
| | 100% |

The following **Final Grades** will be awarded:

A, A-, B+, B, B-, C+, C, C-, D, F

Academic Honesty

The MA Program in Holocaust & Genocide Studies (MAHG) expects students to maintain the highest standard of academic honesty. All work that you turn in must be your own. Please review Stockton's Academic Honesty Policy, which can be found in the Student Handbook (intraweb.stockton.edu/eyos/page.cfm?siteID=67&pageID=2#10). You also should make yourself familiar with the penalties for violations of the policy and your rights as a student.

Disability or Special Needs

Students with disabilities or special needs that might impact their academic performance are asked to please come talk to me in the first 2 weeks of the semester so that we can discuss how to accommodate your needs.

Conversation Starters

Each week complete the assigned reading; then, prepare a **Conversation Starter that is at least one (1) BUT not more than two (2) single-spaced pages long – NOT shorter and NOT longer.**

Each Conversation Starter must include:

- a. **At least one [1] good, solid paragraph** (you might even write two or three paragraphs) that answers this question: **What did I get out of the reading?** If you “got nothing” out of the reading, be prepared to say and defend why you got nothing out of the reading, but if you got something out of the reading, be prepared to say what you got out of the reading.
- b. **A Short Passage, or two (2) or three (3) Key Sentences that “caught your eye”, or made you think, or shocked you, or made you question something you thought you already knew.** When you come to class, be prepared to defend, discuss, and/or elaborate on your selection(s).
- c. **Questions for Discussion** — Formulate three (3) to five (5) questions, based on your reading that you would like to discuss in the seminar because you want to hear what other people think and because you also want to clarify for yourself what you think, and why you think it. Be prepared to defend **WHY** your question/questions are important to the study of *The Holocaust & the American Experience*.

Book Review Guidelines

Every student will write a *Book Review* of a survivor’s memoir. It can be a memoir of someone who survived genocide, crimes against humanity, war crimes, or the Holocaust.

You may ask why read a survivor memoir? I’d like to borrow some ideas from the late Terrence Des Pres who had this to say in his book, *The Survivor*:

My subject is survival, the capacity of men and women to live beneath the pressure of protracted crisis, to sustain terrible damage in mind and body and yet be there, sane, alive, still human. I am . . . concerned with people who suffered [genocide, crimes against humanity, war crimes, the

Holocaust] . . . who endured the evil and returned to bear witness. . . . [A]n experience such as theirs cannot be understood apart from its context . . . it is with ordinary people that I am concerned; with how they felt and with what they did. . . . if no more than a dozen men and women stayed human [throughout their ordeal] and came through, if only the barest trace of humanness was *there* in the whole of that world [of genocide, crimes against humanity, war crimes, the Holocaust], the survivor's experience would still be invaluable. And as Albert Camus put it, "human evidence must be preserved."

- *The Survivor* (from the Preface)

It's the "human evidence" I want you to pay attention to in the memoir you select, a memoir that reveals the experience, the story of someone who suffered either genocide, a crime against humanity, war crime, or the Holocaust, who endured the evil, and lived to tell about it, reflect on it. I want you to explore and think about what the survivor did, how s/he stayed human, how reading that memoir complements your academic study of *The Holocaust and the American Experience*.

And I want you to venture out of your comfort zone. That is, if you have only been reading Holocaust survivor memoirs, delve into the Vietnam war; if you have only been reading about genocide in Rwanda or former Yugoslavia, explore Armenia, or Nanking, or the Native American Experience, or Slavery (19th, 20th, or 21st century slavery), or Vietnam, or . . . well, you can make a suggestion to me about what you want to read and review.

Guidelines for Book Reviews

- Your Book must be a Memoir of a Survivor;
- Your Book choice must be approved by Professor Rittner;
- Your Book Review must be typed, double-spaced, and paginated;
- Your Book Review must have your Name on it; and
- At the top of the first page, you should write the bibliographic information about the book following this format:

Friedlander, Henry. *The Origins of Nazi Genocide: From Euthanasia to the Final Solution*. Chapel Hill, North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 1995.

The review should not be longer than 1200 words (that's about 5-double-spaced pages) nor less than 900 words (that's about 4 pages).

The review should not spend more than two (2) or three (3) sentences summarizing the survivor's story. The review, among other things, should try to get at WHY the survivor wrote her/his memoir, WHAT you think s/he wants the reader to "get out of the book" (e.g., think about questions? Share insights? What?), and HOW, in your view, the memoir complements, supplements, challenges, or revises your reading and/or your thinking this semester. And you should clearly say if and why, or why you do not, recommend your book for us all to read.

Final Project

This semester I would like to try something different: instead of assigning a research paper (you have an opportunity to do those in other MAHG seminars), I want to challenge you to use your intellectual and creative abilities to develop a **Digital Story**, or an **Animated-Talking PowerPoint Presentation** (with appropriate film clips or podcasts, etc. embedded in it), or a **Digital Graphic Novel** related to the subject matter of MAHG 5004, *The Holocaust and the American Experience*. It is an opportunity for you to develop the *Communication Skills* ELO relative to Multimedia Skills. I'd venture to say that all of us either have, or have access to "smart phones" (iPhones, Nokias, Samsungs, Droids, etc.) and tablets (iPads, other types of products) that have both an audio and video capability and that can take photographs, not to mention video cameras.

In addition, there is tons of information and "how to" instructions regarding all of these options on the internet, so it will be easy enough – OK, challenging – for you to learn how to create a Multimedia Final Project

Here are definitions for terms so you know what I mean by each of the options I am giving you:

- **Digital Story** – Digital storytelling at its most basic core is the practice of using computer-based tools to tell stories. There are a wealth of other terms used to describe this practice, such as digital documentaries, computer-based narratives, digital essays, electronic memoirs, interactive storytelling, etc.; but in general, they all revolve around the idea of combining the art of telling stories with a variety of multimedia, including graphics, audio, video, and Web publishing.
- **Animated-Talking PowerPoint Presentation** –A PowerPoint is a digital aid presenters often use when presenting their topic to an audience. We have all seen them, and perhaps we have even often used them in classes. If you

chose this option, your PPP should be saved in the .pps mode so it automatically “plays” itself. (You might think of this as a kind of “quasi-film”).

- **Digital Graphic Novel** – Graphic novels are, simply defined, book-length comics. Comics are sequential visual art, usually with text, that often are told in a series of rectangular panels. For our purposes, they will not be “funny,” but serious.

Our subject matter in MAHG 5004 is *The Holocaust and the American Experience*. What you must do is create a **Digital Story**, or a **PowerPoint Presentation**, or a **Graphic Novel** that could involve:

- Interviewing a Vietnam Veteran about his/her experiences and probing him/her to tell his/her story and how she/he thinks his/her story may or may not relate to the Holocaust, and Why is does or does not.

Or, maybe you may want to identify, research, explore, discuss, speculate about

- A New Jersey, Pennsylvania, New York, Delaware, or other Native American Indian Tribe’s historical experience, how it affects some living Native American Indian individual today – and whatever “relationship” she/he thinks it may have to the Holocaust (Civil and Religious Rights, Employment, Education, Prejudice, Propaganda, etc.). **Or, maybe you want to**
- Interview a survivor of a WW II Japanese-American Internment Camp, so as to tell her/his story, how it has affected his/her life since 1945, and whether or not she/he sees any relationship to the Holocaust (Why, or Why Not?). **Or, perhaps you may want to**
- Identify a survivor of the Holocaust, interview him/her, tell his her story, and get him/her to speak about how his/her experience somehow sheds light on his/her experience becoming and living as an American, imbued with what American values? **On the other hand, you may want to**
- Interview several people of color (scholar, other professional, laborer, or another person) and get their take on how they think the institution of slavery in American society from the beginning of the colonies until the Emancipation Proclamation impacted American society and them through their lives.
- **Or, maybe you have another idea? Let me know . . .**

Requirements

1. Digital Stories and PowerPoint Presentations must be at least five (5) minutes long and no more than seven (7) minutes long;
2. Digital Graphic Novels must be as long as you need them to be to tell your story, or make your point (convincingly, of course!).

Criteria Against Which I Shall Evaluate Final Projects

- Clarity
- Accuracy of Information
- Creativity

Reading, Viewing, Assignment Schedule (Please Read Carefully)

September

- 9 Bergen, *War and Genocide*, 2nd edition (entire)

Next Week, Tuesday, September 16th, Dr. Robert Skloot, Fall 2013 *Ida E. King Distinguished Visiting Scholar in Holocaust Studies*, will give a MAHG Lecture at 4:30 PM in Room F-111: "Wandering with Firm Purpose: Raphael Lemkin's Crusade to Stop Genocide." **You are invited to the lecture.**

- 16 Kakel, *The American West and the Nazi East* (Preface, Introduction, Chapters 1–3)
- Dr. Carroll “Pete” Kakel, author of *The American West and the Nazi East*, will join us in our seminar via Skype (about 7:30 PM).

Next Week, Tuesday, September 23rd, Dr. Faraz Sanei, Researcher, Middle East and North Africa Division, Human Rights Watch, NYC, will give a lecture at 4:30 PM in the HRC classroom, “Challenges to Human Rights Advocacy in the 21st Century.” **You are invited to the lecture.**

- 23 Kakel, *The American West and the Nazi East* (Chapters 4 – Conclusion)
- Dr. Faraz Sanei will join us for about the first hour of our class to talk about career opportunities for graduates with a degree/interest in Holocaust & Genocide Studies. After a short break, we shall continue with our discussion of *The American West and the Nazi East*.

Next Week, Tuesday, September 30th, Lillian Hussong, who just completed all requirements for her MA in Holocaust & Genocide Studies, will give a MAHG Lecture at 4:30 PM in Room F-111: "LGBT Uganda and the Threat of Genocide." **You are invited to the lecture.**

- 30 Brown, *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee* (Foreword – Chapter 9)
- **Selection of your topic and Medium of Choice is Due today**

October

- 7 Brown, *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee* (Chapters 10 -19)

On Thursday, October 9th at 4:30 PM in C-134, Dr. Laurence Baron from the University of San Diego, CA, will give a MAHG Lecture: “Serious Humor: Holocaust Comedy Films.” **You are invited to the lecture.**

- 14 Alvarez, *Native America and the Question of Genocide* (entire)
- Dr. Alex Alvarez, author of *Native America and the Question of Genocide*, will join our class via Skype at about 7:30 PM.
- 21 12 Years a Slave (**DVD**)
- Dr. Rob Gregg, Professor of History and Dean of the School of General Studies, will join us in our seminar at 6 PM for some introductory comments and discussion about “The Holocaust and the African-American Experience of Slavery: Is there Any Relationship Between These Two Horrific Experiences to Think About or Discuss? Why, or Why Not?”
- 28 Gruenewald, *Looking Like the Enemy* (entire)

Tomorrow, Wednesday, October 29th, Dr. Tibi Galis, Executive Director, Auschwitz Institute, NYC, will give a lecture at 4:30 PM in the HRC Classroom: “The Future of Genocide Prevention in the 21st Century.” **You are invited to the lecture.** He also will join the MAHG Wednesday evening seminar to speak about career/employment opportunities.

November

- 4 Gruenewald, *Looking Like the Enemy* (entire)
- Japanese-American visitors to our seminar to discuss with us their experiences in Japanese-American Relocation/Internment Camps during World War II.
- 11 Turse, *Kill Anything That Moves: The Real American War in Vietnam* (Introduction – p. 143)
- 18 Turse, *Kill Anything That Moves: The Real American War in Vietnam* (pp. 144 – 268)
- Dr. John O’Hara is Assistant Professor of the First Year Studies Program. One of his primary academic interests is the Vietnam War. Professor O’Hara will join us for some comments and discussion about “The Vietnam War and the Holocaust: Is there Any Relationship Between These Two Horrific Experiences to Think About or Discuss? Why, or Why Not?”

On Thursday, November 20th, Dr. Rachel Lithgow, Executive Director of the American Jewish Historical Society, NYC, will give a lecture at 4:30 in the HRC Classroom: “The Future of Museum Education on the Holocaust and Genocide in the 21st Century.” **You are invited to attend the lecture.** Dr. Lithgow will join the Thursday MAHG seminar to speak about career/employment opportunities.

- 25 No Class but Book Reviews are Due – Four [4] to Five [5] double-spaced pages long – and are to be sent to me Electronically.**

December

- 2 Oral Presentations of Book Reviews
Summary and Conclusions
- 9 Presentation of Final Projects