CIEE Prague, Czech Republic

Course title: Jewish Culture in Central Europe
Course code: CEAS 3008 PRAG
Programs offering course: Central European Studies, Communication, New Media, and Journalism
Language of instruction: English
U.S. semester credits: 3.00
Contact hours: 45.00
Term: Spring 2022

Course Description

The existence of the Jewish community in Prague was first documented in the writings of an Arab-Jewish traveler, Ibrahim ibn Yaqub, in 965 AD, while in Hungary some records even predate 895 AD. Jewish communities have been part of Central European space for over one thousand years and have influenced art, architecture, and many social and cultural artifacts throughout their history. This course explores Jewish culture in Central Europe, covering the most significant periods, movements and representations, including the importance of Renaissance rabbis and scientific discoveries in early modern Europe and the large Central European centers of Jewish thought as well as the transition of Europe from the old order of the Austro-Hungarian Empire to the formation of national states and the onset of Nazism, studying the circles of Jewish writers and intellectuals in the Central European capitals. Furthermore, the course also delves into the little researched and long disappeared world of wealthy industrialists, gaining rare insights into the world of large art collections which were mostly looted by the Nazis. The "final solution of the Jewish questions" is seen through the optics of notable Central European authors and filmmakers.

Learning Objectives

By completing this course, students will:

- Acquire a critical understanding of Central European Jewish culture, including visual art, film, architecture, literature, and philosophy;
- Compare the representations of Jewish culture in different Central European countries;
- Contextualize the existence of the Jewish population within the plurality of cultures in the region;
- Critically evaluate the course material and presented studies through academic writing and presentations.

Course Prerequisites

None

Methods of Instruction

This course is taught using a dynamic combination of lectures, discussions, group work, student presentations, and field trips, including a mandatory one-day trip to Kolín, one of the main centers of Jewish life in Bohemia since the 14th century. A guest speaker will offer her personal experiences with culture in the Terezín ghetto.

Assessment and Final Grade

1. Discussion Leader 20%
2. Class Excursion Participation and Reflection 10%
3. Research Paper and Presentation 15%
4. Presentation of Research 5%
5. Group Presentation 10%
6. Reading Checks 20%
7. Class Participation 20%

TOTAL 100%

Course Requirements
Discussion Leader

Each student will lead a presentation on a given topic or a reading assignment. Assessed areas include clarity, delivery and organization. This task includes a PowerPoint presentation with one slide presenting information about the author of the reading assignment (if relevant), five slides explaining the topic and difficult points of the text and the last slide containing questions and polemic points for moderating a class discussion. Grading takes into account the accuracy in the delivery of the main issues to the class and success in stimulating discussion. Remember that as you are presenting the content of the reading assignment (if relevant), your comments and interpretations are to be voiced in the discussion part.

Class Excursion Participation and Reflection

Research Paper and Presentation

Projects are evaluated according to the quality of research and the ability to supply the student’s own commentary. The work must be related to the topics and readings covered in class. The topic must be discussed with the instructor and approved by him/her in advance by week 6. Paper length: 1500–2000 words

Presentation of Research

Presentations of learner’s research should be 10-15 minutes long including the class discussion.

Group Presentation

Students will be divided into groups, each group will prepare a presentation on an assigned topic. A group presentation should take approximately 15 minutes and the assignment includes 15 minutes of leading of a discussion. The evaluation focuses on the clarity, delivery, organization and ability to engage fellow students.

Reading Checks

Reading Checks assess students’ consistent preparation for classes. There are 10 reading checks per semester, approximately 250 words each. A check consists of two parts:

1. First page – check: author, title, year, and bullet points learned, quotes, names, and data. One initiated question for class discussion.
2. Second page – reaction: your evaluation, polemics, criticism, etc.

Reading checks are always due BEFORE the class session: the deadline is two days before the class session at 8 p.m. The submission is required via Canvas. In addition, students should bring their printed check to class.

Class Participation

Class participation involves more than mere attendance. A consistent knowledge of sources and readings is expected as well as active participation in class discussions, including the ability to formulate and ask questions during class discussions, field trips and guest lecture presentations. Class participation also includes four engagement activity checks, length: 250–500 words. These checks may be related to field trips and guest lectures. Checks related to field trips include: place(s) visited, time of construction, a text including learned facts. Checks related to guest lectures include: the name of the Holocaust survivor, bullet points learned, second page: your observations, reflections and thoughts.

Attendance

To encourage engaged learning, regular class attendance is required throughout the program. This includes any required co-curricular class excursion or event, as well as internship, service-learning, or other required field placement.

An excused absence in a CIEE course will only be considered if approved by a CIEE Center Director/Academic Director (not the Instructor), and:

- it is a self-certified absence for illness (only once per course, requires formal request before or within 24 hours, cannot miss assessment worth more than 5% of final course grade)
- a doctor’s note from a local medical professional is provided
- evidence of a family emergency is provided
- it is a pre-approved observance of religious holiday

Unexcused absences include personal travel and/or travel delays, as well as missing more than 25% of a single
class period (including tardiness and early departure). Assessments missed due to unexcused absences will be marked as zero. Students with over 10% unexcused absences will be contacted by CIEE staff. Students with over 20% unexcused absences will be contacted by CIEE staff, receive a formal warning letter (shared with their home institution) and lose 10% of the final course point total (e.g., a final A grade of 93% will be lowered to a B grade of 83%).

For more detail, please consult your CIEE Academic Manual.

**Academic Integrity**

Academic integrity is essential to a positive and inclusive teaching and learning environment. All students are expected to complete coursework responsibilities with fairness, respect, and honesty. Failure to do so by seeking unfair advantage over others or misrepresenting someone else's work as your own can result in grade penalties or disciplinary action. See the CIEE Student Academic Manual for further information on academic integrity.

**N.B. Course schedule and co-curriculars are subject to change. The final duration and distribution of content and assignments will be determined and presented to students at the onset of the course.**

**Weekly Schedule**

**Week 1**

Class: 1.1 Architecture of Synagogues

This module examines the institution of the synagogue at the time of the Jerusalem Temple and its role after its destruction. The synagogue developed into a typical Jewish form of architecture. In the Middle Ages, Jews were often inspired by existing architecture that they adapted to their needs, creating a specific form. The Jews of Eastern and Central Europe developed their own architectural concepts especially between the 16th and the 18th centuries.

**Reading:** Fiedler, 1991.

**Week 2**

Class: 2.1 Jewish Liturgical Items

This module explores ancient Jewish history reflected in Jewish holidays and traditions and their representation in liturgical items created in Central Europe from the 17th through the 20th centuries.

**Reading:** Kosáková, 2005.

**Week 3**

Class: 3.1 Representation of Jews in the Middle Ages and Jewish Illuminated Manuscripts

The topics covered in this module include the Crusades and medieval anti-semitism as well as the changes in the position of Jews and their representation, demonstrated on illuminated manuscripts, mural paintings and sculpture. Richly illuminated Hebrew manuscripts, namely *Megilat Ester* and *Haggadot shel Pesach*, are examined in the second part of the module.

**Reading:** Lipton, 2014, Metzger, 2007.

**Week 4**

Class: 4.1 The Maharal of Prague and His Followers, Centers of Jewish Literacy

This module explores prominent Renaissance rabbinical personalities in Central Europe and their influence on the Jewish as well as non-Jewish communities. In the Habsburg Empire, Prague was a city bustling with rich cultural exchanges as the imperial court attracted scholars from various parts of Europe. Being the capital of the Empire around the year 1600, Prague became one of the foremost Jewish centers of the 17th century.

The famous *yeshivot* in Moravia and present-day Slovakia are examined in the second part of the module. The 18th-century Chassidic movement is demonstrated on the figure of Reb Shmelke of Nikolsburg (Mikulov) in Moravia, while the Jewry in Slovakia is explored using the example of the *Pressburger Yeshiva* (Bratislava) established by Chatam Sofer, which developed into one of the
largest and most influential centers of Jewish education in Central Europe in the 19th century.


Cultural engagement activity check I due

Week 5

Class: 5.1 Field Trip to the Jewish Museum in Prague

Excursion to the oldest functioning synagogue in Europe dating from the 1200s. In its rich collections, the Jewish Museum in Prague houses a number of synagogue curtains, silverware and other liturgical objects, particularly from the baroque era and the 19th century. The wealth of Central European Jewry was accumulated there by the Nazis who, according to Egon Erwin Kisch, planned to establish a museum of “an extinct nation” in Prague.

**Reading:** Rybar, 1991.

Week 6

Class: 6.1 Prague Jewish Writers

*Midterm Exam Period*

Prague of the fin de siècle was a city of Czechs, Germans and Jews. The German speaking Jewish authors, such as Franz Werfel, Max Brod and Franz Kafka, were also very active as translators of Czech literature into German and, therefore, served as mediators between the often mutually hostile cultures, building bridges of understanding.

**Reading:** Spector, 2000.

Week 7

Class: 7.1 Viennese Circles and the Disintegration of the Austro-Hungarian Empire

The transition of Europe from the old order of the Austro-Hungarian Empire to the formation of nation states and the arrival of Nazism is demonstrated on writings by Joseph Roth, Stephen Zweig, and philosopher Martin Buber.

This module also includes screening and a discussion of the contemporary Israeli movie about Martin Buber, The Way of Man, by Yaakov Lifshin.

**Reading:** Roth, multiple editions.

Cultural engagement activity check II due

Week 8

Class: 8.1 "Judapest"

This module focuses on the rich heritage of Hungarian Jewish authors, such as Ephraim Kishon, Imre Kertesz, and Joseph Pulitzer, and includes screening extracts from Fateless, a film based on a novel written by Imre Kertesz, a Nobel Prize Laureate, and Ephraim Kishon’s Sallah Shabbati.

**Reading:** Kertesz, 2004.

Week 9

Class: 9.1 Jewish Industrialists and Art Collectors

This module explores the hitherto-little researched world of wealthy Jewish families that were prominent in various fields of industry (e.g., sugar making, textile production and brown coal mining). It also provides rare insights into the world of big art collections that were mostly looted by the Nazis. Jewish industrialists also had their villas and palaces built by the foremost architects of their respective time periods. Prague, Brno as well as the Bohemian countryside were significantly shaped by their contributions.

Week 10

Class: 10.1 One-day Mandatory Trip to the Kolín region

The city of Kolín was one of the main centers of Jewish life in Bohemia from the 14th century. In
addition to the synagogue, we will also visit the 15th-century Jewish cemetery which is the second most important one in the country, eclipsed only by the Old Jewish Cemetery in Prague. The second part of the trip will explore affluent Jewish families in the region, including the Petscheks, the Bauers, exploring the Bauers’ Cubist villa in Libodřice, and the Mandelíks, visiting the Château Kotěra, originally the Mandelík family palace.

Reflection of the Holocaust in Central European Film

This module introduces theme of the “final solution of the Jewish question,” through screening the 1965 Academy Award-Winning film, The Shop on Main Street by Ján Kadár and Elmar Klos and a subsequent discussion on Slovakia, the first country to start deporting Jews.

Readings:

Cultural engagement activity check III due

Week 11
Class: 11.1 The Warsaw Ghetto Uprising in Polish Movie and Literature

An act of Jewish resistance in the largest of all of the Jewish ghettos in Nazi-occupied Europe during World War II is the main theme of this module. The class examines the reactions of the international community and their position in the Polish political discourse, alongside its representations by Academy Award-Winning film directors Roman Polanski, Andrzej Wajda, and prolific Polish author Jerzy Andrzejewski.


Week 12
Class: 12.1 Culture in Terezín

Terezín is an example of an exceptional Jewish ghetto and a transitory concentration camp, which gathered some of the most prominent European personalities such as conductor Karel Ančerl. The Terezín ghetto is known for its extensive, high-quality cultural activities that included visual arts, music, theatre, and philosophy lectures. The module also includes a meeting with Holocaust survivor Michaela Vídláková.

Reading: Friesová, 2011.

Week 13
Class: 13.1 Final Exam Week

Presentations of students’ projects
Final Exam
Cultural engagement activity check IV due

Course Materials
Readings


Ruderman, David B. *Jewish Thought and Scientific Discovery in Early Modern Europe*. Yale University, 1995.


**Media Resources**

**Films:**


