



WISCONSIN
UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON

HISTORY 845: EMPIRE AND NATION IN MODERN CENTRAL EUROPE



Central Europe after Austrian Victory in 1866 (Helmut Walser Smith)

Course Information

Instructor:	Prof. Brandon Bloch (bjbloch@wisc.edu)
Office Hours:	Wed. 1-4 p.m. or by appointment (Humanities 5118 or online)
Semester:	Spring 2026
Meeting Time:	Mon. 3:30-5:25 p.m.
Location:	Humanities 5257
Modality:	In-person
Credits:	3
Requisites:	Consent of instructor
Course Designation:	Grad 50% - Counts toward 50% graduate coursework requirement
Canvas Site:	https://canvas.wisc.edu/courses/488671

Course Description

The transnational turn in historical writing has transformed the study of modern Central Europe. If the field once focused on German national history, framed around the question of Germany's "special path" to modernity, today's historians of Central Europe are more likely to emphasize the porousness of national borders, the instability of identities, and the legacies of empire. Recent scholarship has blurred the boundaries of German, Central European, and East European histories, and brought into focus their interactions with the wider world—through commerce, imperialism, colonialism, and migration. But the recent upsurge of populist, xenophobic, and Eurosceptic movements across the region—and not least the ongoing war in Ukraine—makes clear that questions of national sovereignty have hardly disappeared. As the historian Helmut Walser Smith has noted, "Despite globalization, we lived in a world where precisely mapped countries occupy more than 95 percent of the inhabited surface of the earth, and roughly 97 percent of the world's people will die in the nation of their birth."¹

This graduate seminar takes stock of the impact of transnational and global approaches to Central European history, while asking what role nationalism and the nation (should) continue to play. Are empires and nation-states mutually exclusive, or do they overlap? How do these categories relate to other political geographies such as borderland, region, and city? In what ways have historians of Central Europe rethought their scales of analysis in response to challenges from transnational and global history? The course conceives of "Central Europe" broadly to encompass German-speaking Europe as well as the Austro-Hungarian Empire and its successor states. The course also spotlights the region's interactions with the world beyond Europe, in particular through colonialism and its legacies. We will focus on the period since 1850. However, graduate students specializing in other regions and periods, including students in adjacent departments, are welcome to enroll. There is wide flexibility in selecting a topic and format for the final paper. The seminar will be enriched by bringing together participants from diverse disciplinary backgrounds and approaches.

In addition to introducing graduate students to major recent works of Central European historiography, many of them based on the authors' dissertations, this course places significant emphasis on building professional skills. We will devote time during class meetings to discussing professional development and workshopping relevant documents. The assignments, including a publishable book review and a final paper related to a potential master's thesis or dissertation topic, are designed to produce tangible benefits for your graduate career.

¹ Helmut Walser Smith, *Germany: A Nation In Its Time: Before, During, and After Nationalism, 1500-2000* (Norton, 2020), xvi.

Please note: Graduate students planning to complete a preliminary exam field with me during the next three years (through Spring 2028) are expected to enroll in this course. I will be available to schedule independent studies, but this course will serve as the foundation for the exam field.

Learning Outcomes

By the end of the course, you will be able to:

- Explain major trends in the writing of modern German and Central European history over the past two decades, with particular attention to questions of empire, nationalism, borderlands, and mobility
- Develop an empathetic approach to historiographic analysis that asks what a book or article contributes and how an author builds their argument
- Define your academic profile through professional documents, personal reflection, and an online presence
- Identify key primary sources in your field available at UW-Madison and (if applicable) in archives abroad
- Write a publishable book review
- Produce a final paper that advances your graduate career by analyzing primary sources and/or secondary literatures relevant to a potential master's thesis or dissertation topic

Course Books

Most of the readings are available as e-books and journal articles through the UW-Madison Libraries and are linked in the modules on Canvas. Helmut Walser Smith's *Germany: A Nation in Its Time*, is not available as an e-book but is placed on reserve at College Library in Helen C. White Hall. There is no need to spend money on this course (although I highly recommend the \$15 investment in Karen Kelsky's *The Professor Is In*).

Course Requirements

1. Seminar Participation (35%)

Attendance and active participation in discussions are crucial to the success of the seminar. We will aim to foster a classroom environment based on generosity and constructive engagement, toward both one another and the authors we are reading. We

will have a conversation about discussion norms during the first class meeting. Seminar participation will be evaluated holistically at the end of the semester according to the rubric on p. 15. You will also receive a provisional participation grade midway through the semester.

2. Professional Development Assignments (10%)

An important goal of this course is to help you develop your professional profile as a scholar. While I recognize the importance of preparing graduate students for a wide range of careers, the skills of an academic professional are foundational to the work you will do in graduate school. Moreover, building professional skills early in graduate school is critical for success in both academic and non-academic careers.

With this in mind, there are several brief assignments designed to help you place yourself in your field, and to prepare you for entering the academic and professional world beyond UW-Madison.

The assignments are as follows (see the course schedule for due dates):

- CV and/or professional resume
- Academic Vision Statement: In about 1,000 words, describe the core questions that motivate your research, what you hope to contribute in your prospective master's thesis and/or dissertation, and your long-term goals for graduate school and beyond. You may also choose to reflect on a book that has been especially formative for your development as a scholar. You can use this document as a starting point for the research statement or personal statement that is typically required by grant applications.
- Primary Source Bibliography (1-2 pp.): Submit a bibliography of key primary sources in your field that are available through the UW-Madison Libraries, interlibrary loan, or online. If you work in a field that involves archival research, you can also include archival sources. The bibliography might serve as the starting point for a master's thesis or dissertation prospectus; you might also use this assignment to explore possible topics for the final paper.
- Statement of research interests for the website of your department or program, or draft of professional website

3. H-Net Book Review (10%)

Choose a recent book in your field (published in the past three years) and write a review of 1200-1500 words for publication on a relevant H-Net site (e.g. H-German, H-Habsburg, H-Nationalism, H-Transnational German Studies.). The book review is due in class on March 16. After peer reviewing your draft in class, I would encourage you to revise and submit your review to an H-Net editor. Book reviews are an essential tool of academic communication, and also a great way to start publishing as an early-career scholar. We will discuss conventions for academic book reviews in class.

4. Final Paper (45%, including 10% for intermediate assignments)

The final paper is due on Wed. May 6 at 11:59 p.m. A two-page (double-spaced) proposal is due in class on March 9, and an outline and/or draft introduction is due in class on April 13. Your final paper can take a variety of possible formats; please consult with me and your primary adviser to choose a format that will best serve your goals and stage in your graduate program. I would recommend that students in the History PhD program work on at least one traditional research paper, based on primary sources in their main research language(s), during each semester of coursework.

You are encouraged to use the final paper as an opportunity to explore primary sources and/or secondary literatures relevant to a potential master's thesis or dissertation. You may draw on the class readings, but this is not required. The only requirements are that the paper engages with current historiography of modern Central Europe, broadly defined, and that it is at least 15 pages (double-spaced) in length, excluding the bibliography.

Possibilities for the final paper include:

- Research paper (At least 20-25 pages, and may serve as a draft chapter or section of a master's thesis or dissertation, or as a draft article publication. This option will require the most in-depth research and writing.)
- Historiographic review essay (discuss at least 4 books in an emergent subfield)
- Conference paper and abstract (ideally to be submitted to an upcoming conference)
- Master's thesis or dissertation prospectus (including project description, literature review, provisional outline, research plan, and bibliography)

- Grant application (including abstract, project description, literature review, methodology, research schedule, budget, and bibliography)

During the final class meeting (April 27), you will be asked to give a ten-minute talk on your final paper in the style of an academic conference presentation.

Grading

A: 93-100	AB: 88-92	B: 83-87	BC: 78-82
C: 70-77	D: 60-69	F: Below 60	

Credit Hours

The credit standard for this 3-credit course is met by an expectation of a total of 135 hours of student engagement with the course's learning activities (45 hours per credit, or 9 hours per week). This includes scheduled class meetings, reading, writing, individual consultations with the instructor, and other work as described in the syllabus. Since the seminar meets for **2 hours of direct instruction per week**, you should plan to allot an average of 7 hours per week outside of class for course-related activities. In addition, each student will meet with me during the week of March 9 to discuss your research proposal for the final project. Additional meetings throughout the semester are encouraged.

Attendance and Late Work

Please make every effort to attend all seminar meetings and submit the assignments on time, since discussions and peer workshops are crucial to achieving the course learning outcomes. If extenuating circumstances such as illness, religious observance, or family emergency prevent you from attending a class, please let me know in advance. You may be asked to complete makeup work, such as a response paper, in lieu of a missed class. Unexcused absences and late work will impact the seminar participation portion of your grade.

Please note that I am not able to accept any written work for this course after Friday, May 8, the last day of the semester. Taking a grade of Incomplete is not to your benefit, since this will stall your progress in the graduate program and could hinder your applications for internal and external fellowships. A grade of Incomplete will only be granted in the case of a personal or family emergency.

Academic Integrity

Proper citation is crucial to the practice of history. Please let me know if you have any questions about citing sources. Citations are not required for the academic vision statement, and we will discuss how to cite sources in the book review and final paper. Chicago Style citations are standard in the discipline of history. It goes without saying that the consequences for plagiarism in graduate school are serious.

We will have discussions about potential uses of Artificial Intelligence (AI) applications in historical scholarship. You are permitted to use AI as a research and brainstorming tool in this class, though beware that any information generated by AI needs to be corroborated in scholarly sources. You may also use an AI tool such as Grammarly for polishing your writing. If you utilize AI in any such capacity, please append a note to your assignment explaining how you used the AI tool and whether you found it helpful. However, you are not permitted to import text generated by AI into written work for this course, or to submit a paper that is merely a revised version of a draft written by AI. Submitting AI-generated text for any assignment will be considered an academic integrity violation.

Accessibility

I am committed to ensuring that all students receive equal access to the course materials and equitable opportunities to achieve the course learning goals. If you experience or anticipate any challenges related to the format, materials, or requirements of this course, please let me know as soon as possible. I am happy to explore a range of options for removing barriers to your learning, including official accommodations. All communications regarding accessibility will remain confidential.

Advice on Graduate Study

You may find the following resources helpful for this course and your graduate career more broadly.

Karen Kelsky, *The Professor Is In: The Essential Guide to Turning Your PhD into a Job* (2015)

Oriented toward career preparation for academic positions; see also Kelsky's blog, <https://theprofessorisin.com>, which includes resources on careers outside the academy.

Jessica McCrory Calarco, *A Field Guide to Grad School: Uncovering the Hidden Curriculum* (2020)

Advice on navigating the unspoken ins-and-outs of graduate school, including working with advisers, completing degree requirements, reading and research, attending conferences, and work-life balance.

Gregory Colón Semanza, *Graduate Study for the Twenty-First Century: How to Build an Academic Career in the Humanities*, 2nd ed. (2010)

Similar to Calarco, but with a greater focus on writing conventions in the humanities.

American Historical Association Graduate Education Resources

<https://www.historians.org/jobs-and-professional-development/professional-life/resources-for-graduate-students>

Christopher S. Rose, "Grad School Survival Guide: How to Read" (2019)

<https://christophersrose.com/2019/05/15/grad-school-survival-guide-how-to-read/>

Rose received his PhD in History from the University of Texas at Austin in 2019; the posts in his "grad school survival guide" are useful and very readable!

Shia Lurie, "How to Read a Book in Two Hours or Less" (2014)

<https://www.insidehighered.com/blogs/gradhacker/how-read-book-two-hours-or-less>

More helpful advice on reading strategies—though two hours is, hopefully, exaggerated! (See the note on Credit Hours above.)

Thomas Mullaney, "How Academia Works"

<https://www.youtube.com/@tsmullaney>

YouTube channel by a Stanford historian covering grad school survival skills, funding applications, research and writing, presenting your work, academic politics, and more.

Additional Resources

The UW-Madison Graduate School and the History Department make available a wide range of resources to foster the success and wellbeing of graduate students. It is a good idea to familiarize (or re-familiarize) yourself with the following:

UW-Madison Graduate School Resources

<https://grad.wisc.edu/current-students/>

Information on academic and professional development; reporting hostile and intimidating behavior; graduate school policies; wellness; and student life.

DiscoverPD

<https://grad.wisc.edu/professional-development/#discoverpd>

Professional development resources for UW-Madison master's and doctoral students, including events calendar of Professional Development Programming on campus.

University Writing Center

<http://www.writing.wisc.edu/>

Individual consultations and workshops on academic writing, as well as Graduate Writing Groups (<https://writing.wisc.edu/writinggroups/>) to foster accountability and community.

UW-Madison Libraries Graduate Support Series

<https://www.library.wisc.edu/research-support/graduate-workshops/>

Librarian-led workshops for graduate students on topics including grant applications, publishing, data analysis, citation managers, and oral history.

McBurney Disability Resource Center

<https://mcburney.wisc.edu/>

Contact the McBurney Center if you have or think you may have a disability to discuss a range of possible accommodations.

History Department Graduate Program Handbook

<http://www.history.wisc.edu/our-graduate-program/current-students/graduate-program-handbook/>

Course Schedule

Readings and assignments are due at the beginning of class, unless otherwise indicated.

Readings listed as “Additional Resources” are optional, and are intended to provide further guidance for the assignments. I have not indicated page numbers for most of the assigned books, but graduate school involves learning to read efficiently for argument, intervention, and evidence. We will discuss reading strategies during the first weeks of class, and can decide on chapter selections if necessary. Guidelines for written assignments are available on Canvas.

Many historians working today aim to reach audiences through a variety of venues, not only traditional scholarly publications but also podcasts, magazines, blogs, public talks (sometimes posted online), and social media. While this course focuses on scholarly books and articles, you are encouraged to study the reception of books that are of special interest by consulting public-facing media as well.

Week 1 (Jan. 26): What Is a Nation?

Ernest Renan, “What Is a Nation?” (1882 lecture at the Sorbonne University, Paris)

Eric Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality* (1990), intro.

Frederick Cooper and Rogers Brubaker, “Identity,” in Cooper, *Colonialism in Question: Theory, Knowledge, History* (2005)

A. Dirk Moses, “The German Catechism” (2021)

OPTIONAL: Rogers Brubaker, *Ethnicity without Groups* (2004), chap. 1

Additional Resource:

Gregory Colón Semanza, “The Graduate Seminar,” in *Graduate Study for the Twenty-First Century* (2010), chap. 4

Week 2 (Feb. 2): The Nation in German History

Celia Applegate, *A Nation of Provincials: The German Idea of Heimat* (1990), chs. 1-3

Till van Rahden, “Germans of the Jewish *Stamm*: Visions of Community between Nationalism and Particularism, 1850-1933,” in *German History from the Margins*, eds. Neil Gregor, Nils Roemer, and Mark Roseman (2006)

Helmut Walser Smith, *Germany: A Nation In Its Time: Before, During, and After Nationalism, 1500-2000* (2020), intro., chs. 8-9

Additional Resources:

Karen Kelsky, “Rules of the Academic CV,” in *The Professor Is In* (2015)

Assignment: CV

Week 3 (Feb. 9) Imperial Germany/German Imperialism

David Ciarlo, *Advertising Empire: Race and Visual Culture in Imperial Germany* (2011)

Adam Blackler, “From Boondoggle to Settlement Colony: Hendrik Witbooi and the Evolution of Germany’s Imperial Project in Southwest Africa,” *Central European History* 50 (2017): 449-470

Assignment: Academic Vision Statement

Week 4 (Feb. 16): Empire and Nation in Habsburg Central Europe

Tara Zahra, “Imagined Non-Communities: National Indifference as a Category of Analysis,” *Slavic Review* 69 (2010): 93-119

Emily Greble, *Muslims and the Making of Modern Europe* (2021), intro., chs. 1-2

Christina Florea, *Bukovina: The Life and Death of an East European Borderland* (2025), intro., chs. 2-3

OPTIONAL: Pieter Judson, “Prisoner of Peoples? Empire, Nation and Conflict Management in Habsburg Central Europe, 1848-1925,” *Philosophy and Social Criticism* 50, no. 4 (2024): 559-570

Larry McEnerney, “The Craft of Writing Effectively” (2014),
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vtIzMaLkCaM&t=1362s>

Assignment: After watching McEnerney’s lecture, go through the first section of Zahra’s article and underline the words that make the article valuable.

Week 5 (Feb. 23): What Is a State?

Natasha Wheatley, *The Life and Death of States: Central Europe and the Transformation of Modern Sovereignty* (2023)

Karl Renner, "State and Nation: On the Austrian Nationalities Question" (1899), excerpt

OPTIONAL: Symposium on Natasha Wheatley's *The Life and Death of States* (2023):

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aoOlvhn9Owo>

Week 6 (March 2): War and Postwar

Dominique Kirchner Reill, *The Fiume Crisis: Life in the Wake of the Habsburg Empire* (2020)

Sean Andrew Wempe, "From Unfit Imperialists to Fellow Civilizers: German Colonial Officials as Imperial Experts in the League of Nations, 1919-1933," *German History* 34 (2016): 21-48

Assignment: Bibliography of key primary sources in your field

Week 7 (March 9): Interwar Borderlands

Kathryn Ciancia, *On Civilization's Edge: A Polish Borderland in the Interwar World* (2020)

Additional Resource:

Semanza, "The Seminar Paper," in *Graduate Study for the Twenty-First Century*, chap. 5

Assignment: Two-page proposal for final project, including one-sentence research question

*Mandatory meeting with the instructor this week to review your research proposal

Week 8 (March 16): Book Review Workshop

Read a book in your field that has appeared during the past three years and write a book review formatted for publication on an H-Net site. This could be a book you will use for your final paper.

Additional Resources:

Wendy Laura Belcher, "How to Write an Academic Book Review" (2015)

Casey Brienza, "Writing Academic Book Reviews" (2015)

Assignment: H-Net Book Review

Week 9 (March 23): Beyond Totalitarianism

Nicole Eaton, *German Blood, Slavic Soil: How Nazi Königsberg Became Soviet Kaliningrad* (2023)

Mark Roseman, "Racial Discourse, Nazi Violence, and the Limits of the Racial State Model," in *Beyond the Racial State: Rethinking Nazi Germany*, eds. Devin Pendas, Mark Roseman, and Richard Wetzell (2017)

Arthur McEvoy, "Rule of Fives" (2011), see especially pp. 3, 8-13, 24-26

Assignment: Identify ways in which Roseman's chapter follows the "rule of fives." Be prepared to share your findings in class.

Optional: Revised H-Net Book Review, in preparation for submission (due March 27)

*SPRING BREAK

Week 10 (April 6): Transnational and Local in Holocaust History

Anna Hájková, *The Last Ghetto: An Everyday History of Theresienstadt* (2020)

Omer Bartov, "Historical Uniqueness and Integrated History," in *Genocide, the Holocaust, and Israel-Palestine: First-Person History in Times of Crisis* (2023)

Assignment: Up-to-date statement of research interests for publication on the website of your department or program, or draft of professional website

Week 11 (April 13): Cold War Borderlands and Internationalism

Edith Sheffer, *Burned Bridge: How East and West Germans Made the Iron Curtain* (2011)

Andrew Demshuk, "East Germany and the Lost German East: Dresden–Wrocław 'Socialist Friendship' after Nazism and Forced Migration," *Urban History* 51 (2024): 744-762

Assignment: Outline and/or draft introduction for the final paper, including a one-paragraph statement on how you are adapting writing techniques discussed in the class resources and/or showcased in the readings

Week 12 (April 20): Nation and Race after Nazism

Brandon Bloch, *Reinventing Protestant Germany: Religious Nationalists and the Contest for Post-Nazi Democracy* (2025), intro., chs. 3, 6

Michelle Lynn Kahn, *Foreign in Two Homelands: Racism, Return Migration, and Turkish-German History* (2024), intro., chs. 4-5

Week 13 (April 27): Presentations on Final Papers

Additional Resources:

Paul Edwards, “How to Give an Academic Talk” (2015)

Linda Kerber, “Conference Rules: How to Present a Scholarly Paper” (2008)

Semanza, “Attending Conferences,” in *Graduate Study for the Twenty-First Century*, chap. 9

Assignment: Ten-minute “conference talk” on your final paper

Final Paper due on Wed. May 6 at 11:59 p.m.

HISTORY 845 Seminar Participation Rubric

A-range (90-100)	• Regular attendance • Consistent, insightful contributions to seminar discussions • Discussion contributions display thorough knowledge of the readings; engage with peers' comments; and utilize the tools of historiographic analysis introduced in class • Abides by the group agreement established by the seminar in the first week of class
B-range (80-89)	• Regular attendance • Participates actively in discussions but tends to synthesize what others have said rather than raising new insights • Discussion contributions display accurate knowledge of the readings • Abides by the group agreement established by the seminar in the first week of class
C-range (70-79)	• Regular attendance • Limited contributions to discussions • Demonstrates gaps in knowledge of the readings; offers mainly facts rather than interpretation • Contributes when called upon but not actively engaged
D-range (60-69)	• Consistent unexcused absences • Rarely contributes to discussion • Demonstrates gaps in knowledge of the readings
F	• Rarely or never attends class • Demonstrates little or no knowledge of the readings