"Postwar:" Aftermaths of World War II

26:510:543  Topics in World History, Spring 2015; Thurs. 5.30-8.10pm, Conklin 448

Instructor:   Dr. Susan Carruthers (scarruth@rutgers.edu), Conklin, 318

Office hours: Tuesdays, 1.30-2.30pm; Thursdays, 4.30-5.30pm; other times by arrangement.

Please feel free to discuss any aspect of the class or your performance throughout the semester, remembering that the earlier you raise concerns, the sooner they can be tackled productively.

Course overview

World War II claimed in excess of 60 million lives: victims of combat, aerial bombardment, disease, starvation, and calculated annihilation. As warfare ended-- a rolling, incomplete process-- the victorious Allies struggled to agree on how best to tackle questions of humanitarian relief and political reconstruction that confronted their own societies as well as those of the defeated Axis powers and their former empires. The tumultuous half decade from 1945-50 saw the birth of the nuclear age; the division of Europe; the onset of the Cold War; the reconstitution of colonial empires in Asia and Africa; and the inauguration of the United Nations.

This course examines the period from 1945 to 1950, adopting a thematic approach to wartime legacies and distinct forms of postwar reconstruction. Weekly readings generally comprise a number of scholarly articles rather than single monographs. These will be studied alongside selected primary source materials, including films, diaries, letters, and fiction from the late 1940s. The goal is to gain a multi-faceted appreciation of "postwar" derived both from contemporary sources and new scholarly interpretations to this profoundly consequential half-decade. We will thus read fresh work in the fields of transnational history; the history of gender and sexuality; the history of emotions; refugee and Holocaust studies, and works of cultural critique drawn from disciplines outside History.

Objectives

- to appreciate the fitful ways in which World War II came to an end in different locations and the often messy processes by which war mutated into "postwar"-- if not always exactly peace
- to gain an understanding of how central the immediate aftermath of World War II has been to individual and collective memory, and identity-formation, thereafter
- to acquire skill in analyzing different kinds of primary sources, printed and visual, with sensitivity to both the circumstances of their production and their contemporary reception
- to appreciate the variety of ways in which historians, working in different disciplinary sub-fields, have approached the study of "postwar"
- to deepen facility in close critical reading of individual secondary sources
- to foster aptitude in synthetic interpretation of multiple texts
- to develop experience and confidence in opening/leading class discussion, and in working collaboratively with peers and the instructor
- to improve skills in historical interpretation both in oral contributions to class discussion and by writing an extended paper; incorporating and positively responding to feedback
SCHEDULE OF MEETINGS AND READINGS

*** denotes pdf posted on BlackBoard. Where articles are not posted on BB, they can be accessed online through the Rutgers Library site.

1 Introduction: When and What was "Postwar"? (01/22/15)


Part I DEFEAT: ENDINGS/BEGINNINGS

2 Rape as a gendered experience of defeat (01/29/15)

Primary Source: Anonymous, A Woman in Berlin: Eight Weeks in the Conquered City (Picador, 2005)


3 Hiroshima: a war ends, and an "age" begins (02/5/15)

Primary sources: John Hersey, Hiroshima (1946) [any edition]


Part II SOLDIERS: VICTORS/VICTIMS

4 Prisoner politics, repatriation, and cold war origins (02/12/15)


5 Demobilization, "reconversion," and entitlement struggles (02/19/15)

*Primary source*: Robert Neville, "What's Wrong with Our Army?," *Life*, Feb. 25, 1946 [googlebooks]


6 Intimate reconstructions: the disabled veteran as victor and victim (02/26/15)


William Wyler (dir.), *The Best Years of Our Lives* (1946) [view at home or in Dana]

Christina Jarvis, "'If He Comes Home Nervous:' US World War II Neuropsychiatric Casualties and Postwar Masculinities," *Journal of Men's Studies*, 17, ii (Spring 2009): 97-115


John Michalczyk & Susan Michalczyk, "Troubled Silences: Trauma in John Huston's Film *Let There Be Light*," in *War & Film in America* (McFarland, 2003)***
PART III  SURVIVORS

7  The camps and after: liberators & survivors (03/05/15)


Viewing: USHMM oral history interview with Heymont [in class]


8  "The child:" reconstructing families, reascribing identities (03/12/15)

Primary sources: Fred Zinnemann (dir.), The Search (1948) [in class viewing]

Tara Zahra, "'A Human Treasure': Europe's Displaced Children Between Nationalism and Internationalism," Past and Present (2011), Supplement 6, 332-50**

Heide Fehrenbach, "War Orphans and Postfascist Families: Kinship and Belonging after 1945" in Frank Biess and Robert G. Moeller (eds.), Histories of the Aftermath: The Legacies of the Second World War in Europe (Berghahn Books, 2010), 175-95**


***** SPRING BREAK: NO CLASS ON MARCH 19 *****
PART IV    UNDER OCCUPATION

9 Immoral economies I: need, greed, and postwar black markets (03/26/15)

Primary Source: John Horne Burns, The Gallery (1947), selections***


Alice Weinreb, "'For the Hungry Have No Past nor Do They Belong to a Political Party:' Debates over German Hunger after World War II," Central European History, 45 (2012): 50-78


Suggested viewing: Carol Reed (dir.), The Third Man (1949)

10 Immoral economies II: sex under occupation (04/02/15)


Julian Bach, "GIs Between the Sheets" from America's Germany (1946), 71-83***


Suggested viewing: Billy Wilder (dir.), A Foreign Affair (1948)
PART V  HUMAN RIGHTS, WRONGS, AND MORAL ORDERING

11  The camera as witness, accuser, re-educator and obfuscator (04/09/15)

Primary Source: Die Todesmühlen [in class]

Cora Sol Goldstein, "American Propaganda Films," chapter 2, Capturing the German Eye: American Visual Propaganda in Occupied Germany (University of Chicago Press, 2009), 41-67***


12  "Victors' Justice"?: the war crimes' trials (04/16/15)


Janet Flanner, "Letters from Nuremberg"*** [originally published in the New Yorker]

Elizabeth Borgwardt, "A New Deal for the Nuremberg Trial: The Limits of Law in Generating Human Rights Norms," Law and History Review, 26, iii (Fall 2008): 679-705


13  Imperial reconstruction & the birth of the United Nations (04/23/15) NB: DRAFTS DUE


14  Concluding discussion (04/30/15)
EXPECTATIONS

A graduate seminar's success is contingent on all participants sharing responsibility for making the classroom a dynamic, engaged, and civil space. Each week, two or three members of the group will take on the role of opening and facilitating discussion. But every member of the group must come to class having done all the reading, and with reflections to share, EVERY week.

BEFORE CLASS:

Make sure you read ALL the assigned texts. There are many of them, but they're chosen to work in dialog/tension with one another. So, please don't skimp on preparation!

As you're reading each text, look out for:

- the author's central argument(s)
- how they position themselves in the literature (i.e. which other scholars/traditions are they in debate with and why?)
- what primary sources they've drawn on, and how persuasively you think they've used their evidence

Once you've read all the texts, consider and make notes on:

- what overarching themes emerge
- what key points of overlap or divergence you identify between the authors, and gaps left to fill
- what you consider the most "discussable" elements of the texts, individually and collectively

Bring a one-page set of talking points to notes in which you distill your responses to the week's readings, sharpening your thoughts prior to discussion

IN CLASS:

Please arrive on time. Punctuality is a basic courtesy and I expect you to arrive in class for a prompt "kick-off" at 5:30pm. If you can't get to class on time, please do your best to let me know ahead of time that you're running late. (You can call or leave a message on my work phone: 973-353-3889)

Please silence your phone any/or anything else that makes a distracting noise. "Devices" should be stowed for the duration of class. Laptops, tablets, etc. may be used for note-taking and to refer to the readings. But please don't succumb to the temptation to drift/surf/multi-task etc. Not only will you be distracted, so too will those around you-- and the instructor herself, who notices when attention wanders (!!). So, kindly engage throughout.

Attendance is a requirement. However, I do understand that sometimes unavoidable situations occur-- family crises, health problems, treacherous travel conditions, and so on-- that make coming to class impossible. Should you need to miss a session, please let me know about your absence, preferably in advance or, if not, as soon after the missed class as possible.
ASSESSMENT

Participation  20%  [This portion of the grade will reflect your weekly contributions to discussion in terms of both their depth and frequency]

Leading class x 2  20%  [You will be graded on your advance preparation; evidence of team-work and cooperation, and on the effectiveness of your opening/leading of discussion. See below.]

Final paper 60%  5000 words. THURSDAY MAY 7 by email. [No extensions]

Leading discussion

Each member of the group will share responsibility for leading discussion TWICE during the semester.

Preparing for this role involves 3 distinct things:

1) doing the reading and pondering how you propose to kick off the class
2) liaising with your partner(s) ahead of time about how you'll divide up the work of opening class/leading discussion
3) sharing your class plan with me by 5pm the day BEFORE class

Class facilitators should aim to spend no more than 15 MINS ALL TOLD (not per person) at the start of class laying the groundwork for that night's discussion.

You may approach this in various ways, perhaps combining several of these approaches:

- by offering further historical context about the topic at hand
- by situating the author (particularly of primary sources) in biographical context
- by sharing a (brief) primary source, film or audio clip, and/or photographs

You may, if you wish, use PowerPoint, but it's certainly not required.

Facilitators are also responsible for generating and leading discussion, not just opening things up. So you will also need, collectively, to plan how you'll do so. Do you want the class to discuss particular things from ALL the readings, or will you focus on drawing out themes that unite them? Do you want to ask smaller sub-sections of the class to spend a few minutes tackling specific questions before uniting the whole group in discussion?? There are many different ways to proceed.

You should aim, as a team, to prepare discussion pointers that will sustain class discussion at least for the period before our half-time break.

Make sure you've completed your preparations the day before-- and please EMAIL me with your class plan by 5pm on the WEDNESDAY EVENING BEFOREHAND. I will also be available, should you wish, for in-person consultation on any given Tuesday afternoon. (Your grade for leading discussion will depend, in part, on the quality of your advance preparation-- as well as how things go "on the day.")
FINAL PAPER

You have two options for your final paper:

a) identify a theme that cuts across various of the readings from the semester as a whole (i.e. not just one week's selections), and write an interpretive essay that draws on a variety of appropriate texts. Preferably, your essay will make use of both primary and secondary sources.

Points to bear in mind:

- your paper should have a clear thesis-- an argument-- that you pursue, drawing on various primary and secondary sources. In other words, it should aim to do something original and creative with the readings, not simply summarizing their key points.

- you may, if you wish, draw on additional sources that you've identified as relevant beyond those that appear on the syllabus. But I do want to see you using at least some of the assigned texts.

Themes may be conceived in terms of (geo)political processes, individual or collective emotions, human exchanges, and/or the workings of memory and identify formation.

(Some examples: victory/defeat; grief/mourning; mobility/confinelement; guilt/innocence; sex; vengeance/retribution; return; exile; reconstruction/justice; "home"/homecoming; nationalism/internationalism; warfare/welfare)

b) if you're feeling ambitious-- and/or are thinking ahead to a possible master's essay or thesis relating to postwar in some way-- you could alternatively write a research paper, rooted in original primary source research, but also drawing on some of the secondary sources we've read.

The "greater Newark" area is richly endowed with relevant archives, including:

- the UNRRA archives, NYC
- the New York Public Library
- the Center for Jewish History/Leo Baeck Institute, NYC
- Rutgers-New Brunswick Special Collections (and online WWII oral histories)

Columbia and Princeton Universities' special collections also have many relevant sets of private papers.

Whichever option you choose, I would like to hear what your preliminary plan is by the Thursday after Spring Break (March 19). Please bring a paragraph (or so) long abstract for the paper to hand in.

If you want feedback on a draft of your paper, please BRING A COPY with you to class on APRIL 23. You'll then receive comments on April 30, leaving you a week to amend/polish before MAY 7.