

Course title:	Seduction and Terror: Hitler's Germany
Instructor:	Dr. Marcus Funck
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Track:	A-Track
Language of instruction:	English
Contact hours:	48 (6 per day)
ECTS-Credits:	6
Prerequisites:	Students should be able to speak and read English at the upper intermediate level (B2) or higher.

Course description

The 'thousand year Reich' that Hitler promised when he became Chancellor of Germany in January 1933 lasted but 12 years. During this time, however, Hitler and his Nazi Party came to dominate European and even world affairs, terrorizing vast numbers of Germans, launching a devastating war, and orchestrating the murder of more than five million Jews. Yet Hitler and the Nazi Party gained the active support and involvement of most Germans. How was this possible?

This class focuses on Hitler's Germany and it begins with the essential 19th century background. How did political anti-Semitism grow there? What shaped the social and political life? Central to this session will be a discussion of the broad political currents and the popular literature that Hitler and many of his supporters read and absorbed.

Crucial to understanding the lure of Hitler and the Nazi Party was Germany's experience in the First World War, a conflict that decimated a generation and destroyed Europe as it was known. Germany became a democratic state, but was torn by political divisions and dissatisfaction. In this climate of uncertainty and despair, Hitler and the Nazi Party grew from a small group on the radical fringe in Munich to a national force. How did this happen? Those traits of Hitler crucial to his success, particularly his charisma, will be defined and analyzed within the broader political context of Weimar political life.

In late January 1933 Hitler gained the long desired but elusive goal: he became chancellor of Germany, the leader of a coalition government. Much attention will be paid to how Hitler, his cabinet, and supporters were able to consolidate the control over the state and society within a matter of months. This came at the cost of political liberties, through the growing use of terror, oppression, and intimidation. Yet, Hitler gained supporters as he seemingly offered economic stability and a new unity to the German people. How the regime solidified its control over society and political life will be examined and discussed at length in this session.

A key element of Hitler's rule was the concentration camp system, what came to be a vast chain of prisons and centers of oppression and death. How this developed will be examined and analyzed.

Hitler's ambitions, the conquest of 'living space' in Eastern Europe and the annihilation of the Jews, motivated his foreign ambitions and led directly to World War II, the most destructive conflict in human history. A central element of the war was the Holocaust, the all-out program to destroy the Jews of Europe. The session will examine closely these developments, the nature of the war, how the Holocaust was implemented, and the role that terror played in sustaining Nazi rule. We will also discuss the measures taken against the handicapped, homosexuals, Sinti and Roma.

In Germany and later in occupied Europe opposition and resistance emerged and challenged Nazi rule. Opponents were motivated by a variety of reasons, some personal, some political, and these too will be discussed.

Lastly, the class will examine the end of the war, the so-called 'zero hour' in Germany, the destruction and collapse of Germany, and then how this nation has dealt with the legacy of Hitler and Nazi rule.

We will be visiting local museums, historical sites and locations that reveal the operations of Nazi rule. These visits are a key element of the class and the experience of studying in Berlin.

Student profile

We welcome students from all disciplines who are interested in gaining an insight into the operations and dynamics of Nazi rule in Germany, its attempt to annihilate the Jews and to dominate the continent.

Prerequisites

Interest and curiosity.

Course requirements

Attendance in class, the careful reading of the assigned course materials, participation in the field trips, the presentation and discussion of the material in class, one short paper (1.000 words), and completion of a final essay (3.000 words). Guidelines for the essay as well as suggested topics will be provided during the first session.

Required language skills

The language of instruction is English. Language proficiency on an advanced intermediate level (B2) is a prerequisite for participation. For orientation purposes, you can assess your language skills here (Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR): <https://rm.coe.int/CoERMPublicCommonSearchServices/DisplayDCTMContent?documentId=090000168045bb52>

Attendance

Each class consists of six teaching modules (45 minutes each). If you miss 8 modules (unexcused), your final course grade will drop by one grade. Coming more than 20 minutes late counts as one missed module (this also applies to excursion days). If you come late to class six times (up to 20 minutes) your entire course grade will also drop by one grade. If you miss 20 modules or more (unexcused), you will fail the class. Excused absences, such as those with medical documentation, do not count toward these totals.

Grading

Class participation	30%
One short paper	30%
Essay	40%

Readings

A digital course reader will be provided. This includes a recent monograph on Nazi Germany, a selection of articles offering the newest research and insights, excerpts from original documents (in translation), a weekly schedule of the readings and a series of questions as a guide through each of the texts.

Course schedule

Date	Program*
Monday, July 20, 2026	The radical Right in Germany before Hitler Session 1 Welcome, introduction & technicalities Session 2 The rise of political antisemitism and radical nationalism before 1914 Session 3 World War I, the revolution of 1918, and the radicalization of German politics
Thursday, July 23, 2026	The Nazi party coming to power Session 1 The Weimar Republic and the “crisis of classical modernity” Session 2 Hitler and the rise of the NSDAP, 1923-1933 Session 3 30 January 1933: Seizure or handover of power?
Monday, July 27, 2026	The “Nazi revolution” 1933/34 Session 1 Dismantling the constitution and creating the <i>Führerstaat</i> Session 2 Terror and violence: the destruction of the political opposition Session 3 <i>Gleichschaltung</i> : Bringing the people into line
Thursday, July 30, 2026	German Society under Nazism Session 1 The Volksgemeinschaft (community of people) and its limitations Session 2 Life and work under the Nazis: Labour, leisure and consumption Session 3 Culture between propaganda and entertainment

Monday, August 3, 2026	The Concentration Camp System Session 1 to 3 Field trip to the Sachsenhausen Concentration Camp Memorial Center Due date short paper
Thursday, August 6, 2026	Nazi Germany at War Session 1 In preparation for war: German foreign policy 1933-1939 Session 2 The Eastern front and Germany's war of extermination Session 3 The German occupation system Field trip to the Museum Berlin-Karlshorst
Monday, August 10, 2026	The Extermination of European Jewry Session 1 From discrimination to persecution: antisemitism as state policy Session 2 Ordinary men? Portraits of perpetrators Session 3 Life and death of the persecuted Field trip to the House of the Wannsee Conference Documentation Centre
Thursday, August 13, 2026	The Downfall: Germany 1944/45 Session 1 From Stalingrad to Berlin: stages of German military defeat since 1943 Session 2 20 Jul 1944. Opposing the regime: non-conformism and resistance Session 3 A society in defeat: cohesion and disintegration at the end of the war Due-date essay

*Field trips are subject to change depending on the availability of appointments and speakers. On field trip days, class hours may be adjusted.