

## **Ellen Johnson**

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Mildred Suesser Fellow Ellen Johnson, recipient of the Hannah and Roman Kent Research Award, investigates identity transformations vis-à-vis group interactions among Jewish inhabitants in the Riga ghetto. Her dissertation, *Encountering Others: Jewish Social Identity and Intergroup Relations in the Riga Ghetto*, draws on testimonies of German- and Yiddish-speaking Jews. The Riga ghetto was one of four ghettos where the Nazis deported Jews from the Incorporated Reich Territories into the same spaces as local Jews. In studying the effects of these deportations, Johnson considers the range of responses to ghettoization across cultures and societies, thus complicating commentaries on the relationships between Jews from Eastern and Western Europe.

The primary source material on identity and intergroup relations comes from diaries, memoirs, and written, oral, and video testimonies. Johnson has gathered testimonies from the USC Shoah Foundation's Visual History Archive and Yale's Fortunoff Video Archive. Additional documentation from ghetto newspapers and the publications of social groups reveal how various organizations and their members perceived themselves and others. The National Library of Israel maintains a database of Jewish newspapers published during the Second World War, which show that accurate reports on developments in the Riga ghetto reached Jewish news outlets all over the globe in real time. Johnson is continuing to plumb these reports for names of eyewitnesses who successfully smuggled information out of the ghetto. In addition, the American Jewish Archives in Cincinnati, Ohio contain wartime testimonies from Riga ghetto escapees compiled by the World Jewish Congress, which they disseminated to Jewish newspapers. Documents from Nazi ghetto

administrations – such as censuses, deportation lists, and housing records – provide valuable demographic data.

Documents from the Riga ghetto can be found in the US, Germany, Latvia, and Poland. A grant from the American Academy for Jewish Research funded a research trip to the USHMM to consult unpublished accounts. A Conny Kristel Fellowship from the European Holocaust Research Infrastructure funded a fall research trip. At the Bundesarchiv in Berlin-Lichterfelde, she compiled Nazi documentation of ghettoization orders, property appropriation, deportations, and allusions to the mass killings of Latvian Jews. A visit to the Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw to examine materials in the Central Historical Commission and a trip to the Institute for Contemporary History in Munich are planned as well.