



IFE course syllabus

Belgium in Europe and the World: An historical approach

Course taught by

Chantal Kesteloot

Researcher in history of the twentieth century, Chantal Kesteloot is senior scientist at CEGESOMA (Archives and Research Center on War and Contemporary Societies/State Archives), and Head of Public History and Coordinator of the site www.belgiumwwii.be, Chantal is the author of works on the history of Brussels and on the memory of two world wars and the importance of commemoration in the Belgian society.

Purpose of the course

The goal of this course is to situate Belgium in the “concert of nations” since the 19th century, using a joint historical/geo-political approach, as a method for illustrating major historical and political trends of Europe qua Europe.

Description of the course

Questions examined include the colonial past and its lingering impact at home, the impact of two world wars, as well as the role of Belgium in the long and incomplete phenomenon of European integration. Belgium serves at once as the focus of examination as well as an illustration of larger European issues, such as the past, present and future of the nation-State, war and peace, colonialism and post-colonialism, sub- and supranational community, among others.

Course format

The format of this course has been designed for maximum pedagogical effectiveness in light of the constraints of a course offered intensively over a short period of time. Accordingly, the course comprises two types of sessions, with lecture/seminar meetings alternating with discussion sections. Students are expected to participate in both informal debate and discussion as well as formal presentations (oral exposés, press reviews, and the like).

Each course of the preparatory session also includes appropriate site visits, in addition to the three museum visits listed as part of the course outline (below).

This course meets approximately 32 hours, including mandatory site visits.

Course outline

1. From the birth of Belgium to its place in the world on the eve of WWI

The significance of the international context - the situation in Europe since the end of the Napoleonic Wars and the general context of the revolutionary movement of 1830 - strategic dimensions and the role of the Great Powers - Belgian neutrality - development of a model constitution - political issues - the importance of local movements.

2. From WWI to the aftermath of 1945

WWI: Specificity of the Great War and of the stakes involved - Situation of Belgium and the major European alliances on the eve of war - violation of Belgian neutrality and its impact nationally and internationally - German occupation and its domestic effects - Belgium in exile - coming out of war.

The inter-war period and WWII: Consolidation of democracy in Belgium and internationally - a fragile peace - relations between neighboring States - impact of economic crisis and the rise of nationalisms.

Belgium as text for the political/ideological movements of Europe: populism, fascism, anti-fascism, conservatism, liberalism, etc. - impact, specificities and parallels of a second occupation - Belgian society at the Liberation and coming out of war.

3. Post-war Belgium and European integration

A nation and its political crises: Belgium and the Marshall Plan - the royalty controversy - the schooling wars - changes in the economic context and economic upheaval - contesting the unitary State - etc.

Changes in Europe coming out of WWII: birth of the Benelux, the ECSC, and the Common Market - Cold War and the establishment of Blocs - Belgium as home to NATO and numerous European institutions - the impact of Europe on Belgium - widening of EU membership and Belgium's reaction in a rapidly transforming international context (post-1989).

4. The issue of the State and its structure

The changing role and nature of the State in western democracies: Consolidation of western States after 1945 - the social welfare State - the nation State - democracy and citizenship - languages and identities.

Belgium as case study: emerging regional identities and the unity State under fire - shifting structures of power and new modes of State governance - federalism - post-federalism - what State and what nation?

5. Colonialism and post-colonialism

Belgium's colonial past followed a unique development since it began as a private enterprise under the reign of Leopold II: A colony 1908-1960 - its specificities - perceptions in Belgium - what place today in Belgian society for questions of colonization/decolonization?

6. The social and political stakes of memory

Telescoping historical memory in contemporary societies: A Belgian phenomenon? - a European phenomenon? - fractured memory of two world wars - the phenomenon of victimization.

Emerging issues and new readings: colonial heritage - relations with former colonies, the Belgian case - the tendency towards litigating the past.

7. Final session: review, synthesis and debate of the themes of the course

Also, three lecture/visits to Belgian museums:

- The BelVUE Museum - A look at the Belgian past thematically, to complement the chronological approach of the course.
- The Museum of Central Africa - An immersion in the question of representations of the colonial past, and a museum's efforts in favor of decolonialization.
- The Museum of the Army - A visit to the galleries of 1939-1945 to deepen understanding of WW II.
(These visits are also the occasion to reflect on the role of museums as places of representation of the past.)

Suggested bibliography

Beyen, M, Destatte Ph., *Un autre pays : nouvelle histoire de Belgique 1970-2000*, Bruxelles, Le Cri, 2008

Collaboration, répression. Un passé qui résiste sous la direction de José Gotovitch et de Chantal Kesteloot, Bruxelles, Labor, 2004

De Schaerdrijver S., *La Belgique et la Première Guerre mondiale*, Bruxelles, Peter Lang, 2004

Dictionnaire de la Seconde Guerre mondiale en Belgique sous la direction de Paul Aron et de José Gotovitch, Bruxelles, André Versaille, 2008

Dujardin V., Dumoulin M., *Nouvelle histoire de Belgique. 1950-1970 : l'Union fait-elle toujours la force?*, Bruxelles, Le Cri, 2008

Dumoulin M., *Léopold II, un roi génocidaire ?*, Bruxelles, Académie Royale de Belgique, 2005

Lauro A., Godderis I., Vanthemsche G., *Le Congo colonial, une histoire en questions ?*, Bruxelles, La Renaissance du Livre, 2020

Mabille X., *Histoire politique de la Belgique. Facteurs et acteurs de changement*, Bruxelles, Le Crisp, 2011

Nouvelle histoire de Belgique, 1. 1830-1905 sous la direction de Michel Dumoulin, Vincent Dujardin, Emmanuel Gerard et Mark Van den Wijngaert. - Bruxelles : Complexe, 2005

Nouvelle histoire de Belgique. 2. 1905-1950 sous la direction de Michel Dumoulin, Vincent Dujardin, Emmanuel Gerard et Mark Van den Wijngaert. - Bruxelles : Complexe, 2006

Roekens A., *La Belgique et la persécution des Juifs*, Bruxelles, La Renaissance du Livre/CEGES, 2010

Stanard M.G., *The Leopard, the Lion and the Cock. Colonial Memories and Monuments in Belgium*, Leuven, University Press, 2019

Vanthemsche G., *La Belgique et le Congo. Empreintes d'une colonie 1885-1980*, Bruxelles, Complexe, 2007

Witte E., Van Velthoven H., *Langue et politique*, Bruxelles, VUBPress, 1999

Grading

Student work is evaluated on the basis of a mid-term essay and a written examination at the end of the course, the grades for which are averaged with the participation grade based on oral presentations, press reviews and discussion participation.

Equivalent in American university course offerings

History of the 20th Century in Western Europe