

A Cultural History of The Weimar Republic

Syllabus

Instructor: Mason Tattersall

Office hours: TBA

E-mail: tattersm@oregonstate.edu

Course Website:

Required Texts: Gay, Peter. *Weimar Culture: The Outsider as Insider*. New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1968.

Roth, Joseph. *What I saw: Reports from Berlin 1920-1933*. New York: W. W. Norton & Co. 2003.

Willett, John. *The Weimar Years: A Culture Cut Short*. London: Thames & Hudson, 1984.

Other Required Readings:

Additional readings will be made available as handouts, and electronic documents.

Kaes, Jay, & Dimendberg (Eds.) *The Weimar Republic Sourcebook*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994. [Two copies will be on reserve in the library.]

Course Goals and Objectives: This course will introduce you to the turbulent history of the German republic between World Wars One and Two. The Weimar Republic was a vibrant, chaotic world of social, economic, and political turmoil, of artistic innovation, cultural flowering, philosophical and scientific breakthroughs, of boundary-pushing in all directions. But it was also a world of racism, reaction, and violence. It existed for little more than a decade, but during this time all of the extremes of the modern world made their presence felt. The republic was born out of the defeat of the German Empire in World War One and it died when the Nazis dissolved it in 1933. In this course we will explore this intense, chaotic historical world paying particular attention to its cultural innovations. We will cover the social, political, and economic history of the Republic and then delve into its artistic, literary, scientific, and philosophical histories. We will spend a great deal of time on visual culture, the arts, film, fashion, and theatre. We will discuss scientific and philosophical movements and innovations. We will discuss questions of identity, nation, sex and gender, race, class, and belonging. By the end of the course you will have a varied and nuanced sense of this crucible of the early twentieth century modern world.

Format: The class will meet twice a week for lectures and discussion [based on the 4-credit, 2-hour per lecture system at OSU].

Grades: Your final grade will be constituted in the following manner:

- 1) Document Responses: 10%
- 2) Essay 1: 25%
- 3) Midterm: 10%
- 4) Essay 2: 30%
- 5) Attendance & Participation: 5%
- 6) Quizzes: 10%
- 7) Final Exam: 10%

A: 100-93

B-: 82-80

D+: 69-67

A-: 92-90

C+: 79-77

D: 66-63

B+: 89-87

C: 76-73

D-: 62-60

B: 86-83

C-: 72-70

F: 59 or below

Written assignments: 2 essays, 2 document responses

Midterm Exam: (10% of the grade) Short answer questions from lectures and readings (including images), and a short essay.

Quizzes: There will be in-class quizzes throughout the term, worth 10% of your total grade

Final Exam: (10% of the grade) Same format as Midterm.

Document Responses: 2 (10% of your grade total) One page each. One response is due in each half of the term. See instructions below:

Document Response Guidelines

For each document response pick one of the primary documents that you have read from this half of the term (Weeks 1-5 for Document Response 1; Weeks 6-10 for Document Response 2) and provide a 1-page analysis. Put the document into its historical context. What does it tell us about the historical situation from which it arises? Why is this document significant? What can we learn from it?

The goal of the document responses is *analysis*. This means that you will have to think about and comment on such issues as the *significance*, *context*, and *meaning* of the document: what are the broader issues, what seems to be the intent behind this document, what other texts does it seem to relate to, etc. will be the type of questions you will need to answer. **Do not merely summarize what you have read.** We will discuss this further in class.

Essays: 2 (55% of your grade total). See instructions below:

Essay 1: “The Murder of Walther Rathenau”

(6-8 Pages)

Due: Week 5

This Essay is Worth 25% of your final Grade.

The murder of the Jewish German foreign minister Walther Rathenau in 1922 was an emblematic incident of political and racial violence for the Weimar Republic. Discuss the significance of Rathenau’s career and murder for the history of the Weimar Republic as we have explored it thus far. For your sources, begin with Carole Fink’s article (Fink, Carole. “The Murder of Walther Rathenau.” *Judaism* Vol. 44, No. 3 (1995)). How does Fink’s account differ from Gay’s? How does Roth describe the event? In addition to Fink’s article and your texts, consult books and articles from the library, and use primary sources from *The Weimar Republic Sourcebook* (on reserve in the library). See the handout for more information. We will also discuss this assignment in class.

Essay 2: “Mass...”

(6-8 Pages)

Due: Week 10

This Essay is Worth 30% of your final Grade.

Mass consumption, mass production, mass politics, mass fashion, mass violence, mass society... A great deal of the stresses and pressures of Weimar society – and in some cases, their relief – arose out of and revolved around the new realities of mass society. Using your course texts, books and articles from the library, and at least 3 documents from the *Weimar Republic Sourcebook* [on reserve in the library], describe the role that mass society played in one of the following aspects of Weimar culture:

- 1) The Arts
- 2) Consumer Culture
- 3) Politics

See the handout for more details. We will also discuss this assignment in class.

Internet Sources: The internet is full of good information and bad information. One of the practical things we will discuss is how to tell the difference. For the purpose of your assignments *please check with me if you have any questions about a source.*

Late papers: Late papers will be accepted but with a penalty for each day past the due date. Please inform me immediately if you think you will not be able to hand your paper in on time.

Plagiarism: Plagiarism will not be tolerated. We will discuss ways to avoid plagiarism in class. You can also look at OSU's student conduct page for more information:
<http://oregonstate.edu/admin/stucon/plag.htm>

Please turn off cell phones!!

Disabilities: Students with documented disabilities who may need accommodations, who have any emergency medical information the instructor should know of, or who need special arrangements in the event of evacuation, should make an appointment with the instructor as early as possible, no later than the first week of the term.

Schedule & Readings List

Due Dates:

- X** - **Document Response 1 due**
- X** - **Essay 1 due**
- X** - **Midterm Exam**
- X** - **Document Response 2 due**
- X** - **Essay 2 due**
- X** - **Final Exam**

Weekly Topics & Readings:

Week 1

Prelude: The German Empire 1871-1918
Economy, Politics, & Culture of the Empire
Art and Ideas in 19th Century Germany

Readings: Gay: Preface & Appendix 1
Mann, Heinrich: "The Meaning & Idea of the Revolution"

Week 2

The Great War, Rupture, Endings & Beginnings
The politics and economics of the early Weimar years
War Trauma

Readings: Gay: Chapters 1 & 2
Simmel, Ernst: "War Neuroses & 'Psychic Trauma'"

Week 3

Weimar Culture(s)

Social movements, Cultural movements, Forces & Trajectories

Cities & the Countryside

Women & Men

Workers, Peasants, Bosses, & the Unemployed

Readings: Gay: Chapter 3

Roth: Intro & Part 1

Willett: Intro

Meineke, Friedrich: "On German History"

Week 4

Movements in the Arts

Dada

Expressionism

The New Objectivity

Readings: Gay: Chapter 4

Roth: Part 2

Willett: 1918-20

Tzara, Tristan: "DaDa Manifesto"

Hartlau, Gusav: "Introduction to 'New Objectivity': German Painting since Expressionism"

Week 5

Science, Technology, & Industry

Science in the Weimar Republic

Technology, Industry, Economics, & Politics

Technological marvels & Modernity

Uncertainty

Readings: Gay: Chapter 5

Roth: Part 3

Willett: 1921-3

Van Dongen, Jeroen. "Reactionaries & Einstein's Fame: 'German Scientists for the Preservation of Pure Science,' Relativity, & the Bad Nauheim Meeting." *Physics in Perspective* 9 (2007), 212-230

Week 6

Philosophy & Ideals

Philosophical developments

Phenomenology

"Existentialism"

New Theological Ideas

Modern ideals

Readings: Gay: Chapter 6
Roth: Part 4
Willett: 1924-8
Gropius, Walter: "Program of the Staatliches Bauhaus in Weimar"

Week 7

Cabaret, Gender, & Sex
Transgression
Cabaret
Gender

Readings: Roth: Part 5
Willett: The Culture of Cities
Hausmann, Raoul: "The German Philistine Gets Upset"
Herrmann, Elsa. "This is the New Woman"

Week 8

The Psyche, The Irrational, The Occult
Freud & Psychoanalysis
Irrationality
"The Masses"
Spiritualism & the Occult
Anxiety

Readings: Roth Part 6
Willett" 1929-33
Wolfram, Heather. "Parapsychology on the Couch: The Psychology of Occult Belief in Germany, C. 1870-1939." *Journal of the History of the Behavioural Sciences*. Vol. 42 (3), 237-260 (Summer 2006).

Week 9

Politics & Violence
Reactionary politics
Hitler & the NSDAP
Anti-Semitism

Readings: Roth Part 7
Bloch, Ernst: "Hitler's Force"

Week 10

Escapism, Turmoil, & the End
Film, Glamour, & Poverty
"The Mass Ornament"
"A Substitute for Dreams"
The end of the Republic

Readings: Roth: Parts 8 & 9
Hofmannstall, Hugo: "A Substitute for Dreams"
Jehring, Herbert: "An Expressionist Film"