

Hist 212-301: The First World War (Ben Franklin Seminar)

(NOTE: This is a prospective syllabus. There may be changes to readings and assignments.)



Otto Dix, "Storm Troopers under Gas Attack" (1924)



John Singer Sargent, "Gassed" (1918-1919)

Many historians contend that the First World War marked the end of the nineteenth century, and served as the true beginning of the “short twentieth century.” It opened, in the words of one historian, “the Age of Catastrophe.” We will devote the semester to examining one of the most epochal wars in world history.

Our course will examine: the dynamics of violence which preceded the First World War; the July Crisis, which led to the beginning of the war; the military course of the war, and the policies that made it possible to wage total war for so long; and how the war came to end. Throughout our course, we will trace not only the military, political and social processes that affected millions of lives, but we will also devote a significant portion of our course to “the intimate history of the war,” via Peter Englund’s history of the war through the lives of twenty individuals. Readings will run ca. 200 pp./week.

This course is organized as a seminar. While I may occasionally lecture on particular topics not covered in the readings, our primary activity will be class discussion. The success of the course, therefore, depends in large measure on you. Scrupulous attendance and informed participation will be essential components of your overall performance. Written assignments will include examinations of documents, an analysis of one battle, and a final paper on a topic of your choice. No prior knowledge of the First World War is assumed or required, only a commitment to investigating it.

Books to purchase (all available at the Penn Book Center, 34th Street and Sansom):

- Peter Englund, *The Beauty and the Sorrow: An Intimate History of the First World War*
- Isabel Hull, *Absolute Destruction: Military Culture and the Practices of War in Imperial Germany*
- Hew Strachan, *The First World War* (New York: Viking, 2003)
- Richard F. Hamilton and Holger H. Herwig, eds., *Decisions for War, 1914-1917*
- *Recommended:* David Stevenson, *Cataclysm: The First World War as Political Tragedy*

Assignments: Written work must be turned in on the designated due dates. I will accept late work only with prior approval in documented emergencies. In other words, if you have a problem, you must let me know before the assignment is due. I will strictly enforce standards of academic integrity.

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| • Participation: | 20% |
| • Brief of one government’s position during the July Crisis (5 pp.) | 5% |
| • Analysis of one battle (7 pp.) | 20% |
| • Analysis of one set of documents on war aims and diplomacy (7 pp.) | 5% |
| • Bibliographic essay on final topic (7 pp.) | 20% |
| • Final paper (15-20 pp.) | 30% |

NOTE: Students in this course are expected to abide by the University of Pennsylvania's Code of Academic Integrity. You may find the code at: <http://www.vpul.upenn.edu/osl/acadint.html>

Participation: A seminar is a collective experience, predicated on informed participation by, and discussion among, its participants. Participation will constitute a significant portion of your grade for the class (20%). Remember that posing good questions is often more important than providing rote answers.

For each session, two students will be responsible for providing an overview of the week's readings. This overview should *not* be a summary of the reading, but should raise questions about problems, concepts and issues on the week's *THEME*. The students responsible for a particular week should provide a one- to two-page outline.

In order to provide timely feedback on your seminar participation, we will schedule individual meetings in mid-semester to discuss your individual performance in seminar. This meeting will be purely diagnostic. It will not result in a grade.

Week 1: Introductions and mechanics

- Peter Englund, "To the Reader," "Dramatis Personae" and "1914" in *The Beauty and the Sorrow* (pp. xi-xvi, 1-72)

Week 2: The forerunners of total war?

- Isabel Hull, *Absolute Destruction*, chs. 1-3, 8 (pp. 7-90, 182-96)
- Robert Gerwarth and Stephan Malinowski, "Hannah Arendt's Ghosts: Reflections on the Disputable Path from Windhoek to Auschwitz," *Central European History* 42 (2009): 279-300. [PDF]

Week 3: The outbreak of war

- Hew Strachan, *The First World War*, chs. 1-2 (pp. 1-64)
- Samuel R. Williamson, Jr. and Ernest R. May, "An Identity of Opinions: Historians and July 1914," *Journal of Modern History* 79, no. 2 (June 2007): 335-87. [J-STOR]
- Read the relevant chapter for "your" government in Hamilton and Herwig, eds., *Decisions for War*, and be prepared to explain your state's position
- DOCUMENTS: Imanuel Geiss, ed., *July 1914: The Outbreak of the First World War, Selected Documents* (New York: Charles Scribners, 1967), pp. 76-88, 113-16, 259-60, 288-300, 305-06, 309-13, 330-331. [PDF]

ASSIGNMENT: Five-page brief of "your" government's position during the July 1914 Crisis.

Week 4: Dynamics of Destruction? German singularity?

- Hew Strachan, *The First World War*, chs. 5-6 (pp. 131-97)[66 pp.]
- Isabel Hull, *Absolute Destruction*, chs. 4-6, 9 (pp. 93-158, 197-225) [103 pp.]
- Alan Kramer, ch. 2, “Radicalization of Warfare” (pp. 31-68) and part of ch. 4 “German Singularity” (pp. 114-132) of *Dynamics of Destruction* [PDF] [55 pp.]

Week 5: Blockades and the Home Front **[HEAVY READING LOAD THIS WEEK!]**

- Hew Strachan, *The First World War*, chs. 3, 7 (pp. 65-96, 199-230) [62 pp.]
- Avner Offer, *The First World War: An Agrarian Interpretation*, pp. 1-7, 270-317, 23-28, 69-78 [68 pp.]
- Roger Chickering, “Total War: The Use and Abuse of a Concept,” in *Anticipating Total War: The German and American Experiences, 1871-1914*, eds. Manfred Boemke, Roger Chickering and Stig Förster, eds., (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 13-28. [PDF]
- Thierry Bonzon and Belinda Davis, "Feeding the Cities," in *Capital Cities at War. Paris, London, Berlin 1914-1919*, edited by Jay Winter and Jean-Louis Robert (New York, 1997). [PDF]
- Peter Englund, “1915” in *The Beauty and the Sorrow* (pp. 73-201)

Week 6: Battles

- David Stevenson, “The Land War in Europe: Strategy” and “Technology, Logistics, Tactics,” in *Cataclysm*, chs. 6-7 (pp. 123-160) [PDF]
- Peter Englund, “1916” in *The Beauty and the Sorrow* (pp. 201-315)

ASSIGNMENT: Write a seven-page analysis of one battle, based on one additional book (from bibliography and in consultation with Prof. Holquist), and the treatments in Strachan and Stevenson.

SPRING BREAKWeek 7: Occupations and Genocides

- Isabel Hull, “Civilians as Objects of Military Necessity,” ch. 10 in *Absolute Destruction* (pp. 226-62)
- Alan Kramer, part of ch. 4, “German Singularity” in *Dynamic of Destruction* (pp. 132-58)

- Donald Bloxham, “The Armenian Genocide of 1915–1916: Cumulative Radicalization and the Development of a Destruction Policy,” *Past and Present* 181 (2003): 141-191 [J-STOR]
- Lohr, Eric. “The Russian Army and the Jews: Mass Deportations, Hostages, and Violence During World War I.” *Russian Review* 60, no. 3 (2001): 404-419. [J-STOR]
- DOCUMENTS: Secret Meetings of the Russian Council of Ministers, Summer-Autumn 1915, in Michael Cherniavsky, ed., *Prologue to Revolution*, pp. 3-11, 36-47, 56-68, 120-23, 147-48, 168-72 [PDF]

SCHEDULE MEETINGS WITH PROF. HOLQUIST TO DISCUSS PARTICIPATION

Week 8: Diplomacy and Grand Strategy

- David Stevenson, “War Aims and Peace Negotiations,” ch. 5 of *Cataclysm* (pp. 103-122)
- Niall Ferguson, “How (Not) to Pay for War: Traditional Finance and ‘Total’ War,” ” in *Great War, Total War: Combat and Mobilization on the Western Front, 1914-1918*, eds. Roger Chickering and Stig Förster, eds., (New York: Cambridge, University Press, 2000), pp. 409-36. [PDF]
- CENTRAL POWER DOCUMENTS: September Program, Program of Six Economic Organizations, Polish Border Strip, Proclamations on Poland
- ALLIED DOCUMENTS: The Treaty of London (1915) [California Digital Library], Sykes-Picot Accords, Policy toward India and Ireland

ASSIGNMENT: Analyze one set of documents (7 pp.)

Week 9: Mutiny and Revolution

- Peter Englund, “1917” in *The Beauty and the Sorrow* (pp. 315-421)
- Hew Strachan, *The First World War*, ch. 7 (pp. 231-66)
- Leonard V. Smith, “War and ‘Politics’: The French Army Mutinies of 1917,” *War in History* 2, no. 2 (April 1995), pp. 180-201 [PDF]
- Peter Gatrell, “Hierarchy Subverted: The February Revolution and the Provisional Government” and “Conclusion: Russia’s First World War in Comparative Perspective,” chs. 9 and Conclusion of *Russia’s First World War: A Social and Economic History* (New York: Pearson-Longman, 2005), pp. 197-220, 264-76 [PDF]

Week 10: Monday, April 2: The final push

- Peter Englund, “1918” in *The Beauty and the Sorrow* (421-96)
- Michael Geyer, “Retreat and Destruction,” in *Scorched Earth: The Germans on the Somme, 1914-1918*, pp. 141-78.

- Hew Strachan, *The First World War*, “Germany’s Last Gamble,” ch. 9
- Isabel Hull, “Repetition and Self-Destruction,” ch. 12 of *Absolute Destruction*, 291-323

Week 11: Presentation and discussion of final topics

ASSIGNMENT: Seven-page bibliographic essay on final paper topic

Week 12: Ending the war

- David Stevenson, “Ceasefire” in *Cataclysm* [PDF]
- DOCUMENTS: Woodrow Wilson’s 14 Points
- DOCUMENTS: U.S. and German Armistice Notes, and the Armistice text, in *U.S. State Department, Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States*, Supplement 1, The World War, Volume 1 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1933), pp. 337-38, 343-46, 351-53, 357-38, 363-67, 379-81, 395-96, 463-69, 481-82, 489-90. [PDF]

Week 13: Brave New World

- David Stevenson, “Peacemaking,” ch. 18 of *Cataclysm* (pp. 409-30) [PDF]
- Zara Steiner, “The Peace Settlement,” in *The Oxford Illustrated History of the First World War*, ed. Hew Strachan (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), pp. 291-304.[PDF]
- Eric Weitz, “From the Vienna to the Paris System: International Politics and the Entangled Histories of Human Rights, Forced Deportations and Civilizing Missions,” *American Historical Review* 113, no. 5 (Dec. 2008) [J-STOR]
- Mark Mazower, “Empires, Nations and Minorities,” ch. 2 of *Dark Continent* [PDF]

FINAL PAPER: Due ca. ten days after final class