Competing Narratives: Modern European History

 Semester and Year: Spring 2017
 Credits: 3
 History Core Class
 Study Tour: Warsaw and Berlin
 Related Disciplines: History
 Faculty Member: Thorsten Wagner
 Meeting Times: Monday and Thursday, 8:30-9:50
 Location: V10-B25

Description of Course
Europe – the cradle of liberal democracy, civil rights, Western culture and secular civilization, but also fertile ground for colonialist expansion, racist violence, social engineering, and the brutal tyrannies of the 20th century: this course sets out to explore the staggering ambiguities of the European experience in the modern era. Simultaneously, it is a study of how selective ways of remembering Europe’s past have shaped collective and individual identities, as we will be examining the complex web of competing historical narratives and studying concepts and discourses in the contemporary field of history and memory studies.

Course Instructor
Thorsten Wagner

DIS Contacts:
Matt Kelley, Program Assistant, European Humanities Department
The course will begin with identifying the new, massive challenges that European societies were confronted with in the course of the 19th century, both in terms of the dynamic development of capitalist, industrializing economies, in turn generating new social classes, and in terms of new political concepts such as nationalism, socialism, and liberal democracy. A strong emphasis will be put on the changing and conflicting perceptions of this new reality and their expressions in art, science, literature, and religion: how did European citizens try to make sense of these changes, what were the frames of reference that defined meaning and purpose in the midst of rapid transformation and upheaval?

A significant part of the course will be dedicated to Germany as a case study of European modernity: Questioning the outdated notions of German exceptionalism, we will zoom in on how Germany became a key player in 20th-century Europe. The legacy of the previous century was ambivalent: In the 19th century, Germany had seen the rise of an ethno-centrist national identity, the failure of liberal-democratic movements, the birth of a strong organized labor movement, and, eventually the creation of a rapidly modernizing, unified nation-state of the Kaiserreich, combining dynamic modernism and backward autocracy. Hungry for influence and recognition, the traditionalist elites of the German Empire contributed significantly to the outbreak of World War I. The Great War caused the collapse of the multinational, autocratic empires of Europe, and its end marked the birth of a Europe of nation-states. But the multiple crises of interwar Germany and the lack of a strong middle class dedicated to the new Weimar republic and its democratic political system paved the way for the Nazi takeover of power.

A second focus of the course is the era of European dictatorships and genocide. In the 1930s and 1940s, Nazi and Soviet rule and the ensuing Second World War destroyed nation-states, caused the death of at least 15 million civilian Europeans and created the Bloodlands (Tim Snyder), a landscape of destruction and genocide in Central and Eastern Europe.

In a third and final step, the course will examine the process of rebuilding Europe after WWII. Again, a crucial factor was Germany, separated by the ominous Iron Curtain and the frontline of the Cold War. West Germany’s surprisingly speedy return to the family of civilized nations, facilitated by a remarkable recognition of historical responsibility for the murder of European Jews and the destruction of the continent, paved the way for a peaceful unification of both Germany and Europe after 1989. We will wrap up the course with a discussion of the state of Europe today, with Germany at its head, the old-new leader of the continent – respected by most, hated by some.
**Core Course Week including Short Tour**

The theme of the core course week is Border Regions. We will start with a two-day seminar in Copenhagen, before we go on a three-day study tour to Southern Jutland and Northern Germany with a continued focus on Denmark and its neighbors to deconstruct Danish national myths and how these historical interpretations shape current Danish memory and identity.

**The Long Tour Destinations**

Like no other cities, Berlin and Warsaw epitomize the trajectory of Modern Europe: from the ambiguities and pitfalls of nationalism, through the catastrophic destruction and genocidal violence of WWII to the rebuilding of the continent as a diverse, yet unified entity. The two war-torn but revitalized capitals, bridging East and West, provide the perfect gateway for an exploration of the fascinating complexities of their nations’ past and present. They embody political and cultural centers with a rich and interconnected history; having found their ways out of the rubble of World War II, both cities are now key players in the Europe of the 21st century.

**Course Objectives**

- To acquire a general overview of the major themes and problems in European history of the 19th and 20th century: democratization, industrialization, social reform, nationalism, conflicting ethnic identities and border disputes, colonialism
- To zoom in on the case study of Modern German History with its transnational entanglement with the European context
- To explore the crucial and ongoing impact of competing memories and conflicting narratives on a continent devastated and ripped apart in war and genocide, but eventually united in the pursuit of peace and economic cooperation.

**Course Format**

The course will meet 18 times during the semester and also involves two field studies. It is not a lecture class, but relies heavily on class discussion, informed by an in-depth, critical reading of the assigned texts. Students will be expected to bring the text (in a paper version) and reading notes as well as questions to class. It is crucial to analyze and criticize the argument put forth in the reading. Students need to be able to relate their points of view to an academic and research-based argument. An engaged, informed and active participation in class discussion is crucial.
Study tour to Berlin and Warsaw:

While Berlin seems self-evident as a destination for a course with focus on modern Germany, Warsaw is a most meaningful counterpart to the old-new German capital. We can’t even begin to fathom the European drama of the 20th century and the consequences of Nazism and Stalinism without zooming in on Central Eastern Europe – the “Bloodlands” (Timothy Snyder) between Germany and Russia.

Berlin and Warsaw both carry complex layers of meaning, having been positioned at the center of turbulent centuries of national history, and constitute polar opposites: While Berlin symbolizes Prussian, Imperial and Nazi hegemony, it also came to constitute the epicenter of Weimar modernity and the key battleground of the Cold War. Warsaw, for its part, epitomizes the century-long struggle for national independence, lost with the Polish Partitions in the late 18th century, temporarily re-established after WWI, and regained after 1989. This struggle for freedom was driven by an exclusionary, anti-Semitic and ethnocentric nationalism, undermining the rich multinational and multicultural diversity that had characterized the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth for centuries. Before the Holocaust, more than a third of Warsaw’s population was Jewish.

Poland took the full brunt of aggression by Nazi Germany and the Stalinist Soviet Union. The brutality of a dual invasion and occupation reinforced the deep-seated traumas of the Polish nation. The ghetto in Warsaw and the nearby death camp of Treblinka became key sites of the Holocaust. No other European country had to suffer so massively from ethnic cleansing and mass murder, and no other nation fought so courageously for six full years against totalitarian domination. On the other hand, a painful process of revisiting WWII history has begun. Questions about Polish participation in violent acts against Jewish neighbors are undermining cherished but simplistic notions of victimization.

Both Germany’s mass murder of Jewish and Christian Poles and the expulsion of Germans from Poland and other parts of Central Eastern Europe after 1945 constitute defining moments for the intricate web of ambivalent historical experiences and traumatic memories in present-day Europe. Though these instances of violence obviously can’t be equated, they are key components of conflicting national narratives: Berlin and Warsaw are ideal case studies through which to explore the complex ambiguities of victimhood and violence. This complex relationship becomes even more evident with the collapse of Communism: the creation of Solidarnosc in Poland was one of the factors that led to the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the subsequent demise of the Iron Curtain. Both cities, Warsaw and Berlin, symbolize most powerfully the rise of a Europe liberated from the shackles of dictatorship, facing the challenges of the 21st century.
Course Requirements

Oral Presentation: Each student will be assigned a time to give a max. 10-minute oral presentation to the class on the basis of a text listed as recommended reading. The presentation should use a very concise PowerPoint slide show, with a maximum of 5 slides. The task is to present the essence of the additional reading to the fellow students, so the time limit will be enforced strictly.

Midterm Essay: The midterm essay will give students an opportunity to reflect on the major themes that have been covered in class until this point. Students will have 30 minutes in class to choose from three essay questions and to respond with a short essay, drawing on readings and class discussions.

Research Paper: Each student will produce a research project in the form of a topic paper that reflects the theme of the course. Throughout the semester, the students’ reflection process will become increasingly individualized as they find texts that fit into the research project that will be completed at the end of the semester as their topic paper. The paper is expected to be research-based, amount to 1600-1800 words, and have a clear focus on Modern European history. The final paper is to be turned in April 6th.

As the first preparatory stage for this paper, a 200-250 word project proposal (in prose) is due on March 16th. The proposal describes the problem that will be discussed in the final paper, raises the key questions guiding the research process, and includes a revised and extended bibliography, which lists (minimum) five peer-reviewed academic articles or book chapters taken from research-based academic publications that are not part of the required or recommended course reading. Websites, encyclopedia articles, fiction, newspaper articles, book reviews, essays, movies, etc. do not count. Please do not hesitate to make use of the DIS library for this portion of the paper: http://www.disabroad.org/study-abroad-students/library/

All assignments must be handed in on the due date BOTH in hard copy AND electronically (i.e. sent as an ordinary Word document attached to an email). Not meeting the requirements regarding word count, handing in assignments late, or failing to hand it in both forms will affect the grade substantially.

List of recommended films:

1) 1864
2) The White Ribbon
3) Heimat
4) The Tin Drum
5) Generation War
6) Conspiracy
7) Rosenstrasse
8) Sophie Scholl – The Final Days
9) Stauffenberg
10) The Downfall
11) A Woman in Berlin
12) Aftermath
13) The Reader
14) Ida
15) The Baader Meinhof Complex
16) Barbara
17) Goodbye Lenin
18) Lives of Others
19) The Nasty Girl
20) And Along Come Tourists
21) Hannah Arendt

Grade Components

Class participation: 25%
Mid-term essay: 25%
Oral presentation and ppt. slides: 20%
Final paper: 30%

To be eligible for a passing grade in this class you must complete all of the assigned work.

Disability and resource statement

Any student who has a need for accommodation based on the impact of a disability should immediately contact Office of Academic Support (acad supp@dis.dk) to coordinate this. In order to receive accommodations, students should inform the instructor of approved DIS accommodations.

Attendance

Attendance at all class sessions is mandatory. If a student misses multiple classes, the Director of Academic Support and Registrar will be notified and they will follow up with him or her. Two unexcused absences will warrant a reduced letter grade. Three unexcused absences will result in failure. Absences will jeopardize grades and standing at DIS; allowances will be made in cases of illness, provided that a doctor’s note is submitted. Arriving late to class is unacceptable and will affect participation grades. In order to be eligible for a passing grade in the class, all work must be submitted.
**Classroom Etiquette**

The use of distracting devices (smartphones, iPads, laptops, etc.) is strictly prohibited during class. Failure to comply will adversely affect participation grades. Use of laptops for the purpose of note-taking requires prior consultation with the professor. Students should refrain from all other computer activities, as they prove distracting to themselves and fellow students. Mobile phones and other electronic devices should of course be turned off and stored away.

**Academic Honesty - Plagiarism and Violating the Rules of an Assignment**

DIS expects that students abide by the highest standards of intellectual honesty in all academic work. DIS assumes that all students do their own work and credit all work or thought taken from others. Academic dishonesty will result in a final course grade of “F” and can result in dismissal, and the students’ home universities will be notified. DIS reserves the right to request that written student assignments be turned electronically for submission to plagiarism detection software. See the Academic Handbook for more information, or see the professor with any questions.
Course Schedule

Where nothing else is noted, the class meets with the instructor in the assigned classroom at DIS.

Session 1
Thursday, January 19

Introduction to the course

What is Modern European History? And what role has Germany played in the context of the history of Europe since the French Revolution? As we begin to explore these questions, we will be identifying some key themes and problems of European history. What does it mean to look at European history in a comparative perspective, to look at processes of cultural transfer and examples of an entangled history?

Required reading:
Alison Smale/Steven Erlanger, As Obama Exits World Stage, Angela Merkel May Be the Liberal West’s Last Defender
Rick Noack, How Angela Merkel, a conservative, became the „leader of the free world“

Recommended reading:

Kocka, Jürgen, Comparison and Beyond, in: History and Theory 42 (2003), S. 39-44.

Session 2
Monday, January 23

History and Memory: Contemporary Europe and the Shadows of World War II and Genocide

What are the differences between history and memory? What role did the experiences of World War II play in the development of European and national identities after 1945? For decades, self-pity and memories of heroic victimhood predominated over painful questions of collaboration and complicity.

Required reading:

I. Society, Identity, and Culture in Modern Europe, 1780-1914

Session 3
Thursday, January 26

From Empire to Nation-State, from Monarchy to Democracy? Reform and Revolution in the Age of Industrialization and Urbanization

The Enlightenment, Romanticism, and a fledgling liberal, bourgeois society were key factors in the emergence of the notion of nationhood. New concepts of exclusion and inclusion informed the ideas of civic liberty and national homogeneity. Oscillating between the markers “1789” and “1848”, European societies embarked on a bumpy road towards a modern and more participatory form of government. At the same time, the rapid technological and economic change of European societies both produced new social conflicts – between an increasingly organized working-class and a propertied bourgeoisie.

Required reading:


Recommended reading:

Presentation: The War of 1864 in Danish and German History
Session 4

Thursday, February 2

The "Jewish Question": Jews and Anti-Semitism in Modern Europe 1750-1917

The Jewish minority in Europe became the ultimate litmus test of a modern, inclusive democracy. Jewish communities morph from being persecuted outsiders to key players in the modernization of European societies. But simultaneously, a new form of hatred was rearing its ugly head: Modern racial anti-Semitism.

Required reading:

Recommended reading:

Presentation: The History of Jews in Denmark – the European Exception?

February 6-11: CORE CLASS WEEK (INCL. SESSION 5 and 6) AND SHORT STUDY TOUR TO SOUTHERN DENMARK
(see separate program)

Session 7

Monday, February 13

Europe and the World: Hegemony, Colonialism, and Imperialism

The dynamics within European societies obviously were closely intertwined with the domination of European countries on a global stage. Economically and politically, the European powers structured world politics and the domestic development of their colonies. But this unfolding of imperialist power had a significant impact on European societies themselves.
Required reading:

Presentation:
European Imperialism in the 19th and Early 20th Century

II. The Second” Thirty Years’ War” 1914-1945
Session 8
Thursday, February 16
World War I: The Brutalization of Warfare and the Collapse of Empires
The war that was supposed to end all wars radically transformed Europe’s borders, societies, and mentalities. Towards the end of WWI, the multi-ethnic empires of the continent collapsed, revolutions wiped away the old elites, and new nation-states were established. But what was supposed to be the starting-point for a democratic Europe generated new massive instabilities.

Required reading:

Recommended reading:

Presentation: 1914 in Historical Scholarship and Public Debate

Session 9
Monday, February 20
Mid-term Essay
Europe Between the Wars: Politics and Society at the Crossroads
The interwar years were a period of radical social and aesthetic experiments. Urban life in the metropoles offered new perspectives and opportunities, and particularly Berlin grew into the epicenter of an innovative and vibrant modern culture. Harsh conflicts between the Left and the Right soon paralyzed the political system of the Weimar Republic, but also in many other parts of Europe, nationalist and autocratic movements gained the upper hand.
Required readings:


Recommended Reading:

Session 10
Thursday, February 23
The Failure of Civil Society and the Rise of Nazism 1933-1939
The rise of the Nazi movement lead to a breach of civilization (Diner). Hitler’s so-called seizure of power was made possible by the support of the traditional elites, but gradually, all political opposition was crushed and a terrorist dictatorship established. But why did the regime enjoy massive support by large parts of German society, an enthusiasm and fascination that endured until the very end?

Required reading:

Recommended reading:

Presentation: The Crisis of Democracy in Interwar Europe.

February 25 – March 5: TRAVEL BREAK/LONG STUDY TOURS
Session 11

Monday, March 6

The Second World War 1939-1945

In many ways, the Second World War was to become the defining moment of the 20th century. Soon, also non-European countries found themselves dragged into this war - a carnage that left the continent in ruins. Particularly hard hit was the Central Eastern part of Europe – the area that Tim Snyder so powerfully has described as the “Bloodlands”. At the outset, Germany had embarked on a massive genocidal conquest and racist transformation of living space (Lebensraum) in the East, at the end, the era of European world dominance was over.

Required reading:
(on Canvas)

Recommended reading:

Presentation: Poland during WWII and the Jedwabne debate.

Session 12

Thursday, March 9

The Holocaust: The Murder of European Jewry.

After recapitulating the decision-making process and the implementation of the so-called Final Solution, the focus will be on recent attempts to explain and contextualize the murder of European Jewry and on the consequences for German and European societies after 1945. Who were the perpetrators, the bystanders, the victims? What motivated the perpetrators? Did situational, ideological, or rational-economic factors prevail? How did European Jewry react to persecution and mass murder? How was it possible to organize a genocide with the collaboration of so many European societies? And what motivated the rescuers?
Required reading:

http://www.ushmm.org/learn/introduction-to-the-holocaust

http://www.ushmm.org/learn/timeline-of-events/before-1933


Presentation: The Ghetto Uprising 1943 and the Warsaw Uprising 1944

III. A Divided Europe, 1945-1989

Session 13
Monday, March 13

The Postwar Order of Europe: Reconstruction, the Iron Curtain, and the Beginnings of the Cold War

1945 became the turning-point for a new world order, dominated by the new superpowers, the US and the Soviet Union. The infamous Iron Curtain divided the continent, defining Central Eastern Europe as the sphere of Soviet control. New non-democratic regimes were established, but also the first foundations for a new united Europe were established. Germany, a landscape of ruins, became the main battleground of the Cold War.

Required readings:

Recommended reading:

Presentation: “Stunde Null” 1945? – Discontinuities and Continuities in German Society after Nazism
Wednesday, March 15, 8:30am-12:30: FIELD STUDY

(Meeting-point: Vestergade 10 Archway)

Session 14

Thursday, March 16

Project Proposal Due

Two Germanies 1949-1989: Volkswagen or Trabant?

The postwar period fostered two German states with diametrically opposed founding myths, state ideologies and political systems. Democratic West Germany enjoyed massive American help in the process of reconstruction, and soon the so-called Economic Miracle enabled the establishment of a Western consumer society. The exodus of millions forced the rigid socialist regime in East Germany to close the last loophole in the Iron Curtain by building the Berlin Wall. But soon, both societies grew accustomed to the separation; a German nation-state seemed a thing of the past, and the prospect of reunification remote. The first postwar Social Democratic (Labor) government, led by the former emigré Willy Brandt, embarked on a spectacular policy of reconciliation with East Germany and Poland (Neue Ostpolitik).

Required reading:

LONG STUDY TOUR TO BERLIN/ WARSAW: March 18-26

(see separate program)

Student Presentations on LST:

1) The Royal Palace in Berlin
2) The Brandenburg Gate
3) The History of Janusz Korczak
4) Mila 18
Session 15
Monday, March 27
“1968”: Protest Movements, Leftist Terrorism, and a Quest for more Democratic Participation

Two decades after the war, a new generation of activists caused political upheaval: The student movement, the Anti-Vietnam War demonstrations and the beginnings of alternative political forms of protest shook the foundations of the Western societies, particularly in Central and Western Europe. In West Germany, the radicalization of political dissent led to the creation of leftist violent extremism (the RAF), but also caused what is known as the Second Founding of the Republic. In the Czech Republic, on the other hand, the Prague Spring – crushed by Soviet Tanks – stood for a different set of hopes for a more democratic society.

Required reading:

Recommended reading:


Presentation: Heroes or Villains? Left-Wing Terrorism in 1970s Europe

Session 16
Thursday, March 30
Freedom, at last: 1989 – the End of Socialism and the Cold War

After a period of political thawing, the Cold War came to a fairly abrupt end in the late 1980s. Poland took the lead with the establishment of the Free Unions (Solidarność), but soon Hungary, Czechoslovakia and eventually even East Germany followed suit. The legalization of a non-communist opposition and the creation of Round Tables lead gradually to the collapse of the old regimes. A key player was Mikhail Gorbachev, who as the new strong man in the Kremlin in 1985 decided to ease control with the satellite states of the Warsaw Pact and to allow for Perestroika and Glasnost, reforms and openness.
Required reading:


Presentation: 1989 – The Magic Year of Change in History and Memory

**IV. Haunting Memories, Competing Narratives**

**Session 17**

**Monday, April 3**

*Memories of War and Genocide: Germany’s attempts to come to terms with a troubling past*

The two German societies dealt very differently with the question of national guilt, but in both cases the blame tended to be shifted on the other side of the border. East Germany saw itself as heirs of a heroic antifascist resistance, whereas West Germans decried the Soviet puppet state as another totalitarian regime, tended to blame a small clique of SS gangsters for Nazi mass crimes and war, and preferred to commemorate fallen Wehrmacht soldiers and conservative resistance fighters. Only since the 1980s, citizens’ groups started to rebel against a willful forgetfulness and demanded to *dig where you stand*. Increasingly, taking responsibility for the crimes of Nazism became the cornerstone of a new German national identity. After the fall of the Wall, two very different memory cultures had to be merged, which generated multiple frictions and conflicts. Most recently, a new renaissance of notions of German victimhood can be discerned.

Required readings:


Recommended reading:

Session 18
Thursday, April 6 – Final Session
Final Paper due

European Memory of War and Genocide

Historians debate how to interpret the Holocaust within the wider framework of Modern European History. It has been argued that it is necessary to understand Holocaust scholarship and its attempts to analyze and understand the genocide as a phenomenon of contemporary cultural history. Similar to the interpretation of the French Revolution, the Holocaust also has become a foundational past (Alan Confino). In a related, but different vein, Timothy Snyder has warned against the distortion that the predominance of the memory paradigm over history has caused, and Dirk Rupnow has outlined the causes and dangers of the current globalization of Holocaust memory.

Final Discussion:

Wrapping up the readings and discussions of the semester, we are going to look at contemporary Europe: what does the current crisis of European cooperation imply for the future of the European project? Will Germany be able to exercise its leadership to the benefit of the community, or will fears of Berlin’s predominance and economic conflicts of interest cause the disintegration of the Union? How can we make sense of the current situation against the backdrop of Modern European History?

Required reading:

Recommended reading:
Wednesday, May 3

CONCLUDING SOCIAL EVENT—ATTENDANCE MANDATORY

13.00-17.00

Location: TBA