How valuable are perspective and precedent in the study of history? Can earlier centuries shed light on present ones? How far back may one meaningfully go?

Germans have two histories—the twelve years between 1933 and 1945, which are exceedingly well known, and the twenty centuries before and after the Nazi Era, which are barely known. Freshman Seminar 46e places Germany’s shorter history within its longer. In doing so, it asks whether there are geographical features, political and social structures, cultural and intellectual patterns that typify a people over time and can illuminate present behavior.

By contrast with other European countries, Germany’s historical development is said to be exceptional and peculiar, even retarded and perverse. Freshman Seminar 46e reaches back to the first century C.E. and forward to the twenty-first in search of tradition and innovation in German history. The goal is to discover defining experiences in German history and memory and to ask what they promise, or portend, for modern Germans, who confront new demographic, economic, and geo-political crises, which many observers predict they cannot survive.

For students interested in enrolling in Freshman Seminar 46e, the Federal German Government’s annual publication, Facts About Germany, edited by Arno Kappler, is a great book to skim and is recommended as a primer. It may be obtained free of cost at the Boston German consulate, or at Mr. Ozment’s office in Robinson Hall! Another good read is Anne Galicich, The German Americans.

Any one of the following recent histories may be consulted both for background reading and reliable interpretation. Copies may be found at the COOP and in the reserves in Lamont and the History Library (Robinson Hall, 2nd floor):


Copies of the following books, which will be heavily read and discussed, are also available at the COOP and on reserve:


Freshman Seminar 46e is a cooperative seminar-style reading and discussion course. The syllabus contains far more reading than any one member of the class could easily cover and digest. So each week there will be both shared selections, which we all will read, and individually assigned readings (marked by an *), which students may “volunteer” for in accordance with their interests. Students are required to attend all sessions and to participate in
the discussions. The course is graded Pass/Fail, and a passing grade will be based on class reports and discussion. Students with special interests—a current topic, a review of a classic study—may discuss alternative readings for class reports with Mr. Ozment.

**Sessions**
(* indicates a class report)

Sept. 21: COURSE INTRODUCTION

Sept. 28: AMERICA, GERMANY, AND EUROPE TODAY


*Tod Lindberg, Beyond Paradise and Power: Europe, America and the Future of a Troubled Partnership (Routledge, 2005), chs. 5 (Ischinger), 7 (Ash), and 12 (Lindberg).

Oct. 5: MASTER NARRATIVES OF GERMANY


Oct. 12: GERMANIC PEOPLES IN ANTIQUITY: GAINING POWER AND RESPECT


Oct. 26: THE GERMAN RENAISSANCE AND REFORMATION


Nov. 2: GERMAN BACKWARDNESS? SOCIETY, WAR, AND GENDER, 1600-1800

Heide Wunder, “The Stages of a Woman’s Life” and “Professionalization,” in ‘He is the Sun, She is the Moon:’ Women in Early Modern Germany (Harvard UP, 1997), pp. 16–36, 85–113.

Nov. 9: ENLIGHTENMENT AND REVOLUTION

Giles MacDonogh, Frederick the Great (St. Martin’s, 1999), pp. 130–177.


Nov. 16: THE AGE OF BISMARCK


Nov. 23: THANKSGIVING

Nov. 30: WEIMAR REPUBLIC AND NATIONAL SOCIALISM, 1919–1945


Dec. 7: POST-WAR GERMANY


Dec. 14: DISCUSSION AND SUMMATION