

The Holocaust: Exploring the Issues of Resistance and Rescue

WH
Jan. 30; Feb. 6, 13, 20, 27; Mar. 5 (9:30-11:30)

Don Schilling
schilling@denison.edu

“Let us not go like sheep to the slaughter. It is true that we are weak, lacking protection, but the only reply to a murderer is resistance. Brothers, it is better to die as free fighters than to live at the mercy of killers. Resist, resist, to our last breath!” (Abba Kovner, December 3, 1941, Vilna, Lithuania)

“No one knows for certain how many non-Jews risked their lives to save Jews during the Holocaust. There were nearly 700 million people in Nazi-occupied territories. Only a tiny fraction of them were involved in rescue activities.” WHY? (Eva Fogelman, *Conscience & Courage*, 1994)

The Course

Among the many complex and perplexing questions raised by the Holocaust are those related to the topics of Jewish resistance and the rescue of Jews. What actions/behaviors qualify as resistance? Why did so many victims appear to go to their deaths “like sheep to the slaughter”? What factors made Jewish resistance very challenging? Why didn’t Jews receive more support when they did engage in acts of resistance? In what ways was Jewish resistance successful? What actions/behaviors constitute rescue? Why did Jewish communities and individuals under assault by National Socialist Germany’s anti-Jewish policies have such difficulty finding safe havens in other nations? Once the Final Solution was being fully implemented (late 1941 through 1944) should the Allies done more to rescue Jews? In a sea of bystanders why did so few individuals attempt to rescue Jews? For those bystanders who did become rescuers what factors seem to account for their extraordinary behavior? What was achieved by rescue efforts? What lessons do we draw from our study of the history of Jewish resistance and rescue during the Holocaust? The discussion of selected documents, visual evidence, and my presentations will help us engage these questions, although finding definitive answers will often prove elusive.

Objectives: 1) Class members will acquire a fuller understanding of the scope and nature of Jewish resistance and the factors that made such resistance extremely difficult.
2) Class members will acquire a fuller understanding of the scope and nature of rescue efforts and the factors that made such efforts exceptionally challenging.
3) Class members will contribute to our collective learning through their discussion of a number of complex (and perhaps contentious) issues related to the topics of resistance and rescue.

Class Schedule:

Jan. 30	Introductions, Contexts, & the Nature and Scope of Resistance The Historical Framework Defining Jewish Resistance Examples of Jewish Resistance Identifying the Major Obstacles to Armed Jewish Resistance Required Reading: Documents Packet #1—Document #1 (p. 1) Discussion Questions: What constitutes resistance? What do we learn about the difficulties of resisting from Virba and Levi? (Doc. #1)
Feb. 6	Patterns of Resistance & The Warsaw Ghetto Uprising Patterns of Jewish Resistance in Western Europe Patterns of Jewish Resistance in Eastern Europe The Warsaw Ghetto Uprising (Spring 1943)

Required Reading: Documents Packet #1—Documents #2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7 (in that order, pp 2-14).

Discussion Questions: What do the assigned documents reveal about the motives for, the challenges of, the kinds of actions intended, and consequences of resistance? What accounts for the timing of the Warsaw Ghetto uprising, the tactics employed, and its ultimate defeat? In what sense was this uprising a “success”?

Feb. 13 The Bielski Partisan Movement & Conclusions

The Bielski Partisans: Historical Overview
The Bielski Partisans: A Cinematic Representation
Concluding Issues

Required Reading: Document Packet #1—Document #8 (pp. 15-20)

Discussion Questions: How was the Bielski otriad organized and how did it evolve over time? What enabled the Bielski otriad to survive the war when so many Jewish partisan groups failed to do so? How much credit does Tuvia Bielski deserve for that success and why? Concluding questions: What did Jewish resistance accomplish and what was its significance? How does the incidence of Jewish resistance compare with that of other groups experiencing oppression by the Nazi regime? Has your understanding of this topic changed as a result of this unit? If so, how?

Feb. 20 Rescue: Background, Contexts, The US and Issues of Rescue

Rescue: An Overview
The US Responds to the Plight of the Jews between 1933-1941
The US at War and the Role of Rescue
The “Bombing of Auschwitz” Controversy

Required Reading: Document Packet # 2—Documents #1, 2, & 3 (pp. 1-17)

Discussion Questions: How did the US respond to the plight of German Jews in the 1930s? What factors shaped that response? How did the US respond to the plight of Jews during WWII? What factors shaped its response? In the debate among historians over US rescue policy what are the major arguments? Which do you find most compelling? Could the Allies have bombed Auschwitz in 1944? Should they have done so?

Feb. 27 Large-Scale Rescue: The Case of Le Chambon

Le Chambon: A Small, French Community Rescues Jews

Discussion Questions: How was rescue achieved in this case? What seems to have motivated the rescuers? What factors influenced the responses of the perpetrators?

Mar. 5 A Nation Saves Its Jewish Population & How and Why Bystanders Became Rescuers

Denmark: A Nation as Rescuer
Case Studies of individuals and institutions rescuing Jews
Examining Research on Rescuers
Conclusions

Required Reading: Packet # 2—Documents #4, 5, 6 (pp. 18-24)

Discussion Questions: What accounts for the success of the Danish rescue effort? How and why do bystanders become rescuers? What kind of answers do we get from scholarly studies? Which answers, if any, do you find most convincing? What is the value of exploring the topic of rescue? Has your understanding of this topic changed as a result of this unit? If so, how?