

**HIST 2290-301: The Great War in Memoir and Memory**  
**Penn Global Studies Seminar**

**Spring 2024**

**Thursday 10:15-1:15**

**WARREN BRECKMAN**

206E College Hall

Office Hours: Tuesday 10:00-12:00, or by Appointment

215-898-8518

[breckman@sas.upenn.edu](mailto:breckman@sas.upenn.edu)

My Personal Zoom Link: <https://upenn.zoom.us/j/98967147192>



World War One was the primordial catastrophe of twentieth-century history. For all who passed through it, the Great War was transformative, presenting a profound rupture in personal experience. It was a war that unleashed an unprecedented outpouring of memoirs and poetic and fictional accounts written by participants. In its wake, it also produced new forms of public commemoration and memorialization – tombs to the unknown soldier, great monuments, soldiers’ cemeteries, solemn days of remembrance, and the like. One hundred years after World War One, this course will explore the war through the intersection of these processes of personal and public memory. [Please note: This is **not** a seminar in military or diplomatic history, but rather an exploration of

personal experiences of the War, representations of experience, and the cultural and political dimensions of memory.]

The course will end with a visit (May 15-25 2024) to the Western Front area of northern France. Accompanied by Sylvestre Bresson, a tour guide specializing in this history, we will travel to sites in northern France and Belgium: we will consider the scale and topography of some of the major battles, visit cemeteries and ossuaries and reflect on their various forms of secular and sacred organization, various national war monuments, and WWI museums, including the pathbreaking museum in Peronne and the national WWI museum in Meaux.

**This course is open to all students. There are no prerequisites.**

### **Structure of the Course:**

We will use Canvas to facilitate class communication, post assignment prompts and supplementary course readings, and collect student responses.

Keeping on top of the reading material and engaging actively in your learning are important in any semester, but never more so than in the current situation. Needless to say, in this and every course, you should view me as a resource in both good and bad times. I'm committed to helping you have as successful and rich a semester as possible! I welcome the opportunity to speak with you outside of class time.

### **Participation**

Attendance at our weekly meeting is **mandatory**. If you cannot attend a *specific* session, please notify me with a reasonable explanation **in advance** of the class and please use Course Action Notices to officially document absences.

Participation includes regular, active contributions to discussion. Please come to our meetings having read the assigned readings. Good participation can include responding to questions, asking questions yourself, and weighing in on discussions.

Participation extends to our travel experience. You are expected to be on time for our excursions and to be attentive and engaged during our activities. At the sites that we visit, students will be assigned short oral presentations relevant to the location.

### **Travel Component**

Participation in the trip to France depends on satisfactory performance throughout the semester. I will inform you if you are slipping into a problematic zone.

### **Appropriate Use of Recordings and Other Online Content:**

**Your use of any recordings generated in this course is limited to this class**, meaning you should not share these recordings with anyone outside the class or otherwise reproduce their content. This policy exists to ensure the confidentiality of our classroom discussion and thereby facilitate the free exchange of ideas. It also honors the creativity and labor that I invested in creating course content.

For the same reasons, I ask that you not copy or distribute the content of any material from our Canvas site.

**Course Requirements:**

Participation		30%
Presentation		10%
(Each student will be responsible for a presentation centered on the readings of that week)		
Essay on WWI historical understanding	(Feb 19)	15%
Essay on Soldiers' Experience	(March 4)	15%
Essay on Memoirs	(April 3)	15%
Essay on Monuments	(May 6)	15%

(Each essay should be a max. of five pages, not including footnotes and bibliography; essays should be submitted by 11:59 pm on the due date)

**All work should be submitted to Canvas *and* emailed to me directly as Word files**

**Course Materials:**

The following books are available at the **Penn Bookstore:**

- Erich Maria Remarque, *All Quiet on the Western Front*, Vintage, 1996
- Hew Strachan, *The First World War*, Penguin, 2002
- Stéphane Audoin-Rouzeau and Annette Becker, *14-18: Understanding the Great War*. Hill and Wang, 2014.
- Leonard V. Smith, *The Embattled Self: French Soldiers' Testimony of the Great War*. Cornell University Press, 2014.
- Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory*. Oxford University Press, 2013.
- Robert Graves, *Goodbye to All That*. Penguin Modern Classics, 2000.
- George L. Mosse, *Fallen Soldiers: Reshaping the Memory of the World Wars*. Oxford University Press, 1991.
- Ernst Junger, *Storm of Steel*. Penguin Classics, 2004.
- Vera Brittain, *Testament of Youth*. Penguin Classics, 2005.
- Bakary Diallo and Lamine Senghor, *White War, Black Soldiers: Two African Accounts of World War I*, Hackett, 2021

These books are available at the Penn Book Center, and most of them are easily found at used book websites. I know that there are options for accessing texts through the internet. My own experience – and cognitive research supports this – is that students read better when they have hard copy texts, but I can't object if you choose to read on a screen. What I can say with certainty is that seminar discussions work better when students have the text with them. Regardless of the format in which you read, please come to the seminar with your copy of the text. If you choose to use library copies, there are options through BorrowDirect, EZ Borrow, and Interlibrary Loan. Be sure to allow enough time to get a book if you choose one of these borrowing options.

**Some Excellent Van Pelt Primary Source Guides:**

[https://guides.library.upenn.edu/Great\\_War\\_Memoir\\_Memory](https://guides.library.upenn.edu/Great_War_Memoir_Memory)

<https://www-firstworldwar-amdigital-co-uk.proxy.library.upenn.edu>  
<https://guides.library.upenn.edu/WorldWarI>  
[https://guides.library.upenn.edu/WorldWarI/personalnarratives\\_speeches\\_papers](https://guides.library.upenn.edu/WorldWarI/personalnarratives_speeches_papers)  
<https://www.bl.uk/world-war-one#>  
[http://www.1914-1918-online.net/06\\_WWI\\_websites/index.html](http://www.1914-1918-online.net/06_WWI_websites/index.html)

### **Jan 18: Introduction**

### **Jan 25: Sound and Fury, Shock and Awe: *All Quiet on the Western Front***

Erich Maria Remarque, *All Quiet on the Western Front*

### **Feb 1: The War: A Brief Overview**

Hew Strachan, *The First World War*, xv-160

### **Feb 8: The War: A Brief Overview**

Hew Strachan, *The First World War*, 161-340

### **Feb 15: The Great War and Meaning**

Stéphane Audoin-Rouzeau and Annette Becker, *14-18: Understanding the Great War*

### **Assignment #1**

#### **WWI Historical Understanding (due Feb 19):**

How does the approach of Audoin-Rouzeau and Becker resemble and/or differ from Strachan's approach? Arguably any historical work on the Great War attempts to 'understand' it. In what ways does the book *14-18* claim to 'understand' the Great War?

### **Feb 22: Soldiers in their own words**

Leonard V. Smith, *The Embattled Self: French Soldiers' Testimony of the Great War*

### **Feb 29: The Great War and Memory: Literature**

Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory* (You can **omit** Chapter V "Oh What a Literary War", Chapter VI "Theater of War", Chapter VII "Arcadian Recourses")

### **Assignment #2**

#### **Essay on Soldier's Experience (due March 4):**

Drawing on the categories and concepts developed in the works we've discussed so far, analyze the writing of one soldier or non-combatant participant drawn from the Adam Matthew website 'The First World War', available through the University of Pennsylvania library website. You could focus on one or two dramatic episodes or consider a longer span of time in your chosen diary. Be sure to provide some context for the material you choose to discuss. The collection of

diaries is to be found at: <https://www-firstworldwar-amdigital-co-uk.proxy.library.upenn.edu>

**March 7: No Class -- Spring Break!!!**

**March 14: The Narrative Arc of Memoir**

Robert Graves, *Goodbye to All That* (Selection: Chapters I-II, Chapters X-XXV)

**March 21: The Politics of Memory**

George L. Mosse, *Fallen Soldiers: Reshaping the Memory of the World Wars*

**March 28: War as Inner Experience**

Ernst Jünger, *Storm of Steel* (You can skip pages 111-191 in the Penguin Edition)  
Please watch "In the Trenches of History," a very good documentary on Jünger (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JLeuL5rB2l4>)

**April 4: Gendering Memoir**

Vera Brittain, *Testament of Youth* (Selection: Ch III, pp. 94-134, Ch IV, pp. 135-204, Ch V, pp. 205-219, 232-236, Ch VI, pp. 239-261, Ch VIII, pp. 362-426)  
Because I've cut out a lot from this long book, let me say that the first section of the book chronicles Vera's childhood as the daughter of reasonably prosperous middle class parents. As would befit a girl of her station, everyone's expectation was that she would become a polished young lady who would marry well. Early on, she developed a different ambition, namely to study at Oxford and become a writer. The struggle that brought her to Oxford makes the chapter "Oxford or War" particularly poignant. In the course of the memoir, we learn that she loses to the war every young man she cared for. I don't think that's a spoiler, and in any case, because of the excerpting, you'd miss some of her account and wonder what happen to Roland, Edward, et al. It is also worth mentioning that the final sections of the book are extremely interesting. They chronicle Brittain's work as a feminist activist and as a pacifist international campaigning on behalf of the League of Nations.

**April 8: Special evening viewing of the film adaptation of *Testament of Youth***

Location and Time TBA – there will be pizza!

**April 11: War, Race, and Memory**

W.E.B. Du Bois, 'The African Roots of War' (1915); W.E.B. Du Bois, editorial in *The Crisis* (1918); Chad Williams, "World War I in the Historical Imagination of W.E.B. Du Bois," *Modern American History*, 1 (2018), 3-22; Bakary Diallo, "Strength and Goodness," in *White War, Black Soldiers: Two African Accounts of World War I*

**April 15: Special evening viewing of the film "Father & Soldier" (2022), in French 'Les Tirailleurs'**

Location and Time TBA – there will be pizza!

### **Assignment #3**

#### **Essay on Memoirs (due April 15):**

Select one of the memoirs from Graves, Jünger, Brittain or Diallo, and write a short essay on it. You are free to focus on a question of your own choosing, but issues to consider might include: basic attitude toward the war experience, modes and styles of representing experience, the gendering of experience, national differences and/or stereotypes, the operation of memory within the memoir as literary genre.

#### **April 18: The Politics of Memory**

Modris Eksteins, "Memory and the Great War," in *The Oxford Illustrated History of the First World War*, 305-317; George L. Mosse, *Fallen Soldiers: Reshaping the Memory of the World Wars*, 3-11; 15-50; Jay Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning: The Great War in European Cultural History*, "War Memorials and the Mourning Process," 78-116; (From our earlier reading, recall Stephane Audoin-Rouzeau and Annette Becker, *14-18: Understanding the Great War*, 175-225)

#### **Special Event: Tuesday, April 23, 5:15-6:30**

##### **Chad Williams, "W.E.B. Du Bois, the First World War and Social Scientific Failure"**

Professor Williams will be presenting in the History Department's Annenberg Lecture Series

There will be a pre-circulated paper

**Attendance is mandatory**

#### **April 25: No Class**

### **Assignment #4**

#### **Essay on Monuments (due April 29)**

Choose a World War One monument. (Many may be viewed through an internet search.) It could be one of the monuments located on the Western Front or one in a city anywhere in the world. Analyze the monument in terms of its symbolism and its relation to the history it tries to commemorate. What message(s) does it attempt to communicate and does it succeed? To whom is it 'addressed'? To the individual, the nation, humanity? Feel free to engage the categories and concepts suggested by Eksteins, Mosse, Winter, and Audoin-Rouzeau and Becker.

**!!! France May 15-25 !!!**