"The First World War . . . was nothing less than the greatest error of modern history."

"The Second World War is the largest single event in human history, fought across six of the world’s seven continents and all its oceans. It killed fifty million human beings, left hundreds of millions of others wounded in mind or body, and materially devastated much of the heartland of civilisation."

“Practical men, who believe themselves to be quite exempt from any intellectual influences, are usually the slaves of some defunct economist. Madmen in authority, who hear voices in the air, are distilling their frenzy from some academic scribbler of a few years back.”

— Keynes, *The General Theory of Employment, Interest and Money*

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**Winter Quarter 2021**

**MW 3:30-4:50pm, online**

**Robert J. Gordon, KGH 3341**

**rjg@northwestern.edu**

**web site:** google “Robert J. Gordon”

**Office Hours:** via Zoom, by appointment

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**The Purpose of Freshman Seminars.** By now you have already taken one of your two freshman seminars. The guidelines to instructors as provided by the WCAS Office of Studies list these major goals of Freshman Seminars: (1) to teach intellectual skills (reading critically, thinking logically, speaking effectively and persuasively), (2) to allow freshmen to become acquainted with faculty members more informally than is usually possible in large courses, (3) as the key writing experience for freshmen, to emphasize the rules on plagiarism and citations, (4) Freshman Seminars should never be lecture courses, (5) Freshman Seminars are never a substitute for introductory courses in a given field.
This Seminar: What it is and is not. The subject matter covers both history and economics, but it is in no way an introductory course to the history of Europe nor an introduction to Economics. Despite its title, "Did Economics Win the Two World Wars?" this seminar is as much about the political and military history of the two wars as about their economics.

Prequisites and Advance Knowledge. There are no prerequisites for this seminar. Nobody is expected to know anything in advance about European history or about economics. We are all here to learn together, from the readings, from class discussions, and from writing papers. While some people may know more than others at the beginning of the class, others may be better writers. It is the quality of your papers and classroom discussion that matters, not how much you know on the first day of class.

The two world wars were the pivotal events of the twentieth century. These topics cover a substantial period of years, relate to many countries, and involve topics upon which thousands of books have been written. Our goal is to read enough general historical commentary to comprehend the main events and the issues that are subject to debate, and to develop critical skills by pulling apart the conflicting arguments, discussing them in class, and writing papers about them. This course is about the big issues; it is not about dates or facts.

Reading

There are two sources of reading. These are (1) two required books that you must purchase, and (2) selected items on library electronic "Course Reserve" accessed through Canvas.

There are two required purchase books. (1) Richard Overy, Why the Allies Won, Norton paperback, 1995 and (2) Ian Kershaw, Fateful Choices: Ten Decisions that Changed the World, 1940-41. Penguin, 2007. These books are about World War II and are used only in the second half of the course. Please note: Because these books are widely available new or used on the internet, they are not stocked by the Norris or Beck’s bookstores. You are responsible for obtaining them on your own from any web source you prefer. Be sure to have both books in hand by Monday, February 1.

Except for these two books, the NU library provides all of the required reading
material online through a Canvas link to electronic library resources (details below about how to access). You will be able to read all of the course readings from your own computer or any computer on campus.

Beyond the articles and book chapters listed below on the reading list, additional optional books are available in the library to help you in writing your second and third papers. A list of books that might be helpful in getting you started on your research for these papers is contained in the last few pages of this syllabus. You will be able to write your first paper entirely from Canvas electronic course reserves.

**Writing**

There are no quizzes or exams in this Seminar. Your grade will depend 70 percent on the quality of your written work, and 30 percent on your class participation. There will be three writing assignments, two short papers of 4 or 5 pages, and one longer paper due at the end of the quarter of more substantial length, roughly 12 to 15 pages. There will be no choice in the topic of the first paper, but a choice of two topics on the second short paper. There will be unlimited latitude for choice of topic for the longer paper, as long as it has something to do with World War II.

For the first two papers, we will use a technique called "peer editing" which is encouraged by WCAS. Pairs of students will exchange the first draft of a paper by e-mail the night before the first draft is due; each pair of students will bring a print-out of both papers to class with comments. Students will exchange comments in the last 15 minutes of the designated class using the “breakout room” feature of Zoom. Then the final version of the paper will be turned in for a grade to me via Canvas prior to the next class.

WCAS awards prizes for the four best papers written in Freshman Seminars during this academic year. Winning such a prize would look very good on your future resume and in any graduate school application. I encourage you to do your best, and I will nominate the two best papers submitted during the quarter. Four of my students have won the freshman writing prize in the past, including one in Winter 2019, so there is ample precedent for thinking that you could also win.

The class schedule lists specified deadlines for submission of final drafts of papers. You submit your paper via Canvas by midnight on the specified date. The
“peer editing” system automatically creates an incentive for you to have your first draft ready several days before the final draft is due.

Every paper must have a title page with the paper’s title and your name, and pages must be numbered, starting with the first page of text as “Page 1”. You can insert page numbers by themselves or embed page numbers in a header.

Regardless of what program you use to write your paper, it must be submitted in MS Word format (.doc or .docx), since that is the program that I use to grade papers. To turn in a paper, simply upload it on Canvas under the “Assignments” tab PAPER #1 (or #2 or #3). Upload your paper as a .doc or .docx file and use the filename Lastname_Firstname_Paper #1 (or #2 or #3).

The Writing Place. When working on writing assignments for this class, I encourage you to visit the Writing Place in the main library. The juniors and seniors who staff the WP can provide you with assistance and feedback for any part of the writing process. They will work with you to brainstorm ideas, organize or outline an essay, clarify your argument, use proper style to document your sources, and refine grammar and style. While walk-ins are possible if there is space, it is better to make an appointment in advance at www.writing.northwestern.edu.

Class Discussion

A stated above, classroom discussion counts for 30 percent of your grade. Discussion, after all, is what makes this freshman seminar into a seminar and not a lecture course. Keep your video on throughout the seminar so that everyone can see you when you speak. Attendance is required at every class. If you have a legitimate excuse for missing a class, especially any medical or health problem, send me an e-mail to let me know in advance of the class you must miss. Unexcused absences will reduce your score on classroom participation.

The focus of class discussion will be on pre-assigned discussion questions that will be distributed one week in advance of the date when they will be discussed. What does the grade for classroom participation involve? You want to emerge from your freshman year not only as a good writer, but as an effective participant in a group meeting, a role that you will play many times in future life, starting in college activities.
Effective classroom participation means learning to speak confidently, concisely and persuasively. I will be looking for comments, interruptions, and questions by all students. The more you raise your hand to say something relevant, the better. When you want to say something, just raise your hand so that I will see you on the Zoom display. Keep your Zoom audio unmuted so that you can participate in back-and-forth discussion without any need to reach for the unmute button.

Your grade in the course will be lower than your grade on the papers if you are silent during the class sessions. What if you have nothing to say? EASY! Just ask questions to those students who are speaking and to me. “Why did Mr. A do Action B?” “What actually happened after event A that caused event B?”

Preparing for discussion. To be an effective contributor to the discussion, it is imperative that you complete the reading assignments prior to the class where they will be discussed. Keep the discussion questions in hand when doing the assigned reading, and take notes as you develop your answers to the questions. That way you can have your notes nearby during the in-class Zoom discussion.

Contact

If you have questions or comments about any aspect of the course, send me an e-mail and if your question is of general interest, I will forward your question and my answer to the other students. If you have a personal problem or question, make that clear in your e-mail and I will of course treat it as confidential. The easiest way to talk to me is just to remain in the Zoom session after the other students leave, or make an appointment to have a separate Zoom discussion with me. Note that I do not set aside a particular time slot for office hours, as that time may not be convenient for some students. Also, having a preset 60 or 90 minute time slot for office hours is likely to result for me in an empty Zoom window much of the time. Far better to have office hours by appointment to suit your schedule and mine.
AVAILABLE READING BY TOPIC

Notes: each item is numbered by topic and item. “WX” means that this item is available through online Course Reserve and is listed under week “X”, e.g., “W1” for “week 1”.

To find electronic reserve items grouped by week, as in “W1” = “week 1”, go to this course in Canvas, click on the left tab “Course Reserves.” This will give an overall list of all the items on course reserve (many of which are not required reading). Under the heading called “TAG CLOUD” above the highlighted list of readings, click on “Week 1”. This will give you the list of items designated by “W1” on the list of readings below. To the left of the item title you will see an underlined “View Item.” The item will then download -- scroll below the copyright page and your item will be there, ready to read by scrolling down.

(*) indicates that all students are expected to read this item. (+) indicates that the reading is not required reading by every student. Instead, starting with readings in weeks 3 and 4, students are given an option of alternative paper topics and only need to read the items related to their chosen paper topic. The selection of the (*) vs. the (+) items is guided by a desire to keep your reading down to roughly four book chapters per week. The items to be read by students doing a particular topic are viewable on Course Reserve in groups such as “Week 5 for Some Students.” On the syllabus below these are abbreviated W5fSS.

1. Overview of the Century


Excerpts Ch. 1, "By Way of Introduction," pp. 3-10; pp. 25-30.

2. Causes and Consequences of World War I

*A. "Attempted Suicide," *The Economist*, December 31, 1999, pp. 31-32 (W2)


*C. "Why Germany made it global," *Economist*, May 12, 2001. (W2)


3. The Role of Economics in World War I and its Aftermath

4. Economic and Political Aftermath of World War I and the Origins of World War II


+B.* Ferguson, Chapter 14, “How Not to Pay for the War.” (W5)


5. World War II: Strategic Dilemmas and Why the Allies Won (Military Issues)

*A.* Richard Overy, *Why the Allies Won*, Norton, 1995, Chapters 1 and 10 (Required for purchase)


UK, pp. 20-53.
Germany, pp. 54-71.
USSR, pp. 263-97.
US, pp. 298-319.
Japan, pp. 331-74 and pp. 360-66.

+C. Students should also read the chapters from Keegan’s *World War II* on the same two countries they have chosen from Kershaw. (W7)

Ch. 6, Hitler’s Strategic Dilemma, pp. 127-41
Ch. 12, Tojo’s Strategic Dilemma, pp. 240-50
Ch. 17, Churchill’s Strategic Dilemma, pp. 310-19
Ch. 24, Stalin’s Strategic Dilemma, pp. 450-57
Ch. 29, Roosevelt’s Strategic Dilemma, pp. 536-45.

6. The Role of Economics in World War II

*A.* Overy, Chapter 6 (required purchase).


*D.* Yergin, *The Prize*, Chapter 16, "Japan’s Road to War," 17 "Germany’s Formula for War," 18 "Japan’s Achilles’ Heel," 19 "The Allies’ War." (W8fSS)


Other Sources, Useful for Papers (All of these books are in the library abut none of them is required. Consider them as a helpful resource if and when you need any of them)


Joseph E. Persico, *Roosevelt’s Secret War: FDR and World War II Espionage*, Random


Ian W. Toll, *Pacific Crucible*, Norton, 2011. *(This is about the first six months of the Pacific war in 1941-42).*


**ECONOMICS 101-6-20**  
**LIST OF TOPICS AND ASSIGNMENTS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Day</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Topic</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>M</td>
<td>11 Jan</td>
<td>Student Introductions, Course Introduction</td>
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<tr>
<td>W</td>
<td>13 Jan</td>
<td>Role of the Wars in the Century; World in 1901</td>
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<tr>
<td>M</td>
<td>18 Jan</td>
<td><strong>NO CLASS: Martin Luther King, Jr., Birthday</strong></td>
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<td>W</td>
<td>20 Jan</td>
<td>Causes of World War I</td>
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<td>M</td>
<td>25 Jan</td>
<td>More on Causes of World War I</td>
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<td>W</td>
<td>27 Jan</td>
<td>First drafts Paper #1 &quot;peer editing&quot;; Debate Causes of World War I</td>
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<tr>
<td>M</td>
<td>01 Feb</td>
<td><strong>Final drafts Paper #1 due; Economic Issues of WWI</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>W</td>
<td>03 Feb</td>
<td>Economic Issues (Discussion #2)</td>
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<td>M</td>
<td>08 Feb</td>
<td>Treaty of Versailles and its Aftermath</td>
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<td>W</td>
<td>10 Feb</td>
<td>Major events of the interwar period</td>
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<tr>
<td>M</td>
<td>15 Feb</td>
<td>First drafts Paper #2 “peer editing”; More on major events of the interwar period</td>
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<tr>
<td>W</td>
<td>17 Feb</td>
<td><strong>Final drafts Paper #2 due; What Happened in WWII</strong></td>
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<td>M</td>
<td>22 Feb</td>
<td>What Happened in WWII (student presentations)</td>
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<td>W</td>
<td>24 Feb</td>
<td>Strategic Choices in WWII</td>
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<td>M</td>
<td>01 Mar</td>
<td>Strategic Choices in WWII (Disc #2)</td>
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<tr>
<td>W</td>
<td>03 Feb</td>
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<td>08 Mar</td>
<td>Economic Issues of WWII (Disc #2)</td>
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<td>W</td>
<td>10 Mar</td>
<td>Last Class: Watch WWII Videos</td>
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<td>F</td>
<td>19 Mar</td>
<td><strong>Paper #3 due by 4pm, no extensions</strong></td>
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