

George Mason University

**History 387 DL3/History 389 DL2:  
The Second World War**  
Fall 2020

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The Second World War raged from the late 1930s until August of 1945. By the time Japan signed the final Instrument of Surrender, 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. The war changed geopolitics in ways that reverberated throughout the twentieth century and continue to this day.

This course traces the causes, course, and outcome of the greatest calamity in human history. It examines the political, social, and economic issues that led to war; the home fronts, war leadership, diplomacy, combat motivation, and grand strategy; the Holocaust; the political and social legacies of the conflict; and the way that nations remember and commemorate the war.

This is an **online, asynchronous** course. You will need access to a computer and a reliable internet connection. The course will run through George Mason’s BlackBoard site, and all of the material you need will be there.

We will not have any scheduled meetings, in person or virtually. You’ll be exploring this fascinating period in history by drawing on a course text, on primary sources, and on a series of slideshows that will make connections between key concepts and ideas and the material in the text and in the sources. There is a structure built in to the course: Module 0 serves as an introduction and a chance for you to familiarize yourself with the syllabus, assignments, and deadlines. After that, we’ll dig into a series of seven modules that each explore some facet of the Second World War era. Modules will always begin on a Monday morning and end on a Friday evening. Most are two weeks.

This syllabus provides you with information about the course. Take the first week to familiarize yourself with the syllabus, the assignments, readings, and course policies. If you have questions, reach out to me at [chamner@gmu.edu](mailto:chamner@gmu.edu). I am more than happy to answer questions via email, phone, Zoom, or Skype. The orientation week is an excellent time to make sure that you understand all of the course requirements and expectations so that we can dive into this fascinating history in Module 1.

**COURSE STRUCTURE:** The course is divided into a set of modules. Module 0 is the orientation module to give you a moment to familiarize yourself with the class structure, assignments, policies, and expectations. After Module 0 we'll start with the substance of the course in Module 1. The syllabus shows exactly what we'll cover in each module, resources for you, and the assignment you are responsible for.

**HOW TO USE THE SYLLABUS:** Each module block on the syllabus contains all of the information you'll need to complete the module.

The **Title** provides a short description of the material and themes we'll cover in the module. The **Dates** show when the Module is scheduled to begin and end. New modules start on Monday mornings and end on Friday evening. Most run two weeks; a few are one week long.

The **Overview** section show what new information and skills you will master over the course of the module.

**Read** indicates the pages from the course text (Max Hastings' *Inferno: The World at War, 1939-1945*) that you should read over the course of the module. Occasionally there is a supplementary article for a module; those articles will appear in the module folder.

**Documents** refers to the primary sources documents that we'll explore in the module. Copies of each module's documents appear in the module's folder. Additionally, you'll find all the documents for the course in one long Word document in the "Course materials" folder.

**View** refers to the PowerPoints you should view in conjunction with the readings and documents. These are narrated slideshows that will explore important core themes and concepts using primary sources. The slideshows and the text act as complements. It is important to block out time to read and reflect on both. Most of the slideshows are 8-10 minutes in length. Depending on the module there may be six to eight slideshows.

**Watch** refers to video clips that accompany many of the modules. World War II is especially fascinating to study as it took place after the advent of motion picture technology, and there are thousands of hours of video footage of events pertaining to the conflict. Some modules include movie footage as primary sources. Module 6, "War & Memory," also includes some clips from Hollywood films released decades after the end of the war. Links to the clips are active in the syllabus, and direct links appear in individual module folders.

**Assignment** shows the written assignment that is due for each module. With the exception of the Module 0 introduction, **THERE IS SOMETHING DUE FOR EACH MODULE.** There are two kinds of writing assignments in the course (see below), and many weeks you have a choice which to submit within certain guidelines.

**DUE** tells you when the written assignment for that module is due. Written assignments should be submitted via BlackBoard by 5:00pm on the last day of the module. All due dates fall on a Friday.

**THERE IS SOMETHING DUE ON THE LAST DAY OF EACH MODULE.**

**WRITTEN ASSIGNMENTS:** The course has two kinds of writing assignments: short, 250-word primary source exercises and longer, 1,200-word essays. Over the course of the semester you will complete **FIVE** primary source exercises and **TWO** longer essays.

There is some flexibility built into the system—there are four different long essays to choose from in Modules 3, 4, 5, and 6. You are free to pick any two from the Essay Prompt handout. On weeks you do not elect to write a long essay, you will submit a primary source exercise. **THERE IS SOMETHING DUE ON THE LAST DAY OF EACH MODULE.** You can mix and match to suit your interests and schedule, but by the end of the semester you must complete **FIVE** primary source exercises and **TWO** long essays.

**Primary source exercises** give you a chance to think deeply about the primary sources produced by participants in the events of World War II. Module 1 will introduce you to a set of Historical Thinking Skills that professional historians use to explore and understand the past, as well as a set of tools that historians utilize in order to make connections between primary source documents. Each module has primary-source documents associated with it. Some are text-based; some are images; a few are video clips. See the “Primary source exercise description” in the Module 0 folder for instructions and a sample source and reflection. Primary source exercises will be graded on according to a 10-point rubric.

Two **long essays** give you a chance to develop your skills of writing, analysis, and argument by responding to real-world questions about the war. There are four different opportunities to write a longer essay, and each prompt is different. Longer essays appear in modules 3, 4, 5, and 6. You will select two to write for the semester; for the other modules, you will complete a primary source exercise. See the “Essay prompts” document for all four assignments. The long essays will be graded on a standard A to F scale.

Remember, **THERE IS SOMETHING DUE ON THE LAST DAY OF EACH MODULE.**

Over the course of the semester you will submit seven pieces of writing in total: Five short reflections and two longer essays. There are four different long essay options, each associated with a different module. You are free to select the two that interest you the most and best fit your schedule. For modules you are not submitting a longer essay, complete a primary source exercise. There is some flexibility built into the assignments, to help account for your other coursework and for whatever curveballs 2020 has yet to throw at us.

There are seven due dates throughout the semester. Mark them on your calendar now in red ink, since you will be submitting either a primary source reflection or a long essay on each of them. Your assignments are due at 5:00pm on Fridays.

- Module 1: Friday, September 4
- Module 2: Friday, September 18
- Module 3: Friday, October 9
- Module 4: Friday, October 23
- Module 5: Friday, November 13
- Module 6: Friday, November 20
- Module 7: Friday, December 4

**GRADING:** Over the course of the semester you will complete seven assignments, one per module. **THERE IS SOMETHING DUE ON THE LAST DAY OF EACH MODULE.** You'll write two long essays of your choice, and will complete primary source exercise for the other modules. Grades will break down as follows:

Primary source exercises (5): 10 points each

Long essays (2): 25 points each

**Remember, THERE IS SOMETHING DUE ON THE LAST DAY OF EACH MODULE.**

**NO LATE ASSIGNMENTS WILL BE ACCEPTED. NO EXCEPTIONS.**

The grading scale is as follows:

A 94-100

A- 90-93

B+ 87-89

B 84-86

B- 80-83

C+ 77-79

C 74-76

C- 70-73

D+ 67-69

D 65-66

**Module 0****Course Introduction****Week 1**

August 24—August 28

<b>Overview</b>	<p>This module serves as the introduction to the course structure, policies, and assignments. It will familiarize you with the structure of the course, give an overview of the material we'll be covering this semester, and explain all of the material and written assignments you'll be responsible for from now until December.</p> <p>By the end you will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• understand the structure of the course</li><li>• understand the two kinds of written assignments for the semester</li><li>• be familiar with the due dates for each assignment</li><li>• understand how course grades are calculated</li></ul>
<b>Read</b>	Course syllabus Essay prompts Primary source exercise instructions and sample
<b>Documents</b>	
<b>View</b>	
<b>Watch</b>	Neil Halloran, "The Fallen of World War II" <a href="https://vimeo.com/128373915">https://vimeo.com/128373915</a>
<b>Assignment</b>	Email professor with any questions you have about course policies and structure

<b>Module 1</b> <b>Historical Thinking</b> <b>Week 2</b> August 31—September 4	
<b>Overview</b>	<p>This module introduces the historical thinking skills that will guide our work with primary sources over the course of the semester. Thinking like a historian is not an intuitive way to look at the world. But it is a set of skills that can be learned and mastered with practice. This module will begin to familiarize you with those skills and give you an opportunity to begin practicing them on your own.</p> <p>By the end of the module you will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• be able to define core primary source thinking skills: Sourcing, Close Reading, Corroboration, and Contextualization</li> <li>• recognize those skills in practice</li> <li>• be able to apply each historical thinking skill to a primary source on your own</li> <li>• understand how historians use concepts like Perspective, Hindsight, Agency, and Contingency in making arguments about the past</li> <li>• be able to identify Perspective, Hindsight, Agency, and Contingency in primary sources on your own</li> </ul>
<b>Read</b>	
<b>Documents</b>	1A: Cartoon, <i>Louseous Japonicas</i> (1945) 1B: Poster, “He Volunteered for Submarine Service” (1943) 1C: Poster, “Each Little Error” 1D: Poster, “Americans Will Always Fight for Liberty (1943) 1E: Poster, “Liberators” (1944)
<b>View</b>	Module 1 slideshows
<b>Watch</b>	
<b>Assignment</b>	Primary source exercise 1
<b>DUE:</b>	<b>Friday, September 4 at 5:00pm</b>

<b>Module 2</b> <b>The Road to War</b> <b>Week 3-4</b> September 7—September 18	
<b>Overview</b>	<p>This module explores events in the decades leading up to the outbreak of war in Europe in September 1939. It begins in the closing months of World War I and examines the Treaty of Versailles, the peace settlement that ended that conflict. It explores the way the German Nazi party blended the bitter defeat in World War I, and the racial pseudoscience that permeated the globe since the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, into a potent political narrative that shot them to power in Germany in the 1930s.</p> <p>This module also covers the events of the late 1930s that led directly to the war in Europe, including German rearmament, the “America First” neutrality movement, and the non-aggression pact signed by Germany and Russia.</p> <p>By the end of the module you will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• be able to identify key provisions in the Treaty of Versailles that planted the seeds of the Second World War</li> <li>• understand the lessons that different nations took from their experiences in the First World War</li> <li>• describe the pseudoscience of race that shaped thinking about global geopolitics in the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century</li> <li>• understand how the German Nazi party rose to power</li> </ul>
<b>Read</b>	Max Hastings, <i>Inferno: The World at War, 1939-1945</i> , xv-xx
<b>Documents</b>	2A: Georges Clemenceau on the Treaty of Versailles (1919) 2B: John Maynard Keynes on the German economy (1919) 2C: New York <i>Times</i> article (1922) 2D: Cartoon, “Transparent Dodge” (1921) 2E: Cartoon, “Cost of Victory” (1923) 2F: Cartoon, “(P)Reparations” (1932) 2G: Poster, Living Space (1930s)
<b>View</b>	Module 2 slideshows
<b>Watch</b>	Leni Riefenstahl, <i>Triumph of the Will</i> (1935), opening sequence <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MLy9Q5538wk">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MLy9Q5538wk</a>
<b>Assignment</b>	Primary source exercise 2
<b>DUE:</b>	<b>Friday, September 18 at 5:00pm</b>

**Module 3**

**The Early Years, 1939-1941**

**Week 5-7**

September 21—October 9

<b>Overview</b>	<p>This module explores the early years of the war, from the German invasion of Poland and the conquest of Western Europe to Hitler’s attack on the Soviet Union in 1941 and the Japanese attack on the naval base at Pearl Harbor. It examines the early tide of the war in Europe and the events that finally broke American resistance to intervention.</p> <p>By the end you will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• understand Hitler’s strategy for victory in World War II</li><li>• be able to identify the reasons behind Germany’s approach to the war in Europe</li><li>• understand the significance of Operation Barbarossa, the German invasion of the Soviet Union</li><li>• be able to summarize the arguments of the pro-neutrality movement in the United States</li></ul>
<b>Read</b>	<i>Inferno</i> , 3-223
<b>Documents</b>	3A: Adolf Hitler, speech before the Reichstag (1937), excerpt 3B: Winston Churchill, address to House of Commons (1940), excerpt 3C: Charles Lindbergh, radio address “Neutrality and War” (1939) 3D: Cartoon, “Hard Defense to Crack” (1939) 3E: Cartoon, “Rendezvous” (1939) 3F: Cartoon, “Someone is Taking Someone for a Walk” (1940) 3G: Franklin Roosevelt to Joint Session of Congress (1941)
<b>View</b>	Module 3 slideshows
<b>Watch</b>	Frank Capra, <i>Why We Fight: Prelude to War</i> (1942), <a href="https://youtu.be/wcAsIWfk_z4">https://youtu.be/wcAsIWfk_z4</a>
<b>Assignment</b>	Primary source exercise 3 <b>OR</b> Module 3 essay (American neutrality in WWII)
<b>DUE:</b>	<b>Friday, October 9, at 5:00pm</b>

<b>Module 4</b> <b>The Middle Years, 1942-1943</b> <b>Week 8-9</b> October 12—October 23	
<b>Overview</b>	<p>This module explores the middle years of the war, from the fighting in the Pacific between the United States and the Empire of Japan to the savage war on the Eastern front between Stalin’s Russia and Nazi Germany. It will also explore the war from the perspective of those away from the fighting—civilians on the home fronts and the millions of European Jews murdered by the Nazi regime.</p> <p>By the end you will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• be able to summarize the main belligerents’ policy and strategy goals in World War II</li> <li>• understand Stalin’s insistence on opening a second front in the war against Germany as soon as possible</li> <li>• understand the relationship between the fighting and civilian support at home, and the profound challenges different nations faced in maintaining civilian morale</li> </ul>
<b>Read</b>	<i>Inferno</i> , 224-454 Benjamin Schwarz, “Stalin’s Gift,” <i>The Atlantic</i> (2007)
<b>Documents</b>	4A: Adolf Hitler, address to workers of Berlin (1940) 4B: Josef Stalin, Order No. 227 (1942) 4C: Lt. Gen. J.J. DeWitt’s Letter of Transmissal (1943) 4D: William Hoffman Diary (1942) 4E: Isao Matsuo to parents (1944) 4F: Teruo Yamaguchi to father (1945) 4G: Cartoon, “Now for Some Teamwork, Joe” (1942) 4H: Minutes of the Wannsee Conference (1942)
<b>View</b>	Module 4 slideshows
<b>Watch</b>	Department Film Bulletin no. 181, “Automatic Weapons: American vs. German” (1945), <a href="https://youtu.be/Oyj-ZHXFKQI">https://youtu.be/Oyj-ZHXFKQI</a>
<b>Assignment</b>	Primary source exercise 4 <b>OR</b> Module 4 essay (Stalingrad editorials)
<b>DUE:</b>	<b>Friday, October 23 at 5:00pm</b>

<b>Module 5</b> <b>The Last Years, 1944-1945</b> <b>Week 10-12</b> October 26—November 13	
<b>Overview</b>	<p>This module explores the final years of the war in both Europe and the Pacific, as the Allied nations finally brought the war directly to the German homeland. It explores the final campaigns against the Wehrmacht on the Eastern Front and in Europe following the cross-channel attacks. It also examines the final months of the American war against Japan as it reached new heights of brutality.</p> <p>This module also considers the morality and strategic utility of using strategic airpower against civilian targets, both in Europe and against the Japanese Empire</p> <p>By the end you will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• be able to identify the major campaigns of the war’s final two years</li> <li>• be able to identify and critique the strategic and moral logic underpinning the use of strategic bombing during World War II</li> <li>• be able to summarize and critique different scholars’ arguments for the war’s outcome</li> </ul>
<b>Read</b>	<i>Inferno</i> , 455-629 S.L.A. Marshall, “First Wave at Omaha,” <i>The Atlantic</i> (1960)
<b>Documents</b>	5A: Winston Churchill, address to House of Commons (1943) 5B: Ernie Pyle, “The Death of Captain Waskow” (1944) 5C: Dwight Eisenhower, “Order of the Day” (1944) 5D: Langston Hughes, “Beaumont to Texas” (1945) 5E: Poster “I’ll Carry Mine Too” (1943)
<b>View</b>	Module 5 slideshows
<b>Watch</b>	Document: John Huston, PMF 5019, <i>Let There Be Light</i> (1946), <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lQPoYVKeQEs&amp;t">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lQPoYVKeQEs&amp;t</a>
<b>Assignment</b>	Primary source exercise 5 <b>OR</b> Module 5 Essay (Letters)
<b>DUE:</b>	<b>Friday, November 13 at 5:00pm</b>

<b>Module 6</b> <b>World War II &amp; Memory</b> <b>Week 13</b> November 16—November 20	
<b>Overview</b>	<p>This module explores the difference between “history” (the events that happened in the past) and “memory” (the deliberate choices that individuals and nation-states make about what to remember and emphasize about the past, and what to ignore or eliminate). “History and memory” is one of the most fascinating areas in scholars’ study of the past, and it is particularly fascinating in military history because war plays such a central role in so many nations’ understanding of themselves. Close attention to the differences between events of the past and the way different groups choose to remember, commemorate, or celebrate them opens a host of new insights into the way we understand the world.</p> <p>By the end you will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• be able to define the difference between “history” and “memory”</li> <li>• be able to apply historical thinking skills to monuments and memorials</li> <li>• be able to connect America’s “Good War” mythology surrounding World War II with specific choices about the conflict.</li> </ul>
<b>Read</b>	John Bodnar, “ <i>Saving Private Ryan</i> and Postwar Memory in America,” <i>American Historical Review</i> (2001)
<b>Documents</b>	6A: OWI Feature Report, <i>Casablanca</i> (1942) 6B: S.Res.257 (1993-1994)
<b>View</b>	Module 6 slideshows
<b>Watch</b>	War Department Official Film, Misc. 1317 “Decision” (1946), <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TVuqaEinlM">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TVuqaEinlM</a> <i>The Longest Day</i> (1962), Omaha Beach sequence <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cpWYxVM80Mw">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cpWYxVM80Mw</a> <i>Saving Private Ryan</i> (1997), Omaha Beach sequence <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X-bogN0V8RM">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X-bogN0V8RM</a>
<b>Assignment</b>	Primary source exercise 6 <b>OR</b> Module 6 essay ( <i>Time Magazine</i> ’s “Person of the War”)
<b>DUE:</b>	<b>Friday, November 20 at 5:00pm</b>

<b>Module 7</b>	
<b>The Roots of the Cold War</b>	
<b>Weeks 14-15</b>	
Date November 23—December 4	
<b>Overview</b>	<p>This module explores the world the war created. It explores the years after the end of hostilities, when the former wartime allies the United States and the Soviet Union became locked in a deep ideological struggle that divided the world between Soviet-style communism and western liberal democracy.</p> <p>By the end you will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• be able to explain the Cold War and the bipolar power dynamic left in the wake of World War II</li> <li>• understand how the different countries viewed the end of the Second World War and the world it created</li> </ul>
<b>Read</b>	<i>Inferno</i> , 630-651
<b>Documents</b>	<p>7A: Conversations among German nuclear scientists (1945)</p> <p>7B: Newsmag, “The Sun Is Down” (1945)</p> <p>7C: Cartoon, “Can He Block It?” (1947)</p> <p>7D: Cartoon, “Marshal Stalin Plan” (1949)</p>
<b>View</b>	Module 7 slideshows
<b>Watch</b>	<p>“Duck &amp; Cover” (1951)</p> <p><a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IKqXu-5jw60">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IKqXu-5jw60</a></p>
<b>Assignment</b>	Primary source exercise 7
<b>DUE:</b>	<b>Friday, December 4 at 5:00pm</b>

**FINALLY: A note on plagiarism and academic integrity.**

All of the work you submit as part of this course should be your own. There is no need to conduct outside research for any of the writing assignments. All can be answered using materials in the course text, the primary sources, and the course slideshows. Do not be tempted to use Google to find an answer to these prompts. They are specific to the course, and the answers you may turn up will not account for the specific material we are covering and the way we are covering it.

You can find information about Mason's honor code [here](#). It is useful to be familiar with Mason's academic integrity policies throughout your career. For the purposes of this course, we can keep things simple:

**Do your own work. Do not make use of outside help. Do not collaborate with friends or classmates.**

Follow those simple guidelines and you will have nothing to worry about. A quick tip: Stay on top of your assignments: Looming deadlines often lead students to make poor choices. Don't let procrastination put you in a place where you make a bad decision that has a permanent effect on your academic record.

The above rules are fairly straightforward, and the penalties for breaking them are simple, too:

**SUBMITTING WORK THAT IS NOT YOUR OWN WILL RESULT IN A FAILING GRADE FOR THE COURSE.**