

# HISTORY 120: EUROPE AND THE MODERN WORLD, 1815 TO THE PRESENT



A contemporary depiction of Giuseppe Garibaldi's entry into Naples, September 7, 1860

## Course Information

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Instructor:	Prof. Brandon Bloch ( <a href="mailto:bjbloch@wisc.edu">bjbloch@wisc.edu</a> )
Office Hours:	Mon. 1:30-4:30 p.m. or by appointment (Levy Hall 2219 or online)
Teaching Assistants:	TBD
TA Office Hours:	TBD
Semester:	Fall 2026
Lecture:	Mon./Wed./Fri. 9:55-10:45 a.m. (Levy Hall L1210)
Sections:	Wed. 11:00-11:50 a.m. (Levy Hall 1204) [FIG] Wed. 1:20-2:10 p.m. (Levy Hall 4202) Wed. 3:30-4:20 p.m. (Humanities 2101) Wed. 4:35-5:25 p.m. (Humanities 2251)

Thurs. 8:50-9:40 a.m. (Humanities 2221) [FIG]

Thurs. 9:55-10:45 a.m. (Humanities 2211)

Thurs. 12:05-12:55 p.m. (Humanities 2125)

Thurs. 1:20-2:10 p.m. (Humanities 2121)

Modality: In-person

Credits: 4 (section registration is required)

Requisites: None

Course Designations: Breadth – Either Humanities or Social Science

Level – Elementary

L&S Credit – Counts as Liberal Arts and Science credit in L&S

Canvas site: TBD

## Course Description

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This survey of modern European history stretches across more than two centuries of political and social transformation, from the aftermaths of the French Revolution through the current war in Ukraine. This period saw dramatic changes across politics, economy, society, and culture that are crucial for understanding the origins of the contemporary world: the explosive growth of capitalism; centralization of nation-states; rise of mass politics; recasting of gender and the family; proliferation of industrial warfare; and emergence of ideologies such as liberalism, conservatism, nationalism, socialism, communism, and fascism. Europe was deeply intertwined with the wider world throughout our period: first through colonialism and imperialism, and since the post-1945 era of decolonization, through ongoing ties with its former colonies. This course is necessarily also a world history.

The aim of the course is not, primarily, to teach you the “facts” of European history, though you will be introduced to key people, places, and events. Instead, we will focus on core themes to draw connections across time and space. Three sets of questions will guide us:

### **War and Revolution**

Why was modern European history so violent? What are the drivers of war and revolution, and how did Europeans seek—sometimes successfully, often not—to avoid them? Was war more a cause, or a result, of Europe’s social, political, and economic transformations? Can we draw parallels between the violence practiced by European states in the colonial world and on the European continent?

### **The Nation-State and National Identities**

How did Europe end up with 44 independent countries—more than any other continent proportional to its size? What is the relationship between the state (a political entity that exercises sovereign control over a territory) and the nation (a community that supposedly shares a common language, history, and culture)? When and why did Europeans identify themselves as members of nations? What were, or are, the alternatives to the nation-state?

### **Colonialism, Imperialism, and their Aftermaths**

Why did European states seek to conquer and rule vast territories in Asia and Africa? What was the impact of imperialism on European domestic politics? How did colonial entanglements shape Europeans' ideas about race, nationhood, and modernity? How did metropolitan Europeans come to terms—or fail to come to terms—with Europe's colonial past following post-1945 decolonization?

## Learning Outcomes

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This course is designed as an introduction to college-level history and does not assume any prior background. (History majors and certificate students are, of course, also welcome!) The premise is that history is not a static collection of facts, but an evolving process of debate and interpretation. Lectures and assignments are structured to introduce you to the skills of historical analysis: reading critically; interpreting primary sources; evaluating competing arguments; and presenting your own ideas in lucid and compelling prose. Writing assignments build in complexity over the semester, and lectures and sections will devote time to practicing the skills you will need to succeed in these assignments. The purpose of the course is as much to introduce you to central themes of modern European history as to help you become a better reader, writer, listener, communicator, and thinker.

By the end of the course, you will be able to:

- Describe major developments in the political and cultural history of Europe since 1815
- Discuss how historical thinking includes interpretation and analysis, not simply names, dates, and facts
- Assess the significance of war and revolution, nationalism and the nation-state, and colonialism and imperialism as forces of change in modern European history
- Defend a historical argument based on primary sources in clear and compelling prose

## Course Books

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Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness* (New York: Signet Classics, 2008). ISBN: 9780451531032.

This book is available for purchase at the University Book Store and is placed on reserve at College Library in Helen C. White Hall. You may choose to use either the print version of Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* or the edition available online through the library. You will also need to obtain a copy of one of the books excerpted in Weeks 8-11 for the second essay. These books are placed on reserve at College Library and are available for purchase online.

## Course Requirements

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\*Further details on all assignments, including expectations, guidelines, and rubrics, will be available on Canvas.

### 1. Top Hat (10%)

We will use the platform Top Hat (integrated into the course Canvas site) to facilitate an interactive classroom during lectures. Your Top Hat grade will be based on in-class polling and discussion questions. Top Hat questions will be graded complete/incomplete, and will serve as a record of your attendance at lecture. You will be permitted two excused absences from lecture (no need to provide a reason). If you need to miss lecture more than twice due to religious observance, illness, or family emergency, please fill out the Absence Notification form available on Canvas.

### 2. Section Participation (25%)

*Discussion Participation:* Weekly section discussions, where you will have the opportunity to apply concepts from lecture and try your hand at primary source analysis, are crucial to your learning in the course. You will have a free pass to miss one section meeting, for any reason. Additional absences will be excused due to illness, religious observance, or personal or family emergency. In general, you will be asked to submit makeup work to receive credit for additional missed sections. Unexcused absences will lower your section participation grade.

Section participation will be evaluated holistically according to the rubric on p. 16. You will receive a provisional participation grade midway through the semester, and you will have the opportunity to improve this grade during the second half of the course. Please

keep in mind that the quality of your contributions to section discussions is as important as the quantity, and that asking a well-informed question counts as participation. We recognize that participation may come more easily to some than others. We are happy to meet if you would like to discuss strategies for speaking in class.

*Reading Responses:* You will be asked to contribute eight brief reading responses (approximately 150-200 words each) to the Canvas discussion board. Discussion posts are due in lecture on Wednesday during weeks 2-5 and 8-11, and should address that week's reading. Reading questions will be available in advance. These posts will form the basis for section discussions, and will be graded credit/half-credit/no credit. You will receive full credit as long as you demonstrate concrete evidence of engagement with the reading (for instance, discussing a specific quotation or passage).

### 3. Two Primary Source Essays (35%)

The culminating writing assignments are two essays on primary sources. The first essay (4-5 double-spaced pages) will address one of the readings from Weeks 2-5 and is due on Oct. 13 at 11:59 p.m. For the second essay (5-6 double-spaced pages), you will choose one of the sources excerpted in Weeks 8-11 and read the full text. This essay is due on Nov. 25 at 11:59 p.m. Prompts for both essays will be distributed in advance, and we will spend time in class discussing the qualities of a strong history essay. The first essay counts for 15% of your course grade; the second essay counts for 20%.

A draft of the introductory paragraph and an outline for each essay is due in section the week before the essay due date. These assignments will be graded credit/no credit and count toward your section participation grade. You will peer review one another's introductions and outlines in section.

### 4. Midterm Exam (10%)

An in-class midterm exam will take place on Oct. 19. The exam will consist of two analyses of primary sources: one source discussed in class, and one source you haven't seen before (but that you'll be able to analyze using the historical contexts and interpretive skills introduced in class). You may bring one single-sided page of notes (typed or handwritten) to use during the exam.

## 5. Final Exam (20%)

A final exam will be held on Dec. 12 from 10:05 a.m.-12:05 p.m. (Location TBD). The exam will include two primary source analyses and one essay. The primary source analyses will cover material since the midterm, while the essay will ask you to draw connections across different parts of the course. You may bring one single-sided page of notes (typed or handwritten) to use during the exam.

### Grading:

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A: 93-100	AB: 88-92	B: 83-87	BC: 78-82
C: 70-77	D: 60-69	F: Below 60	

### Credit Hours:

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The credit standard for this 4-credit course is met by an expectation of a total of 180 hours of student engagement with the course’s learning activities (45 hours per credit, or 12 hours per week). This includes regularly scheduled meeting times, reading, writing, group work, individual consultations with the instructors, and other student work as described in the syllabus. Since lecture and section meetings count for 4 hours of direct instruction per week, you should plan to allot an average of 8 hours per week outside of class for course-related activities.

### Late Work:

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If you are unable to meet an assignment deadline, please let Prof. Bloch or your TA know as soon as possible and we can work out a plan for you to get caught up. We understand that life can be unpredictable, and that you may require an extension due to illness, religious observance, or personal or family emergency. In cases of unexcused late work, we reserve the right to apply a deduction to late assignments out of fairness to other members of the class. Typically, this deduction will be 3 points (out of 100) per day late.

Please note that we are not able to accept any written work for this course after Thurs. Dec. 17, the last day of the exam period. Incomplete grades can only be granted to students who are unable to complete the final exam due to “illness or other unusual and substantiated cause beyond their control.” For the university policy, see: <https://registrar.wisc.edu/incompletes/>.

## Academic Integrity

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The exchange of ideas is at the core of academic inquiry, and you are encouraged to discuss the course material with your classmates. However, all work that you submit for a grade should reflect your own thinking and writing. Passing off another person's words or ideas as your own is not only unfair to your peers; it is also theft of the original author's work, shutting out their voice from the academic conversation.

In my experience, plagiarism tends to result from either lack of knowledge about how to cite sources and/or trouble meeting a deadline. The course is designed to mitigate both of these factors. We will discuss how to cite your sources for each assignment; if you're unsure about a particular case, don't hesitate to ask. If you are worried about not finishing an assignment as a deadline approaches, please email Prof. Bloch or your TA! We can always work out solutions to help improve your organization, and it's much better to accept a late penalty (or turn in less than perfect work) than to cheat. If you plagiarize, then we have to address the case as a disciplinary infraction rather than a learning opportunity. Serious academic misconduct may be reported to the Office of Student Conduct and Community Standards.

## A Note on Generative AI...

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AI technologies can help you refine your ideas about a topic, discover new connections, and write with greater clarity. However, these tools frequently produce false information, and can easily become a substitute for the independent thinking that college is meant to foster. Guidelines on the permissible use of AI will be provided with each assignment.

In general, AI tools may be used in the following ways in History 120:

- Testing out ideas for your essays. For instance, you can provide an AI tool with a draft of your thesis statement and ask the program to generate possible objections or counter-examples in order to hone your argument. If you utilize AI in this capacity, you will be asked to submit a note with your final paper explaining how you used the AI tool—including the prompts you submitted—and whether you found it helpful.
- Checking your grammar and style with tools like Grammarly. At the same time, please be aware that we will not deduct points for spelling or grammatical errors (so long as your writing is understandable), and that using AI to revise your prose may detract from your original voice.
- Studying for the midterm and final exams. You are welcome to ask an AI tool clarifying questions about the course material, or use it to generate practice exam questions.

However, beware that the responses you receive may be incorrect or incomplete. You should always check information provided by AI against reliable sources (including course lectures and readings). You are ultimately responsible for the accuracy of information you submit in the essays and exams.

- If you choose to use AI for the purposes above, I strongly recommend using only tools that are licensed and approved by UW-Madison: [Google Gemini](#), [Google NotebookLM](#), and [Microsoft Copilot](#). University-licensed tools provide higher data security and privacy protection than public services and prevent your prompt data from training large language models. (These guidelines are adapted from the [Center for Teaching, Learning, and Mentoring](#).)

Please do not use AI tools for the following:

- Completing short assignments such as the reading responses or in-class writing exercises. These assignments are low-stakes opportunities to try out ideas and ask questions about the course. AI would make these assignments superfluous and undermine your ability to develop the analytical skills they are meant to foster.
- Drafting the two take-home essays. You are not permitted to directly import text generated by AI into your essays, or to submit a paper that is merely a revised version of a draft written by AI. I am implementing this policy for two reasons: a) AI does not function as a “source” (for reasons we will discuss in class); and b) the purpose of History 120 is to develop your skills as an independent writer (which will allow you to use AI more critically in the future). Submitting AI-generated text in either of the two essays will be regarded as a violation of academic integrity.
- Please do not enter assignment prompts directly into AI tools. This use of AI off-loads the thinking you are meant to do, and does not support your learning in the course. Instead, you can ask AI questions to test ideas you have already developed, or to obtain additional sources or information on topics covered in class (though AI-generated information should always be corroborated).

## Technology

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Please come to class with a device that can access the Internet in order to participate in the Top Hat exercises, as well as peer review exercises in section. Of course, we ask that you refrain from checking email and social media during class. If you face challenges accessing the technology necessary to succeed in this course, please reach out to Prof. Bloch.

## Accessibility

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We are committed to ensuring that all students receive equal access to the course materials and equitable opportunities to achieve the course learning goals. If you experience or anticipate any challenges related to the format, materials, or requirements of this course, please let Prof. Bloch know. I am happy to explore a range of options for removing barriers to your learning. If you have a disability, or think you might have a disability, you may also wish to work with the McBurney Disability Resource Center (<https://mcburney.wisc.edu/>). All communications regarding accessibility will remain confidential.

## A Note on Sources

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The course raises sensitive issues surrounding war, violence, racism, and imperialism, among others. It is crucial that we remain respectful of one another's viewpoints in class discussions. If you disagree with a classmate (and debate and disagreement are encouraged!), then be sure to direct your comments at the idea, not the person. It is often helpful to summarize a peer's idea before disagreeing, to ensure you have really understood it. Each section will develop a "group agreement" at the beginning of the semester, outlining shared discussion norms and expectations for the classroom community. Please do not hesitate to meet with Prof. Bloch or your TA if you have concerns about any aspect of the course content.

## Additional Resources

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UW-Madison and the History Department make available a wide range of resources to foster your academic success and personal wellbeing. It's a good idea to familiarize (or re-familiarize) yourself with the following:

### University Writing Center

<http://www.writing.wisc.edu/>

Individual consultations, workshops, and online guides on all aspects of academic writing.

### History Lab

<http://go.wisc.edu/hlab>

A resource center for undergraduates in history courses staffed by experienced graduate students, who are available to assist you with writing history papers. You can sign up online for an individual consultation at any stage of the writing process.

### Greater University Tutoring Service

<https://guts.wisc.edu/>

Study skills support and peer tutoring across academic subjects.

### McBurney Disability Resource Center

<https://mcburney.wisc.edu/>

Contact the McBurney Center if you have or think you may have a disability to discuss a range of possible accommodations.

### Mental Health Services

<https://www.uhs.wisc.edu/mental-health/>

### Resources on Sexual Assault and Domestic Violence

UW-Madison is committed to fostering a safe, productive learning environment and offers a variety of resources for students impacted by sexual assault, sexual harassment, dating violence, domestic violence, and stalking. The Office of Student Assistance and Support has compiled a comprehensive guide to resources on and off campus, including both confidential resources and options for reporting: <https://osas.wisc.edu/report-an-issue/sexual-assault-dating-and-domestic-violence/>.

# Course Schedule

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Reading responses are due by the beginning of lecture on Wednesdays, and will address the readings listed for that week. Assignment guidelines and rubrics will be posted on Canvas. All readings will be available on Canvas. See the “Modules” tab for week-by-week links.

## **Week 1: Introduction**

Wed. Sept. 2: Course Introduction: What is Modern Europe?

Fri. Sept. 4: Legacies of the Enlightenment and the French Revolution

Reading: [for Friday lecture]

- National Assembly, “Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen” (1789)
- Olympe de Gouges, “Declaration of the Rights of Women” (1791)

## **Week 2: Revolution and Reaction**

Mon. Sept. 7: Labor Day

Wed. Sept. 9: The Industrial Revolution

Fri. Sept. 11: Europe in 1815: The New Balance of Power

Reading:

- E. T. A. Hoffmann, “The Sandman” (1816)

Assignment:

- Reading response #1

## **Week 3: Limits of Restoration**

Mon. Sept. 14: The Liberal Challenge

Wed. Sept. 16: Karl Marx and the Origins of Communism

Fri. Sept. 18: The Working Classes

Reading:

- Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, “The Communist Manifesto” (1848)
- “Testimony Gathered by Ashley’s Mines Commission” (1842)

Assignment:

- Reading response #2

#### **Week 4: Making Nation-States**

Mon. Sept. 21: Revolutions of 1848 [*Yom Kippur*; lecture prerecorded]

Wed. Sept. 23: Nationalism and Republicanism after 1848: Italian Unification

Fri. Sept. 25: The Paradoxes of Liberal Nationalism: German Unification

#### Reading:

- Hedwig Dohm, “Women’s Right to Vote” (1876)
- Ernest Renan, “What is a Nation?” (1882)
- Begin reading *Heart of Darkness*

#### Assignment:

- Reading response #3

#### **Week 5: Race and Imperialism**

Mon. Sept. 28: Origins of the New Imperialism

Wed. Sept. 30: Colonial Genocide: The Congo Free State

Fri. Oct. 2: Race and Colonial Cultures

#### Reading:

- Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness* (1899)
- Bruno Hafala, “Oral History Regarding Events on the Maringa River in the Equateur District, ca. 1899-1901”

#### Assignment:

- Reading response #4

#### **Week 6: The Age of Questions**

Mon. Oct. 5: Socialism and the “Social Question”

Wed. Oct. 7: Zionism and the “Jewish Question”

Fri. Oct. 9: Feminism and the “Woman Question”

#### Assignment:

- Introduction and outline for Essay #2

#### **Week 7: End of the Old Order**

Mon. Oct. 12: Feminism and the “Woman Question”

Wed. Oct. 14: Review for Midterm Exam

Fri. Oct. 16: The July Crisis

Assignment:

- Essay #1 due Oct. 13 at 11:59 p.m.

**Week 8: The Great War**

Mon. Oct. 19: Midterm Exam

Wed. Oct. 21: The Great War: Trench Warfare, Occupations, and the Home Front

Fri. Oct. 23: The Bolshevik Revolution

Reading:

- Belá Zombory-Moldován, *The Burning of the World: A Memoir of 1914*, pp. 88-115

Assignment:

- Reading response #5

**Week 9: Interwar Politics and Culture**

Mon. Oct. 26: Making a Postwar Order

Wed. Oct. 28: Interwar Culture and the “New Woman”

Fri. Oct. 30: The Rise of Fascism and Nazism

Reading:

- Irmgard Keun, *The Artificial Silk Girl* (1932), pp. 1-54

Assignment:

- Reading response #6

**Week 10: Crises of Democracy**

Mon. Nov. 2: The Depression and the Unmaking of Democracy

Wed. Nov. 4: New Internationalisms and the Spanish Civil War

Fri. Nov. 6: The Nazi Empire

Reading:

- George Orwell, *Home to Catalonia* (1938), pp. 49-91

Assignment:

- Reading response #7

**Week 11: Total War and Genocide**

Mon. Nov. 9: Holocaust and Genocide in East and West

Wed. Nov. 11: The End of the War: Resistance, Liberation, and Reckonings

Fri. Nov. 13: Origins of the Cold War

Reading:

- Charlotte Delbo, “Arrivals, Departures” (1946)
- Ruth Kluger, *Still Alive: A Holocaust Girlhood Remembered* (2001), pp. 89-112

Assignment:

- Reading response #8

**Week 12: Divided Europe**

Mon. Nov. 16: Politics and Everyday Life under Communism

Wed. Nov. 18: Christian Democracy and Cold War Culture in Western Europe

Fri. Nov. 20: Decolonization and Colonial Legacies

Assignment:

- Introduction and outline for Essay #2

**Week 13: 1968 and its Aftermaths**

Mon. Nov. 23: “Revolutions” of 1968?

Wed. Nov. 25: The (Re)Birth of Human Rights [*lecture prerecorded*]

*Fri. Nov. 27: Thanksgiving Break*

Assignment:

- Essay #2 due Nov. 25 at 11:59 p.m.

*\*No sections Nov. 25-26*

**Week 14: A New European Order**

Mon. Nov. 30: Immigration and the New Right

Wed. Dec. 2: The Fall of Communism

Fri. Dec. 4: Making Post-Communist Europe

Reading:

- Pap Khouma, *I Was an Elephant Salesman: Adventures Between Dakar, Paris, and Milan* (1990), pp. 1-26, 92-138

**Week 15: Conclusion**

Mon. Dec. 7: Review for Final Exam

Wed. Dec. 9: Conclusions: Challenges for Europe Today

*\*No sections Dec. 9-10*

\*Final Exam: Sat. Dec. 12, 10:05 a.m.-12:05 p.m. (Location TBD)

**HISTORY 120 Discussion Participation Rubric**

A-range (90-100)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Regular attendance</li> <li>• Consistent, insightful contributions to both small group and full class discussions</li> <li>• Discussion contributions display thorough knowledge of the readings; engage with classmates’ comments; and utilize the tools of primary source analysis introduced in class</li> <li>• Abides by the group agreement established by the section in the first week of class</li> </ul>
B-range (80-89)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Regular attendance</li> <li>• Participates actively in small-group discussions, with more limited contributions to full-class discussions</li> <li>• Discussion contributions display knowledge of the readings</li> <li>• Abides by the group agreement established by the section in the first week of class</li> </ul>
C-range (70-79)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Regular attendance</li> <li>• Limited contributions to both small-group and full-class discussions</li> <li>• Demonstrates gaps in knowledge of the readings; offers mainly facts rather than interpretation</li> <li>• Contributes when called upon but not actively engaged</li> </ul>
D-range (60-69)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consistent unexcused absences</li> <li>• Demonstrates little or no knowledge of the readings</li> </ul>
F	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rarely or never attends section</li> <li>• No contributions to discussion</li> </ul>