Course Description

Semester: Fall 2015
Title: Germany in the 20th Century
Professor: David Crew
Course: LAH 350
Cross List: HIS 337N, REE 335 011

Hitler and the Nazis have given twentieth-century Germany a world-historical significance it would otherwise have lacked. Even from our vantage point, the Nazi regime is still one of the most dramatic and destructive episodes in western European, indeed, in world history. Nazism is synonymous with terror, concentration camps and mass murder. Hitler's war claimed the lives of tens of millions and left Europe in complete ruins. The danger resides in the temptation to view all of German history from the end of the nineteenth-century onwards as merely the pre-history of Nazism, thereby failing to deal with each period on its own terms. And what do we do with the more than half a century of German history since 1945? With the defeat of Nazi Germany in 1945, the course of German history appears to have experienced a radical break. New political and social systems were imposed upon the two halves of the divided Germany by the victors. The hostilities of the Cold War appeared to ensure a permanent division of Germany, which in 1961 assumed a compelling symbolic form, the Berlin Wall. But in 1989, the dramatic changes in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe revolutionized East Germany as well. The Berlin Wall came down so East and West Germany were once again joined together in one nation. What exactly this newest version of the German nation will look like in ten or twenty years is still unclear.

In the first half of the course, we will begin by discussing the origins and effects of World War One (1914-1918), then move on to the German Revolution (1918-1919) and the Weimar Republic (1918-1933), the Nazi regime (1933-1945) and the Holocaust. The questions we will focus on here are: Was Germany's first experiment with democracy between 1918 and 1933 doomed to failure? What factors contributed to the rise of Nazism and how did the Nazi regime affect Germany and Europe? Were all vestiges of Nazism destroyed in 1945? In the second half of the semester we will discuss the history of Germany in the Cold War (1945-1989). We will end by talking about the consequences of the end of the Cold War and the fall of the Berlin Wall (1989 to the present). Here, the main questions will be: Did West and East Germany follow fundamentally new paths? What clues can be found in the histories of the Federal Republic in West Germany and the German Democratic Republic in East Germany since 1949 that may indicate the possibilities for change in the future? How does the unification of East and West Germany affect Germany's future role in Europe and the world?

Texts:
Mary Fullbrook, The Divided Nation; Erich Maria Remarque, All Quiet on the Western Front; Richard Bessel (ed), Life in the Third Reich; Primo Levi, Survival in Auschwitz, Peter Schneider, The Wall Jumper

Requirements:
This course combines lectures and discussions of secondary readings as well as original historical documents (short selections), and contemporary visual materials such as photographs, newsreels, propaganda and election posters. The course assignments are designed to allow you to think and write about each of these different ways of gaining access to the German past. There will be no formal mid-term or final exam. The writing requirements are:
(1) Two longer essay assignments (each 6-8 pages typewritten, each worth 30% of your final grade) which ask you to think critically about some of the major issues in twentieth century German history. The first assignment will deal with the period up to 1939. The second will focus on the period from 1939 to the present. Essay 1 will be due in mid-October. Essay 2 is due no later than the official exam date for this course.
(2) In addition to these two longer essay assignments, you will be asked to write one shorter essay (4-5 pages typewritten-worth 20% of the final grade) on any one of the books by Remarque, Bessel, Levi, or Schneider. This is not a book report. I will hand out specific questions on each of these books which you need to answer in your essays.
(3) Finally, you will be asked to write two short (2-3 page) analyses of visual evidence (photographs, propaganda, election posters, etc.) that I will include among the class materials, or internet sites on twentieth century Germany that you yourself have found (each of these 2 assignments is worth 10% of the final grade).