

FU/BEST Program

Name: Dr. Lauren van Vuuren

Email address: fubest@fu-berlin.de

Course title: Rebels, Radicals, Revolutionaries: Resistance and Protest in Post-War Europe 1953 - 1989

Course number: FU-BEST 3

Language of instruction: English

Contact hours: 45

ECTS-Credits: 6 **U.S. semester credits:** 3

Course description

In this course we examine the emergence of mainly youth-led resistance and protest movements in post-World War II Europe on both sides of the Iron Curtain, and attempt to understand their origins, their meaning and their effect on the societies in which they occurred.

American counterculture in the 1960s is often associated with rock'n'roll music, drug-taking, 'dropping out' and the Anti-Vietnam protest movement. In Europe the associations are more complex and include countercultures in places like West Germany and Italy that are remembered for planting bombs and joining underground terror cells in the name of the New Left, or more extreme iterations of the New Left. On the other side of the Iron Curtain, in places like Hungary, East Germany, Czechoslovakia and the Soviet Union, anti-government protesters faced a very different, more dangerous existential struggle against authoritarian regimes that utilised torture and detention without trial to mute or prevent social uprisings.

In this course we account for the nature and intensity of post-war European protest movements by examining the historical context of the traumatic impact of recently defeated fascism on the continent, and the division of Europe into spheres of interest reflecting the Cold War world. We examine the post-war socio-economic developments that led to the massive expansion of higher education in Western Europe, promoting a generational divide which saw a radicalized younger generation turn on their parents and other members of the older (Nazi) generation or the so called system, sometimes in rage and violence, as in the examples of the Red Army Faction in Germany and the Red Brigades in Italy. We compare this to examples in Eastern Europe, where resistance movements against Communist regimes, such as in Hungary, Czechoslovakia and East Germany, were met with deadly force and violent oppression.

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The course keeps as its particular focus East Germany (GDR) and West Germany (FRG), but we will also encounter the student-led uprisings against Sovietized Communism in Hungary in 1956 and during the 1968 'Prague Spring', as well as the curious case of the 'Soviet Hippies'. Throughout the course, the city of Berlin will serve as a backdrop: as a place of often very radical anti-government movements in West Berlin, compared with the muted and hidden resistance to authority over the Berlin Wall in East Berlin. We will also examine how 'resistance' in Western Europe often meant solidarity with anti-colonial movements in the Middle East, Africa and South America. Last but not least, we will also discuss the gestation and rise, within these larger movements, of political parties such as the Green Party in Germany.

Some of the major questions in this course will be: how did the concept of 'resistance' and 'rebellion' differ between Western Europe and Eastern Bloc countries? How did dramatic changes after World War II in education, technology and popular culture inspire young people to question authority and choreograph that questioning into mass movements? What were the terms and concepts (the language, the writers and the thinkers) that they utilised to justify their struggle? How did these movements become violent? When were they productive and inspiring, when did they career into nihilism and destruction? What were, if any, the long-term effects on their societies and political institutions? And finally, in our current world of enormous economic inequality and environmental destruction, what can we learn from the radicals and resisters of the second half of the twentieth century in Europe, about the potential for productive protest and resistance today?

As source materials we will read historical accounts and analyses, contemporary sources such as communiqués and newspaper articles, watch films, and go on outings in Berlin that will take us to the scenes of some of the most dramatic confrontations of this era. Being at Freie Universität is a good start – it was at this university that some of the most radical student activism of the 1960s occurred.

Student profile

Second-semester sophomore or above

Prerequisites

None

Learning objectives

This is a history course first and foremost, and so students will be expected to grasp the facts of these extraordinary stories of idealism and violence, and to understand the historical context of Europe after World War II that generated particular sets of challenges and responses from young people in a rapidly changing world. You will gain a better understanding of the Cold War world that created the fault lines still effecting the geo-politics of our world today. You will also be able to situate the explosion of 'youth culture' embodied by hippies and rock'n'roll in a broader global context, and to identify the far-ranging effects of this social revolution beyond their enduringly influential pop cultural manifestations. In your assignments, you will be invited to utilise your own training, for example in economics or philosophy or gender studies, to

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analyse and assess themes in the course that you are inspired to work on, including situating/evaluating these movements in relation to major movements today, such as the Environmental Movement and the Black Lives Matter Movement.

Course Requirements

Active Participation: 15%
 Independent Project Report: 15%
 Midterm exam: 25%
 Term Paper: 35%
 Final Presentation: 10%

Literature

Digitalized readings posted on the online learning platform Blackboard.

Course schedule

Sessions	Topics, Readings, etc.
Session 1	<p>Topic: Post-War Western Europe and the Demographic Explosion</p> <p>Reading:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Eric Hobsbawm, <i>Age of Extremes</i> (Abacus, 1995), pp. 288-300.
Session 2	<p>Topic: Facing the Past in East and West Germany: coming to terms with the Holocaust and Nazism (or not)</p> <p>Reading:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Herf, Jeffrey, <i>Divided Memory. The Nazi Past in the Two Germanys</i> (Harvard University Press, 1997), selected readings.
Session 3	<p>Topic: Student Politics and the Rise of the Extra Parliamentary Opposition (APO) in West Germany.</p> <p>Reading:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tony Judt, <i>Postwar: A History of Europe since 1945</i> (Vintage Books, 2010), pp. 401-407. Michael A. Schmidtke, "Cultural Revolution or Cultural Shock? Student Radicalism and 1968 in Germany." <i>South Central Review</i>, vol. 16/17, 1999, pp. 77-89.

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<p>Session 4</p>	<p>Topic: West Berlin: the Death of Benno Ohnesorg and the Days of Infamy: 1967-1969</p> <p>Reading:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Richard L. Merritt, “The Student Protest Movement in West Berlin.” <i>Comparative Politics</i>, vol. 1, no. 4, 1969, pp. 516-533. • Dirk Kurbjuweit, Sven Röbel, Michael Sontheimer, Peter Wensierksi, <i>Der Spiegel Online</i>, 20.05.2009, ‘The Truth about the Gunshot that Changed Germany’.
<p>Session 5</p>	<p>Topic: Formation of the RAF (Baader-Meinhof Gang): Key figures and moments</p> <p>Readings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • J. Smith and André Moncourt, <i>The Red Army Faction: A Documentary History</i> (Kerspledeb, 2009) pp. 2-44. • Colvin, Sarah. “The Personal Is Political (1966–70): From Feminism to a Language for the Revolution.” <i>Ulrike Meinhof and West German Terrorism: Language, Violence, and Identity</i>, vol. 49, Boydell & Brewer, 2009, pp. 50-78. • Selections of Ulrike Meinhof’s communiques whilst living underground as a member of the RAF
<p>Session 6</p>	<p>Midterm Exam</p>
<p>Session 7</p>	<p>Topic: Extended Classroom: ‘Baader-Meinhof Tour’ of Berlin with Jean-Baptiste Schöneberger</p> <p>Reading:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Karrin Hanshew, “‘Sympathy for the Devil?’ The West German Left and the Challenge of Terrorism.” <i>Contemporary European History</i>, vol. 21, no. 4, 2012, pp. 511-532.
<p>Session 8</p>	<p>Topic: Resistance in Eastern Europe: the Hungarian Uprising of 1956 and the Prague Spring of 1968</p> <p>Reading:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • William A. Pelz, ‘From the Berlin Wall to the Prague Spring: A New Generation of Europeans’, <i>The People’s History of Modern Europe</i> (Pluto Press, 2016), pp. 183-196.

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Milan Svec, "The Prague Spring: 20 Years Later." <i>Foreign Affairs</i>, vol. 66, no. 5, 1988, pp. 981-1001.
Session 9	<p>Topic: Dissent in East Germany: Writers/singers/activists/prisoners of conscience</p> <p>Reading:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Timothy S. Brown, "'1968' East and West: Divided Germany as a Case Study in Transnational History." <i>The American Historical Review</i>, vol. 114, no. 1, 2009, pp. 69-96. Celia Donert, "'Since Makarenko the Time for Experiments Has Passed': Peace, Gender, and Human Rights in East Berlin during the 1980s." <i>Making Sense of Dictatorship: Domination and Everyday Life in East Central Europe after 1945</i>, edited by Celia Donert et al., Central European University Press, 2022, pp. 153-76.
Session 10	<p>Topic: Soviet Hippies: A Lesser Known Story of Quiet Dissent</p> <p>Guest Lecturer: Prof. Juliane Fürst, Universität Potsdam</p> <p>Reading:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Juliane Fürst, "Love, Peace and Rock'n'Roll on Gorky Street: The 'Emotional Style' of the Soviet Hippie Community." <i>Contemporary European History</i>, vol. 23, no. 4, 2014, pp. 565-587.
Session 11	<p>Topic: Lust and Sound in West Berlin: the waning of radicalism and the rise of nihilism: 1977-1989</p> <p>Reading:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Belinda Davis, "The City as Theater of Protest: West Berlin and West Germany, 1962-1983." <i>The Spaces of the Modern City: Imaginaries, Politics, and Everyday Life</i>, edited by Gyan Prakash and Kevin M. Kruse, vol. 2, Princeton University Press, 2008, pp. 247-274. Ely, John. "Green Politics and the Transformation of the Left in Germany." <i>New German Critique</i>, no. 72, 1997, pp. 177-92. <p>Film: B-Movie: Lust and Sound in West Berlin (2014)</p>

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Session 12	Final Presentations
Session 13	Final Presentations Final questions and debates