

Spring 2018
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History 506:401:01 – The Experience of World War II
W 1:10-4:00 VD 011

Though the ranks of those who lived through the Second World War are rapidly thinning, the war retains an undiminished presence in history textbooks and popular consciousness as the greatest turning point in recent history and bedrock of the present world order. Americans and Russians, nations that helped achieve victory over Nazi Germany and Japan, remember World War II with pride – as a “Great Patriotic War,” or “the good war,” fought by the “greatest generation.” For many people from these countries, the history of the war amounts to a history of good vs. evil, right vs. wrong. This is also true for Germans, though in an inverted sense: German memory of WW II is informed by a shameful memory of a war of annihilation. This memory works as a moral compass, impelling Germans to redeem their past sins.

How do accounts of personal experience of World War II interact with how societies at large remember the war? What exactly is experience, how does it take shape in documentary form, and what work does its writing and publishing do? Who gets to be a subject of experience, and of which narrative of the Second World War? Does everyone have an experience? Are soldiers and civilians, men and women, people in the West and the East, Whites and non-Whites all remembered in the record of the war, and on equal terms? Turning to us researchers: where do we find the experience of World War II, and what techniques do we use to retrieve or unlock it? What parts of the war experience appeal to us in particular measure, and why? These are some of the questions that we will be engaging with throughout the seminar.

The primary purpose of the seminar is to help students learn how to do historical research using primary source materials, and write a formal research paper. This is one of the most demanding courses offered to History undergraduate students at Rutgers, and one of the most rewarding ones as well, as it proceeds in a small group setting and allows participants to do serious research and explore a subject matter in considerable depth.

During spring 2018, I will also be teaching “World War II in World History” (506:102:02, CAC AB-1180, M/W 7). If you have time and energy left, participation in that course will help you with the history seminar, but is not required.

Requirements:

The main focus of the seminar is the production of a substantial research paper at the end of the semester. This paper will go through various draft stages; in its final shape it will be about 20 pages long. Don’t exceed 25 (Times Roman, 12 pt, double spaced).

The seminar also includes a number of shorter assignments: response papers in preparation for each session for which readings are assigned, and a proposal for the research topic.

Post your response papers in the form of individual blogs on Sakai (only you and I can see this material). Share your proposal on the Sakai discussion board. Response papers are due by 4 PM the day before the class meets. Your proposal needs to be posted 24 hours before the class meets. You are expected to do an oral presentation of your work, following the submission of the first draft of your research paper.

Regular, active attendance in class and coverage of all the readings listed on the syllabus other core requirements for this seminar.

Required readings:

The following book will be available at the Rutgers Bookstore:

-- Annette Wieviorka, *The Era of the Witness* (Cornell University Press, 2006)

All other readings on this list are available on our Sakai course site where they can be found under «Resources / Weekly Readings». The titles there correspond to those listed on the syllabus. Download them to your own computer and print them out. Please always bring paper copies of the required readings for a given day to class. The syllabus is also posted on Sakai.

For your written assignments, please follow the History Department Guide on writing historical essays: <http://history.rutgers.edu/undergraduate/learning-goals/writing-historical-essays>

Most of the work related to this seminar is done outside the classroom and requires you to take personal responsibility for planning your research strategy and then carrying it out. You should expect to spend at least eight to ten hours each week doing individual research.

The course is divided, roughly, into three parts: The first part (sessions 1-5) is meant to make all participants fluent with the subject matter and important analytical tools required for the writing of the research paper. You are also expected to determine the subject of your research paper during this early phase. The second part (roughly, sessions 6-11) is centrally devoted to the researching and writing of your projects. During these weeks you will need to work closely with your sources to develop a position or an argument that will be the primary focus of your paper. You will be writing more, presenting, revising, and rewriting your papers in the final part of the seminar (sessions 12-14).

My colleagues in the History Department and I view the History Seminar as one of the most important parts of the entire major. We do so because we believe that the skills students develop in the seminar are essential to the major and also because we believe that these skills have value in the world outside the university. The seminar teaches students how to find meaning in documents and texts, how to develop creative and persuasive arguments about interesting areas of enquiry, and how to express their points-of-view in polished essay form. All of these skills will be useful to students in a wide array of careers after graduation.

You are responsible for familiarizing yourself with the History Department's policy on Mutual Responsibilities and Classroom Etiquette:

http://history.rutgers.edu/?option=com_content&task=view&id=108&Itemid=147

For the course to “work,” i.e., to be a rewarding individual and collective learning experience, you are expected to attend all classes. If you expect to miss a single class please use the University absence reporting website <https://sims.rutgers.edu/ssra/> to indicate the date and reason for your absence. If you miss more than one class without a valid and documented reason your absence will affect your grade.

Schedule of Classes and Readings

1. (Jan. 17) Introduction.
2. (Jan. 24) Some Theory: Unraveling "Experience." Life-writing in Wartime.

Reading: Joan Scott, “The Evidence of Experience”; Raymond Williams, "Experience"; Eric Leed, “The Structure of the War Experience”

3. (Jan. 31) Immediacy, Memory, Myth: Frames of Experience

Reading: Elena Kochina, Blockade Diary (selections); Lisa A. Kirschenbaum, *The Legacy of the Siege of Leningrad, 1941-1995: Myth, Memories, and Monuments* (2006) (introduction and part I)

Short paper due Sept. 17, 8 PM

4. (Feb. 7) Recording Experience

Reading: TBA

5. (Feb. 14) Unrecorded Experience

Reading: TBA:

6. (Feb. 21) Discussion of students' proposed themes, round one.

You must post your abstract on the Sakai discussion board **24 hours** before the beginning of class.

7. (Feb. 28) Presentation of proposals

Post your proposal and bibliography on the Sakai discussion board **24 hours** before the beginning of class

8. (March 7) Doing Oral History

Read and watch this: <https://blog.oup.com/2014/01/teaching-oral-history-in-digital-age/>;
please also read: Moyer, Judith. Step-by-Step Guide to Oral History. Available at http://www.dohistory.org/on_your_own/toolkit/oralHistory.html.

Other websites you can explore: <http://ohda.matrix.msu.edu/>, <http://voices.iit.edu/>

March 14 Spring Break

9. (March 21) Open session: share your sources, sections, questions

Reading will be assigned in accordance with your topics

Post a source or source excerpt on the Sakai discussion **48 hours** before the beginning of class.

10. (March 28) The Era of the Witness

Reading: Annette Wieviorka. *The Era of the Witness* (2006)

11. (April 4) No class – students work on their research papers. Be in touch with instructor

12. (April 11) Oral presentations I

X students post draft papers by April 8.

13. (April 18) Oral presentations II

Y students post draft papers by April 15

14. (April 25) Editorial Roundtable

Final submission of papers on April 30