

**Seth Bernstein**  
**Keene Flint Hall 209**  
**Th: 11:45AM-2:45PM**  
**Course Site: <https://ufl.instructure.com/courses/540389>**

**[sethbernstein@ufl.edu](mailto:sethbernstein@ufl.edu)**  
**Office Hours:**  
**MT: 11AM-Noon**  
**(and by appointment)**

EUH 4930  
Research Seminar: World War II in Europe

**Course Description:**

The Second World War was a catastrophe that transformed Europe. Nazi Germany's brutal military campaigns led to the death of an estimated fifty million Europeans, including in unprecedented campaigns of systematic murder against civilians. The war that destroyed lives also created new ways of living. Huge number of people from around the world met in new countries as conquerors and conquered, forced laborers and masters, liberators and war criminals. The war continues to reverberate in our current conceptions of human rights, international security, and geopolitics.

The goal of this course is to produce a substantial (15-page) research paper on a topic of your choice. This course uses World War II as a canvas to practice different kinds of history writing. The history of war is often synonymous with operational histories. Military history is evolving to include the kinds of histories that assess the impact of war in society, culture, politics, and the economy, in addition to work that examines battlefield operations. Moreover, the war experience differed by country or even by region. The class readings and suggestions for research paper sources will allow students to explore a variety of topics and geographies.

The readings will come from specialist research. These works will give an example of in-depth scholarly research.

**Course Goals:**

1. Practice research and writing skills.
2. Consider the intersections between war and other aspects of modern life.
3. Familiarize yourselves with the history of World War II in Europe.

**Course Assignments:**

*Participation* (10%): Engagement in discussions that demonstrate a student's having read and understood assigned materials. In a three-hour seminar class, it is especially important that students prepare well for the class. At the risk of stating the obvious: Participation is not possible without attendance, but attendance does not guarantee full credit for participation.

*Reflection Posts* (5%): In weeks where we will be reading, students should write a short reflection post (one or two paragraphs – perhaps 250 words) on the course Canvas discussion board. These reflections can raise questions or insights about the reading, consider parallel

histories, think about related possibilities for the research paper, and more. These reflections do not need to be polished prose but should be thoughtful contributions that show your work and facilitate discussion. You are welcome to respond (constructively) to others' posts.

*Book Review and Presentation* (10%): After reviewing the syllabus in the first week, students should sign up to give a book review on a relevant week. The book under review does not have to fit exactly with the topic for the week but should be complementary (e.g., a book about postwar memory could fit with the week on war crimes trials). Additionally, try to choose a work that fits with your research topic. Having read the book, you will give a ten-minute (maximum) presentation about it. Besides a quick summary of the book, the presentation should analyze how the work's contribution to the historiography. In other words, what is the point of the book? What aspect of the historiography is it contesting? How have (or might) other works respond to that argument? A week after the presentation (Friday 5pm), you should submit a written version of the review (750 words).

*Research Paper* (65%): The centerpiece of this class is the paper based on original research in the history of World War II, understood broadly. It should investigate a problem in the field based on primary and secondary sources. It should have a clear thesis related to this problem. Work on this paper will proceed in stages over the course of the semester:

*Project Journal* (15%): A critical part of any long-form writing project is devoting regular thought to the problems and work involved in it. Five times a week, including one time in class, you should spend at least 15 minutes writing in your journal (can be physical journal or electronic). What form the entries take is up to you. At the beginning of the semester, the entries will probably concern possible topics, themes, and sources. In the middle of the project, you may find that it is useful to draft paragraphs. In the last weeks, the journal entries from the last weeks could be used to iron out problems in a mostly finished text. We will spend the 20-30 minutes in class each week discussing our current work.

*Prospectus* (15%): This is a fancy way of saying a long proposal. There are three basic elements to the prospectus—what, why, and how:

1. The what: What is the history that you are proposing to explore? What is the broader context of the topic? In short, it provides a historical context. If I want to write a case study of the Holocaust at ghetto X, I need to explain the basics of the camp (Where? When? Who?) as well as well as a brief view of how it fits in the broader context of the history of the Holocaust.
2. The why: Why is this topic important in the literature? What questions have scholars asked that make this research relevant? What current events can this history help explain? What makes it different than histories on similar topics? In the hypothetical case of ghetto X, there have been many studies of ghetto life and I might explore some classics plus a few of the latest treatments to give a sense of the problems in the field. But ghetto X has received little or no attention,

despite its exceptional qualities. It might be that an extraordinary number of people survived, and this ghetto can address the question of the factors that led to survival or death in ghettos. Or it could be that the population of the ghetto was unusual and allows me to test existing arguments about how the Holocaust worked under different conditions.

3. The how: What sources do you have to examine this project? Where do they come from? Who created them and how and when? How will you access them? Will they be enough to write the history you want to write? Are there any special methodological challenges? Returning to ghetto X, it might be that I am working with survivor testimony, and I would need to address the strengths and weaknesses of oral history sources. If I only have one survivor testimony, I will need to explain how I can write a history of this ghetto based on this person alone.

The prospectus should be at least 1000 words, excluding the bibliography. There must be a working title. There is no minimum number of primary sources, but you will have to justify the project based on the sources. There should be eight to ten scholarly secondary sources.

*Organizational Notes (5%):* Halfway through the semester, you will need to turn in organizational notes. Although there are acceptable variations, I expect thematically or chronologically organized paragraphs with citations at the end at the end of the paragraph. These paragraphs should be a midway point between raw notetaking and a draft. I will show you an example of how to make these notes during the semester.

*First Draft (10%):* The first draft should be a complete version of the paper. It may be that there are elements to be included later and some parts that are sketched rather than fully explored. At a minimum, the draft should be ten double-spaced, 12-point font pages of prose and include an introduction and conclusion that contain the project's main thesis. We will discuss the drafts in small groups, so the fuller they are, the better feedback you will receive.

*Presentation (5%):* The final two class periods will be presentations. Each student should prepare to speak for about ten minutes about their project. The presentation should convey the question that motivated the paper, the evidence you found for research, and the arguments you present. There will be about ten minutes for questions following each presentation.

*Final Paper (15%):* The final paper will be at least fifteen pages of prose, plus a bibliography. The grade for the paper will consider: the quality of the thesis; the depth of the research in both primary and secondary sources; the quality of the writing; the incorporation of feedback from the drafting process.

*Reflection* (10%): Alongside the final paper, you should submit a 1000-word reflection paper about your research. What was difficult about researching the topic? How would you approach the topic differently now? Is there another topic that you discovered that seems more attractive? What limitations did you discover about the sources or the literature? What topics would you have undertaken if you had the time and money (and perhaps language skills) to travel to a library or archive that has relevant materials?

### **Texts:**

Each week we will be reading a different book on the history of World War II, its precedents, and its consequences. Rather than trying to encompass every aspect of the history of World War II, this course uses the war to explore various aspects and methodologies to give a sense of the approaches, sources, and topics you might consider for your research paper.

We will read an entire book most weeks. The other weeks we will read from several sources that will be the equivalent. A book a week is a lot of reading, so be prepared. All books are available via UF Libraries. Here are the books we will read in full:

Koestler, Arthur. *Scum of the Earth*. London: Eland, 2007 [1955]. [https://ufl-flvc.primo.exlibrisgroup.com/permalink/01FALSC\\_UFL/175ga98/alma99383923898206597](https://ufl-flvc.primo.exlibrisgroup.com/permalink/01FALSC_UFL/175ga98/alma99383923898206597).

Roberts, Mary Louise. *What Soldiers Do: Sex and the American GI in World War II France*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013. [https://ufl-flvc.primo.exlibrisgroup.com/permalink/01FALSC\\_UFL/175ga98/alma99383927104106597](https://ufl-flvc.primo.exlibrisgroup.com/permalink/01FALSC_UFL/175ga98/alma99383927104106597).

Stahel, David. *Operation Barbarossa and Germany's Defeat in the East*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009. [https://ufl-flvc.primo.exlibrisgroup.com/permalink/01FALSC\\_UFL/175ga98/alma99386141390906597](https://ufl-flvc.primo.exlibrisgroup.com/permalink/01FALSC_UFL/175ga98/alma99386141390906597).

Zahra, Tara. *The Lost Children: Reconstructing Europe's Families after World War II*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011. [https://ufl-flvc.primo.exlibrisgroup.com/permalink/01FALSC\\_UFL/175ga98/alma99384002236106597](https://ufl-flvc.primo.exlibrisgroup.com/permalink/01FALSC_UFL/175ga98/alma99384002236106597).

If you are interested in reading a full history of World War II, I recommend the following:

Mawdsley Evan. *World War II: A New History*. Second edition. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020.

### **University Policies:**

This course complies with all UF academic policies. For information on those policies and for resources for students, please see [this link](#).

### **Grading Policy:**

You can find University of Florida's grading policies here:

<http://catalog.ufl.edu/UGRD/academic-regulations/grades-gradingpolicies/>

<b>Letter Grade</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
A	93-100
A-	90-92
B+	87-89
B	83-86
B-	80-82
C+	77-79
C	73-76
C-	70-72
D+	67-69
D	63-66
D-	60-62

I will round grades to the nearest whole number (e.g., 89.5 = 90 = A-).

## **Course Schedule:**

### **Aug. 21: Why Did World War II Happen?**

Readings:

Isabel Hull. *Absolute Destruction: Military Culture and the Practices of War in Imperial Germany*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2005. (197-262, 291-333)

Ian Kershaw. “‘Working Towards the Führer’: Reflections on the Nature of the Hitler Dictatorship.” *Contemporary European History* 2, no. 2 (1993): 103-118.

Discussion: Introduction to the course; basic history of WWII

Journal theme: What do you know about World War II?

### **Aug. 28: The Lived Experience**

Reading:

Koestler, *Scum of the Earth*.

Discussion: Finding a Topic, finding secondary sources

Journal theme: What would be an interesting and feasible topic for you?

### **Sep. 4: The Military in Military History on the Eastern Front**

Readings:

David Stahel. *Operation Barbarossa and Germany's Defeat in the East*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009. (1-69, 153-208, 423-451)

Schechter, Brandon. *The Stuff of Soldiers: A History of the Red Army through Objects*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2019. (107-146)

Discussion: Finding primary sources, taking notes

Journal theme: How will you find enough sources for your paper?

### **Sep. 11: The Holocaust and Historiography**

## Readings:

Browning, Christopher R. "The Nazi Decision to Commit Mass Murder: Three Interpretations: The Euphoria of Victory and the Final Solution: Summer-Fall 1941." *German Studies Review* 17, no. 3 (1994): 473–81. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1431894>.

Dworok, Gerrit, Richard J. Evans, Mary Fulbrook, Wendy Lower, A. Dirk Moses, Jeffrey K. Olick, Timothy D. Snyder, and Andrew I. Port. "Holocaust Scholarship and Politics in the Public Sphere: Reexamining the Causes, Consequences, and Controversy of the *Historikerstreit* and the Goldhagen Debate." *Central European History* 50, no. 3 (2017): 375–403. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26567745>.

Friedländer, Saul. "The 'Final Solution': On the Unease in Historical Interpretation." *History and Memory* 1, no. 2 (1989): 61–76. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25618581>.

Shenker, Noah. "Embodied memory: The Institutional Mediation of Survivor Testimony in the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum." In *Documentary Testimonies: Global Archives of Suffering* edited by Bhaskar Sarkar and Janet Walker, 35-58. Taylor and Francis, 2010. <https://www.taylorfrancis.com/chapters/mono/10.4324/9780203883419-7/embodied-memory-institutional-mediation-survivor-testimony-united-states-holocaust-memorial-museum-noah-shenker-bhaskar-sarkar-janet-walker?context=ubx&refId=da766abe-687a-46cc-b900-866f65fd634a>.

Discussion: The History of the Holocaust, finding a historiography

Journal: What is the sign of a real argument about a topic?

## **Sep. 18: Sex and Occupation**

### Reading:

Roberts, *What Soldiers Do*.

Discussion: Writing a prospectus

Journal: Position *What Soldiers Do* in the field to your parents. What would they need to know about World War II to understand the book?

## **Sep. 25: Refugees in the Aftermath of War**

Zahra, *The Lost Children*.

Discussion: Writing a prospectus II, organizational notes

Journal: Explain the basics “what you need to know” of your project.

\*\*\*Prospectus Due

## **Oct. 2: Individual Meetings**

I will meet with each of you individually for ~20 minutes in the class period or at a time of our agreement to discuss your prospectus and project.

## **Oct. 9: War Crimes and the Aftermath**

Readings:

Fulbrook, Mary. “Reframing the Past: Justice, Guilt, and Consolidation in East and West Germany after Nazism.” *Central European History* 53, no. 2 (2020): 294–313.

Gross, Jan T. *Fear: Anti-Semitism in Poland after Auschwitz*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007. 31-80.

Hirsch, Francine. “The Soviets at Nuremberg: International Law, Propaganda, and the Making of the Postwar Order.” *The American Historical Review* 113, no. 3 (2008): 701–30.  
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/30223049>.

Discussion: Writing rules I (syntax etc.)

Journal: What are aspects of your writing that you will be on watch for in this project?

\*\*\*Organizational Notes Due

## **Oct. 16: The War on Film (Hurricane flex day – if we are rained out, this is the class that will go away)**

Readings/Viewings:

Moeller, Robert G. “Winning the Peace at the Movies: Suffering, Loss and Redemption in Postwar German Cinema.” In *Histories of the Aftermath: The Legacies of the Second World War in Europe*, edited by Frank Biess, and Robert G. Moeller, 139-155. New York: Berghahn Books, 2010.

Films TBD (Watch one of three films by agreement in the previous class.)

Discussion: Writing rules II (structure)



Journal: Does your project have a narrative? What is it?

**Oct. 23: Memory**

Readings:

Bergholz, Max. "The Strange Silence: Explaining the Absence of Monuments for Muslim Civilians Killed in Bosnia during the Second World War." *East European Politics and Societies* 24, no. 3 (2010): 408-434.

Confino, Alon. "Collective Memory and Cultural History: Problems of Method." *The American Historical Review* 102, no. 5 (1997): 1386–1403

Discussion: Figuring out the conclusion – repetition? epilogue? implications?

Journal: What conclusions (broader implications) might you make from the story in your project?

**Oct. 30: No Class – Work on Papers (Hurricane Flex Day II)**

\*\*\*First draft due

**Nov. 6: Revisions**

We will meet briefly to discuss the papers, then in small groups, times to be decided. You will be responsible for reading papers of three or four of your peers in addition to the following:

Hunt, Lynn. "The Art of History: How Writing Leads to Thinking." *Perspectives on History*. February 1, 2010.

**Nov. 13: Presentations I**

**Nov. 20: Presentations II (Zoom)**

\*\*\*Final paper and reflection paper due December 12, 9:30AM