



Middlebury
College

Middlebury College
Middlebury, Vermont 05753

July 2021

Dear Members of My Alumni College Class,

I am happy you have chosen to join me next month in my class, Understanding the Holocaust. I introduced this class to Middlebury 17 years ago when I first arrived at the College and have offered it to undergraduates many times since then. It is a class that means a lot to me, so I am happy to now be able to offer it to yet another audience, Middlebury alumni.

Perhaps the most important issue to note at the beginning, as we prepare to undertake a course on understanding the Holocaust, is that there are rarely simple answers. Many facts are clear, such as when Hitler became chancellor or how many Jews were murdered in the Holocaust, of course. We will learn these facts. But that is where history begins, not where it ends. More importantly, I hope we will tackle the “bigger questions” that lie at the heart of the study of history and in particular of the Holocaust. For example, why did people vote for Hitler? When was the plan for murder developed? How could such barbarism take place? These are questions that scholars have asked and will continue to ask, sometimes answering in varying and even competing ways. We will examine how and why these interpretations differ, enabling us to hopefully gain an understanding of these “bigger questions” as well.

Before arriving at Bread Loaf for our course, I would like you to do two things. First, please read **Primo Levi's *Survival in Auschwitz***. It is widely available on Amazon as well as elsewhere. Second, please make a list of about a dozen “big questions” that you would like to see addressed in the course. For “extra credit,” think about how you might propose answering them.

I look forward to meeting you all in August.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading 'Rebecca Bennette', with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Rebecca Ayako Bennette
Professor, Department of History