German Colonialism, Late Imperialism and Racial Theories

Pre-Histories of the Holocaust?

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Office hours by appointment (preferably Wednesdays after the seminar or Thursdays)
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Wednesdays, 14.00-17.00
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This course examines the “long road to Auschwitz,” as it is sometimes called, or the pre-histories of the Holocaust. It does so from within the context of German history, with a special focus on the colonial and imperial experience. It begins with German nationalism and the creation of the (“Second”) Reich as well as its development and politics. The seminar will examine the development and prevalence of racial theories, especially from the late 19th century onwards and how they were applied to different peoples and parts of the world (including Anti-Semitism and the Aryan theory). It will focus especially on colonial experiences, cultures of violence before and in World War I as well as the rise of new far right politics and the Nazis themselves. In the final sections it will discuss how the colonial experience and the ideas of Lebensraum help us explain the Holocaust.

While the seminar will continue along the timeline up to 1933, it will constantly test theories and ideas about “path-dependency” and how and why some historians tend to identify straight lines where others reject those. The seminar will also give students a feeling for how the Holocaust is used today to make sense of other atrocities in history (here in the case of those committed in the Congo and Namibia as well as the Armenian Genocide).
Structure

The seminar will feature in each session mainly three components: 1. a short/semi-short introductory lecture, mainly presenting an overview; 2. discussion of our assigned reading materials; 3. work with sources (where possible/feasible) or with other media.

The seminar also features a series of focus topics featured in two sessions each (German colonialism; the Herero and Nama Genocide; the Armenian Genocide). These will offer us the opportunity to venture deep(er) into a topic and also go far beyond the factual level and the discussion of newest research. Where possible we will also learn a bit more about the work of the historian (also for those students who are not historians), will work critically with texts, and have a chance to debate the broader repercussions.

Reading assignments

Since this is a three-hour seminar, extensive reading is required. However, texts will be assigned and split across the group (A, B, C) in order to manage the reading load and to stimulate debate. Reading the core texts for each week is an essential component of the seminar (requirements), as is active participation which will, at a minimum, involve regularly presenting to the group one of the assigned texts in very short form as well as thoughts and criticisms regarding these texts.

Texts will be generally available on the course’s moodle platform as pdfs.

Writing assignments and grading/credit options

Each student will have to hand in one short essay (4-6 pages) replying to the question: 

*Do the pre-histories we discussed in the course add something substantially new to your understanding of the Holocaust? How so? If not, why not?*

Additionally, depending on the chosen format (by the student), there are three grading options available, depending on the credit points needed by the student: 1. a seminar paper (about 25-30 pages; using primary materials; topic and outline subject to discussion and approval in the course of the seminar; deadline for submission of seminar papers: 21 June 2017); 2. a short final paper (“Referat”; about 10 pages; using secondary sources; deadline for submission one month after the end of the semester); or 3. a grade given for semesters’ on-going assignments (such as the short essay and active participation in the seminar).

It is the students’ responsibility to choose his/her assignments out of the three and update the course convener. All papers to be handed in as printouts. Papers which are not handed in during the course need to put into my mailbox in the History Department, Eshkol Tower, floor 13.
Introductory reading


Core books

(given their scope and availability as paperbacks students might want to consider buying one or more of the following)

Artistic background reading (optional), novels

Mari Serebrov, Mama Namibia (Wordweaver Publishing, 2014)

Background reading (optional)

Weekly topics and reading assignments

* preliminary, subject to change; however those marked with a “*” are a safe bet for anybody who wants to get ahead with the reading. Students who enjoy the long-read and like to get a head start can read the books listed above as “core books.” These are written in a lively style and will convey an overall sense of the subject matter in a readable fashion.

27th February 2019: Introduction: Pre-histories? Or: Why the Germans?


6th March 2019: German nationalism and history in the 19th century – Overview

Lecture: Overview – German history in the 19th century


13th March 2019: Colonial Ventures I – German Colonial designs, conquest, and experience


20th March 2019: Discourses of Race and modern Anti-Semitism

Lecture: “Race, anthropology, and modern Anti-Semitism”


C. Christopher M. Hutton, Race and the Third Reich (Cambridge: Polity, 2005), chapter “Hans Günther and racial anthropology” (35-63).

27th March 2019: Colonial Ventures II – The colonial experience

lecture: Colonial violence – Germany's and Europe’s rule and experiences of violence

* Adam Hochschild, King Leopold’s Ghost: A Story of Greed, Terror, and Heroism in Colonial Africa (Boston/New York: Mariner 1999), chapters 8, 10, 11.


10th April 2019: The Genocide of the Herero and Nama I

lecture: Genocide in German South-West Africa – Overview


B. David Olusoga & Casper W. Erichsen, The Kaiser’s Holocaust – Germany’s Forgotten Genocide (London: Faber & Faber, 2010), chapters 8, 9, 12, 13

* various press and academic reviews of The Kaiser’s Holocaust

Further reading: Jürgen Zimmerer, “The model colony? Racial segregation, forced labour and total control in German South-West Africa,” in Jürgen Zimmerer & Jürgen Zeller (eds.), Genocide in German
1st May 2019: The Genocide of the Herero and Nama II


15th May 2019: World War I, the Armenian Genocide and Germany I

lecture: The Armenian Genocide – Overview


media dealing with the genocide (various clips) and novel excerpt


22nd May 2019: The Armenian Genocide and Germany II

lecture(s): The German dimension of the Armenian Genocide I&II


* Stefan Ihrig, Justifying Genocide – Germany and the Armenians from Bismarck to Hitler (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016), prologue & epilogue

source material from the Political Archives of the German Foreign Office (in English)

29th May 2019: From conquest to the ghettos, to the concentration camps

Lecture: Nazi imperialism, Lebensraum, and conquest

* Christopher R. Browning, The Path to Genocide (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), chapter “Nazi resettlement policy and the search for a solution to the Jewish Question, 1939-1941” (3-27)


5th June 2019: *Colonial pre-histories? Continuities, discontinuities, and the many big questions about humanity, politics, and modernity*

* Birthe Kundrus, “Colonialism, imperialism, National Socialism – How imperial was the Third Reich?” in Bradley Naranch/Geoff Eley (Hg.), *German Colonialism in a Global Age*, Durham/London 2014, 330-346.


12th June 2019: **conclusions & final discussion**