

The Weimar Republic

Instructor: Liat Spiro

Course description

Since John Maynard Keynes' *The Economic Consequences of the Peace* (1919), the Weimar Republic has been viewed as a frail, flawed, and ill-fated experiment in German democracy. Whether from the debt imposed at Versailles by victorious WWI powers, the loss of limited, but treasured colonial holdings, the Ruhr Crisis, the hyperinflation, or the infamous Article 48 of its constitution, many have argued that it was ripe for radicalization and destined to fail. Within historical writing on Germany specifically, scholars have posited a "special path" (*Sonderweg*) of German development toward fascism, due to structural and cultural factors such as the lack of a successful nineteenth-century "bourgeois revolution."

This course will attempt to understand how contemporaries viewed, contributed to, and undermined Weimar's democratic project. With an emphasis on primary sources, we will investigate how their political subjectivities and conflicts developed in real time. This will mean treating politics within the realms of economic, social, cultural, and intellectual life within neighborhoods, cities (above all, Berlin), parties and movements, and the press. We will trace debates over the political subject, economic rationalization and technological rationality, representation and parliamentary democracy, the friend-foe distinction and sources of group identity, shifting gender norms and the new middle classes, republicanism and hierarchy, symbol, modernity, and fate. We will include widely-read authors from the interwar Austrian Republic and "Red Vienna," as they navigated the end of the Habsburg Empire and the politics (left and right) of potential *Anschluss* with Germany. These primary sources and historical interpretations will equip us with the tools to understand and debate both the how and the why of the Weimar Republic's fall.

Assignments

Participation in discussion (20%)

Response papers (20%)—Write ~250 words on the week's readings. Include one or two questions inspired by them.

Short paper (25%)—Three prompts will be circulated one week prior to the deadline. Choose one and write 6-8 pages, twelve-point font, double-spaced.

Final paper (35%)—This may be a historiographical paper engaging a prominent debate in the field, a research paper on a topic chosen in consultation with the instructor, or a primary source translation-plus-analysis (for students majoring or minoring in German). 12-15 pages, twelve-point font, double-spaced.

Schedule

Week 1

Detlev Peukert, *The Weimar Republic: The Crisis of Classical Modernity* (Hill and Wang, 1992) parts one and two

Primary source:

Weimar Constitution (1919)

Week 2

Detlev Peukert, *The Weimar Republic: The Crisis of Classical Modernity* (Hill and Wang, 1992), parts three, four, and five

Optional (for readers of German):

Otto Neurath, *Durch die Kriegswirtschaft zur Naturalwirtschaft* (Munich: G.D.W. Callwey, 1919)

Week 3

Kees Gispens, *Poems in Steel: National Socialism and the Politics of Inventing from Weimar to Bonn* (Berghahn Books, 2002), selections

Jeffrey Herf, *Reactionary Modernism: Technology, Culture, and Politics in Weimar and the Third Reich* (Cambridge University Press, 1986)

Primary source:

Ernst Jünger, *Storm of Steel: From the Diary of a German Storm-Troop Officer on the Western Front* (Doubleday, 1929)

Week 4

Charles Maier, "Between Taylorism and Technocracy: European Ideologies and the Vision of Industrial Productivity in the 1920s," *Journal of Contemporary History* 5, no. 2 (1970): 27-61.

Mary Nolan, *Visions of Modernity: American Business and the Modernization of Germany* (Oxford University Press, 1994)

Primary source:

Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility," in *The Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility and Other Writings on Media* (Harvard University Press, 2008)

Optional (for readers of German):

Otto Neurath, *Betriebaräteorganisation als Wirtschafts-Organisation* (Vienna: Verlagsgenossenschaft "Neue Erde," 1920)

Week 5

Kathleen Canning, "Claiming Citizenship: Suffrage and Subjectivity in Germany after the First World War," in *Gender History in Practice: Historical Perspectives on Bodies, Class & Citizenship* (Cornell University Press, 2006)

Christiane Eifert, "Coming to Terms with the State: Maternalist Politics and the Development of the Welfare State in Weimar Germany," *Central European History* 30, no. 1 (1997): 25-47.

Timothy Mason, "Women in Germany, 1925-1940: Family, Welfare, and Work," in *Nazism, Fascism, and the Working Class* (Cambridge University Press, 1996)

Uta G. Poiger, "Fantasies of Universality? *Neue Frauen*, Race, and Nation in Weimar and Nazi Germany," in *The Modern Girl Around the World: Consumption, Modernity, and Globalization* (Duke University Press, 2008)

Primary source:

Modern Girl images

Optional:

Seth Koven and Sonya Michel, "Womanly Duties: Maternalist Politics and the Origins of Welfare States in France, Germany, Great Britain, and the United States, 1880-1920," *American Historical Review* 85, no. 4 (October 1990): 1076-1108.

Paper #1 Due

Week 6

Sabine Hake, *Topographies of Class: Modern Architecture and Mass Society in Weimar Berlin* (University of Michigan Press, 2008)

David Clay Large, *Berlin* (Basic Books, 2000), chapters two, three, four

Primary source:

Alfred Döblin, *Berlin Alexanderplatz: The Story of Franz Biberkopf* (Continuum, 2003 [1929]), selections

Optional (for readers of German):

Alfred Döblin, *Berlin Alexanderplatz* (Berlin: Fischer, 1929)

Alf Lüdtke, "Industriebilder—Bilder der Industriearbeit? Industrie- und Arbeiterphotographie von der Jahrhundertwende bis in die 1930er Jahre," *Historische Anthropologie* 1, no. 3 (1993): 394-430.

Week 7

Peter Jelavich, *Berlin Alexanderplatz: Radio, Film, and the Death of Weimar Culture* (University of California Press, 2006)

Primary sources:

Bertolt Brecht, "Mann ist Mann: Die Verwandlung des Packers Galy Gay in den Militärbaracken von Kilkoa im Jahre neunzehnhundertfünfundzwanzig" (1926)

Oswald Spengler, *Decline of the West* (Oxford University Press, 1991 [1921])

Optional (for readers of German):

Otto Neurath, *Anti-Spengler* (Munich: Georg D.W. Callwey, 1921)

Week 8

Peter Gay, *Weimar Culture: The Outsider as Insider* (Norton, 2001 [1968]), chapters one, two, three

Primary source:

View collection of Walter Gropius & Bauhaus images

Final Paper Proposal Due

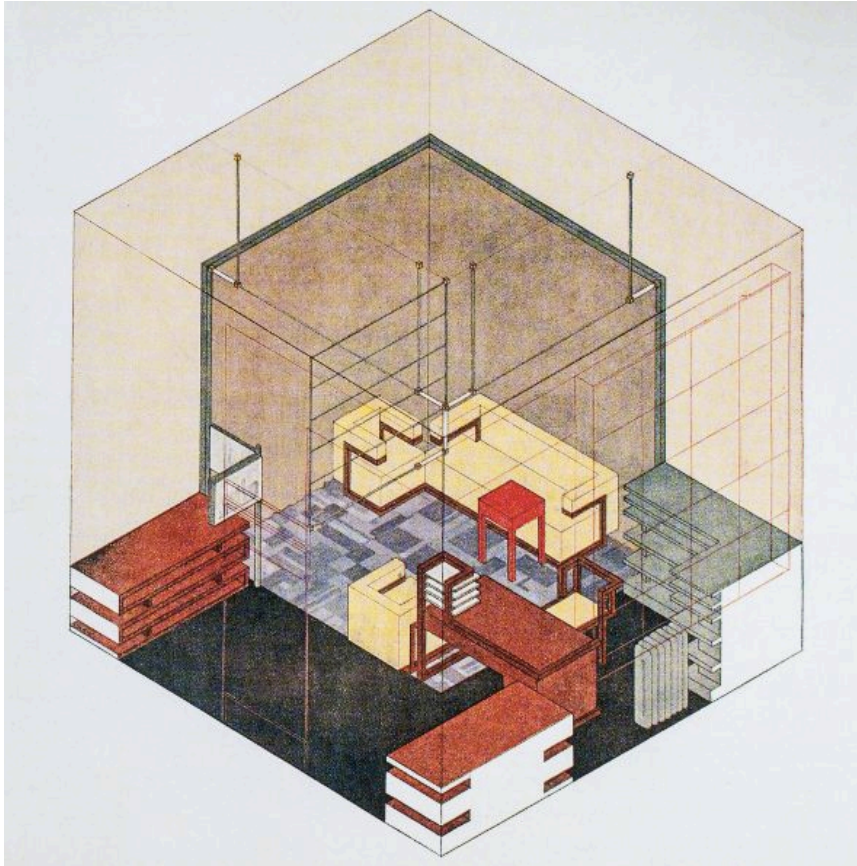


Figure 1 Herbert Bayer, "Isometric drawing of Walter Gropius's study in the Weimar Bauhaus" (1923).

Week 9

Peter Gay, *Weimar Culture: The Outsider as Insider* (Norton, 2001 [1968]), chapters four, five, six

Primary sources:

Stefan George, *Poems*

Hugo von Hofmannsthal, "The Written Word as the Spiritual Space of the Nation" (1927)

Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents* (W.W. Norton, 1989 [1929])

Week 10

Volker Berghahn, "The North Atlantic Triangle: Economic Reconstruction and Collapse, 1923–1933," in *American Big Business in Britain and Germany: A Comparative History of Two "Special Relationships" in the 20th Century* (Princeton University Press, 2014)

Charles Maier, *Recasting Bourgeois Europe: Stabilization in France, Germany, and Italy in the Decade after World War I* (Princeton University Press, 2016), selections

Primary source:

Siegfried Kracauer, *The Salaried Masses: Duty and Distraction in Weimar Germany* (Verso, 1998 [1930])

Optional (for readers of German):

Otto Neurath, *Lebensgestaltung und Klassenkampf* (Berlin: E. Laub, 1928)

Otto Neurath, *Empirische Soziologie: der wissenschaftliche Gehalt der Geschichte und Nationalökonomie* (Vienna: J. Springer, 1931)

Week 11

Pamela Swett, *Neighbors and Enemies: The Culture of Radicalism in Berlin, 1929-1933* (Cambridge University Press, 2004)

Optional (for readers of German):

Klaus Neukrantz, *Barrikaden am Wedding: Roman einer Strasse aus den Berliner Maitagen 1929* (1931)

Week 12

Donna Harsch, *German Social Democracy and the Rise of Nazism* (University of North Carolina Press, 1993), chapters one through five

Primary source:

Carl Schmitt, *The Crisis of Parliamentary Democracy* (MIT Press, 1985)

Optional:

Manuela Achilles, "With a Passion for Reason: Celebrating the Constitution in Weimar Germany," *Central European History* 43, no. 4 (2010): 666-689.

Week 13

Donna Harsch, *German Social Democracy and the Rise of Nazism* (University of North Carolina Press, 1993), chapters six through eight

Primary source:

Carl Schmitt, *Legality and Legitimacy* (Duke University Press, 2004 [1932]), selections

Optional:

Joachim C. Häberlen, "Scope for Agency and Political Options: The German Working-Class Movement and the Rise of Nazism," *Politics, Religion & Ideology* 14, no. 3 (September 2013): 377-394

Week 14

Kathleen Canning, "The Politics of Symbols, Semantics, and Sentiments in the Weimar Republic," *Central European History* 43, no. 4 (December 2010): 567-580.

Richard Evans, *The Coming of the Third Reich* (Penguin, 2005), parts two, three, four, and five

Optional:

Eric Bryden, "Heroes and Martyrs of the Republic: *Reichsbanner Geschichtspolitik* in Weimar Germany," *Central European History* 43, no. 4 (2010): 639-665.



Figure 2 Stolperstein for Paul Fischer, a member of Reichsbanner, Chemnitz.