

The Holocaust represented human behavior at its worst and also manifested human goodness that preserved human life. Yet we hear a lot less about rescue than about Hitler, which risks giving perpetrators the last word. We will examine narratives of perpetration in context with rescue and defiance, with attention to how gender mattered. Hitler's rule and overwhelming social conformity tested individual character, probably beyond what any of us has known. Recognizing the Holocaust's uniqueness, we see it as representing mechanisms of behavior across civilizations that we must face right now, as popular autocracies displace democracies. We will consider the question of how to fairly compare and contrast the memory of the Holocaust to American slavery and the extermination of first peoples. We now encounter national debates about the ways in which acknowledging guilt could stifle national pride, questions West Germany debated during the 1980s. What are the potentials and limitations of comparisons posed by the problem of racial evil? Guest lectures are an important element of our learning.