

Divided Germany and the Cold War, 1945-1990
History 423 / Spring 2026

Cleft in two by the Cold War, postwar Germany provides an outstanding vantage-point for studying the clash between capitalism and communism. The American occupation, with its mission to “de-Nazify, de-militarize, de-mocratize, and de-cartelize” the Germans, laid the groundwork for a dazzling economic recovery in the western zones of the country. The Soviet occupation of eastern Germany produced a mirror image of the Stalinist system, with a tightly controlled economy and constant surveillance of the citizenry. East and West Germany rose to become model members of their respective alliances, the Warsaw Pact and NATO; each advertised itself as “the *good* Germany.” The shadow of the Holocaust lingered over both states, however, and we’ll examine how each society sought to suppress or atone for the memory of Nazism.

Course Objectives (Learning Outcomes)

Aside from conveying an understanding of the course material, this reading seminar is designed to:

- improve students’ ability to communicate their ideas in a classroom setting
- enhance students’ skills in analyzing historical scholarship critically
- help students synthesize material into well-argued essays
- guide students in a scholarly evaluation of primary source material

Course requirements

Participation (10% of course grade). This is a reading-intensive course, with a substantial emphasis on classroom discussions. The occasional reading quiz may also factor into the participation grade.

First paper (20% of course grade). This five-page paper examines the nature of the Cold War competition in Germany. Due Wednesday, Feb. 11 at the end of the day.

Second paper (20% of course grade). This five-page paper will examine West German social movements and the lingering effects of memory politics. Due Thursday, March 26 at the end of the day.

Third paper (20% of course grade). This five-page paper concerns East Germany and the process of unification. Due Thursday, April 23 at the end of the day.

Primary source exercise (30% of course grade). You will choose a set of primary sources and work up an original analysis of 2,500 words (approximately 9-10 double-spaced pages). Due Friday, May 6 at 5 pm.

Course Readings

The following paperbacks are required for this course and available from Follett’s or the University Bookstore. In case you wish to search for these items from an on-line retailer, be sure to make use of the ISBN numbers below to ensure that you wind up with the right edition.

Andrew Port, *Germany* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2025). ISBN-13 (paper): 978-1-5095-4667-1

Nora Krug, *Belonging: A German Reckons with History and Home* (New York: Scribner, 2019). ISBN-13 (paperback): 978-1-476-79663-5.

Otherwise, a substantial proportion of our course reading will derive from articles and book chapters posted to Brightspace. Please note: all reading assignments should be considered required course material!

Course Policies

Attendance is essential. You are allowed six unexcused absences; after that, each absence will be counted against your participation grade. It is not my job to “approve” absences one way or another, but if you expect to be representing the university in an official capacity (sports, band, etc.), please let me know in advance.

Common courtesy suggests that you should arrive on time. If you must leave early, please inform us ahead of time and then raise your hand at the appropriate time. A classroom discussion is not the same thing as a television viewing! Your coming and going may represent a significant distraction.

Contemporary students are tempted by all kinds of electronic distractions that inhibit their ability to learn effectively in class. I am going to ask that you refrain from using any electronic devices during class: no laptops, no tablets, and no phones will be permitted during class. This is your opportunity to perfect the art of note-taking by hand!

Academic integrity: The assignments in this course require you to formulate complex thoughts in your own words. Attempts to pass off another’s words as your own – be it on an exam or in your primary source exercise – will carry harsh penalties. Plagiarized papers will earn a “zero” for the assignment and may lead to further consequences, including notification of the Dean of Students Office. The “University Regulations” handbook contains further information on dishonesty. Individuals are encouraged to alert university officials to potential breaches of this value by either emailing integrity@purdue.edu or by calling 765-494-8778.

The use of AI tools such as “ChatGPT” is strongly discouraged. In my recent experience, they tend to result in lower grades, because the results do not address the assigned material very well.

Disclaimer: In the event of a major campus emergency, the above requirements, deadlines and grading policies are subject to changes that may be necessitated by a revised semester calendar. Any such changes in this course will be posted, once the course resumes, on the course website or can be obtained by contacting the instructor via email or phone.

Discussion and Reading Schedule		Read for class
Jan. 12	Introduction	
Jan. 14	Zero Hour	Port, 1-28
Jan. 16	Fraternization	Goedde article
Jan. 19	NO CLASS (MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR. DAY)	
Jan. 21	“Rubble Women”	Heineman article
Jan. 23	Two Germanys	Port, 28-44
Jan. 26	The Adenauer Era	Port, 45-75
Jan. 28	The Economic Miracle	
Jan. 30	Rock 'n Roll	Poiger article
Feb. 2	East-West Competition I: Diplomacy	Gray chapter
Feb. 4	East-West Competition II: Culture	Paulmann article
Feb. 6	East-West Competition III: Sports	Dichter chapter
Feb. 9	The Border as a Tourist Attraction	Eckert chapter
Feb. 11	The Berlin Wall	
[Feb. 11]	[PAPER #1 DUE AT 11:59 PM]	
Feb. 13	Memory politics in Adenauer's Germany	Straumann chapter
Feb. 16	Memory politics in the 1960s	Port, 76-104
Feb. 18	Willy Brandt's <i>Ostpolitik</i>	Gray chapter
Feb. 20	Arms Exports and Holocaust Memory	Leber article
Feb. 23	Family Memories in Germany (I)	Krug, Parts 1-4
Feb. 25	Family Memories in Germany (II)	Krug, Parts 5-11
Feb. 27	Family Memories in Germany (III)	Krug, Parts 12-Epilogue
March 2	The Sexual Revolution	Herzog chapter
March 4	The Red Army Faction	Port, 105-141

March 6	“Guest Workers”	Miller chapter
March 9	The 1980s in West Germany	Kahn chapter
March 11	Peace Movements	Becker-Schaum chapters
March 13	Black Germans	Florvil chapter
March 23	Film: The Nasty Girl (I)	
March 25	Film: The Nasty Girl (II)	
[March 26]	[PAPER #2 DUE AT 11:59 PM]	
March 27	No CLASS [CONFERENCE ABSENCE]	
March 30	The 1960s in East Germany	Ciesla/Poutrus chapter
April 1	Africans in the GDR	Pugach chapter
April 3	The Stasi	Spiekermann ed. volume
April 6	The 1970s in East Germany	Zatlin article
April 8	East Germany’s “Coffee Crisis”	Kloiber chapter
April 10	Environmental disaster	Uekötter chapter
April 13	The Welfare State	Süss chapter
April 15	The Revolution of 1989	Kowalcuk chapter
April 17	Uniting Germany	Port, 142-180
April 20	The Treuhandanstalt	Seibel chapter
April 22	“Ossis” and “Wessis”	
[April 23]	[PAPER #3 DUE AT 11:59 PM]	
April 24	Introducing the Euro	
April 27	Red-Green Reforms	Port, 181-207
April 29	Missions abroad	Neuss chapter
May 1	Merkel’s Germany	
May 8	PRIMARY SOURCE PAPER DUE, 5:00 PM	

