HI 537
World War II
Causes, Course, Consequences

This advanced seminar explores World War II from its discrete causes in Asia and Europe through its major military campaigns to its global consequences. It includes discussion of economic, geopolitical, and moral consequences of the greatest war ever fought. We ask whether major decisions by individual leaders determined the grand strategic outcomes of the war, or whether material factors offer a better explanation of who won and lost and how they won or lost. While the course necessarily explores statecraft at the top levels of grand strategy and command decision-making, it is also concerned with experiences of battle by flesh and blood soldiers and with ‘home front’ conditions, including resistance to or collaboration with various occupation forces. It is decidedly international in approach: it does not take an Anglo-American centric view of the war, as is common. It explores in-depth the motives of the Axis powers, the strange policies of Imperial Japan, and especially the great German-Soviet war at the core of WWII, as well as other key events and actors in Italy, Africa, China & the Pacific. It is deeply concerned with the moral history of the war, from obliteration of combat rules to strategic bombing and naval blockades by the Western Allies, to the roots of Japanese war crimes, Soviet forced migrations, and the nature and practices of Nazi Rassenkampf (“race struggle”).

Required Readings

- Zeiler - Annihilation, 10 (Oxf), ISBN 9780199734733
- Story - Concise Historical Atlas of WWII, 06 (Oxf), ISBN 9780195182200
- Beevor - D-Day: The Battle for Normandy, 10 (Peng USA), ISBN 978-0143118183
- Sledge - With the Old Breed, 07 (Random), ISBN 9780891419198
- Grossman - A Writer at War, 07 (Random), ISBN 9780307275332

- Willy Peter Reese, A Stranger to Myself: The Inhumanity of War: Russia, 1941-1944

Note: This book is no longer in print. A limited number of copies are available on Amazon and other sites. I have purchased a clean copy to lend to those who need it, but please try to obtain one of your own. It is a truly amazing first-hand account of the Russian war by a German soldier, evocatively written and intense. You will never see war the same way again. Reese began it as a diary/set of notes at age 21, when he enlisted in the Wehrmacht in 1941. He was killed in 1944.

Administrative Information

Office hours: W 7:00-9:00 p.m. and Thur. 4:30-5:30 or after class, or by appointment: Room B-13, 725 Commonwealth Ave. Phone: (617) 353-1165  e-mail: cnolan@bu.edu

Grading: Attendance and participation in the seminar is required. Weighting is as follows:

- Participation: 25% Must be regular and active.
- Book review (5 pages) 25% Due: March 6
- Major research paper (15 pages) 50% Due: April 24

Graduate students are graded to a higher standard and write a 25-30-page paper. All students must submit a 1-2 page “work-in-progress” report on the research paper no later than March 27.
SCHEDULE

We approach World War II the way it unfolded: chronologically and geographically. I have reserved one or two later sessions for topical treatments based on developing interests of the class. Take this as a fairly tight, but not rigid, guide for advance readings.

Week 1: Origins of World War II

Zeiler - *Annihilation*, Introduction & Chapters 1-4

Week 2: War in the West: Democracies Defeated, 1939-1941

Zeiler - *Annihilation*, Chapters 5-8
*Online article:* “British Surrenders in 1940"

Week 3: Germany’s War: Barbarossa and barbarism, 1941

Zeiler - *Annihilation*, Chapter 9
Willy Peter Reese, *A Stranger to Myself*. Foreword and Preface

Week 4: Japan’s War: China and the Pacific

Zeiler - *Annihilation*, Chapters 10-11
*Online article:* “Race and War in the Pacific”

Week 5: Russia’s War: Moscow, Leningrad, Stalingrad, 1942-1943

Zeiler - *Annihilation*, Chapter 12
Willy Peter Reese, *A Stranger to Myself* pp.3-65
Grossman - *A Writer at War* Part II: pp.67-200

Week 6: War in the West: At Sea, in the Air, in the Mediterranean: 1942-1944

Zeiler - *Annihilation*, Chapters 13-14, 17
*Online article:* “Prisoners of War in World War II”

Week 7: Occupation and Genocide: 1942-1944

Willy Peter Reese, *A Stranger to Myself* pp.77-165.

Week 8: Turn of the Tide: January 1943-June 1944

Zeiler - *Annihilation*, Chapter 18

Week 9: Assault on Hitler’s “Fortress Europe,” June-December, 1944

Beevor, *D-Day* read the whole book
Zeiler - *Annihilation*, Chapters 19, 21

Week 10: The Beast’s Lair: Germany, 1945
Week 11: Defeating Japan, 1944-1945
Zeiler - Annihilation, Chapters 15-16, 20, 23, 25
Eugene Sledge, With the Old Breed: read the whole book

Week 12: What if the Axis had Won?
I will make a short presentation on Adolf Hitler’s victory plans, as well as those of Japan and Italy. We will discuss these at length, including revisiting the Shoah in an effort to situate it within larger German-Axis plans for fundamental “racial” and geopolitical reordering of the world.
Zeiler - Annihilation, Conclusion

Week 13: What did it all mean?
General discussion of the meaning of World War II, not as precursor to the Cold War, as is far too often done, but as the culmination (so far) of a much longer and more profound trend toward total war in the military, political, social, and economic history of the modern world.
Grossman - A Writer at War Part V: pp.344-350