TEACHING 20TH-CENTURY GERMANY – BRIDGING THE DISCIPLINARY DIVIDE

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INTRODUCTORY ESSAY

“20th-Century Germany: Culture, Political Conflict, Gender, and National Identity,” is an upper-level elective course that is offered for majors and minors in Eastern Washington University’s departments of History and German Languages and Literatures, and for non-majors as a university-required International Studies Course. The course was collaboratively developed and is team-taught by Sally Winkle, a professor of German Literature and Women’s and Gender Studies and Ann Le Bar, a professor of History. E.W.U. enrolls students primarily from our region’s towns and smaller cities, including a large fraction of first-generation, place-bound, and non-traditional students. We designed “20th-Century Germany” with the aim of foregrounding cultural and historical continuities that are often masked by the way Central European history is taught in the United States. By offering a rigorous but broadly accessible, interdisciplinary course for undergraduates on the role of “the Germanies” in modern world affairs, we also hope to bring this complex nation and its past alive, especially for students who have never travelled abroad or interacted with a foreign culture. Our objective is to equip our students with knowledge that will help them better grasp what it means to be a citizen of a militarily-dominant, highly-industrialized, multi-cultural society.

The course objectives for “20th-Century Germany” are inspired by E.W.U.’s International Studies goals and objectives, in particular two goals 1) stressing an understanding of modern problems or issues linking societies around the globe, and 2) enabling students to examine an international problem from a non-U.S. perspective. In this course we use a wide variety of historical documents and fictional texts to examine the effect of the two world wars, the division of Germany, changing gender roles, and social transitions on Europeans in the 20th century in general and the German people in particular.

Our interdisciplinary approach seeks to overcome some pedagogical obstacles common in German studies. First, disciplinary boundaries, we have found, tend to divorce “historical fact” from “literary fiction,” printed texts from film, politics from culture, gender identity from national identity. To counter that, we have chosen the materials for every unit in this course to assure that students constantly engage with a wide array of texts, media, and perspectives. In contrast to the traditional historical narrative of modern Germany, which usually breaks off in 1945, we devote four weeks (out of ten total) to the post-World War II period. And finally, while Cold-war Germany is popularly understood in the United States as the story of Communist East versus Capitalist West, or simply as the triumph of the West, we present the German Democratic Republic’s historical development with texts that depict its citizens’ experiences and aspirations.

Despite our efforts to create continuities, we also knew as we designed it that our course would establish its own boundaries, leaving out material that other specialists might consider essential for teaching about modern Germany to undergraduates. We are also constrained by our university’s quarter system, which requires packing a large amount of material into a five-credit, ten-week course.
One case in point is that we begin the course chronologically in 1918, which is sensible in political/constitutional terms, but bifurcates German expressionism, the German women’s movement, and the evolution of racial anti-Semitism, among other things. To bridge this arbitrary divide, we include background on several of those topics in the first two weeks of class, thus blurring the beginning date of the course by backtracking to the late 19th century for the Women’s Movement and pre-World War I to discuss the impact of German Expressionism. Likewise, we end the course in 1990 on the eve of reunification. As a result, we are not able to fully address the costs and consequences of German reunification nor to discuss in detail the enduring identity fissures that former East and West Germans live with. This frequently leaves our students with questions about Germany today, which we take turns addressing based on our personal experiences watching the fall of the Berlin Wall and working in reunited Germany. We have chosen to take the course up to 1990 rather than concentrating only on the Weimar Republic and Nazi regime, because knowledge of the post-war occupation and division of Germany and the subsequent development of two separate, distinct German states and societies is essential to a complete understanding of 20th-century Central European History.

Our focus on interdisciplinarity also results in less time to discuss military strategies or specific battles, however the integration of historical and cultural texts provides students with insight into many aspects of 20th-century German life to which American students are not frequently exposed. While the course covers a time period devastated by two world wars, systematic genocide, and the rise and fall of a fascist totalitarian regime, our lectures and discussions do not center as much on military battles as they do on the impact of these wars and of various social, political and cultural conflicts on Germans, European Jews, and people of all nationalities and ethnicities throughout Europe. In other words, we come to the course with the notion that war is about far more than specific battles and soldiers, and that military conflict has a lasting influence on all aspects of a society and culture. World War II was fought and lost on German soil and affected everyone in Europe and Asia in profound ways. European Jews, Sinti-Roma, political dissidents, Jehovah’s Witnesses, Communists, Socialists and labor leaders suffered immensely under the Nazi regime, which was supported by a large number of Germans. Women did not actually fight in the war and yet were greatly affected both as victims and perpetrators of atrocities, as followers of Nazism, as resisters, and as those at ground zero of civilian bombings.

"20th-Century Germany" was originally designed as a "Language across the curriculum" course, meaning that it is cross-listed with both German and History and contains a German language component. Students taking the course for German credit have somewhat different assignments than those taking it for History credit and there is a prerequisite for the German-language students. The course is taught in English, but German-language students do a portion of the reading and writing assignments in German and they have access to German sources for their research papers. Almost all of the primary sources we assign in the course were originally written in German. There is also a 1-credit German discussion section to accompany "20th-Century Germany." That section meets one hour per week and is conducted in German with readings related to the course topics.

The course is chocked with historical detail including a rich array of voices from the past. In our enthusiasm and interdisciplinary zeal, we assign lots of reading – and some students inevitably complain – but we’ve found that if they stay on top of the assigned work, students come to an understanding that contemporary Germans’ national identities are, like all people’s national identities, dynamic mixtures of gender, family, locality, class, national mythology, and memory. If we enhance students’ knowledge and increase their curiosity about Germany of the past and present, we have succeeded.

We believe that fiction, poetry, memoirs, diaries, visual art in addition to feature and documentary film increase our understanding of the daily lives, beliefs, values, and experiences of various groups of people within a specific culture and society, in this case Germany from 1918 to 1990. But inevitably, our
inclusive, discipline-blurring approach presented obstacles to course design and teaching, some of which we still grapple with. Finding the right readings was one such hurdle. When we first developed “20th-Century Germany” in the 1990s, there were only a very few English-language textbooks and no suitable English-language source anthology that crossed the post-World War II divide. Therefore the first several times the course was offered, we resorted to assembling a photocopied Course Reader comprised of snippets and chapters from dozens of different books. It was laborious for us and the end product was pedagogically inferior. Our current syllabus retains a few of those individual texts that were very successful for students, such as the short stories “Excursion of the Dead Girls” written by Anna Seghers in exile in the 1940s, and “Waves of Balaton” by Siegfried Lenz, about social and cultural differences separating East and West Germans in the 1970s. Thankfully, there are now many excellent, affordable textbooks to choose from. Dietrich Orlow’s *A History of Modern Germany* (7th edition) gives a very well-balanced overview of events, which is essential when so many of our students have no prior German history knowledge. Winkle/Stackelberg’s *Nazi Germany Sourcebook* extends back to include lots of texts from the Weimar era and forward to the Cold-War (through *Ostpolitik* and the *Historikerstreit*), thus making it the best-suited anthology for a course like ours. We assign one novel, *The Reader*, which addresses many of the questions surrounding "Vergangenheitsbewältigung" (coming to terms with the past) -- questions that were discussed in fiction, film, philosophical essays, and historical texts in post-war Germany.

We screen at least one film from the Weimar period to demonstrate Germany’s early contributions to film as an art form as well as the social and cultural significance of German film in the 1920s. We also show a more recent feature film to exemplify ways that German contemporary film deals with difficult aspects of the German past. Film also helps establish a more visceral connection for our students to eras they have not experienced directly. We have most recently shown “Metropolis” (1926/7) and “Sophie Scholl: The Final Days” (2005), but we are also considering films such as “Berlin: Symphony of a Great City” (1927) and/or “M” (1931) for the first half of the course and either “Sophie Scholl” or perhaps “Hannah Arendt” (2012) for the second half of the course.

The course typically meets three days a week for 85 minutes. Since the course is team taught, both instructors attend every class with very few exceptions. Most of our lectures are supported with visuals (art, maps, photographs, as well as the lecture outline) via Powerpoint. We typically assign study questions to accompany the course reading. Since the class usually enrolls 30 to 40 students, we conduct discussions by dividing them into small groups (5 or so). We move among these groups as they are discussing, answering questions and putting them back on track when necessary. Discussion days conclude with a 20 minute full-group recap, when we invite the small groups to share their best insights on the day’s readings. The team teaching approach we use is very collaborative and the distinct perspectives we bring from our respective disciplines and research specialties provide a comprehensive picture of the period covered in the course.

Finally, to engage students in interdisciplinary work themselves, we require a major final project with an individual research paper and a group poster presentation. In their research papers, the students write about topics of their choosing from the perspective they are most familiar with, be it literary criticism, musicology, political science, or history. However, in developing the poster presentations, students collaborate in small groups with others whose topics complement theirs. Invariably the poster-presentation groups are comprised of students from multiple majors. Their assignment is to convey in their poster the cross-section and key findings of their individual research, using all of the relevant media forms they can find. Our final class meeting (prior to exam week) is set up as a professional conference setting. Over the years, the outstanding poster presentations have creatively incorporated
film clips, war-time propaganda, newsreels, poetry, as well as photos and text. Invariably, we find that nearly all our students do their best work in preparation for this poster session and they very much enjoy sharing their research through their posters.

This course may be one of the few interdisciplinary courses our students encounter in their university careers and over the years we have realized the necessity of explaining in our syllabus, introductory lectures, and discussions the merit of an expanded, interdisciplinary approach to this topic. Students' assignments, especially the poster presentations, often serve as examples of the benefits of interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary collaboration. We believe this specific course could be used as a model for any number of interdisciplinary courses in the humanities or social sciences.

SYLLABUS

20th-Century Germany: Culture, Political Conflict, Gender, and National Identity

Hist 382 / Germ 382: 5 Credits
Germ 383: 1 credit German Discussion Section on 20th-Century Germany

COURSE DESCRIPTION AND OBJECTIVES

Our aim in this course is to introduce students to major themes in the history and culture of 20th-century Germany. Specifically, we will be looking at "continuities": themes in German history that bridge the East/West and pre/post-World War II divides. The principle themes of the course are National Identity, Cultural Expression, Gender Roles, and Political Conflict -- each of which contains a host of more specific issues and concerns. Throughout, we will take an interdisciplinary approach to the subject matter, encouraging students to think about the recent German past from various perspectives and from their own experience.

The integration of social history, cultural texts such as film, short stories, visual art, and a novel, in addition to primary documents and interpretative historical readings provides students with insight into the many aspects of life in Germany during the tumultuous 20th century. Although the course covers a time period devastated by two world wars, systematic genocide, and the rise and fall of a fascist totalitarian regime, this course does not focus as much on military battles as it does on the impact of these wars, social and political conflicts, and subsequent persecution on European Jews, Germans, and people of all nationalities and ethnicities throughout Europe. Indeed, we approach this course with the idea that war is much more than specific battles and that political and economic conflict have an enduring impact on all aspects of a society and culture. World War II was fought and lost on German soil and affected everyone in Germany and throughout Europe, Russia, and Asia in profound ways. Similarly, the post-war occupation and division of Germany, which resulted in two separate, distinct German states and societies, had profound ramifications for all of Cold-War Europe. Through works of fiction by Wolfgang Borchert, Siegfried Lenz and Bernhard Schlink, we look closely at how Germans in the East and in the West forged separate national identities by very differently dealing with the Nazi past. At the same time, both states experienced economic miracles that positioned them as among the strongest economies in their respective Cold-War blocs and set the stage for the dominant position that re-united Germany plays in the European Union and the global economy today.
In this course a wide variety of primary, secondary and fictional texts will aid us in exploring the effect of the two world wars, the division of Germany, changing gender roles, and social transitions on the German people and Europeans in the 20th century. We have developed the course outline based on the premise that fiction, poetry, memoirs, diaries, and visual art in addition to feature and documentary film enhance our understanding of the daily lives, beliefs, values, and experiences of various groups of people within a society or culture. Therefore we include a number of these cultural texts in this course to accompany Orlow's *History of Modern Germany* and official historical documents. Weekly study questions and discussion of course readings, in addition to a major research paper assignment, enable students to develop skills to research and critically assess information about the history and culture of Germany in this critical period of European history. Through course readings, lectures and discussions, students gain an understanding of the impact of World War I, Nazism, World War II, and the Cold War on Germany and Central Europe.

**TEXTS**


Articles, Primary Documents, and Stories posted on Canvas

**REQUIREMENTS**

| Attendance and Participation | 20% |
| Take-home Midterm Exam | 25% |
| Research paper (20%) and Poster presentation of Research (10%) | 30% |
| In-Class Final Exam | 25% |

**PREREQUISITES**

Hist 382 / Germ 382 counts as an International Studies course within University’s General Education core curriculum and therefore is open to any student; no prior knowledge of German history or culture is required. However, because the course requires a research paper, students must have passed English Composition (Eng. 201) or an equivalent prior to enrolling in this course. Students taking the course for German language credit must have completed Germ 203 or equivalent.

**GRADING SCALE**

| 4.0 | 100-95 | 3.1 | 84 | 2.2 | 75 | 1.3 | 66 |
| 3.9 | 94 | 3.0 | 83 | 2.1 | 74 | 1.2 | 65 |
| 3.8 | 93 | 2.9 | 82 | 2.0 | 73 | 1.1 | 64 |
| 3.7 | 92 | 2.8 | 81 | 1.9 | 72 | 1.0 | 63 |
GUIDELINES AND EXPECTATIONS FOR REQUIRED COURSE WORK

1) Class participation and discussion (20%). Attendance will be taken every day and will factor into your grade. In addition to regular attendance, all students are expected to keep up with assigned reading and to participate actively in the discussions of the reading that will occur impromptu during class periods, two or three times per week. The questions for each week’s discussion are posted in Canvas. Plan to complete all of the week’s reading, taking notes on the discussion questions, by the Monday class period. Bring *The Nazi Germany Sourcebook* with you to class every day. German Language students will read selected texts in German and will participate in the German discussion section once a week.

Learning requires students’ active engagement; the best learning occurs when everyone in the class is fully engaged. But “engagement” in a learning setting does not look the same for all of us. In fact, lots of good students – including both of us, once upon a time – are well-prepared, listen eagerly to what other students and teachers say and take lots of notes, but don’t speak up very often. Knowing that, we grade class participation by weighing multiple factors, and each student’s participation grade will be based on the combination of factors appropriate to her or him. Below is a grid showing the factors that we consider in assigning participation grades after each class meeting.

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<th>If you . . .</th>
<th>3.6 91</th>
<th>3.5 90</th>
<th>3.4 89</th>
<th>3.3 88-87</th>
<th>3.2 86-85</th>
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<tr>
<td>regularly . .</td>
<td>2.7 80</td>
<td>2.6 79</td>
<td>2.5 78</td>
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<td>are attentive when others are speaking, evidenced by remaining quiet, making eye contact with the speaker and taking notes on what the speaker says</td>
<td>1.8 71</td>
<td>1.7 70</td>
<td>1.6 69</td>
<td>1.5 68</td>
<td>1.4 67</td>
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<td>complete all assigned reading ahead of time and come with the relevant books and documents for the day’s work, open to the relevant pages</td>
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<td>additionally . .</td>
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<td>add ideas or evidence as support to another speaker’s statements that are relevant and show understanding of the day’s material</td>
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<td>draw our attention to a quote or passage from the readings and films that is relevant to the lecture or discussion at that point</td>
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<td>answer questions accurately and thoroughly</td>
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<td>pose questions, observations or comments that show evidence of understanding the day’s topic or evidence of respectful understanding of the on-going conversation</td>
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<td>pose questions, observations or comments that introduce a new insight; “new” insights may be based on an individual’s life experiences, outside reading, or an unexpected interpretation of the text, film, or artwork under discussion</td>
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reference ideas formulated from class discussion in subsequent assignments: for example, in subsequent discussions, on exams, in the research paper, and/or during the poster presentation.

| never . . . | come to class late |
| area . . . | leave class early |
| never . . . | are inattentive, because texting, talking with a neighbor, eating, surfing the web, or reading non-course material |
| never . . . | make noise or conversation that disrupts others’ attention |
| never . . . | speak or act disrespectfully to anyone in the class |
| . . . you will earn 4.0 on participation, and learn more overall. |

2) Take-home midterm exam (25%). The midterm exam will be handed out in class during Week 5 and will be due back in class at the end of Week 6. All students will answer one comprehensive question and 5 shorter questions. Exam questions will refer to all the material covered in the course through the end of Week 5. This is an essay exam, so the final product you turn in should be typed, carefully organized, carefully proofread for mistakes, and should include quotations and references to course materials, cited parenthetically. Total exam length should be 5-6 double-spaced pages (with 1-inch margins and 12-point font). When answering the exam questions, you may take information only from the class lectures (including Powerpoint slides and outlines), class discussions, films shown in class, and class readings (A History of Modern Germany, Nazi Germany Sourcebook, documents on Canvas and class handouts). Your short and long essay answers need to include synthesis, interpretation, and analysis of the materials and topics covered in the course. German language students will answer at least one question in German.

3) Research paper (20%) and poster presentation (10%). The purpose of these projects is for students to do an in-depth, interdisciplinary study of a topic of their choosing, write an 8-10 page research paper, and present the results to the class in poster form. Students will research and write their papers individually, but are encouraged to team up to create the posters. A list of suggested research topics will be handed out in class; you will also have the opportunity to look at several outstanding posters by past students before yours is due.

**SOURCES**

At a minimum, your research paper should be based on three to five secondary sources (scholarly books and/or journal articles) and three to four primary sources. Be imaginative in your assembly of primary sources. Look for memoirs, essays, poems, recorded music, play scripts, filmed theater and movie clips, reproductions of paintings, sculptures, architectural drawings, sketches of mechanical or other inventions, newspaper and journal accounts, diaries, etc. Sources for your primary materials may include (but not be limited to!) library books and periodical collections, DVDs and music CDs from the library’s collection, and primary source texts you have read in class. In addition, check the World Wide Web for texts, images, and further sources of primary and secondary materials. This is a multidisciplinary research project, and you will want to utilize the university library either on campus or on-line for a majority of your sources. Be sure to use legitimate academic sources. Remember that your work must
be your own; plagiarism is a serious violation of academic integrity and will severely affect your grade. A properly formatted bibliography or works-cited page must accompany both your final paper and your poster.

ROUGH DRAFT

Though it is not required, we strongly urge you to show us a rough draft of your paper, no later than Friday of Week 8. You may turn in your rough draft either electronically or in print, to either one of us, or both of us. Within a week, we will return your draft to you with comments and a “draft grade” (a grade that indicates what this draft would earn if it were handed in as your final draft). Invariably, students who do a rough draft earn substantially higher grades on their papers, and on their poster presentations.

POSTERS

The posters provide a creative means to share with your classmates what you have learned in your individual research papers. Students are encouraged to collaborate on posters in groups of two or three with classmates who have researched similar or complementary topics. The posters should be interdisciplinary in approach, informative, creative, and offer insight into the topic. The most effective poster presentations are well researched, clearly expressed, engaging, and well organized. Poster presentations may include a brief PowerPoint featuring short film clips, slides, or music; they often include pictures, quotes, brief explanations, poems, or excerpts from memoirs. Students display their posters on the last day of the quarter to their classmates and instructors and the poster presentation will comprise a portion of the research paper grade.

4) In-class Final exam (25%). The exam consists of 6-8 short essay questions (answered in 6-8 sentences) and one long essay question (to be answered in about 300-350 words). The questions will focus on course material covered after the midterm; students will receive a study guide ahead of time, to prepare for the exam, but they are not allowed to use any notes or reading materials during the exam.

COURSE SCHEDULE

I. Weimar Republic and the Rise of Fascism (1918-1933)

Week 1: Themes: German National Identity and Impact of WWI; Nationalism, Versailles settlement.


Week 2: Themes: Politics, Culture, and Class in the Weimar Republic; Political and Economic Crises, German Women's Movement, Conflicts within the Multi-party System; the SPD and the NSDAP.

Reading: Orlow, Chapter 4, pp. 102-37.


**Week 3:**  **Themes: Weimar Society and Culture**; Expressionist Art, Literature and Film; Social Conflict and Change.

**Reading:**  Orlow, Chapter 5, pp. 138-58.


**Film:**  “Metropolis” by Fritz Lang (1927) or “Berlin: Die Symphonie der Großstadt (Berlin: Symphony of a Great City) by Walther Ruttmann (1927).

II. The Third Reich (1933-1945)

**Week 4:**  **Themes: Collapse of the Weimar Government and Building the Nazi State**; Creation of the one-party state; Gleichschaltung; Women and Gender in Nazi Germany.

**Reading:**  Orlow, Chapter 6, pp. 159-194.


**Week 5:**  **Themes: Daily Life in Nazi Germany, Nazi foreign policy**; Book burning; Exile literature, Nazi concept of culture and propaganda; Lebensraum; Racial Hygiene.

**Reading:**  Orlow, Chapter 7, pp. 195-205.


Short story on Canvas:  Anna Seghers, "Excursion of the Dead Girls."

**Take-home midterm handed out on Wednesday**

**Week 6:**  **Themes: World War II; Resistance to Nazism; End of War.**

**Reading:**  Orlow, Chapter 7, pp. 205-23.

Nazi Germany Sourcebook, pp. 260-63; 276-79; 295-303; 303-307; 311-313: William Shirer, Berlin Diary, Paris, June, 1940; Halder War Diary, 1941; “Commissar Decree”; Hitler's last public speech and Goebbels’ Speech in the Berlin Sportpalast; White Rose Pamphlets.


**Take-home midterm due on Friday**
III. The Cold War (1945-1990s)

Week 7: Themes: The Holocaust; Defeat, Occupation and Division of Germany; Denazification; Die Stunde Null.

   Orlow, Chapter 8, pp. 224-59.
   Short story on Canvas: Wolfgang Borchert, “Rats do sleep at night.”


Reading: Orlow, Chapter 9, pp. 260-296.
   Bernhard Schlink, The Reader.


Reading: Orlow, Chapter 10, pp. 297-334.
   Nazi Germany Sourcebook, pp. 404-408: Otto Grotewohl, “Buchenwald Admonishes Us!”
   Short story on Canvas: Siegfried Lenz, "The Waves of Lake Balaton."

Week 10: Themes: The Problem of German National Identities and Unification; Women's and Gender Roles and diverging forms of feminism in the two Germanies; Impact of unification

Reading: Documents on Canvas: Helke Sander, "Speech by the Action Council for Women's Liberation," Ina Merkel, "Another Kind of Woman."
   Orlow, Chapter 11, pp. 335-385.

Friday: Poster Presentations

Final Exam: In Class on scheduled Final Exam Day.
BIBLIOGRAPHY OF PRIMARY SOURCES


Bibliography


Moeller, Robert G. “What has ‘Coming to Terms With the Past’ Meant in Post-World War II Germany? From History to Memory to the ‘History of Memory.’” *Central European History*, 35:2 (2002), 223-256.