

A History of World War II

This course will offer an in-depth look at World War II and how it played out in Europe. It will combine military history with political and social aspects of the war. The course seeks to offer a comprehensive picture of a conflict that claimed the lives of tens of millions of peoples. It will do so by analyzing different perceptions, levels, and layers of the conflict. The course will also touch upon questions of remembrance, justice, and portrayals in popular culture. Furthermore, by including recently discovered footage and other sources from the time, it is hoped that this course will challenge existing trends that put this conflict into a very distant and removed past. This course will open up important perspectives on the Holocaust.

In light of the ongoing COVID-19 crisis and to make this course more engaging, this course is focused on student projects. Besides reading, thinking, and taking part in discussions, it will be essential to become engaged with some of the core topics more deeply and to investigate a bit on your own.

What you will have to do

Besides coming with an open mind and developing your own interests, you will have to do three main things: 1) read and participate, 2) various special projects (intro video, book video, soldiers clip (team project), devil's advocate clip (team project), short written feedback on three topics), 3) write a final paper (around eight pages long).

For your orientation, there is a checklist of your assignments at the end of this syllabus.

Reading

Extensive reading is a must for a history course. The core texts will be available on the course's moodle platform as pdfs. You are required to read two books in full – both relatively short and essential for this course; various chapters from these books are included in the weekly reading assignments anyway (the books are by Richard Overy and Norman Stone and are listed in the reading list, under essentials, a few pages down, in this syllabus). We will have special reading & project weeks to help you catch up.

Video Clips

We will feature online teaching in some form for all sessions, even if we actually meet in person as well. You will be asked to record, produce, and upload short clips for the rest of the group

on an ongoing basis (“projects”). Familiarize yourself with how to make clips with the equipment and software that you have available (phone, computer, tablet, etc.).

Projects

Reading and writing are core activities and tools for students. But it is also important to present research, thoughts, and arguments in other media. We will feature video clip presentations throughout the course. Some are to be carried out by the single student, some in collaboration with others.

Project I: Intro video

Everybody will be asked to record a short clip of herself/himself/themselves after the first meeting in which they should say 1) who they are, 2) where they are from, 3) how they feel about studying history, 4) what they find interesting about the history of World War II and/or what they don't know or know about it already and want to explore further. Up to but no longer than two minutes.

Project II: Book report video

We are covering many topics and sometimes it just makes sense to look more closely at one special topic. There is always something happening in the world of research; some of it is very exciting and offers entirely new perspectives. At the end of this syllabus you will find a list of podcasts in which new research books are discussed with the respective author. Choose one and sign up for them on moodle (only one per student & only one student per podcast). In order to share with others what your book topic was about and what you found interesting about it, you will make a short, three-minute clip about it, telling us what the book is about, and what was interesting about it (and perhaps what you did not like), and how it is related to our core topics.

The clip should be up to three minutes long.

Project III: Feedback notes

We are going to have a mixed format for this course. You will be asked to watch various documentary clips as well as a discussion between pre-eminent historians of our topic. You will be asked to give short feedback to some of our documentary viewing – the task being to identify things that are wrong or misleading in the documentary clip and what you found especially interesting. For the historians' clip, you will be asked to write a short text (up to one page maximum) about whether you agree with the one or the other of the featured historians (it is about the case for and against bombing Germany).

Project IV: Devil's advocate

History is often controversial. Debates about certain topics can continue for dozens of years. Sometimes, debates come back after we thought them long resolved. Additionally, as time moves on, history is often reduced to certain 'iconic' events and places. This means that often important topics are also reduced to almost 'automatic' meaning and interpretation. But as

students of history we have to be more critical to understand what are often highly complex circumstances and chains of events.

We will feature a series of debates, fought out by you (in teams). The core of each will be two opposing video statements – pro and con. Each side will consist of two students who will work together and produce a 6-7 minute clip together. All of us will vote on which side we thought was more convincing.

It is called ‘devil’s advocate’ because you will have to argue a case that you do not necessarily agree with. For example, we will need to teams arguing the significance of the decision to wage an all-out battle for Stalingrad. One side will have to argue that yes, Stalingrad would have been a major symbolic victory for the Germans, worth all that it cost. The other side has to argue the opposite. You may find yourself on the ‘wrong’ side of the argument – but that is part of the project as well.

The topics are to be found in this syllabus and you can sign up on moodle for them.

Final paper

Your final assignment in the course is to write a short paper on your thoughts on *Why the Allies won the war*. The student is expected to draw in this essay on the debates during the class as well as her/his/their reading of the texts for the class. Think of it like an ongoing assignment, something like the student’s research ‘diary’ of the course. Not much additional reading and work should be necessary, but may be required, depending on your argument, and is, in any case, welcome.

The paper should be between five to eight pages long (font size 12, one-and-a-half spacing, 2,5 cm margins all around).

Be sure to find a coherent overall approach and argument – do not just string together bits and pieces of information and argument.

Upload your paper, via moodle (bottom of page) by the first week of Semester B. (Save your paper as a pdf, make sure you have a title page as well as page numbers).

Grading

Your various projects and your participation in the course will count for 50% of the final grade. Your final paper for the other 50%.

If you chose to write a referat or a seminar paper for this course, contact me during the semester. The referat/seminar paper is then additional to the above-mentioned requirements, projects, and the final paper.

Structure: COVID-19 and in-person meetings

We assume that the semester will take place online, via zoom (but the situation may change). For (almost) every session, you will have video material to watch. I will record and upload lectures for (almost) every session. They will be online well before the respective session. Watch the lectures and the material every week before the Tuesday session. We will usually meet each week for 30-50 minutes to discuss – in person or via zoom.

Be aware: Watching the lectures and the other clips is considered essential participation. We can track your 'watching attendance' via moodle. Not having watched the clips will result in failing the class.

essential reading

(to be read in total, on moodle)

Norman Stone, *World War II – A Short History* (London: Penguin, 2014).

Richard Overy, *Why the Allies Won* (London: Pimlico, 2006 [1995]).

further key texts

Richard Overy, *Russia's War, 1941-1945* (London: Penguin, 2010 [1997]).

Antony Beevor, *The Second World War* (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2012).

Gerhard L. Weinberg, *A World at Arms – A Global History of World War II* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

further suggested reading

Antony Beevor, *Stalingrad* (London: Penguin, 2017 [1998]).

Antony Beevor, *Arnhem – The Battle for the Bridges* (London: Viking, 2018).

Michael Burleigh, *Moral Combat – A History of World War II* (London: Harper Press, 2010).

Richard J. Evans, *The Third Reich at War, 1939-1945* (London: Allen Lane, 2008).

Ian Kershaw, *Fateful Choices – Ten Decisions that Changed the World, 1940-1941* (London: Penguin, 2008).

Soenke Neitzel & Harald Welzer, *Soldaten on Fighting, Killing and Dying – The Secret Second World War Tapes of German POWs* (London: Simon & Schuster, 2012).

Andrew Roberts, *The Storm of War – A New History of the Second World War* (London: Penguin, 2010).

Nicolas Stargard, *The German War – A Nation Under Arms, 1939-45* (London: Vintage, 2015).

Adam Tooze, *The Wages of Destruction – The Making and Breaking of the Nazi Economy* (London: Penguin, 2007).

Weekly topics, reading assignments, and meeting schedule

Week 1: Introduction

21 October 2020

- 1) watch the lecture video clip
- 2) meet in person (or zoom, depending on the COVID situation) to discuss at 14:00 for about 30-40 minutes.

project work: produce and upload your intro clip

assignments: make sure you have signed up for all the various project groups, reading projects and such.

no assigned reading (start reading ahead)

Week 2: Hitler's world (view) and Nazi Germany

28 October 2020

- 1) read the texts
- 2) watch the lecture video clip
- 3) watch your colleague's intro clips
- 4) meet us at 14:00 to discuss for about 40-50 minutes.

reading

Stone, *World War II*, ch. 1;

Evans, *The Third Reich in Power*, ch. 7/1 (612-637).

Week 3: project and reading week

4 November 2020

** get ahead with your reading and projects (contact me if you need assistance)*

Week 4: Revisionism and appeasement

11 November 2020

- 1) read the text
- 2) watch the lecture video clip
- 3) watch the documentary clip
- 4) watch the clip(s) of your colleagues
- 5) meet us at 14:00 to discuss for about 40-50 minutes.

reading

Evans, *The Third Reich in Power*, ch. 7/2-4 (638-712).

Week 5: Poland and the war in the West

18 November 2020

- 1) read the texts
- 2) watch the lecture video clip
- 3) watch the documentary clip
- 4) watch the clip(s) of your colleagues
- 5) meet us at 14:00 to discuss for about 40-50 minutes

reading

Weinberg, *A World at Arms*, ch. 2;

Evans, *The Third Reich in Power*, ch. 1/1, 2/1, 2/2.

Week 6: project and reading week

25 November 2020

* *get ahead with your reading and projects (contact me if you need assistance)*

Week 7: Barbarossa and beyond

2 December 2020

- 1) read the texts
- 2) watch the lecture video clip
- 3) watch the documentary clip
- 4) watch the clip(s) of your colleagues
- 5) meet us at 14:00 to discuss for about 40-50 minutes

reading

Overy, *Russia's War*, ch. 3 & 4;

Overy, *Why the Allies Won*, ch. 3.

Week 8: Homefront and bombing war

9 December 2020

- 1) read the texts
- 2) watch the lecture video clip
- 3) watch the documentary clip

4) meet us at 14:00 to discuss for about 40-50 minutes

reading

Overy, *Why the Allies Won*, chapters 2, 4, 6, 8.

Week 9: project and reading week

16 December 2020

** get ahead with your reading and projects (contact me if you need assistance)*

Week 10: Einsatzgruppen, SS, and Wehrmacht

23 December 2020

- 1) read your text & produce and upload your clip with your team
- 2) watch the lecture video clip
- 3) watch the documentary clip
- 4) watch the clip(s) of your colleagues
- 5) meet us at 14:00 to discuss for about 40-50 minutes

reading

Neitzel & Welzer, *Soldaten*, various chapters (sign up on moodle)

Week 11: Reversal I

30 December 2020

- 1) read the texts
- 2) watch the lecture video clip
- 3) watch the documentary clip
- 4) watch the clip(s) of your colleagues
- 5) meet us at 14:00 to discuss for about 40-50 minutes

reading

Overy, *Russia's War*, chapters 7 & 8.

Week 12: project and reading week

6 January 2021

** get ahead with your reading and projects (contact me if you need assistance)*

Week 13: Reversal II

13 January 2021

- 1) read the texts
- 2) watch the lecture video clip
- 3) watch the documentary clip
- 4) watch the clip(s) of your colleagues
- 5) meet us at 14:00 to discuss for about 40-50 minutes

reading

Weinberg, chapters 12 & 13.

Week 14: Ending the war

20 January 2021

- 1) read the texts
- 2) watch the lecture video clip
- 3) watch the documentary clip
- 4) watch the clip(s) of your colleagues
- 5) meet us at 14:00 to discuss for about 40-50 minutes

reading

Weinberg, chapters 14 & 15.

Book podcast topics

week 4

* C. Goeschel, *Mussolini and Hitler – The Forging of the Fascist Alliance*

<https://newbooksnetwork.com/christian-goeschel-mussolini-and-hitler-the-forging-of-the-fascist-alliance-yale-up-2018/>

* R. Crowcroft, *The End is Nigh – British Politics, Power, and the Road to the Second World War*

<https://newbooksnetwork.com/robert-crowcroft-the-end-is-nigh-british-politics-power-and-the-road-to-the-second-world-war-oxford-up-2019/>

week 5

* R. Moorhouse, *Poland 1939 – The Outbreak of World War II*

<https://newbooksnetwork.com/roger-moorhouse-poland-1939-the-outbreak-of-world-war-ii-basic-books-2020/>

* R. Carswell, *The Fall of France in the Second World War – History and Memory*

<https://newbooksnetwork.com/richard-carswell-the-fall-of-france-in-the-second-world-war-history-and-memory-palgrave-macmillan-2019/>

* G. Clews, *Churchill's Phoney War – A Study in Folly and Frustration*

<https://newbooksnetwork.com/graham-t-clews-churchills-phoney-war-a-study-in-folly-and-frustration-naval-institute-press-2019/>

week 7

* D. Stahel, *Operation Barbarossa and Germany's Defeat in the East*

<https://newbooksnetwork.com/david-stahel-operation-barbarossa-and-germanys-defeat-in-the-east-cambridge-up-2009-3/>

* R. Citino, *Death of the Wehrmacht – The German Campaigns of 1942*

<https://newbooksnetwork.com/robert-citino-death-of-the-wehrmacht-the-german-campaigns-of-1942-up-of-kansas-2007/>

* D. Stahel, *Retreat from Moscow – A New History of Germany's Winter Campaign, 1941-1942*

<https://newbooksnetwork.com/david-stahel-retreat-from-moscow-a-new-history-of-germanys-winter-campaign-1941-1942-fsg-2019/>

* S. Fritz, *The First Soldier – Hitler as a Military Leader*

<https://newbooksnetwork.com/stephen-fritz-the-first-soldier-hitler-as-a-military-leader-yale-up-2018/>

* F. Ellis, *The Damned and the Dead – The Eastern Front through the Eyes of Soviet and Russian Novelists*

<https://newbooksnetwork.com/frank-ellis-the-damned-and-the-dead-the-eastern-front-through-the-eyes-of-soviet-and-russian-novelists-university-press-of-kansas-2011/>

* A. Krylova, *Soviet Women in Combat – A History of Violence on the Eastern Front*

<https://newbooksnetwork.com/anna-krylova-soviet-women-in-combat-a-history-of-violence-on-the-eastern-front-cambridge-up-2010/>

* R. Manley, *To the Tashkent Station – Evacuation and Survival in the Soviet Union at War*

<https://newbooksnetwork.com/rebecca-manley-to-the-tashkent-station-evacuation-and-survival-in-the-soviet-union-at-war/>

* R. Carmack, *Kazakhstan in World War II – Mobilization and Ethnicity in the Soviet Empire*

<https://newbooksnetwork.com/roberto-carmack-kazakhstan-in-world-war-ii-mobilization-and-ethnicity-in-the-soviet-empire-up-of-kansas-2019/>

week 10

* T. Kuehne, *The Rise and Fall of Comradeship – Hitler's Soldiers, Male Bonding and Mass Violence in the Twentieth Century*

<https://newbooksnetwork.com/thomas-kuhne-the-rise-and-fall-of-comradeship-hitlers-soldiers-male-bonding-and-mass-violence-in-the-twentieth-century-cambridge-up-2017/>

* K. Jarausch, *Reluctant Accomplice – A Wehrmacht Soldier's Letters from the Eastern Front*

<https://newbooksnetwork.com/konrad-h-jarausch-reluctant-accomplice-a-wehrmacht-soldiers-letters-from-the-eastern-front-princeton-university-press-2011/>

* W. Beorn, *Marching into Darkness – The Wehrmacht and the Holocaust in Belarus*

<https://newbooksnetwork.com/waitman-beorn-marching-into-darkness-the-wehrmacht-and-the-holocaust-in-belarus-harvard-up-2013-4/>

* H. Pieper, *Fegelein's Horsemen and Genocidal Warfare – The SS Cavalry Brigade in the Soviet Union*

<https://newbooksnetwork.com/henning-pieper-fegeleins-horsemen-and-genocidal-warfare-the-ss-cavalry-brigade-in-the-soviet-union-palgrave-macmillan-2015/>

week 11

* C. Symonds, *World War II at Sea – A Global History*

<https://newbooksnetwork.com/craig-symonds-world-war-ii-at-sea-a-global-history-oxford-up-2018/>

* A. Prusin, *Serbia under the Swastika – A World War II Occupation*

<https://newbooksnetwork.com/alexander-prusin-serbia-under-the-swastika-a-world-war-ii-occupation-u-illinois-press-2017/>

* B. Shepherd, *Terror in the Balkans – German Armies and Partisan Warfare*

<https://newbooksnetwork.com/ben-shepherd-terror-in-the-balkans-german-armies-and-partisan-warfare-harvard-up-2012/>

* J. Batinic, *Women and Yugoslav Partisans – A History of World War II Resistance*

<https://newbooksnetwork.com/jelena-batinic-women-and-yugoslav-partisans-a-history-of-world-war-ii-resistance-cambridge-up-2015/>

* N. Stargardt, *The German War – A Nation under Arms, 1939-1945*

<https://newbooksnetwork.com/nicholas-stargardt-the-german-war-a-nation-under-arms-1939-1945-basic-books-2015/>

* D. Edgerton, *Britain's War Machine – Weapons, Resources and Experts in the Second World War*

<https://newbooksnetwork.com/david-edgerton-britains-war-machine-weapons-resources-and-experts-in-the-second-world-war-oxford-up-2011/>

week 13

* S. Plokhy, *Forgotten Bastards of the Eastern Front – American Airmen behind the Soviet Lines and the Collapse of the Grand Alliance*

<https://newbooksnetwork.com/serhii-plokhy-forgotten-bastards-of-the-eastern-front-oxford-up-2019/>

* J. Fennell, *Fighting the People's War – The British and Commonwealth Armies and the Second World War*

<https://newbooksnetwork.com/jonathan-fennell-fighting-the-peoples-war-the-british-and-commonwealth-armies-and-the-second-world-war-cambridge-up-2019/>

* SA Bourque, *Beyond the Beach – The Allied War Against France*

<https://newbooksnetwork.com/stephen-alan-bourque-beyond-the-beach-the-allied-war-against-france-naval-institute-press-2018/>

* **JC McManus**, *September Hope – The American Side of a Bridge Too Far*

<https://newbooksnetwork.com/john-c-mcmanus-september-hope-the-american-side-of-a-bridge-too-far-nal-2012/>

* **T. Moye**, *Freedom Flyers – The Tuskegee Airmen of World War II*

<https://newbooksnetwork.com/todd-moye-freedom-flyers-the-tuskegee-airmen-of-world-war-ii/>

* **K. Peiss**, *Information Hunters – When Librarians, Soldiers, and Spies Banded Together in World War II Europe*

<https://newbooksnetwork.com/kathy-peiss-the-information-hunters-oxford-up-2019/>

week 14

* **R. Bessel**, *Germany 1945 – From War to Peace*

<https://newbooksnetwork.com/richard-bessel-germany-1945-from-war-to-peace-harper-2009/>

* **F. Hirsch**, *Soviet Judgment at Nuremberg – A New History of the International Military Tribunal after World War II*

<https://newbooksnetwork.com/francine-hirsch-soviet-judgement-at-nuremberg-oxford-up-2020/>

* **V. Hebert**, *Hitler's Generals on Trial – The Last War Crimes Tribunal at Nuremberg*

<https://newbooksnetwork.com/valerie-hebert-hitlers-generals-on-trial-the-last-war-crimes-tribunal-at-nuremberg/>

* **F. Slaveski**, *The Soviet Occupation of Germany – Hunger, Mass Violence and the Struggle for Peace, 1945-1947*

<https://newbooksnetwork.com/filip-slaveski-the-soviet-occupation-of-germany-cambridge-up-2013-4/>

* **B. Crim**, *Our Germans – Project Paperclip and the National Security State*

<https://newbooksnetwork.com/brian-crim-our-germans-project-paperclip-and-the-national-security-state-johns-hopkins-up-2017/>

Devil's advocate topics

I. Appeasement: *Had France and Britain stopped Hitler right at the beginning, he wouldn't been able to start a world war and conquer Europe*

for the session on 11 November 2020: Revisionism and appeasement

II. Blitzkrieg: *There was no such thing as a lightning war – it was a propaganda stunt*

for the session on 18 November 2020: Poland and the war in the West

III. Barbarossa *was un-winnable*

for the session on 2 December 2020: Barbarossa and beyond

IV. Moscow: *Had the Germans captured Moscow, they would have won the war (against the Soviet Union)*

for the session on 2 December 2020: Barbarossa and beyond

V. Stalingrad: *Conquering Stalingrad would have substantially changed the course of the war*

for the session on 2 December 2020: Barbarossa and beyond

VI. Second front: *It was the right decision of the Western Allies to wait until opening a second front*

for the session on 30 December 2020: Reversal I

VII. Nuremberg: *The Nuremberg Trial was a good punishment for the Nazi leadership*

for the session on 20 January 2021: Ending the war

Checklist assignments

1. produce and upload your personal intro video

until 25 October 2020

2. book report video

upload until the week of the topic (Sunday evening the latest), see list

3. feedback notes

after watching some of the documentary clips for two week (to be announced later); enter on moodle until Monday evening before respective the session the latest.

4. notes on historians' debate

write a short text (one page maximum) on the historians' debate for week 8 (to be uploaded on moodle, no later than the Monday before meeting)

5. clips on reading the chapters of Soldaten (week 10)

sign up for your chapter on moodle; upload until Sunday before the weeks meeting (team project)

6. devil's advocate

upload until the week of the topic (Sunday evening the latest), see list (team project)

7. final paper

due by the first week of Semester B, to be uploaded on the course's moodle page (at the bottom of page)