

## World War I: Social and Cultural Perspectives

History 640  
Sarah Curtis

Spring 2011  
Th 4:10-6:55

In this seminar, we will explore how European society was turned upside down during the "Great War" from 1914 to 1918 and in its immediate aftermath. Using primary documents, memoirs, fiction, poetry, film footage, images, and historical studies, we will examine such issues as the trauma of trench warfare, shell shock, women's work on the home front, the propaganda used to promote the war, objectors to the war, strikes and worker discontent, women's roles and gender anxieties, the "lost generation," and the construction of memory after the war. This seminar is not intended to be a diplomatic or military history of World War I, but rather an exploration of the societal and cultural transformations that accompanied the strains of Europe's first total war. The focus will be on the British, French, and German experience of war, but you may consider the Eastern Front in your research paper if you wish.

Besides introducing you to the cultural and social aspects of World War I, this course also requires you to write a major research paper from primary sources. It serves as a capstone course for your history major and History 300 is a prerequisite for this course. Some background in modern European history is also useful.

### Learning outcomes:

1. Students will demonstrate knowledge of the specific impact of World War I on European society and culture. More broadly, they will become aware of the transformative power of war on society and culture.
2. Through class discussion and short essays, students will learn to analyze and interpret primary sources about World War I, including letters, memoirs, fiction, poetry, film footage, and images. By reading and discussing secondary sources, they will also become familiar with historical debates about the social and cultural meanings of the war.
3. Students will demonstrate the ability to do historical research and to communicate the results within the context of major historiographical debates, using the conventions of historical writing, through the research and writing of a major (15-20 pp.) research paper and a short oral presentation.

### Office hours and contact information:

2:30-3:30, and by appointment  
office location: Science 267  
e-mail: [scurtis@sfsu.edu](mailto:scurtis@sfsu.edu)

phone: (415) 338-2250  
website: <http://bss.sfsu.edu/scurtis>

**Reading:**

The following books are available for purchase at the bookstore:

Michael Howard, *World War I: A Very Short Introduction*

Modris Eksteins, *Rites of Spring: The Great War and the Birth of the Modern Age*

Denis Winter, *Death's Men: Soldiers of the Great War*

Erich Maria Remarque, *All Quiet on the Western Front*

Helen Zenna Smith, *Not So Quiet*

Martha Hanna, *Your Death Would Be Mine: Paul and Marie Pireaud in the Great War*

Jean-Yves Le Naour, *The Living Unknown Soldier: A Story of Grief and the Great War*

The Howard book is for background only and will not generally form part of class discussion.

Other readings, as indicated on the syllabus, are available through the library database JSTOR or on electronic reserve (ER). JSTOR is accessible through the "articles and databases" section of the library website; if you need further help with it, please consult a reference librarian.

Electronic reserves is also linked to the main page of the library website. The password for this course is Verdun. One reading (Rivers) is available directly on the web.

**Course requirements:**

The format of the seminar will be student-generated discussion. Students should come to class having completed the assigned reading and prepared to discuss it. Regular attendance is therefore very important. More than one missed class will affect your grade. **Please telephone or e-mail me in advance if you have to miss class.**

In addition to class participation, there will be two short essays during the course of the semester (dates indicated on the schedule). Topics will be given out in class.

The major writing project for the semester will be a 20-25 pp. research paper based on primary sources. See the last two pages of the syllabus for some ideas about topics and sources. We will also have a library session with the history librarian, Kendra Van Cleave (kendrav@sfsu.edu), who will help you develop search strategies for finding both primary and secondary sources. A proposal and bibliography for the research paper is due before spring break. You will also be expected to give a short presentation on your research, scheduled for one of the last three classes.

**Grading:**

Grades will be determined as follows: short essays 15% each, proposal and bibliography 10%, research paper 30%, presentation 10%, class discussion 20%. Late assignments turned in the Tuesday after they are due will be marked down a half grade; a week after they are due a full grade; **assignments will not be accepted more than one week late.** If you are unable to complete the course requirements by the end of semester, it is your responsibility to withdraw from the course. I will issue no instructor-initiated withdrawals or incompletes. Student-initiated incompletes are reserved for serious medical excuses (with documentation) or other natural disasters within the last three weeks of the semester. The last day to drop a course without a "W" is Feb. 4; the last day with a "W" (except in extreme circumstances) is April 22.

**Graduate students:**

Graduate students who have completed History 700 are eligible to take this course for graduate credit. Please see me for details. All graduate students will be assigned a week of the course for which they will be expected to do additional reading and present it to the class. You should come see me to discuss your reading and presentation at least two weeks before your assigned class period. This assignment will be included in your class discussion grade.

**SCHEDULE:**

- January 27    **Introduction**
- February 3    **Outbreak**  
Howard, chaps. 1-3 (background only)  
Eksteins, chaps. 2-3  
Vera Brittain, *Testament of Youth*, “Provincial Young-Ladyhood” (end); “Oxford vs. War”, and “Learning vs. Life” (beginning) (ER)  
War poetry (handout)
- February 10    **Stalemate**  
Howard, chaps. 4-5 (background only)  
Winter, introduction, chaps. 1-5  
Eksteins, chap. 4-6  
Robert Graves, *Goodbye to All That*, chaps. 10, 12, 14 (ER)
- February 17    Library session with Kendra Van Cleave (meet in Burk Hall 229)  
**Short paper due**
- February 24    **Trench Warfare**  
Winter, chaps. 6-7, 10-14  
Eksteins, chap. 7  
Ernst Jünger, *Storm of Steel*, “The Great Battle” (ER)  
War poetry (handout)
- March 3        **The Front Experience**  
*All Quiet on the Western Front* (entire)  
Eksteins, chap. 9
- March 10      **War Wounds**  
Winter, chaps. 8-9  
Rivers, “The Repression of War Experience”  
(<http://net.lib.byu.edu/estu/wwi/comment/rivers.htm>)  
Elaine Showalter, *The Female Malady*, chap. 7, “Male Hysteria: W.H.R. Rivers and the Lessons of Shell Shock” (ER)

Joanna Bourke, "Effeminacy, Ethnicity, and the End of Trauma: The Sufferings of Shell-Shocked Men in Great War Britain and Ireland," *Journal of Contemporary History* vol. 35, no. 1 (January 2000): 57-70 (JSTOR)

War poetry (handout)

**Research proposal and preliminary bibliography due**

March 17 **The Home Front**  
Hanna (entire)

March 24 **Women at War**  
*Not So Quiet* (entire)  
Susan Grayzel, "Mothers, Mairaines, and Prostitutes: Morale and Morality in First World War France," *The International History Review* vol. 19, no. 1 (1997): 66-82 (JSTOR)

**Short paper due**

## **SPRING BREAK**

April 7 **Antiwar**  
Howard, chaps. 6-7 (background only)  
Belinda Davis, *Home Fires Burning*, chap. 3, "Women of Lesser Means" (ER)  
Tyler Stovall, "The Color Line behind the Lines: Racial Violence in France during the Great War," *American Historical Review* vol. 103, no. 3 (June 1998): 737-69 (JSTOR)

April 14 **The Lost Generation**  
Howard, chaps. 8-9 (background only)  
Winter, chap.15  
Le Naour (entire)

April 21 **War Without End?**  
Eksteins, chaps. 8, 10  
Mary Louise Roberts, *Civilization without Sexes: Reconstructing Gender in Postwar France, 1917-1927*, chap. 4 "A Matter of Life or Death" in (ER)

April 28 Presentations

May 5 Presentations

May 12 Presentations  
**Final paper due**

May 19 Final paper return

## Research Paper

The main written project for this class will be a research paper on an aspect of World War I. The paper must be based on primary sources and will give you an opportunity to pursue a topic in more depth, develop a historical interpretation from original sources, and strengthen your research and writing skills. The choice of paper topic is up to you, but I must approve it. It should focus on the European experience of war, but you may do a paper on the Eastern Front if you wish. Although I expect you to read additional secondary material pertaining to your topic, the main focus of your paper should be an analysis of primary sources. Below are some suggestions about types and locations of sources and what you might do with them to get you started. It is not an exhaustive list. We will also have a class session with Kendra Van Cleave, the history librarian, to further your search for sources, both primary and secondary.

1) **Memoirs and letters.** World War I generated an enormous number of memoirs about the war. Most are by soldiers, but there are also some by non-combatants and women. You could choose several to analyze, measuring them against the reality of warfare as indicated by other sources, or comparing and contrasting them with each other. You could analyze just a few memoirs in depth or use many to examine one particular issue. There is a list of published memoirs of British soldiers at the end of *Death's Men*. You can also consult Edward G. Lengel, *World War I Memories: An Annotated Bibliography of Personal Accounts Published in English since 1919*. One memoir that can be found online is: World War I: An Infantryman's Diary (<http://www.northerngrid.org/ngflwebsite/infantryman/>). Three anthologies of letters are: A. de laPradelle and Frederic Coudert, eds., *War Letters from France* (1916); A.F. Wedd, ed., *German Students' War Letters* (1929); and Laurence Housman, ed., *War Letters of Fallen Englishmen* (1930). You might want to seek out memoirs or letters by participants of different nationalities. For women's writings, see Sharon Ouditt, *First World War Women Writers: An Annotated Bibliography*. For songs, see John Brophy and Eric Partridge, *The Long Trail: Soldier's Songs and Slang, 1914-18* and R.F. Nettleingham, *Tommy's Tunes* (1917).

2) **Fiction and poetry.** World War I participants also wrote novels and poems about the war. You could examine a particular literary figure or compare and contrast several in order to determine the relationship between their created works and their war experience. You could also examine how popular fiction about the war reflected particular themes or anxieties. For short stories, see *Women, Men, and the Great War: An Anthology of Stories*. For poetry, start with *The Penguin Book of First World War Poetry* as well as the following website:

The Great War, 1914-1918 <http://beck.library.emory.edu/greatwar/index.html>

3) **Medical interpretation of shell shock.** Some of the physicians and psychiatrists who worked with shell shocked soldiers wrote articles summarizing their findings. We will read an excerpt by W.H.R. Rivers in class; see also his *Conflict and Dream* as well as Lewis Yealland, *Hysterical Disorders of Warfare* (1918) and E.E. Southard, *Shell-Shock and Other Neuro-psychiatric Problems* (1919). You should also consult the notes to the assigned Showalter chapter, and I can provide some additional titles.

4) **Visual representations of the war.** During and especially after the war, artists translated their wartime experience into visual material. You could analyze a body of artistic work that came out of the war, for example, the art of Käthe Kollwitz, Max Beckmann, or Otto Dix. Some of those artists also left diaries or memoirs. One website to get started is Art of the First World War (<http://www.art-ww1.com/gb/visite.html>). Also see the following books: Richard Cork, *A Bitter Truth: Avant-Garde Art and the Great War*; Kenneth Silver, *Esprit de Corps: The Art of the Parisian Avant-Garde and the First World War, 1914-1925*; Matthias Eberle, *World War I and the Weimar Artists*; Rose-Carol Washton Long, ed., *German Expressionism: Documents from the End of the Wilhelmine Empire to the Rise of National Socialism*. You could also analyze propaganda posters, postcards, or photos. Many of these have been digitized. See especially:

The Great War, 1914-1918 <http://beck.library.emory.edu/greatwar/index.html>

World War I and II Posters and Postcards <http://digital.lib.umn.edu/warposters/warpost.html>

Trenches on the Web: Posters from the Great War <http://www.worldwar1.com/posters.htm>

Trenches on the Web: Photo Archive <http://www.worldwar1.com/pharc.htm>

See also Pearl James, ed., *Picture This: World War I Posters and Visual Culture*.

5) **Film representations of the war.** There were a number of films made about World War I in the 1920s and 1930s. These include: *J'Accuse* (1919 and 1937), *The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse* (1920), *All Quiet on the Western Front* (1930), *Westfront 1918* (1930), *Journey's End* (1931), *Verdun: Vision d'Histoire* (12932), *Les Croix des Bois* (1932), *The Rules of the Game* (1939). Be sure to choose films that were made in the interwar period, not recently produced films about the war. You could analyze two or more of these films for the message and interpretation of the war that they presented. See chap. 5 in Jay Winter's *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning* for an example of this kind of analysis.

6) **Newspaper reports.** You could use newspaper articles and editorials to track conditions at the front or at home, attitudes towards the war or the enemy, particular events during or after the war. (Keep in mind that newspapers were often censored during the war.) The SFSU library has *The (London) Times* for this period. Check Wikipedia for other digitized newspapers: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_online\\_newspaper\\_archives](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_online_newspaper_archives). The SFSU library has a copy of the complete run of the British trench (satirical) newspaper, *The Wipers Times*.

7) **Other or complementary documents.** For online sources, two general websites:

World War I Document Archive [http://wwi.lib.byu.edu/index.php/Main\\_Page](http://wwi.lib.byu.edu/index.php/Main_Page)

World War I: Trenches on the Web <http://www.worldwar1.com/>

If you want to do archival research, the Hoover Archives at Stanford University has a great collection: <http://www.hoover.org/library-and-archives>, but you will have to travel to Palo Alto (during weekday business hours) to work with their documents.