

Catherine Plum  
Spring 2004  
1221 Humanities  
9:55 MWF

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**History 223:  
East German Society & Culture, 1949-1989**

This course is designed to introduce students to the history of East German society and culture from the foundation of the German Democratic Republic through the velvet revolution of 1989 and the demise of the regime. While the course will focus predominantly on the period 1949-1989, a brief exploration of postwar conditions and the Soviet Occupation, 1945-1949, will provide the students with sufficient historical background to better evaluate the main period under investigation.

From its first meeting onward, this course will identify leading theories and questions useful for analyzing this historic era. Scholars on both sides of the Atlantic have struggled to understand East German power dynamics, the regime's ability to retain power over the course of four decades despite popular dissatisfaction with numerous aspects of East German society and culture. Should we categorize the GDR as a totalitarian state with strong similarities to the Nazi regime in terms of the regime's attempts to control the social and cultural sphere, or should we define East Germany as an idealistic, albeit flawed, experiment to construct a socialist society? Can the GDR best be described as a "modern dictatorship" ala Jürgen Kocka, or as a "welfare dictatorship," a term preferred by Jarausch and Klessman. What difficulties did politicians and administrators first encounter as they attempted to form an antifascist cultural climate and a classless society? Under the communist system, are traditional notions of elite and popular culture appropriate? How rigid was the separation between the government-controlled schools, organizational life and cultural venues on the one hand and the private sphere, which many scholars argue allowed for a unique "niche-society?" To what extent did the state realize its changing plans for the development of East German culture and society? Which cultural and social campaigns met with the most support from the populace? Which policies or indeed lack of action or initiative engendered the strongest levels of dissatisfaction? To what degree did cultural and social actors on different levels find the necessary space to critique and comment on the state and its policies within the communist system?

Finally, at the end of the course, we will question whether one can best define the social and cultural changes that accompanied the *Wende* as a sort of "reunification" or more accurately as an "*Anschluß*" -- the takeover of E. German social and cultural spheres by West Germans and their value systems. To what extent did social and cultural trends and traditions that evolved under the East German regime have an enduring impact on the new federal states in the first few years after reunification? How can we understand the importance many *Ossis* (former GDR citizens) place in the relics of East German consumer society – in its Trabis, rock music, *Kampflieder* (fighting songs) and kitchen utensils? How did specific societal groups such as adolescents and women fare in the chaos of these defining years?

**Requirements:**

Participation (15%), midterm (25%), paper (25%) and a final exam (35%).

### **Class Policies:**

**Communication:** If a serious matter keeps you from attending class, keep me informed about your situation and progress. Communicating with me via email is generally the best. Keep in mind that I may not check my email on the weekend, however. I can also be reached at reasonable hours at the following number should a crisis occur: (608) 628-4109. It is not a good idea to call me the day before a paper is due for an extension.

**Participation:** This class will provide you with a forum to express your views on the course reading and lecture material. So keep up with the reading, come prepared and speak up! Asking questions and making comments are equally important to the quality of our discussion. Remember that any question you have is an important question. Any relevant comment you want to make is an important comment. Similar to your overall grade, when I determine your grade for participation, I will take into consideration improvement over the course of the semester. If you are a shy person by nature, take advantage of this course as an opportunity to speak up with confidence. The best discussions are normally those in which a variety of different people take part.

Finally, students are consumers and should have some input in the education they receive. I will try to accommodate your suggestions, diverse learning styles and interests.

### **Texts:**

Berdahl, Daphne. *Where the World Ended: Re-Unification and Identity in the German Borderland*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999.

Jaraus, Konrad. Ed. *Dictatorship as Experience: Towards a Socio-Cultural History of the GDR*. New York: Berghahn Books, 1999.

Wolf, Christa. *Quest for Christa T*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1979.

A course reader will be available for purchase at the Humanities copy shop.

A copy of all readings, including the course reader, will be available on reserve at the Helen C. White Library.

### **Course Outline:**

#### **Week 1:**

##### **January 21: Course Overview**

**January 23: Postwar Reconstruction of Culture and Society in the Soviet Occupation Zone**  
Read: Chapter 1, "Eastern Germany at Zero Hour," in Gareth Pritchard, *The Making of the GDR, 1945-1953; from Antifascism to Stalinism* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000), 7-29.

#### **Week 2:**

**January 26: Culture and Society in the Soviet Occupation Zone Continued**

Read: Chapter 8, "The Politics of Culture and Education," in Norman Naimark, *Russians in Germany: a History of the Soviet Zone of Occupation, 1945-1949* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard, 1995), 398-464.

**January 28: The Foundation of East Germany**

Read: The introduction and Chapter 4 of *Dictatorship as Experience*, 3-16 and 73-85, and Konrad Jarausch and Volker Gransow ed., *Uniting Germany: Documents and Debates, 1944-1993* (Providence, RI: Berghahn Books, 1994), documents 4 and 5, pages 8-10.

**January 30: Foundations & Applications of Socialist Policy I**

**Week 3:**

**February 2: Foundations & Applications of Socialist Policy II**

Read: Chapters 1-3 in *Dictatorship as Experience*, 17-72.

**February 4: Stalinism**

Read: Chapters 5-6 and 14 in *Dictatorship as Experience* 91-121 and 265-284.

**February 6: Socialist Realism & the Arts in the Early Years of the Regime**

**Week 4:**

**February 9: East German Work Culture**

Read: Chapters 15 and 16 in *Dictatorship as Experience*, 285-324.

**February 11: Education- Creating the Socialist School**

Read: Sterling Fishman and Lothar Martin, "Goals of Education in East and West" in *Estranged Twins: Education and Society in the two Germanys* (New York: Praeger, 1987), 63-86.

**February 13: Youth Organization Life and Youth Cultures**

Read: Alan Nothnagle, "In the Spirit of Ernst Thälmann?: The Antifascist Myth," in *Building the East German Myth: Historical Mythology and Youth Propaganda in the German Democratic Republic, 1945-1989* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1999), 93-142.

**Week 5:**

**February 16: The Berlin Wall, Social and Cultural Repercussions of the E/W Divide**

Read: "The Ulbricht Era in the GDR 1949 - 1971" in Henry Ashby Turner Jr., *The Two Germanies Since 1945* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987), 87-103; Documents nine and ten concerning the erection of the Berlin Wall from the Jarausch and Gransow edited book of documents, pages 13-16.

**February 18: *Wirtschaftswunder* in the East? Consumer Culture in the 60s and 70s**

Read: André Steiner, "Dissolution of the 'Dictatorship over Needs'? Consumer Behavior and Economic Reform in East Germany in the 1960s" in Susan Strasser, Charles McGovern and

Matthias Judt, ed. *Getting and Spending: European and American Consumer Societies in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge, 1998), 167-185.

**February 20: Consumer Culture Continued**

Read: Burghard Ciesla and Patrice Poutrus, "Food Supply in a Planned Economy: SED Nutrition Policy between Crisis Response and Popular Needs" in *Dictatorship as Experience*, 143-162.

**Week 6:**

**February 23: Developments in Mass Media**

Read: Chapters 12 and 13 in *Dictatorship as Experience*, 213-264.

**February 25: Mid-semester Review**

**February 27: In-class Midterm Exam**

**Week 7:**

**March 1: Socialist Policy vs. Daily Reality: the Experiences of Women in the GDR**

Read: Ansorg and Hürtgen, "The Myth of Female Emancipation: Contradictions in Women's Lives" and Langenhan and Ross, "The Socialist Glass Ceiling: Limits to Female Careers" in *Dictatorship as Experience*, 163-191.

**March 3: Women in the GDR Continued**

Read: Donna Harsch, "Society, the state, and abortion in East Germany, 1950-1972," *American Historical Review* (February 1997): 53-84.

**March 5: Sport Culture: From the Local to the National and International Arena**

Read: Tara Magdalinski, "Sports history and East German national identity," *Peace Review* (December 1999): 539-545.

**Week 8:**

**March 8: From Ulbricht to Honecker: Social and Cultural Policy**

Read: Kaiser, "Reforming Socialism? The Changing of the Guard from Ulbricht to Honecker during the 1960s" and Jessen, "Mobility and Blockage during the 1970s" in *Dictatorship as Experience*, 325-360.

**March 10: Finding a Voice: Writers and Artists in the 70s and 80s**

**March 12: Finding a Voice Continued**

Read: Christa Wolf, *Quest for Christa T*, 3-84.

**Week 9 Spring Break**

**Week 10:**

**March 22: Discussion of Wolf's Quest for Christa T.**

Finish reading: *Quest for Christa T*, 85-185.

**March 24: Policemen, Stasi and their Spitzel: Citizen Surveillance**

**March 26: Citizen Surveillance Continued**

Read: Chapter 7 in *Dictatorship as Experience*, 126-141.

**Week 11:**

**March 29: The GDR: A Militarized Society?**

**March 31: The Built Environment: Socialist Architecture and Housing**

Read: Brian Ladd, "Socialist Planning and the Rediscovery of the Old City in the German Democratic Republic" *Journal of Urban History* (July 2001): 584-603; and Danielle Pensley, "The Socialist City? A Critical Analysis of the Neubaugebiet Hellersdorf," *Journal of Urban History* (July 1998): 563-602.

**April 2: Memory Culture: Interpreting the Past through a Socialist Lens**

Read: Chapter 11, p.195-212 in *Dictatorship as Experience* and Alan Nothnagle, "From Buchenwald to Bismarck: Historical Mythmaking in the German Democratic Republic," *Central European History* (1993): 91-113.

**Week 12:**

**April 5: Travel and Tourism**

**April 7: Consumer Culture in the 1980s**

Paper Assignment due

**April 9: Good Friday – No class**

**Week 13:**

**April 12: Foreigners and Homosexuals in the Land of *Volkerfreundschaft***

Read: Raelynn J. Hillhouse, "Out of the Closet behind the Wall: Sexual Politics and Social Change in the GDR," *Slavic Review*, Vol. 49, No. 4 (Winter, 1990): 585-596.

**April 14: Religious Minorities in East Germany**

Read: Robin Ostow, "From the Cold War Through the *Wende*: History, Belonging, and the Self in East German Jewry," *Oral History Review* 21/2 (Winter, 1993): 59-72.

**April 16: Religious Movements and other Protest Groups**

Read: Chapter 3, "The Church as a Religious and Political Force" in John P. Burgess, *The East German Church and the End of Socialism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 45-59, and a selection from Richard V. Pierard ed., *The Revolution of the Candles: Christians in the*

*Revolution of the German Democratic Republic* (Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press, 1996), 95-122.

**Week 14:**

**April 19: The Social and Cultural *Wende* & its Immediate Aftermath Part I**

Read: Documents 1-5, pages 30-41, Jarausch and Gransow book of documents.

**April 21: The Social and Cultural *Wende* & its Aftermath Part II**

Jarausch and Gransow's essay, "The New Germany: Myths and Realities," 17-30, Jarausch and Gransow book of documents.

**April 23: Berdahl and Borderlands**

Read Daphne Berdahl, *Where the World Ended: Re-Unification and Identity in the German Borderland* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 1-71.

**Week 15:**

**April 26: Reactions to the *Wende***

Read: Berdahl, 72-183.

**April 28: Neonazis in the GDR and the New *Bundesländer***

**April 30: Youth in the new *Bundesländer***

**Week 16:**

**May 3: Society and Culture in the new *Bundesländer***

Read: The remainder of Berdahl, 184-233.

**May 5: Ostalgie? (Nostalgie for the former GDR)**

Read Paul Betts, "The Twilight of the Idols: East German Memory and Material Culture." *Journal of Modern History* 72 No. 3 (September 2000), p.731-765 and Catherine Plum, draft article "Contested Namesakes: East Berlin School Names under Communism & in Reunified Germany."

**May 7: Review**

**Sunday May 9: Final Exam 12:25; Place TBA**