

New Course “Sliding into Dictatorship: A Historical Moment Examined”

In my recent course offering “Dictatorship Imagined: Novels of Authoritarianism and Totalitarianism,” we read eleven fictions depicting characters living either through the transition from democracy to dictatorship or living in well-established totalitarian regimes. We tried to identify methods and features of these regimes in hopes of understanding our own historical moment better. These novels were written over a period of roughly 100 years and our reading and our discussions constituted a kind of longitudinal study, examining one genre of writing: fictions.

The course I am now proposing is more like a cross-sectional study. We will read only one novel, *The Oppermanns* by Lion Feuchtwanger. This novel depicts Germany’s slide into dictatorship in 1932 and 1933 through the lens of an extended Jewish family. This time, we will contextualize the novel with books from different genres that depict roughly the same historical moment in different ways: a memoir, a retrospective journalistic examination of individuals who lived through that time, and an academic history of the Weimar Republic’s transition into dictatorship. We will also read selections from two further books that examine how ordinary people, Germans in one case, Americans in the other, experienced that transition.

These are the books:

Lion Feuchtwanger. *The Oppermanns*. 1933/1934.

Sebastian Haffner. *Defying Hitler*. 1939/2000/2002.

Milton Mayer. *They Thought They Were Free. The Germans. 1933-45.*
1955/2017.

Benjamin Carter Hett. *The Death of Democracy: Hitler’s Rise to Power and the Downfall of the Weimar Republic*. 2018.

Konrad Jarausch. *Broken Lives: How Ordinary Germans Experienced the 20th Century*. 2018. (selections).

Andrew Nagorski. *Hitlerland. American Eyewitnesses to the Nazi Rise to Power*. 2012. (selections).

Having taken my earlier course is not a prerequisite for this one.

The course will meet in the Community Room of the Library on Thursdays, October 11, 18, 25, November 1, 15, from 10:30 -12:30, and for a 6th meeting after Thanksgiving, exact date TBD.

The course fee will be \$20.

You can sign up for the course at the circulation desk of the library. Maximum enrollment is 20. If necessary, there will be a wait list. You can also sign up by contacting me directly at jkruse@wellesley.edu.