

Abstract:

My approved research topic is on the legal processes surrounding accused war criminals using the trials of John (Ivan) Demjanjuk, one of the last alleged Holocaust-era Nazi perpetrators to be criminally prosecuted, as a case study. Demjanjuk represents a highly singular case of attempts at reaching postwar justice, simply because much of his life story and alleged crimes are uncorroborated. In addition to this, there have been substantial questions raised about the conduct of both the prosecution and defense, as well as procedural concerns regarding the case's original investigative teams. Though there have been a number of published papers and other academic research projects related to Demjanjuk, the vast majority have involved gathering speculative evidence regarding his time as a Nazi concentration camp guard. Rather than re-investigate a case that other scholars have examined fairly thoroughly, my focus will instead be on the specific mechanisms created to administer postwar justice in relation to mass atrocity. I plan to do both archival and publically-accessible research, as well as personal interviews with both members of the defense and prosecution in Demjanjuk's cases in order to gain a more complete understanding of the circumstances of his trials. The purpose of my project is not to deem Demjanjuk innocent or guilty of the crimes he was accused of, but instead to examine the international legal mechanisms by which these conclusions could be reached in the first place.

Methods:

This research will have three major components: publically-accessible research, archival research, and interview. Publically-accessible research, meaning research drawn from sources such as news articles from the Demjanjuk trials and digitized public records from both pre- and post-trial periods, will help to create a level of academic and public context necessary for my project. Because my research also deals with the so-called "court of public opinion," having a full understanding of that public opinion is vital to properly exploring the Demjanjuk case. I also plan to interview members of both the defense and prosecution teams as well as original case investigators in order to understand their individual and collective roles in the trial process, as well as their effects on investigative and trial outcomes. My final method will be archival research. Currently, the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Archives contain a collection of around 500 microfiche (along with other audio and video clips) that make up the entirety of Tom Teicholz' original research on Demjanjuk, including otherwise inaccessible interviews with the Demjanjuk family, the investigative teams, the press, Demjanjuk himself, and complete trial transcripts. It cannot be understated how useful having access to these materials would be to my research process.