

History 600: Weimar Culture and the Rise of Nazism
Fall 2014, Humanities 5255 M 11-1
Instructor: Prof. Koshar (rjkoshar@wisc.edu)
Office hours, 4101 Humanities, TR 3-3:45

Did Weimar fail? The answer to this question was once thought to be a classic no-brainer. Historians uniformly praised the innovativeness and vibrancy of Weimar art, literature, architecture, city planning, cinema, and popular culture. But in political histories of the era from 1918 to 1933, the Weimar Republic stood both as the symbol of a failed democracy and as a prelude to Nazism, war, and genocide. Weimar's association with liberal collapse and the rise of authoritarianism has been enduring. As recently as 2013, an American political commentator in *The New Republic* warned that a stalemated "Weimar America" faced some of the same challenges that pre-fascist Germany faced.

Over the past two decades, an interdisciplinary scholarship has re-examined Weimar politics by focusing not just on elections and parties but also on the symbols and discourses of political culture. This scholarship has uncovered new realms of previously unexplored social and political experience and thereby re-opened the question of Weimar's failure. In this seminar we study some of the new research themes as well as some of the classic topics: work, class, gender, body politics, citizenship, visual culture, popular culture, and consumption. We'll use a broad array of primary sources, including novels, films, memoirs, official documents, and more. It is hoped that by the end of the seminar students will have developed their own historically informed responses to the important question of whether Weimar failed.

The pedagogical goals of the course are: to deepen your knowledge of a fascinating moment of modern European cultural and social history in all its drama and many-sidedness; to build your expository and critical skills through writing and discussion; to advance your abilities to analyze primary sources with reference to larger historical narratives and problems; and to relate past and present (e.g., is America experiencing a "Weimar moment"?) through rigorous comparison and analogy.

Beside weekly readings and discussions, seminar requirements include six one-page response papers and a research paper of roughly 15-18 pages. Discussion counts for 25% of the total grade, response papers for another 25%, and the research project 50%. More information will be coming on the research project and response papers in the course of the semester. For weekly discussions, I'll assign lead discussants, who will offer responses to pre-circulated questions as a way of kick-starting our deliberations.

Required Reading (On reserve and available at University Book Store):

Rudy Koshar, "How to Speak Weimar," *The Montreal Review* (May 2014)
<http://www.themontrealreview.com/2009/How-to-Speak-Weimar.php>
Eric Weitz, *Weimar Germany: Promise and Tragedy* (Princeton)
Anton Kaes, et al, eds., *The Weimar Republic Sourcebook* (California)
Anton Kaes, *Shell Shock Cinema: Weimar Culture and the Wounds of War* (Princeton)
Hermann Hesse, *Demian* (Harper Collins)

Irmgard Keun, *The Artificial Silk Girl* (Other Press)
Hans Fallada, *What Now Little Man?* (Melville House)
Sebastian Haffner, *Defying Hitler: A Memoir* (Picador)

Course Schedule

Sep 8 The Weimar Republic: Themes and Problems, I
Reading: Koshar; Weitz, 1-206.

Sep 15 The Weimar Republic: Themes and Problems, II
Reading: Weitz, 207-368
Response Paper #1 due

Sep 22 A New Democracy in Crisis
Reading: WRS, Sections 1-6

Sept 29 War and Community
Reading: Hesse
Response Paper #2 due

Oct 6 Pressure Points of Social Life
Reading: WRS, Sections 7-10
General discussion of potential research topics

Oct 13 The War in Memory
Reading: Kaes, *Shell Shock Cinema*
Response Paper #3 due

Oct 20 Intellectuals and the Ideologies of the Age
Reading: WRS, Sections 11-14

Oct 27 The New Woman
Reading: Keun
Response Paper #4 due

Nov 3 The Challenge of Modernity
WRS, Sections 15-19

Nov 10 White Collars Workers in Crisis
Reading: Fallada
Response Paper #5 due

Nov 17 Changing Configurations of Culture
WRS, Sections 20-25
One-page description of research topic due

Nov 24 The Transformation of Everyday Life
WRS, Sections 26-30

Dec 1 Resisting Nazism
Reading: Haffner
Response Paper #6 due

Dec 8 Oral Reports on Research Projects

Dec 15 Research papers due