



Survey of Western Civilization Since 1500AD
Prothro-Yeager College of Humanities and Social Sciences
HIST 1433
Summer 2026

Contact Information

Instructor: Dr. John Ashbrook
Office: 215 O'Donohoe Hall
Office Hours: via email only
E-mail: john.ashbrook@msutexas.edu
Phone: 434-386-1750

Course Description

Some scholars and journalists suggest that the French Revolution was the event that brought Europe kicking and screaming into the “modern” period. It is true that this revolution challenged autocratic, aristocratic rule, sparked the birth and development of modern nationalism, and allowed for “enlightened” thought to influence mass politics and society. However, the development of the modern state and statecraft preceded this event by approximately two centuries. We will explore the history of the modern state in this course and see how changing political, diplomatic, and economic processes shaped Europe from just before the Reformation in 1517 to the recent expansion of the European Union into Eastern and Central Europe and the Balkans in 2004/2007. This is a special introductory survey of European history from the years just prior to the Reformation to the end of the 20th century. **What makes this section unique is that we will be examining this history through the lens of German history in Berlin, Germany.**

Some of the more important questions we’ll cover include how and why the centralized state emerged and how concepts from the Enlightenment shaped its forms and structures. Why did nationalists strive to create nation-states to the detriment of multiethnic empires? Why was imperialism so important to European states? Were WWI, WWII, and the Holocaust products of modernity and enlightened thought, or were they deviations? Were communism and socialism movements to benefit the masses or used merely to dupe them into revolutionary activity? What is the role of the EU and its predecessors in modern European diplomacy and politics?

The course itself examines almost five centuries of history primarily through the lenses of imperialism and nationalism, two processes that significantly shaped Europe and the world and sparked much conflict. Furthermore, since history examines human change over time, we will focus much of our discussion on European revolutions and how they shaped the modern world. Beyond presenting a narrative of events, this course is meant to stimulate discussion of historical issues, while challenging preconceived notions or prejudices in an environment of respect for those with differing perspectives.

You will be expected to have read the textbook for the course in the weeks before we travel to Berlin. You will write very short summaries for your readings, which will help you understand the history of Europe through the prism of Germany and its peoples. In-country you will be expected to make constant connections to the German history presented in classes and in your experiences on various field trips with the readings you've done in your textbook. Your final project, due three weeks after you return to the United States, will be a paper in which you explore a topic that relates to some aspect of European History from 1500 to the present. We will determine the paper topic together in the days before we travel, or in the first week of the program in Berlin.

Student Engagement in the Material

Students will be held personally responsible for their own education. I am a harsh taskmaster and do not accept excuses that tend to be pervasive in today's society. You are adults, and with age comes responsibility for your own actions or lack thereof. Active student participation in learning (which includes careful reading of ALL assignments, the completion of ALL assignments in a timely manner) and adequate preparation is essential to meeting the learning goals of the course. A grade of A is a designation for superior work, and B for good work. If your work ethic, written work, and other efforts are merely satisfactory, you will EARN a C. The bare minimum earns a D.

Textbook

We will be using a single textbook for the course. It is an easy read, presenting a cohesive (but biased) narrative of European History. The book is affordable at the university bookstore, but I encourage you to get an electronic copy, if available, so you have it on an electronic device immediately after ordering. I will not accept "the book didn't come in" or similar excuses.

Text: Edward Berenson, *Europe in the Modern World: A New Narrative History* (2020): 9780190078874

Online Readings: As assigned

Readings MUST BE DONE by the first week of the Berlin program.

Academic Integrity, Misconduct Policy & Procedures

Academic Dishonesty: Cheating, collusion, and plagiarism (the act of using source material of other persons, either published or unpublished, without following the accepted techniques of crediting, or the submission for credit of work not the individual's own). Additional guidelines on procedures in these matters may be found in the Office of Student Conduct.

Notice: Understand the following – it applies to all assignments, including drafts of papers. If you in any instance "cut and paste" from any internet source without citing that source (plagiarism) or use unapproved internet sources, you will fail the assignment in question. Depending on the severity of the offense, the professor reserves the right to employ any and all

university sanctioned disciplinary actions, of which I will pursue prosecution to its fullest extent. I will drop you from the course and report the incident to Student Affairs and any other office as per university policy. This also applies to any work done with **ANY AI tools**. I run your assignments **through AI and plagiarism detectors**, so **DO NOT use AI** in your assignments.

Grading

In the past, I've used a number of different assignments to evaluate student learning and retention. This summer you will be evaluated on a final research project, short written assignments, including summaries, and on class participation.

Assignments	Percentage of grade
Final Research paper	40%
Participation and short written assignments (summaries)	60%

Final Grade	Percentage
A	90% plus
B	80 – 89.9%
C	70 – 79.9%
D	60 – 69.9%
F	Less than 60%

The final paper may be a new exercise to some in the class. It is meant to be a focused research paper on some aspect of European/German history. The topic should fall into the timeframe of the class (1500-present) and we will discuss a proper topic in the weeks before we travel. It should be about 1800 words in length and should draw on about 10 academic resources, one of which CANNOT be your textbook. It should be well-written, edited, and argue a thesis.

Early work is encouraged. It will be due, without exception, three weeks after our return date. No late work will be accepted.

Extra Credit

I do NOT offer extra credit for any reason. Don't ask.

Make Up Work/Tests

I will only allow make up work if there is a legitimate excuse. I have the sole discretion in determining whether or not an absence is excused. Other reasons must be documented in some acceptable form or fashion (proof).

Desire-to-Learn (D2L)

MSU Texas uses this platform for online instruction. Each student is expected to be familiar with it as it provides a primary source of communication between student and professor. Check D2L regularly for announcements, course material, and recorded lectures on specific topics. You can log into D2L through the MSU Homepage. If you experience difficulties, please contact the technicians listed for the program in the Distance Learning Office at MSU.

Online Computer Requirements

It is your responsibility to have (or have access to) a working computer for this course. *Assignments and tests are due by the due date, and personal computer technical difficulties will not be considered reason for the instructor to allow students extra time to submit assignments, tests, or discussion postings.* Your computer being down is not an excuse for missing a deadline! Your future boss will tell you the same thing when he is dismissing you.

E-mail: Note that e-mail correspondence is the most effective and convenient way in which to communicate with me. The professor/student relationship is professional by nature and, accordingly, your e-mail correspondence should be constructed professionally.

Withdrawals (Course Drop): The professor is NOT responsible for student withdrawals. The student is responsible for meeting all academic deadlines including withdrawal deadlines.

Services for Students with Disabilities: In accordance with Section 504 of the Federal Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, Midwestern State University endeavors to make reasonable accommodations to ensure equal opportunity for qualified persons with disabilities to participate in all educational, social, and recreational programs and activities. After notification of acceptance, students requiring accommodations should make application for such assistance through Disability Support Services, located in the Clark Student Center, Room 168, (940) 397-4140. Current documentation of a disability will be required in order to provide appropriate services, and each request will be individually reviewed. For more details, please go to Student Disability Office.

Grade Appeal Process: Students who wish to appeal a grade should consult the Midwestern State University Undergraduate Catalog.

Changes in the course syllabus, procedure, assignments, and schedule may be made at the discretion of the instructor. The videos for viewing are listed in the contents section on D2L by day.

Course Schedule

As this is a study abroad course, our schedule will be determined in Berlin itself. I will have a tentative schedule once our field trips have been booked. However, I expect you to have read the assigned chapters in the book and started your short summaries of the chapters assigned by the time we arrive or in the first couple of days in Berlin. You are responsible for reading and doing a **100-word summary** on each of the following chapters in the book:

Chapter 1

Chapter 2

Chapter 3

Chapter 4

Chapter 5

Chapter 6

Chapter 7

Chapter 8

Chapter 9

Chapter 10

Chapter 11

Chapter 12

Chapter 13

Chapter 14

Chapter 15

Epilogue