

Proposal for Humanities Seminars Program for Spring 2025
Germany Refracted: German Culture, Literature and History through Multiple Lenses

Course Syllabus:

This seminar *Germany Refracted* will be taught by several professors in the Department of German Studies. Classes will focus on areas of expertise that range from the Middle Ages to contemporary German literature, culture and language. Each class will be two hours on **Mondays from 10 – 12** over 6 weeks.

March 17: The seminar will begin with a session by Professor Albrecht Classen on “Knights, Castles, and Cathedrals in Medieval Germany” Prof. Classen contends that although Germany is a very modern country today, some of its most attractive cities and towns are those that have preserved their medieval past. Most tourists are only interested in the medieval city centers, with their cathedrals, churches, city halls, and then also the city walls. The medieval half-timbered houses or Gothic buildings make many city centers like Frankfurt, Hamburg, or Cologne a gem. This class will highlight the true intrigue of medieval architecture and the world of knights dominating modern German cityscapes until today.

Required Text: https://bpb-use2.wpmucdn.com/sites.arizona.edu/dist/0/269/files/2022/08/HerzogErnst_edited.pdf

March 24: In the second week of the seminar, Assistant Professor Obenewaa Oduro-Opuni will explore German-language engagements with slavery and the transatlantic slave trade by focusing on German- language abolitionist contributions. Specifically, she will introduce the dramatic genre of *Sklavenstücke* (slave plays) from the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century and demonstrate how these works provide a nuanced critique of slavery and the transatlantic slave trade. She will showcase an early German-language discourse that reflects abolitionist currents and present a critique of abolitionist cultural production by highlighting an example that demonstrates anti-slavery views while still arguing for some form of servitude of Black enslaved individuals to white people. This exemplifies the “dialectic of the Enlightenment” within a Black studies context and underscores the two-sided nature of the abolitionist coin.

March 31: Assistant Professor Joela Jacobs will introduce “Jewish Life in Germany” in the third week of the seminar. The Jewish community in Germany today is a diverse and vibrant but small group. The descendants of those who stayed during World War II or returned after 1945 mingle with those who arrived in larger numbers from Eastern Europe after the fall of the Iron Curtain in the early 1990s. Increasingly, young Israelis and Americans have joined them and declared Berlin their new home. Against the backdrop of Germany's past, the decision to live in Germany is frequently questioned by the Jewish community around the world, and it is nearly impossible not to engage with this history and its aftermath as a member of German society. This burden of representation is placed, both from within and without, on a community that is actively negotiating what it means to be Jewish in the 21st century. This seminar introduces Jewish voices discussing identity, belonging, and life in Germany in contemporary literature and culture.

Required Reading/Viewing: Jacobs, Fatherland & Mother Tongue: German-Jewish Identity in the 21st Century” (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G9Sadww9L9s>)

April 7: In the fourth week of the seminar Professor Barbara Kosta looks at “The Weimar Republic and the road to exile: The course introduces 1920s Berlin as one of the most exciting cities in Europe and the place of the most radical experimentation in the visual and performing arts, in mass entertainment and theater, in literature and architecture. While the cultural stage was vibrant and intoxicating, the celebrated roaring twenties also was haunted by the shell shock of World War I and

by economic instability, social upheaval, and political turmoil. This class first explores avant-garde movements like Expressionism and Dada, Bertolt Brecht's innovative play *Three Penny Opera* and Fritz Lang's monumental film *Metropolis*, the modern woman and the impact of mass culture and technological developments on twentieth-century sensibilities. Secondly, we will discuss the remarkable number of German-speaking émigrés who escaped fascist Germany and moved to southern California.

Required Reading: Bertolt Brecht's *The Three Penny Opera*

April 14: Associate Professor Barbara Citera will discuss "Fascination Alps: A Story of Relationships" in the fifth week of the seminar. The Alps have played a central role in Europe's past and presence: as a geographical border, as a region of transit, exchange and exploration, as "Europe's playground" and as a place of longing ("Sehnsuchtsort") and belonging. In this seminar we explore the story of relationships between humans and the mountains in the German speaking regions of the Alps; how the mountains have shaped and inspired culture and lifestyles, and how human interactions and actions have impacted the alpine environment.

April 21: In the sixth and final week of seminar Professor Peter Ecke will focus on "East- and West-Germany, Rock, and the Cold War" on Pop and Rock songs from East- and West-Germany from the 1960s to early 1990s. Students will analyze and discuss how the songs and song lyrics reflected people's attitudes and beliefs as well as everyday challenges and concerns during the time of the Cold War in both parts of Germany and until shortly after Germany's reunification. The discussion will include how the U.S. and Soviet Union were perceived (as nuclear powers, allies, occupiers etc.) by the artists and how people in both Germanys feared becoming eradicated in a nuclear war between NATO and the Warsaw Pact. English translations of the German song lyrics will be used in addition to the German originals.