

Essay describing your research strategies , library tools, resources & services in completion of the project (TXUSTR)

Created: 02/13/2016

Last updated: 02/16/2016

Maximum 750 words

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Provided a 500-750 reflective essay describing your research strategies and your application of library tools, resources and services in completion of the project

This research topic arose from my observation that significance gaps exist in research upon culture in Polish ghettos during the Holocaust. In particular, few historians have studied the practical value of culture and the ambiguities of its use in the ghettos. I became disenchanted with the focus upon culture as having positive psychological value alone, and wished to explore this topic for myself to potentially fill in these prevalent gaps.

The University of Ottawa library has a wealth of resources for Holocaust research which I used exhaustively while conducting my research. First, to establish general knowledge of the Holocaust ghettos, I read the books Professor Grabowski keeps on reserve as a reference for his students and the staple Holocaust literature contained in the physical library such as Raul Hilberg, Lucy S. Dawidowicz, and Barbara Engelking's work. This process led me to realize that unfortunately, due to a lack of access to archival material in Europe, it would be best to research the larger ghettos.

After I decided on Warsaw and Łódź as my geographical focus, my scope of research became more limited and I was able to move on to using the library databases. These databases were crucial to formulate the historiographic element of my paper. The history research guide led me quickly to the right databases for my research; I found JSTOR, Historical Abstracts, and Academic Search Complete to be the most fruitful. These journal articles also included valuable primary sources which I was able to interpret and apply in my paper to further my argument. Since, as I mentioned above, it is difficult to access Holocaust-era primary documents in Canada, having a wide breath of peer-reviewed journal articles at my disposal was integral.

However, the University of Ottawa is unique in that it has complete access to the University of Southern California Shoah Foundation's Visual History Archive. This was my most original use of library resources, the USC Foundation has over 50,000 full-length testimonies of Holocaust survivors which all University of Ottawa students can view. I reference two testimonies in my paper, Janina Bauman and Frieda Aaron, and watched many others to gain perspective and witness-accounts of the events. These testimonies are an extremely valuable primary source, some up to six hours long. They added a dynamic element to my research, as I was able to both practise my primary analysis skills and expand my sources. Testimonies by witnesses recorded many years, in this case around 40 years, following an event offer a challenge to historians. While viewing these sources I had to constantly question their validity, keeping in mind the memories of these survivors might be altered by temporal distance and other sources they have been exposed to since.

In addition to the USC Shoah Foundation, diaries were my other main source of primary accounts. Since most of the diaries I needed were not available through our library, I used the Inter-library Loan (RACER) service. I studied these diaries with the purpose to understand the role culture played in the lives of individuals inside the Łódź and Warsaw ghettos. I was able to identify three trends which became the structure for my paper. In completing this project, I received guidance from Dr. Jan Grabowski, who provided me with primary sources I was unable to find with RACER and feedback throughout the process of research.

My final use of library resources was the Geographical, Statistical, and Government Information Centre. With the help of librarians at the centre, I was able to locate a map of Warsaw from 1943 and a 1970s map of Łódź. I have included digitalized copies of the maps in my paper, and located the ghettos within these maps to provide geographical context.

Now that the project is complete, I am able to see some possible areas of improvement in both the research method and sources used. As I am dually a musician and a history student, I wish I would have applied my musical analysis skills as well as undertaking research in culture-focused databases for theatre, musical, and visual art sources. I only realized of this benefit when Dr. Grabowski encouraged me to record my own playing of the music from the ghettos to complement my research presentation, which I have attached to this application. Nevertheless, I believe I applied the library tools and resources to extract sufficient primary and secondary evidence, and my final paper contributes uniquely towards the field of culture during the Holocaust.