

History 499 001
THE UNITED STATES IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR
Department of History and Art History, George Mason University
Spring 2020

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Mondays, 7:20-10:00pm

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Office hours: Mondays, 5:00-6:00 and by appointment

The Second World War raged from the late 1930s until August of 1945. By the time Japan signed the final Instrument of Surrender aboard the USS *Missouri*, more than 60 million people—the majority of them civilians—had lost their lives in the fighting. The war raged across the globe, involving all the world’s major powers, and combat occurred on four continents, in the sky, on the oceans and under the seas. U.S. involvement in the war changed nearly every facet of American life, and affected the nation’s course for the decades that followed.

This course is the capstone of the History major. Students will complete a major research paper on a topic dealing with some facet of the American experience in the Second World War. That paper will demonstrate mastery of the skills of historical research, analysis, argument, and presentation. The final paper should be 5,000-6,000 words in length (that is, 20-25 pages, excluding footnotes and bibliography.)

This course is an RS-designated course, fulfills the Writing Intensive requirement for the History major, and is a Synthesis course for George Mason’s Core.

BOOKS AND RESOURCES:

William Cronon, “Learning Historical Research” site, available at
<http://www.williamcronon.net/researching/>

recommended references:

Max Hastings, *Inferno: The World at War, 1939-1945*

or

Gerhard Weinberg, *A World at Arms*

or

James Madison, *World War II: A History in Documents*

SCHEDULE

27 January. **Introductions and Expectations**

3 February. **Researching in the World War II era: Finding a topic**

Read:

Cronon, "Asking Good Questions" at <http://www.williamcronon.net/researching/questions.htm>

Assignment:

Turn in three potential research topics for your essay, 2-3 sentences each

10 February. **Sources: Primary, Secondary, and Tertiary**

Read:

Cronon, "Finding Documents" at <http://www.williamcronon.net/researching/documents.htm>

Cronon, "Positioning Yourself" at <http://www.williamcronon.net/researching/positioning.htm>

Assignment:

Turn in a one-paragraph description of your topic and the central question you will explore

17 February. **In-class research** (bring a laptop)

NOTE: CLASS MEETS IN FENWICK LIBRARY 1014A

Read:

Cronon, "Searching for Information" at <http://www.williamcronon.net/researching/searching.htm>

Cronon, "Taking Notes" at <http://www.williamcronon.net/researching/notetaking.htm>

Assignment: Submit an annotated bibliography of your sources. That bibliography should consist of three parts: Three representative primary sources; six secondary sources; and three scholarly articles. Use Chicago style (outlined in Storey, 44-49) and include two sentences describing each work.

24 February. **Historical thinking and primary source analysis**

Assignment: Identify a sample primary source your research has turned up. Send an electronic copy (a document or an image) to chamner@gmu.edu by 5pm on February 24.

2-4 March. **Individual meetings—No class**

Be ready to discuss the status of your research and your proposed next steps.

9 March. **Spring Break—No class**

- 16 March. **Making an argument and organizing an essay**
Read:
Cronon, “Arguing and Telling Stories” at <http://www.williamcronon.net/researching/arguing.htm>
Cronon, “Drafting, Editing, and Revising” available at <http://www.williamcronon.net/researching/writing.htm>
- 23 March. **Independent writing—No class**
I will be available by appointment if you would like to discuss your progress.
- 30 March. **Oral Presentations** (Group A)
Prepare a *brief*, five-minute report summarizing your topic and research to date. Bring a powerpoint featuring a few relevant sources to accompany your report. Your presentation should explain what your project is, the primary sources you are using, your research questions, and your hypothesis.

Assignment:
All students in Group A and Group B should turn in a three- to five-page Introduction to your paper
- 6 April **Oral Presentations** (Group B)
Prepare a *brief*, five-minute report summarizing your topic and research to date. Bring a powerpoint featuring a few relevant sources to accompany your report. Your presentation should explain what your project is, the primary sources you are using, your research questions, and your hypothesis.
- 13 April **Independent writing—No class**
I will be available by appointment if you would like to discuss your progress.
- 20 April **PAPERS DUE—No class**
Assignment:
Submit your essay. This is a first version of the entire paper, *not* a rough draft. All your footnotes should be policed, though you do not need to attach a formal bibliography. Send an email copy to your assigned reader and an email copy to me at chamner@gmu.edu.

I will be available by appointment if you would like to discuss your progress.
- 27 April **Critique and discussion**
Assignment:
Prepare a short, 400-500 word critique of the paper assigned to you. Provide a hard copy for me and one for the author. Summarize the paper’s argument, its primary-source base, and the paper’s greatest strength and weakness. Focus on the author’s research, evidence, and analysis; *do not* concern yourself with the author’s writing style.

Be ready to give a short, three-minute summary of your review in class.
- 4 May **Conclusions**

FINAL PAPERS ARE DUE BY NOON ON MONDAY, MAY 11

CHECKLIST FOR FINAL PAPER

20-25 pages in length (5,000-6,000 words, excluding footnotes and bibliography)

Typed and double-spaced in Times New Roman 12-point font with numbered pages

Citations follow the Chicago Manual of Style

Divide your bibliography into three headings: Primary Sources, Secondary Source Books, and Secondary Source articles

Submit one hard copy to my mailbox in the History Department and one electronic copy to chamner@gmu.edu

GRADING

Final grades will break down as follows:

- Oral presentation and class participation, 25%
- Milestone assignments, 25% total
- First draft, 20%
- Final draft, 30%

Criteria for evaluating research papers:

- States an original thesis or historical interpretation
- Uses primary sources effectively
- Relates work to existing secondary literature in the field
- Synthesizes and analyzes diverse sources
- Links the subject to broader historical questions or historiography
- Writing is clear and grammatical; essay is well-organized, coherent, and follows historical norms

Criteria for evaluating Oral Presentations:

- Demonstrates ability to present one's work in a clear and organized manner
- Completes the essential elements within the allotted time
- Engages and maintains the audience's attention
- Demonstrates ability to handle questions from the audience

FINDING A TOPIC

The purpose of your research paper is to explore a specific, narrowly-defined topic related to the American experience in the Second World War, using primary sources and relevant secondary sources. Your interest in this conflict should guide your choice of topic, but you **MUST** focus your project so that you have a manageable question that can be pursued within the limits of a 14-week course. The end result of your research will be a sophisticated historical argument that answers your question with evidence in an essay of 20-25 pages.

Certain kinds of questions are much less likely to yield a successful topic. As you are narrowing your search, steer away from these kinds of questions:

OVERLY BROAD QUESTIONS: Large, sprawling research questions, while fascinating, will not work within the context of this course. “How did women affect American wartime production?” is far, far too large to answer in a project of this scope. “How did the Federal government recruit women in Fairfax County to join the war effort between 1943 and 1945?” is a much more manageable version of that question.

EVALUATIVE QUESTIONS: Questions that pass judgment on decision or event do not lend themselves to exploration with primary sources (and they usually call for a kind of historical expertise and authority that takes decades to develop). “Should Mark Clark have been relieved during the Italian campaign?” is not a question that can be answered easily from the historical record. “How did Eisenhower justify his decision to retain Clark during the Italian campaign?” on the other hand, has an answer that can presumably be found within the historical record.

COUNTERFACTUAL QUESTIONS: Questions that deal with “what if?” scenarios can be fascinating, but are impossible to answer with traditional kinds of historical research. Your essay must be built on primary-source research; counterfactuals, by definition, produce no primary sources because they never occurred. “Could the Normandy invasion have been turned back if the Germans had released their armored divisions earlier?” is a “what if?” question that cannot be adequately answered with primary sources. “Why were Allied D-Day planners so concerned about German armor in Normandy, and how did they plan to respond if it mobilized for attack?” on the other hand, is a question you might

NARRATIVE QUESTIONS: Questions that simply lay out a story do not allow for much historical analysis or interpretation, and are not usually good areas for original research. “What happened at the Battle of Midway?” is a difficult question to answer from primary sources, and it is one that has been studied exhaustively by other scholars. Your job as a historical researcher is to make an argument; narrative history offers few opportunities for that kind of persuasive writing.

SOURCES

Finding an adequate primary source base is the first step toward writing a good research paper. These sources can include: newspapers, pamphlets, letters and correspondence, magazines and periodicals, legislative records, laws, novels and poetry, petitions, court records, church records, political cartoons, maps, and so on. These sources may be available through online databases, in printed volumes, or at particular libraries and archives (the Library of Congress, the National Archive, Virginia Historical Society, Fenwick Special Collections, the U.S. Army Heritage and Education Center are just a few that are either local or within two hours’ drive.).

STATEMENT ON PLAGIARISM AND ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

All GMU students are bound to abide by the Honor Code (<http://academicintegrity.gmu.edu/honorcode/>). One of the most common honor code violations is plagiarism. Plagiarism is a broadly defined term that includes a wide spectrum of violations. Put most simply, it is appropriating another person's words or ideas as if they were your own. It includes, but is not limited to, the use of another person's words without attribution or proper citation; submission of work that is not one's own, whether the work is stolen, purchased, or used with the author's permission; the too-close paraphrasing of another person's words or ideas. If you don't know if something constitutes plagiarism, ask the instructor. Students suspected of Honor Code