

City university of New York
Medgar Evers College
Department of Philosophy & Religious Studies
Fall 2015

Torture and Dual Identities

This course sets out to understand how the historical experience of torture by marginalized groups, specifically Jewish and Black communities, shapes their self-perception as bearers of dual identities; specifically the role of torture in conceptualizing such identities as American-Jewish or European-Jewish and American-Caribbean or European-Caribbean. The ambition of this course is twofold. By means of close reading of Frantz Fanon's *Black Skin White Masks*, its first goal is to lay out Fanon's comparison of the European perception of Jewish and French Caribbean communities during the post second world war period and his conclusion that both communities are ostracized. On the basis of this argument, the course reflects on the accounts of Jewish survivors of the holocaust and slave narratives. Hence, the texts of Viktor Frankel, Jean-Amery, Etty Hillsum and Ann Frank among others will be central to grasp the Jewish rendition of torture during the holocaust. On the other hand, the accounts of John Fields, Sara Graves and Charley Williams will be read to illustrate the experience of torture by slaves in the US South.

Objectives: By the completion of the course, students should be fluent in the narrative techniques used by both Jewish survivors and slaves and how such techniques are conducive to the embrace of dual identities (American-Jewish or European-Jewish and American-Caribbean or European-Caribbean) by both communities. Furthermore, students will develop an appreciation of the mnemonic techniques and processes at work in the memoirs of Jewish survivors of the holocaust and slave narratives. Ultimately, the course assists students in grasping the continuity between the experience of torture, narratives, memoirs and dual identities.

Required Reading:

Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*

Sterling Bland, *African-American Slave Narratives, Vol. 3*

Joseph Rebhun, *Why Me? Memoirs of Holocaust Survivors*

Attendance Policy: Students must attend the lectures. Absences must be justified by a valid medical or legal note when necessary.

Course Type: The course will be a lecture course.

Course Level: the course is 300 level course and requires fluency in English and psychology fundamentals.

Evaluation: students' grade will be determined by two 5-7 pages essay. The short essays are worth 20 points. The major essay is worth 50 points. Lastly, students are expected to present a topic of the reading to their classmates. It is worth 10 points. The presentation should be an elaboration of your thought and reaction to one of the figures in the assigned reading. Students must consult with the instructor for approval of the topic of their final essay.

Duration: The course follows a twelve weeks standard period of instruction.