In the first half of the 20th Century, Europe witnessed an unprecedented explosion of violence. For one thing this was the “age of total war.” Two total wars took the lives of tens of millions of European citizens, not just combatants but increasingly casualties on the home front. But it was also the “age of extremes.” There were bloody episodes of ethnic cleansing before and after the First World War, violent revolutions in the post-WW1 period, and state-sanctioned purges costing the lives of millions of Germans, Soviets and East Europeans in the 1930s and 1940s. This course seeks to understand the violence and to ask about causes and interrelationships what was the relationship between international war and civil wars, between total war and political extremes? It asks about participation what was involved in turning citizens into soldiers and killers, and turning whole societies into the workshops and breeding grounds for war? And it asks about effects why did interwar society prove such fertile ground for violent ideologies and renewed total war, and why did the post-1945 period prove, by and large, so much more peaceable?

Readings will be from two course books and some articles and documents on e-reserve. The course will explore the difference between primary sources and secondary materials. Some documentaries and films will also be part of the course materials. Students’ learning will be evaluated through two papers, a final exam and in-class written exercises.

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