

Postwar Justice: Holocaust and War Crimes Trials in Soviet Lithuania

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This research project investigates the World War II war crimes trials in Soviet Lithuania, with a focus on the 1964 Klaipėda trial. In this war crimes trial process, seven local perpetrators, including an exiled Catholic priest, were convicted for the execution 3,000 people, mostly Jews, in the neighborhood town of Skuodas and its surrounds in the summer of 1941. Through an analysis of this case study, this project aims to newly evaluate war crimes trials related to the Holocaust in Soviet Lithuania, their representation, and their reception in the context of the Cold War. This legal process was directed towards a number of target audiences— anti-Soviet activists, the Lithuanian Catholic Church, the Lithuanian-American exile community, as well as Western countries.

This study uses a micro-historical approach and archival sources, such as trial transcripts, press releases, and other publications of the contemporaries, to offer insight not only into how this Soviet war crimes trial was initiated and investigated but also t how it was presented and gendered in the courtroom, and channeled through media for publicity. How did this war crimes trial function in Soviet Lithuania (from investigation, judicial process to sentence and reception), and what meaning of the Holocaust was reflected in this judicial proceeding? The project will contribute to the fields of Soviet legal history and Holocaust studies and will show the intersections between legal, media and gender studies as well as memory research.

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