

History 600: Totalitarianism

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Fall 2020

Wednesdays 1:20-3:15 via BB-Collaborate

Office hour consultations (10-minute slots) and small-group discussion meetings (20-minute slots) will be held in BB-Collaborate on Tuesdays 11-12 and Thursdays 1-2. I will have a sign-up sheet posted on Canvas.

In 1949 George Orwell published his novel *1984*, warning the world of the perils of “totalitarianism.” The world had just witnessed the rise and fall of Nazi Germany and the expansion of Stalin’s Soviet Union into Eastern Europe. Three years later, Hannah Arendt published *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, examining Nazism and Stalinism as terrifying examples of a completely new form of government that threatened the future of humankind. In the decades since, philosophers, political scientists, historians, psychologists, pundits, and others have used the term “totalitarian” to describe a wide range of states, political movements, and even parenting styles. But what is totalitarianism? And how useful is this term? What can we learn from a comparison of Nazism and Stalinism? And what can we take away from the lessons of the past? This seminar will engage these questions and more. We will start by reading Orwell and Arendt. Next, we will look at Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union, examining politics, propaganda, terror, and everyday life under both regimes. Finally, we will investigate how theories about “totalitarianism”—and the use of the term—have evolved over time.

Format: Reading and weekly discussion in BB-Collaborate. (We will likely switch to Zoom once the site license is set up). Students are expected to show up for class prepared and ready to participate.

Goals: This capstone seminar will focus on honing the following skills:

- Asking questions, including questions that may generate new directions for historical research. Developing historical questions through engagement with different kinds of sources. Asking historical questions to guide individual research. Posing questions to prompt productive group discussion.
- Finding and citing sources. Mastering the logic of footnotes, bibliographies, search engines, libraries, and archives, and consulting them to identify and locate

source materials. Identifying the purposes, limitations, and parameters of various search engines. Taking advantage of the range of library resources available online.

- Evaluating sources. Determining the perspective, credibility, and utility of source materials. Distinguishing between primary and secondary material for a particular topic. Identifying the perspective or authorial stance of a source. Summarizing an argument presented in a text. Distinguishing between the content of a source and its meaning in relation to a particular question.
- Developing and presenting an argument. Using sources appropriately to create, modify, and support tentative conclusions and new questions. Writing a strong, clear thesis statement. Revising a thesis statement based on additional research or analysis. Identifying the parts of an argument necessary to support a thesis convincingly. Citing evidence to support each part of an argument. Identifying the contribution of an argument to existing scholarship.
- Planning further research. Drawing upon preliminary research to develop a plan for further investigation. Writing a research proposal, annotated bibliography, and outline.
- Communicating ideas and research findings effectively through formal and informal written and oral presentations.

Blog Posts: Over the course of the semester students will post ten blog posts related to the weekly readings. These blog posts must be posted to Canvas by 3 pm the day before class.

Archive Assignment: During week 10 students will work with documents from the Wisconsin State Historical Society Archives that the historian Erik Larson used in his bestselling book about Nazi Germany. Students will complete a 2-page assignment based on these sources.

Research Paper: Each student will write an original 12-page research paper on a topic related to the course theme. Students are required to use a range of primary sources and to become well acquainted with the secondary literature on their chosen topic. There is a multitude of primary sources available online, including newspapers, memoirs, government documents, archival documents (in edited volumes or on approved websites), photographs and other visual sources, speeches, letters, and so on. I will consult with students individually or in small groups during office hours about sources. On designated dates (noted below), students will submit a research question, a research proposal, a revised research proposal, and a short bibliography of primary and secondary sources.

Readings: Most readings are available on Campus or as ebooks through the UW Library website. Other books can be purchased or borrowed as Kindle ebooks.

Credit Hours: This 3-credit course has 2 hours of group meetings per week. In addition to class time, plan to allot roughly 7 hours per week for reading, writing, preparing for discussions, and working on your research paper.

Course grades will be based on the following distribution: Participation (including presentations) 35%, blog posts 20%, research-related assignments 15%, final research paper 30%.

Part One: Theorizing Totalitarianism

Week 1, 9/2: Introduction: Thinking about Totalitarianism

Assignment for the first day of class: Come to class with a definition of “totalitarianism” to discuss. You can bring a definition from an encyclopedia or dictionary or from a philosophy text. Or you might want to see how Benito Mussolini or other political figures defined the term. I will ask you to put the definition into a shared document on Canvas and to be prepared to discuss it with the class.

Week 2, 9/09: Totalitarianism as Dystopia

Common Reading:

George Orwell, *1984* (1949)

(Available as a free ebook via the UW Library website:

<https://search.library.wisc.edu/catalog/9913033440102121>)

Blog Post #1:

Write a (roughly 400-500 word) blog post addressing the following: How does Orwell’s *1984* relate to the idea of “totalitarianism”? In your opinion what are the most important themes of the book?

Week 3, 9/16: Totalitarianism as a Political Phenomenon

Common Reading:

Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1951), Part Three

(Available as a free ebook via the UW Library website:

<https://search.library.wisc.edu/catalog/9912980748802121>)

Blog Post #2:

Write a (roughly 400-500 word) blog post addressing the following: According to Hannah Arendt, what are the origins of totalitarianism? How compelling do you find her argument?

Part Two: Comparative Case Studies: Nazism and Stalinism

Week 4, 9/23: Hitler and Stalin

Common Readings:

1. Alan Bullock, *Hitler and Stalin: Parallel Lives*, 1993, pp. 342-418. (Canvas)
2. Richard Overy, *The Dictators: Hitler's Germany, Stalin's Russia*, 2004, pp. 1-97. (Canvas)

Blog Post #3:

Write a (roughly 400-500 word) blog post addressing the following: How effective is the method of comparative biography for understanding the rise of Nazism and Stalinism?

Week 5, 9/30: Mass Politics and Propaganda

Common Readings:

1. Ian Kershaw, *The Hitler Myth: Image and Reality in the Third Reich*, 2001, pp. 13-82, 229-252. (Canvas)
2. Jan Plamper, *The Stalin Cult: A Study in the Alchemy of Power*, 2012, pp. xiii-xx, 29-86. (Available as a free download via the UW Library website at: <https://search.library.wisc.edu/catalog/9913043658302121>)
3. Look at Soviet and Nazi propaganda posters and other forms of visual culture. (Links to websites are posted on Canvas)

Blog Post #4:

Write a (roughly 400-500 word) blog post addressing the following: How important were the Hitler myth and the Stalin cult to the Nazi and Soviet revolutions?

Class Presentation #1: Select a Soviet or Nazi propaganda poster or political cartoon. Copy it to the shared document for this week on Canvas. Be prepared to discuss it with the class.

Week 6, 10/7: Everyday Life

Common Readings:

1. Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Everyday Stalinism: Ordinary Life in Extraordinary Times: Soviet Russia in the 1930s*, 1999, pp. 14-39, 67-114, 139-189. (Canvas)

2. Detlev J. K. Peukert, *Inside Nazi Germany: Conformity, Opposition, and Racism in Everyday Life*, 1982, pp. 21-66. (Canvas)

Blog Post #5:

Write a (roughly 400-500 word) blog post addressing the following: Do this week's readings challenge or complicate the idea of "totalitarianism"?

Research Deadline #1:

Research question due. Post to the class Dropbox.

Class Visit:

Slavic bibliographer Dr. Andy Spencer will visit with us for part of class to talk about online resources for your research papers.

Week 7, 10/14: Perpetrators

Common Readings:

1. Christopher Browning, *Ordinary Men: Reserve Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland*, 1993. (Can be purchased as a Kindle download)
2. Lynn Viola, "The Question of the Perpetrator in Soviet History" (with comments by Wendy Goldman and Peter Fritzsche), *Slavic Review* 72, no. 1 (2013): 1-31. (Canvas)

Blog Post #6

Write a (roughly 400-500 word) blog post addressing the following: Why did "ordinary people" participate in the crimes of Nazism and Stalinism?

Part Three: Thinking about Sources

Week 8, 10/21: Working with Memoirs and Letters

Common Readings:

1. Lev Kopelev, "The Last Grain Collections (1933)," in *The Education of a True Believer*, 1978, pp. 224-235, 248-267. (Canvas)
2. Alexander Solzhenitsyn, *The Gulag Archipelago, Volume 1: An Experiment in Literary Investigation*, 1974, chapters 1 and 5. (Canvas)
3. *Stalinism as a Way of Life*, ed. Lewis Siegelbaum and Andrei Sokolov, eds., 2000, read two letters of your choice from Chapter Six. (Canvas)

Blog Post #7

Write a (roughly 400-500 word) blog post addressing the following: What kinds of insights do the letters and memoirs we have read this week give you into the workings of totalitarian states?

Research Deadline #2:

One-page research proposal due. Post to the class Dropbox.

Week 9, 10/28: Working with Diaries

1. “Diary of Stepan Filippovich Podlubny,” in *Intimacy and Terror: Soviet Diaries of the 1930s*, ed. Veronique Garros, Natalia Korenevskaya, and Thomas Lahusan, 1995, pp. 291-331. (Canvas)
2. Victor Klemperer, *I Will Bear Witness: A Diary of the Nazi Years 1933-1941*, 1999, pp. 3-46. (Canvas)

Blog Post #8:

Write a (roughly 400-500 word) blog post addressing the following: What are the pluses and minuses of using diaries like these as primary sources?

Week 10, 11/4: Using Archival Sources to Write History

1. Erik Larson, *In the Garden of Beasts: Love, Terror, and an American Family in Hitler's Berlin*, 2011. (Available as a free ebook via the UW Library website: <https://search.library.wisc.edu/catalog/9910105160202121>)
2. Letters from the Wisconsin State Historical Society Archive (Canvas)

Archive Assignment:

Two-page primary source paper. The instructions will be posted on Canvas. Post to the class Dropbox by 3 pm on 11/3.

Class Visit:

An archivist from the Wisconsin State Historical Society Archive will visit with us for part of class to talk about the letters that historian Erik Larson used for his research.

Part Four: Thinking About Totalitarianism

Week 11, 11/11: Totalitarianism and Dissent

- Vaclav Havel, “The Power of the Powerless,” 1978. (Canvas)
- Paul Jackson, “Totalitarianism in the Twentieth Century and Beyond,” *Open Democracy*, August 27, 2019, <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/countering-radical-right/totalitarianism-twentieth-century-and-beyond/>

Blog Post #9:

Write a (roughly 400-500 word) blog post addressing the following: What is Havel's main argument? Do you find it compelling?

Research Deadline #3:

Revised one-page research proposal due. Post to the class Dropbox.

Week 12, 11/18: Rethinking Totalitarianism

1. Samuel Clowes Huneke, “An End to Totalitarianism,” *Boston Review*, April 16, 2020, <http://bostonreview.net/politics/samuel-clowes-huneke-end-totalitarianism>
2. Shoshana Zuboff, “The Surveillance Threat is Not What George Orwell Imagined,” *Time*, June 6, 2019, <https://time.com/5602363/george-orwell-1984-anniversary-surveillance-capitalism/>
3. Paul Mason, “Reading Arendt is Not Enough,” *New York Review of Books Daily*, May 2, 2019, <https://www.nybooks.com/daily/2019/05/02/reading-arendt-is-not-enough/>
4. Watch Masha Gessen’s talk about her 2017 book *The Future of History: How Totalitarianism Reclaimed Russia*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=glISOp50eO8&list=PLXPACm5V96bAwkX369umUtF14Fp8KgiR3&index=77&t=0s>

Blog Post #10:

Write a (roughly 400-500 word) blog post addressing the following: Based on this week’s readings and the Gessen talk, do you think the term “totalitarian” has value today?

Research Deadline #4:

Bibliography of primary and secondary sources due. Post to the class Dropbox.

Week 13, 11/25: Thanksgiving

Part Five: Class Presentations

Week 14, 12/2: Research Presentations

Week 15, 12/9: Research Presentations

Research Paper Deadline: 12/11 at 5 pm