

Professor John McCole
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Spring 2006
Seminar meetings: 373 McKenzie
Mondays 3-5:30

History 407/507:
History of the Weimar Republic, 1918-1933

The topic

Germany's Weimar Republic lasted for less than fifteen years, but no other period of German history has been as fiercely contested. German democrats and moderate socialists saw it as a progressive liberation from the authoritarian German Empire that had preceded it. Conservatives refused to acknowledge its legitimacy; they saw it as the product of a shameful betrayal of the nation to the victors of the Great War. National Socialists agitated to replace it with a racial state; Communists wanted to destroy it to create a Soviet-style workers' state. Many ordinary Germans came to feel that the Republic had failed to protect them against the tumultuous economic, social, and cultural forces that were sweeping through their society. Ever since, historians, politicians, and ordinary citizens have debated the causes for the failure of democracy, which proved to have such horrendous consequences. But before it was destroyed by political polarization, social upheaval, rival visions, and intrigue, the Weimar Republic produced a legendarily brilliant cultural and intellectual life. For a relatively stable period from 1924-1929, it appeared to some that this culture had a chance to survive.

The purpose of the course

This course has a single, clear purpose: to produce a research paper. Your goal is to produce a 15-20 page paper based on your own original work with primary sources. Informed by existing histories, you will have the opportunity to "do" history yourself. To facilitate this, the course will be run as a research seminar. We will start the course with a core of common readings. The first goal of these weeks is to give you a basic literacy in the history of the republic and to introduce you to some of the major issues of historical interpretation. The second goal is to read some primary sources together and discuss how to interpret and explore them. In the middle portion of the term, you will be pursuing your research and meeting twice with me individually; during this time, there will be no class meetings. In the final week of the term, we will reconvene for your presentations of your work to the entire group.

About our schedule

The short span of a ten-week term presents us with a challenge. If you are to succeed, *you will need to get an early start on your project and work steadily throughout the term.*

>By Week 3 (April 17), you should have a topic and submit a one-paragraph description to me.

>By Week 4 (April 24), you must submit a formal prospectus: a two-page outline plus a bibliography.

>During Week 6 (May 8-12), we will have individual conferences at which I will ask you to show me notes on your reading.

>By Week 8 (May 22-26), you should have a preliminary draft of your paper to discuss with me in individual conferences.

>In Week 10 (June 5), you will present your research to the group.

>Your final paper is due by Wednesday, June 14 at noon, during exam week.

Grading

Since the primary goal of the course is to produce a research paper, the paper itself is the single most important element of your grade. Two thirds of the grade will be based on the research paper; one third will be based on your class participation, including general discussion and your presentation of documents in weeks 2-4.

Suggestions for identifying a paper topic

Look at the chapter headings in *The Weimar Republic Sourcebook*. There are thirty (30) of them, ranging across the issues of democracy, social change, intellectuals and ideology, “modernity,” art and politics, high and popular culture, and aspects of everyday life. Each section has a good, short introduction by the editors. You should read into several of the sections to explore the possibility of a topic. Not all of them are equally suited in terms of finding sources in English. You should also look carefully through the editors’ extensive bibliography at the back of the volume, which is organized under large topic headings; it provides another way to begin identifying a paper topic.

Required readings

Available for purchase at the University Bookstore; also on reserve at Knight Library.

Ruth Henig, *The Weimar Republic, 1919-1933*

Detlev Peukert, *The Weimar Republic: The Crisis of Classical Modernity*

Anton Kaes, Martin Jay, and Edward Dimendberg, eds., *The Weimar Republic Sourcebook*

Peter Gay, *Weimar Culture: The Outsider as Insider*

Class schedule

Week 1 (April 3): Introduction to the Course and to the Weimar Republic

Henig, *The Weimar Republic, 1919-1933*

Note: Henig provides an excellent, concise narrative of the basic history of the Weimar Republic. Read it through first and then consult it again as we move through the history of the republic in the first weeks of the course.

Week 2 (April 10): The Founding of the Republic and Early Crises, 1918-1923

Peukert, *The Weimar Republic: The Crisis of Classical Modernity*

Chapters 1-3, pp. 1-77 for the overall picture

Chapter 4, "Generation Gaps and Emancipatory Struggles"

Kaes et al., *The Weimar Republic Sourcebook*:

Section 1, "The Legacy of War" (excerpts)

Section 2, "Revolution and the Birth of the Republic" (excerpts)

Section 8, "The Rise of the New Woman" (excerpts)

Week 3 (April 17): Years of Stability? 1924-1929

>Your description of your topic is due (one paragraph)

Peukert, *The Weimar Republic*

Chapters 10-12, pp. 191-245 for the overall picture

Chapter 7, "Social Milieux and Political Formations"

Chapter 9, "'Americanism' versus *Kulturkritik*"

Kaes et al., *Weimar Republic Sourcebook*:

Section 4, "Coming to Terms with Democracy" (excerpts)

Section 14: "Cultural Pessimism" Diagnoses of Decline" (excerpts)

Section 15, "Imagining America" (excerpts)

Week 4 (April 24): Crisis and Dissolution of the Republic, 1929-1933

>Your prospectus is due (two-page outline plus bibliography)

Peukert, *The Weimar Republic*

Chapters 13-14, pp. 247-272 for the overall picture

Chapter 8, "Mass Culture and the *neue Sachlichkeit*"

Kaes et al., *Weimar Republic Sourcebook*:

Section 11, "Redefining the Role of the Intellectuals" (excerpts)

Section 13, "Revolution from the Right" (excerpts)

Section 17, "Designing the New World" (excerpts)

Week 5 (May 1): A Classic View of Weimar Culture

Peter Gay, *Weimar Culture: The Outsider as Insider*, entire

Week 6 (May 8) Individual student conferences with me (progress report and notes)

Week 7 (May 15) Research period: no class meeting

Week 8 (May 22) Individual student conferences with me (preliminary drafts)

Week 9 (May 29) Memorial Day: no class meeting (research and writing period)

Week 10 (June 5) Student presentations of research projects

**Wednesday, June 14, noon: RESEARCH PAPER DUE
at my office, 303 McKenzie**