

**Oberlin College  
Department of History**

**History 286: World War II in Asia, 1931-1945**

**Fall 2007**

**Mondays and Wednesdays, 2:30-3:45 PM**

**Instructor: Leonard V. Smith**

**315 Rice Hall, x8950**

**E-mail: Leonard.V.Smith@oberlin.edu**

**Office Hours: Wednesdays and Fridays, 12:00-2:00 PM; other times by appointment**

In the West, the teaching and writing of the history of World War II has often replicated the "Europe First" strategy of Western military planners at the time. That is to say, the war in Asia has frequently been considered a sideshow to the "primary" conflict between the Allies and Nazi Germany. This course considers World War II in Asia on its own terms, as a conflicted with distinct causes and outcomes. For this reason, it is necessary to have a broader chronological focus than a course on World War II based in Europe or the United States. We begin not in 1939 (the German invasion of Poland) or in 1941 (the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor), but in 1931 (the Japanese invasion of Manchuria). The course ends with the dropping of the atomic bomb over Hiroshima and Nagasaki and with the Soviet invasion of Manchuria. Together, these episodes marked the end of World War II and the beginning of the Cold War in Asia.

Much as any course on World War II in Europe would emphasize Nazi Germany, this course will emphasize Imperial Japan. We will cover traditional subjects such as diplomatic, political, and military history, but also newer fields such as social and cultural history. We will also explore how methodologies can intersect, such as in the cultural history of military experience.

The format of the class will combine lecture and discussion. The readings combine secondary and primary sources, and attempt intentionally at some points to confuse the two. Personal and political passions continue to influence the writing of the history of World War II in Asia, much as is the case for World War II in Europe. The point here is not to "expose" the "hidden history" of the war in Asia, or to have students read simply to commemorate heroes and victims. Rather, students will be expected to engage these texts critically--to think about what is and is not told in them, and about why these texts found their way not just into print, but into English translations.

**Requirements:**

**I. Advance Preparation and Attendance**

While there is no prerequisite for this course, some background in the history of Asia, the United States, or Europe would certainly be of benefit. The readings for this course are diverse in

methodology and content. Part of any history course involves thinking through what history itself is about.

## II. Readings

There is no general textbook for this course. The lectures follow a general chronological outline, and multiple timelines are available on the web and elsewhere if additional signposts are needed.

The following books should be purchased:

Saburo Ienaga, *The Pacific War: 1931-1945* (1968, first published in English in 1978)

Iris Chang, *The Rape of Nanking: The Forgotten Holocaust of World War II* (1997)

Akira Iriye, *Pearl Harbor and the Coming of the Pacific War: A Brief History with Documents and Essays* (1999)

Frank Gibney, ed., *Senso: The Japanese Remember the Pacific War* (1995)

E.B. Sledge, *With the Old Breed at Peleliu and Okinawa* (Oxford University Press, 1990)

E.B. Sledge, *China Marine: An Infantryman's Life After World War II* (Oxford University Press, 2003)

Short readings will also be distributed from time to time in class.

## III. Written Work

Three varieties of written work will be required. Each will figure into the final grade in the following manner:

Mid-term: 25%

Discussion Write-up: 25%

Final: 50%

Final grades for the course may be shaped at the margin by the cumulative performance on the discussion papers, as described below.

### I. Exam and Final Essay:

There will be an in-class midterm exam and a take-home essay. For both, students will be expected to choose among several questions. The questions will be distributed one week before the exams. Students may prepare in advance as much as they like, but they may not use notes or outlines during the exam. The midterm will take place during class time on October 15. The final essay will be open book, with no time limit but a strictly enforced page limit. It will

cover the entire course, and will be due at a time determined by the college final examination schedule.

## II. Discussion Papers:

A number of discussion days are noted on the syllabus. On designated days, students will be required to turn in a one-page discussion paper, in which students identify and briefly explain issues in the readings. These papers are for students' benefit. Their purpose is to facilitate discussion and to provide a foundation for one "think" piece essay (see below). Since their focus is classroom discussion, late papers will not be accepted for any reason.

These papers are required, and must be word processed. Chronic failure to turn in discussion papers will be noted, and will have an unfavorable impact on a student's final grade. Each discussion paper will receive a "grade" of  $\sqrt{+}$ ,  $\sqrt{}$ ,  $\sqrt{-}$ , or 0 (meaning either a derisory effort or failure to turn the paper in at all). The cumulative performance on these papers may be used to shape a student's final grade. For example, if a student's final grade hovers between an A- and a B+ and that student got a  $\sqrt{+}$  on all the discussion papers, the student will likely receive a final grade of A-. Discussion papers may help push a final grade down in a similar manner. Comments will not be written on the papers themselves, but students are welcome to come talk to me about them if they have concerns or questions.

## III. Five-page Paper on One Discussion

Students will be expected to write a "think piece" paper (as opposed to a research paper) on one of the in-class discussions. A logical way to write this paper is either to write an expanded version of a discussion paper from the readings, though this is not a requirement. This paper has a strictly enforced 5-page maximum limit, and is subject to the ground rules stated at the end of the syllabus. This essay is due the last day of class, December 12.

Students who turn in this paper by November 28 will have their papers returned within a week, and will have the opportunity to do a rewrite. The recorded grade will be that of the rewritten version, which is due the last day of class.

## **Schedule of Classes:**

### *Part I: The Protagonists*

September 5                      What's in a Name: or What to Call the War of 1931-45 in Asia?

Readings: Ienaga, *Pacific War*, Translator's Note and Preface; *Senso*, Introduction; Chang, *Rape of Nanking*, Forward, Introduction; Iriye, *Pearl Harbor*, Preface, Introduction to Part I

September 10                      The Meiji Regime

Readings: Ienaga, Ch.1-3; *Senso*, Ch.1-2

September 12 Japanese Race Doctrine

Readings: begin *Senso*, Ch.3 and Chang, *Rape of Nanking* Part I, for discussions on September 28 and 30 (see below)

September 17 The Colonization of Asia before 1931

September 19 China: The Middle Kingdom Conquered?

Readings: Ienaga, Ch. 4-5; complete readings for *Senso* and Chang for next week

September 24 Remembering the China War

Discussion of *Senso*, Ch. 3

***1-page discussion paper due***

September 26 The War in Europe and its Implications for Asia

Readings: begin Iriye, “The Documents, ” pp. 14-108

(NOTE: these readings cover the period up to the exam on October 15. You will need to cover them in some detail.)

*Part II: From Regional War to World War: 1937-41*

October 1 Nanking: The “Forgotten Holocaust”?

Discussion of Chang, *Rape of Nanking*

***1-page discussion paper due***

October 3 No Class: Attend REQUIRED Lecture, October 5, Noon

Louise Young (University of Wisconsin), “Manchukuo and Japanese Imperialism”

October 8 Japanese Options: Escape from the Hole or Dig Deeper?

***Midterm Exam Questions Distributed***

October 10 American Options: A Two-Front War?

October 15 ***In-class Midterm Exam***

*Part III: Total War: 1941-45*

October 17                    From Asian War to Pacific War to World War

Readings: Ienaga, Ch 7; Iriye, Part II (this covers material we will be discussing generally over the next several weeks)

**Fall Break!!!**

October 29                    Allied Propaganda: The Japanese “Other”

Readings: begin Chang, Part II; Geoffrey Gorer “Why are Japs Japs?,” *Time*, 7 August 1944 (handout)

October 31                    The Theory and Practice of Wartime Empire

Readings: *Senso*, Ch.4-6; Ienaga, Ch.8-9; begin Sledge, *With the Old Breed*

November 5                    “Collaboration” and “Resistance” in Occupied Asia

Readings: Continue *Senso* and Ienaga, for discussion on November 7

November 7                    The Japanese Home Front

Discussion of *Senso*, Ch 4-6; and Ienaga, Ch.8-9

***1-page discussion paper due***

November 12                    The Air War

Readings: *Senso*, Ch. 7; continue Sledge, *With the Old Breed*

November 14                    Why Was Kyoto Spared?

November 19                    The Ground War in the Pacific

Discussion of Sledge, *With the Old Breed*

***1-page discussion paper due***

November 21                    Day Off for Good Behavior (Happy Thanksgiving!)

*Part IV: Ending and Remembering World War II in Asia*

November 26            The End Game of the Ground War

Readings: *Senso*, Ch. 8; Ienaga, Ch. 11; Begin Chang, Part III

November 28            The Atomic Bomb

Readings: Poem by Kurihara Sadako, “Let Us Be Midwives!” and “When We Say ‘Hiroshima’” (handouts)

December 3            The Origins of the Cold War in Asia

Readings: Continue Chang, Part III

December 5            General MacArthur and The Occupation of Japan

Readings: *Senso*, Ch.9

December 10          The Reinvention of the Shôwa Emperor

Readings: Ienaga, Conclusion; finish Chang, Part III

***Final Exam Questions Distributed***

December 12          Yasukuni Shrine and the Struggle for Memory

Readings: *Senso*, Ch. 10-11

***5-page write-up of one discussion paper due***

***Final Essay***

***(due at a time to be determined by the college master schedule)***

**Additional Ground Rules:**

1. Due dates and page-limit requirements are to be taken most seriously. I am not in the business of persecuting students if a genuine problem exists, but in principle I strongly dislike giving extensions. Normally, I take off 1/3 of a letter grade for every 24 hours a paper is overdue.
2. Three excuses for requesting extensions will never be acceptable: 1) a self-defined character flaw of procrastination; 2) extracurricular activities, including performances and political activities; 3) work in other classes.

3. Papers must be double-spaced and have 1-inch margins. They must be word-processed with near letter quality resolution. I will return unread any illegible paper.
4. All written work in this course will be presumed to adhere to the Honor Code. I will ask students to sign the following statement at the end of each piece of work submitted for a grade: "I have adhered to the Honor Code in the writing of this exercise." Additional information on the Oberlin Honor Code is available at [www.oberlin.edu](http://www.oberlin.edu)
5. All three major pieces of written work (the in-class exam, the second essay, and the final essay) must be completed in order to pass the course. That is to say, a student who receives an A on the in-class exam and on the second essay, but who does not complete the final essay will fail the entire course.