

George Mason University
Department of History

History 387 003/History 389 005
The Second World War
Fall 2023

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Planetary Hall 206
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[BlackBoard site](#)

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.

Reading List

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

Primary Source packet (available on Bb)

Grading

Course performance will be determined by your participation in class, in-class midterm essays, and a final exam.

There will be two in-class midterm essay exams. The first will be on October 2 and the second on November 1. Only your higher score will count toward your final grade. The lower score will be dropped. If you are unable to attend one of the midterms, that is the score that will be dropped.

The final exam on December 11 is mandatory.

THERE ARE NO RESCHEDULED OR MAKE-UP EXAMS.

THERE IS NO EXTRA CREDIT.

The final grade will break down as follows:

Participation:	15%
Higher midterm exam:	35%
Lower midterm exam:	dropped
Final Exam:	50%

The grading scale is as follows:

A- 90-93; A 94-100

B- 80-83; B 84-86; B+ 87-89

C- 70-73; C 74-76; C+ 77-79

D 64-66; D+ 67-69

F 50

COURSE POLICIES:

A note on plagiarism. Each assignment completed as part of this course is bound by the University's Honor Code and its strict rules regarding plagiarism. Plagiarism entails presenting someone else's words, work, or ideas without proper acknowledgement, or borrowing the sequence of ideas, the arrangement of material, or the pattern of thought of someone else without proper acknowledgment. Whether the source is another historical work, an internet source, a classmate, or your roommate does not matter; failure to cite the source properly constitutes plagiarism, the most serious academic violation one can commit. Students found plagiarizing in this class will fail the course. These assignments are designed so that it is easier to simply write the essay than to cheat.

Classroom Behavior. Active participation in class discussions is a vital part of mastering this set of skills and information. (Individual participation is weighted as fifteen percent of the overall grade to reflect its critical importance.) In order to maximize opportunities for every student to participate constructively and to minimize distractions, a few simple guidelines will be observed:

- civil, respectful interactions among *all* class participants
- **NO ELECTRONIC DEVICES**—cell phones, smart phones, laptops, and so on. If it runs on electricity and it does not fulfill a medical requirement, switch it off for the duration of class.

Class Schedule and Readings

Introductions and historical thinking

- 21 August. **Introductions and expectations: What do historians do, exactly?**
- 23 August. **Thinking about the Second World War: What do we want to know?**
Neil Halloran, “The Fallen of World War II,”
film available at <https://vimeo.com/128373915>
Max Hastings, *Inferno: The World at War, 1939-1945*, xv-xx
- 28 August **Historical thinking: Analyzing sources**
Introductory primary sources (in module folder)
- 30 August. **Historical thinking: Interpreting sources**
Introductory primary sources (in module folder)
- 4 September. **NO CLASS—LABOR DAY HOLIDAY**

Module 1: The road to war

- 6 September. **The First World War and the roots of the Second**
Document A: Georges Clemenceau on the Treaty of Versailles (1919)
- 11 September. **Nazism and ideology**
Document B: John Maynard Keynes on the German economy (1919)
Document C: New York *Times* article (21 November 1922)
- 13 September. **1939**
Hastings, *Inferno*, 3-25;
Document D: Adolf Hitler, speech before the Reichstag (30 January, 1937), excerpt
- 18 September. **1940**
Inferno, 26-51;
Document E: Winston Churchill, speech to the House of Commons (18 June 1940), excerpt
- 20 September. **America in the interwar years**
Inferno, 52-76;
Document F: Charles Lindbergh radio address “Neutrality and War” (13 October 1939)
- 25 September. **1941**
Inferno, 77-101;
Document G: Franklin Roosevelt to a Joint Session of Congress (8 December 1941)
audio available at http://www.radiochemistry.org/history/video/fdr_infamy.html
- 27 September. **States mobilize**
Inferno, 102-136;
Document H: Adolf Hitler’s speech to the workers of Berlin (10 December 1940), excerpt
Document: Frank Capra, *Why We Fight: Prelude to War* (1942)
film available at https://youtu.be/wcAsIWfk_z4
- 2 October. **FIRST MIDTERM EXAM**

Module 2: The heart of the war

- 4 October. **The Eastern Front**
Inferno, 137-161
Document I: Josef Stalin, Order No. 227 (28 July 1942)
- 9 October. **NO CLASS—FALL BREAK—CLASS SHIFTS TO TUESDAY**
10 October. **Race and the Second World War**
Inferno, 162-179;
Document J: Office of War Information posters (1942-1944)
- 11 October. **1942**
Inferno, 180-197;
Document K: William Hoffman diary (1942), excerpt
- 16 October. **The war in the Pacific**
Inferno, 198-263;
Document L: Isao Matsuo to parents (28 October 1944)
Document M: Teruo Yamaguchi to father (June 1945)
- 18 October. **The Holocaust**
Inferno, 480-507;
Document N: Minutes of the Wannsee Conference (20 January 1942), excerpt
- 23 October. **History and memory: Hollywood’s Second World War**
Document O: Office of War Information, Motion Picture Bureau “Feature Report: *Casablanca*” (1942)
- 25 October. **1943**
Inferno, 264-315; 351-386; 414-426;
Document P: Winston Churchill, Speech to the House of Commons (11 February 1943), excerpt
Document Q: Ernie Pyle, “The Death of Captain Waskow” (8 January 1944)
- 30 October. **SECOND MIDTERM EXAM**

Module 3: The end of the war and the legacy of the conflict

- 1 November. **The soldiers’ experience in battle**
Inferno, 316-327
Document: War Department Film Bulletin no. 181, “Automatic Weapons: American vs. German” (1945)
film available at <https://youtu.be/Oyj-ZHXFKQI>
- 6 November. **The home fronts**
Inferno, 328-350
Document R: Office of War Information posters (1943-1944)
- 8 November. **1944**
Inferno, 427-454; 508-539;
Document S: Dwight D. Eisenhower, “Order of the Day” (1944)
- 13 November. **Civil rights in wartime**
Inferno, 387-413;
Document T: Langston Hughes, “Beaumont to Detroit” (1943)
Document U: Lt. Gen. J.L. DeWitt's letter of transmittal of his *Final Report; Japanese Evacuation from the West Coast 1942* (5 June 1943), excerpt

- 15 November. **The air war and the strategic bombing campaign**
Inferno, 455-479
Document V: Edward R. Murrow, radio broadcast (20 September 1940), excerpt
audio available at billdownscbs.blogspot.com/2015/09/1940-edward-r-murrow-from-london.html
- 20 November. **1945**
Inferno, 540-576;
Document W: United States Army Air Forces leaflet (August 1945)
- 27 November. **History and Memory: The Smithsonian *Enola Gay* exhibit**
Inferno, 611-629;
Document X: S.Res.257 — 103rd Congress (1993-1994)
- 29 November. **The Allied victory and the roots of the Cold War**
Inferno, 577-610; 630-651
Document Y: Surreptitiously taped conversations among German nuclear physicists at Farm
Hall (6-7 August 1945), excerpt

FINAL EXAM: MONDAY, DECEMBER 11, 1:30-3:30